

Community-Based Counterterrorism in Conflict Regions: An Empirical Assessment of Village Defence Committees and Village Defence Guards in Jammu and Kashmir

Dr. Jewan Lal Dhar¹, Dr. Shamboo Nath²

¹Associate Professor of Political Science, Higher Education Department,
Government of Jammu & Kashmir

²Associate Professor of Education, Higher Education Department,
Government of Jammu & Kashmir

Abstract

Community participation has emerged as an important dimension of contemporary counterterrorism strategies, particularly in conflict-affected regions where geographical constraints and limited state presence hinder conventional security operations. Jammu and Kashmir provides one of India's most significant examples of institutionalized community-based security through the establishment of Village Defence Committees (VDCs) in 1995 and their subsequent restructuring into Village Defence Guards (VDGs) in 2022. This study examines the historical evolution, institutional framework, operational effectiveness, and governance of the VDC–VDG model within the broader framework of community-based counterterrorism. Adopting a mixed qualitative case-study approach supported by field data from 150 respondents across Kishtwar, Doda, and Ramban districts, the study combines documentary analysis with empirical evidence to assess the contribution of VDCs/VDGs to local security, intelligence generation, community resilience, and coordination with security agencies. The findings indicate that the VDG framework has significantly strengthened localized security by enhancing intelligence sharing, improving rapid response capabilities, and fostering greater cooperation between citizens and law enforcement agencies. However, persistent challenges relating to training, logistical support, volunteer welfare, accountability, and human rights continue to affect institutional effectiveness. The study argues that community-based counterterrorism initiatives can function as effective force multipliers only when embedded within transparent legal frameworks, professional supervision, democratic accountability, and continuous institutional reform. The experience of Jammu and Kashmir contributes to the broader international discourse on localized security governance by demonstrating how community participation can complement professional security institutions while remaining consistent with constitutional principles and the rule of law.

Keywords: Community-Based Counterterrorism; Village Defence Committees; Village Defence Guards; Jammu and Kashmir; Community Policing; Internal Security; Participatory Governance.

1. Introduction

The nature of terrorism has undergone profound transformation over the past three decades, compelling governments to reconsider conventional security strategies based solely on military and police responses. Contemporary counterterrorism increasingly recognizes that sustainable security cannot be achieved through coercive measures alone but requires active cooperation between state institutions and local communities. This shift has contributed to the emergence of Community-Based Counterterrorism (CBCT), which emphasizes local participation in intelligence gathering, early warning systems, resilience building, and prevention of violent extremism. Across diverse conflict environments, community engagement has become an integral component of national security policy because local populations possess contextual knowledge that formal security agencies often lack.

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir represents one of the most complex internal security environments in South Asia. Since the outbreak of insurgency in 1989, the region has experienced prolonged terrorism, cross-border infiltration, targeted civilian killings, and recurring militant violence. These challenges have been particularly acute in the mountainous districts of the Jammu division, where dispersed settlements, dense forests, and difficult terrain have constrained the operational reach of security forces. Under such conditions, localized security arrangements emerged as an operational necessity rather than merely an administrative innovation.

Recognizing these realities, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir established Village Defence Committees (VDCs) in 1995 to provide immediate defensive capability in vulnerable villages. Functioning under the supervision of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, these volunteer groups were intended to strengthen local vigilance, support intelligence collection, and delay terrorist attacks until professional security forces could respond. Nearly three decades later, the Government reorganized the programme as Village Defence Guards (VDGs) through Government Order No. 59-Home of 2022, introducing standardized recruitment procedures, structured training, remuneration, enhanced police supervision, and greater institutional accountability. The transition reflected an important policy shift from an emergency defence arrangement toward a more formalized and regulated community-security institution.

Despite the strategic importance of the VDC–VDG model, existing scholarship remains fragmented. Most studies examine the programme either from a counterinsurgency perspective emphasizing operational achievements or from a human rights perspective highlighting concerns regarding civilian militarization, accountability, and weapon misuse. Very few studies integrate these competing perspectives within a comprehensive analytical framework that simultaneously evaluates operational effectiveness, democratic legitimacy, institutional governance, and community participation. Furthermore, the recent restructuring of VDCs into VDGs has received limited scholarly attention despite its significant implications for security governance in Jammu and Kashmir.

The present study addresses these limitations by combining documentary evidence with empirical data collected from 150 Village Defence Guard members across the districts of Kishtwar, Doda, and Ramban. Rather than treating VDCs and VDGs merely as auxiliary security organizations, the study conceptualizes them as an institutional model of community-based counterterrorism operating at the intersection of state security, community participation, and democratic governance. By integrating Community-Based Counterterrorism, Community Policing, Human Security, and Participatory Governance into a unified analytical framework, the study seeks to explain not only how community defence mechanisms contribute to counterterrorism but also under what institutional conditions they remain effective, accountable, and democratically legitimate.

The study therefore contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it provides one of the few empirical assessments of the transition from Village Defence Committees to Village Defence Guards using primary field evidence from the Chenab Valley. Second, it bridges the divide between security-centered and rights-based approaches by evaluating operational performance alongside governance, accountability, and human rights considerations. Third, it situates the experience of Jammu and Kashmir within the broader international debate on community-based counterterrorism, thereby offering policy lessons for conflict-affected societies confronting similar security challenges.

1.2 Historical Background

The contemporary security environment in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been profoundly shaped by the emergence of armed insurgency and cross-border terrorism since the late 1980s. Although the political dispute over Jammu and Kashmir originated with the Partition of British India in 1947, the outbreak of insurgency in 1989 fundamentally transformed the region's internal security landscape. Militant violence, cross-border infiltration, targeted assassinations, attacks on civilians, and recurrent terrorist incidents created unprecedented challenges for the Indian state, particularly in geographically remote and mountainous areas where difficult terrain constrained the operational effectiveness of conventional security forces (Ganguly, 1997; Lamb, 1991; Schofield, 2021; Wirsing, 1994).

The districts of Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Udhampur, Rajouri, and Poonch became particularly vulnerable during the 1990s because of their rugged terrain, dispersed settlements, dense forests, and proximity to infiltration routes frequently used by terrorist groups. These districts experienced repeated attacks on civilians, minority communities, government officials, and public infrastructure, exposing the limitations of conventional policing in providing continuous security coverage to remote villages (Bose, 2003; Ganguly, 1997; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024). Under these circumstances, the Government recognized the need for localized security arrangements capable of providing immediate defensive support until police or security forces could reach affected areas.

To address these challenges, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir introduced the Village Defence Committee (VDC) scheme in 1995. The programme authorized carefully selected village volunteers, functioning under the supervision of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, to defend vulnerable villages against terrorist attacks. Volunteers were provided with firearms and basic operational training to strengthen local vigilance, support intelligence gathering, protect civilian populations, and delay militant assaults until reinforcements arrived (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 1995; Biberman, 2019; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). The initiative represented one of India's earliest institutional experiments in community-based counterterrorism, recognizing that local communities possess superior knowledge of geographical conditions, social networks, and suspicious activities that can significantly enhance preventive security measures (Kilcullen, 2010; Ganor, 2021).

During the height of militancy, Village Defence Committees contributed to protecting numerous vulnerable villages across the Jammu region by strengthening surveillance, facilitating intelligence sharing, and improving coordination between local communities and security agencies. Several scholars acknowledge that the VDC system played an important role in reducing terrorist attacks in remote areas where the permanent deployment of police and military personnel was operationally difficult (Biberman, 2019; Suri, 2013; Vaid, 2020). At the same time, the programme attracted criticism concerning inconsistent recruitment procedures, allegations of weapon misuse, inadequate training, weak accountability mechanisms, and limited institutional oversight. These concerns generated important

debates regarding civilian participation in security governance and the need to balance operational effectiveness with constitutional safeguards and human rights protections (Jackson, 2016; Schofield, 2021; Wilkinson, 2011). Since their establishment in 1995, Village Defence Committees (VDCs) have participated in numerous counterterrorism operations across the Jammu region, contributing to village defence, intelligence gathering, and operational support to the Jammu and Kashmir Police and other security forces. Numerous VDC members lost their lives while defending their villages or were specifically targeted by terrorist organisations because of their association with the programme. Although the operational contribution of VDCs is widely acknowledged, neither the Ministry of Home Affairs nor the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has published a consolidated official database documenting the total number of encounters involving VDCs, militants neutralised with VDC participation, or cumulative VDC fatalities since the programme's inception in 1995. This absence of systematically compiled official statistics highlights an important gap in the literature and underscores the need for further archival and empirical research on community-based counterterrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

Recognizing both the operational achievements and institutional shortcomings of the VDC system, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir initiated significant reforms through Government Order No. 59-Home of 2022, formally reorganizing Village Defence Committees into Village Defence Guards (VDGs). According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (2024), the VDG programme constitutes one of India's largest community-based security initiatives. At present, 4,153 Village Defence Groups are functional in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir against a sanctioned strength of 4,985 groups. These groups comprise approximately 32,355 Village Defence personnel deployed across terrorism-affected districts under the supervision of the Jammu and Kashmir Police. The highest concentration of VDGs is found in Doda, Rajouri, Reasi, Kishtwar, Ramban, and Udhampur, reflecting the historical intensity of terrorism in these districts. The revised framework introduced standardized recruitment procedures, police verification, structured training programmes, fixed honoraria, enhanced police supervision, and clearly defined administrative responsibilities.

District-wise Village Defence Committees / Village Defence Groups in Jammu Division

District	Sanctioned VDCs/VDGs	Constituted VDCs/VDGs
Doda	1,050	875
Rajouri	700	683
Reasi	724	628
Kishtwar	450	412
Ramban	400	370
Udhampur	474	335
Kathua	500	326
Poonch	250	125
Samba	202	202
Jammu	140	197*
Total	4,890	4,153

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs (2024); Government of Jammu & Kashmir.

The transition from VDCs to VDGs also coincided with broader changes in India's internal security strategy following the constitutional reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. Contemporary counterterrorism policy increasingly emphasizes intelligence-led policing, community resilience, preventive security, technological surveillance, and inter-agency coordination, rather than relying exclusively on military responses. Within this evolving security architecture, Village Defence Guards have been repositioned as community-based partners supporting intelligence collection, early warning systems, local surveillance, and defensive preparedness under the operational supervision of the Jammu and Kashmir Police (Hoffman, 2020; Schmid, 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024).

Despite the strategic significance of the Village Defence Guard programme, systematic empirical research examining its institutional effectiveness remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused either on the operational contribution of Village Defence Committees during the peak years of militancy or on normative debates concerning civilian participation, accountability, and human rights (Suri, 2013; Biberman, 2019; Schofield, 2021). Comparatively little research has evaluated the post-2022 Village Defence Guard framework using field-based evidence from volunteers serving in terrorism-affected regions. The present study addresses this gap by providing an empirical assessment of the historical evolution, institutional framework, operational effectiveness, governance mechanisms, and community legitimacy of Village Defence Guards in the districts of Kishtwar, Doda, and Ramban. In doing so, it contributes to the broader literature on community-based counterterrorism, participatory security governance, **and** localized resilience in conflict-affected societies (Ganor, 2021; Schmid, 2023; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025).

1.3. Research Questions

1. How have Village Defence Committees (VDCs) evolved into Village Defence Guards (VDGs), and what institutional reforms have shaped this transition in Jammu and Kashmir?
2. To what extent have Village Defence Guards contributed to community-based counterterrorism through intelligence gathering, surveillance, and the protection of vulnerable villages?
3. How do Village Defence Guard members perceive the effectiveness of the VDG programme in enhancing local security and strengthening cooperation between communities and security agencies?
4. What are the principal operational, administrative, and welfare-related challenges affecting the performance and sustainability of the Village Defence Guard programme?
5. How can the Village Defence Guard framework be strengthened to improve institutional accountability, democratic governance, human rights compliance, and long-term counterterrorism effectiveness?

1.4. Research objectives:

1. To examine the historical evolution of Village Defence Committees and Village Defence Guards in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To assess the operational effectiveness of Village Defence Guards in counterterrorism.
3. To evaluate community participation and intelligence generation through the VDG system.
4. To identify institutional challenges and governance issues affecting the VDG programme.
5. To propose policy recommendations for strengthening community-based counterterrorism.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Counterterrorism and Community Participation.

Counterterrorism scholarship has evolved considerably from traditional state-centric approaches toward more comprehensive models emphasizing prevention, resilience, intelligence, and public participation. Classical theories viewed terrorism primarily as a military and policing challenge requiring coercive state responses (Wilkinson, 2011; Hoffman, 2020). More recent scholarship argues that successful counterterrorism depends equally upon the legitimacy of state institutions and the willingness of local communities to cooperate with security agencies (Schmid, 2011; Ganor, 2021). Community participation strengthens intelligence networks, improves early warning systems, enhances public trust, and reduces opportunities for extremist organizations to exploit local grievances (Bjørge, 2013; Atran, 2010; Cronin, 2009). Consequently, Community-Based Counterterrorism has emerged as an important paradigm that complements rather than replaces conventional security operations (Silke, 2019; Richards, 2015; Sandler, 2018).

2.2 Community Policing and Human Security

The concept of Community Policing similarly emphasizes partnership between police institutions and citizens in maintaining public safety. Rather than viewing security as the exclusive responsibility of law enforcement agencies, community policing promotes shared responsibility, local engagement, and preventive interventions (Bayley, 1994; Goldstein, 1990; Skogan, 2006). Closely related is the Human Security paradigm, which shifts the focus of security from protecting territorial sovereignty to safeguarding individuals from fear, violence, and insecurity (UNDP, 1994; Kaldor, 2013). These theoretical developments are particularly relevant in conflict-affected regions where the legitimacy of security institutions depends upon public confidence, accountability, and respect for constitutional rights (Paris, 2001; Putnam, 2000; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018).

2.3 Community Defence Models in Comparative Perspective

International experience demonstrates that locally recruited community defence organizations have contributed significantly to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Kenya, and Colombia (Kilcullen, 2010; Biberman, 2019; Shultz & Dew, 2006). These programmes have frequently improved intelligence collection and local resilience while simultaneously raising concerns regarding accountability, politicization, civilian militarization, and human rights compliance (Jackson, 2016; Schmid, 2023; Wilkinson, 2011). Comparative evidence therefore suggests that community defence initiatives achieve sustainable success only when operating within clearly defined legal frameworks supported by professional supervision, transparent recruitment, regular training, and democratic oversight (United Nations, 2006; UNODC, 2018; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025). Recent studies further emphasize that community-oriented approaches to preventing violent extremism are more effective when grounded in local trust, institutional legitimacy, and sustained public engagement (Arefin & Rahman, 2026; Demir & Bastug, 2025).

2.4 Village Defence Committees and Village Defence Guards in Jammu and Kashmir

Within the Indian context, the Village Defence Committee (VDC) system represents the country's most extensive experiment with community-based counterterrorism. Existing scholarship generally recognizes the contribution of VDCs in protecting vulnerable villages, supporting security forces, and generating intelligence during the most intense phases of militancy (Ganguly, 1997; Bose, 2003; Biberman, 2019). However, the literature also documents concerns regarding inadequate supervision, inconsistent recruitment procedures, weapon misuse, civilian militarization, and limited institutional accountability (Suri, 2013; Schofield, 2021; Vaid, 2020). The Government of Jammu and Kashmir formally

reorganized the programme into Village Defence Guards (VDGs) through Government Order No. 59-Home of 2022, introducing standardized recruitment procedures, structured training, remuneration, and enhanced police supervision (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2022). Despite these important reforms, systematic empirical evaluation of the VDG framework remains limited, particularly with respect to its operational effectiveness, governance, community legitimacy, and contribution to contemporary counterterrorism policy (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2024; South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2025).

2.5 Research Gap

The review of existing scholarship reveals four important gaps. First, the literature remains polarized between security-oriented and human rights-oriented interpretations with little effort to integrate both perspectives within a common analytical framework. Second, empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of Village Defence Guards after the 2022 reforms remain scarce. Third, limited research employs field-based evidence from VDG members themselves to assess institutional performance and operational challenges. Finally, few studies situate the Jammu and Kashmir experience within broader international debates on community-based counterterrorism and participatory security governance.

Addressing these gaps, the present study combines documentary analysis with primary field data from 150 respondents to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the VDC–VDG framework. By integrating theoretical insights with empirical findings, it contributes to the emerging scholarship on community participation, localized security governance, and democratic counterterrorism.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Conceptual Foundations

This study adopts an interdisciplinary analytical framework that integrates Community-Based Counterterrorism (CBCT), Community Policing, Human Security, and Participatory Governance to evaluate the evolution and effectiveness of Village Defence Committees (VDCs) and Village Defence Guards (VDGs) in Jammu and Kashmir. Individually, these approaches explain different dimensions of community participation in security governance; collectively, they provide a comprehensive framework for assessing operational effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, accountability, and democratic sustainability.

Community-Based Counterterrorism (CBCT) provides the principal theoretical lens. CBCT argues that effective counterterrorism extends beyond military operations and intelligence agencies by recognizing local communities as active partners in preventing violence. Community members possess detailed knowledge of local geography, social networks, and behavioural patterns that enables early detection of suspicious activities. Consequently, community participation enhances intelligence generation, strengthens early warning mechanisms, and improves preventive security while complementing professional law enforcement.

Community Policing further explains the institutional relationship between citizens and the police. Rather than treating security as an exclusively state function, this perspective emphasizes partnership, trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility in maintaining public safety. The VDG programme reflects these principles through structured collaboration between village volunteers and the Jammu and Kashmir Police, particularly in surveillance, intelligence sharing, and emergency response.

The Human Security framework broadens the concept of security beyond territorial defence by emphasizing protection of individuals from fear, violence, and insecurity. Within this perspective,

community defence initiatives must not only improve physical security but also operate within constitutional norms, human rights principles, and democratic accountability. Accordingly, the effectiveness of VDGs must be evaluated not merely by operational outcomes but also by their capacity to maintain public trust and institutional legitimacy.

Participatory Governance complements these approaches by emphasizing collaborative decision-making between state institutions and citizens. It views security as a shared public responsibility requiring transparency, accountability, and community ownership. The transformation of VDCs into VDGs illustrates an attempt to institutionalize community participation within a regulated administrative framework while strengthening police supervision and governmental oversight.

3.2 Analytical Model

Based on these theoretical perspectives, the study conceptualizes training, community participation, intelligence sharing, police supervision, and institutional coordination as the principal independent variables influencing the effectiveness of Village Defence Guards.

These factors are mediated by:

- Community trust
- Administrative accountability
- Legal oversight
- Human rights compliance

The dependent outcomes include:

- Improved village security
- Intelligence generation
- Rapid response capability
- Community resilience
- Overall counterterrorism effectiveness

The framework therefore enables simultaneous evaluation of operational performance and institutional governance rather than treating them as competing perspectives.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a **mixed-method descriptive case study design** combining qualitative documentary analysis with quantitative survey data collected from Village Defence Guard personnel. The mixed-method approach was selected because understanding community-based counterterrorism requires both institutional analysis and empirical assessment of participant experiences.

Jammu and Kashmir constitutes the single case study owing to its unique history of prolonged insurgency, difficult geographical terrain, and institutionalized community defence mechanisms.

4.2 Study Area

The empirical investigation focuses on the Chenab Valley districts of Kishtwar, Doda, and Ramban, which have historically experienced significant terrorist activity and where Village Defence Committees were extensively constituted during the 1990s. These districts continue to represent the core operational area of the Village Defence Guard programme.

4.3 Sampling

Primary data were collected from 150 respondents selected through purposive sampling.

The respondents included:

- Village Defence Guard members
- Group Commanders
- Senior volunteers

Only respondents with operational experience were included to ensure informed responses regarding organizational functioning and counterterrorism operations.

District-wise Distribution

District	Respondents	Percentage
Kishtwar	60	40.0
Doda	50	33.3
Ramban	40	26.7
Total	150	100.0

The distribution ensured balanced representation of the principal terrorism-affected districts in the Chenab Valley.

4.4 Sources of Data

The study relies upon both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data consist of structured interviews and questionnaires administered to Village Defence Guard members.

Secondary sources include:

- Ministry of Home Affairs reports
- Government of Jammu and Kashmir notifications
- Jammu and Kashmir Police publications
- Parliamentary debates
- Judicial decisions
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Books
- International reports

The study also examined publicly available records and publications of the Jammu and Kashmir Police relating to the Village Defence Committee (VDC) and Village Defence Guard (VDG) programme. However, no consolidated official database is publicly available documenting cumulative encounters involving VDCs, militants neutralised through VDC participation, or VDC fatalities since 1995. Accordingly, the historical analysis is based on triangulation of Ministry of Home Affairs reports, Government notifications, police publications, scholarly literature, and primary survey data.

4.5 Analytical Techniques

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including:

- Frequency distribution
- Percentage analysis
- Mean
- Standard deviation

The qualitative component employed thematic content analysis to examine:

- Historical evolution
- Institutional development
- Operational effectiveness
- Governance

- Accountability
- Human rights concerns

The integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence enables a comprehensive assessment of the VDG framework.

5. Results and Data Analysis

5.1 Respondent Profile

The respondents represent experienced Village Defence Guard personnel serving in terrorism-affected regions of the Chenab Valley. The majority fall within the economically active age group and possess considerable operational experience. This enhances the reliability of their perceptions regarding organizational effectiveness and operational challenges.

Educational Profile

The educational profile indicates that most respondents possess secondary or middle-level education, reflecting the rural demographic composition of the study area.

Qualification	Percentage
Primary	16.7
Middle	26.7
Secondary	33.3
Higher Secondary	16.7
Graduate and Above	6.6

Although educational attainment varies, respondents demonstrate substantial practical knowledge acquired through years of operational engagement.

5.2 Perceived Effectiveness of Village Defence Guards

Respondents were asked whether the Village Defence Guard programme contributes effectively to counterterrorism operations.

Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	40.0
Agree	33.3
Neutral	13.3
Disagree	10.0
Strongly Disagree	3.4

Nearly three-fourths of respondents expressed positive perceptions regarding organizational effectiveness. This finding indicates broad confidence in the VDG framework as an institutional mechanism for strengthening village security.

The results further suggest that respondents perceive VDGs primarily as preventive security organizations rather than offensive armed groups. Their principal contribution lies in surveillance, intelligence generation, and immediate defensive response until professional security forces arrive.

5.3 Operational Performance

Respondents consistently reported that Village Defence Guards have significantly improved local preparedness against terrorist attacks.

The principal operational contributions identified include:

- Intelligence gathering
- Village surveillance

- Early warning
- Community mobilisation
- Defensive support

These findings reinforce the theoretical assumptions of Community-Based Counterterrorism by demonstrating that localized knowledge substantially enhances preventive security.

5.4 Community Participation

One of the strongest findings emerging from the survey concerns community participation.

An overwhelming majority of respondents stated that villagers actively cooperate with VDG personnel by:

- Reporting suspicious activities
- Sharing intelligence
- Assisting during emergencies
- Supporting security operations

The evidence demonstrates that community participation has strengthened public confidence while reducing the isolation traditionally experienced by remote villages.

5.5 Institutional Challenges

Although respondents expressed confidence in the VDG programme, they also identified significant institutional constraints.

The most frequently reported challenges include:

Challenge	Percentage
Inadequate Weapons	33.3
Poor Communication	23.3
Insufficient Training	20.0
Difficult Terrain	13.3
Low Honorarium	10.0

These findings indicate that operational effectiveness depends not only upon community participation but equally upon sustained governmental investment in equipment, communications infrastructure, and volunteer welfare.

5.6 Welfare Assessment

Respondents expressed considerable dissatisfaction regarding welfare provisions.

Response	Percentage
Satisfied	20
Partly Satisfied	30
Dissatisfied	50

Half of the respondents indicated dissatisfaction with existing honoraria and welfare benefits. The results suggest that long-term sustainability of the programme will require improvements in insurance coverage, medical facilities, compensation mechanisms, and financial incentives.

5.7 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Training Adequacy	3.20	0.92
Community Support	4.10	0.78
Intelligence Effectiveness	3.80	0.84

Welfare Satisfaction	2.40	0.95
Overall VDG Effectiveness	3.90	0.81

The descriptive statistics demonstrate that respondents assigned the highest ratings to **community support** and **overall organizational effectiveness**, whereas **welfare satisfaction** received the lowest mean score. This indicates that while respondents perceive the VDG framework as operationally successful, improvements in volunteer welfare remain essential for sustaining long-term institutional effectiveness.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpreting the Evolution of Community-Based Counterterrorism

The evolution of Village Defence Committees (VDCs) into Village Defence Guards (VDGs) represents one of the most significant institutional adaptations in India's counterterrorism strategy. Established during the escalation of terrorism in the mid-1990s, the VDC programme emerged as a pragmatic response to the inability of conventional security forces to maintain a permanent presence in remote mountainous villages. Rather than functioning as an alternative security apparatus, the initiative sought to empower local communities to undertake defensive responsibilities while remaining under the operational supervision of the Jammu and Kashmir Police.

The restructuring of the programme in 2022 marked an important transition from an emergency response mechanism to a more institutionalized model of community security governance. Standardized recruitment procedures, structured training, financial incentives, and enhanced police oversight collectively indicate the Government's attempt to balance operational effectiveness with democratic accountability. These reforms also reflect a broader shift in India's internal security policy toward integrating local participation within formal state institutions rather than relying exclusively on centralized counterinsurgency operations.

6.2 Community Participation as a Force Multiplier

The empirical findings strongly support the proposition that community participation constitutes the principal strength of the VDG framework. Nearly three-quarters of respondents expressed positive perceptions regarding the effectiveness of Village Defence Guards, while respondents consistently identified intelligence gathering, surveillance, and early warning as their most important operational functions. These findings reinforce the theoretical assumptions of Community-Based Counterterrorism, which emphasize that local communities possess unique situational awareness unavailable to external security agencies.

Unlike conventional counterterrorism operations, where intelligence is generated primarily through specialized agencies, the VDG model utilizes the everyday interactions of local residents to detect suspicious movements, identify unfamiliar individuals, and monitor vulnerable routes frequently exploited by terrorist organizations. Such localized intelligence substantially reduces response time while increasing the operational efficiency of the police and security forces. Consequently, VDGs should be viewed less as armed civilian groups and more as community-based intelligence partners operating within a structured administrative framework.

The survey further demonstrates that villagers actively cooperate with VDG members by reporting suspicious activities and assisting during emergencies. This community support significantly enhances public confidence while strengthening state–society relations in areas historically affected by insurgency.

6.3 Operational Effectiveness and Institutional Performance

The statistical analysis indicates that respondents rated overall organizational effectiveness relatively high (Mean = 3.90), while community support received the highest average score (Mean = 4.10). These findings suggest that the programme enjoys considerable social legitimacy within the surveyed districts despite continuing security challenges.

Respondents also acknowledged that VDGs provide immediate defensive capability until police or Army reinforcements arrive. This function is particularly significant in geographically isolated villages where difficult terrain and limited transportation infrastructure often delay conventional security responses. Consequently, the VDG framework operates primarily as a force multiplier that extends the operational reach of professional security institutions rather than replacing them.

However, operational effectiveness remains closely associated with institutional capacity. Respondents consistently identified deficiencies in communication equipment, weapons, logistics, and refresher training. These findings indicate that community participation alone cannot ensure effective counterterrorism unless supported by sustained governmental investment in organizational capacity and technological modernization.

6.4 Governance, Accountability and Democratic Legitimacy

Although respondents generally expressed confidence in the Village Defence Guard programme, they also recognized the importance of accountability mechanisms. Survey participants supported regular police supervision, maintenance of operational records, weapon monitoring, and periodic legal training. These findings demonstrate an awareness among volunteers that institutional legitimacy depends upon transparency and adherence to constitutional principles rather than operational success alone.

The transition from Village Defence Committees to Village Defence Guards reflects an attempt to address earlier criticisms concerning inconsistent recruitment, inadequate supervision, and weapon misuse. The strengthened institutional framework introduced after 2022 therefore represents not merely an administrative reform but an effort to reconcile community participation with democratic governance and the rule of law.

From the perspective of Human Security, these reforms are particularly significant because effective counterterrorism must simultaneously protect civilian lives, preserve public trust, and safeguard fundamental rights. Consequently, accountability should be regarded as an operational asset rather than an institutional constraint.

6.5 Comparative Perspective

The findings of this study correspond closely with international experiences of community-based security initiatives. Community defence programmes in Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Colombia similarly demonstrate that local participation enhances intelligence generation and strengthens preventive security. At the same time, these programmes illustrate that inadequate supervision, politicization, and weak accountability can undermine institutional credibility.

Compared with these international experiences, the Village Defence Guard framework possesses several institutional advantages. Unlike many community defence initiatives that operate with limited governmental oversight, VDGs remain formally integrated within the administrative structure of the Jammu and Kashmir Police. Police verification of volunteers, official maintenance of weapon records, structured training programmes, and clearly defined defensive responsibilities collectively distinguish the Indian model from less regulated community defence initiatives elsewhere.

Nevertheless, comparative evidence also suggests that sustained effectiveness depends upon continuous professional development, technological modernization, volunteer welfare, and periodic institutional evaluation. These lessons remain highly relevant for future reforms of the VDG programme.

6.6 Policy Implications

The findings of this research generate several important policy implications.

First, community-based counterterrorism should be institutionalized as a complementary rather than substitute component of India's internal security architecture. The effectiveness of VDGs lies in their ability to strengthen intelligence generation and local resilience rather than conduct offensive counterterrorism operations.

Second, continuous professional training should extend beyond firearms handling to include intelligence analysis, cyber awareness, disaster response, first aid, conflict management, communication technology, and human rights. Such multidimensional training would improve both operational capability and institutional legitimacy.

Third, modernization of communication systems and surveillance infrastructure should become a priority. GPS-enabled reporting systems, secure digital communication platforms, drone-assisted surveillance where appropriate, and improved mobility can substantially enhance operational responsiveness in remote mountainous terrain.

Fourth, volunteer welfare requires urgent policy attention. The survey demonstrates considerable dissatisfaction regarding honoraria, insurance coverage, medical support, and long-term financial security. Addressing these concerns is essential for sustaining motivation and reducing volunteer attrition.

Finally, institutional transparency should be strengthened through periodic audits, independent evaluation, community grievance-redress mechanisms, and systematic monitoring of organizational performance. Such reforms would reinforce public confidence while ensuring that community participation remains fully consistent with democratic governance.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the evolution of Village Defence Committees into Village Defence Guards represents a significant innovation in India's community-based counterterrorism strategy. By integrating local participation within the formal security architecture, the VDG framework has enhanced intelligence generation, improved village security, strengthened community resilience, and expanded the operational capacity of the Jammu and Kashmir Police in terrorism-affected regions.

The empirical findings derived from 150 respondents across the Chenab Valley indicate widespread confidence in the operational effectiveness of the programme. Respondents identified intelligence sharing, community cooperation and rapid defensive response as the principal strengths of the VDG framework. However, they also highlighted continuing deficiencies relating to logistics, training, communication infrastructure, volunteer welfare, and institutional resources. These findings emphasize that operational success depends not only upon community participation but equally upon sustained governmental investment in organizational capacity and professional supervision.

The study further demonstrates that community-based counterterrorism is most effective when embedded within transparent legal frameworks, democratic accountability, and respect for constitutional principles. The transition from VDCs to VDGs illustrates an important policy effort to reconcile localized security initiatives with modern standards of governance and human rights. In this regard, the

Jammu and Kashmir experience offers valuable lessons for other conflict-affected regions seeking to balance operational effectiveness with institutional legitimacy.

Beyond its regional significance, the study contributes to the broader literature on community-based security governance by demonstrating that professionally supervised community defence mechanisms can complement formal security institutions without undermining the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Future policy should therefore prioritize institutional strengthening, technological modernization, volunteer welfare, and evidence-based evaluation to ensure that the Village Defence Guard framework continues to serve as a sustainable model of democratic and community-oriented counterterrorism.

References:

1. Atran, S. (2010). *Talking to the enemy: Violent extremism, sacred values, and what it means to be human*. HarperCollins.
2. Bapat, N. A. (2012). Understanding state sponsorship of militant groups. *British Journal of Political Science*, 42(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123411000210>
3. Bayley, D. H. (1994). *Police for the future*. Oxford University Press.
4. Biberman, Y. (2019). *Gambling with violence: State outsourcing of war in Pakistan and India*. Oxford University Press.
5. Bjørge, T. (Ed.). (2013). *Strategies for preventing terrorism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Bose, S. (2003). *Kashmir: Roots of conflict, paths to peace*. Harvard University Press.
7. Byman, D. (2005). *Deadly connections: States that sponsor terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Crenshaw, M. (2011). *Explaining terrorism: Causes, processes and consequences*. Routledge.
9. Cronin, A. K. (2009). *How terrorism ends: Understanding the decline and demise of terrorist campaigns*. Princeton University Press.
10. David, S. R. (2003). *Fatal choices: Israel's policy of targeted killing*. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.
11. Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D. (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American Political Science Review*, 97(1), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000534>
12. Ganguly, S. (1997). *The crisis in Kashmir: Portents of war, hopes of peace*. Cambridge University Press.
13. Ganor, B. (2021). *The counter-terrorism puzzle: A guide for decision makers* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
14. Goldstein, H. (1990). *Problem-oriented policing*. McGraw-Hill.
15. Goodhand, J. (2001). *Violent conflict, poverty and chronic poverty*. Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper No. 6, University of Manchester.
16. Government of Jammu and Kashmir. (2022). *Government Order No. 59-Home of 2022: Constitution of Village Defence Guards*. Home Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir.
17. Grossman, D. (2008). *On combat: The psychology and physiology of deadly conflict in war and in peace* (3rd ed.). Warrior Science Publications.
18. Gunaratna, R. (2018). *Countering terrorism: Can we meet the threat of global violence?* Reaktion Books.
19. Hoffman, B. (2020). *Inside terrorism* (3rd ed.). Columbia University Press.
20. Horgan, J. (2014). *The psychology of terrorism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
21. Jackson, R. (Ed.). (2016). *The Routledge handbook of critical terrorism studies*. Routledge.

22. Jammu and Kashmir Police. (2023). *Annual Security Review 2023*. Jammu and Kashmir Police.
23. Kaldor, M. (2013). *Human security*. Polity Press.
24. Kilcullen, D. (2010). *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford University Press.
25. Kilcullen, D. (2013). *Out of the mountains: The coming age of the urban guerrilla*. Oxford University Press.
26. Kraska, P. B. (2007). Militarization and policing—Its relevance to 21st century police. *Police Quarterly*, 10(4), 501–513. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611107303242>
27. LaFree, G., & Dugan, L. (2007). Introducing the Global Terrorism Database. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19(2), 181–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550701246817>
28. Lamb, A. (1991). *Kashmir: A disputed legacy, 1846–1990*. Roxford Books.
29. Lia, B. (2015). *Globalisation and the future of terrorism: Patterns and predictions*. Routledge.
30. Ministry of Home Affairs. (2023). *Annual Report 2022–23*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
31. Ministry of Home Affairs. (2024). *Annual Report 2023–24*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
32. Moghaddam, F. M. (2005). The staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration. *American Psychologist*, 60(2), 161–169. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161>
33. Nye, J. S., Jr. (2011). *The future of power*. PublicAffairs.
34. Omand, D. (2010). *Securing the state*. Columbia University Press.
35. Paris, R. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security*, 26(2), 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753191141>
36. Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
37. Richards, A. (2015). *Conceptualizing terrorism*. Oxford University Press.
38. Sageman, M. (2017). *Misunderstanding terrorism*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
39. Sandler, T. (2018). *Terrorism and counterterrorism: An overview*. Oxford University Press.
40. Schmid, A. P. (Ed.). (2011). *The Routledge handbook of terrorism research*. Routledge.
41. Schmid, A. P. (2023). *Handbook of terrorism prevention and preparedness*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT).
42. Schofield, V. (2021). *Kashmir in conflict: India, Pakistan and the unending war* (4th ed.). I.B. Tauris.
43. Sharma, A. (2023, January 5). *What are Village Defence Committees, which J&K locals want revived amid militant attacks?* *The Indian Express*.
44. Shultz, R. H., & Dew, A. (2006). *Insurgents, terrorists, and militias: The warriors of contemporary combat*. Columbia University Press.
45. Silke, A. (Ed.). (2019). *The Routledge handbook of terrorism and counterterrorism*. Routledge.
46. Skogan, W. G. (2006). *Police and community in Chicago: A tale of three cities*. Oxford University Press.
47. South Asia Terrorism Portal. (2025). *Jammu & Kashmir assessment*. Institute for Conflict Management.
48. Stohl, M. (2006). The state as terrorist. In R. Jackson, M. Breen Smyth, & J. Gunning (Eds.), *Critical terrorism studies: A new research agenda* (pp. 43–50). Routledge.

49. Suri, K. (2013). Women, violence and resistance: A study of Village Defence Committees (VDCs) in Jammu and Kashmir. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research*, 2(8), 113–126.
50. United Nations. (2006). *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. United Nations.
51. United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press.
52. United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Human Development Report 2021/2022: Uncertain times, unsettled lives—Shaping our future in a transforming world*. United Nations Development Programme.
53. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. (2023). *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy review*. United Nations.
54. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2018). *Handbook on community-oriented policing*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
55. United Nations Security Council. (2023). *Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security*. United Nations.
56. Vaid, S. P. (2020). *Endgame in Kashmir*. Vitasta Publishing.
57. Weinberg, L. (2013). *Global terrorism: A beginner's guide*. Oneworld Publications.
58. Wilkinson, P. (2011). *Terrorism versus democracy: The liberal state response* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
59. Wilkinson, P. (2017). *Political terrorism* (4th ed.). Routledge.
60. Wirsing, R. G. (1994). *India, Pakistan and the Kashmir dispute: On regional conflict and its resolution*. St. Martin's Press.