



MISSING YOUNG VOTERS IN PAKISTAN

BRIEFING PAPER

2024





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PREFACE

The briefing paper on Missing Young Voters of Pakistan addresses the critical issue of the under-representation of youth in Pakistan's electoral process. The paper is compiled so as to explore methods to enhance the participation of youth in the electoral process of the country both as voters and as participants.

Despite representing a significant portion of registered voters, young Pakistanis (aged 18 to 35) show a turnout that lags behind the national voting average. Youth constitutes a significant part of Pakistan's population and therefore needs to be understood as a critical demographic for shaping the nation's future political culture. Their historic low voter turnout poses critical issues for the future of Pakistan's democratic and electoral process. This paper compares Pakistani youth's electoral participation with other democracies in order to illustrate the benefits of better engagement of youth in the electoral process often due to state-led initiatives.

The paper also highlights reasons behind low engagement of youth in the electoral process and offers recommendations and targeted strategies to empower young voters to engage more actively in Pakistan's electoral and democratic processes.

January 2024



Abbreviations and Acronyms

AVR	Automatic voter registration
ECI	Election Commission of India
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
OVR	Online Voter Registration
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
SDR	Same-day or Election-Day registration
SVEEP	Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America



Introduction

Pakistan's population has surpassed 240 million and, according to the 2023 census, its growth rate stands at 2.55 per cent.¹ Pakistan is now the fifth most populous country in the world and its population is equivalent to 3.02% of the total world population.² In addition, it is also witnessing a massive increase in the youth population that will significantly influence the upcoming election. This demographic surge is notably characterized by a significant youth bulge, poised to play a decisive role in shaping the nation's electoral outcomes.

A sustainable democracy and the strength of its institutions hinge on the active involvement of this well-informed youth demographic. The vigour of democracy is sustained by the vigilant participation of its young citizens, particularly through voting - a fundamental democratic exercise.

However, there is a concerning trend in Pakistan: the youth voter turnout is on a decline, with only an average of 31% participating in general elections.

This paper delves into the critical questions surrounding this issue: Why is Pakistan's youth reluctant to vote, and how can their engagement in the political process be invigorated, especially as the country approaches upcoming election? By examining these questions, the paper seeks to uncover strategies to bolster youth participation, ensuring the success and continuity of democratic processes.

Defining Youth and Pakistan's Global Ranking

The erstwhile National Youth Policy of Pakistan, 2008 defined youth as persons 15-29 years of age. After the devolution of 'Youth' as a subject from the federal to the provincial domain in 2010, the same definition of 'Youth' has been retained in the provincial youth policies. Different countries and international agencies

have their own definition of youth. United Nations, for example, states 'youth' as those individuals who are between the ages of 15-24.³ In this paper, we are using the term youth for people who are between the ages of 18 to 35. This is mainly because one can be a member of the National Assembly/Provincial Assemblies and the Senate at the age of 25 and 30, respectively. In addition, the minimum age required for casting a vote is 18 in Pakistan.

According to population numbers given by the UN Population, 2021, Pakistan is the world's third largest in terms of the youth population, which is 46,785,263 (15-24 age category),⁴ after China 160,749,902 and India 254,585,607, which is on the top of the list in the same category. In 2023, the median age of Pakistan stood at 22.7 and its rank was 49 when we counted the lowest median age according to the CIA data.⁵

Historical Data on Youth Voter Turnout in Pakistan

Figure 1 shows the missing young voters in Pakistan. According to the data, the gap between overall voter turnout and youth voter turnout has been ranging from 7 percentage points in 1993 to 27 percentage points in 2013, showing an increasing trend with the only exception of the 2018 General Election when this gap narrowed to 16.5 percentage points.

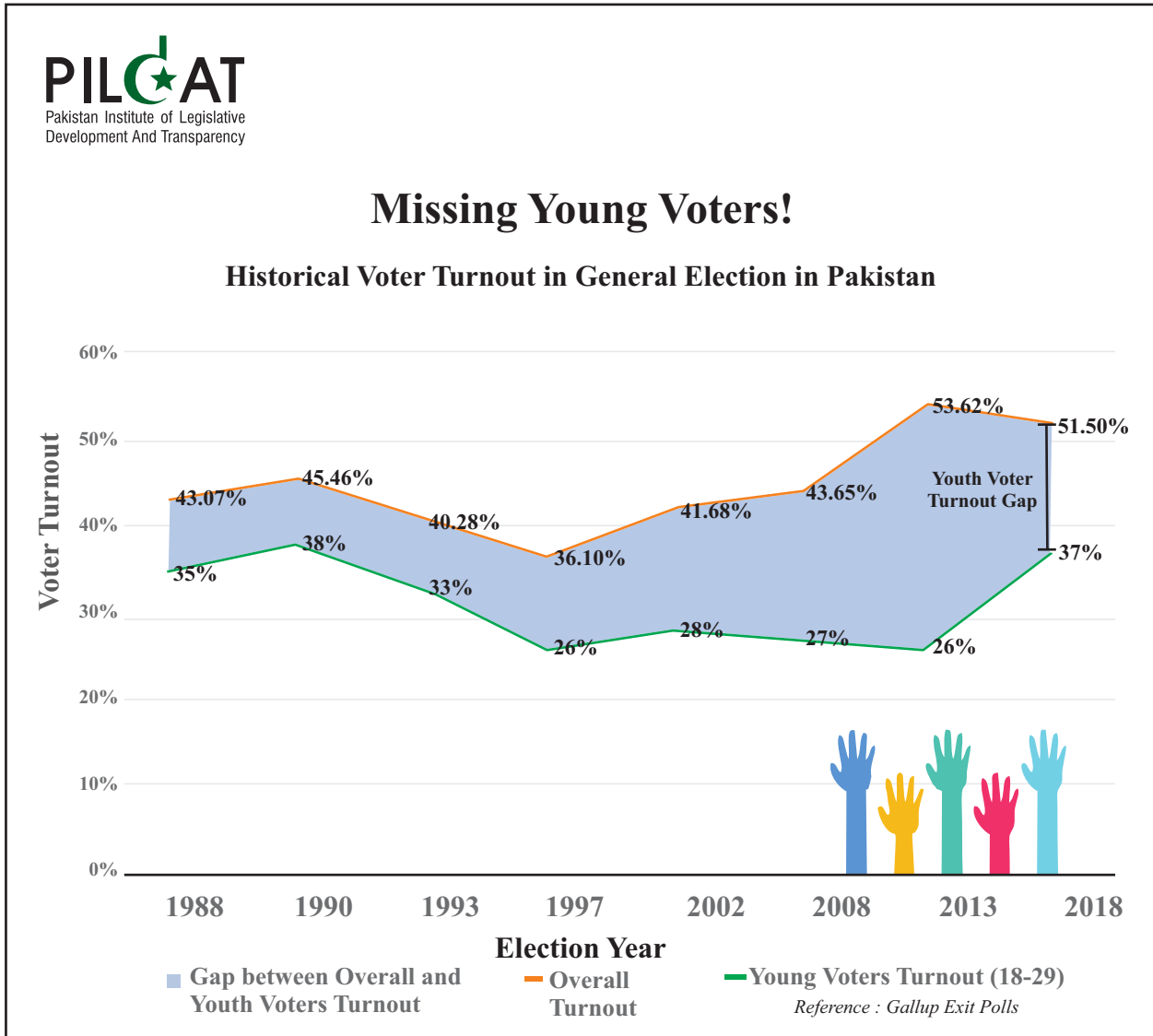
PILDAT has estimated that the average youth voter turnout of the past eight elections, from 1988 to 2018, has been an abysmally low at 31%, which is 13 percentage points lower than the average overall voter turnout of 44% in these eight elections.

Average Youth voter turnout (31.5%) was even lower than women's voter turnout.⁶ According to the ECP, the women voter turnout in the 2018 general election stood at 40% with 21 out of 46 million registered women voters participating in the election.⁷

1. Mubarak Zeb Khan, 'Population Surpasses 240m, New Census Shows', *Dawn* online, August 06, 2023, accessed January 15, 2024. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1768626>.
2. 'Pakistan Population (2024) - Worldometer', accessed January 8, 2024. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/pakistan-population/>.
3. United Nations, 'Youth', United Nations (United Nations), accessed November 30, 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>.
4. 'World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations', accessed January 8, 2024. <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.
5. 'Median Age', accessed January 11, 2024. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/median-age/country-comparison/>.
6. 'Annual Report 2021-22', August 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Annual-Report-2021-22-120723.pdf>.
7. Roshaneh Zafar, "Beyond Women Voter Turnout in Elections," *The Express Tribune* online, September 11, 2018, accessed January 11, 2024. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1800497/beyond-women-voter-turnout-elections>.



Figure 1: Missing Young Voters in Pakistan



(Source: Gallup Pakistan)

Youth as Registered Voters in Pakistan

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the total number of registered voters in 2024 stand at 128,585,760. Among these voters 55.93 Million (55,925,940) are young Pakistanis aged between 18-35, which makes up 43.85% of the total registered voters.⁸

Further elaboration shows that 23.5 million Pakistani voters are aged between 18 to 25 while 32.6 million fall within 26 to 35 age bracket.⁹ Among the total registered voters 53.87% are male voters and 46.13% are female voters.

8. "Latest Province Wise Voter Statistics (as on 13-12-2023)," Election Commission of Pakistan, December 13, 2023, accessed January 11, 2024. <https://ecp.gov.pk/electoral-rolls>.
 9. 'Election Data Shows over 50 Million Pakistanis Aged 18-35 Crucial Vote in Upcoming General Polls', Arab News July 18, 2023, accessed January 11, 2024, Election data shows over 50 million Pakistanis aged 18-35 crucial vote in upcoming general polls (arabnews.pk).



Age-wise and Province-wise Youth Voter Statistics

As of September 2023, voter statistics from the ECP reveal intriguing insights contained in Table 1.

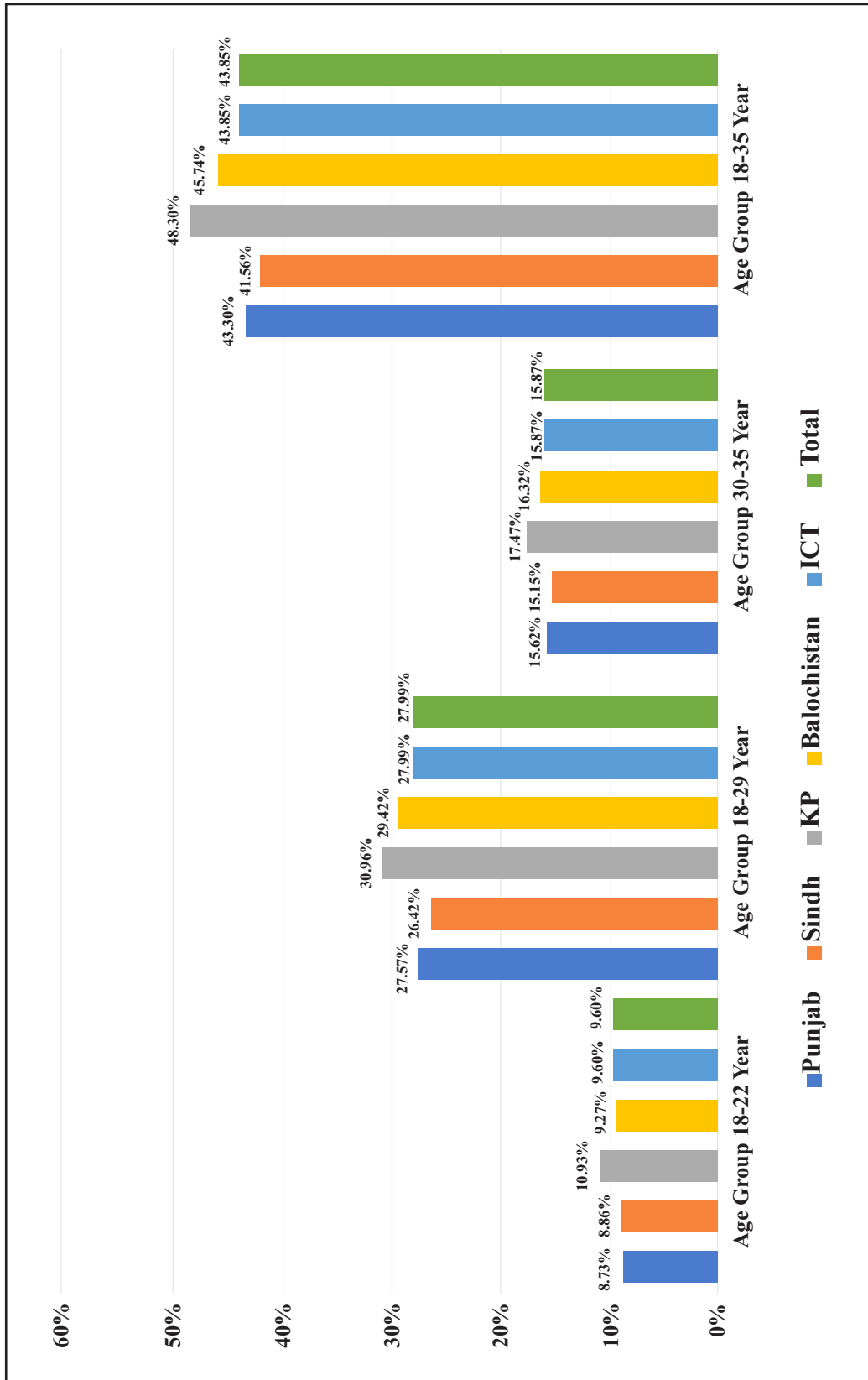
Table 1: Age-wise & Province-wise Voter Statistics (September 2023)

Number and Percentage of Young Voters in Each Province										
Province	Total Registered Voters	Total Registered Voters of the Province / Territory as percentage of total registered voters of Pakistan (%)	Age Group 18-22 Years (First time Voters in GE2024)		Age Group 18-29 Years (Young Voters with upper limit as per definition of Youth given in Provincial Youth Policies)		Age Group 30-35 Years		Age Group 18-35 Years	
			Number	% of total Registered Voters of the Province	Number	% of total Registered Voters of the Province	Number	% of total Registered Voters of the Province	Number	% of total Registered Voters of the Province
Punjab	73,011,224	57.25%	6,375,484	8.73%	20,130,700	27.57%	11,406,748	15.62%	31,537,449	43.20%
Sindh	26,783,254	21.00%	2,373,711	8.86%	7,075,854	26.42%	4,056,458	15.15%	11,132,312	41.56%
KP	21,779,218	17.08%	2,379,803	10.93%	6,742,460	30.96%	3,805,889	17.47%	10,548,349	48.43%
Balochistan	5,333,267	4.18%	494,356	9.27%	1,569,134	29.42%	870,132	16.32%	2,439,266	45.74%
ICT	1,071,227	0.84%	102,845	9.60%	299,789	27.99%	169,983	15.87%	469,772	43.85%
Total	127,527,086	100%	12,243,477	9.60%	35,689,129	27.99%	20,236,111	15.87%	55,925,240	43.85%

(Source: Election Commission of Pakistan as of September 11, 2023)



Figure 2: Age Breakdown of Registered Voters in Pakistan



(Source: Election Commission of Pakistan September, 2023)



As of examining the voter demographics across different provinces of Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) stands out with the highest registered voter percentages in various age groups. Among the 18-22 age range, KP leads with 10.93%, followed by Balochistan at 9.27%, Sindh at 8.86% and Punjab at 8.73%.

Shifting to the 18-29 bracket, KP maintains the lead with 30.96%, trailed by Balochistan at 29.42%, Punjab at 27.57% and Sindh at 26.42%.

In the 30-35 age group, KP retains the top position with 17.47%, followed by Balochistan at 16.32%, Punjab at 15.62% and Sindh at 15.15%.

Overall, considering the 18-35 age range, KP maintains the highest at 48.43% registered voters, trailed closely by Balochistan at 45.74%, Punjab at 43.20% and Sindh at 41.56%.

The cumulative data from all provinces reveals that out of the total 127 million registered voters, the proportion of registered voters aged 18 to 22 is 9.60%. For the age bracket of 18 to 29, it constitutes 27.98% of the total, while the 30 to 35 age group comprises 15.87% of the overall registered voters.

Notably, when considering the age bracket of 18 to 35, the collective registered youth voters across all provinces sum up to 43.85% of the total 127million registered voters.

International Case Studies

Engaging young voters and restoring their trust in the political system is necessary for the success of any democracy. This paper examines youth voter turnout in four other democracies for a better understanding of trends in other democracies.

India

India is perhaps as the most relevant and most inspiring example for Pakistan in terms of youth voter turnout.

India and Pakistan won independence at the same time in August 1947 when the British-India was partitioned into two countries. Even though the two countries went

through their separate experiences in democratic development, both have similar socio-economic conditions.

Overall youth voter turnout in India displays a completely different picture from that of Pakistan.

Comparing data provided by Gallup Pakistan and *Lokniti* India,¹⁰ one can see how actively the youth of India participates in the electoral process. The average overall voter turnout of the past five elections for India turns out to be 61.6% while the youth voter turnout for the same period in India is 60%.

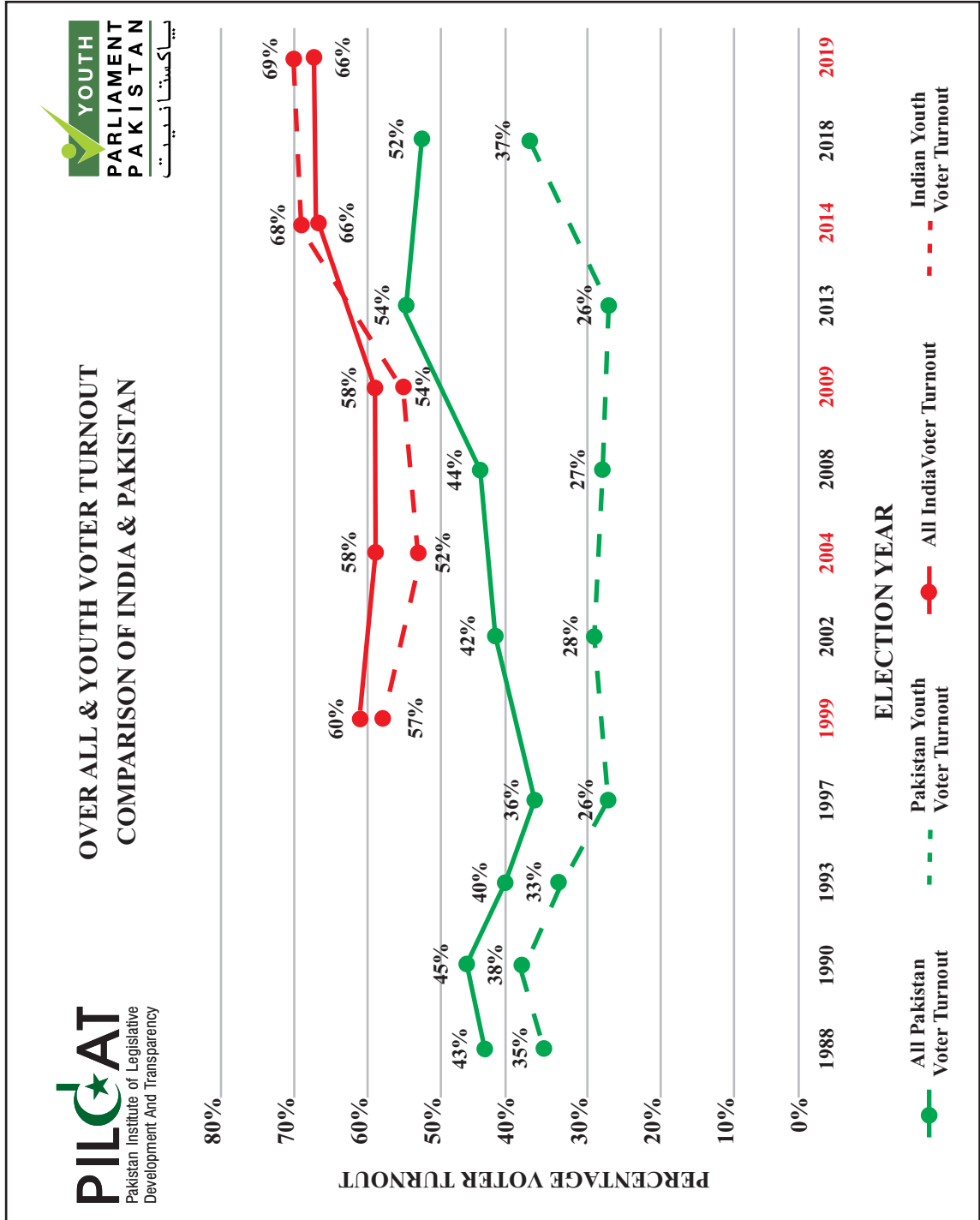
In the case of Pakistan, we find the gap between the overall and youth voter turnouts to be 15 percentage points in 2018 election which is considerably higher than the gap in India.

The youth voter turnout in the past two Indian Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and 2019 exceeded the overall voter turnout by 2 and 3 percentage points respectively. Figure 3 depicts the above-discussed voter turnouts between the two countries.

10. The Lokniti Programme for Comparative Democracy is a research programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), an autonomous social science research institute in Delhi. It is dedicated to studying and understanding the democratic and electoral politics of India and its neighbourhood. <https://www.lokniti.org/lok-sabha-election>.



Figure 3: Overall and Youth Voter Turnout Comparison of India and Pakistan





The shared societal fabric and historical continuities between India and Pakistan offer a unique opportunity for Pakistan to glean valuable insights for enhancing youth electoral participation.

The Indian model demonstrates the profound impact of strategic civic engagement and voter education on youth turnout. The Election Commission of India's (ECI) innovative approaches - ranging from integrating the Right to Vote within the wider civic duties to embedding electoral awareness in cultural and social activities - have successfully resonated with young citizens. The ECI's initiatives extend beyond mere information dissemination, fostering a sense of community and citizenship through participation in sports, arts, and cultural events, cleverly tailored to captivate the youth's attention and sustain their interest in democratic processes.

The observance of National Voter Day serves as a commendable model, not just in celebrating new voters, but in proactive engagement with future electorates, instilling the importance of voting before they reach the legal age. India's proactive approach, including the establishment of a Voter Education Division and the launch of the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program (SVEEP), underscores the commitment to voter literacy and the empowerment of individual votes.

The ECI's astute recognition of the influential role of popular culture and sports figures underscores a nuanced understanding of youth psychology and societal trends. Leveraging cricket celebrities as brand ambassadors and reinterpreting popular music to engage with young voters demonstrates a creative and impactful approach to voter engagement.

Pakistan's Election Commission can draw from this well of experience, adapting and implementing similar initiatives to bridge the voter gap and inspire its youth to embrace their electoral rights with similar enthusiasm. The time is ripe for Pakistan to craft its own narrative of youth engagement, one that could decisively shape the democratic landscape for years to come.

Bangladesh

For the 2018 election, the overall voter turnout in Bangladesh stood at 80%¹¹ an almost 30% jump from

the 2014 election when the voter turnout was just 51.4%.

Bangladesh's Election Commission and civil sector were able to successfully activate its citizens to vote in the previous election.

Bangladesh is one of the few countries that celebrate its own National Voters Day. On March 02, the Bangladesh Election Commission officials routinely carried out conferences, dialogues and rallies¹² in high schools in different regions of the country to create awareness among youth on their voting rights. These activities aim to inspire Bangladeshi voters to exercise their voting rights, to infuse democratic culture in them, and to create social awareness and inspire voters to cast their votes as per their own choice to further strengthen the democratic process.

The Bangladesh Election Commission has also taken to social media to directly engage with youth through their infographics, YouTube videos, and awareness posts to remind the younger generation to register themselves as voters and cast votes.

A fourth of the country's population is in the 15-29 age group. In numbers, the country's current youth population is around 45.9 million, according to the census report published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. So, the role of youngsters in the next elections will be critical in this country.

Sri Lanka

The latest Parliamentary election in Sri Lanka was held on August 05, 2020 to elect 225 members to Sri Lanka's 16th Parliament. The election was postponed at least twice due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in the country before the date was finalized as August 5, 2020. While this gave relevant bodies time to extend their voter registration and campaigning activities, the voter turnout was still expected to be low. According to International IDEA the 2020 Sri Lankan parliamentary election had an overall voter turnout of 75.9%, a small decline from 77.7% in 2015 election.

Sri Lanka continued to conduct campaigns and election during the peak of Covid-19. According to the report of the Asian Network for Free Election's (ANFREL) on Sri Lankan elections, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka had made continuous voter education efforts via

11. 'Database Result (Country Only) | International IDEA', accessed 30 November 2023, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/country?country=19&database_theme=293.

12. 'National Voters' Day Observed in Rangpur | District', BSS, accessed 30 November 2023, <https://www.bssnews.net/district/47997>.



its four-year Participatory Strategic Plan which laid out nationwide voter education activities to get all citizens actively involved in the election process.

This time, due to Covid-19, they were unable to carry out numerous workshops on the grassroot level and instead had to rely on mass media and social media to disseminate information on polling hours, health guidelines and guidelines for Persons with Disabilities. Infographics and videos in English and local languages like Sinhala and Tamil were published to inform new voters of the registration guidelines, voting and complaint processes, Covid-19 health measures, FAQs, etc. The Civil Society sector also played its part by conducting voter education workshops, online seminars, and social media campaigns to achieve its goals of increased voter participation.

United States of America

In the United States of America, mid-term elections for the House of Representatives (lower house of the Congress) & the Senate (upper house) are held after every two years.

In 2020, the voter turnout for the congressional elections was 70.8%, a noticeable increase from the 2018 elections which had an overall turnout of just 56.8%. For the presidential elections of 2020, the overall voter turnout was 66.8%, a modest increase in turnout as compared to 61.4% in the 2016 presidential election.

While youth voter data is not available for congressional elections, youth voter turnouts have been provided for the US Presidential election between Joe Biden & Donald Trump in 2020. According to CIRCLE, 50% of the young people, aged 18-29, voted in the 2020 presidential election, a remarkable 11-point increase since 2016 when only 39% of young voters had turned out to vote. The highest youth voter turnout was for the state of New Jersey where 67% youth turned out to vote while the lowest was South Dakota with 32% youth turnout.

One reason for the high turnouts was the ease of registration and ballot casting provided by different states for their young citizens. Automatic voter registration (AVR), online voter registration (OVR), same-day or Election-Day registration (SDR), early voting, no-excuse absentee voting, pre-registration and

requirements for voter registration programmes in high schools were some election laws that prevailed in most high-youth-turnout states.

According to CIRCLE's analysis, states with four or more of the above policies had a combined youth turnout rate of 53%, compared to 43% turnout from states with less than four policies. It is likely that a number of these policies complement each other to create a system and culture of voting that is more conducive to youth participation.

Another area of election policy that facilitated youth in voting was the mail-in voting, an initiative taken more seriously and expanded upon during the Covid-19 pandemic. On average, youth voter turnout was the highest (57%), and had the largest increases over 2016, in states that automatically mailed ballots to voters. States with the most restrictive vote-by-mail laws, conversely, had the lowest youth turnout - an average of 42%.



Key Reasons Contributing to Low Youth Voter Turnout in Pakistan

In a youth opinion survey conducted among PILDAT's Youth Parliament Pakistan® from April 07 to April 12, 2022, 42.3% of the youth respondents believed that poor performance of politicians is the key reason for abysmally low youth voter turnout, followed by a low level of trust in Political Parties (42%) and the poor past performance of Election Commission (37.5%).¹³

The key reasons contributing to the low youth voter turnout in Pakistan, as discussed in PILDAT's various dialogues and forums, point to a range of societal and systemic issues.

Scepticism and Disillusionment

Young people's scepticism about the electoral system has been exacerbated by witnessing economic challenges and the peak of terrorist activities, making them resilient but still sceptical about the effectiveness of their participation in the electoral process.¹⁴

Systemic Barriers for Young Women

Young women, in particular, face significant barriers to casting their votes, including mobility constraints and household responsibilities, which prevent them from participating actively in the electoral process.¹⁵

Lack of Civic/Political Education

The absence of student unions, which are critical for gaining political education and empowerment, has been a significant deterrent to youth participation in the political process. Even though there has been progress, such as the passing of the Sindh Students Union Act, the activation of these unions in educational institutions has been slow.¹⁶

Inadequate Outreach and Education

There's a need for the Election Commission of Pakistan and other institutions to engage in more extensive outreach and education initiatives targeted at the youth

to inform them about the electoral processes and the significance of their participation.¹⁷

Identity Card Issues

Problems associated with obtaining National Identity Cards, which are necessary for voting, have been cited as a barrier to youth participation in elections.¹⁸

Lack of Inclusivity in Political Participation

The political environment has not been conducive to inclusive participation, with young people feeling that there is not enough space for them to engage meaningfully in politics, which is often dominated by more established and older demographics.¹⁹

Distrust in the Political Process

A general atmosphere of mistrust among the youth towards the political process and the institutions involved has led to disengagement and a lack of motivation to participate in elections.²⁰

Delayed Implementation of Student Unions

The slow progress in implementing student unions, despite legislative advancements, has been identified as a bottleneck in fostering youth political engagement and education.²¹

13. 'Annual Report 2021-22', August 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Annual-Report-2021-22-120723.pdf>.
14. 'Experts highlight low youth voter turnout in Pakistan', PILDAT Forum November 14, 2021, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://pildat.org/youth1/experts-highlight-low-voter-turnout-of-youth-in-pakistan-symposium-frames-recommendations-to-address-low-voter-turnout-of-youth>.
15. Ibid.
16. 'Despite lifting the ban, Sindh has no student unions activated', PILDAT Forum November 24, 2022, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://pildat.org/youth1/despite-lifting-the-ban-sindh-has-no-student-unions-activated-pildat-hosts-a-forum-to-improve-youth-voter-turnout>.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. 'Speakers demand effective measures to enhance youth participation in electoral process', APP December 20, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.app.com.pk/national/speakers-demand-effective-measures-to-enhance-youth-participation-in-electoral-process/>.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.



Recommendations for Improving Youth Voter Turnout in Pakistan

As we pivot from analysing the factors contributing to low youth voter turnout in Pakistan to crafting actionable solutions, the recommendations section becomes a vital component of this discourse. This portion of the paper is dedicated to outlining practical, strategic measures that can be adopted and implemented by key societal pillars - political entities, media outlets, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The goal is to present a cohesive set of suggestions designed to galvanize the youth towards active electoral participation. These recommendations will focus on harnessing the unique strengths and capabilities of each stakeholder group to create a more engaging, informative, and inclusive voting environment for the nation's youth.

Through the collective efforts and synergy of these diverse sectors, the recommendations aim to construct a robust framework for change, empowering the young electorate and thereby reinforcing the foundations of Pakistan's democracy.



Political Parties

The 17th Youth Parliament Pakistan® on January 21, 2023, passed a bill to revive student unions across Pakistan. In a display of leadership and determination, the young leaders of the 17th Youth Parliament Pakistan® voted to give students a voice in their educational institutions and to promote active participation in democracy. This bill was passed with the expectation to shape a more equitable and just future for Pakistan.

The Youth Parliament Pakistan®²² made up of young trailblazers from across the country, is a platform for the next generation of leaders to come together and make their mark on the future of Pakistan. The passing of this bill was a powerful statement from the youth of the nation, demanding that their voices be heard and their rights be respected.

The Youth Parliament Pakistan® powered by PILDAT is committed to creating a more inclusive and democratic society in Pakistan. With the passing of this and similar bills at provincial levels and motions/resolutions at federal level, the Youth will be able to make its contribution toward a brighter future for Pakistan.

It is suggested that a discussion that is both well-informed and well-structured should be encouraged among the political parties (along with ECP and elected representatives) involved in the topic of how student unions in Pakistan might be brought back to life in a methodical and orderly manner. Everyone who has a stake in the issue should be encouraged to take part in the conversation, and the government should also be transparent about sharing their thoughts and worries. Encouragement from the media should be given to guarantee a greater diversity of these cultures. In this context, the decision taken by the Syndicate of Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad – the largest public university of the federal capital – in September 2023 to revive the elected Students Union and the departmental societies is a very welcome step.²³

Political parties need to amend their election manifestos to include the areas of concern for youth. They should specifically highlight the issues relating to Education, Engagement, Employment and Environment that youth currently face and what

policies and programmes will the political party introduce to tackle these issues.

Moreover, political parties should pursue membership drives to increase youth representation within their own party, while also giving youth important offices to hold. While inexperienced, it is the duty of the seasoned politicians to train and expose the young members to the political world.

More importantly, during elections, every political party should offer its party tickets to young candidates in proportion to their population. This would not only increase youth representation in the national and provincial legislatures but would also mobilise those non-voters among youth who wish to see young representatives with similar opinions and backgrounds as themselves.

Political campaigns and candidates must abandon the “likely voter” model of mobilization that often only appeals to their already existing voter body and neglects new voters and others who aren't yet on the voter rolls. Appealing to the youth's needs and wants and favouring policies that are pro-youth will aid in winning youth's support.

While ensuring that youth voices are reflected during election campaigns it is just as meaningful to partner with youth on outreach efforts that go beyond just asking for a young person's vote. This will promote integrity of the political party and youth would be able to see the tangible efforts made by political parties in youth's priority areas.

As elected legislators, political parties in collaboration with the ECP and education departments should advocate the enforcement of law for compulsory civic education in secondary and higher education.

In this regard, the National Assembly passed a law called the National Civic Education Commission Act, 2018 but it extends only to Islamabad and the Act's implementation is still a question mark since its passing. Civic education should reach all youth, feature comprehensive nonpartisan teaching about elections, include key civic skills like media literacy, and help students develop their voice and power as future voters.

Parties need to amend their constitutions to ensure that

22. 17th Youth Parliament Passes Groundbreaking Students' Union Revival Bill and Expresses deep concern on the prevailing brand of Democracy: <https://yp17.youthparliament.pk/17th-youth-parliament-passes-groundbreaking-students-union-revival-bill-and-expresses-deep-concern-on-the-prevailing-brand-of-democracy/>

23. 'Student union set to be revived at Quaid e Azam University', Dawn September 23, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, Student union set to be revived at Quaid-i-Azam University - Pakistan - DAWN.COM.



the women's and youth's wing leadership is made ex-officio members of the higher decision-making bodies of the party, where administrative as well as policy-making is debated and finalized. This may also include a youth women's wing. Amend election manifestos to include areas of concern for young women and highlight policies addressing their issues. Political parties should ensure that at least one senior and one junior/young female leader speaks at the rallies organized by the party. Women, who are given tickets for the general election, under the new electoral laws, should be provided financial help to contest the election, especially those who are young candidates.

Building a robust and successful political organization requires political parties to invest in the mentoring and training of their young members, office bearers, and lawmakers. Mentoring and training for new members, officeholders, and lawmakers may have many positive effects.

Young members, office bearers and lawmakers may benefit from mentoring and training programmes that assist them to acquire the skills necessary to do their jobs effectively. This category includes abilities like talking to strangers, haggling, giving speeches, and leading.

Young members, office bearers and lawmakers may benefit greatly from programmes designed to educate and teach them about political institutions, laws, and processes. Informed decision-making and better representation of constituents may result from this.

Youth members, officeholders, and lawmakers who participate in mentoring and training programmes benefit from introductions to more senior political figures. This may help them network, win allies, and progress professionally.

Mentoring and training programmes may assist political parties to find and cultivate future leaders, which is an important aspect of succession planning. This may secure the party's long-term viability by creating a succession plan for its leadership.

Media & Civil Society

Awareness Campaigns

Media: Launch comprehensive awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of youth participation in elections. These campaigns should focus on the impact of voting on issues critical to the youth, utilizing platforms popular among young people like social media, YouTube, podcasts and streaming services.

Civil Society: Organize seminars and workshops in educational institutions and youth clubs to educate young individuals on the electoral process and the significance of their vote. Use interactive tools and peer-led sessions for better engagement.

Promotion of Youth Debates and Dialogues

Media: Host televised and online debates focused on youth issues, inviting young leaders and policymakers to discuss and propose solutions. This can help in making the political discourse more relevant to the youth.

Civil Society: Facilitate town hall style meetings and forums where young voters can directly engage with candidates and political leaders, fostering a two-way dialogue.

Collaborations for Voter Registration Drives:

Media: Partner with CSOs to promote voter registration drives, especially targeting areas with historically low youth turnout. Utilize advertising space and broadcast time to remind and encourage young people to register.

Civil Society: Collaborate with educational institutions, youth organizations and community groups to hold voter registration camps, making the process accessible and convenient.

Storytelling and Narratives

Media: Share success stories of young individuals who are actively participating in the political process, either as voters, activists, or candidates, to inspire others.

Civil Society: Document and disseminate impactful narratives of youth-led community development projects that have succeeded through political engagement.

Fact-Checking and Information Dissemination

Media: Establish fact-checking initiatives to counter misinformation and provide accurate information about the electoral process and the candidates.

Civil Society: Create and distribute easy-to-understand informational material about voting rights, election laws and the importance of each vote.

Youth-Centric Content Creation

Media: Develop content that resonates with young audiences, such as infographics, short videos and animations that break down complex political issues into relatable content.

Civil Society: Use social media campaigns and viral content to spread messages that encourage youth to participate in the electoral process.



Engagement Through Technology

Media: Leverage technology to create apps or websites that can inform, educate and motivate youth about elections.

Civil Society: Develop online platforms that connect young voters with election resources, volunteer opportunities and forums for political discussion.

Monitoring

Media: Conduct polls and surveys to monitor the concerns and interests of young voters, and report on these trends to keep the electoral stakeholders informed.

Civil Society: Work with academic institutions to research youth voter behavior and develop data-driven strategies to increase turnout.

Academia

Develop and integrate comprehensive civic education programmes into the curricula across secondary and higher education levels. These programmes should focus on the significance of electoral participation and understanding of the political system.

Support the formation of student unions and organizations that encourage political discussion and engagement. Provide platforms for students to organize voter registration drives and informational sessions on campus.

Encourage research on political participation and voter behaviour, specifically focusing on the youth demographic. Publish findings and policy recommendations that can guide political parties and electoral bodies.

Organize mock elections and debates to give students practical experience in electoral processes. These simulations can be pivotal in demystifying the voting process and underlining its importance.

Collaborate with electoral bodies, non-governmental organizations and media to disseminate voter education materials. Facilitate workshops and seminars with experts on the electoral process.

Engage with alumni who are active in politics or related fields to mentor students and encourage their participation in politics, providing real-world insights into the political landscape.

Establish or sponsor research centres or think tanks focused on youth and politics. These platforms can serve as incubators for new ideas to enhance youth electoral engagement.

Encourage an interdisciplinary approach to studying politics, where students from non-political science backgrounds can also learn about the importance of civic engagement and voter turnout.

Utilize digital tools and online platforms to reach out to students with information on electoral processes. Develop interactive applications or websites that make learning about politics more appealing to the tech-savvy youth.

Initiate community engagement projects that require students to interact with local communities, thereby understanding their concerns and the importance of voting in addressing those issues.

Election Commission of Pakistan

The efforts by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the past two years have been commendable in engaging women and young registered voters. Through targeted initiatives, the ECP has extensively reached out to the youth in different colleges and universities across Pakistan, aiming to educate them about the voting process and emphasize the significance of their participation.

For instance, the ECP, along with collaborating entities, conducted a substantial number of sessions specifically tailored to the youth. These student work show sessions, totalling 1935 sessions, successfully connected and informed a significant number of students, amplifying their understanding and involvement in the electoral process.²⁴

This dedicated outreach plays a crucial role in fostering a more informed and participative young electorate.

PILDAT, in partnership with UNDP and ECP, also conducted 15 outreach activities aimed at enlightening the youth on the significance of the electoral process and their participation. These concerted efforts were pivotal in imparting knowledge and understanding among young individuals, emphasizing the importance of their participation in shaping the democratic landscape. Through these initiatives, a platform was established to engage and inform the youth, fostering a sense of active citizenship and empowerment, thereby contributing significantly to the cultivation of a more politically aware and participative generation.

First and foremost, data collection and analysis on existing young electorate has to be carried out and made public. Estimation of total number of registered



voters that fall within the age group of 18-29 has to be conducted and broken down on the basis of gender, provinces and even constituencies.

Further research also has to be conducted with a focus on youth electoral participation to figure out the reasons behind the historically low youth voter turnout. Once the causes and issues have been brought to light only then could they be systematically tackled.

The Election Commission officials must focus their efforts on designing and executing special campaigns aimed at educating youth on the importance of votes and by giving new voters and others who haven't voted before the practical information they need to register and cast a ballot. The ECP has to follow youth trends and utilize social media as their main platforms of information dissemination. Involving celebrities and social media influencers in their campaigns will increase interest and retention of information amongst youth. In this context, it is very encouraging that the ECP, many other institutions like UNDP and civil society organizations like PILDAT and IFES have been running youth outreach campaigns in universities across the country for the last two years. This campaign needs to be continued and expanded to youth outside the educational institutions.

Exit Polls are a method to collect demographic data of the individuals who have actually casted votes to find out who they voted for and why. They are an early indication of the voter turn-out. Most of the exit polls may not always consider the age group of voters, leaving youth voter turnout undetermined. Conducting multiple exit polls to ascertain the level of youth voter turnout in the General and Local Government elections should be made a compulsory exercise by the Election Commission.

The Election Commission of Pakistan published its Strategic Plan for 2019-2023 but it did not mention youth as a priority area. The ECP must be commended that in response to PILDAT suggestion, it amended the Strategic Plan to include youth-related strategic actions aimed at addressing the low youth voter turnout. The design of these strategic actions can be further refined and their implementation further improved and implemented. The next 5-year strategic plan (2024-2028) should also include a separate section on youth.

Similarly, a dedicated youth wing/division or a focal person within the ECP has to be designated to focus

continuous attention on youth's electoral participation.

From our international comparison, we have seen examples of countries celebrating their National Voters Day with great enthusiasm and positively engaging with youth using their platforms. The ECP also commemorates National Voters Day in Pakistan on December 7 every year. It may be more befitting if the ECP plans special activities focusing on youth and the importance of their vote for Pakistan National Voters Day.

The ECP should make efforts to eliminate inequalities between young men and women and to encourage the meaningful involvement of young women in all areas of political life. By Carrying out data collection and analysis specifically on the female young electorate and publicizing these results to highlight the gender gap in young voter registration and participation, the specific issues relating to the registration and participation of young women voters can also be highlighted.

The ECP should also strive to hold periodic consultative sessions with political parties, civil society, media and youth to identify & tackle issues that prevent youth from being an active participant of the electoral process. It may be a good idea to create platforms or forums of these groups within the ECP.

24. 'Spokesperson ECP', Twitter, December 02, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, <https://twitter.com/spokespersonecp/status/1730876177735430473?s=46&t=pCVmtRxhjGjY2q53pi461Q>.



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