

Next Generation

Pakistan

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Foreword

Pakistan is currently the sixth most populous country globally, with two-thirds of the population below the age of 30, making it among the world's youngest nations. Eight countries, of which Pakistan is one, will account for more than half the rise in global population by 2050. At present, Pakistan's population represents the 10th largest labour force in the world. Yet, unemployment rates are high, access to quality education and skills development is limited, socio-economic inequality restricts access to opportunities and resources, and political instability is fueling economic and social insecurity. However, where there are challenges, there are immense opportunities too.

Over the last decade, since the previous Next Generation report was published, the government and other stakeholders have made various efforts to support young people by launching initiatives geared towards improving access to education, supporting skills development, encouraging entrepreneurship and initiating youth engagement programmes. The desire to support young people is evident, yet the results make clear that much more needs to be done to help the next generation unlock their full potential and create an equitable and prosperous society in which they can thrive.

This research – a part of the British Council's global initiative, the Next Generation Series – investigates factors that will enable young people to become engaged, fulfilled, and active citizens in their countries. It seeks to gain a deeper understanding of their aspirations, needs and readiness in the hope of bringing together Pakistan's brightest minds to identify ways of tapping into the energy and talent of Pakistani youth.

This research was initiated during a difficult period for Pakistan. As the country was dealing with the consequences of Covid-19, the already challenging situation was made worse by the devastating floods

of 2022. Despite a minimal contribution to global emissions – Pakistan's total CO2 emissions account for approximately 1.5% of total emissions – the country found itself at the center of the climate crisis as well as leading the climate justice conversation. Moreover, ongoing political instability and escalating economic uncertainty has had an impact on the findings. Still, the findings were surprising.

Even though Pakistan's economy has remained in a state of flux for decades, with frequent macroeconomic crises, Pakistani youth are optimistic about their future in the country. Most young people want to remain in Pakistan as opposed to moving abroad. This optimism is in part due to the digital revolution and its potential to improve the lives of young people through direct access to e-commerce platforms that are increasingly providing new opportunities for economic empowerment.

The speed and enthusiasm with which young people have embraced digital opportunities as a route for self-empowerment is a striking development in this latest report.

As Pakistan engages in digital transformation and prioritises inclusion for all in the digital economy, it is critical to note there remain gaps between those with the access, skills and knowledge to capitalise on the opportunities of digital citizenship, and those without, notably historically marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities, minorities and the rural populations. Meanwhile, many technologically literate young people, whilst aware of the power of digital, are concerned about the spread of disinformation and its polarizing effects.

The consensus shared by young men and women throughout the report is broadly similar. For instance, climate change is of greater concern than

ever, however, concerns around quality education, bridging the skills gap, and lack of decent employment opportunities takes precedence. Furthermore, whilst young people are not disinterested in politics, there is clearly a need for more concerted efforts to meaningfully engage them in the political and civic space.

This research has given us the opportunity to stop, think, re-evaluate, and most importantly, listen to and work with young people directly to explore how we can create a more sustainable and successful future for young Pakistanis.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to the young people who took part in this study. Their voices are critical to shaping the future and the deep insight they have provided is invaluable.

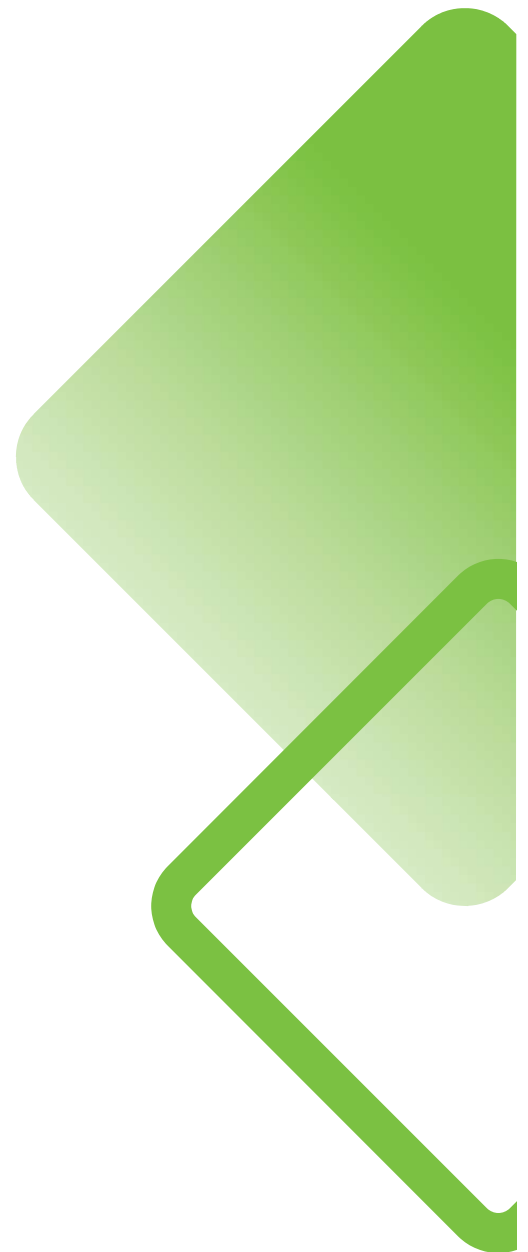
We believe that Next Generation Pakistan has the power to bring the right people together to generate a constructive discourse on the aspirations, opportunities and challenges facing young people today, as well as exploring ways to fully unleash their as yet untapped potential. The findings present not only key challenges faced by young people in present times, but also point toward measures and critical actions required by all stakeholders – including government, civil society, media, academia, and society at large – to overcome them. Supporting young people in gaining the right education and skills, confidence and connections will allow them to participate in and create strong and inclusive communities. The benefits of which are unlimited.

Amir Ramzan

Country Director British Council

Task Force

Next Generation Pakistan



Acknowledgements

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We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Asghar Zaidi, Vice Chancellor of Government College University (GCU) Lahore for helping us reach students from public universities across Pakistan gathered at GCU for Annual Student Societies' Summit 2022, and seek their opinion through online polling as well as providing us access to a bright and hard-working group of young students who participated in a workshop that helped generate solutions to youth problems.

Youth Task Force

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the British Council. Any errors and omissions remain our own.

Executive summary

The Next Generation Pakistan is a significant national research study which comprehensively examines the perceptions of the country's young population between the ages of 16 and 34 with specific focus on their views, values, beliefs, and actions. It assesses in detail the challenges which Pakistan's youth face today, how it impacts their choices and decisions, and the efforts they are undertaking to transform and better their lives. The project aims to ignite a critical conversation on what are the needs of the country's young citizens, and how the country's institutions could transform and adapt in order to realise their potential.

The project was an extensive effort in mix methods research, utilising a combination of evaluating existing research, interviews and consultations with prominent practitioners and experts, and a nationwide field research comprising focus groups and surveys with youth from all regions and stratas of society. A special Youth Task Force composed of senior and young thought leaders with expertise in areas relevant to youth engagement, provided much needed context and insight to support the research. Our approach was to provide young Pakistanis with the opportunity to openly and honestly express their concerns, fears, hopes and dreams. Nearly four thousand youngsters from all walks of life participated, allowing for a holistic and accurate picture of the country's diverse and largest demographic cohort.

The results of the study have been enlightening. The young people of this country have always been lauded for its talent and potential, yet its leaders and communities have repeatedly misunderstood, limited and excluded them, refuting their abilities to transform themselves and Pakistan in the process. The study reflects several areas where young Pakistanis feel demotivated, apathetic or pessimistic. However, the research also brings forward a mindset where young people are

attempting new ways of taking charge and are using their agency to try and rise above societal and institutional limitations to grow personally and professionally. Emboldened by the emergence of new technologies, they are taking their destiny into their own hands, creating new economic opportunities, emancipating themselves politically and socially, and transforming their potential into tangible change.

This process is a delicate one, for change can go both ways. The study shows that key stakeholders, particularly on the political and economic front, have a critical role to play in this evolution. If encouraged, facilitated and supported, young Pakistanis can be empowered to positively alter the trajectory of the nation towards economic and social betterment. If they are discouraged or left on their own, they can take the country towards regressive social conflict and political polarisation.

These perceptions have been recorded at a time when Pakistan faces a myriad of crises. The country is experiencing a serious economic downturn, as well as major political instability while the next general elections are just around the corner, and an unprecedented environmental catastrophe that has depleted its resources and opportunities. How the nation deals with these developments is crucial, and young people are at the centre of this storm as they are its biggest affectees and change makers. This is a crossroads moment for Pakistan, now more than ever. How we tackle this crucial juncture will determine the future of this country.

Key findings

Mindset

Young Pakistanis are divided on their identity: 47% prefer to identify by their religion first, while 44% prefer to identify by their nationality as Pakistanis. They are optimistic about their future lives and careers and wish to stay in Pakistan as opposed to moving abroad.

They are politically very passive and apathetic, with little to no faith in the political system.

Environment

Generation gap

Evidence shows young people differing from the views and values of their parents in several areas, including social change, lifestyle and education. Majority of young people feel they are unable to decide their own future.

Most respondents believe their lives are worse off than their parents.

Social marginalisation

Two in three young Pakistanis complain of discrimination in Pakistan on the basis of ethnicity, religious beliefs and political beliefs.

Educated and internet-using respondents were more likely to report discrimination.

Three in five youth participants state that society treats people differently on the basis of gender.

Over 60% of young people believe the transgender community is discriminated against.

Over 60% of young people believe that persons with disabilities face discrimination.

Economy

Economic growth is seen as the top concern for young people as the economic crisis is directly linked to a decline in employment, a key priority of theirs.

Almost nine in ten young Pakistanis see the economy as a key voting issue at the national level.

Climate change

70% of young Pakistanis are concerned with the environmental impact of climate change.

56% of respondents linked the 2022 floods to climate change, while 68% said they have an understanding of the science behind it.

80% of participants considered climate change as a key voting issue at the national level.

Emerging challenges

Employment

Financial security and career success are among the highest priorities for young people.

Unemployment and need for economic growth are the highest areas of concern.

Female youth are seven times more likely to be unemployed than male youth, and twelve times less likely to be employed than their male counterparts. Seven in ten respondents said their family's financial situation determined their career choices. Educated and internet-using participants are far more optimistic about their careers.

Transgender respondents complained of sexual harassment and mistreatment at the workplace.

Education

Young people acknowledge the failure of the education system in providing them with skills needed for modern employment; lack of innovation is seen as a critical issue.

Teaching quality emerged as the top concern in the education system.

Curriculum development is harshly criticised as a major issue, as its focus lies heavily on theory rather than practical application. Widening industry-university gap, particularly in technology, leaves young people feeling unprepared for the job market.

Effects

Digital enhancement

Young people increasingly prefer digital/technological skills and problem solving skills over traditional skills like maths and literacy. Seven in ten respondents are in favour of non-traditional technical and skill-based education over formal education systems.

Seven in ten respondents see online learning as critical for young people to boost skills they can utilise for their professional work.

E-professionalism

The majority of young people are interested in starting their own businesses within the next five years.

Over half of the respondents see online freelancing as a viable option and have an understanding of digital e-commerce platforms.

Young women are seen as the major beneficiaries of e-commerce since it bypasses restrictions that hinder traditional employment.

Civic engagement and activism

Three in five Pakistani youth use the internet, and practically all internet users are on social media. Nearly half of all young people regularly post about political issues on social media, and over half have regular discussions with their friends on political issues, with internet users more active.

Three in five respondents believe online civic and political activism will change Pakistan.

Majority of Pakistani youth see themselves as playing an active role in mitigating climate change.

Social and political polarisation

Internet users are increasingly politically and socially intolerant, and claim to have seen material targeting their communities and ideologies on social media.

Enabling factors

Political engagement and policymaking

The majority of respondents feel their voices are not being heard by the country's leadership. Participants showed low direct participation in the political process, with only 10% stating they voted in the last twelve months.

Political participation, engagement and an active say in policymaking is a key demand of young Pakistanis.

Education engagement

Only one in four respondents stated receiving any kind of career guidance from their educators. Young Pakistanis are demanding that education must adapt and innovate in response to the needs of the 21st century student and young professional.

Nine in ten young people believe that education helps drive change in society, and eight in ten state that a good education is integral for facing future challenges.

Background

Next Generation is a global British Council research series focusing on young people. We believe it is important to listen to and engage with young people, as they will become the next generation of influencers, leaders and shapers of their countries. Yet we recognise that they are not just the future, they are the present, and they have the capacity to create, contribute and make a difference today.

Next Generation research – a global initiative

The Next Generation research series examines the conditions that support young people in becoming creative, fulfilled and active citizens in their countries. Since 2009, when the first Next Generation report was published in Pakistan, the British Council has conducted a number of seminal studies across the globe.

Countries as diverse as Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Kenya, South Africa, the UK and Turkey, have been analysed in depth to examine the challenges and aspirations of the youth. The most recent phase of this initiative (2021-22) assessed perspectives from Germany, Poland, Italy, Lebanon, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Vietnam, reaching out to over 17,000 young citizens between the ages of 15 and 35 via survey polls, and conducting hundreds of direct engagements via focus group discussions, in depth interviews, online diaries and youth workshops.

The reports have shed light on critical aspects relevant to the youth population. The 2022 wave showed how young people are hungry to engage, with a strong desire on their part to work with policymakers to develop solutions to improve their lives. Despite this, young people felt underappreciated and disempowered, believing that their views and contributions did not receive the attention to the same extent as older generations, creating restrictions in their ability to affect change. Resultantly, they have shifted from formal to informal systems of engagement, using activism and issues-based

campaigning to make their voices heard. The Next Generation Pakistan series has echoed many of these same sentiments, albeit in a context specific to the country's own issues.

Next Generation research – Pakistan

First published in 2009 in Pakistan by the British Council, the Next Generation¹ report sparked a much-needed debate on how Pakistan can transform itself to harness the potential of its young people.

The study made some critical insights, with half of the respondents claiming they don't have the skills for the modern labour market, while only 5% claimed to have received any higher education, a major indictment of the country's learning systems.

There was also a noted disillusionment in democracy with only 10% having confidence in the government, and less than 40% voting in the 2008 elections (with another 50% not even on the voter list). Overall, the report urged leaders to take young people and their issues seriously, establish a new social contract with them and make them active citizens and leaders for the country's future. Two more reports were published in 2013 (Next Generation goes to the Ballot Box)² and in 2014 (Untold Stories, Insecure Lives)³ taking a deeper look at youth political participation and impact of conflict and violence respectively.

Since then, Pakistan has gone through waves of evolution, with a rarely seen continuity in the democratic process, as well as major regional and global upheavals, the emergence of the digital revolution, a once-in-a-century health crisis, and the rise of a new political order. This has inevitably shaped Pakistani society, and particularly its youngest inhabitants, who have now become the largest group in the country.

As of 2022, Pakistan is currently the sixth most populous country globally, with two-thirds of the

1. British Council Pakistan. (2009). Pakistan: The Next Generation. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next-generation-report.pdf>

2. British Council Pakistan. (2013). Next Generation goes to the Ballot Box. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/next-generation-goes-ballot-box-pakistan>

3. British Council Pakistan. (2014). Next Generation Pakistan: Insecure Lives, Untold Stories. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/next-generation-pakistan-insecure-lives-untold-stories>

population below the age of 30, making it among the world's youngest nations⁴. This 'youth bulge' is now the driving force of this 220+ million strong people. In order to understand the trajectory of this country, it is key to identify major views, beliefs and practices of young Pakistanis. We firmly believe that the time is right for a new iteration of the Next Generation research, which can build on learning from previous studies, while also gathering new insights to help recognise and understand the shifts in how young people in Pakistan view themselves, their environments and the world. This, in turn, is integral to determining the next major trends and preferences for youth development programming for all key stakeholders, including the British Council.

The research parameters of this report seek to understand the local and global challenges and barriers that Pakistani youth face in their day-to-day lives and in achieving their full potential. It also examines the aspirations, potential and the solutions that they develop to overcome and contribute to the wider development objectives of Pakistan.

Despite a 13-year gap, the 2023 report reflects many of the same challenges and frustrations for young Pakistanis as reported in 2009. Economic problems, particularly around employment, remain a key concern, as does lack of political participation and an education system that does not meet the needs of the youth. However, new areas of challenges and opportunities have emerged, including climate change and the rise of social media, which are now shaping youth engagement and priorities in a new direction. The report will attempt to chronicle these insights in this document.

4. PIDE. (2022). Youth Bulge in Pakistan: Bane or Boon? Retrieved from <https://pide.org.pk/research/youth-bulge-in-pakistan-bane-or-boon/>

Introduction

2022 has been the latest in a series of tumultuous years for Pakistan. The last decade saw an explosion of violent extremism, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands. While militancy was driven away, it came at the cost of extreme economic and ecological destruction, which devastated the livelihoods and homes of millions, putting pressure on a society already rife with poverty, illiteracy and conflict. The political system, struggling to maintain democratic continuity after years of military rule, has seen multiple governments unable to complete their tenure. They remain on a perpetual knife-edge, ravaged by multiple crises ranging from political instability, corruption cases and scandals to institutional friction and systemic upheaval. Climate change has laid waste to some of the most fertile areas of the country, as extreme weather changes have caused heat waves and glacial melting, culminating in a natural disaster so devastating and unprecedented in this year's floods, that it forced the world to take notice of the dangers of global warming. Social and political divisions have taken on new dimensions with the ascent of social media. Religious extremism has become extremely politicised, with violence in the name of faith targeting marginalised communities and political leaders alike. Finally, a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic upended the social order like never before, with its effects being felt even now in education, employment and business. 2022 has continued this unfortunate trend, with a slew of new challenges, including political chaos, economic downturn, ecological disasters and a resurgent wave of militancy.

This has been an incredibly challenging time for young Pakistanis, and it is in this landscape that the Next Generation study was conducted. It was necessary to see how the youth of Pakistan was responding to these developments, how it was

impacting them, and how it was being perceived. The findings are immensely important. Young Pakistanis have been adversely affected, not just by the circumstances outlined above, but also by a failing education system, a deteriorating employment environment, social and political polarisation and a widening generation gap. Despite this, the youth of Pakistan remain optimistic, fuelled by the promise of new media and 21st century communications. Their response to the chaos enveloping them has been to take matters into their own hands, using the internet to define their actions and their future. They are creating their own opportunities, amplifying their own voices, and becoming a force for change in Pakistan.

The findings demonstrate how young Pakistanis are developing new approaches to emancipate themselves, learning new skills, economically empowering themselves, and becoming a force for positive change through civic engagement and climate action. The story of Pakistan's Next Generation is the story of a generation yearning for change and is now finding the means to transform its own fortunes, as well as the future of this nation, amidst tremendous structural challenges that threaten to hinder this process.

Report structure

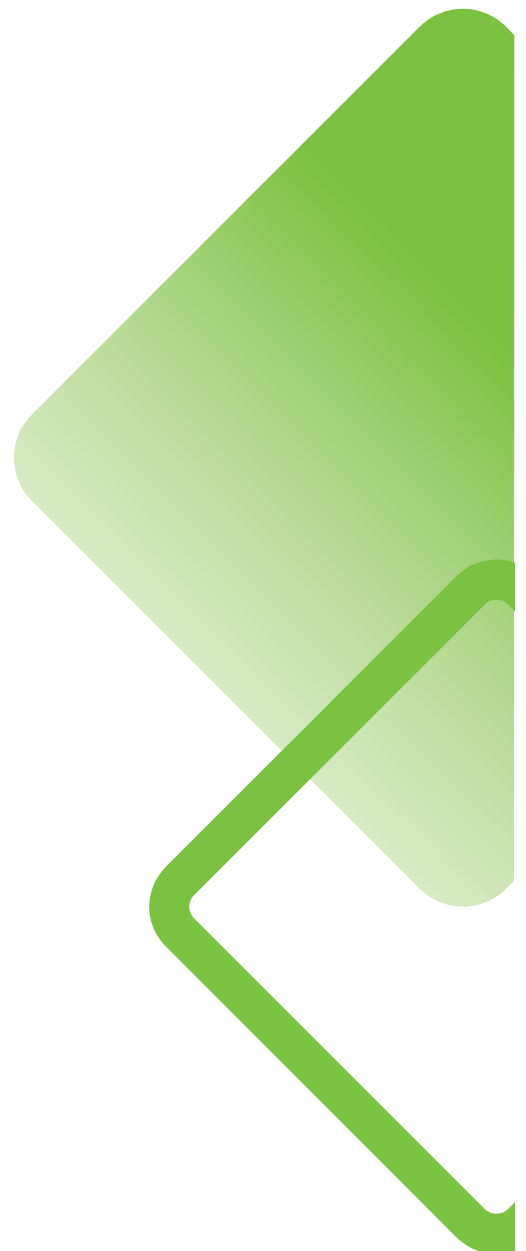
The report is structured in three parts. The first part will explain our overall methodology, whereby we conducted a comprehensive research exercise comprising seven in-depth interviews with thought leaders and change makers, 18 focus group discussions with youth nationwide, and a detailed survey conducted on 3,446 respondents. A Youth Task Force of prominent experts and practitioners from a diverse variety of fields was constituted to help analyse the findings and distill key insights.

The second part of the report outlines four key sections which categorise the findings based on our analytical framework, the 4E Model:

- E1: Environmental factors
- E2: Emerging challenges
- E3: Effects
- E4: Enabling factors

These sections will showcase the most important findings related to youth perceptions and attitudes towards a number of critical areas identified from our research, including perceptions of families, living standards, employment, education, climate change, socio-political discrimination and biases, the role of the internet and civic engagement.

The final part of the report lists the main recommendations of the report on institutional, policy and programmatic responses, highlighting key suggestions which relevant stakeholders need to understand and implement based on the responses documented in the study.



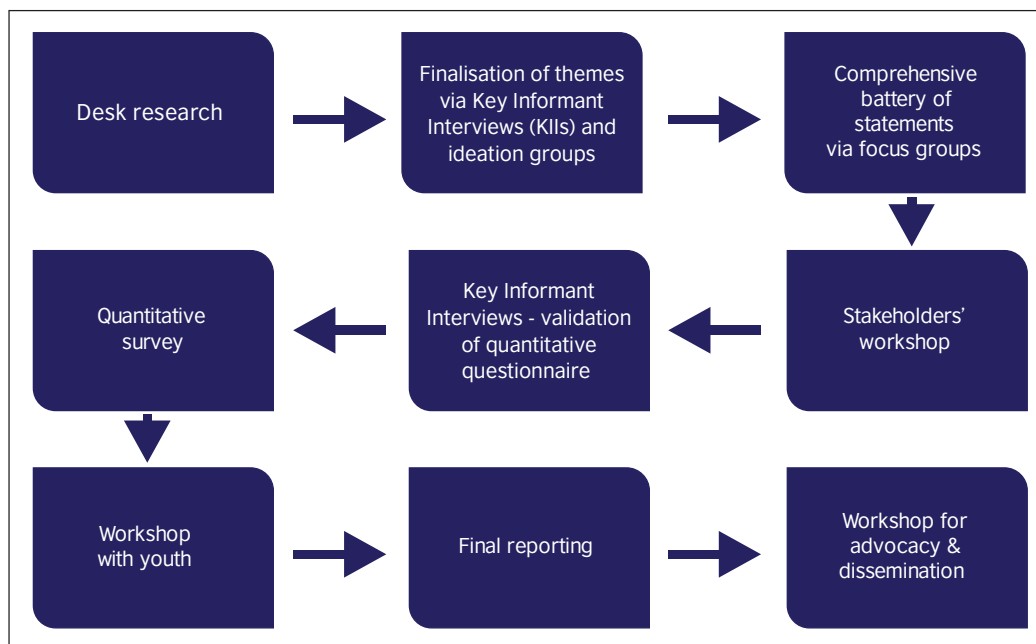
Research design & methodology

After reviewing the pilot study design and available materials, we adopted a mixed-methods research approach; namely desk review, qualitative (i.e., KIs, FGDs, consultative workshops) and quantitative (i.e., survey), to address the research objectives of this youth-led Next Generation study.

The methodology was designed around the core objectives laid out for the report:

- Research that gathers data to explore the needs, potential and aspirations of young people in the target country.
- Stakeholder engagement activity built within and around the research, throughout the stages of research design, data collection, analysis and after the launch of the final report.
- Influence policy, British Council youth engagement programming in Pakistan.

Research design

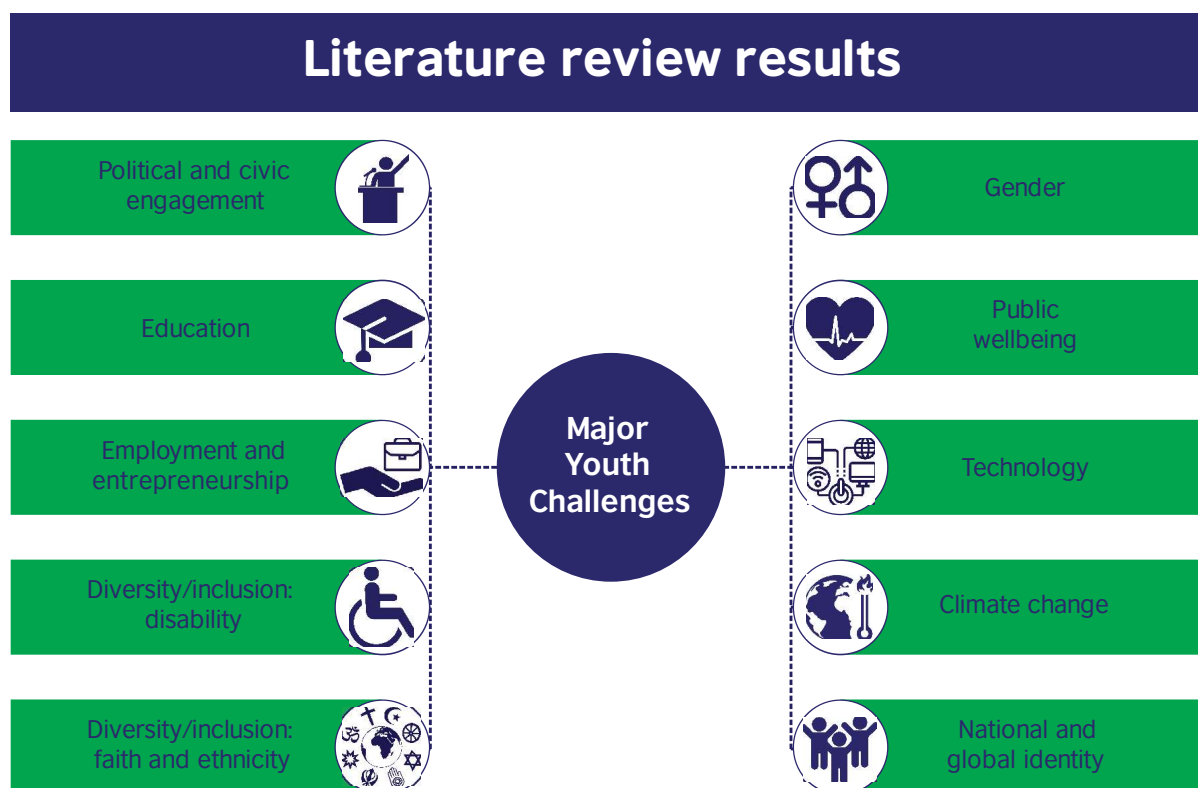


Desk research and emerging themes

A thorough literature review was conducted to assess the key challenges of young Pakistanis and establish the key patterns on which to carry out the research. Multiple research articles, policy papers, government reports, and regional/global indexes were studied in depth keeping in mind the main areas of focus for the British Council.

The desk review benefited from a rich body of literature on youth engagement, as well as insights from the previous Next Generation studies, which were used to identify the main areas of inquiry.

The literature review identified ten key challenges, which were used as the basis for the next phases of research:



Key Informant Interviews and ideation groups

To adjust and improve the research tools for the next phases of the research design, IPSOS conducted **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with seven thought leaders** from a variety of fields including human rights, technology and entrepreneurship, youth politics, and academia. Several insights were gathered from these interviews which then led to the Ideation Group stage. **Four ideation groups** were held with young people between the ages of 16 to 34 from all over Pakistan, comprising males and females from both rural and urban areas. These served as brainstorming sessions to discuss the areas identified in the KIIs and the desk review and develop the discussion guides for the qualitative stage of the project.

Qualitative research

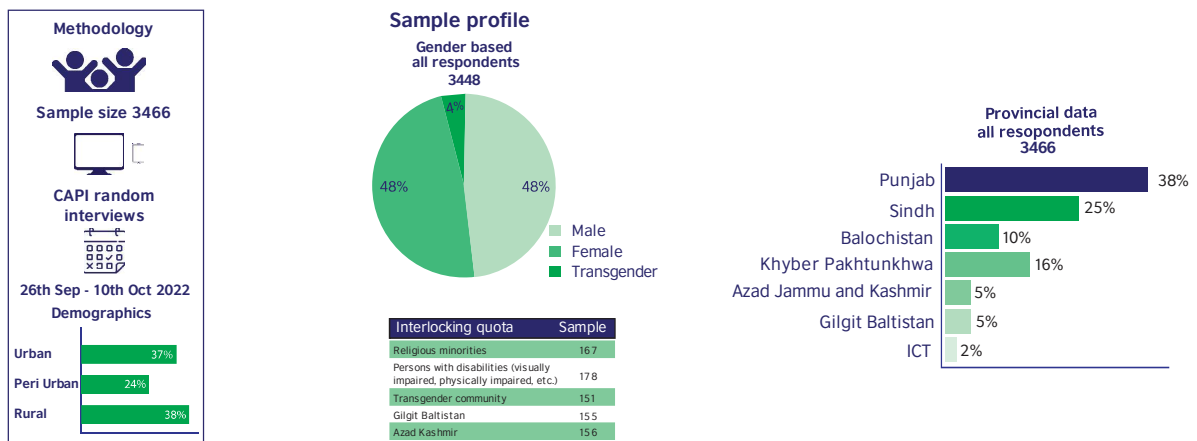
18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising 6-8 participants per group were conducted in multiple cities of Pakistan, with separate groups of males and females from all socio-economic groups. Two key age groups, 16-24 and 24-34, were

engaged for the FGDs. To ensure representation of all communities, the discussions were held in all provinces and regions of Pakistan, as well as both rural and urban areas. The research team took care to have respondents from marginalised communities, transgender people and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) for a complete perspective. Students, professionals, and stay-at-home youth were all targeted, even taking into account professions from different industries and sectors (i.e transportation, IT and administration, agriculture, health care, etc.) to ensure a diverse array of opinions.

The topics of inquiry in the Discussion Guides (DGs) focused on aspects gathered from the previous stages. The responses in the discussions were invaluable in informing the research team on the priorities, concerns, and aspirations of young people, helping us devise an analytical framework that could be used to develop linkages between these various factors. They also helped the team develop a battery of statements that would serve as the basis for the quantitative questionnaire.

Quantitative survey

As with the qualitative exercise, the survey questionnaire process was comprehensive. A total of 3,446 respondents, between the ages of 16 and 34, residing in cities and villages found in the urban and rural areas of all provinces and cities were engaged. A 50:50 male female ratio was utilised to capture an accurate picture on gender lines. To ensure the data would not be biased or skewed, a Multistage Stratified Random Sampling technique was employed.



Following the same practice as the focus groups, the project team included participation from marginalised communities as well, establishing a quota of respondents for religious minorities, transgender people and PWDs, as well as the under-represented regions of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit Baltistan (GB). The research team took multiple steps prior to the nationwide dissemination of the research to ensure ease in language and comprehension of the survey via pre-testing prior to launch.

Data collection

For optimal collation and efficiency, the study used the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) method. The sample was collected in the months of September and October 2022, following which it went through multiple stages of data cleaning, quality assurance and tabulation.

The data was then analysed by dedicated research teams to ascertain key trends and patterns, which have formed the basis of this report.

Youth Task Force and workshops

The findings of the research, once collated, were then put to a specially constituted Youth Task Force (YTF), which included practitioners and experts from Pakistan, renowned in their fields, ranging from social media to academia, public and private sector, arts and culture, and policy. Two meetings of the task force were held in 2022 to provide key input on the findings and analyse them considering the larger developments in Pakistan, as

well as the inferences of the study for youth engagement in the country.

Additionally, a special research and advocacy workshop with students was held at Government College University in Lahore in December 2022 to validate the findings of the study with students and gauge their opinions on it.

Reporting

All the views and assessments from the task force, as well as the IPSOS research team and the British Council, were gathered and examined through a multifaceted analytical framework that sought to create linkages between the findings and understand their wider implications for the state of youth in the country. The collective analysis forms the basis of this study.

Following the development of this report, the findings most relevant for the public will be shared for dissemination, in order to aid public policy on youth and programmatic learnings for youth engagement.

Analytical framework for the research

A key feature of the Next Generation study is not just to collect the findings on the perceptions of young people, but to help explain the linkages between them, and provide a comprehensive understanding of how these factors influence each other.

Our analysis reveals a process that young Pakistanis are going through, which explains their internal pressures and external burdens, affects their priorities, determines their responses, and highlights the key bodies and institutions that have a role to play in shaping the direction of this process.

From our research, this trajectory passes through four key phases. We call this process the **4E framework**. The process first outlines the key internal and external pressures which affect young Pakistanis, or their **environment**. This in turn has a major effect on their key priorities, or **emerging challenges**. Due to these pressures, young Pakistanis are manifesting change through their own agency, or **effects**. Finally, young people cannot do this on their own, but are reliant upon key avenues which will determine whether they succeed or fail, which are the **enablers**. Each of

these factors flow from one end to another, influencing each other and shaping the trajectory of young people.

- **E1: Environment**

The key external factors prevalent in Pakistan which have great impact on young citizens in terms of their present and future challenges.

- **E2: Emerging challenges**

The areas which are key pressure points for young people, and hence critical to address in coming years.

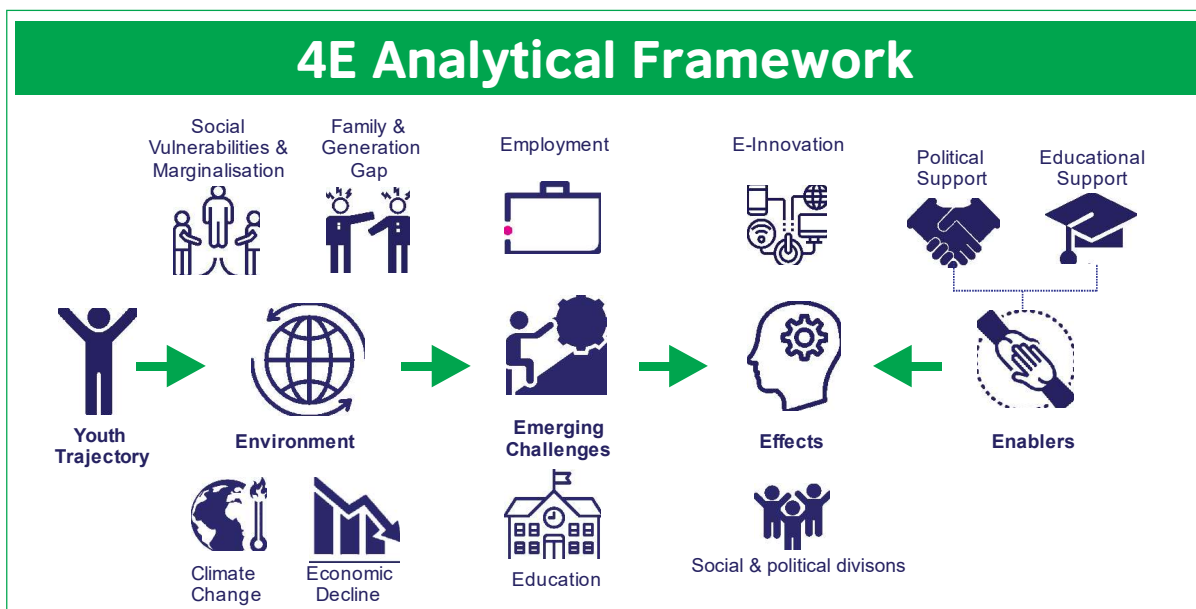
- **E3: Effects**

The manifestations from the environment and challenges which show the negative and positive impact and prospects for young Pakistanis.

- **E4: Enablers**

The institutions which have a crucial role to play in the success or the failure of our next generation, and how they should intervene.

The 4E Model, illustrated in the diagram below, serves as the roadmap for this study.





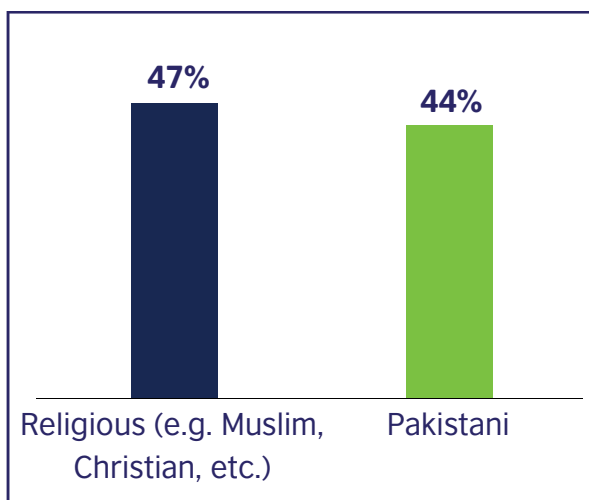
Portrait of a generation

The youth of Pakistan is going through a phase of rapid change. Their trajectory appears fluid and shifting, as they respond to the societal transformation around them. This section explores fundamental insights into what young people think about themselves, how they prefer to be perceived, what drives their optimism, and where they feel neglected.

Identity

Identity is a key part of self-perception. Belonging to a multi-cultural heterogeneous society, Pakistan's communities are composed of a multitude of ethnicities, religions, cultures and familial systems. We felt it was important to ascertain the principal identity of young Pakistanis, one they felt represented them the best. Our findings showed that the Next Generation identifies itself according to: nationality (i.e. Pakistani) and religious affiliation (i.e. Muslim/Christian/Hindu, etc.).

What do you prefer as your main identity? All respondents



The separation of religion from nationalism is a difficult one to unravel for Pakistan. The nation's religious identity is intertwined with its nationalist one, as its foundation has been justified on the principle of the Two Nation theory: i.e. that the religious affiliation of Muslims necessitated a

separate homeland. However, religious identity extends beyond sovereign boundaries, and with Muslims it is even more strongly so through the concept of Ummah, the global Islamic community. However, a national outlook remains within the boundaries of Pakistan, and hence the preference of youth towards the latter is important, as it indicates their focus is becoming more internal than external, at least on the issue of identity.

Further breakdown of the data reveals some rich insights. Respondents prioritising religious identity are more likely to come from a private education background, suggesting higher levels of affluence. They are also more likely to be Internet users, as well as educated from matric to postgraduate studies. Students are more representative of this population, as well as male respondents. Finally, on the geographic end, this identification was more pronounced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan.

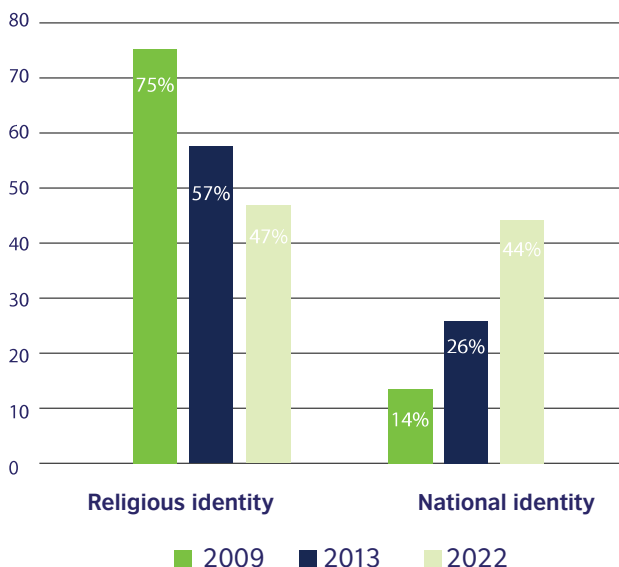
On the other hand, those prioritising national identity are likely to be less privileged, with little to no educational background. Most of them are non-internet users and are either self-employed or unemployed. Geographically, the larger provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan are represented higher in this group.

The findings indicated a major shift in identity towards an increasingly nationalist outlook. To illustrate this, we did a comparison of the identity question results from the previous Next Generation studies in 2009 and 2013. The results show a drastic reduction in identity on religious lines, and a rise in national identity to a point where it is almost at parity with the former.

Multiple reasons can be attributed to this. Communities have become increasingly connected through the telecommunication revolution, with national identity being seen as the fundamental differential amidst an increasingly global community. Political participation, at least at an optical level, has taken centre stage nationwide,

with the emergence of newer nativist political forces espousing a strong national identity as their foundation. Another group of reasons concern the hotbed of controversies and violence fomented by religious identity-based politics and terrorism. The mitigation of these conflicts has relied relatively less on religious narratives and more on emphasising the supremacy of the state, which has meant gravitation towards a more nationalist identity. Another possibility can be disillusion with religious identity being used for violence and extremism particularly in the last decade, which has led youth to redefine themselves through loyalty to the state.

How youth identify themselves: comparisons of Next Generation Studies



Preference for Pakistan

Pakistan's brain drain has always been a major concern for the country's fledgling growth. According to statistics available with the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment,⁵ over three quarters of a million people left Pakistan for abroad in 2022, nearly triple the departures in 2021. The deteriorating economic and political situation has much to contribute to the uncertainty that drives people to leave their homeland for financial security and safety.

However, the Next Generation, despite these uncertainties, prefers to stay in Pakistan instead of moving abroad.

As in the case of identity, variations exist between those who want to move abroad, and those who want to stay. Young people preferring the former are more likely to be male, privately educated, with access to and utilisation of the internet. They are also more educated, with many receiving graduate and postgraduate education. Regionally, respondents from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir were more likely to prefer moving abroad.

On the other hand, young citizens that wished to remain in Pakistan were more likely to be female, married, self-employed and not internet users. Geographically, respondents from Punjab and Sindh were more in favour of staying in Pakistan. That is not to say that young people were not drawn to places outside of Pakistan. The countries most attracted to young people personally were Saudi Arabia (52%), followed by the United States (14%), and Turkey (12%). The United Kingdom was favoured by 8% of respondents.

The composition of participants thinking of moving abroad challenges our traditional notions of immigration to other countries. Previously, the vast numbers of Pakistanis moving overseas (mainly to Gulf countries) has been largely restricted to blue collar or labour employment, due to favourable purchase parity through earning foreign currency. However, our data shows that young Pakistanis may show more preference for white collar and professional environments as can be seen from their education levels and lifestyle choices.

It's clear that young Pakistanis want to move abroad not just to earn better, but to do better. The lure of being abroad perhaps isn't as enticing for a majority of the youth. They are being selective about why they should, and it appears they will do so if they feel it is right for them.

5. BEOE (Board of Education and Examination) Statistics. (2022). Retrieved from <https://beoe.gov.pk/reports-and-statistics>

An optimistic future

Despite the challenges facing Pakistan and young people across the country, the Next Generation remains quite optimistic about its future, as well as their future in it. Nearly seven in ten respondents expressed positivity about the country's outlook in the years to come.

What is your outlook of the future?

My country's outlook	
Optimistic	69%
Pessimistic	15%

Young Pakistanis are also optimistic about their professional futures in Pakistan, seeing a bright career trajectory for themselves.

My future career	
Base: All respondents	3446
Optimistic	71%
Pessimistic	16%

Young Pakistanis also see a bright future for their quality of life, showing they remain upbeat about the prospects of a better life in the years to come.

My quality of life	
Optimistic	73%
Pessimistic	15%

It can be seen that young Pakistanis remain hopeful about the future trajectory of this country, and also see a better life for themselves. This is a key indicator that doesn't just show their resilience, but also their faith in their nation. This perhaps also helps us understand why youngsters are increasingly preferring to identify themselves as Pakistani rather than their religious identity.

Frustration with the present

Despite the optimism of young Pakistanis, there is a feeling that they are not being allowed to determine their course of direction. Respondents feel disempowered about the ability to make changes to better themselves. Many feel

frustrated that they are unable to decide on their future direction.

Do you have a say in what your future is going to be like?	
Base: All respondents	3446
No	39%
Yes	43%

At first this does appear to contradict the findings from the results in the previous section. After all, how can young Pakistanis be hopeful about their future, while also being frustrated about not being able to decide their future direction?

The latter section on generational gap explains a struggle between youth and their parents, specifically about a lack of agency in career choices, lifestyle and overall outlook, which helps explain this pessimism. However, they may see this not as a permanent situation, and hope that they will soon be given the reins to follow their aspirations, thus creating a more optimistic outlook about the years to come.

Personal success and happiness

Young Pakistanis see personal success as their highest priority. For them, their personal and financial wellbeing, as well as their independence, is of the utmost importance. While traditional priorities such as having a family give them the highest levels of personal success, the data also shows priorities shifting towards more individualistic goals. This includes financial security, careers of their choice, living independently and having a lifestyle of their choosing.

When thinking about personal success and happiness (both now and in the future), which of the below do you think contribute?	
Base: All respondents	3446
Living with family / having a family	43%
Having financial security	40%
Having a circle of close friends	20%
Living independently	38%
Having a career of my choice	36%
Freedom of choice in my lifestyle	23%

Agents of change

Young Pakistanis are strongly inclined towards self-betterment and progress. For them, the answer to tackling the challenges of the world lies in empowering themselves through education and advocacy, encouraging inclusivity and fostering innovation. Education remains one of their top priorities, which will be explored in detail in the analysis section later.

“My issue is that the system should change... These problems will not change by sitting. They will only change by acquiring the seat of power. We need to be empowered. That is the role I see for myself, to be politically more empowered.”

Social Activist, KII

What do you think are the most powerful tools that can be used to deal with global challenges?	
Base: All respondents	3446
Education	75%
Research and innovation	26%
Encouraging diversity and shared ethical values	36%
Campaigning/activism/advocacy	33%
Fostering creativity and innovation	31%
Fostering cultural engagement	15%

Politically passive and excluded

Despite wanting to be a force for change, and being more politically involved in recent years thanks to increasing presence on social media, young people are not translating their political activism into political action. Less than half of the respondents intend to vote in the country's next local or general elections, fuelled by deep levels of distrust in a political system that doesn't engage them or represent their interests and concerns.

Do you intend to vote in your country's next local or general/national election?	
Base: All respondents	3088
Yes	48%
No	31%

As we will see in the later sections, there is a distinct gap between the formal participation of youth in political engagement, and their informal participation. In the case of the latter, young Pakistanis are increasingly making their voices heard, especially as they now have social media to amplify their concerns and priorities. Political parties have capitalised on this sentiment to engage them for their own digital presence and outreach. However, this is not effectively translating into direct participation, hinting at potential barriers, such as lack of trust in their representatives.

What level of trust do you have in your political system?	
Base: All respondents	3446
I have no trust in the political system	28%
I do not have much trust in the political system	29%
I have some trust in the political system	26%
I have trust in the political system	14%
I have a lot of trust in the political system	14%



E1: Environment

The opinions, behaviours and direction of youth cannot be separated from the conditions and communities that they live in. These factors determine the youth's social values, their financial standing, their access to opportunities and finally, their ability to co-exist among others.

- **Most respondents believe their lives are worse off than their parents.**

When it comes to personal development, the role of family cannot be understated. Good parenting is found to be associated with better emotional regulation, obedience, academic performance,

Environmental factors

4E Module



ECONOMY



ENVIRONMENT



CLIMATE CHANGE



SOCIAL
VULNERABILITIES



FAMILY AND
GENERATION GAP



SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
DIVISIONS

Through the course of our research, we identified the key environmental factors that intrinsically and extrinsically impact the lives of young Pakistanis, namely:

- Family and generation gap
- Social marginalisation
- Economic decline
- Social and political polarisation
- Climate change

This section explores their importance, as well as the findings of our research specific to these factors.

Next Generation vs now: the role of families and intergenerational gaps

Key takeaways

- **Evidence shows young people differing from the views and values of their parents in several areas, including social change, lifestyle and education.**
- **Majority of young people feel they are unable to decide their future.**

social competence, and resilience⁶. Family influence is also seen to positively correlate with career decision self-efficacy and happiness, contributing to their professional development and satisfaction. Furthermore, the economic status of families is crucial to providing children with access to opportunities and mobilisation, which are key to their advancement in various personal and professional spheres.

While a similar correlation exists in Pakistan as well, the research has highlighted tensions and sources of division between parents and their adult children, a signal of a generational gap on key family and societal issues, which in turn could be negatively impacting Pakistani youngsters and their ability to reach their potential.

Previous research on the subject shows that family conflicts due to generational gaps in Pakistan are linked to traditional conservatism. A study by Sattar

6. Shonkoff, J. P., & Richmond, J. B. (2009-2021). Investment in early childhood development. Retrieved from <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/pdf/expert/importance-early-childhood-development/according-experts/investment-early-childhood-development-lays>

et al⁷ states that “age-old traditions, outmoded customs and sectarian attitudes of the elders often come in conflict with the aspirations of the youth....they expect their children to follow the same age-old customs and traditions of their forefathers.” The study also showed imposition of values from parents on their children, resulting in intra-family conflict.

Due to the disparity in age, the elderly group tends to hold set views which run contrary to the way of thinking of the younger generation. Differences of opinion will arise and this will lead to misunderstandings within the family. Age-old traditions, outmoded customs and sectarian attitudes of elders often come in conflict with the aspirations of the youths. Some elderly people cannot tolerate the modern ideas and ways of living of the younger generation. They expect their children to follow the same age-old customs and traditions of their forefathers. These differences in perception between the conservative parents and the younger generation are a common source of conflict within families of today. A lack of proper understanding between parents and their children is actually causing them to distance themselves from each other.

The qualitative research indicated tensions between young people and families. A key area is gender. One expert interviewed in the KIIs commented that the confidence women have in being able to face social challenges such as fighting against harassment, or striving for employment, is based on family support, a theme which was corroborated by the FGDs. The inability of households to adequately support them leaves young women unable to deal with adversity in the long run. Statements from some of the working women reflected an attitude in the house that having a career is a choice or privilege, while their real priority should be the home.

“There's family pressure to do household chores as a career is your choice while ghar ka kaam (house work) is your obligation.”

Female Respondent, 16-24, Karachi Rural

This reflects the larger issue of women being adversely impacted through discriminatory treatment in the household, which can take on grave dimensions in Pakistan. A Reuters Foundation study listed the country as the sixth most dangerous in the world for women due to the risks they face from cultural, religious and traditional practices, as well as the fifth worst country on non-sexual violence, including domestic abuse⁸. The COVID pandemic also escalated violence against women, with a sharp rise observed in 2020 according to a report by the Aurat Foundation. Attitudes and behaviours in the home are an important factor in changing this, as discussed in the qualitative research. Young female respondents noted that the confidence they have in being able to face social challenges (fighting against harassment, striving for employment) is based on family support. This was reflected in the FGDs, but with women often saying that the lack of adequate support in the home on these matters, leaves them ill equipped to deal with such adversity.

“Lack of confidence is another challenge, as I'm unable to speak to people or fight for my rights.”
Female Respondent, 16-24, Karachi Urban

Another issue that young people in the FGDS see as a significant generational gap is mental health. Young people feel that mental health is an issue their parents don't understand, and views from key informants align with this. The stigmatisation of mental health and the difficulty in talking openly with parents left many young people feeling they do not have any avenue to express themselves. In fact, in some cases, family comments were seen as the greatest source of mental stress.

“Environment impacts us as family plays a role. Sometimes family pressure inhibits our focus... the behaviour and attitude of family members also makes us sad and angry.”
Female Respondent, 16-24, Karachi Urban

7. Sattar, T., Yasin, G., Fani, M. I., & Afzal, S. (December 2010). Determinants of generation gap among parents and children in Multan City, Pakistan. International Research Journal of Finance and Economics, 60, 94-101.

8. Thomson Reuters Foundation. (2018). World's 10 Most Dangerous Countries for Women. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-dangerous-poll-factbox-idUSKBN1JM01Z>

“Wellbeing is ignored in Pakistan, people have anxiety but no ways to help them.”

Female Respondent, Islamabad, Urban, 24-34

Mental health has escalated into a critical issue for youth, particularly during the COVID pandemic. An Ipsos survey in 2020 stated that 60% of Pakistanis experienced mental health issues.

According to data from Dr. Ayesha Mian at Aga Khan University, around 50 million Pakistanis are already suffering from mental health disorders, while approximately 20 million children, or 10% of the population, require attention from mental health practitioners. In 2022, National university of Engineering and Technology, (NED) Karachi’s neurocomputational laboratory revealed results from a study of 3000+ youth, showing a 40% rise in psychologically adverse effects, a 28% rise in depression, 27% rise in anxiety and 22% rise in stress, in comparison to the previous year. The increase was largely attributed to the societal impact of the COVID pandemic⁹.

The 2014 Next Generation study chronicled a number of stories where young individuals recalled being subject to psychological harassment from families. Some young women interviewed said they were bullied for not being attractive enough compared to other girls, while young men complained of being stigmatised for not having a job, resulting in a lack of self confidence¹⁰. These sentiments were mirrored in the 2022 Next Generation study as well.

“When people stay at home, they feel depressed due to negative words from their families. Our society doesn’t take people seriously if they mention that they are feeling depressed.”

Female Respondent, Islamabad, Urban, 24-34

Pressures arising from the economic situation of families is also a source of frustration and disillusionment among some young people. Many in the FGDs discussed that they have been forced to join the family business, leave education to start a job, or to pick a ‘safe’ career over those they would

prefer to pursue, in order to financially support their families.

“Families pressurise you to join the family business, so they think of education as a means to prepare you for the business. So I had to switch careers according to my dad’s wishes.”

Male Respondent, 24-34, Lahore Urban

A lack of autonomy in other areas of life was also discussed. It was often expressed in the FGDs that young people are unable to have their emotional or intellectual needs met. A culture where there is a huge emphasis on obedience to parents/elders and any questioning of how things work is viewed as insubordination, means that young people feel personal development and growth is stifled.

Combined with the lack of freedom to choose how they want to live or work, there is a real risk that Pakistani youth may end up ambitionless or lacking critical thinking and innovation. Given the presence of the youth bulge, this could have serious implications for the country’s political, social and economic future.

“Parents do not understand their children’s ambitions, their need to be more than just robots... They are not looking for answers. They are looking for someone to just obey.”

Tech/entrepreneur expert, KII

The findings from the survey support the views that were expressed in the qualitative research regarding these generational gaps. The results showed that practically every issue they were asked about, a significant proportion of the participants believe they hold different opinions to the older generation. This was most notable on the issue of social change, with 46% agreeing that they hold different views to their family compared with 37% who disagreed.

9. Ayub, I. (March 2022). Depression, Stress on the rise among Karachi Youth. DAWN.

10. British Council Pakistan. (2014). Next Generation Pakistan: Insecure Lives, Untold Stories. Retrieved from

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-in-sight/research-reports/next-generation-pakistan-insecure-lives-untold-stories>

My parents and I have differing social and religious values:

Agree	44%
Disagree	43%

My views, opinions and preferences regarding education are very different from those of my parents:

Agree	45%
Disagree	40%

My family doesn't approve of my lifestyle choices:

Agree	42%
Disagree	41%

My family and I have differing views when it comes to social change:

Agree	46%
Disagree	37%

My parents and I clash when it comes to career choices:

Agree	37%
Disagree	46%

Some groups stand out as believing their views differ from those of their parents/families even more often. For instance, those who are self-employed are more likely to say their social and religious values differ from those of their parents (57%) and that they clash with their parents on career choices (43%) more often than the national youth average. Transgender respondents are also more likely to say their views differ from their parents, particularly regarding lifestyle choices (64%) and education (63%). Such perceptions and experiences on differing views between young people and their elders could lead to them being unable to express or actualise themselves. Without the right support in their homes, for example, they are unable to decide their life or career direction.

Indeed, two in five young people said they were unable to decide their future, a sign they feel

powerlessness which could have potentially dire consequences.

Further breaking down the data reveals that young people belonging to joint/extended families, with little trust in the political system, and hailing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan, are more inclined towards lack of agency in their lives than the national average.

“I used to dream about being a cricketer but knowing my father's financial status, I realised that he needs me to earn money and help him out and I killed my dream right there. In any case, parents usually don't support such things.” Male Respondent, 16-24, Peshawar Rural

Both the KPK and Balochistan provinces have seen much strife in the last decade, fuelled by insurgencies and anti-state militancy. The KPK has recently merged with the previously Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a region which has been riddled with militancy in the last two decades. Balochistan is witnessing a transformation of its own, particularly with major investments through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) have been actively targeting law enforcement officials and communities in the region, with the country suffering 376 attacks in 2022 alone, the majority of which have taken place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. This onslaught may have contributed to a sense of powerlessness and divisiveness among young people in these provinces, as evidenced by the data.

Are you able to decide what your future is going to be like?

Base: All respondents	3446
Very much unable/somewhat unable to decide my future	39%
Neither able nor unable to decide my future	18%
Somewhat able/very much able to decide my future	43%

The lack of agency that youth feel about their future is not purely related to perceptions of differing views on social issues alone. Pakistan has seen a decline in several key economic indicators, which in turn could be impacting how the participants feel about their current and future circumstances.

Indeed, almost half of those surveyed believe that their lives are worse off than their parents. Importantly, 75% of respondents who said their lives are worse off also stated that they were unable to decide their future. This reflects a pattern of pessimism and fatalism among a substantial portion of young Pakistanis. Provincially, the highest percentage was in Balochistan, where 70% of the respondents stated that young peoples' lives are worse off than those of their parents.

How would you say the lives of young people in Pakistan today compare to their parents?	
Base: All respondents	3446
The lives of young people today are a lot worse than their parents	23%
The lives of young people today are a little worse than their parents	26%
The lives of young people today are neither better nor worse than their parents	19%
The lives of young people today are a little better than their parents	23%
The lives of young people today are a lot better than their parents	9%

Insecure lives: social marginalisation based on gender and disability

Key takeaways:

- Two in three young Pakistanis complain of discrimination in Pakistan on the basis of ethnicity, religious beliefs and political beliefs.
- Educated and internet using respondents were more likely to report discrimination. Three in five participants state society treats people differently on the basis of gender.
- Over 60% of young people believe the transgender community is discriminated against.
- Over 60% of participants believe that persons with disabilities face discrimination.

Social inclusivity is a critical aspect of development, particularly in pursuing access to and ensuring equality of opportunities and outcomes for all segments of society. The UN Report "*Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development*" notes that development will only be sustainable if it is inclusive as "the emphasis on sustainability, equity and inclusion reminds us that pursuing development grounded in social justice will be fundamental to achieving a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable future"¹¹.

On the one hand, Pakistan can be seen to have had some successes in terms of promoting and achieving an inclusive society. Multiple ethnicities (five major and numerous minor), faiths and other identities such as family linkage or baradari and tribal affiliation exist in unison. No better evidence of this exists than the estimate that over 70 languages are spoken across Pakistan¹². However, it can also be seen that certain groups remain disenfranchised from the mainstream, and in particular including women, persons with disabilities and minorities.

Social inclusivity comprises economic, political and social empowerment, in a manner that is representative and inclusive of the diverse communities of Pakistan. Pakistan's cultural diversity has commonly been placed as its strength, as a heterogeneous 220+million strong population with multifaceted representation from individuals and groups belonging to various faiths and ethnicities. Despite this, issues of access and exclusivity exist at multiple levels, which prevent those who are deprived or disenfranchised from becoming part of the mainstream. This disproportionately affects young people, who are the majority of the population, and constitute a higher population of unemployed and disability prone than the national average.

Gender and youth

Pakistan's data on gender equality paints a grim picture. The National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) 2022 report by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives catalogued

11. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2016). Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf>

12. SAMAA News. (2019). How Many Languages are Spoken in Pakistan. Retrieved from <http://www.samaaenglish.tv/news/1692432>

some of the major global indices related to gender, none of which show Pakistan in a positive light¹³. These indices are shown below:

According to sources reported by the Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD), the majority of the transgender community remains illiterate due to stigmatisation and social exclusion,

Gender Development Index (GDI) Measures the gender gaps in human development by accounting for disparities between women and men in 3 human development dimension – health, education and quality of life. Computed by UN In 2014, Pakistan's GDI was 0.750 Vs. 0.837 for South Asia	Gender Inequality Index (GII) Reflects gender inequalities in reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity. Computed by UN In 2017, Pakistan GII was 0.541, ranking it 133 out of 160 countries	Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) Developed in 2011 by World Economic Forum and it measures economic participation, educational attainment, health & survival and political empowerment. In 2020, Pakistan ranked 3rd-to-last (151 out of 153 countries)
Social Institution and Gender Index (SIGI) SIGI ranks non-OECD countries according to social institutions like social practices and legal norms contributing to observed gender inequalities. Computed by OECD Development Center Pakistan is ranked 0.79 on SIGI, highly discriminatory towards women	Women's Economic Opportunity Index (WEOI) Piloted in 2010 by Economist Intelligence Unit, it measures indicators influencing economic opportunity of a country. Pakistan is ranked 108 out of 113 countries on WEOI	Female Opportunity Index (FOI) Measures advancement in female leadership in the government, corporate sector, STEM and entrepreneurship. Computed by N26 Pakistan ranks 100th out of 100 countries

The NGPF report outlines some key gaps between the employment potential and reality of women in Pakistan. For instance, the female to male ratio of youth labour force participation is 0.32, while for physically intensive labour, it is 0.24. This is in stark contrast to the female-male ratio for secondary enrolment and political participation, 0.8 and 0.65 respectively. Multiple barriers at community, workplace and education levels limit young women in contributing to their fullest.

“Parents push their sons to study more as they have to support their families and since daughters will be married off, they are not given opportunities.”

Female respondent, 24-34, Islamabad Urban

This discrimination is only further exacerbated when it comes to the transgender community.

while workplace barriers mean their most common employment choices are dancing and sex work and those with fewer choices even resorting to begging¹⁴. It does not help that the government has little in policy other than a declared quota for transgender people. An analysis of youth policies by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) noted that Punjab, KPK and Balochistan have no explicit policy on the transgender community, while the Sindh Youth Policy mentions a 2% job quota for all vulnerable youth groups, including minorities, trans people and PWDs¹⁵.

Female participants discussed how their experiences in the home and the workplace are often different to male experiences, and how this

13. Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. (2022). The National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) 2022 report. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NGPF.pdf>

14. Global Human Rights Defence. (2022). TRANSGENDER EMPLOYMENT QUOTAS IN PAKISTAN 2022. Retrieved from <https://ghrd.org/transgender-employment-quotas-in-pakistan/>

15. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT). An analysis of youth policies. Retrieved from <https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AStudyofYouthPoliciesinPakistan.pdf>

contributes to continued gender inequality. This included for example, how people objectify them, how parents prioritise the education of their sons over that of their daughters, which in turn means men have more opportunities in life and how men are preferred as employees as they can work longer and do not have to face the restrictions women have in their home life.

“The staring of people makes me very uncomfortable since I walk to my workplace. Their eyes are bad and they stare a lot in a bad way.”
Female respondent, 16 – 24, Karachi Rural

“In organisations men are preferred more as they can work late and don’t have home issues.”
Male respondent, 24 – 34, Lahore Urban

The survey results affirm the feedback from the FGDs, with three in five (62%) of all respondents saying that they are treated differently because of their gender/sex.

You are treated differently because of your gender/sex	
Agree	62%
Disagree	26%

This sentiment was more pronounced among respondents from rural areas (65%), educated at religious institutes (72%) and were pessimistic about their outlook (68%).

In addition to this, the rights and disadvantages of the transgender community were also highlighted as a key issue, with many stating that they don’t receive employment opportunities or social standing due to their gender.

“Transgender people have the most issues in our society as they don’t get any jobs or opportunities. They can’t even get admissions in schools.”
Female Respondent, 16-34, Karachi Rural

The transgender community also feels a lack of opportunities. Overall, the Pakistani youth recognise this as an issue for the transgender community, with 61% agreeing that the

transgender community is denied opportunities, with this increasing to 79% among the transgender respondents. The experiences of the transgender community in the workplace are discussed in more detail in the section on Employment.

The transgender community is denied opportunities	
Agree	61%
Disagree	17%

Percentage who agree transgender community is denied opportunities		
Male	Female	Transgender
61%	59%	79%

While youth consider these issues as important, there is a mixed verdict on the extent to which young people feel empowered to do anything about it. Most of the groups put the onus on the government to intervene, while some of the experts stated that social media has allowed the amplification of activism to address these aspects.

“Practices which discriminate against other people are never going to provide solutions. Polarisation and stigmatisation need to stop. Youth know it’s wrong, but they are not empowered enough to do anything about it. For them it’s a survival thing, they are just trying to get past it, without any solutions to be provided for them.” Academic Expert, KII

Public attitudes towards minority genders are largely skewed towards existing patriarchal structures of masculinity and femininity in society. The annual report of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) observes that like most countries around the world, Pakistan also suffers from “the existing and continuing inherent patriarchal structures, shaping the social and cultural patterns. Such structures affect girls and women the most, owing to which girls and women to date suffer from gender inequality in every walk of life¹⁶.” Recurring patterns of violence, cyberbullying, limited political and

16. National Commission on the Status of Women. (2018-19). Annual Report 2018-19. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NiBVcPcfPT3xH6fy1IZ3Ps6uFALlpyJ3/view>

economic opportunities, and unending social constrictions, diminish the likelihood of young women and transgender people attaining socio-economic empowerment.

“There is physical violence, but verbal violence is worse. I feel people are very violent with the way they look at women. That also includes women.”
Female Academic Expert, KII

Persons with Disability (PWDs)

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include seven specific targets related to PWDs, reflecting the importance of catering to their needs as a key development indicator¹⁷. Pakistan defines Persons with Disability as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others¹⁸.” The inclusion of individuals who are differently abled/disabled is a key development indicator for Pakistan, based on their ability to access and avail opportunities, as well as co-opt into society.

Upon analysis of the historic data, the number of PWDs in Pakistan have actually decreased in proportion to the population. Gallup conducted a deep dive in its Big Data Analysis of Census 2017¹⁹ based on the latest census figures, and found that 0.44% of Pakistanis identified as disabled, compared to the 1998 Census when the percentage was 2.38%. Over 2/3 of PWDs are illiterate, which is significantly higher than the average Pakistani illiteracy rate of 41.09%. Almost 70% of this population resides in rural areas, where accessibility issues are far more prevalent than in urban areas. Further data from the National Institute of Population Studies DHS survey shows that about a quarter of young people in rural areas between the ages of 10 and 29 experience

disability in some form (10-15 at 2.2%, 15-19 at 2.4% and 20-29 at 2.6%)²⁰, which is over five times the 0.44% national percentage. Hence the issue of accessibility, both in terms of physical spaces and opportunities, disproportionately affects youth.

Further barriers also exist. The same Gallup study also noted that less than 23% of PWDs are employed. The British Council report “Moving from the Margins” details the various reasons, including societal stigmatisation, lack of quality education/skills, misconceptions and negative outlooks on disability, physical inaccessibility, and lack of adequate facilities for PWDs. The report also observes the lack of Special Education Needs (SEN) schools in rural areas, and issues of limited mobility and accessibility in the primary and especially tertiary education sectors. Lack of infrastructure, curriculum design and inclusivity driven policies are major barriers for both employment and education for young PWDs.

These concerns are shared by young Pakistanis, who agree by a significant majority that PWDs are subject to discriminatory treatment.

People are treated differently because of mental/physical disability

Agree	66%
Disagree	22%

The aspect of intersectionality is a crucial one too. The survey conducted for the British Council Moving from Margins report showed that an overwhelming percentage of young women with disabilities were unemployed (93%), while just over half (53%) received any kind of education. Hence the discrimination being dealt to young women in literacy and the workplace is just compounded when they are a PWD as well.

17. United Nations. (#Envision2030). Retrieved from

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html#:~:text=The%20SDGs%20also%20explicitly%20include,the%20 monitoring%20of%20the%20SDGs.>

18. DisabilityIN. (Country section: Pakistan). Retrieved from

<https://disabilityin.org/country/pakistan/#:~:text=Pakistan%20also%20follows%20the%20CRPD's,an%20equal%20basis%20with%20others.%E2%80%9D>

19. Gallup Pakistan. (2017). Big Data Analysis of Census 2017. Retrieved from <https://gallup.com.pk/post/32361>

20. National Institute of Population Studies. (2018). Disability studies. Retrieved from <http://www.nips.org.pk/page/disability-data>

An economy in crisis: financial decline and youth prospects

Key takeaways:

- **Economic growth is seen as the top concern for youth (61%).**
- **Economic crisis is directly linked to employment decline, a key priority of youth.**
- **Almost nine in ten young Pakistanis see the economy as a key voting issue at the national level.**

Pakistan's economy has remained in a state of flux for decades. The country has experienced frequent macroeconomic crises due to a growth model with limited productivity enhancing investments and exports²¹. While the 21st century has seen the country perform admirably on poverty alleviation, it has less to do with economic policy, and more with other factors such as the increase in migration and associated remittances, which allowed over 47 million Pakistanis to escape poverty between 2001 and 2018²².

Many of the economic issues plaguing Pakistan are chronic, ranging from a debt trap to an unstable GDP, fluctuating exchange rates, rising inflation and widening current account deficits. To keep afloat, the country has reached out to the IMF 22 times²³, and despite political promises, has continued to resort to bailouts from the Fund, or friendly nations. Due to these poor indicators, Pakistan is currently ranked 153 out of 165 countries in the Global Economic Freedoms Index 2022, with an overall score of 48.8, the fifth lowest in the region²⁴.

This downward trend went to new lows with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The outbreak had a major impact on the global economy, destroying supply chains and ravaging businesses with serious socio-economic consequences. Pakistan, struggled to combat the economic fallout, with adverse effects in major

sectors like tourism, travelling, hotels and hospitality, transportation and education²⁵.

2022 has not fared any better. Data from the Finance Ministry highlights that the global economy is suffering from slow growth, higher inflation and monetary tightening, leading to a contraction in global economic activity in August 2022²⁶. This has also led to higher energy and commodity prices, which have been compounded by the catastrophic floods this year. The loss of billions in livelihoods, living areas, livestock and crops, has put the economy in an extremely precarious situation. This has tremendous ramifications for young students and professionals, who see a decline in opportunities, reduction in purchasing power, and severe economic stress. This is a major extrinsic burden on young Pakistanis, preventing their upward mobilisation and actualisation.

These apprehensions are corroborated by the survey results, which show that unemployment and economic growth are the top concerns of young Pakistanis.

21. World Bank. (2023). Pakistan: Country Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview>

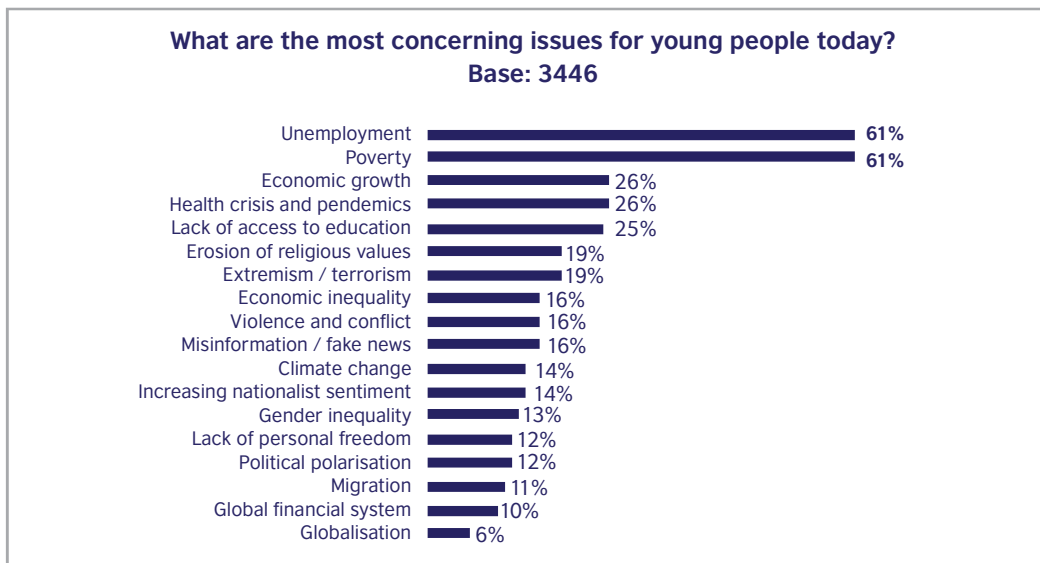
22. World Bank. (2023). Pakistan: Country Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview>

23. Hussain, N. (2022). Economy: Pakistan's Story of Debt. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1726921>

24. Heritage Foundation. (2022). Pakistan. Economic Freedoms Index 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/pakistan>

25. Ministry of Finance. (2021). Economic Survey of Pakistan. Retrieved from https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_21/Overview.pdf

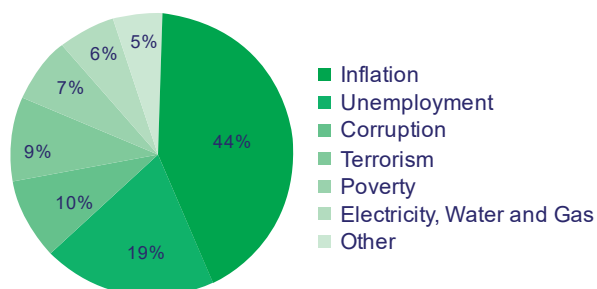
26. Ministry of Finance. (2021). Economic Survey of Pakistan. Retrieved from https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_21/Overview.pdf



It is important to note that these apprehensions existed in the 2009 report as well, which listed inflation and unemployment among the top issues facing Pakistan. It is unfortunate that 13 years later, not much has changed on this front.

2009 Next Generation Pakistan report

What is the single most important issue facing Pakistan?



It follows then, that improving the economy is one of the top demands of young people from policymakers. Nearly 90% of respondents taking our survey said that improving the economy is a critical factor in determining who they vote for.

How important are economic policies to you when voting?

Base: All respondents	3466
Important	89%
Not important	4%

Additionally, issues of non-merit based opportunities, economic deprivation brought on by high inflation rates, and lack of social justice, and promoting capital flight were some of the main complaints highlighted in the KIIs and the FGDs. Another area highlighted by the KIIs, and picked by the group respondents later, was the inequality of facilities, particularly infrastructure development, that created severe disparities in technology and internet support. This was a key factor which determined crucial outcomes for youth empowerment, which will be discussed further in the following section.

“Unemployment will increase in the coming years due to our economic state, even if our education is good, we still won’t be able to find any jobs in Pakistan. All we’re told is that we should leave school and start working at a very young age.”
Male Respondent, 16-24, Peshawar Rural

The perils of polarisation: social and political divisions

Key takeaways

- **Young Pakistanis show acceptance for religious diversity, with the majority accepting people of other faiths, and showing support for teaching multiple religions in schools.**
- **Two in three respondents complain of discrimination in Pakistan on the basis of ethnicity, religious beliefs and political beliefs.**

Pakistan is going through a unique period of high civic and political engagement, particularly on the internet. However, this engagement comes at a cost. The fine line between acceptance of diversity, and ideological absolutism is being violated, with violence being committed along religious, gender and ethnic lines.

For many years, Pakistan has faced a growing problem of religiously motivated violence and extremism. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom Report 2022 included Pakistan on a list of countries that “engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom” during 2022²⁷. The report particularly highlighted the issue of violence in the name of blasphemy, as the narratives of extremist elements have limited the space for religious inclusion²⁸.

In the most recent high-profile case, a mob of several hundred factory workers fatally beat a Sri Lankan Christian manager of a factory in December 2021. The videos of the incident spread like wildfire on social media, leading to the arrests and sentencing of 88 people²⁹. The Center for Social Justice tabulated that in 2021, 84 people were accused of blasphemy³⁰ and 39 of the 84 were from minority communities. This is just the tip of the iceberg when we take into account large scale acts of violence against minority communities, including burning of homes, attacks on places of worship, forced conversions, and targeted mob violence against both individuals and groups. Youth radicalisation is being seen as a catalyst in these

developments. A study by the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies notes that incidents of religiously motivated violence at educational campuses and the rise in youth led vigilante crimes are symptomatic reflections of growing radicalisation among educated youngsters³¹.

Actions involving ethnic groups have also risen in recent years, both violent and non-violent.

Freedom House, an organisation which maps political, economic and social freedoms, has ranked Pakistan among the lowest countries in its Global Freedom Index, partially due to its concerns over ethnic violence in parts of KP and Balochistan. Baloch separatist groups have turned increasingly violent against state authorities, with attacks aimed at military installations, universities and foreign nationals³². The rejection of the status quo, to the point of carrying out such acts of violence, requires an examination into social and political divisions in Pakistan, and where young people stand on many of these issues.

The study has attempted to isolate the areas where these divisions occur, and how they lead to discrimination and discontentment among young Pakistanis.

Social acceptance

On face value, there seems to be a relatively high acceptance for religious diversity among young Pakistanis. According to the Next Generation survey results, over half of young people (56%) say that they accept the views of people of other faiths and a similar proportion (55%) agree that children should be taught about all religions in school. Around a quarter in each case, however, disagree.

I accept the views of people of other faiths

Agree	56%
Disagree	24%

I believe children in school should be taught about all religions

Agree	55%
Disagree	24%

27. DAWN. (Dec 2022). US Keeps Pakistan on Religious Violators List. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1724407#:~:text=WASHINGTON%3A%20The%20United%20States%20on,of%20religious%20freedom%E2%80%9D%20during%202022.>

28. DAWN. (Dec 2022). US Keeps Pakistan on Religious Violators List. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1724407#:~:text=WASHINGTON%3A%20The%20United%20States%20on,of%20religious%20freedom%E2%80%9D%20during%202022.>

29. Al-Jazeera. (Dec 2021). Sri Lankan Factory Manager Lynched and Set on Fire in Pakistan. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/3/sri-lankan-factory-manager-lynched-and-set-on-fire-in-pakistan>

30. Center for Social Justice. (2022). Human Rights Observer 2022. Retrieved from https://csjpak.org/pdf/HR_Observer_2022.pdf

31. PIPS. (2023). Youth and the social contract in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/youth-and-the-social-contract-in-pakistan>

32. Freedom House. (n.d.). Pakistan. Global Freedom Index. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan>

This sentiment was reflected in some of the focus groups as well, where young women said that this education should begin from the home.

“Parents should answer kids’ queries regarding different religions and ethnicities so children are aware about other communities and religions. Young respondents from minority communities have also desired to have a more pluralistic outlook in the education environment.”

Female Respondent, 24-34, Islamabad Urban

“We should educate our children on the vulnerable groups, teachers can play a vital role to educate children on vulnerable groups, as they spend the most time with teachers.”

Christian Male Respondent, 24-34, Lahore

Social fault lines

Further analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, however, does show a gap between how Pakistani youth perceives its own levels of tolerance and their experiences and perceptions of discrimination.

In the FGDs for example, young people recognised that religious minorities are not able to even celebrate their events and holidays, while some experts expressed concern about increasing polarisation among young people with regards to religion.

“I see two kinds of kids now, none in the middle. One is very vocal about how religion is being misused...the other is about how far away we are from religion and how we need to go back to our core values. There’s a lot of this on social media. There’s always one group asking for someone to be lynched.”

Youth education expert, KII

“Minorities are not treated right...Muslims are a majority and they celebrate events whereas minorities can’t.”

Male Respondent, 24-34, Lahore Urban

“I have faced many things due to which people try to maintain a distance from me because I am a Shia and

the majority is Sunni.”

Female Respondent, Shia, 16-24, Karachi

The study findings corroborated these assertions, with a majority of youth responding that people in Pakistan are discriminated against for a variety of reasons, including ethnicity, religious/spiritual beliefs and political beliefs. The reduction of space for pluralistic acceptance and nuance has given way to a divisive and binary atmosphere. The results are a damning indictment of the way young people perceive social relations in Pakistan.

Society treats differently on the basis of:

Race/ethnicity	
Agree	66%
Disagree	22%

Religious/spiritual beliefs	
Agree	67%
Disagree	20%

Political beliefs	
Agree	67%
Disagree	20%

While these views were held by all segments of society, educated and internet users were more likely to agree with these statements. There are two potential reasons for this. Either a) young people who are more aware of social biases and discrimination are more likely to recognise them vs. those who are not, or b) these persecutory practices are happening more in educational institutes or the internet, resulting in greater reporting among these groups. This will be discussed further in the section on effects.

Climate catastrophe: global warming and its impact

Key takeaways

- **70% of young Pakistanis are concerned with the environmental impact of climate change.**
- **56% of respondents linked the 2022 floods to climate change, while 68% said they have an understanding of the science behind it.**
- **80% of young Pakistanis consider climate change as a key voting issue in the national election.**

Pakistan is among the countries most vulnerable to the effects of global warming. The Global Climate Risk Index 2020 ranks Pakistan as the fifth most affected country due to the impacts of climate change observed from 1999 to 2018. Pakistan saw a rise from the eighth position in 2017 to fifth position in 2018³³. Only four other countries - Puerto Rico, Myanmar, Haiti and Philippines - have a higher Climate Risk Index (CRI) score than Pakistan.

2022 has been a major wake up call for the country and the world on the adverse effects of climate change. This summer, severe monsoon weather resulted in rainfall nearly three times more than the

national average, causing widespread flooding and landslides. According to UNICEF data³⁴, over 6.4 million people, including an estimated 3.4 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance, while over half a million homes were destroyed, and another million damaged. In all, 33 million people have been adversely affected, with 80 districts declared 'calamity hit'. The damage runs into tens of billions of dollars, much of which may never be recovered.

As destructive as this year has been, the young people of Pakistan will likely feel the worst effects of climate change as they grow older; temperature increase and the subsequent fallout will be witnessed in the decades to come unless urgent global action is taken. Hence knowledge of climate science, mitigation and adaptation strategies, the role of personal and institutional responsibility, regulatory knowledge and advocacy are all critical.

The floods and their devastation have forced the public to take notice of climate change in a way never seen before in Pakistan. The Next Generation survey shows that a majority of Pakistani youth are concerned about the environmental impacts of climate change in Pakistan, with higher apprehensions among those living in urban areas than those living in rural areas.

Statements on youth perceptions on climate change

Base: Percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement

'I am concerned over the impact of climate change in Pakistan'

70%

'2022 floods happened due to climate change'

68%

'I understand the science of why climate change happens'

59%

'Climate change is a key voting issue for me'

80%

33. Eckstein, D., Kunzel, V., Schafer, L., Wings, M. (2020). Global Climate Risk Index 2020: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events? Weather Related Loss Events in 2018 and 1999 to 2018. Germanwatch.

34. UNICEF. (n.d.). UNICEF Flash Flood Appeal Infographic. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/127526/file/UNICEF%20Pakistan%20Floods%20Flash%20Appeal.pdf>

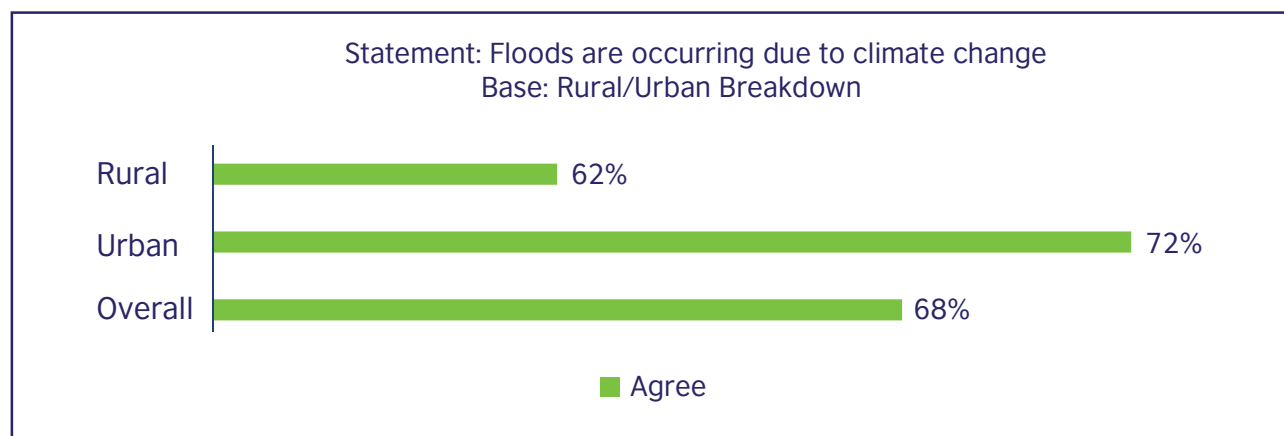
These findings are somewhat similar to those found in the British Council Climate Connection Pakistan report, which stated that seven in ten young Pakistanis were concerned about the perceived threat of climate change³⁵.

The data also showed that the public is linking the 2022 floods to climate change. Once again, this linkage was clearer for urban respondents than rural ones, indicating more sensitisation of the issue in urban areas.

Is tackling climate change an important consideration when deciding who to vote for?

Yes	80%
No	6%

Slightly over half of the respondents also claim to have an understanding of climate change as a subject. As expected, educated urban youth scored slightly higher. This too shows higher sensitisation



This invites some comparisons with the 2021 Climate Connection study, in which only 19% of young respondents cited floods as a climate-posed incident. The tremendous rise of young people making this connection can be attributed to high sensitivity due to 2022 floods, which were widely seen as a major sign of global warming impacting communities all around the world, from Australia to Venezuela³⁶.

The issue is also expected to be a major priority for young voters in the 2023 election. The survey findings show that 80% of participants consider tackling climate change an important issue in deciding who they support. Young Pakistanis are demanding that policymakers deal with the issue as a priority, and we can expect to see greater political messaging on it in the 2023 Elections.

to global warming, and increased interest in the subject.

I understand the science behind why climate change happens:

Agree	56%
Disagree	21%

While there is awareness of the issue, more is needed to educate and activate young people on the causes and effects of climate change. The British Council “Youth Voice on Climate Action: Pakistan” brief alludes to this as well, with young respondents identifying three key hurdles to increased awareness on climate change: limited or no access to knowledge resources, limited or no tutoring on climate and related issues at educational institutes, and the insufficient role of media in creating awareness³⁷.

35. British Council. (2021). Climate Connection – Pakistan: South Asia Perceptions of Young People on Climate Change and Action. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/country_report_pakistan_full_v7.pdf

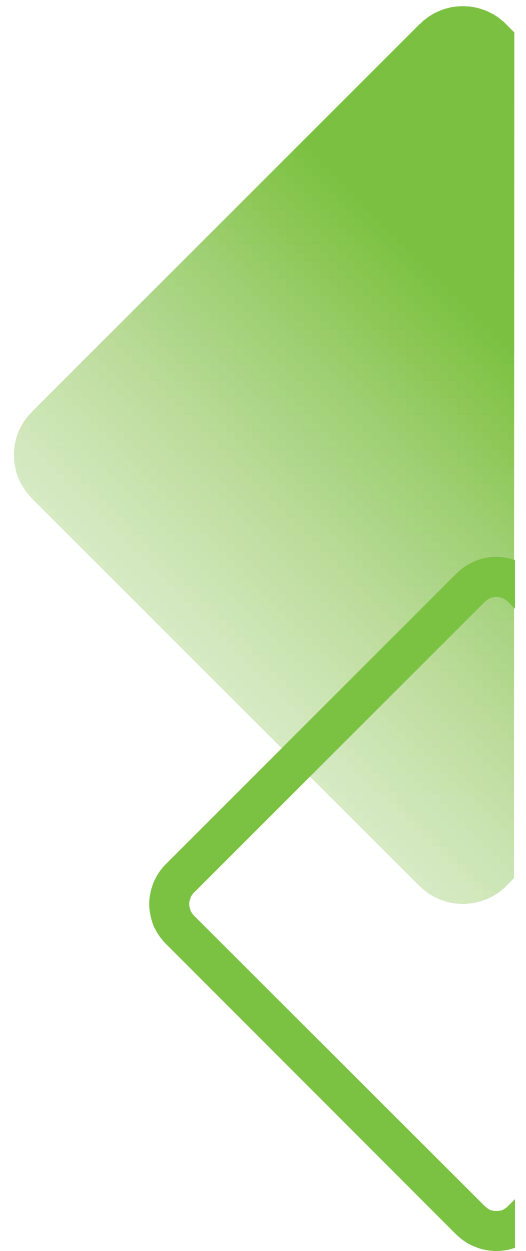
36. The Guardian. (2022). Nature is Striking Back: Flooding around the world from Australia to Venezuela. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/20/flooding-world-climate-crisis-australia-venezuela-nigeria>

37. British Council. (2021). Youth Voice on Climate Action: Pakistan. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cluster_c_country_letters_pakistan_fnl_branded.pdf

On the other hand, the experts interviewed for this study were of the view that though young people know about its importance, they do not consider it particularly relevant to their lives personally. Therefore, it was suggested that more could be done at the primary to university level, introducing it as part of the curriculum.

“We hold our professors accountable for a number of issues, but we don’t raise our voices about big issues such as climate change. You will not see youth speak much there. For example, when a politician says something silly, you’ll see kids making memes out of it, but there’s little along the lines of ‘what is going on with the climate problem? This is not ok.’”

Youth Education expert, KII





E2: Emerging challenges

The environmental factors discussed in the previous section have heavily influenced the key priorities of young Pakistanis. The main focus of the next generation is to better itself and progress both financially and intellectually. For this reason, young minds are firmly fixed on the two avenues critical to this process: earning and learning. The following section outlines the main preferences and obstacles to both these fields, and how it is shaping their approach to them.

Employment prospects for the next generation constitute one of the most critical issues for youth. Increasingly, the choices of young people are geared towards financial stability and wellbeing of their families, and the ability to earn remains their highest priority. It is seen as an integral means to better oneself, improve family status, and mobilise upwards in society.



Benefit of opportunities: the employment challenge

Key takeaways

- Financial security and career success are among the highest priorities for youth.
- Unemployment and economic growth are the highest areas of concern.
- Women are seven times more likely to remain unemployed than men, largely due to cultural barriers.
- Seven in ten respondents said their family's financial situation determined their career choices.
- Educated and internet users are far more optimistic about their career prospects.
- Transgender respondents complained far more about sexual harassment and mistreatment in the workplace.

After making a family (43%), young people say that financial stability (40%), living independently (38%), and a career of their choice (36%) is what will contribute most to their personal success and happiness. While young people seem optimistic about their future careers (71%), the reality is that Pakistan is going through one of the most challenging economic periods in its history. World Bank data indicates a slowing growth rate of 2%, compounded by the economic devastation left behind by the 2022 floods, which have crippled a country already struggling with high public debt, subdued global growth and sharply rising inflation³⁸. In such an environment, work opportunities are severely decreased.

The issue is not necessarily new. In the 2009 Next Generation report from the British Council, it was already highlighted that 36 million jobs would be needed in the decade that follows³⁹, while opportunities were on the decline due to the

38. World Bank. (2022). Pakistan's Economy Slows Down While Inflation Rises Amid Catastrophic Floods. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/10/06/world-bank-pakistan-s-economy-slows-down-while-inflation-rises-amid-catastrophic-floods>

39. British Council. (2009). Next Gen Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next-generation-report.pdf>

2008/9 global recession. In the 15 or so intervening years, only half those jobs have been created according to the findings from the 2022 Labour Force Survey⁴⁰.

However, employment is not just down to economic conditions. The youth bulge of the country has increased due to an alarming population growth rate of 2.4%⁴¹. Out of the 220+ million population of the country, approximately two thirds are under the age of 30, making Pakistan one of the youngest populations in the world. This means an even greater number of youth require employment, suggesting that the youth of 2022 are even more disadvantaged than the youth of 2009. According to the World Bank, youth unemployment rates for 15-24 year olds have risen from 0.8% in 2007 to 9.4% in 2021, the highest it has ever been⁴². Another barrier to youth employment is the gap between industry requirements and what is being taught through the education system, with suggestions that the current system is severely hampered in its ability to produce professionals equipped for modern industries and services. According to data produced by the Global Business Coalition for Education (GBC-Education) and UNICEF, only 18% of Pakistanis under the age of 24 have the skills required for 21st Century jobs⁴³. The majority of graduates entering the job market are not skilled/trained enough to cope with the challenges of 21st century job requirements, leading to unemployment, or unsteady employment.

It follows, therefore, that unemployment ranks as the top concern (alongside economic growth) among those surveyed.

The literacy-labour dichotomy

According to government statistics, Pakistan possesses the tenth largest labour force in the world, increasing from 65.5 million in 2017-18 to 71.76 million in 2020-21⁴⁴. While the overall

unemployment rate in the country has dropped from 6.9 to 6.3 percent in this time period, youth unemployment is actually much higher, with a 12.2 percent unemployment rate for young people between the ages of 20 and 24, and 8.9 percent for ages 25 to 29. Furthermore, these percentages have actually risen significantly in recent years. Traditionally, progress on youth literacy and enrolment should be seen as creating a more skilled and employed workforce. World Bank statistics show a rise of literacy levels among 15-24 year olds from 65% in 2005 to 73% in 2019⁴⁵. Yet discrepancies exist between education and employment levels, which appear to be moving in opposite directions. This is partially explained in previous Next Generation studies, which state that despite rising literacy and enrolment levels, unemployment levels have not improved significantly – indicating the link between expanding human capabilities and higher productivity. The 2015 British Council-Pakistan Institute of Development Economics report “Skill Disconnect in Sindh” assessed three key areas for skill development where deficiencies exist in the labour pool: English proficiency, Computer and IT skills, and numeracy and computational skills⁴⁶. The report noted a significant gap between the requirements of the industry and the emphasis by the skill institute as reported by respondents. It was also observed that these skills are highly prioritised by youth as well, yet don’t appear to be receiving the requisite level of attention.

This in turn translates to higher unemployment levels, even for those educated enough to be part of the labour force. Job creation is a critical challenge now.

“Our main challenges are in employment creation, not skills organisation or learning...Persons of an employable age vs. employment opportunities has resulted in a big supply demand issue.”
Disability Advocate, KII

The survey results reflect these anxieties. As discussed in the earlier section on the economy,

40. Express Tribune. (March 2022). Employment Boom in the Last 3 Years. Retrieved from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2350416/employment-boom-in-last-3-years>

41. Ministry of Finance. (2018-19). Population, Labor Force and Employment. Economic Survey of Pakistan. Retrieved from https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_19/12-Population.pdf

42. World Bank. (2023). Unemployment, youth (15-24). Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=PK>

43. UNICEF. (2019). NICEF GBC Education Study Results. Retrieved from

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-half-south-asian-youth-are-not-track-have-education-and-skills-necessary>

44. Ministry of Finance. (2022). Ministry of Finance statistics. Retrieved from https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_22/PES12-POPULATION.pdf

45. World Bank. (2023). Literacy Rate – 15-24 years in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.ZS?locations=PK>

46. British Council. (2015). Skill Disconnect in Sindh. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/skill_disconnect_in_sindh.pdf

young people increasingly see unemployment as the most worrying issue for them, followed by economic growth, both of which are deeply linked. Young women are at even greater disadvantage than young men with regards to employment. According to the Next Generation survey, young women are seven times more likely to be unemployed than young men (85% to 12%), and twelve times less likely to be employed than their male counterparts (84% to 7%), even though their ratio as students is roughly 2:1. Clearly a major proportion of the young female population is not being allowed to join the workforce, despite being capable of doing so.

	Overall sample	Student	Employed	Self-employed /entrepreneur	Unemployed
Male	48%	64%	84%	74%	12%
Female	48%	36%	7%	11%	85%

Low rates of female employment are rooted in social and cultural restrictions. The British Council report “Understanding Meaningful Participation of Women In Leadership” sheds further light on this, stating that patriarchal values and subsequent cultural barriers restrict women’s performance in the workplace. Along with household responsibilities, a lack of family support leading to self-doubt and inadequate policies for working mothers contribute to lower participation of women in senior positions⁴⁷.

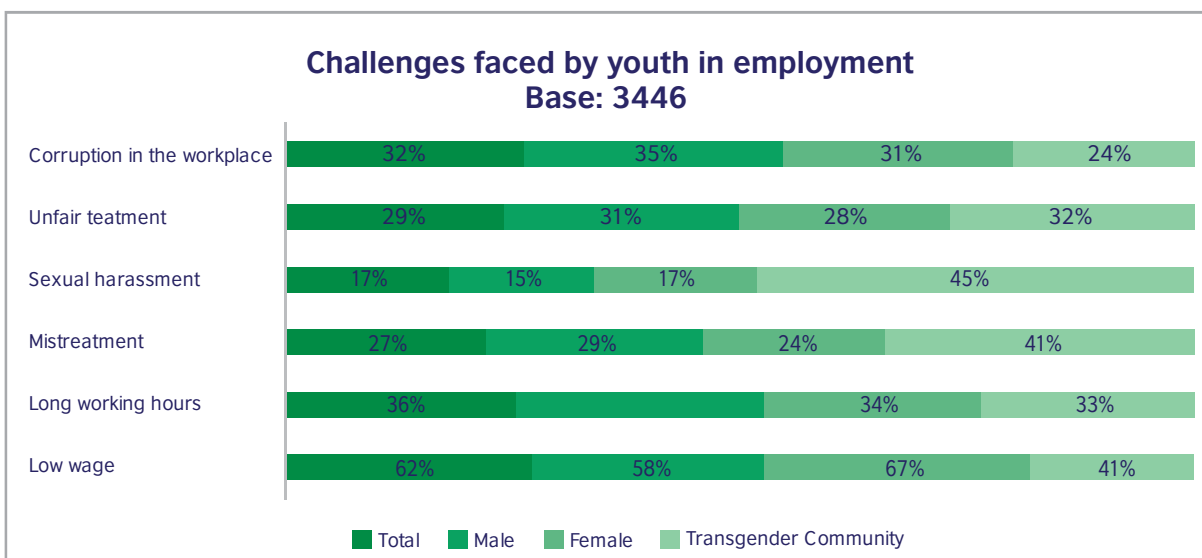
Dissatisfaction and stigmatisation

However, young people are not just facing issues with unemployment. Even when they are part of the workforce, they encounter various other limitations.

Our survey data highlights several key challenges. Young people most commonly identify low wages as a challenge for youth in employment, which has likely become a problematic issue due to declining purchasing power amidst rampant inflation. Excessive labour supply also means companies have the upper hand in determining salaries, which means it will be harder for young people to change the current status of salaries.

Low wage, long working hours and corruption are the next most mentioned challenges for youth in employment overall, though for the transgender community mistreatment and sexual harassment are bigger concerns. A major reason for this is the cultural stigmatisation of the transgender community, which prevents them from social and economic inclusion, leaving them prone to persecution in the workplace.

Even for employed youngsters, the notion of job satisfaction is lacking in many ways. One key



47. British Council. (April 2021). Understanding Meaningful Participation of Women In Leadership. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/bc_mpw_l_report_final_for_web.pdf

reason uncovered in the research was family limitations. Several respondents in the focus groups complained of having very different aspirations from the jobs they eventually ended up at, with cultural limitations being cited by females and financial limitations mentioned by male respondents. Nearly seven in ten participants stated that their family's financial situation determined their career choices. Many respondents expressed exasperation with not being able to follow their career path because either their family was too limited financially or saw lucrative jobs as the only form of employment while marginalising other careers.

“Every parent wants their kids to excel regardless of how poor they are, but their state forces them to make their kids work at a young age. All of this happens due to financial issues, they are compelled to do this to their children, while no parent wants their kid to stress about financial issues at such an age.”

Male Respondent, 24-34, Peshawar Rural

The inability of women to have the same career success as men was a major source of discontent, attributed mainly to lack of support from families, and a perception that workplace environments are less accommodating of them.

“The major issue we face are mental challenges leading to stress. Sometimes people are a challenge, as they ask why are you working a job?”

Female Respondent, 16-24, Karachi Rural

Given the restrictions from families, Pakistani society needs to ask itself whether young people are compromising on happiness by being forced to give up on their dreams and instead opt for lucrative or socially appropriate employment that may satisfy the needs of their families but neglect their own.

“I have too many responsibilities, so I had to limit my own wishes and things in life to support my family.”

Male Respondent, 24-34, Lahore Urban SEC BC

The frustration of young professionals also extends to their limitations in professional skills. The wide

gap between educational institutions and the market means that universities are not equipping young people with the right skills to improve their employment prospects. The oversupply of graduates with no professional skills prepares them for little other than administrative careers, reducing their employability. The study South Asian Perspectives on Education, Skills and Employment discovered that the region faces high rates of graduate unemployment.⁴⁸

Religious and ethnic minorities face socio-economic barriers as well. For example, according to human rights groups cited by the New York Times, while Christians make up less than 2% of the country's population, they fill out around 80% of jobs related to cleaning such as sweeping, garbage collection and sewerage cleaning, while Hindus mostly fill the rest⁴⁹. The government has tried to address this at various levels. At the Federal level, a 5% minority employment allocation has been established. On the Provincial level, Sindh has promised a 2% quota, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Balochistan all see minorities as priority groups. However, during a Supreme Court hearing it was revealed that over 30,000 government seats for minority groups remain vacant⁵⁰, signalling either lack of interest in recruiting individuals from such groups, or the lack of trust of groups towards the government itself. These are not positive indicators. They signal that such groups, despite their yearning for upward mobilisation, continue to be economically trapped by a society that refuses to see them as anything else. It is inevitable that young people from minority groups will feel even further disenfranchised.

Despite these major challenges, most young Pakistanis remained positive about their career prospects. The Next Generation survey showed that 71% of participants were optimistic about their future careers. Those with private (75%) and public (71%) education and those who use the internet (79%) felt more optimistic about their future careers than those who were illiterate (58%) and did not use the internet (62%). However, this

48. UNICEF. (2019). South Asian Perspectives on Education, Skills and Employment. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-half-south-asian-youth-are-not-track-have-education-and-skills-necessary>

49. New York Times. (2020). Pakistan Christian Sweepers. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/world/asia/pakistan-christians-sweepers.html>

50. The Express Tribune. (2021). 30,000 govt. vacant minority seats worries SC. Retrieved from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2322342/sc-expresses-concern-over-30000-minority-vacancies-in-govt-sector>

optimism is directly related to their access to key opportunities in skills, learning and facilities. As we will see in later sections, young people are increasingly drawn to accessing newer technologies and skills and availing them is a key source of empowerment. Without them, there is concern that a major segment of the youth population may fall into a limitation trap with fewer prospects for actualising or improving their socio-economic conditions.

What is your outlook of the future?	Total	Private Institute	Public Institute	Illiterate
Base: All respondents	3446	435	1778	521
Optimistic	71%	75%	71%	58%
Pessimistic	16%	10%	16%	26%

What is your outlook of the future?	Total	Internet user	Non-Internet user
Base: All respondents	3446	1870	1247
Optimistic	71%	79%	62%
Pessimistic	16%	11%	23%

Obsolete academics: education and its discontents

Key takeaways

- Young people acknowledge a failure of the education system to provide them with skills needed for modern employment; lack of innovation is seen as a critical issue.
- Teaching quality emerges as the top concern of youth in the education system.
- Curriculum development is harshly criticised as a major issue, with more focus on theory than practical application.

Widening industry-university gap, particularly in technology, leaves young students feeling unprepared for the job market.

Education is recognised as a very important factor in the advancement of a nation. For a country like Pakistan, it is even more essential, considering the low rates of social and economic development over the last 75 years. Reversing these trends requires providing young people with relevant skills and knowledge, which is why education is one of Pakistan's top priority Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNDP research shows that education (or lack of) is the main factor contributing to multidimensional poverty in the country⁵¹.

While access to quality education should be among the top areas of focus for policymakers, it is not attracting the attention it requires. Children's access to education in Pakistan is severely lacking. A White Paper on SDG-4 published by Asim Bashir for Pakistan Youth Change Advocates observed that Pakistan has the second-highest number of out-of-school children in the world. A total of 22.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 16 (44% of the age group) do not attend school⁵². The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reduce these numbers even more. Bashir's analysis shows that up to one million children are feared to drop out of schools due to lack of relevant provisions for online learning. COVID-19 also resulted in greater dependency on hybrid/digital models of learning. This, along with other infrastructure disparities, suggests the education gap between rural and urban communities will widen.

At the primary level, there are a huge number of ghost schools all over the country. The lack of basic facilities at schools discourages parents from sending their children, especially girls, to schools. The problem is more severe in less developed provinces since education is a provincial subject. A brief by the Asian Development Bank makes the case that inadequate infrastructure facilities are among the leading causes of students the unwillingness to attend school.

51. UNDP. (n.d.). Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/pk/MPI-4pager.pdf>

52. Pakistan Youth Change Advocates. (2021). Public Investment in Education. Retrieved from <https://pyca.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/A-white-paper-asim-Bashir-Khan.pdf>

The availability of electricity across the country in primary, middle, high, and higher secondary schools is 68%, 82%, 93% and 97%, respectively. These percentages are alarmingly lower for primary and middle schools of Balochistan and the newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa⁵³.

A critical factor to assess is the major gap in education inequality. Disparities exist based on geographic location as well as demographics. According to the UNDP National Human Development Report, the literacy rate for people 10 years of age and above is 25% lower in rural areas compared to urban⁵⁴. Another key outlier is gender. Pakistan is currently ranked 135 out of 156 countries for educational attainment in the 2022 Global Gender Index⁵⁵, which is a damning indictment of the severe disparity between genders in education. This, in turn, affects key development indicators. Research shows that gender disparities in education lead to the underutilisation of human capital, which has the potential to stifle economic growth, while also affecting social objectives such as educating the coming generation, preventing child mortality, reducing fertility, and enhancing child nutrition⁵⁶.

Beyond literacy and enrolment

Another challenge for the education sector in Pakistan is its inability to produce professionals well equipped for modern industries and services. As noted earlier, GBC-Education and UNICEF research concluded how students are struggling to deal with the challenges of the modern workforce. Higher education institutions continue to struggle in modern teaching methodologies or changing curriculum preferences in accordance with technological advancements, which is a major hurdle in bridging the industry-academia gap. The Next Generation survey shows that young people are aware of and concerned about this issue, with the majority agreeing that the education system does not provide the knowledge and skills needed for the modern age.

Our education system does not provide the knowledge and skills needed for jobs in the 21st century

Agree	58%
Disagree	17%

The views of respondents on the education system of the country reflect their disappointment and frustration. The vast gap between the institutes and industry is a major source of discontentment, with millions of graduates lacking employability not just because of lack of opportunities, but because the higher education system has failed to adapt and innovate to the requirements of the current job market.

A broken education system

Several experts interviewed for this study observed that institutions pay too much attention to non-practical and theoretical aspects, instead of providing relevant knowledge and skills, or even allowing for practical work experience. Furthermore, universities are seen as resistant to innovation, stuck in bureaucratic holes and liken critical thinking and openness to disobedience. The outcome is that the education system is not preparing students for the job market, providing them with either less useful skills or theoretical learning they have to unlearn when they join the labour force.

“Youth need to have the right education and skills to play their role (choosing the right field). Education is not giving them the right knowledge and skills. You need to be more flexible by providing opportunities to youth in terms of skill set to help in their practical life. It is still very academic and book oriented, and they need more realistic/practical learning rather than traditional methods. We have started the concept of open schools. Access to creatively structured programmes is important.”

Education Expert, KII

The Next Generation survey shows that young people are also critical of education provision in Pakistan. Overall, 55% believe that university curricula are outdated and lack innovation.

53. Asian Development Bank. (2022). Access Challenges to Education in Pakistan. Retrieved from

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/771091/adb-brief-207-access-challenges-education-pakistan.pdf>

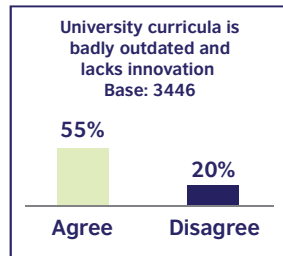
54. UNDP. (2018). Pakistan National Human Development Report. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/pakistan-national-human-development-report>

55. UN Women. (n.d.). Asia and the Pacific. Retrieved from

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan#:~:text=Gender%20inequality%20is%20of%20significant,95%2F156%20for%20political%20empowerment.>

56. Kamal, M. A. (2022). Gender Inequality in Education. Pakistan Today. Retrieved from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/02/27/gender-inequality-in-education/>

This increases to 77% among those who have received a technical diploma/certificate, 64% for graduates and 65% for post-graduates. The public sector education system has received particular criticism, with half the respondents calling it severely dysfunctional.



'I have three kids and I have admitted two of them to a private school and it cost me 4000 PKR. A few months passed by and my financial state got worse and I had to make them leave the school and admitted them to a government school, and there the teachers would be absent all the time.'
Male Respondent, 24-34, Peshawar Rural

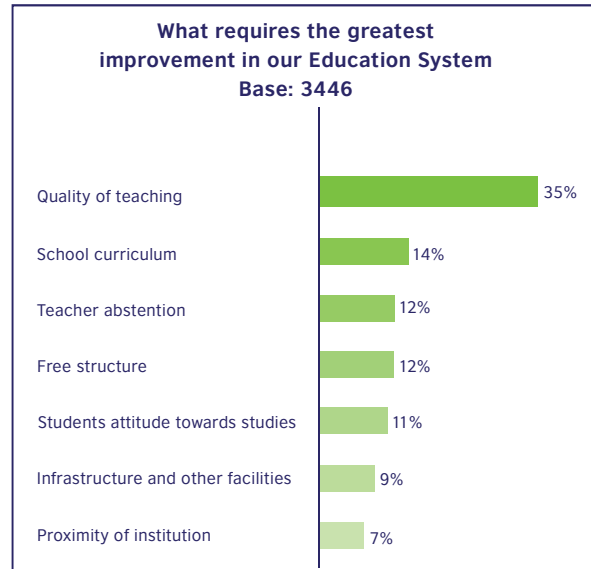
The highest rate of criticism came from the more educated, as well as Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Islamabad, which have higher literacy rates than the national average (largely due to higher enrolment rates, with AJK having over 90% enrolment rate and GB having nearly 80% enrolment rate). This is a dire finding, as the greatest levels of discontentment for the education system appears to come from those that have experienced it fully.

The pandemic further exposed the gap between students on technology and infrastructure, with many unable to attend classes due to poor connectivity. However, an additional adversity was that many of these students relied on freelance online work, which they could only do in universities as they had internet facilities. With their closure, students were deprived of their learning as well as their earning.

Teaching quality

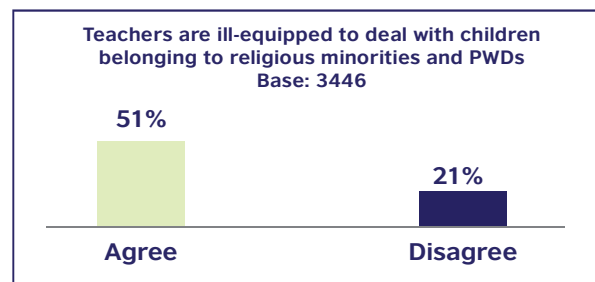
When asked what aspects of the education system needs most improvement, the quality of

teaching is most often mentioned by the young people surveyed.



Provincially, the sentiment was most pronounced in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as middle/upper middle-class segments.

The problem of inclusivity was also identified as a crucial issue, with teachers unable to cater to the demands of students from minority groups or with special needs. The lack of adaptability from educators may create further barriers to adequate education, especially for those that are disadvantaged in social, mental or physical aspects.



"There is religious bias in Pakistan, as teachers are not trained to not be biased towards Hindus kids... My kid's teacher came and asked me "Are you the parent of the Hindu student? Let's see how it feels teaching Hindu children". The school didn't have any Hindu students, no curriculum or plan to teach Hindu children."
Hindu Male Respondent, 24-34, Karachi



E3: Effects

The previous sections reflect how young Pakistanis have been severely let down by status quo enforcing institutions. The unwillingness to change and adapt to the needs of youth today, as well as their dependency on existing obsolete systems of learning and employment, have left them bereft and in need of other solutions.

Crises may be adverse, but they also contain within them new possibilities and opportunities. This frustration has forced young people to look for the answers themselves, and create new avenues and spaces for learning, work and expression.

This section outlines the key methods through which young people have attempted to catalyse change for themselves. The most prominent vehicle for this has been the online space, which is now being explored to learn new skills to compensate for the deficiencies in the education system. It has also opened new doors to e-commerce and freelance work, which is increasingly being preferred in lieu of traditional workspaces. Finally, the online space has ushered in a new era of civic and political activism.

However, these effects are not all positive. The digital landscape has also become a cautionary tale, as social media is encouraging the

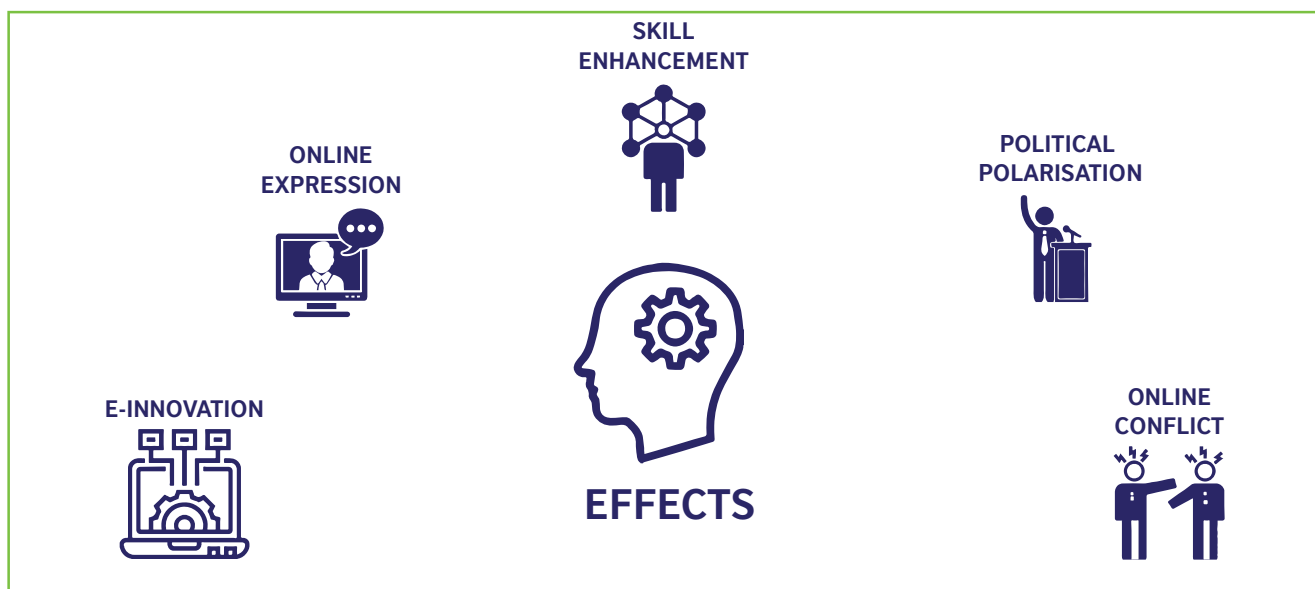
development of echo chambers, filter bubbles and extremist behaviour, which is creating further wedges in society. This section explores the adverse consequences of this phenomenon, and how it threatens the future of young minds.

Learning to earn: digital enhancement and skill development

Key takeaways

- **Young people are increasingly preferring digital/technological skills and problem solving skills over traditional skills like maths and literacy.**
- **Seven in ten respondents are in favour of non-traditional technical and skill based education over formal education systems.**
- **Seven in ten respondents consider that online learning is critical for young people to boost skills they can utilise for their professional work.**

Instead of relying solely on traditional systems of empowerment, the study results show that young people are now investing time and effort to find solutions on their own. The main avenue for this is the online space. Young netizens have increasingly begun seeking ways to develop their skills, network, and find new opportunities through the online media landscape.



Maths and literacy skills are traditionally the foundation of education in Pakistan. While it is clearly important that people have such skills, the Next Generation survey suggests that young people would like to see more focus on problem solving skills, with 40% saying that this is the most important skill needed for employment these days. This is followed by digital and technological skills (27%), communication skills (25%) and creativity (24%), each of which are identified as very important by roughly a quarter of all the respondents. It therefore seems crucial that at all stages of education such topics are introduced to help keep students engaged.

“Skills are more important these days, like digital marketing, online courses... Khan academy is good for learning. YouTube helps in learning as well, so one can self-learn.”

Female Respondent, 24-34, Islamabad Urban

“The more skills you have, the better you can be at life. With the IT boom, kids are also learning. There’s not a single kid I meet who doesn’t say “I am a content writer”. Everyone is a content writer. Many kids on campuses are saying they are helping others with freelance work.”

Youth education expert, KII



These findings challenge our assumptions in terms of knowledge acquisition. Several young people interviewed during the course of the project mentioned how they are using all kinds of resources to learn new skills.

At the geographic level, Sindh and KP respondents are seen to prioritise problem solving skills, while Punjab and AJK prioritise digital skills. Importantly, students educated at religious institutes, as well as students from private institutes, are more in favour of digital skills, than the national average. Religiously educated youth are also increasingly inclined towards learning communication skills.

The gender break-up also reveals some important insights. While both male and female respondents tended to gravitate towards the same skills, the former gave greater preference to digital and technological skills (29% for males vs. 24% for females), and the latter prioritised problem-solving skills more (44% for females vs. 37% for males). Young women also showed a greater preference for networking skills (24% for females vs. 20% for males). The emphasis on modern skills corroborates the findings of the Skill Development report by the British Council, which identified IT and computational skills as a gap between the requirements of the industry and the priorities of skill institutes.

The young people surveyed also felt that technical education should be prioritised over formal education. Male respondents were more in favour of this than females. Additionally, two-thirds (64%) of the respondents also stated it was more important for them to pursue a career than to complete their education. These views suggest that young people are finding Pakistan's

tertiary learning system to be impractical and of limited utility and are inclined towards more pragmatic knowledge and skill enhancement.

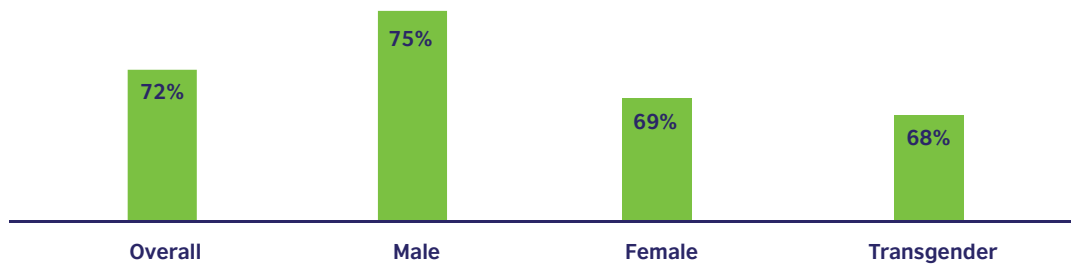
It's more important for me to pursue a career than to complete my education

Agree	64%
Disagree	18%

Many young people hold negative views regarding the education offered in Pakistan as discussed in the previous section. Instead, they desire to acquire skills that are perhaps not being taught in schools and universities, and pursue other avenues for themselves.

In the qualitative research, many young people mentioned the different kinds of resources they are using to develop new skills, with a particular focus on online sources such as video streaming platforms like YouTube and Facebook.

Percentage that agree technical education is more necessary at this time than formal education
Base: 3446



The survey data supports this, with 71% agreeing that online learning can provide them with skills needed for future work.

This sentiment was particularly high among the privately educated, and more affluent classes, as well as the better-educated regions of Gilgit Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Islamabad. But this demand exists among all segments surveyed.

Online learning can provide me with the skills needed for future work	
Agree	71%
Disagree	12%

This is partially attributable to the rise in 3G/4G connectivity and in part due the pandemic upending traditional learning sources such as libraries.

A new world of opportunities: spur e-professionalism, e-commerce and youth

Key takeaways

The majority of youth are interested in starting their own business within the next five years.
Over half of the respondents see online freelancing as a viable option and have an understanding of digital e-commerce platforms.
Women are being seen as the major beneficiaries of e-commerce by helping to bypass restrictions preventing them from traditional employment.

The patterns of online learning reflect a key aspect of Next Generation Pakistan: they are becoming increasingly independent and driven, as well as enterprising.

The digital economy is creating more opportunities for young entrepreneurs, including the evolution of

FinTechs and digital finance⁵⁷

Digital users are also developing a variety of ICT skills including programming, learning and connectivity with others. AlphaBeta estimates that Pakistan can harness its potential through investment in eight key technologies, including mobile internet, FinTech, AI and cloud computing⁵⁸.

Positive indicators are emerging, particularly in the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) and digital sectors. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report has moved Pakistan's rank from 136 in 2019

57. World Bank. (2022). Pakistan Development Update: Financing the Real Economy. Retrieved from <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/410d0506bba8afc6fd9d9541148bfe4d-0310062022/original/PDU-April-2022-April18-ForWEB-Final.pdf>

58. AlphaBeta Strategy. (2021). Unlocking Pakistan's Digital Potential: The Economic Opportunities of Digital Transformation and Google's Contribution. Retrieved from <https://alphabeta.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/pakistan-digital-transformation.pdf>

to 108 in 2020, showing an improvement of 28 places⁵⁹. The SME sector has grown significantly in this time period, from 3.1 million SME businesses to over five million by 2021⁶⁰, largely spurred by the tech sector. The emergence of the digital economy, spearheaded by e-commerce unicorns (worth \$1 billion dollars) such as Daraz.pk, Careem, and Zameen.com have shown the success of Pakistani entrepreneurs on the global stage.

However, the ability to avail these opportunities depends on access and attention. A study by Shair et al. demonstrated major variations in ICT skills at three levels. The first level is location. Urban respondents were three times more likely to possess these skills than rural participants. The second level is education, where higher education (graduate/post-graduate) students were found to be better acquainted with these skills than those at secondary or primary level. The third level is gender, where male respondents were far better skilled at ICT related tasks such as email and using the internet (by a factor of over three times) than females⁶¹.

Entrepreneurship

Young Pakistanis, far from risk averse, are opting to start something of their own rather than joining the traditional workforce. Our survey results show that nearly half of all respondents (49%) are interested in starting their own business within the next five years.

Of these, the more interested respondents were typically male, living in urban and semi-urban areas, internet users, and literate. Geographically, Islamabad and Azad Jammu and Kashmir showed the most enthusiasm for starting their own businesses. Cross analysing the data shows that those who are more interested in building their own businesses, also felt more optimistic about the future of Pakistan, and had more faith in the political system of the country.

Online employment

Many young Pakistanis are looking to the internet as their key source of employment. Several

How interested are you in starting your own business within the next 5 years?				
	Overall	Private Institute	Public Institute	Illiterate
Base: All respondents	3411	430	1755	520
Interested	49%	56%	51%	33%
Not interested	34%	30%	32%	50%

How interested are you in starting your own business within the next 5 years?			
	Overall	Internet	Non Internet
Base: All respondents	3411	1843	1242
Interested	49%	59%	40%
Not interested	34%	25%	43%

examples of young people finding their own ways and means to earn through online resources were given in the qualitative research.

‘My son asked me for a laptop to earn money online. He mentioned he will pay back from online earnings in six months. Children nowadays are so aware of the opportunities online.’

Female Respondent, 24-34, Islamabad Urban

Young people in the FGDS gave examples of using videos by influencers and others to acquire skill development, and then employing those skills to acquire business through freelance work. One participant mentioned how she learned to stitch using YouTube videos, and then began a freelance clothing business on Facebook. Another mentioned how their cook used WhatsApp statuses to become a food vlogger.

‘I use Facebook and Twitter mainly, but I’ve started using TikTok as well. Social media helps us find different opportunities like WhatsApp and messenger groups are really helpful for spreading information around. We’ve also watched freelancing videos in order to learn about it and benefit from it. Our digital literacy is high as we can operate almost all the applications and we know our way around them.’

Male Respondent, 16-34, Peshawar Rural

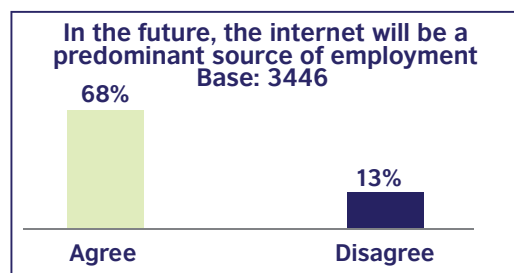
The survey affirmed these accounts, with nearly seven in ten young Pakistanis agreeing that the internet will be the predominant source of employment in the future, while 59% consider

59. State Bank of Pakistan. (2020). Ease of Doing Business Reforms - Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.sbp.org.pk/FS/Ease/Ease-r.htm>

60. Pakistan Today. (2022). Promoting Technology-driven Entrepreneurship in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/04/08/promoting-technology-driven-entrepreneurship-in-pakistan/>

61. Shair, W., Waheed, A., Kamran, M. M., & Kubra, N. (2022). Digital Divide in Pakistan: Barriers to ICT Usage Among the Individuals of Pakistan. Journal of Economic Impact.

online freelancing as a viable path for young people. The explosion of tech start-ups and freelance/gig economy based companies in the last few years have a major role to play in helping push this new form of work to the mainstream.



There is improved understanding on digital platforms (Amazon, Daraz) market places (OLX) & gig economy platforms (Bykea):

Agree	54%
Disagree	20%

Online freelancing is seen as a viable path by the youth nowadays:

Agree	59%
Disagree	15%

Entrepreneurs are also developing a support structure within their ecosystem. One subject matter expert who has worked with several tech incubators makes the point that such institutions have helped to create centres for learning and facilitation to compensate for the lack of support that traditional institutions like family, education or the state have failed to provide. This has also ushered in a new environment where entrepreneurs were engaging and accepting each other, regardless of their background, enhancing social and religious pluralism, and where women who were not allowed to work outside the home were engaging in e-commerce businesses from their homes and generating economic prosperity for themselves and their homes to the surprise of many.

“Young people lack support at home... so many in the entrepreneur community support (each other) as an alternative... Incubators have people of all religions and we found they understood each other and that bond has gotten stronger with time, and led to more tolerance.”

Tech/Entrepreneur expert, KII

Women and e-commerce

A pattern emerging from the research is how the internet is becoming an equaliser for women. As noted in the previous section, there are big economic disparities between men and women in employment. One of the key reasons for this is literacy. According to World Bank data on Pakistan, only 46.5% of women as opposed to 71% of men, are literate⁶² which clearly limits employment opportunities for women. Among those who do work, the majority (73%) are in labour intensive sectors such as fishing, agriculture and forestry, while only 7.5% of working women are involved in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) sectors. Employment and labour retention of women is also challenged by traditional attitudes towards the role of women in society and family and with workplaces being hostile environments for women. It is clear there are multiple barriers to women's employment and future prospects in reaching their full potential.

However, e-commerce is emerging as an area that allows young women to bypass these restrictions.

“Being a doctor, I see my patients online. I'm more aware now with the advent of technology as I can now help with my kids' upbringing better in a post Covid world.”

Female Respondent, 24-34 Islamabad Urban

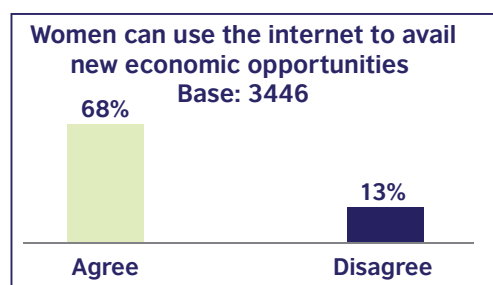
“Women who were not allowed to go out for jobs are now earning sitting at home.”

Female Respondent, 24-34 Islamabad Urban

The survey results indicate how strong this sentiment is, with 68% of respondents stating that women can use the internet to avail new economic opportunities, while 62% agree that women will be the major beneficiaries of e-commerce. As expected, the more literate and internet savvy segments of society are in favour of this, and importantly both men and women are equally supportive. There is some expected resistance to this notion, with youth educated from religious institutions considerably lower in their support

62. The World Bank. (2021). Literacy rate, adult male (% of males ages 15 and above) – Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.MA.ZS?locations=PK>

(39% vs. 68% nationally). Despite this, the online marketplace is being seen as beneficial for women by the majority of youth.



I believe that women are seen as major beneficiaries of e-commerce due to the choice of work from home:

Agree	62%
Disagree	14%

Discourse and discord: expression, engagement and polarisation

Key takeaways

- Three in five young people use the internet, practically all of them use social media as well.
- Television (57%) is the most popular information source consumed by young people, while Facebook is the fourth highest (20%).
- Online platforms are severely distrusted by non-internet users.
- Nearly half of all respondents regularly post on political issues on social media, and over half have regular discussions with their friends on political issues.
- Approximately three in five participants believe online civic and political activism will change Pakistan.
- The majority of Pakistani youngsters see themselves as playing an active role in mitigating climate change.
- Internet users are increasingly politically and socially polarised, and have seen material targeting their communities and ideologies on social media.

Pakistan is fast becoming one of the world's biggest online communities. According to Kepios data, internet users in Pakistan have increased a further 22 million (+36%) between 2021 and 2022⁶³, while the number of social media users has risen to 71 million. Internet usage is increasingly moving from laptops/desktops to mobile phones, with 3G/4G subscribers comprising 114 million or 52% of the population according to the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA)⁶⁴.

While data on age group disaggregation for internet users is not publicly available, one can infer some conclusions from indirect sources. For instance, Meta's ad data shows the majority of social media users are men between the ages of 18 and 34.

Telenor conducted a multi-country survey of youth internet usage with Plan International in 2021, which also included participants from Pakistan⁶⁵. This showed 17% of Pakistani youngsters said they use the internet all the time – from waking up till bedtime.

A survey by Kantar also revealed a pattern on internet users, whereby males (69%), Gen Z individuals (67% of 15-24 year olds and 57% of 25-34 year olds) and employed individuals (63%) are more likely to use the internet⁶⁶.

63. Data Reportal. (2022). DIGITAL 2022: PAKISTAN. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-pakistan>

64. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. (2022). Telecom Indicators. Retrieved from <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/telecom-indicators>

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66. Google South Asia. (2021). Pakistan's journey to digital [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mISvA7MyWo>

The British Council survey results corroborated these studies, with its own findings showing that approximately 60% of youth have access to the internet.

Do you use internet? Base: All respondents	
Yes	60%
No	40%

Internet users in Pakistan seem to have a distinct persona. They are more likely to live in urban areas and are educated. Students (82%) and self-employed/entrepreneurs (84%) have among the highest rates of internet usage.

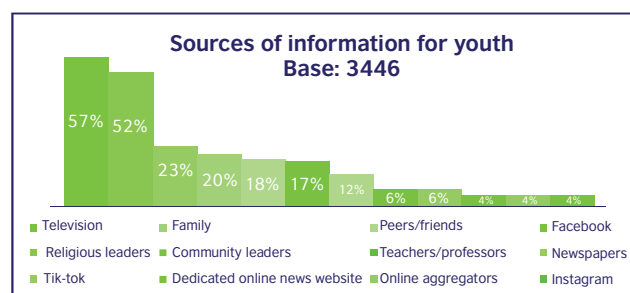
Of note, there is a large gap between men and women, with 73% of male respondents as opposed to 47% of female respondents saying they use the internet. This can possibly be attributed to cultural barriers and restrictions, as well as education levels.

Do you use the internet?	Total	Private Institute	Public Institute	Illiterate
Yes	60%	86%	62%	15%
No	40%	14%	38%	85%

Social Media and Information

Nearly all – 95% - internet users say that they use social media, indicating that internet usage and social media usage have become synonymous with each other.

While traditional sources of information continue to maintain the ascendancy, social media is now also among the most often used sources. Television (57%) and family (52%) are most frequently identified, but Facebook ranks fourth with 20% saying it is one of the main sources of information, placing it slightly ahead of religious leaders (18%).



Young people belonging to nuclear families are far more inclined towards television in comparison to joint families. Facebook is used more by the privately educated (34%), 16 to 24 year olds, and men (30% vs. 11% for women) reflecting disproportionate internet use. Youth educated at religious institutes were far more likely to cite family as an information source (74%) as are women (61%).

Trust in information systems is directly linked to their usage: the more familiar one is with an information source, the more trustworthy it is considered.

Those who do not use the internet have very low levels of trust in online sources of information. For instance, only 16% of non-internet users consider Facebook trustworthy vs. 48% of internet users. The same sentiment is also observed for online news aggregators, which are found trustworthy by only 19% of non-internet users vs. 40% of internet users. While healthy scepticism among young people may be seen as positive, uninformed scepticism, particularly towards new technologies, can be dangerous and resistant to innovation and change which is necessary for the transformation of youth.

Do you consider Facebook to be trustworthy source of information?	3117	Internet users	Non internet users
Yes	35%	48%	16%
No	43%	31%	60%

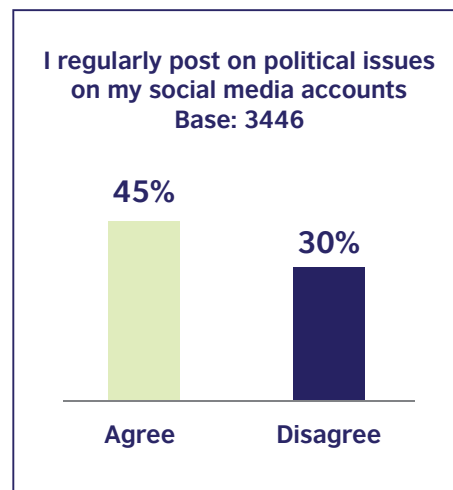
Political and civic engagement

Political and civic expression has gone through a major renaissance in the last decade. The emergence of the youth bulge, coupled with the rise of social media has vastly changed the playing field for social and political engagement. These accelerants have just reinforced the need for youth

to be more engaged in politics, and in a way more meaningful than a vote bank. The traditional dynastically run political parties have lost favour with the younger generation, which is looking for change⁶⁷. The rise of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the country's largest political party is partially attributed to this sentiment. Younger political activists are in the ascendance and there is greater demand for legitimacy of their activism. PILDAT's "Youth Opinion Survey" in April 2022 showed that over 81% of participants were in favour of restoring student unions in public and private universities⁶⁸, which remain banned since 1984 by the then military regime to stop political activism on campuses. Political parties have helped bypass these restrictions by directly reaching out to younger followers via social media.

The results are somewhat mixed. According to a multi-decade survey by Gallup Pakistan, voter turnout for Pakistanis aged between 18 and 29 has hovered around 25-30%, while showing a marginal increase to 37% in the 2018 elections (compared to 53% nationally)⁶⁹. On the other hand, political activism outside of voting has rarely been higher. Twitter and Facebook have become major political battlegrounds, largely fuelled by the accounts of political parties and their members, and their younger, more engaged followers.

The survey results show a high level of political engagement on social media. Nearly half of social media users state they regularly post on political issues on their accounts. Of note, those who use the internet say they regularly talk about political issues with their friends (67%) more often than the national youth average (57%). This may in part be due to the profile of internet users (more likely to be men, educated, studying, employed) who are all more likely to discuss politics with friends anyway, but perhaps also points to how social media can be used to engage people in politics. This of course needs to be done in a responsible way and not further the reach of extremist views.



My friends and I regularly talk about political issues:	Internet users
Agree	66%
Disagree	15%

The internet is increasingly being seen as an amplifier to elevate voices that were previously hidden or ignored in public discourse. Over half of both internet (58%) and non-internet users (56%) believe that online political and civic activism will help change the country. In recent years, examples of how social media and online news sources have been a force for good include highlighting women's rights, the plight of the Hazara community in Balochistan, and extrajudicial killings. These are issues that have not been addressed by mainstream and traditional media in the same way. A report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan suggests that "social media have been instrumental in mobilisations in the face of widespread censorship in mainstream media", as well as becoming "an avenue of accountability of authorities whose presence on these platforms can be leveraged to elicit responses in times of crisis or repression"⁷⁰. Increasing online usage, therefore, among all groups in society could be an effective mechanism for increasing social mobilisation and engagement.

67. Arab News. (2022). Imran Khan's anti-American campaign has strengthened his populist base. Retrieved from <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2078336>

68. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development & Transparency. (2022). Youth overwhelmingly support democracy, despite weaknesses: Youth Parliament Pakistan launches its first edition of the 'Voice of Youth' series. Retrieved from <https://pildat.org/youth1/youth-overwhelmingly-support-democracy-despite-weaknesses-youth-parliament-pakistan-launches-its-first-edition-of-the-voice-of-youth-series>

69. Gallup Pakistan. (2021). Youth Voter Turnout- Empirical Analysis of Elections in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://gallup.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Youth-Voting.pdf>

70. HRCP. (2022). Mapping Social Movements in Pakistan (p. 20).

Online political and civic activism will help change Pakistan:	Overall	Internet users	Non internet users
Agree	56%	58%	56%

A key issue identified in this study was climate change and how young Pakistanis are responding to it. Outside of belief in the existence of climate change, the key challenge globally has been to invoke action on mitigating and adapting to its effects.

Another arena in which increased internet and social media use could be beneficial is encouraging young people to take action in relation to climate change. An Ipsos poll conducted in 2021⁷¹ in 27 countries found that a fifth of the participants under 35 believed it was “too late to fix climate change”, while 66% were fatalistic about reducing greenhouse gas emissions to an acceptable level. However, in the Next Generation survey, when asked if they believed they could play an active role in mitigating climate change, 56% of young people overall agreed that they could. This increases to 63% of internet users which perhaps indicates that online information sources can help to educate young people about actions they can take to combat climate change.

The survey results from our study show that young Pakistanis are seeing themselves as agents of change on climate change. The issue of climate change has never come to the forefront the way it did in 2022 with the devastation of the floods, and has led to a major social awakening on the phenomenon and what needs to be done to tackle it.

I believe that I can play an active role as a citizen in mitigating climate change:	Overall	Internet users
Agree	56%	63%

However, this activism requires activation. While young people intend to play a role as opinion leaders on the issue of climate change, they need

to be involved by stakeholders. The Global Youth Letter report from the British Council in 2021 highlighted that 75% of young people state having the skills to deal with climate change, but 69% have never participated⁷².

Political polarisation and digital conflict

Not all aspects of online engagement are wholly positive or constructive. Partially it is because of digital media platforms, which prefer engagement over meaningful discourse. Francis Haugen's explosive testimony regarding Facebook's role in stoking social divisions showed that the platform's “machine learning models that maximise engagement also favour controversy, misinformation, and extremism: put simply, people just like outrageous stuff”⁷³. Using disinformation campaigns and targeted attacks against individuals have become a cornerstone of digital politics, and young “keyboard warriors” have become their most crucial tools. Social and political polarisation is inevitable.

Online media in Pakistan has also become a hotbed of controversy. Political parties and their social media wings have become increasingly more hostile towards each other, creating friction and polarisation on political lines in a way rarely seen before. Vulnerable social segments are also being targeted on social media. A report by Bytes4All notes that “the issue of online blasphemy accusations and campaigns continued to spiral out of control, with social media users able to target anyone with near complete impunity. Most online cases targeted minorities, members of the media or those teaching/studying in educational institutions”⁷⁴.

The survey results do suggest that young internet users in Pakistan are more divided or extreme in their political views. Two thirds of internet users (65%) agree that the political ideology and party they support is the only one that can save Pakistan,

71. IPSOS. (2021). Climate fatalism grips young people worldwide while the urgency for solution-oriented media grows. Retrieved from <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/climate-fatalism-grips-young-people-worldwide-while-urgency-solution-oriented-media-grows>

72. British Council. (2021). Global Youth Letter on Climate Action. Retrieved from https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/get-involved/global-youth-letter/climate-action?hstc=228432002.78b6c136bf295e36b68ede6a60ec2fa.1669362159334.1674394865783.1674394865789.17&__hssc=228432002.1.1674394865789&hsfp=1389098529&_ga=2.123041160.247604736.1674381399-747457407.1668767862&_gl=1*pipz6*_ga*NzQ3NDU3NDA3LjE2Njg3Njc4NjI.*_ga_X5M3D7HLQQ*MTY3NDM5Mzk0OC4yMi4xLjE2NzQzOTQ4NjIuMC4wLjA

73. Technology Review. (2021). The Facebook whistleblower says its algorithms are dangerous. Here's why. Retrieved from <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/10/05/1036519/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-algorithms/>

74. Bytes4All. (2021). Internet Landscape of Pakistan 2020. Retrieved from <https://bytesforall.pk/publication/internet-landscape-pakistan-2020>

which is significantly higher than among non-internet users (45%). A greater proportion of internet users (57%) also say that they do not accept the political choices and views of others if they are in conflict with their own, than do non-internet users (47%).

The political ideology and party that I support is the only one that can save Pakistan	Overall	Internet users	Non internet users
Agree	56%	65%	45%
Disagree	18%	12%	27%

I do not accept the political choices and views of others if they are in conflict with mine	Overall	Internet users	Non internet users
Agree	52%	57%	47%
Disagree	25%	23%	30%

The rampant spread of hate material and extremist content online that targets marginalised communities and incites hatred against other groups is also a source of concern.

“If Muharram starts, our own friends start posting quotations on social media claiming that this is not the religion of our Prophet.”

Female Respondent, Shia, 16-24, Karachi

Six in ten of internet users in the Next Generation survey report seeing material that targets their community on social media platforms (61%), with similar proportions saying that they have seen material that is intolerant of their social and political views (64% and 63% respectively).

This could, on the one hand, reflect the growing polarisation in Pakistani society and how young people are adversely affected by it. Another way of interpreting the findings is that the perception of young people is becoming increasingly binary, with little patience for diverse political and social views. Hence any difference of opinion is seen as intolerant. In either case, the atmosphere for diversity and inclusion is at risk of being threatened by divisive online expression, of which youth constitute a major part.

I have seen material/content that targets my community on social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp):	
Agree	61%
Disagree	17%

I have often seen content on social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) that is intolerant of my social views:	
Agree	64%
Disagree	14%

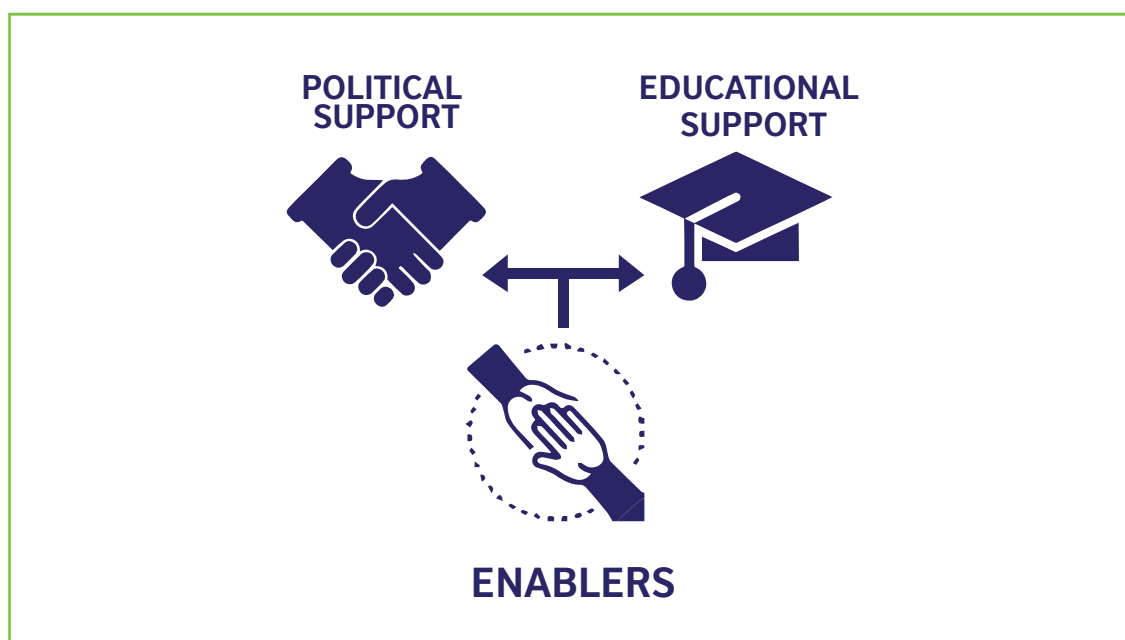
I have often seen content on social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) that is intolerant of my political views:	
Agree	63%
Disagree	15%



E4: Enablers

It would be simplistic to assume that the youngsters of Pakistan are empowered to be a force for change through sheer willpower. If this report has revealed anything, it is that young people feel challenged at various times in their development, held back by social and political institutions that do not represent their interests, or fail to provide them with the support that is needed. These institutions are key to the next generation reaching their potential. This section discusses the two institutions central to this process: politics/governance, and education.

The role of governance in mismanaging the affairs of the country has been dissected in multiple analyses and studies, but a specific focus on the lack of enfranchisement for young citizens is needed. Post the 18th Amendment, policymaking regarding youth is the responsibility of the provincial governments. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) performed a detailed analysis of provincial policies in 2020 with some important revelations⁷⁵. Firstly, there is no Minister dedicated to Youth Affairs other than Punjab. Secondly, policies are



The case for change: political engagement and policymaking for young people

Key takeaways

- The majority of respondents feel their voices are not being heard by the country's leadership.
- Participants showed low direct participation in the political process, with only 10% stating they voted in the last year.
- Political participation, engagement and active say in policymaking is a key demand of young Pakistanis.

announced in the form of endowment funds and public-private partnerships, but no concrete action plan is suggested, nor any implementation strategies formulated (for instance policies are devised on job creation for youth but stop short of suggesting how it will be done).

While political parties have been heavily investing in youth, it is mainly limited to propagation and advocacy rather than representation. The social media wings of parties are primarily composed of technologically savvy youth that are mainly involved in political messaging and trending in the online space.

75. PILDAT. (2020). Study of Youth Policies. Retrieved from <https://pildat.org/youth1/a-study-of-youth-policies-in-pakistan>

The vast presence and activity of these groups can mislead commentators into believing that young people are more engaged and empowered in politics than before. However, our survey results indicate the opposite: young Pakistanis feel extremely underrepresented in policymaking, and that their concerns are not being taken seriously, with only 8% saying that the voices of young people are heard and actioned to some degree.

Do you think the voices of young people on national issues are being heard in your country?	
Base: All respondents	3446
Listened to but no action	29%
Not being heard at all	33%
Heard to very little extent	20%
Heard but little action	10%
Heard well with some action	6%
Heard and significant action	2%

While governments have focused on some flagship youth policies (e.g. Kamyab Jawan program, Youth Laptop scheme), it seems that young people are used as a tool for political parties to gain favour through policies that are then not implemented, or just excluded from the policy making process altogether.

This influences their participation in the political process. The survey results show only 10% young citizens have voted in elections in the past twelve months despite a flurry of by-elections in various parts of the country which were hotly contested and only 13% claim to have taken part in a protest or a political rally. The majority – 68% say they have not participated in any of the political activities asked about.

Young people in the FGDs and youth experts interviewed made a range of suggestions on policies and actions that are needed to help young people and Pakistan in general to progress. This includes very specific actions such as making it easier to open a bank account as a freelancer (as seen earlier, this is a popular employment route among young people) and access to finance to set

Which of the following political activities have you taken part in, in the last 12 months?

Base: All respondents	3446
Voting in local/national elections	10%
Attending a political rally	7%
Taking part in a protest/demonstration	6%
Attend a discussion on local/national issues	8%
Provincial elections	8%
Local body elections	9%

up business, to broader needs around infrastructure development in providing access to digital and technological facilities to all people and regions. Policies and actions, if taken, can support youth enterprise and e-commerce.

“There are things the government wants to do for kids, but there’s a lot of loopholes. When you are just a freelancer, you can’t open a bank account. That makes no sense. I know freelancers who run entire homes.”

Youth education expert, KII

“Our problem is that the government takes initiatives and makes ideal laws but no one makes sure to implement those, the illegal things are still happening at the same pace and no one is scared of the law as the government does not take any sort of action.”
Male Respondent, 16-34, Peshawar Rural SEC CD

“Policies have been very misguided. Connectivity is a big issue. Students have no subsidised internet. Urban areas have connectivity, but others don’t. Lack of development expenditure on this is a problem. The cost of the internet is not in anyone’s reach.”
Social Activist, KII

The route to do this perhaps lies in ensuring young people have a genuine seat at the table with representatives to advocate for youth, with a move away from traditional political systems.

The state’s role must exist as a facilitator at best and removing itself as an impediment at the very least. KIIs refer to well-intentioned but limited policies, and their solution is to provide support in youth entrepreneurship and e-commerce.

Innovation and adaptation: education engagement for youth needs

Key takeaways

- Only one in four respondents stated receiving any kind of career guidance from their educators.
- Young Pakistanis are demanding that education institutes adapt and innovate to the needs of the 21st century student and young professional.
- Nine in ten young people believe that education helps drive change in society, and eight in ten state that good education is integral for facing future challenges.

The second key area that young people identify as key to their betterment is education. There is a near unanimous view among youth that education is a major enabler of social change.

Education helps drive change in society:	
Agree	87%
Disagree	5%

Good education can improve knowledge and understanding of the world/ the way things work:	
Agree	79%
Disagree	7%

Education gives the confidence to take on challenging situations:	
Agree	82%
Disagree	7%

However, the education system has failed in multiple areas, which have been discussed at length in the previous sections.

In addition to issues around ghost schools, poor facilities, limited access and the negative views young people hold on the quality of education, the respondents surveyed said they received little to no career guidance from their educational institutes. Critically, 83% of the respondents who said they hadn't received career guidance from

their education institutions were indecisive about their future. On the other hand, 83% of the students who did receive career guidance claimed it was useful. They were also more likely to be optimistic about their future (83%), and more decisive (88%).

This is a major impediment to the positive activation of young people, and more needs to be done on this front.

Have you ever received career guidance at your last educational institution?	
Yes	24%
No	76%

How would you rate the career guidance you received at your last educational institution?	
Base: All respondents	814
Useful	83%
Not Useful	7%

Educational institutes need upgrading. This is not just in terms of technological abilities, but also in terms of updating their teaching approach, allowing for innovation and inclusivity at all levels, and providing youth with the skills and learning that are needed for today's job environment, rather than teaching them outdated skills. How the education system adapts to these needs is likely to play a pivotal role in the future of the next generation.



Recommendations

Youth participation in policy and decision making

The policy priorities of young people, such as social justice, quality education, entrepreneurship, e-commerce and climate change, need to be prioritised by government representatives. Avenues can be created for parliamentarians and administrations to be more familiar with the diverse needs of young people for effective and informed policymaking.

Policy makers should have access to research and data that helps them understand their young constituents, especially marginalised groups, i.e., young women, young people with disabilities, young religious minorities and transgenders.

A three-way engagement strategy should be developed between policymakers (those with power at the state level), institutions (delivery sectors integral to youth interests), and young people. This will help align the actions of the government with the priorities of young citizens across all sectors, reduce inequality at policy stage, and encourage the development of youth-centric policies on education, employment and engagement.

Engaging young people should be a sustained, long-term approach in policy making. The government and policy makers can reform planning and implementation mechanisms in a way that youth engagement is a permanent feature of policy and decision making.

Education

Access and quality of education not only needs reforms but a thorough implementation plan at all levels. Piloting new ideas in identified geographies will help expand successful initiatives at provincial and national level, instead of trying one-fit-for-all approaches.

Introducing practical learning over academic learning is becoming increasingly important, particularly in areas like entrepreneurship. Educators

should focus on creating opportunities for students to engage in the practical application of their work or business ideas. Allying with public and private incubators will also help budding entrepreneurs tremendously.

Enhancing learning facilities and teaching methods is key, particularly in new industries like information technology and online freelancing. Educators need to constantly upgrade their knowledge to keep up with the latest trends in these sectors or encourage the inclusion of younger academics who are more familiar with the requirements of the job market. Curriculum upgradation is an area where the Higher Education Commission and education ministries can play an active role.

Career counselling services must be professionalised to meet the needs of the youth for growth and employment as per global standards. This also means that educators must expand their understanding of industry requirements, so they are able to help students on their career tracks effectively.

Co-curricular activities including sports, culture and performing arts, creative industries, literature and heritage awareness should be amplified within the educational institutions' offer in addition to academics and qualifications. Such activities harness youth potential and polish their creative and artistic abilities, as well as providing young people with diverse career choices.

Transformational skills should be imparted from the early education stage up till tertiary education. Life skills education, understanding of global challenges, particularly climate change, should be offered as add-ons to students. Critical thinking, communication skills, adaptability, open mindedness, problem solving, and conflict resolution are key transformational skills required by the youth of Pakistan, leading to an intellectually stimulated youth population who is able to use their skills in a decisive manner.

Students should be provided opportunities to engage with local communities and take up community

volunteering or social action to contribute meaningfully as active citizens. This will help create a large workforce of young people who are empathetic and sensitive to local social issues and play an active role in community development.

Non-formal education and skill centres should be established for youth who have dropped out from mainstream education. The TVET sector needs reforms to upgrade existing qualifications and add new skills, especially digital and IT.

Civil society and media

CSOs and media can act as a conduit between young citizens and policymakers, particularly on social inclusion, political and civic engagement. Aiding the development of young people as advocates is important in this regard, as well as creating well organised and inclusive platforms to communicate policy priorities of young people to the implementation stage.

Development organisations need to work with communities to create resources for families in the areas of mental health, gender and career guidance. This will help to create a more youth-centric approach to community wellbeing.

Safe spaces for young people to seek support, advice and counselling are needed more than ever. CSOs and local stakeholders can create spaces which are trusted by youth at large and are equipped with services needed by young people.

Politics

While youth participation has been encouraged by political parties, it continues to focus purely on their use for message propagation and amplification on social media. Young people desire more and wish to have better representation for their interests at the policy level. New forums can be created for policy input to come from young people directly.

Avenues like the Young Parliamentarians Forum can be mobilised to engage with youth from different segments of life to enhance their inclusion and participation in political activities. This can be done through direct engagement, traditional or social media.

Health and wellbeing

Access to health and wellbeing services needs special attention, particularly for vulnerable youth groups, young people need better awareness of such services and how to access them. Both the government and private sector should conduct campaigns to create awareness as well as outreach drives at a large scale to increase accessibility and service delivery.

Gender and social inclusion

An enabling environment is required to support more young women to take up professional leadership positions in both the public and private sectors. This environment should be supported by legislative and practical measures.

Young people with disabilities, religious minority youth and young transgenders are key interest groups in Pakistan, and their inclusion in policy making and implementation is critical. Inclusivity guidelines for policy making and implementation should be developed for policy makers as well as administration.

The existing mechanisms for safeguarding and protecting vulnerable groups in Pakistan needs to be strengthened. Monitoring and accountability measures for gauging effectiveness need to be reviewed and improved so that vulnerable groups can use these mechanisms and receive protective services.

Digital

As the internet becomes more critical for learning and economic opportunities, it is essential that infrastructure development be prioritised so that young people from all walks of life – rural or urban, rich or poor – have access to internet facilities. Internet usage is mainly concentrated in major urban centres. Subsidising IT services for people from disadvantaged areas and more public internet facilities can play a significant role in a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources.

Digital citizenship is a key subject area where all stakeholders should be involved to define an ethical code and guidelines that protect the public's right to

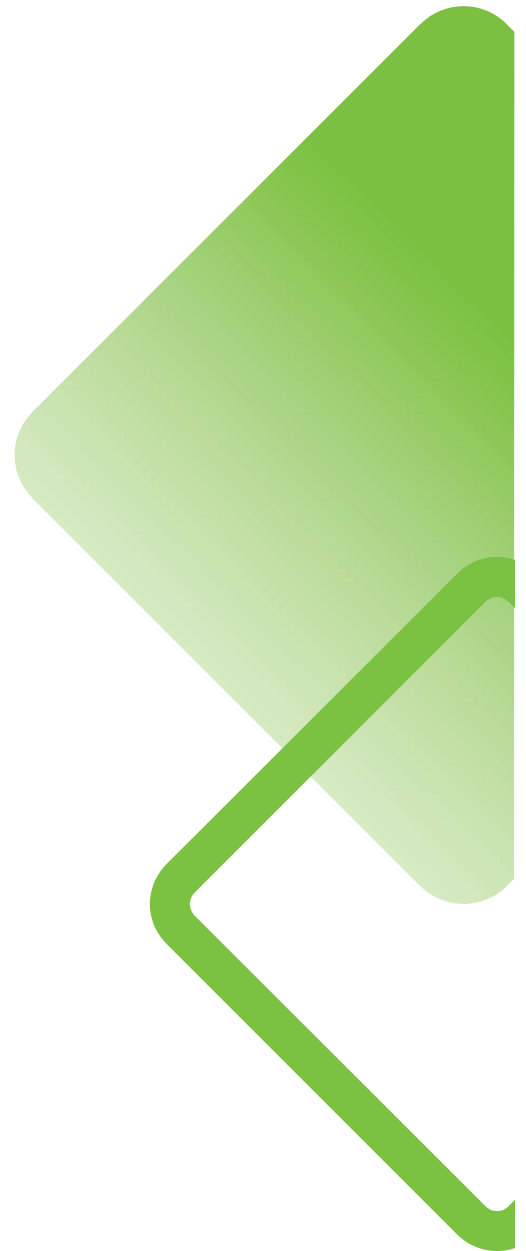
freedom of expression, reduce or eliminate cybercrimes, bullying and harassment and promote sensible use of the internet and social media.

Young people

New advocacy groups working on emerging issues, such as climate change, need to be empowered to engage young people and create a bridge between them and their representatives.

Young people should play an active role in addressing the big challenges faced by Pakistan and themselves by engaging in dialogue, advocacy campaigns and local programmes by suggesting solutions and taking real time action.

Young people should exercise their right to elect their parliamentary representatives by casting their votes and encouraging others around them to do the same.



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