



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Youth Political Disengagement in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Zainab Asif

MS Scholar, Department of Politics and International Relations, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author**

zainabasif.849@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

The study examines the Pakistan's increasing youth political disengagement problem which poses a threat to stability of Pakistan. Finding the root cause of this disengagement and understanding its long term effects on the country's democracy and governance are the main goal. Since youth have historically been important in political initiatives, historical studies show that after the ban on student union and the emergence of dynastic politics, there was a trend toward disengagement. The study looks at the causes of disengagement using a descriptive and exploratory approach and gathers information from focused discussion with individuals aged 18 to 35. The results shows that disengagement is caused by political mistrust, elite power, unstable governance, lack of civic education and socio-economic issues. The study also highlights the way in which youth civic engagement is essential to support the stability of Pakistan's democratic system and understanding the strategies of youth political disengagement. The study recommendations demands for the restoration of student union, setting up the youth quotas in parliament and the addition of meaningful civic education in order to restore the political engagement of youth.

## KEYWORDS

Civic Awareness, Political Disengagement, Democratic Governance, Political Participation

## Introduction

"Political disengagement" is the term used to describe the destruction of public trust in political processes such as voting, activism, and public debate. With almost 60% of its population being young, Pakistan has one of the largest youth populations in the world, implying significant potential for political change and democracy. The youth of Pakistan are disinterested, disengaged, or unhappy with politics. The nature of Pakistan's democracy is seriously threatened by this trend, which has grown increasingly common over time. Despite the country's rising youth population (those between the ages of 18 and 35) and increased access to digital media and education, youth of Pakistan continue to be disengaged from formal political processes.

Any country's youth have a big impact on its political, economic, and social environment. By taking part in elections, public debates, activism, and community involvement, young people in democratic systems support political renewal, accountability, and civic vitality. This disengagement weakens the democratic spirit and makes it more challenging for policy to adapt to the evolving demands of youth. By gaining a strong understanding of their viewpoints and hardly ever experiences, the research seeks to explain why young activists are so disliked engage in youth politics.

The youth disengagement is impacted by social, political, and economic issues rather than happening by accident. To determine all of the possible consequences that

youth disengagement from politics may have on the democratic system, it is crucial to comprehend the causes of this phenomenon. Because the youth's disengagement may also contribute to unstable governance and are thus more vulnerable to the impact of extremist political ideas, disengaged youth present a challenge to democratic responsibility.

### **Literature Review**

Yasir, Baloch and Hassan (2023) explores why Pakistani youth are not a part of the political system and explore the life of politically involved students in their political activities. The paper referred to the simplistic explanation of violence by showing that there are many intertwined links between the limits on student politics, violence, and student indifference. It highlights the themes of similarity and withdrawal in groups of students as it promotes inclusive relationships. The findings give an analysis and recommendations to the governments, the academic institutions and student bodies on how to expand the diversity and vibrancy of youth politics in Pakistan and encourage productive political participation to improve the country.

Ranjha (2025) said the young population in Pakistan was generally not interested in politics because of lack of guidance by political leaders, bad mind sets by the bureaucracy and increase in materialism which undermined ideological beliefs. During a celebratory speech in his honor of the communist leader it was stressed that a good number of the youth did not know anything about the political personalities and historic conflicts, as they were not discussed by leaders. Youth discontent in politics was being caused by the decline in freedom of speech in schools, the lack of youth representation in student unions and in political parties.

Waris, Tariq, Rasool and Irshad (2023) examined how young people in Pakistan's Punjab Province participate in politics and identified a number of variables that lead to their low level of engagement. The major effects investigated through seven guiding questions include a lack of interest, concerns about public issues, economic conditions, the influence of senior politicians, family influence, regional affinities, and perceptions of political corruption. Age, family wealth, and party identification are all crucial factors in determining voting behavior. The findings shows, enhancing young people's political consciousness is critical for increasing their involvement in local and national elections.

Shahzadi (2025) emphasized the role that non-governmental and community-based organizations can play and also analyzed the obstacles that are continuing to prevent the Pakistani youth to participate in politics. Mistrust in the institutions of the government and an excessive academic load and safety concerns are the primary obstacle of disengagement. The non-governmental organizations and the community-based organizations strive to build civic awareness, but they are not able to break the psychological and institutional barriers. The involvement and perceived obstacles do not show any significant relationship or effect. Regression and correlation, although Non-governmental organizations and Community-based organizations have potentials of civic learning. Community-based organizations and Non-governmental organizations strive to raise civic awareness but they are unable to go beyond institutional and psychological barriers.

Wray-Lake (2019) has pointed out that elections and other historical events influenced political attitudes and behaviors, and cultural differences affected involvement. Also, highlighted the importance of knowing how youth get interested in politics. This implied that political participation of different group levels varied. scholars urged for developmentally and culturally informed research to promote practices that enhanced youth political development, especially during difficult sociopolitical periods in order to

discover strategies that empowered varied young voices in addressing societal challenges, The youth learned political skills from everyday experiences with social media, civic education and legislative changes which increase possibilities for participation. As a result, greater institutional collaboration and civic education are needed.

Loader, Vromen and Xenos (2014) said because of youth unemployment and economic inequities, many stakeholders are concerned about the future participation of youth in politics and examines how social media influences youth participation culture and contains contributions from famous academics. To avoid oversimplifying the "internet generation," it investigates subjects such as social media's influence on political socialization, its ability to alleviate political inequality, its role in civic education, and developing forms of political involvement among youth.

Matthes (2020) investigates the potential for social media to promote youth democratic involvement, but the actual influence may be limited because these platforms are mostly used for amusement rather than politics. This study investigates a contradiction that has been found in Japan, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, and Germany, youth increased usage of social media has not been associated with higher voting participation than older generations. The results call for a reevaluation of existing strategies for tackling social media and political involvement, as well as the inclusion of entertainment-focused material in future study to fully understand the consequences for democracy.

Aurangzeb (2008) has shown that the majority of youth had little faith in the institutions of government. Young people were excluded from this process since a small elite controlled much of the decision-making power. It was also noted that the administration was apathetic about implementing initiatives for youth development. At the time, neither a clear National Youth Policy nor a dedicated budgetary allocation for youth existed. It was mentioned that youth could use advocacy strategies to exert pressure on the government. Additionally, once they were granted the right to vote at the age of 18, young people were in a greater position to influence legislators.

Saud and Ashfaq (2024) explored the fact that in the 2013 and 2018 General National elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, political participation by the youth has reshaped the traditional politics in Pakistan. This paper focuses on democratic engagement of citizens using the Public Sphere theory. It discusses the new concept of Youth Inn and how the youth are transforming the political discourse, with the application of qualitative methods such as interviews. Through language and ethnic factors, the youths have always obeyed their elders when voting. But going against such conventions, the youth have greatly enhanced aspects of life, politics and the society and this is one of the aspects that political parties consider a priority in their plans.

Edward (2006) examined the participation of the youth people in social change, particularly among the youths in voting. It considers the existence of other variants of action and raises concerns regarding the lack of interest of young people in political events. The study questions the notion of alienation to democratic principles and the effectiveness of the voting box as a social change agent according to the views of the young people. It argues that youth are complaining about the perceived weaknesses in the political process instead of not attending the polling stations. The report encourages better democratic practices, as opposed to focusing on issues pertaining to the young participation.

## **Material and Methods**

In this study, a qualitative method is used in which the researcher has used a descriptive and exploratory approach to examine and draw conclusions about the cause of youth political disengagement in Pakistan. The study was based on both primary and secondary resources. Primary data is utilized through gather information from individuals with discussion between the ages of 18 to 35, which allows an in-depth look of their experiences and perspective. Secondary sources include research articles and scholarly journals.

## **Results and Discussion**

One of the key reasons that lead to the disengagement of the youth in the politics of the country is the discontent of the youth with the Pakistan political environment. Due to the perception of corruption, unmet promises and lack of accountability, most voters do not trust politicians and political institutions. High profile scandals are also capable of doing serious damage to the reputation of political parties, and lead to a general cynicism that questions the efficacy of political participation and discourages faith in election integrity. Also, constituents are frustrated by the process of being misled when politicians do not deliver as they promise during campaigns, and this is one of the causes of political apathy. The gap between the electorate and the elected leaders increases due to the gap between the promise and the resultant policies put in place. Such a sustained lack of substantial activity on such vital problems as access to healthcare, economic disparity, climate change only weakens citizens' trust in the political system, resulting in disengagement with civic responsibilities which only contributes to a vicious circle of disengagement.

In 2023, in a United Nations index, Pakistan ranked 162 out of 183 countries, meaning youth civic participation was very low, with the Youth Development Index. The fact that Pakistan has poor scores on the Youth Development Index indicates that the country lacks favorable structural issues that remain to be a major challenge to meaningful participation of youth in the society and civic life. According to the index which examines education, health, employment, civic engagement, and inclusiveness, Pakistan is performing poorly in all of those categories. Some of the key issues are low levels of education, high dropout rates, unemployment by the youth, gender inequality, poor civic education, low level of political participation and inadequate youth representation in decision-making. The factors are associated with the marginalization of youth in the civic and political matters and with the disillusionment of political institutions. The Future projections of the Youth Development Index in 2025 show that little or nothing would change compared to previous evaluation in case these areas do not improve further.

The Youth of Pakistan also advised the serious influence of the social media on political participation among the youth. They noted that although these platforms have enabled individuals to be able to access the political content, they have focused on disinformation proliferation. The social media on which the digital intelligence operates tends to foster dramatic and emotional content. The environment has a number of political stories, and young people cannot easily settle the truthfulness of any information hence the confusion and mistrust. It has been suggested that children who have to endure such circumstances daily experience emotional fatigue, confusion, and frustration. When faced with a large number of choices and conflicting plot twists, many resort to totally withdrawing themselves. This issue can have a broader impact on society as well as be a personal issue. When people cease to be involved in conversations, the conversation

becomes less energetic and afford less chance to have the problem-solving in groups (Team, 2025).

In Pakistan, the lack of political participation of the youth is also due to the combination of illiteracy rates and certain institutional problems of the educational system, although education system is the most important factor of political awareness and civic duty. Since less educated individuals are usually not aware of politics, the ability to interpret the political situation, and to comprehend the intricate political processes, illiteracy is the antithesis of democracy. Citizens are deeply disadvantaged when they cannot read newspapers or get access to credible sources of information because this makes their ability to make politically informed judgments extremely restricted. The ignorant citizen is thus an easy target to influence and be swayed and fed misinformation. The formal education system in Pakistan is the root of the ascent of the lack of political participation. The current education system hardly enables political consciousness or civic education to be attained since much emphasis is placed on memorization and test results. This leads to many young people obtaining higher education with no information on civic responsibilities and their political rights.

The study highlighted that young people's lack of opportunities to properly participate in decision-making processes was one of their biggest challenges. The youths are disengaged in their cultures and communities due to lack of opportunities and exposure to actively contribute towards inclusive decision-making processes. Increased capacity building, greater trust of the youth with the institution and participatory mechanisms were also highlighted as necessary. Moreover, it should target efforts towards the most vulnerable youth especially youth specific programs.

### **Consequences for Democracy and Governance**

The youth of Pakistan make up a significant proportion in country's population and their disengagement in politics raise a serious concern about the country's governance. The main consequences are listed below:

**A Disconnect between the People and the Government:** As young people make up over half of Pakistan's population, a government that was chosen without their input cannot be considered truly representative. If youth does not engage in the politics the rule of game will be imposed by the politicians, who may have limited knowledge of the issues that youth faced. Due to this many people feel that the government has no interest in their concerns, which reduce the trust in the government.

**Lack of Innovative Ideas and New Leaders:** The Politics of Pakistan are frequently governed by a few powerful families, and there are very few chances for a new leader. Instead of implementing new innovative ideas and strategies to address the present situation, the majority of political leaders still depend on the old strategies and technologies. As a result, the government becomes less connected to the current global trends and is unwilling to change.

**Reduction in Political Responsibility:** A decline in political duty is implied by younger people's disengagement from politics. As a result of their lack of interest in politics, young people stop monitoring the actions of their leaders and stop demanding transparency from the government. Young people's quiet allows government officials and political players to operate freely, which encourages corruption, ineffective policymaking, and general bad governance. The rulers won't have many opportunities to improve or change their circumstances if there isn't a strong and outspoken public protest.

Furthermore, ongoing disengagement ultimately has a negative impact on society as a whole as well as the political system. According to the study, the removal of youth from the system ultimately means that state institutions would fall apart. The state agencies become even less conscious of the issues of everyday life, and democracy is undermined when it stops counting the majority among its representatives. Instead of progressing, the country reaches the point of inclusive development, which means that everyone gains from the expansion. By ignoring the youth, the system inherently rejects its own future, creating a rigid administration that is unable to undergo a revolution or meet the demands of the modern world.

## **Conclusion**

Summing up, the subject of Political disengagement of young Pakistani population is a worrying phenomenon that begins with a set of institutional distrust, historical limitations and severe socio-economic challenges. The youth are not included in the politics despite them being the largest group of people in the country simply because of poor civic education. This research shows that a situation of Representation Gap where corruption can be practiced and undermines the democracy arises when the youth lose interest in politics. This disengagement is a threat to the long term stability of the country. It is time to cease to regard young people as something like voters but recognize them as partners and leaders that will determine the future of the country.

## **Policy Recommendation for Re-engaging Youth**

The government and political parties should concentrate on these areas in order to reengage youth into the political system and guarantee Pakistan's future stability:

**Bring Back Student Unions:** In the past, the student unions served as the "training ground" for the society's future leaders. Students can learn how to cast ballots, discuss issues, and manage organizations by reiterating their operations under stringent laws that forbid violence. The latter aids in preparing the incoming leaders who will be chosen based on their skills rather than their last names.

**E-Voting" and Digital Democracy:** The government must make it easier for today's tech-savvy youth to participate online. Digital forums enabling the youth to express their opinions on the proposed legislation should be one of the options; safe "e-voting" alternatives could also be investigated. Young people and the government might become closer if politics were made as simple as a smartphone app.

**Improving School Civic Education:** Many young people don't vote because they don't understand how to register to vote or how the government operates as a useful topic. Schools ought to teach civics. The children would also be taught about the local officials that they can contact, the need to vote their future and why it is important other than learning their rights.

**Youth Quotas in Parliament:** National and Provincial Assemblies need to have particular seats in the legislature that are designated to those who are under 35 years of age as well as women and minorities. This puts the youth into the legislative process and enhances the population representation of the government.

## References

- Aurangzeb, B. (2008). *Youth in governance: Exploring dynamics of youth participation in Pakistan*. Institute of Social Studies.
- Commonwealth Secretariat. (2023). *Global youth development index update report 2023* (T.-A. Gilbert-Roberts, Ed.). Commonwealth Secretariat
- Edwards, K. (2006). Youth democracy and social change. In *Social change in the 21st century conference 2006*. Queensland University of Technology.
- Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2014). The networked young citizen: Social media, political participation and civic engagement. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(2), 143–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.871571>
- Matthes, J. (2020). Social media and the political engagement of young adults. *Online Media and Global Communication*, 1(1), 1–15.
- Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency. (2024, January). *Missing young voters of Pakistan* (Briefing paper). [https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MissingYoungVotersinPakistan\\_2024.pdf](https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/MissingYoungVotersinPakistan_2024.pdf)
- Ranjha, W. A. (2025, August 11). State, politicians blamed for youth's apathy towards politics. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1930019>
- Sadozai, A. S. (2025, July 4). Political apathy or awakening? Youth participation in democracy. *Peak Point*.
- Saud, M., & Ashfaq, A. (2024). Shift from traditional to contemporary political patterns: Knowing the youth perspectives on political participation. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 60(6), 3474–3494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096241235292>
- Shafique, N., & Rehman, A. (2024). Challenges to enhance youth political engagement in Pakistan. *Insights of Pakistan, Iran and the Caucasus Studies*, 3(1), 46–57.
- Shahzadi, M. (2025). Barriers to youth political participation in Pakistan: Examining the role of NGOs and CBOs. 3, 42–58.
- Waris, M., Tariq, A., Rasool, F., & Irshad, M. U. (2023). Measuring the factors of limited participation of youth in politics of Punjab (Pakistan). *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, 20(2), 2290–2304.
- Wray-Lake, L. (2019). How do young people become politically engaged? *Child Development Perspectives*, 13(2), 127–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12324>
- Yasir, A., Baloch, M., & Ul Hassan, A. A. (2023). Disengagement of youth with student politics in Pakistan: A study of the experiences of politically engaged students. *Research Journal for Societal Issues*, 5(3), 274–284. <https://doi.org/10.56976/rjsi.v5i3.155>