Empowering Participation or Pushing Boundaries? Self-Efficacy, Activism, and Radicalism among Unemployed Pashtun and Baloch University Graduates in Punjab, Pakistan

Mujahid Khan*[1], Muhammad Owais Amer[2], Abdullah Riaz[3], Muhammad Hamza[4]

[1]BS Scholar, School of Professional Psychology, University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore Campus, Pakistan
Email: syed.m.mujahid.khan@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4691-566X
[2]BS Scholar, School of Professional Psychology, University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore Campus, Pakistan
Email: owaisdgmedia@gmail.com
[3]BS Scholar, School of Professional Psychology, University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore Campus, Pakistan
Email: abdullahriaz6740@gmail.com
[4]MSc Management with Digital Marketing, Hatfield Campus, University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom (UK)
Email: mh3311542@gmail.com
****Corresponding Email:** syed.m.mujahid.khan@gmail.com*

Abstract

Unemployment among university graduates poses serious psychological and sociopolitical challenges, particularly for ethnic minority groups in developing societies. The present study examined the relationships between self-efficacy, collective action intention (activism), and radicalism among unemployed Pashtun and Baloch university graduates in Punjab, Pakistan. Using a cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected from 235 graduates who had remained unemployed for at least one year after completing their degrees from universities located in Lahore, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Bahawalpur, and Multan and living in those cities' hostels. Standardized measures of self-efficacy, activism intention, and radicalism intention were administered. Pearson product–moment correlation and independent-samples t-tests were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that self-efficacy was positively associated with activism and negatively associated with radicalism. Moreover, Pashtun graduates reported significantly higher activism compared to Baloch graduates, while no significant ethnic differences were found in self-efficacy and radicalism. The findings indicate that psychological efficacy plays a critical role in channeling unemployment-related frustration into constructive collective engagement rather than extreme orientations. The study underscores the importance of empowerment-focused interventions for unemployed ethnic minority graduates to promote healthy civic participation and social stability.

***Keywords:** self-efficacy, unemployment, collective action, activism, radicalism, Pashtun, Baloch, Punjab, Pakistan*

Introduction

Graduate unemployment has emerged as a pressing socioeconomic and psychological concern in many developing countries, including Pakistan. Despite increased access to higher education, a

substantial proportion of university graduates remain unemployed for extended periods, resulting in frustration, identity threat, and uncertainty about future prospects (Shahid et al., 2025). This issue is particularly salient for ethnic minority groups such as Pashtun and Baloch graduates who migrate to Punjab for higher education but often face structural inequalities, perceived marginalization, and limited employment opportunities, however, the issue in term of research has not been given wide recognition.

University graduates represent a socially significant group due to their educational exposure and potential role in civic, political, and social development (Egerton, 2002; Kahne et al., 2006). However, prolonged unemployment may influence how graduates express agency, either through constructive collective action such as activism or through non-normative and radical orientations (Becker & Tausch, 2017; Hensen, 2019; Veronese & Kagee, 2025). Identifying psychological factors that shape these divergent pathways is essential for fostering social cohesion and preventing maladaptive outcomes.

Self-efficacy, a central construct within social cognitive theory, refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997; Cervone, 2000; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Individuals with high self-efficacy demonstrate greater perseverance, initiative, and engagement in meaningful social and political activities. Empirical research has consistently linked self-efficacy with civic engagement, political participation, and adaptive coping, particularly among young adults and graduates (Caprara et al., 2009; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

Self-efficacy is closely related to collective action intention, often conceptualized as activism. Activism reflects willingness to participate in organized, lawful, and collective efforts aimed at addressing perceived injustice and promoting social change (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Graduates who believe in their ability to contribute effectively are more likely to engage in such constructive participation. In contrast, when individuals perceive their efforts as ineffective or blocked, prolonged frustration may redirect engagement toward radicalism.

Radicalism involves the endorsement of extreme beliefs or support for non-normative actions that challenge existing social and political systems (Horgan, 2008). Psychological models of radicalization suggest that feelings of powerlessness, blocked aspirations, and diminished efficacy increase susceptibility to radical ideologies, particularly in contexts of unemployment and social exclusion (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In this regard, self-efficacy may function as a protective psychological resource that channels dissatisfaction into peaceful activism rather than extreme expressions.

In Pakistan, Pashtun and Baloch communities have historically faced political exclusion, economic disparities, and identity-related challenges. Graduates from these groups who remain unemployed in Punjab may experience compounded stressors related to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and unmet expectations. Despite this relevance, limited empirical research has examined how self-efficacy relates to activism and radicalism among unemployed Pashtun and Baloch university graduates. The present study addresses this gap by exploring whether self-efficacy empowers constructive participation or restrains radical tendencies in this vulnerable population.

Rationale of the Study

The present study was conducted to address a critical gap in psychological and sociopolitical research in Pakistan by focusing on unemployed university graduates from Pashtun and Baloch ethnic backgrounds. While previous studies have explored youth activism or radicalization

independently, limited attention has been given to the psychological mechanisms that determine whether unemployment-related frustration is expressed through constructive collective action or extreme orientations. By examining graduates who have remained unemployed for at least one year, the study captures a population at heightened psychological and social risk. Understanding the role of self-efficacy in shaping activism and radicalism among these graduates is essential for informing employment policies, youth engagement strategies, and preventive interventions aimed at strengthening social integration and reducing vulnerability to radicalization.

Hypotheses
1. There is a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and activism, and a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and radicalism among unemployed Pashtun and Baloch university graduates.
2. There is a significant mean difference between unemployed Pashtun and Baloch university graduates with respect to self-efficacy, activism, and radicalism.

Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed to examine the relationships between self-efficacy, collective action intention, and radicalism among unemployed Pashtun and Baloch university graduates.

Participants

The sample comprised 235 unemployed university graduates aged between 18 and 35 years, including 94 Pashtun and 141 Baloch participants. Graduates were recruited from private hostels at Punjab i.e. located in Lahore, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Bahawalpur, and Multan. Eligibility criteria required participants to have completed at least a bachelor's degree, self-identify as Pashtun or Baloch, and remain continuously unemployed for a minimum period of one year following graduation.

Measures

Self-efficacy was assessed using the General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater perceived self-efficacy.

Collective action intention was measured using the Activism Intention Scale developed by Moskalenko and McCauley (2009). The scale comprises four items assessing willingness to engage in organized and lawful collective action for social or political change, rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

Radicalism was measured using the Radicalism Intention Scale by Moskalenko and McCauley (2009), consisting of six items assessing endorsement of extreme beliefs or support for non-normative actions, rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were contacted through alumni networks and social media platforms. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics were computed, Pearson product–moment correlation was used to examine relationships among variables, and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to assess ethnic group differences.

Results
Participants Characteristics
Table 1
Characteristics of Participants (N = 235)

Characteristics	*f*	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Age			25.45	2.78
Gender				
Men	173	73.6		
Women	62	26.4		
Ethnicity				
Pashtun	94	40		
Baloch	141	60		
Socioeconomic Status				
Lower Class	124	52.8		
Middle Class	72	30.6		
Upper Class	29	16.6		

Note. *f*=Frequency, *%*= Percentage, *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants (N = 235). The mean age of the participants was 25.45 years (*SD* = 2.78), indicating that the sample largely comprised young adults. The gender distribution showed that most participants were men (n = 173, 73.6%), while women constituted 62 participants (26.4%). In terms of ethnicity, 94 participants (40%) were Pashtun and 141 participants (60%) were Baloch, reflecting a higher representation of Baloch participants. Regarding socioeconomic status, more than half of the participants belonged to the lower socioeconomic class (n = 124, 52.8%), followed by the middle class (n = 72, 30.6%) and the upper class (n = 29, 16.6%). Overall, the sample predominantly consisted of male participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, with a greater proportion of Baloch graduates than Pashtun graduates.

Table 2
Relationship among Study Variables (N= 235)

Variables	1	2	3
1.Self-efficacy	-	.19**	-.18**
2.Activism		-	-.14**
3.Redicalism			-

Note. **p<.01

Table 2 presents the correlations among the study variables (N = 235). Self-efficacy was positively correlated with activism (*r* = .19, *p* < .01) and negatively correlated with radicalism (*r* = -.18, *p* < .01). Activism was also negatively correlated with radicalism (*r* = -.14, *p* < .01), indicating that higher self-efficacy is associated with greater activism and lower radicalism.

Table 3
Ethnicity Difference among Study Variables (N=235)

Variables	Pashtun (n=94)		Baloch (n=141)				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(233)*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
Self-efficacy	28.53	6.65	27.19	6.14	1.57	.11	0.20
Activism	14.52**	5.64	12.56	5.17	2.73	.007	0.36

Radicalism	30.48	7.38	30.39	4.81	.11	.90	0.01

Note. **p<.01, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

The independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine ethnic differences between Pashtun and Baloch unemployed graduates on self-efficacy, activism, and radicalism. Results indicated a significant difference in activism, with Pashtun graduates scoring higher ($M = 14.52$, $SD = 5.64$) than Baloch graduates ($M = 12.56$, $SD = 5.17$), $t(233) = 2.73$, $p = .007$, Cohen's $d = 0.36$. No significant differences were found for self-efficacy ($M = 28.53$, $SD = 6.65$ vs. $M = 27.19$, $SD = 6.14$, $t(233) = 1.57$, $p = .11$) or radicalism ($M = 30.48$, $SD = 7.38$ vs. $M = 30.39$, $SD = 4.81$, $t(233) = 0.11$, $p = .90$), indicating similar levels of these variables across the two ethnic groups. Overall, Pashtun unemployed graduates demonstrated greater engagement in collective action than their Baloch counterparts, while self-efficacy and radicalism did not differ significantly by ethnicity.

Discussion

The present study examined the role of self-efficacy in shaping activism and radicalism among unemployed Pashtun and Baloch university graduates residing in Punjab. The findings demonstrated that self-efficacy was positively associated with activism and negatively associated with radicalism, supporting social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of perceived capability in guiding purposeful behavior (Bandura, 1997).

The positive association between self-efficacy and activism suggests that unemployed graduates who retain confidence in their abilities are more likely to engage in lawful and collective efforts to address social and economic grievances. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that psychological empowerment facilitates civic and political engagement, even under adverse conditions such as unemployment (Caprara et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

The negative relationship between self-efficacy and radicalism highlights the protective function of psychological efficacy. Graduates with higher self-efficacy may perceive constructive activism as a viable means of change, thereby reducing the appeal of extreme or disruptive alternatives. This aligns with theoretical models of radicalization that identify perceived powerlessness and blocked aspirations as key precursors to radical beliefs (Horgan, 2008; Kruglanski et al., 2014).

Ethnic differences emerged only in activism, with Pashtun graduates reporting higher activism than Baloch graduates. This difference may be attributed to variations in political socialization, historical engagement in rights-based movements, and collective ethnic consciousness among Pashtun communities in Pakistan (Ahmad, 2017; Jan, 2010). Pashtun youth have been historically exposed to student politics, protest culture, and mobilization around issues of identity, security, and civil rights, which may foster greater readiness for organized collective action even during periods of unemployment (Ali & Rehman, 2020; Yousaf, 2019). In contrast, Baloch political expression has often been constrained by structural marginalization, limited access to institutional platforms, and reduced visibility in mainstream student activism, potentially limiting engagement in overt activism among unemployed graduates (Baloch, 2018). However, the absence of ethnic differences in self-efficacy and radicalism suggests that prolonged unemployment operates as a shared structural stressor, producing similar psychological effects across ethnic groups by undermining personal agency, future orientation, and perceived control regardless of cultural background (Jahoda, 1982; Paul & Moser, 2009; Saeed & Ahmad, 2021).

Limitations and Recommendations

The cross-sectional nature of the study limits causal interpretations. Self-report measures may be influenced by social desirability bias. Additionally, the sample was limited to unemployed graduates residing in Punjab, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in self-efficacy, activism, and radicalism over time during periods of unemployment. Including qualitative approaches may provide deeper insights into graduates' lived experiences. Expanding samples to other provinces and employment statuses would enhance generalizability.

Implications

The findings have important implications for theory, practice, and policy. Strengthening self-efficacy among unemployed graduates may serve as a protective factor against frustration-driven radical orientations. Universities should implement empowerment-based career counseling, skill-development programs, and mentorship initiatives to enhance graduates' confidence and agency. Policymakers should prioritize inclusive employment strategies and youth engagement programs that address the unique challenges faced by ethnic minority graduates. Community-based interventions promoting peaceful activism and collective problem-solving may reduce susceptibility to radical ideologies. Mental health professionals can incorporate efficacy-enhancing techniques in counseling unemployed youth. At a broader level, fostering psychological empowerment among educated but unemployed populations may contribute to social stability, democratic participation, and long-term national development (Bandura, 1997; Caprara et al., 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2014; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

References

Ahmad, I. (2017). *Pashtun politics, nationalism and resistance in Pakistan*. Routledge.

Ali, S., & Rehman, F. (2020). Political socialization and youth activism in Pakistan: A study of ethnic identity among university students. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, 40*(2), 321–334.

Baloch, A. A. (2018). Political marginalization and youth disengagement in Balochistan. *Journal of Political Studies, 25*(1), 55–72.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Becker, J. C., & Tausch, N. (2017). A dynamic model of engagement in normative and non-normative collective action: Psychological antecedents, consequences, and barriers. In *European Review of Social Psychology: Volume 26* (pp. 43-92). Routledge.

Caprara, G. V., Vecchione, M., Capanna, C., & Mebane, M. (2009). Perceived political self-efficacy: Theory, assessment, and applications. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 39*(6), 1002–1020.

Cervone, D. (2000). Thinking about self-efficacy. *Behavior modification*, *24*(1), 30-56.

Egerton, M. (2002). Higher education and civic engagement. *The British journal of sociology*, *53*(4), 603-620.

Hansen, C. (2019). *Solidarity in diversity: Activism as a pathway of migrant emplacement in Malmö* (Doctoral dissertation, Malmö University).

Horgan, J. (2008). From profiles to pathways and roots to routes: Perspectives from psychology on radicalization into terrorism. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 618*(1), 80–94.

Jahoda, M. (1982). *Employment and unemployment: A social psychological analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Jan, A. (2010). Pashtun student politics and political consciousness in Pakistan. *Journal of Political Studies, 17*(2), 85–101.

Kahne, J., Chi, B., & Middaugh, E. (2006). Building social capital for civic and political engagement: The potential of high-school civics courses. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 387-409.

Kruglanski, A. W., Gelfand, M. J., Bélanger, J. J., Sheveland, A., Hetiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2014). The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization. *Political Psychology, 35*(S1), 69–93.

Paul, K. I., & Moser, K. (2009). Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 74*(3), 264–282.

Saeed, A., & Ahmad, N. (2021). Graduate unemployment and psychological well-being in Pakistan: A socio-structural analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research, 36*(4), 623–641.

Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized self-efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston (Eds.), *Measures in health psychology* (pp. 35–37). NFER-Nelson.

Shahid, M. S., Ramzan, M., Ashraf, S. J., Rasheed, R., & Noureen, S. (2025). Perceived stress and anxiety among unemployed psychology and sociology degree holders in Pakistan. *Journal of Regional Studies Review*, 4(1), 280-287.

Stajkovic, A. D., & Luthans, F. (1998). Social cognitive theory and self-efficacy: Goin beyond traditional motivational and behavioral approaches. *Organizational dynamics*, *26*(4), 62-74.

van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(4), 504–535.

Veronese, G., & Kagee, A. (2025). Interrogates the Complicity of Psychology in Colonial Violence While Advancing a Fanonian and Freirean Framework That Centres Political Consciousness, Collective Struggle, and Transformative Action. In *Contensting borders. Book of Abstracts*.

Yousaf, F. (2019). *Pakistan's youth bulge and political mobilization*. Oxford University Press.