YOUTH AND CONFLICT IN PAKISTAN: UNDERSTANDING CAUSES AND PROMOTING PEACE

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Abstract

Both the analytical methods used to understand the phenomena of peace building and the ensuing viewpoints on achieving and sustaining "sustainable peace" are broad and diverse. This new field of study draws from sociology, anthropology, political theory and political economy, psychology, international relations, and more recently the development sciences to examine the wide range of 'conflicts' it describes. This paper emphasizes the significance of investigating the causes of juvenile disputes. It explains how police corruption encourages youth crime and why it's so important to address this issue head-on. It also examines the historical foundations and external pressures that have increased religious extremism and sectarian strife in Pakistan. The primary argument is that peace is not only a desirable 'goal' in itself, but also that it may be a 'means' to achieve political stability and long-term prosperity. Strategies for constructing peace may take many shapes, each tailored to the specifics of a given conflict, its scope, and the individuals involved. By drawing on some existing literature and applying it to the situation in Pakistan, this article proposes a viewpoint that centers on the participation of young people in the peacebuilding process. Due to their enhanced susceptibility and penchant for demanding change, young people are more likely to get involved in conflict when economic failure and unemployment are present. The piece also emphasizes the marginalization young people experience as a result of their absence from decision-making processes and the political system. The article claims that Pakistan's rapidly growing young population presents a significant chance for a long-term "demographic dividend" in the form of improvements in

peacebuilding processes. This benefit will only materialize if serious steps are done to increase young people's voice and agency in political decision-making.

Key Words: Peacebuilding, Youth-led initiatives, Empowerment, Conflict & Violence, Religious extremism, Political involvement, Decision-making.

1. Introduction

The 20th century was a time of progress and setback for many nations. Many governments experienced setbacks in the form of military dictatorships, bad democracy, terrorism, economic stagnation, low living standards, etc., alongside the socioeconomic advantages brought about by capitalist changes in situations where states handled the accompanying processes and consequences successfully. Significant shifts in the social and political 'demographics' were an integral part of these transformations. Due to the presence of young people in this demographic shift, concepts like "youth bulge" rose to prominence; this was so because of the prominence given to the youth's role (real or imagined) in the other transitions, the most significant of which were attempts to change or reverse political structures, such as the Arab Spring. While in some nations young people were seen as a potential source of peacemakers and workers, in others they had become synonymous with violence and strife. This article summarizes the conversation around the causes of juvenile conflict participation by highlighting several commonly accepted definitions of youth and conflict. In addition, the article draws on international scholarly literature on the definitions and considerations of conflict to emphasize elements of interventions aimed at young people in Pakistan.

2. Youth and Conflict: Short Definitions

One of the most contentious concepts in academic and popular discourse is "youth." The United Nations, the World Bank, and even individual governments have spent years trying to define it, but no consensus has emerged. Youth, according to the United Nations, is defined as "anyone between the ages of 15 and 24." Young people are defined as individuals between the ages of 10 and 24 by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Fraser et al., 2009). Gallup Pakistan estimates that 67 per cent of Pakistan's current population is under the age of 30. The average age of Pakistanis was 21.6 in 2010. Of the 84 million eligible voters in the 2013 elections, over half (47.8%) were younger than 35. Roughly one in five (19.77%) were young adults (aged 18–25). Since Siddiqui (2014), as a result, many Pakistani studies classify young adults as being in that age ranges (18–24).

When two or more parties have disagreements, it is called conflict. According to one research, disagreements arise when people or organizations try to achieve objectives that are incompatible with one another's and/or when they compete for few resources SALTO (2000). Incompatible aims lead to friction.

3. Youth and conflict in Pakistan

Conflict and bloodshed have reached unprecedented levels in Pakistan. Conflict among student unions, sectarian clashes, street violence, etc., are prevalent, and young people are often at the core of them. Much of the argument is on whether or not young people are being duped, indoctrinated, or compensated fairly. This kind of thinking treats young people as if they are nave and fails to consider the socioeconomic contexts that may be contributing to the escalation of violence and conflict among them.

The young people of Pakistan have suffered greatly because of the war (Rahman, 2019). Internal and foreign conflicts have plagued the nation for decades. These include political unrest, sectarian strife, and terrorist attacks (Ahmed, 2017). Young people's lives and ambitions have been profoundly impacted by these wars. Young Pakistanis have been on both sides of the conflict divide in recent years (Malik, 2020). The widespread nature of violence has hampered their socioeconomic development, interrupted their schooling, and stifled their personal progress (Rasool, 2018). Young Pakistanis, however, have shown perseverance and a great desire for peace and stability despite these difficulties (Khan, 2021). They are determined to bring about good change, as seen by their participation in a variety of activities aimed at peacebuilding, interfaith harmony, and social justice (Hussain, 2022). For a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan, youth participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes is essential (Malik, 2020). To make the most of young people's potential and secure the country's future, governments and other stakeholders must acknowledge and encourage their agency (Ahmed, 2017).

It's important to remember that there are always underlying factors at play in every violent incident or tense situation. In addition, the danger factors increase when even the most fundamental safety procedures are neglected. Furthermore, most wars are localized. A classroom, house, neighborhood, or playgrounds are all possible examples of such environments. Similarly, the factors that lead to juvenile delinquency in Pakistan vary greatly from country to country. Here are some of the factors that have been discussed in the literature on youth and violence in Pakistan:

Corruption

Young people's engagement in violent acts in Pakistan has been linked to corruption, according to recent research (Shah, 2018). Corruption is endemic in the nation, and it has a negative impact on the economy, young people's access to opportunities, and the maintenance of inequality (Khan, 2019). According to the research, young discontent and isolation are exacerbated by corruption techniques including bribery, nepotism, and embezzlement (Mahmood, 2020). Some young people show their frustration with the world by resorting to violence because of the lack of openness and accountability in government (Raza, 2016). Corruption has also weakened the delivery of critical services like education and healthcare, depriving young people of fundamental tools and prospects for growth (Zahoor, 2017). Preventing juvenile violence and building a more inclusive and fair society are both aided by addressing corruption and supporting good governance (Khan, 2019).

However, according to Aga (2013), law enforcement corruption is a key contributor to juvenile criminality in Pakistan. He contends that eradicating corruption will go a long way toward resolving the issue. He argues that corruption should be prioritized as a root cause in order to effectively combat criminal activity. Corruption-related issues may be resolved primarily via these corrective actions. The reduction or elimination of technical backwardness in the framework of security instruments, the alleviation of poverty and unemployment, and the appropriation of authority granted to the agencies are all examples. Furthermore, the key to success is finding a solution to the issues in a prioritized order. There may be a dramatic drop in criminal activity if the aforementioned solutions were implemented. (Agha, 2013)

Religion

Violence among Pakistan's young has been linked to religious beliefs, according to a 2015 study (Abbas). The research implies that religious fanaticism and sectarian conflicts have led to the development of violence among young persons (Riaz, 2017). The 'cold war' and Pakistan's involvement in the form of allying with the US created what is called the 'Kalashnikov culture' in the name of jihad. (Sabir,et.al 2013). The roots of the issue go back to the time when General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, during his rule, which began on July 5, 1977, initiated a policy of 'Islamization'. This policy introduced a particular version of Sharia law, predominantly the system of the Hanafi School of Jurisprudence. Taking advantage of the situation, Saudi Arabia and Iran became important external factors in augmenting the sectarian divide in

Pakistan, and foreign forces got a free hand to launch their proxy war in Pakistan on sectarian grounds. (Ahmar, 2007)

The turnout was the result of the division between the Shias and Sunnis on the surface. This was the time when sectarian conflicts started. The government of Pakistan failed to resolve the sectarian conflicts, and polarization at the societal level promoted the forces of religious extremism. Extremist organizations have used religious ideology to attract and radicalize young people in Pakistan (Ahmad, 2020), a country with a varied religious landscape but a large Muslim population. This has led to terrorist attacks, religious wars, and persecution of certain faiths (Ali, 2016). Additionally, it has been acknowledged that the effect of religious organizations and clergy on forming young minds is a role in the prevalence of violence (Khan, 2018). It's important to keep in mind that religious beliefs are not the only factor contributing to juvenile violence. Social and economic inequalities, political unpredictability, and knowledge gaps all contribute to the escalation of religious tensions and the facilitation of violent results (Khalid, 2019). Effective measures to promote religious tolerance, interfaith harmony, and peacebuilding in Pakistan need an understanding of the complex interaction between religion, socio-political forces, and youth violence (Riaz, 2017).

Economic Failure and Unemployment

Conflict engagement among the young has always been higher than among adults. Young people are more likely to be affected by conflicts since their lives are more precarious than those of adults in paid employment. As was discussed before, a significant demographic change has occurred in the form of young unemployment in Pakistan, and the job market is unable to keep up with the rising need for workers. As a result, there is less youth work and more leisure time as the young population grows. According to what Huntington states in Urdal (2004), "young people are the protagonists of protests, instability, reform, and revolution," which suggests that young people have a predisposition for wanting to bring about change. Goldstone in Urdal (2004) states that 'big youth groups might produce conflict because they are more readily drawn toward new ideas and faiths and so question existing forms of authority,' another example of how young people's flawed ideology can lead to violence. In addition to being more receptive to new ideas, youth are also in a unique position to be unencumbered by the kind of constraints—time and safety concerns, for example—that might prevent other demographics from engaging in activism. According to Collier, "the opportunity cost for a young person is generally low," which means that the cost of recruiting young people to rebel groups is relatively cheap. (Urdal, 2004)

Pakistan has had to deal with a major problem in the form of unemployment. According to a United Nations research, young people are far more likely to fall into poverty and engage in criminal behavior since there aren't enough options for them to make a livelihood. Roughly half of the world's 3 billion individuals who live on less than $2 per day are under the age of 24 and are residents of developing nations. There are almost 70 million young people without jobs, and many more who are barely making it on very low pay and in deplorable (and frequently predatory) circumstances in the workplace. To lower unemployment and make room for young people entering the workforce, more than a billion jobs will need to be produced by 2010. According to the United Nations (2003 In Pakistan, the 'demographic bulge' is the highest it has ever been because of the country's rapidly growing young population. Increases in the working-age population and labor force participation rates contributed to an annual growth rate of 3.5% in the juvenile labor force from 2000 to 2009. The teenage labor force increased at an even quicker clip of 3.9% annually, much above the regional average of 2.7%. Cho et al. (2013) Youth conflict and violence are exacerbated by unemployment, which causes feelings of sadness, social isolation, and other behavioral problems.

Pakistan is turning forth a younger generation that is more educated than its predecessors. UNICEF released its 2012 report on youth, including both male and female statistics. The literacy rate for males between the ages of 15 and 24 is 79.1%, whereas it is just 61.5% for females in the same age group. A study conducted in Pakistan between December 2012 and January 2013 among 5,271 young individuals (aged 18-29) found that 43% of them were stay-at-home mothers while 7% were jobless. Only a tiny fraction of the population has steady job (12%), with 18% either being students or self-employed. It has been shown that

Many works investigate the factors that put people of a certain age in a position to commit violent acts or wage war, such as the availability of weapons or the decline in the price of revolt. Quantitative research by Collier et al. (Lyndsay et al., 2009) suggests a connection between economic factors and the likelihood of civil strife.

They contend that insurrection and civil war are much more likely when resources, such as the looting and sale of basic commodities, are readily available. Collier also claims that the availability of cheap rebel labor due to a big youth cohort may help keep recruiting expenses down. Though their most recent paper (Collier et al., 2008) maintains their argument for a connection between conflict and the structure of income and natural resources, it also identifies new variables as significant and quantitatively important,

such as the percentage of a country's population that is male and between the ages of 15 and 29. A group of researchers led by Lindsay (et al., 2009)

Exclusion from decision-making and society

In Pakistan, young people have just recently begun to be included in formal policymaking processes. There were never any young people involved in efforts to bring about peace or rebuild. Young people's feeling of community is often highlighted in accounts of their lives during and after war. Despite being the vast majority of the population, young people have always been seen and regarded as a marginalized group. The social lives of young people are severely disrupted during civil conflicts, according to Newman's writing in Sommers (2006). The author argues further that young people's spheres of influence seldom extend beyond their close families. For example: Conflict-oriented organizations may more easily incite individuals and groups to participate in extreme behaviors and motivate others to act as perpetrators when tensions rise in a variety of areas, including the social, economic, and political realms. Again, the repercussions of being on the outside might differ from person to person based on their unique 'personal qualities and contextual situations. Those who rose to become rebel leaders often had their own histories of victimization and humiliation. "repression, human rights violations, deprivation of needed resources, and/or alienation" may be among the things they've faced. Their hostility seems to stem from "retaliation derived from feelings of indignity and degradation experienced in the past." According to the United Nations (2003

Political Factors

A small number of powerful families in Pakistan have held sway over the country's politics for decades. The official political system has never included young people until lately. Despite engaging in political activities such as voting, competing, and demonstrating, they lack understanding of politics and political involvement. As stated by UNDP (2012), a vibrant and resilient democracy benefits from both official and informal forms of involvement, and both should be encouraged. Young people's involvement in formal, institutional procedures is consistently lower than that of older individuals over the world, according to a large body of research. This undermines the system's ability to fairly represent its citizens and disenfranchises young people. According to a poll done by UN IANYD in August 2012, the vast majority of the 13,000 respondents' voices from 186 nations emphasized insufficient chances for meaningful engagement in decision-making processes as the primary concern for youth. Young men and women often

feel alienated and excluded from society and community when they are denied chances to engage in inclusive decision-making processes. The need of building trust between young people and their respective institutions, as well as increasing their ability, was also emphasized. Efforts should be made to prioritize the most at-risk youth population, particularly young women, via targeted interventions.

A student poll found that students believe that "family connections or [requires] being part of a particular biraderi" are necessary for success in Pakistani politics. It is already challenging for young people to see a future for themselves in politics, and nepotism and favoritism just make things more challenging. A lot of money is required, they claim, for a 'successful election campaign' and to persuade people to cast ballots. The average person lacks the requisite political connections and support base to win an election. Lahore (Pakistan) Higher Education Student (Lall, 2014)

Parties often leverage their youth movements for electoral gain. Youth has greater vigor and works more harshly. They recruit young individuals as 'bhatah' (extortionists) to generate illicit funds for the parties. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi has been said to have a trained young violent group that oversees the steady flow of bhatah and militant actions to protect the interests of their leader, who is now residing in the United Kingdom as a refugee, according to media sources. This has prompted other political parties to form their own bhatah groups, including as the Awami National Party (ANP) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). These bhatah cells are also taught how to adapt to any circumstance and where to hide from the authorities. According to a study (Sabir et al., 2013).

4. **How can we reduce youth involvement in conflict?**

The above-mentioned factors should be considered in the context of any endeavor to bring about a change in terms of constructive participation of youth in decreasing conflict or prohibiting the age group from participating in conflict per se. Pakistan's government has been criticized for not doing enough to help the country's young, although it has actually launched a number of specialized programs to address these issues. The United Nations, the World Bank, and other groups support these kinds of initiatives.

Continued Vocational training and other income support

Organizing vocational training to increase skills required by the market would be a significant treatment to minimize adolescent engagement in conflict, given that providing chances for regular work needs better education and abilities.

The Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program (BBSYDP) is an admirable initiative by the government that has been ongoing and should be maintained. ' In 2008, the Government of Sindh, in partnership with international institutions including the Bank and the ILO, created the BBSYDP, a youth TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) initiative, to address concerns of youth unemployment and skills scarcity. Women and young people without jobs are given priority in the initiative, which targets young people aged 18 to 35. Ninety-seven percent of those taking part have some kind of post-secondary education. With a monthly stipend of PKR 2,500 ($29) and a mobility allowance of PKR 4,000 ($470) for long commuters, this program covers the costs of training for approximately 90 different professions depending on participant choices over the course of 2-3 months. Private and state institutions were chosen in an open competition to give the training based on factors like the quality of their professors, the suitability of their facilities, their financial stability, and so on. Cho et al. (2013)

The Skills Development Council's 'Second Chance' Training Programs are another example; they were first implemented in the 1980s but have undergone significant improvements since 2002, when the current Tripartite (Employers, Employees, and Government) structure was established in conjunction with the Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP) and international organizations (The Bank and ILO). Training programs and the creation of National Vocational credentials are two of the SDC's primary functions, both of which need the approval of the National Training Board. The SDC has a nationwide reach, as shown by its training and award programs. Cho et al. (2013)

Since its founding in 1998, the Ministry of Industry and Production's Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) has provided nationwide SME support. Training, business plan creation, accounting, financial management, legal representation, and advising are all part of the package. Cho et al. (2013). The effectiveness of these and comparable efforts to lessen young people's susceptibility to becoming involved in violent conflict and limit its effects will be substantial.

Fostering adult-youth partnerships

Creating new relationships of adolescents with adult populations via community and professional platforms may go a long way in establishing credibility through the exchange of insights gained in one's professional and community endeavors. If their promises are grasped and their services are exploited, young people are a country's greatest asset. It is widely held that when young people work together with adults, they are more successful in their efforts to promote peace and preserve children's rights. Alliances

between youth-driven groups and those headed by adults in the community may be necessary to accomplish this. (Common Ground Initiative, 2009)

Change your perception of yourself and others.

Ideas like "who are they?" that are nourishing to youth are essential. and who the rest of them are. The Quran does not endorse any particular group of people or declare any certain sect to be correct. If one group enjoys the right to vote in national elections, then so should the other. No major political party can be relied upon to always tell the truth.

Participation and empowerment

Finally, certain political parties may find it difficult to appeal to young voters, creating an opening for those who can organize young people in new and innovative ways. This is according on research done by the British Council in 2013

How different political groups see young voters is another telling indicator. In the run-up to the 2013 elections, political parties' manifestos failed to address the issues of young people beyond making vague promises on education and jobs. The only political parties that guarantee participation for young people in their initiatives were the PTI and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). (Lall, 2014)

The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) is one of the few projects that successfully promotes and advocates for the acknowledgment of young people as peace builders. Through networking, training, and empowerment in support of youth projects, as well as advocacy, campaigning, and practical research on the role of young people in peacebuilding, this global network of young people and youth organizations works towards peace and conflict transformation. As part of their advocacy work, UNOY Peacebuilders raise awareness about problems pertaining to young people's participation in peacebuilding at the local, national, regional, and international levels. The United Nations and other international organizations have successfully intervened on their behalf in the past. Additionally, their message is being disseminated via public events and public relations efforts relating to conflict transformation among the interested public.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, the current 'demographic shift' presents a unique chance to support the country's future workforce, economy, and families by providing assistance to today's youth. Pakistan has always had a large

number of young people, but that population is starting to enter the workforce in greater numbers. One third of the 3.5 million jobless stocks in 2003-04 were males between the ages of 15 and 24, making the issue of their integration into the domestic labor market a pressing one. Most of them had completed high school or furthered their education, yet they still couldn't find work. Their work is taken seriously regardless of where it is located, whether it a major city, a medium-sized town, or a rural location. Youth employment in Sindh and, to a lesser degree, Punjab has not worsened over time, but it has in the two smaller provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. The rural-urban flow of labor, inter-provincial migration, movements between large, medium, and small cities, and international migration may all be used as policy instruments to correct regional imbalances in unemployment, in addition to providing employment opportunities to youth and older unemployed stock in rural and urban areas, especially in two small provinces. According to a study (Chaudary et al., 2008)

It is crucial to understand the dynamics of the youth-conflict relationship and to take affirmative actions to make youth part of the development and peacebuilding agenda in Pakistan, especially in light of the country's changing sociopolitical context, its inevitable role in the war on terror, and its increasing youth population.

Recommendations for Involving Young People in Fostering Peace

1. Foster vocational education and economic security through facilitating the acquisition of marketable skills. Increased funding and resources for youth may be made available via initiatives like the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program (BBSYDP) and Second Chance Training Programs.

2. Encourage collaborations between adults and young people by providing opportunities for them to work together in various contexts. This may let people talk to one another about their lives and the lessons they've learnt.

3. Inspire a cultural change toward more positive stereotypes of young people and other groups by advocating for diversity and inclusion. All citizens, regardless of their origins or beliefs, need to be treated with dignity and justice.

4. Support youth involvement in politics and other forms of decision-making, and provide them more chances to participate in those processes. The forums and platforms for youth representation offered by political parties should reflect the needs and concerns of young people.

5. Help groups of young people who are working to create peace: Support programs like UNOY (United Network of Young Peacebuilders), which educates and mobilizes young people to have a part in peacebuilding efforts. Make available tools and venues for youth-led initiatives, courses, and studies addressing peace and conflict resolution.

6. Deal with the underlying economic and social issues: Take on issues like corruption, religious fanaticism, economic failure, unemployment, and young marginalization from decision-making that lead to their participation in conflicts. Take steps to curb corruption, boost economically-inclusive development, and provide more job possibilities for young people.

7. Boost education and awareness to encourage young people to value diversity, dialogue, and critical thinking. Promote civic learning, and provide forums for discussing and spreading information on peaceful dispute resolution, human rights, and community building.

8. Motivate young people to become involved in politics by making resources like mentors, workshops, and funding available to them. Encourage political systems that are open and accessible to all citizens so that young people may have a voice in shaping public policy.

The young of Pakistan have great potential as agents of change, and if these suggestions are implemented, they will help Pakistan on its path to sustained peacebuilding and prosperity.

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