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Voice of Balochistan's Youth: Identity, Development and Geopolitical Perspectives

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Abstract:

This study examines the perceptions of youth in Balochistan regarding identity, development priorities, governance, and geopolitical attitudes within a context of persistent socio-economic deprivation. The core problem addressed is the marginalization of youth due to limited access to education, employment opportunities, and effective governance structures, which constrains their role in development. The purpose of the study is to generate empirical insights into youth perspectives and to understand how these perceptions vary across demographic and regional groups. A mixed-methods research design is employed, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth experiences. The quantitative component involves a structured questionnaire administered to youth in both urban and rural districts of Balochistan, using stratified sampling to ensure representation across gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds. The qualitative component includes interpretive analysis of open-ended responses and contextual insights. Data is analyzed through descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and thematic interpretation to identify patterns and variations. The findings indicate that while youth possess strong aspirations for development and inclusion, they face systemic barriers such as weak institutional performance, unemployment, and limited educational opportunities. Moreover, perceptions of governance and global actors vary significantly across regions. The study concludes that targeted policy interventions, inclusive governance, and investment in human development are essential to harness youth potential and promote sustainable stability in Balochistan, consistent with mixed-method approaches used in youth development research.

Keywords: Youth, Perceptions, Identity, Development, Balochistan

1. Introduction

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of landmass and has a strategically important location as a crossroad to South Asia, Central Asia, and Middle East. The province has almost 44 percent of the total land area of Pakistan, with huge deserts, mountainous ranges, and a lengthy coastline bordering the Arabian Sea. Although Balochistan is geographically prominent and rich in natural resources, it is the least populated and least developed province socio-economically (Ahmed & Baloch, 2017). It has dispersed population spread in distant districts with poor infrastructure and accessibility of basic social amenities. The province is ethnically and linguistically diverse, which creates a complex and layered socio-cultural environment. According to the 2023 census, the majority of the population is Baloch (approximately 53 percent), followed

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by Pashtoon communities (around 31 percent), while the remaining population comprises Hazara, Punjabi, Urdu-speaking, and other groups. This demographic composition reflects not only diversity but also varying historical, cultural, and political experiences among different communities. This geographical and ethnic segmentation, combined with long-standing marginalization and uneven patterns of development, has deeply shaped the socio-political realities of the region and continues to have a direct impact on the perceptions, opportunities, and lived experiences of younger generations.

Likewise, youth form a significant and growing portion of the Balochistan population and are both a challenge and opportunity to the future of the province. A young population in Balochistan could be a driver of economic growth, social change and political engagement. Nevertheless, to achieve this potential, it is important to deal with structural inequalities that have long been there and restrict access to limited opportunities. In a province where development indicators are always below the national levels (Ahmed, Muhammad, & Wadood, 2020), the contribution of the youth is especially significant in deciding whether Balochistan is heading to sustainable development or it is stuck in the loops of deprivation and unrest.

The problems of youth in Balochistan are complex and closely related. Education has been one of the most urgent issues in the sense that most of the districts have inadequate schools, fewer higher education institutions, and lack of career counseling and growth centers. “It is estimated that over 90 per cent of villages either no school exists, or if a school exists then no teachers are available” (Buzdar, 2018). In some cases where educational institutions are available, the problems of outdated learning curricula, poor facilities, and gender differences prevent meaningful learning. The opportunities available in employment are also limited and the rates of unemployment and underemployment become the factors that cause frustration among both educated and uneducated youths. According to the Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2024 -25, “Balochistan overall unemployment rate is 5.5%” (Statistics, 2025). The lack of industries and the small number of investments in the private sector also limit economic mobility. Additionally, the governance issues such as institutional apathy, corruption and poor service provision have also led to the loss of confidence in the institutions. All these circumstances shape the perception of the youth towards the state, their feeling of belonging and their readiness to be constructively involved in the processes of social and political life.

In both scholarly and policy discussions, there have been opposing accounts of the participation of youth in the future direction of Balochistan. On the one hand, young people are frequently depicted as future developmental actors, as they can become a source of innovations, entrepreneurship, and civic participants in case they get proper resources and opportunities. Conversely, there are other accounts that present youth as vulnerable to political manipulation, radicalization or involvement in instability because of unremitting socio-economic dissatisfactions. Such opposing views indicate the significance of the direct interpretation of the youth voices instead of external interpretations only.

This research aims at bridging these gaps by presenting an all-round profile of the youth demographics and the socio-economic realities in Balochistan. It tries to examine the convergence of identity, chance and political attitudes amongst the youth in the province. In particular, the study explores the perceptions of young people towards their cultural and regional identities, the way the youth rate the work of state institutions, and the extent of their confidence in the governance systems. Moreover, the paper also analyzes how the youth view key global players, such as China, India and the United States whose economic, political and strategic interventions affect the region

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dynamics and development programs in Balochistan. Knowledge about these perceptions is especially important due to the fact of the strategic location of the province as well as the participation in large-scale infrastructure and connection projects such as CPEC, Riko Deq, etc. Besides that, the research presents priorities of the development as expressed by the youth themselves, including education, employment, infrastructure, and social services.

This research is important because it may be used to educate evidence-based policymaking and development planning in Balochistan. The research offers the voices of youth in a way that is multiplied and gives perspectives of the grassroots, which are usually neglected in the policy structures. To policymakers, the results can be used to develop specific interventions that can help alleviate youth grievances and build inclusion and trust. To the development actors such as the governmental and non-governmental organizations, the study will provide guidance on how to align the programs with the stated needs and aspirations of the local communities. Finally, the views of youth should be learned to achieve stability and enhance governance in addition to realizing the potential of long-term development of the province.

2. Problem Statement:

Balochistan's youth are confronted with deep-rooted socio-economic challenges that limit their participation in development processes. Inadequate educational facilities, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure have created an environment where young people struggle to achieve their potential. These issues are further compounded by disparities between urban and rural areas, reinforcing inequality and exclusion in the province.

Additionally, governance challenges such as weak institutional performance, lack of accountability, and limited-service delivery have eroded youth trust in state institutions. As a result, young people often feel disconnected from decision-making processes and lack confidence in the system's ability to address their needs. This situation restricts constructive engagement and contributes to social and political uncertainty.

Furthermore, the absence of empirical data on youth perceptions regarding identity, development priorities, and geopolitical dynamics creates a significant gap in policymaking. Without understanding youth perspectives, policies remain misaligned with ground realities. Therefore, there is a critical need to systematically examine youth experiences and attitudes to inform inclusive and evidence-based development strategies in Balochistan.

3. Objectives:

- To systematically examine the socio-economic conditions of youth in Balochistan, including education, employment, and access to opportunities, in order to understand the structural challenges affecting their development.
- To analyze youth perceptions of identity, belonging, and social inclusion, with particular focus on how cultural, ethnic, and regional factors shape their attitudes and aspirations
- To evaluate youth perspectives on governance, institutional performance, and public service delivery, and to assess the level of trust and engagement with state institutions.
- To investigate youth views on development priorities and geopolitical actors, and to explore how these perceptions influence their expectations for regional stability and economic progress.
- To provide evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at youth empowerment, inclusive governance, and sustainable development in Balochistan, aligning with broader frameworks of youth participation and peacebuilding

4. Research Methodology

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This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine youth perceptions in Balochistan. The quantitative component is based on a survey design that captures the opinions of youth regarding identity, development priorities, governance, and geopolitical attitudes in a systematic manner. This approach enables the collection of standardized data from a wide sample, allowing for meaningful comparisons across demographic and regional groups and ensuring reliability and consistency in measurement.

Sampling was conducted across urban and rural areas of key districts in Balochistan to ensure geographical diversity and representation. A stratified sampling technique was employed to include respondents from different socio-economic backgrounds, gender groups, and ethnic communities. The survey utilized a structured questionnaire divided into sections covering demographic characteristics, education, employment, identity, governance perceptions, development priorities, and views on global actors.

In addition to quantitative data, the qualitative component incorporates interpretive insights drawn from open-ended responses and contextual analysis. This helps to capture deeper perspectives, meanings, and experiences that cannot be fully understood through numerical data alone. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation to identify patterns and relationships, alongside thematic interpretation to enrich the findings. The integration of both methods provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of youth realities, as mixed-method approaches are widely recognized for enhancing the depth and validity of research findings.

5. Literature Review

There is ample of literature available on the youth development and bulge and its implication and consequences on Pakistan. However, there is very limited literature available on this topic that concerns the youth of Balochistan and their development and identity. Muhammad Usman in his paper discusses the impacts of youth bulge in respect to governance and employment in Pakistan (Usman, 2023). Similarly, Muhammad Farooq, et al argues that “unemployment, poverty, un-equal education, trigger events, economic crisis, political instability and inequality in the state were the main reason of youth involvement in unrest, violence, crime and conflict” (Farooq, Idrees, Tariq, Gulzar, & Anwar, 2014). Both these papers best describe the youth bulge in Pakistan in general, its causes and consequences. However, little to no attention is given to Balochistan which requires attention. In a similar context Erum Hafeez believes that “youth bulge can either become a demographic dividend or a time bomb, depending on how young population is engaged in productive activities” (Hafez & Fasih, 2020). Therefore, this paper aims to grab attention of the policy makers towards the youth of Balochistan.

Similarly, there is much literature available on lack of education and employment in Pakistan, viewing its existing gaps and challenges but very less available on Balochistan. Dr. Nek Buzdar, in his research paper titled ‘The Crucial Role of Education in the Economic Development of Balochistan’ discusses the problems of illiteracy and low standards of education in Balochistan However, his paper does not discuss the role it plays in youth development. Buzdar believes that one of the major reasons for less education is poverty. He adds “when no government jobs become available, the costs of sending a child to school outweigh the benefits for many poor parents” (Buzdar, 2018). Other papers argue that the education system in Balochistan is weak due to the fiscal distribution and scarce distribution of the population due to vast geography (Faiz, Mengal, & Ghazi Gajani , 2016).

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According to the literature on youth and politics in Balochistan, a major tension exists. Youth are the bulk of the population of Balochistan, yet their participation in politics has been an informal movement and mobilization around their nationalist agenda rather than a formal political system. Young people are treated regarding political life in the province by the tribal system, weak party politics, and the insurgency that persists. A survey involving 800 youth across Balochistan found that "83% endorsed equal rights for disadvantaged groups, and about half reported experiencing multiple identities that correlated positively with peace-building involvement" (Kakar & Kakar, 2025). However, this study focuses on national politics while ignoring participation and interest in international politics, especially in reference to the global geopolitics that affects Balochistan.

5.1 Youth Bulge and Demographic Pressures in Pakistan

The concept of youth bulge has been widely discussed in demographic and political studies as a critical factor shaping state stability and development trajectories. A youth bulge occurs when a large proportion of the population falls within the young age bracket, creating both opportunities and challenges for governments. Scholars argue that when properly managed, a youthful population can become a demographic dividend contributing to economic growth and innovation; however, if neglected, it can lead to social unrest and instability (Urdal, 2006; UNDP, 2023). In Pakistan, where a significant proportion of the population is under the age of 30, the youth bulge represents a defining feature of its socio-economic landscape (World Bank, 2022).

In the Pakistani context, the youth bulge is closely linked with governance challenges, employment shortages, and resource constraints. Usman (2023) highlights that the inability of state institutions to effectively absorb and engage this growing youth population has resulted in increased pressure on public services and labor markets. This mismatch between population growth and institutional capacity has intensified socio-economic vulnerabilities, particularly in underdeveloped regions. Moreover, the demographic expansion has implications for political stability, as frustrated youth populations may become susceptible to mobilization in protest movements or conflict.

Despite extensive literature on youth bulge at the national level, there remains a significant gap in region-specific analyses, particularly for provinces like Balochistan. Existing studies tend to generalize findings across Pakistan, overlooking the unique demographic, geographic, and socio-political dynamics of smaller provinces. This gap is critical, as Balochistan's dispersed population, limited infrastructure, and historical marginalization create a distinct context in which youth bulge dynamics operate differently (UNDP, 2024). Therefore, there is a pressing need to contextualize youth bulge within Balochistan's specific realities.

5.2 Youth Unemployment, Inequality, and Conflict Dynamics

Youth unemployment remains one of the most significant challenges associated with demographic expansion in Pakistan. High levels of joblessness, combined with poverty and inequality, create conditions that may lead to frustration and social unrest. Farooq et al. (2014) argue that unemployment, unequal access to education, and economic instability are key drivers of youth involvement in violence and conflict. These structural factors contribute to a sense of deprivation among young people, particularly in marginalized regions where opportunities are limited.

The relationship between economic deprivation and conflict has been widely explained through the lens of relative deprivation theory, which suggests that individuals who perceive a gap between expectations and reality are more likely to engage in disruptive behavior (Gurr, 1970; Stewart, 2016). In Pakistan, rising inequality and uneven development have exacerbated these perceptions among youth. Recent studies further indicate that prolonged unemployment can weaken social cohesion and increase the likelihood of political instability (Ali & Rehman, 2021; UNDP, 2024).

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In Balochistan, these challenges are even more pronounced due to structural underdevelopment and limited industrial growth. The province's economy offers few formal employment opportunities, forcing many young people into informal sectors or unemployment. This lack of economic inclusion not only affects livelihoods but also shapes political attitudes and social behavior. Consequently, understanding the link between unemployment and conflict is essential for designing policies that promote youth engagement and stability in the region (Planning Commission of Pakistan, 2023).

5.3 Education Deficits and Human Capital Development in Balochistan

Education is widely recognized as a critical determinant of human capital development and socio-economic progress. In Balochistan, however, the education sector faces significant challenges, including low literacy rates, poor infrastructure, and limited access to quality institutions. Buzdar (2018) identifies poverty as a major barrier to education, noting that many families prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term educational investment. This situation is further aggravated by the lack of government jobs, which reduces the perceived returns to education.

Structural factors such as vast geography and dispersed population also hinder the effective delivery of educational services in the province. Faiz et al. (2016) argue that fiscal constraints and logistical challenges have resulted in unequal distribution of educational resources, leaving many rural areas underserved. Recent reports confirm that Balochistan continues to lag behind other provinces in key education indicators, including enrollment rates and learning outcomes (ASER Pakistan, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). These disparities highlight systemic weaknesses in education policy and implementation.

The implications of educational deficits extend beyond economic outcomes, influencing youth identity, social mobility, and political participation. Limited access to education restricts opportunities for skill development and employment, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion. Moreover, it affects the ability of young people to engage constructively in civic and political processes. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates education with broader development strategies in Balochistan.

5.4 Youth Political Participation and Identity Formation in Balochistan

Youth political participation in Balochistan presents a complex picture shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional factors. While young people constitute a significant portion of the population, their participation in formal political processes remains limited. Instead, youth engagement often takes the form of informal movements and mobilization around identity-based issues. Yusuf (2022) argues that weak political institutions and limited avenues for participation have contributed to this trend.

The role of identity in shaping political behavior is particularly significant in Balochistan. Youth often navigate multiple identities—ethnic, national, and regional—which influence their perceptions of governance and belonging. Kakar and Kakar (2025) found that a majority of youth support inclusive policies and equal rights, indicating a potential for positive engagement in peacebuilding initiatives. However, structural barriers and political exclusion continue to limit their active participation in formal governance structures.

Furthermore, the influence of tribal systems and ongoing conflict dynamics adds another layer of complexity to youth political engagement. Traditional power structures often restrict independent political expression, while security concerns limit opportunities for civic participation. These factors collectively shape the political socialization of youth, emphasizing the need for inclusive

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and participatory governance frameworks that can harness their potential for constructive engagement.

5.5 Identity, Marginalization, and Socio-Political Exclusion

The issue of marginalization is central to understanding the socio-political dynamics of Balochistan. Historical neglect, unequal resource distribution, and limited political representation have contributed to a sense of exclusion among local populations. Baloch (2021) argues that these factors have reinforced identity-based grievances, particularly among youth who perceive themselves as excluded from national development processes.

Identity formation in such contexts is closely linked with experiences of marginalization and inequality. Akhtar (2020) highlights that perceptions of injustice and exclusion can strengthen ethnic and regional identities, often at the expense of national integration. These dynamics are further intensified by disparities in development and governance, which create visible differences between regions and communities.

For youth in Balochistan, these challenges translate into limited opportunities for social mobility and participation. The lack of inclusive policies and representation exacerbates feelings of alienation, potentially leading to disengagement or resistance. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that focuses on equity, inclusion, and participatory governance, ensuring that all communities have a stake in the province's development.

5.6 Global Geopolitics and Youth Perceptions in Balochistan

Balochistan's strategic location has made it a focal point of regional and global geopolitics, particularly in the context of projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These developments have significant implications for local populations, shaping perceptions of opportunity and exclusion. Shah and Ahmad (2023) argue that media narratives and geopolitical discourse play a crucial role in influencing youth perceptions in the region.

Despite its importance, the intersection of geopolitics and youth perspectives remains underexplored in academic literature. Most studies focus on macro-level strategic considerations, neglecting how these dynamics affect local communities. Emerging research suggests that youth perceptions are shaped not only by economic opportunities but also by concerns about representation, participation, and benefit distribution (UNDP, 2024).

Understanding these perceptions is critical for designing policies that promote inclusive development and social cohesion. As global and regional dynamics continue to evolve, it is essential to incorporate local perspectives into policy frameworks. This approach can help bridge the gap between strategic objectives and community needs, ensuring that development initiatives contribute to sustainable peace and stability in Balochistan.

6. Theoretical Framework

This paper relies on various schools of thought to get a complex view of how youth identity, socio-economic marginalization, and perceptions of geopolitics relate in Balochistan. The combination of the Social Identity Theory, Relative Deprivation Theory, Youth Bulge Theory, and a Constructivist Perspective gives an overall picture that can be used to understand how the attitudes and behavior of the youth are formed by the structural conditions, demographic realities, and even subjective perceptions. All these theories provide understanding of how youths in marginalized territories perceive their social status, social relation with the institutions, and develop an opinion on domestic governance as well as international players.

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The Social Identity Theory, by Tajfel & Turner, could be used to explain the way youth of Balochistan form their identities in a social-political marginalized setting. This theory holds that people have much of their self-concept based on their belonging to social groups including their ethnicity, region, language or even nationality (Social Identity Theory In Psychology, 2023). In such situations as in Balochistan, when ethnic diversity and disparities in the regions are combined with historical resentments, the youth identity is tightly related to the sense of belonging, representation, and recognition. The sense of marginality by the mainstream political and economic structures can reinforce the regional or ethnic identities, which determine the attitude towards state institutions and national integration.

Furthermore, the Relative Deprivation Theory assists in understanding how the feeling of inequality and marginalization can be the cause of dissatisfaction and political alienation in young individuals (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). In Balochistan, where the development indicators are lower than the national rates, and the access to education, employment, and infrastructure is unequal, young people can feel that they are disadvantaged comparatively. Such perception may create annoyance, mistrust, and alienation against official political procedures.

Simultaneously, Youth Bulge Theory provides a demographic aspect of the contribution of young people to the development of socio-political results. This theory is based on the idea that as the population of youth is big, there are both opportunities and risks according to the capacity of society to offer education, work and social mobility. A large youth population would be a great powerhouse of economic development and innovation once it is integrated into productive areas. On the other hand, in a situation where there are few opportunities, a high number of the youth can also lead to instability, social unrest, or migration pressures. Using the case of Balochistan, where the population of the youth forms a large percentage of the provincial demographic profile, Youth Bulge Theory can be used to understand the interaction between demographic weight and development predicaments.

Similarly, a Constructivist Perspective would give an understanding of how the youth perceive and give meaning to geopolitical actors and external forces. Constructivism stresses the fact that perceptions and attitudes are produced socially and through discourse, experience, and interaction, and not predetermined by material conditions only. The example of Balochistan frequently involves outside forces, including China, India and the United States in the political discourse, media coverage, and society. The national discourse, the issues of regional security, the economic development projects and the local experiences of the development initiatives may influence the youth perceptions of these actors.

Collectively, these theoretical approaches form a synthesized theoretical framework in which objective conditions are combined with subjective experiences that define the youth attitudes in Balochistan. The Social Identity Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory can be used to understand how identity formation and perceived inequality can affect trust and engagement and Youth Bulge Theory is the theory that can emphasize the demographic relevance of youth populations to stability and development paths. The Constructivist Perspective, in its turn, offers an opportunity to examine the way in which the social narratives and the lived experiences influence the way in which the youth develop perception towards geopolitical actors.

7. Findings and Analysis

7.1. General Findings

Based on the findings, the following data have been analyzed to identify key patterns and relationships concerning youth perceptions in Balochistan. The analysis systematically examines

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socio-economic conditions, including education, employment, and access to services, alongside youth perspectives on identity, governance, and development priorities. The results highlight significant trends of economic deprivation, limited opportunities, and low institutional trust, while also revealing strong aspirations for education and employment. These findings are presented in alignment with the study objectives, allowing for a structured interpretation of how various factors shape youth attitudes and experiences. Overall, the analysis provides evidence-based insights that support a comprehensive understanding of youth challenges and potential in the region, as recommended in standard research reporting practices.

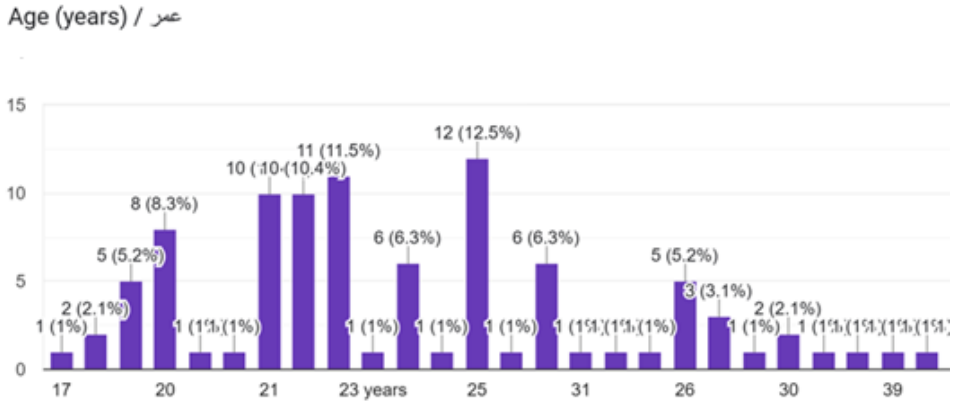
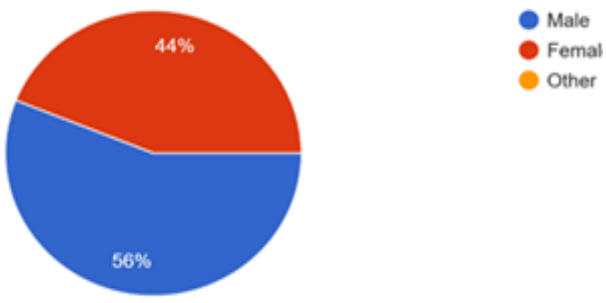


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation: The respondents are overwhelmingly young, with most clustered in the late-teen to mid-twenties range. The chart shows the largest frequencies around ages 17–25, with only a few older respondents.

Analysis: This is methodologically appropriate because the study is about youth perceptions. The concentration in younger age groups means the findings mainly capture emerging adult concerns: education, transition to work, identity formation, digital exposure, and political socialization. It also means the results should be read as "youth voice" rather than "general public opinion.

The study surveyed 1096 respondents, predominantly representing the burgeoning youth bulge of Balochistan. The demographic profile reveals a cohort that is increasingly educated with a significant portion holding or pursuing Bachelor's degrees—yet economically stranded. A critical finding is the Urban-Rural divide, while urban youth have better access to digital tools and educational discourse, rural youth report a statistically significant deficit in basic services. This disparity is not merely geographical but structural; the M-W U tests confirm that being a rural resident in Balochistan significantly correlates with lower trust in provincial service delivery and a more pessimistic view of immediate job prospects.



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Figure 2: Gender of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation: The figure presents a gender-based distribution of respondents, showing a relatively balanced composition with a slight male majority. Males constitute 56% of the sample, while females account for 44%, and there is no visible representation of the "other" category in the chart.

This distribution suggests that the study has achieved a reasonably inclusive representation of both genders, although male respondents are somewhat more dominant. The higher proportion of males may reflect the actual demographic pattern in sectors such as fisheries, where men are typically more engaged in direct fishing activities. In many coastal areas, including regions like Gwadar, Pasni, and Ormara, fishing is traditionally a male-dominated occupation, which could explain their greater representation in the data.

At the same time, the presence of 44% female respondents is significant, indicating that women's perspectives have also been incorporated. This is important because women often play crucial roles in post-harvest activities such as fish processing, drying, and marketing, even if they are less visible in offshore fishing. Their inclusion enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study by capturing broader socio-economic dynamics.

Overall, the figure reflects a fairly balanced gender representation, though slightly skewed toward males. This distribution is acceptable for analysis, but future studies may consider ensuring even more inclusive participation, particularly by capturing the roles and experiences of underrepresented groups.

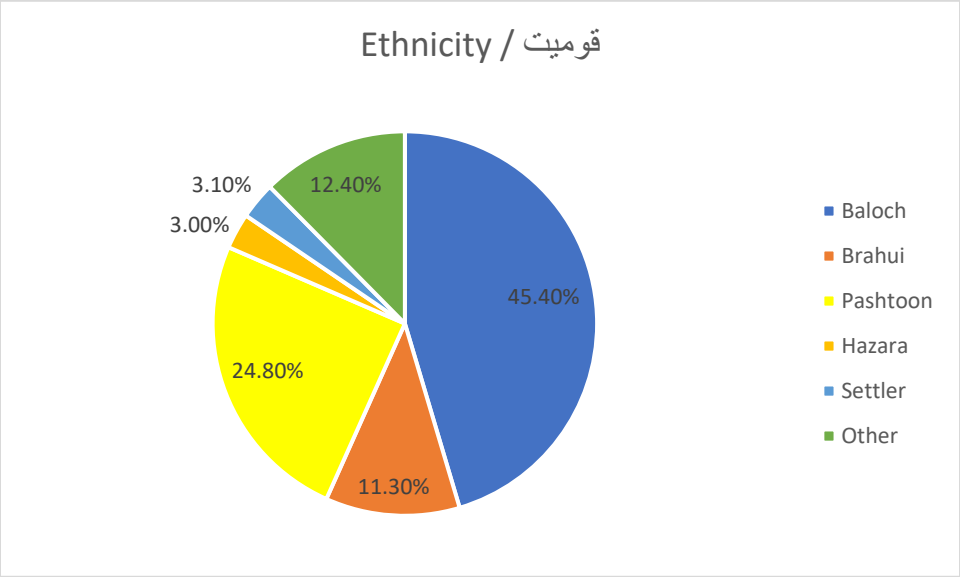


Figure 3: Ethnicity of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation:

The figure presents the ethnic composition of respondents (n=1096), showing Baloch (Brahui) as the largest group (45.40%+ 11.33%), followed by Pashtoon (24.8%), Other (12.4%), with Hazara and Settler groups representing a small proportion. This indicates that the sample is ethnically

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diverse, though dominated by Baloch respondents. The presence of multiple ethnic groups reflects the plural social structure of Balochistan, allowing the study to capture varied perspectives. However, the uneven distribution suggests that some ethnic voices are more represented than others**.**

Analysis & Discussion:

This ethnic composition has important implications for interpreting findings related to identity, governance, and inclusion. The dominance of one group may influence overall trends, particularly in perceptions of belonging and political attitudes. At the same time, the inclusion of minority groups strengthens the study's ability to examine diversity and marginalization. Research shows that ethnic diversity significantly shapes youth perceptions, social inclusion, and political engagement in Balochistan. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with attention to representation, as ethnic imbalance may affect generalizability and comparative analysis.

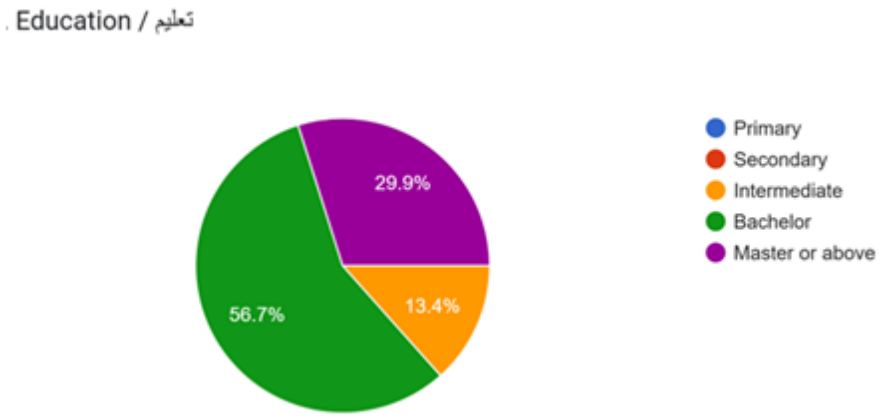


Figure 4: Educational Profile of Respondents (n = 1096)
Interpretation:
The figure illustrates the educational profile of respondents (n=1096), where the majority hold a Bachelor's degree (56.7%), followed by those with a Master's degree or above (29.9%), and a smaller proportion at the Intermediate level (13.4%). There is negligible or no representation from primary and secondary levels. This indicates that the sample is highly educated, with nearly 87% of respondents possessing at least a Bachelor's degree. Such a distribution suggests that the data largely reflects the perceptions of educated youth.
Analysis & Discussion:

This educational composition has significant implications for interpreting the study findings. A highly educated sample is more likely to demonstrate awareness of governance, development, and geopolitical issues, leading to more critical and informed responses. However, it may also limit generalizability, as less-educated or marginalized youth are underrepresented. Research highlights that education shapes attitudes, political engagement, and access to opportunities. Therefore, while

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the findings provide valuable insights into educated youth perspectives, caution is needed when extending conclusions to the broader youth population.

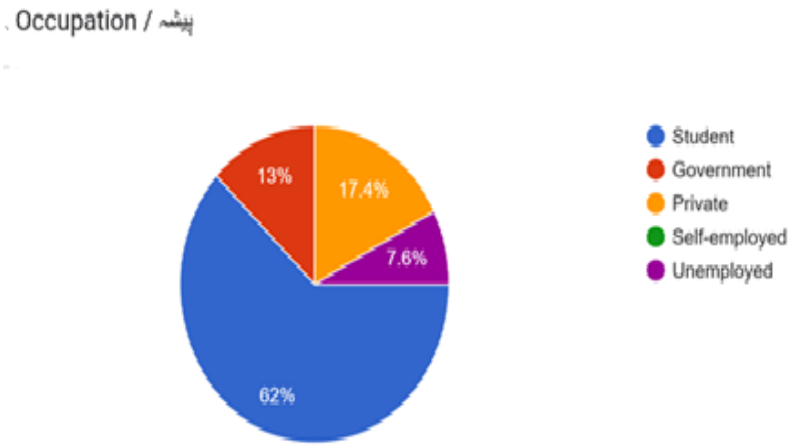


Figure 5: Occupation of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation:

The figure presents the occupational status of respondents (n=1096), where the majority are students (62%), followed by individuals in private sector employment (17.4%), government jobs (13%), and a smaller proportion unemployed (7.6%). There appears to be minimal or no representation of self-employed individuals. This indicates that the sample is heavily dominated by students, reflecting a youth population still in the education or transition phase rather than fully integrated into the labor market.

Analysis & Discussion:

This occupational structure significantly shapes the study's findings, as student-dominated samples tend to emphasize education, employment aspirations, and future-oriented perspectives. The relatively low proportion of employed respondents suggests limited labor market absorption, reinforcing earlier findings on unemployment and economic constraints. Additionally, the presence of unemployed youth, though smaller, highlights vulnerability within the transition phase. Research shows that combining survey data with contextual interpretation helps identify such socio-economic patterns more effectively in mixed-methods studies. Therefore, the findings largely reflect aspirational youth perspectives rather than settled economic experiences.

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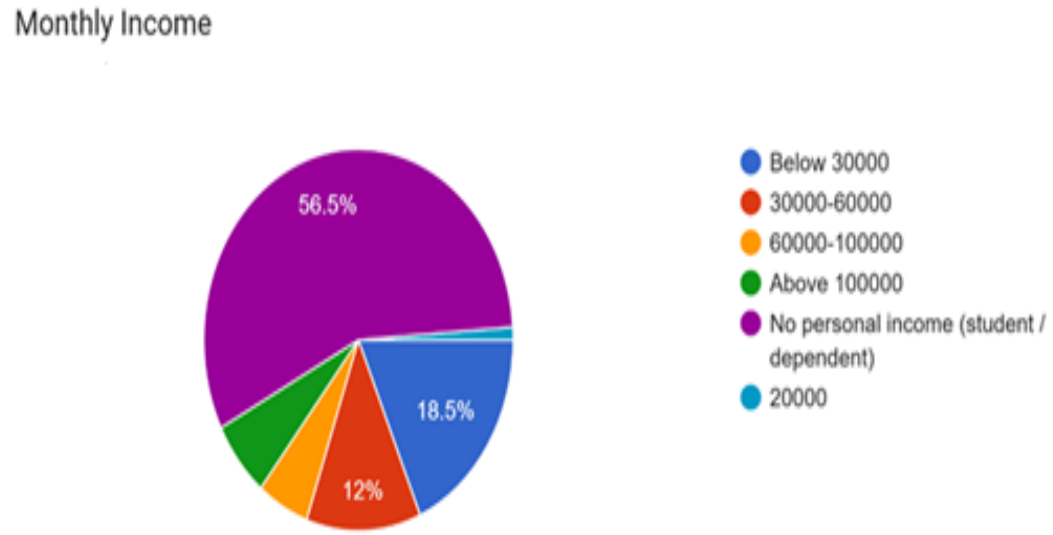


Figure 6: Monthly Income of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation:

The figure presents the monthly income distribution of respondents (n=1096), showing that the majority (56.5%) have no personal income and are classified as students or dependents. Among those earning, 18.5% fall below 30,000, 12% earn between 30,000–60,000, and only a small proportion fall in higher income brackets. This indicates that most respondents are economically dependent, with limited independent earning capacity. The distribution reflects a youth-dominated sample that is still in transition from education to employment.

Analysis & Discussion:

This income pattern reinforces the structural economic challenges highlighted in earlier findings. High dependency levels indicate delayed financial independence, which can contribute to frustration and limited socio-economic mobility. The small proportion in higher income categories suggests weak labor market integration. Survey analysis literature highlights that income disparities significantly influence perceptions of opportunity, governance, and stability. Therefore, the findings reflect not only economic vulnerability but also the broader implications of unemployment and underdevelopment among youth in Balochistan.

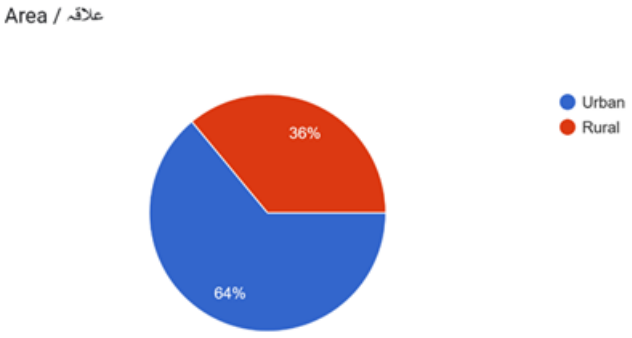


Figure 7: Residential Distribution of Respondents (n = 1096)

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Interpretation:
The figure shows the area-wise distribution of respondents (n=86), where a majority belong to urban areas (64%), while 36% are from rural areas. This indicates that the sample is more urban-centric, though it still includes a considerable rural representation. The presence of both groups allows for capturing diverse perspectives; however, the higher proportion of urban respondents suggests that the data may reflect more urban experiences, particularly in terms of access to education, services, and information.

Analysis & Discussion:

This urban dominance has important implications for interpreting the study findings. Urban youth typically have better access to education, employment opportunities, and digital resources, which may influence their responses toward governance and development. In contrast, rural youth often face greater infrastructural and service delivery challenges. Cross-tabulation analysis highlights that such demographic differences can significantly affect perceptions and outcomes. Therefore, while the data provides valuable insights, conclusions should consider the urban bias and its impact on generalizability.

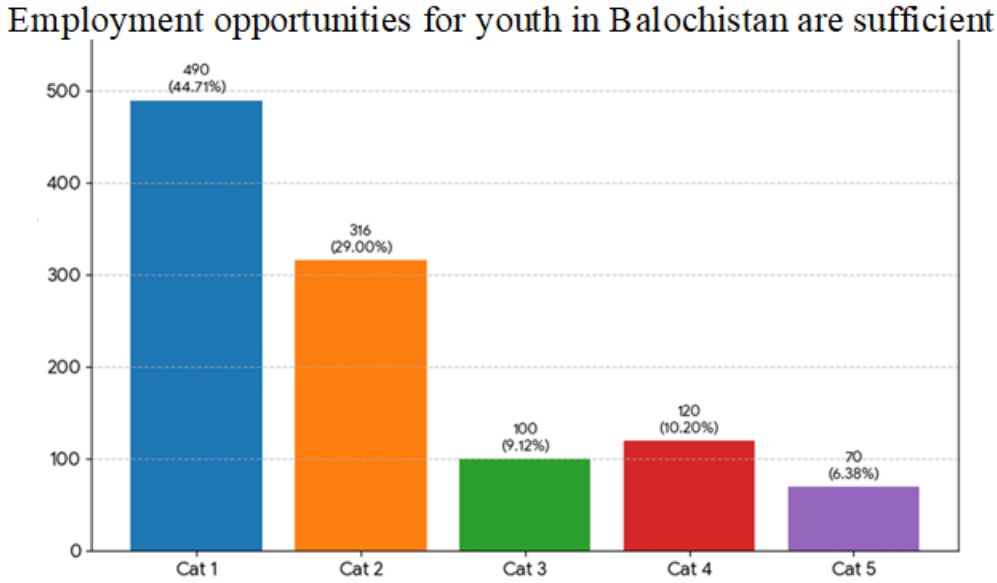


Figure 8: Distribution of Respondents by Employment Categories(n = 1096)

Interpretation: This is one of the clearest negative items. About 490 respondents (44.7%) chose the lowest category, and another 316 (29.0%) chose the second-lowest.

Analysis: This is a very strong signal of economic dissatisfaction. It means roughly four-fifths of respondents reject the idea that youth employment opportunities are sufficient. This finding is central: it suggests unemployment is not a peripheral concern but the dominant structural grievance. Any policy discussion from this dataset must treat job creation as a first-order issue, not a secondary one.

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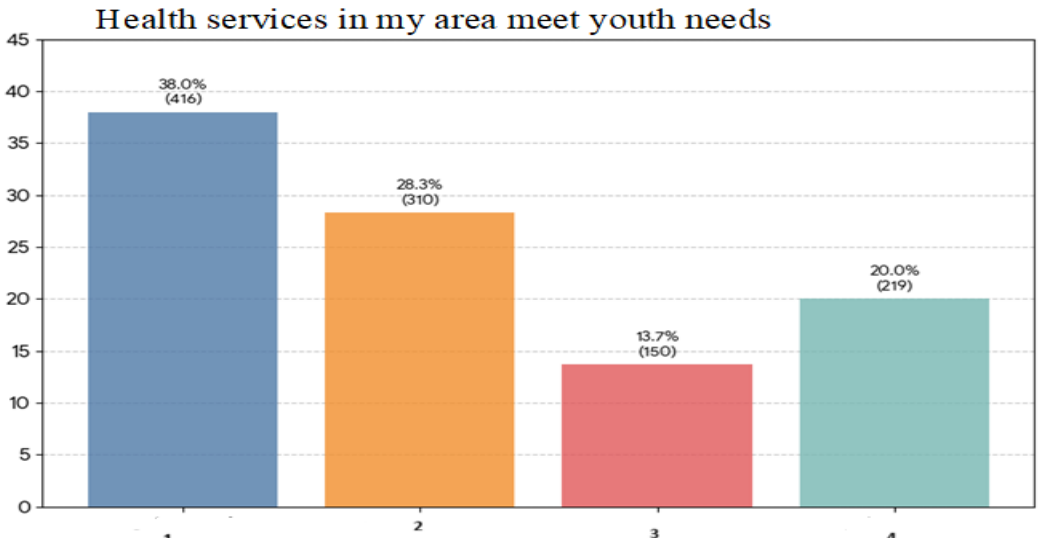


Figure 9: Accessibility and Status of Health Services in Surveyed Localities (n = 1096)

Interpretation: The responses are largely negative: 416 (38%) and 310 (28%) fall in the two lowest categories.

Analysis: Youth do not view health services as adequately responsive to their needs. This may reflect poor rural outreach, limited mental health services, weak maternal and reproductive health support, low specialist availability, and inadequate primary facilities. The result suggests health is not only a public-service problem but also a youth inclusion problem.

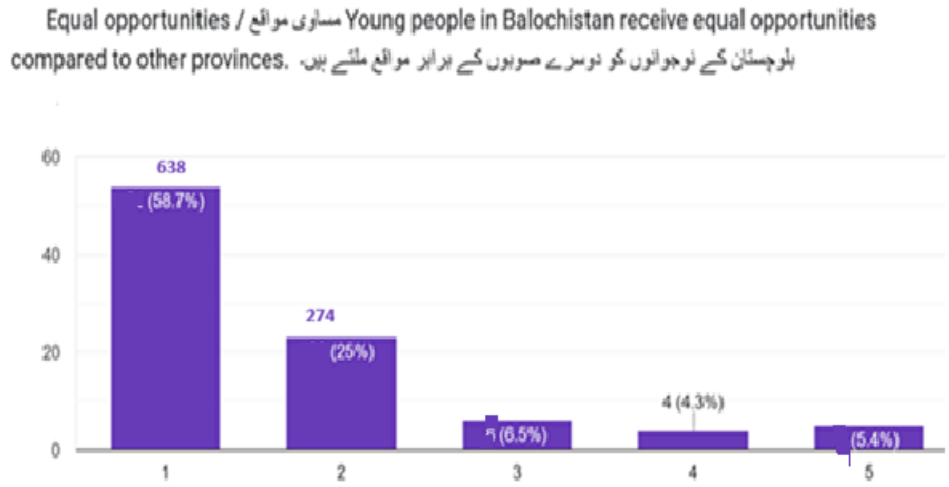


Figure 10: Comparative Analysis of Socio-Economic Opportunities: Balochistan vs. Other Provinces (n = 1096)

Interpretation: This is strongly negative. About 638 respondents (58%) chose the lowest category and 274 (25%) the next-lowest.

Analysis: This is one of the sharpest findings in the entire survey. It indicates a powerful comparative grievance: respondents are not only dissatisfied locally, they feel Balochistan is disadvantaged relative to the rest of Pakistan. That comparative deprivation is politically significant because it feeds exclusion, mistrust, and regional resentment.

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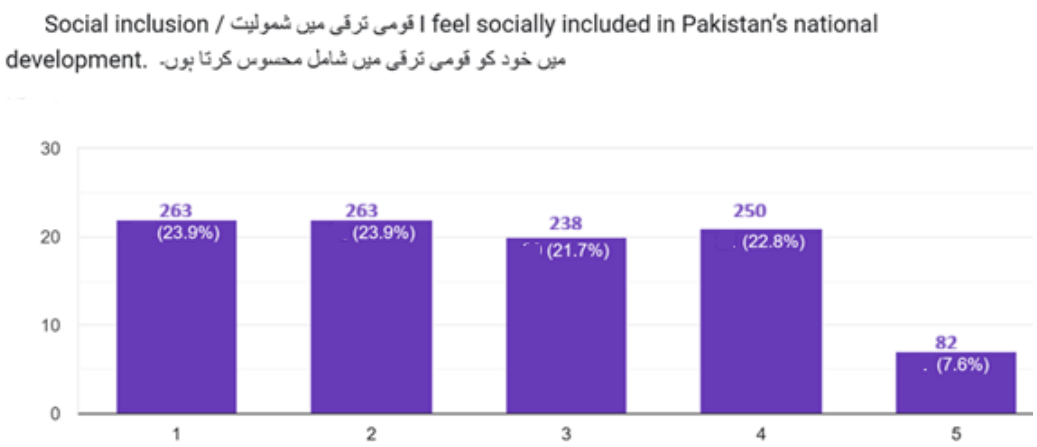


Figure 11: Perceived Levels of Social Inclusion and Participation in National Development

Interpretation: The distribution is mixed but not strongly positive; the responses are spread across middle and lower categories.

Analysis: This suggests that many youths do not fully feel included in the national development story. The issue appears to be symbolic as well as material: respondents are not merely asking for services, but also recognition, representation, and belonging. This finding connects development deprivation with identity politics.

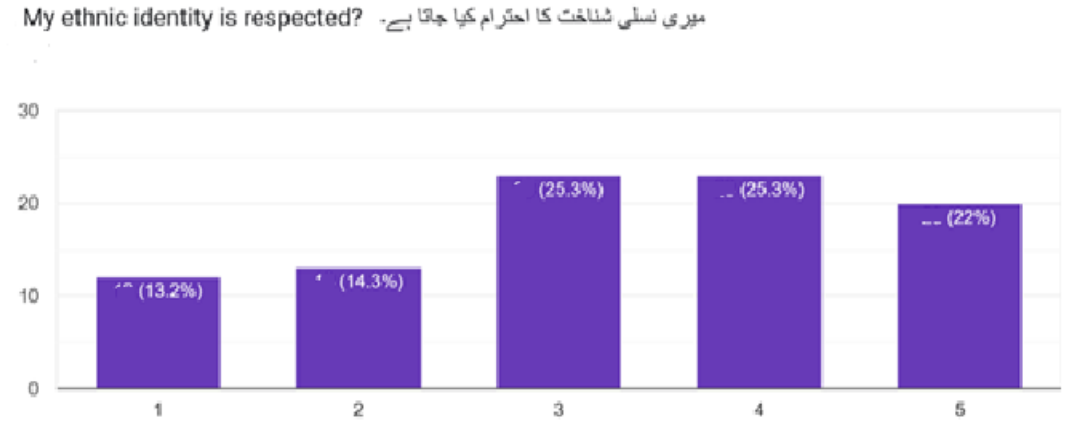


Figure 12: Assessment of Ethnic Identity Recognition within the National Framework

Interpretation: The distribution is divided, with no overwhelming positive consensus.

Analysis: This indicates that recognition remains incomplete. Youth do not uniformly feel their ethnicity is respected. In Balochistan, identity is not merely symbolic; perceived disrespect can translate into political distance, mistrust, and resentment.

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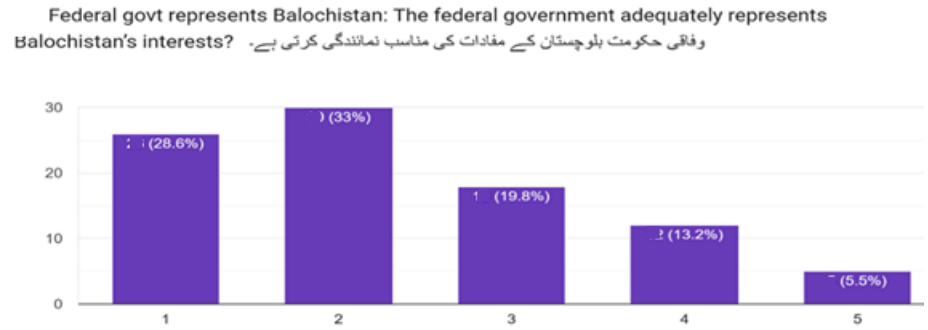


Figure 13 Perceived Levels of Representation within the Federal Government (n = 1096)
Interpretation: The balance tilts negative, with larger responses in the lower categories.
Analysis: This is a direct representation deficit. Youth are signaling that the federation is not perceived as fully responsive to provincial concerns. Such a pattern weakens confidence in national integration and can deepen the perception of political marginalization.

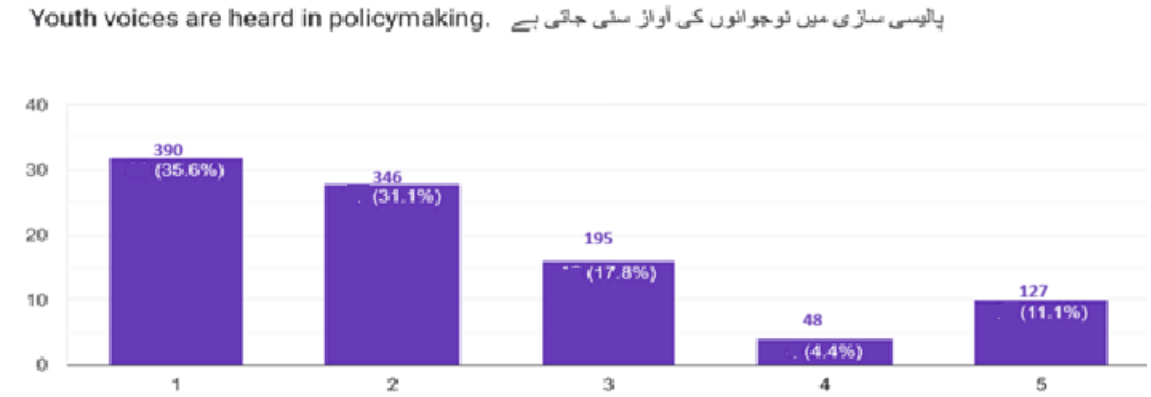


Figure 14: Perceived Influence of Youth Perspectives in Policy-Making Processes (n = 1096)
Interpretation: Strongly negative. About 390 (35.6%) and 346 (31.1%) occupy the two lowest categories.
Analysis: This is a major democratic deficit. Youth do not feel represented in decision-making. The implication is not merely psychological; when a large demographic feels unheard, policy loses responsiveness and legitimacy.

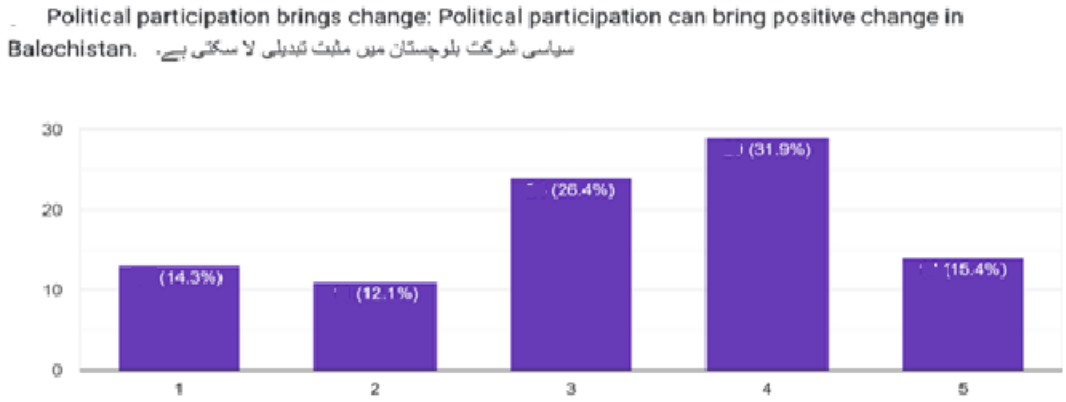


Figure 15: Political Participations of Respondents (n = 1096)

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Interpretation: The responses are mixed but moderately optimistic.
Analysis: This is a hopeful result. Even though youth distrust institutions and feel unheard, many still believe participation can matter. That means cynicism has not fully replaced civic hope. There is still space for democratic engagement if institutions become more credible.

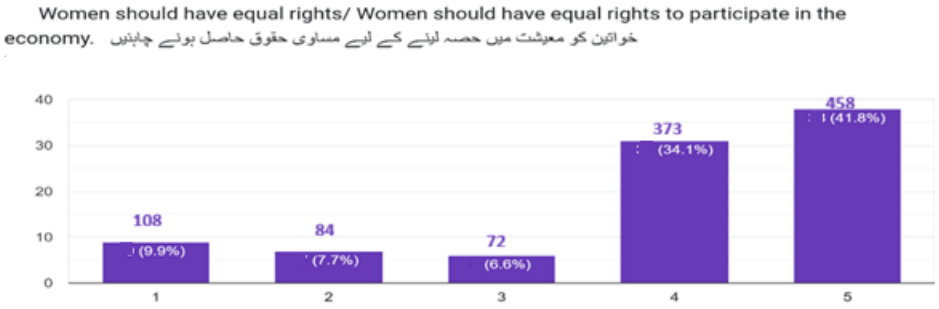


Figure 16: Women Rights (n = 1096)
Interpretation: Strong positive support. About 458 (41.8%) and 373 (34.1%) are in the higher categories.
Analysis: This is one of the strongest progressive findings. Youth broadly support women's economic participation. That indicates social attitudes may be more reform-oriented than stereotypes suggest, especially among younger and educated respondents.

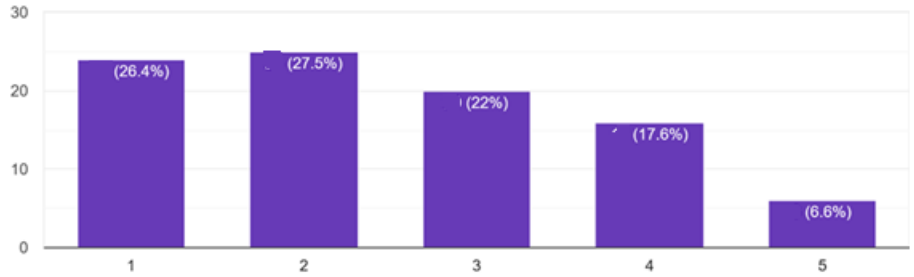


Figure 17: Trust on Provincial Govt of Respondents (n = 1096)
Interpretation: Responses are divided, with a mild tendency toward distrust or ambivalence.
Analysis: Provincial institutions do not enjoy strong legitimacy. Since the province is the immediate site of service delivery, weak trust here suggests not only political dissatisfaction but also a judgment about governance performance.
The youth of Balochistan exhibit a complex, dual identity. While there is a strong sense of cultural and ethnic pride, it exists alongside a desire for national inclusion—provided that inclusion is equitable.
As illustrated in Figure 17 (Governance & Trust), there is a profound "Institutional Trust Deficit." Trust in both the Federal and Provincial governments is notably low, with the majority of respondents feeling that their "voices are unheard in policymaking.

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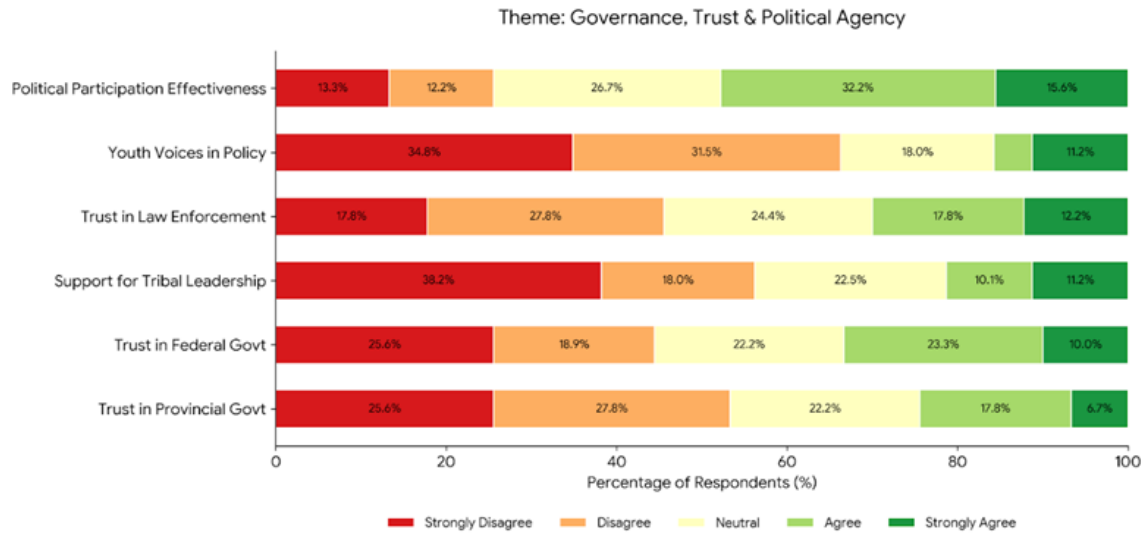


Figure 18: Governance, Trust & Political Agency

The statistical regression indicates that Institutional Trust is a key predictor of Future Optimism. When young individuals see the state as transparent and attentive, their personal viewpoint improves. Conversely, the prevailing absence of trust serves as a psychological impediment to civic involvement, driving many towards a condition of political alienation.

The Economic Exclusion-Stability Perception Pathway

This route map illustrates the outcomes of the multiple linear regression analysis, demonstrating the contributions of numerous parameters to the Stability Concern Index (Q39 + Q40 + Q41).

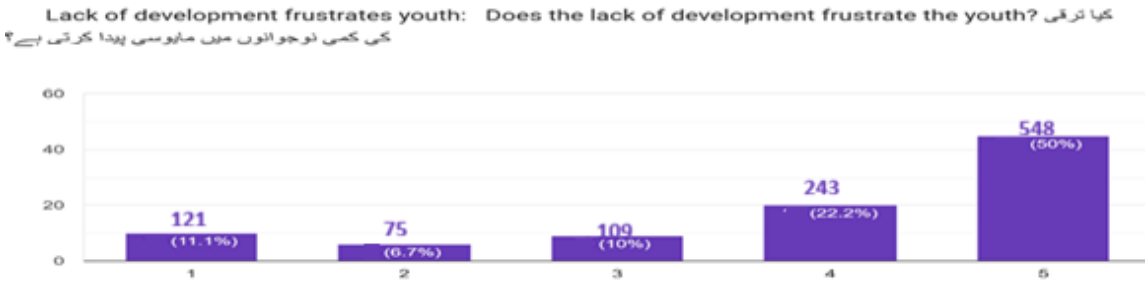


Figure 19: Lack of Development Frustrates of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation: Strong agreement. The highest visible share is 548 (50%), with another 243 (22.2%) nearby.

Analysis: This is a defining result. Underdevelopment is not an abstract complaint; it is experienced as emotional and political frustration. This supports the argument that development deficits are central to youth discontent.

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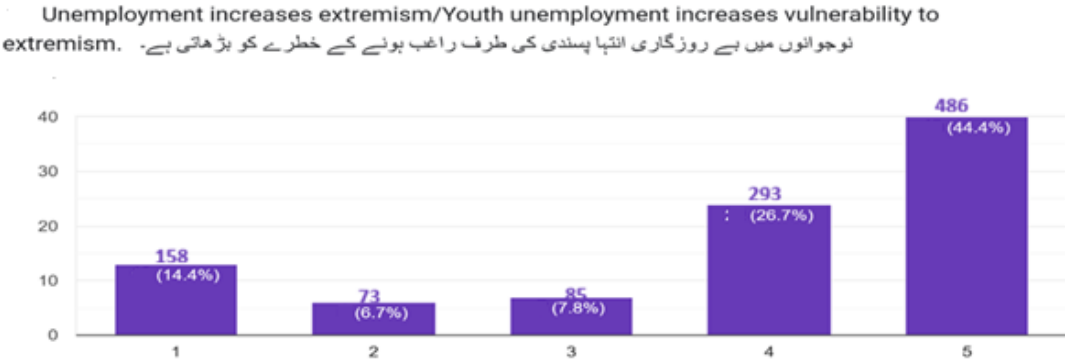


Figure 20: Unemployment and Extremism (n = 1096)

Interpretation: Again, strongly agreed, with 486 (44.4%) and 293 (26.7%) in higher categories.

Analysis: Youth themselves identify joblessness as a risk factor for radicalization. This is a crucial policy insight: employment generation is not only development policy, but also peace and security policy. A significant discovery of this study is the youth's self-assessment of instability. Figure (Stability & Conflict) and the Correlation Matrix (Figure 15) show a significant statistical correlation between economic marginalization and the perceived susceptibility to extremism.

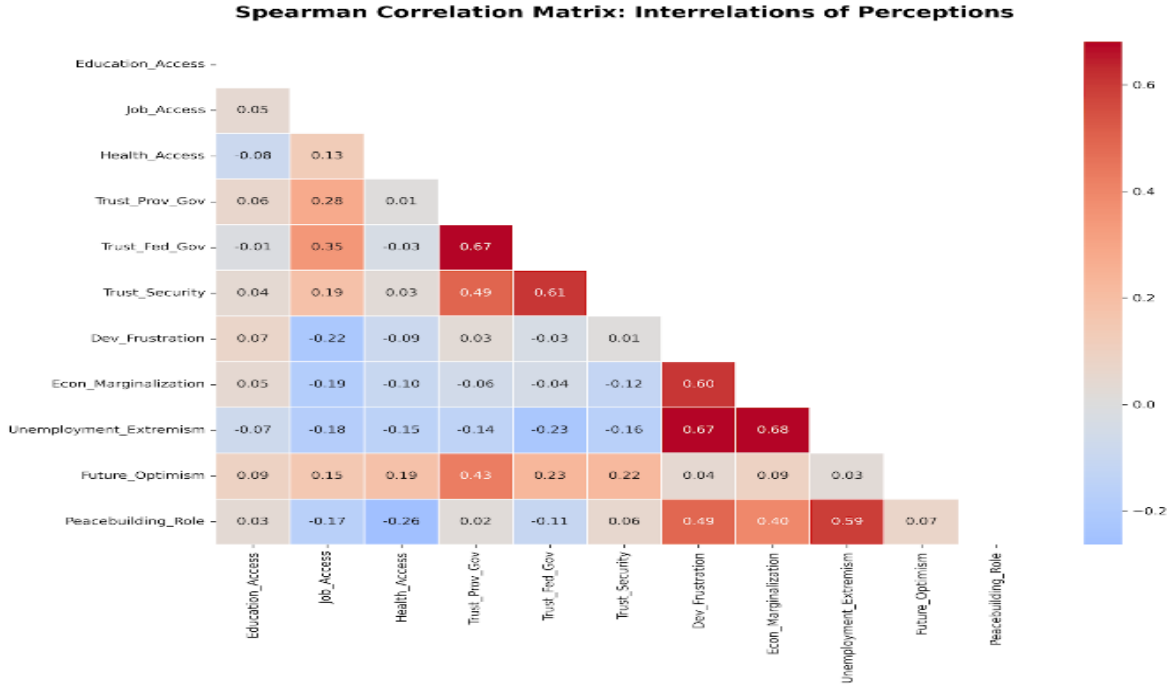


Figure No.21. Interrelation of Perceptions

Young people see extremism not just as an ideology concern, but more as a byproduct of unemployment and developmental discontent. The "Lack of Development" is identified as a key cause of discontent that undermines the social fabric. The data indicates a "Peace Dividend": a significant majority of respondents oppose harsh security measures, favoring discussion and political settlement as the only viable route to peace. Spearman's rank correlation analysis (ρ) reveals a substantial positive link between perceived economic marginalization and predisposition to extremism, indicating that youth see the security situation as a manifestation of systemic economic exclusion.

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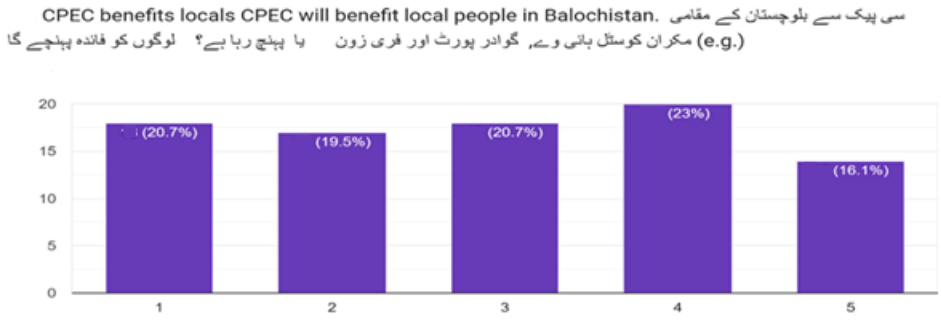


Figure 22: Perception of CPEC-Driven Socio-Economic Benefits Among Local Communities

Interpretation: Responses are split across the scale, with no overwhelming consensus.
Analysis: Youth are not uniformly convinced that mega-projects automatically translate into meaningful benefits for local communities. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents emphasized that such initiatives would only gain legitimacy and support if local Baloch youth are actively considered, included, and prioritized in planning, employment, and decision-making processes. This highlights a critical gap between national-level development narratives—often framed around growth, infrastructure, and strategic gains—and local expectations centered on equitable access, participation, and tangible socio-economic improvements. In many cases, young respondents expressed concern that without deliberate inclusion mechanisms, mega-projects risk reinforcing existing patterns of marginalization rather than addressing them. Therefore, the issue is not outright rejection of development, but rather a demand for inclusive, people-centered development models that ensure local ownership, fair distribution of opportunities, and visible improvements in livelihoods. This perception underscores the need for policymakers to align macro-level development agendas with grassroots realities, particularly by integrating local youth into the economic and institutional frameworks of such projects.

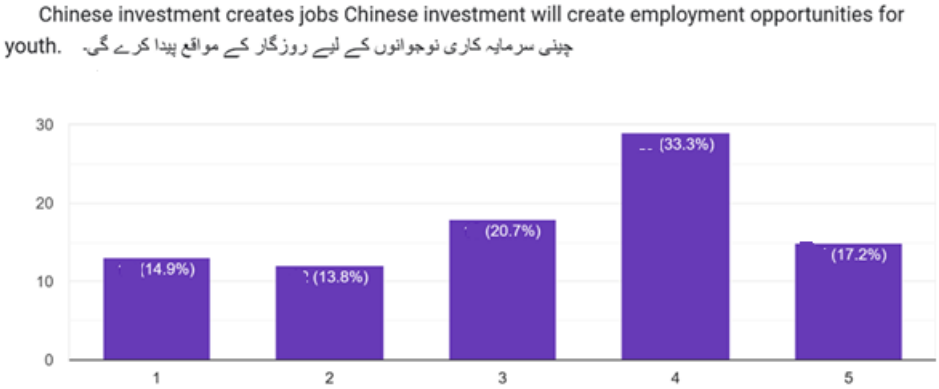


Figure 23: Public Perception Regarding the Impact of Chinese Investment on Employment Generation (n = 1096)
Interpretation:
The figure presents responses regarding whether Chinese investment creates employment opportunities for youth. A majority of respondents lean toward agreement, with 33.3% selecting option 4 and 17.2% selecting option 5. A moderate proportion (20.7%) remains neutral, while smaller shares disagree (14.9% and 13.8%). This indicates that most youth perceive Chinese

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investment positively in terms of job creation, although a notable segment remains uncertain or skeptical.

Analysis & Discussion:

The findings suggest cautious optimism among youth regarding the employment potential of Chinese investment, particularly under initiatives like CPEC. While many respondents expect economic benefits, the presence of neutral and negative responses reflects persistent concerns about actual local impact and the equitable distribution of opportunities. A significant proportion of respondents—especially from the Makran Division—emphasized that local people must be placed at the forefront of planning, employment, and decision-making processes. They argued that without the meaningful participation of local Baloch communities, no development project can achieve long-term sustainability. In this regard, respondents strongly highlighted that first and foremost priority should be given to Baloch youth, ensuring their inclusion in jobs, skills development, and institutional roles linked to these projects.

This perspective underscores a broader disconnect between macro-level development narratives and ground-level realities. While Chinese investment is generally viewed positively, youth perceptions are shaped by whether such projects translate into visible and inclusive local benefits, particularly employment generation and capacity building. The findings suggest that development is not rejected; rather, it is conditionally supported—dependent on fairness, representation, and local ownership. Therefore, the long-term acceptance and success of initiatives like CPEC hinge on adopting a people-centered approach, where local Baloch youth are not merely beneficiaries but active stakeholders in the development process.

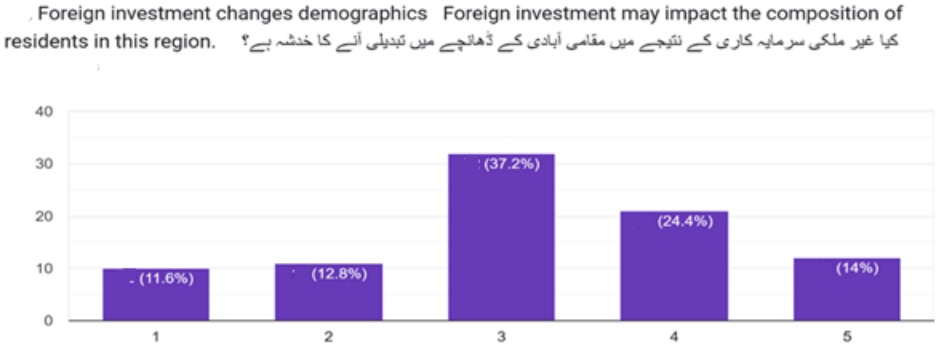


Figure 24: Public Perception about Foreign Investment (n = 1096)

Interpretation:

The figure shows perceptions on whether foreign investment changes local demographics. The largest group is neutral (37.2%), followed by agreement (24.4% and 14%), while smaller portions disagree (11.6% and 12.8%). This distribution indicates that although a notable share of respondents believes foreign investment may alter population composition, the dominant response is uncertainty. Youth appear divided, with no overwhelming consensus, reflecting mixed awareness and varying levels of concern about demographic impacts.

Analysis & Discussion:

The findings point toward a measured apprehension rather than clear resistance among youth regarding the demographic implications of large-scale development initiatives. The dominance of neutral responses indicates that many young respondents are still forming their views, often due to

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limited access to concrete information or a lack of visible evidence about how such projects reshape local population dynamics. At the same time, those expressing concern tend to link foreign investment—particularly in projects like CPEC—with the possibility of increased migration, external labor influx, and gradual socio-cultural transformation within local communities.

A key insight emerging from the data is that perceptions are closely tied to the question of who benefits and who participates. Respondents, particularly from the Makran Division, stressed that anxieties around demographic change can be significantly reduced if local populations are meaningfully integrated into development processes. They emphasized that development cannot be externally driven alone; instead, it must reflect local priorities and ensure that indigenous communities—especially Baloch youth—are central to employment opportunities, skills development, and institutional engagement. In their view, projects that overlook local inclusion risk deepening uncertainty and weakening long-term acceptance.

Overall, these responses highlight that youth attitudes are shaped by a combination of economic hopes and social sensitivities. Rather than rejecting development, young people are seeking clarity, fairness, and a visible stake in outcomes. This underscores the importance of transparent governance, proactive communication, and inclusive policy design. Aligning development initiatives with local expectations—particularly by positioning Baloch youth as key stakeholders—can help transform cautious perceptions into sustained support and ensure that development is both socially and economically sustainable.

As noted by one respondent, Pervez Baloch (personal communication, 2026), “CPEC is seen as a sign of development, especially where infrastructure projects are visible.” However, this understanding is often surface-level, based on general discourse rather than direct economic benefit, reflecting aspirational expectations rather than lived transformation.

At the same time, a significant portion of youth express skepticism due to limited local inclusion in these projects. Many respondents believe that benefits are not equally distributed, especially in rural or underdeveloped districts. This perception reinforces the idea that while CPEC is large in scale, its grassroots impact remains uneven. Faisal Imam (personal communication, 2026) highlighted that “the benefits of CPEC are not reaching all areas equally, particularly rural communities,” reflecting concerns about uneven development. Studies highlight similar concerns where local communities feel marginalized despite being geographically central to development projects.

Youth narratives and personal stories further shape their understanding of CPEC. Those living near project sites often share experiences of increased activity and temporary employment, which fosters optimism. In contrast, youth from remote areas rely on second-hand information through social media or community discussions, leading to mixed or uncertain perceptions. This shows that experiential exposure plays a critical role in shaping attitudes, with direct beneficiaries more likely to hold positive views.

Another key aspect is the perception of exploitation versus opportunity. Some respondents raise concerns that external actors may benefit more than local populations, particularly in terms of resource utilization and demographic changes. This reflects a broader discourse in Balochistan, where development initiatives are often viewed through a lens of political and economic inequality. Such concerns highlight the need for transparency and local participation in development planning.

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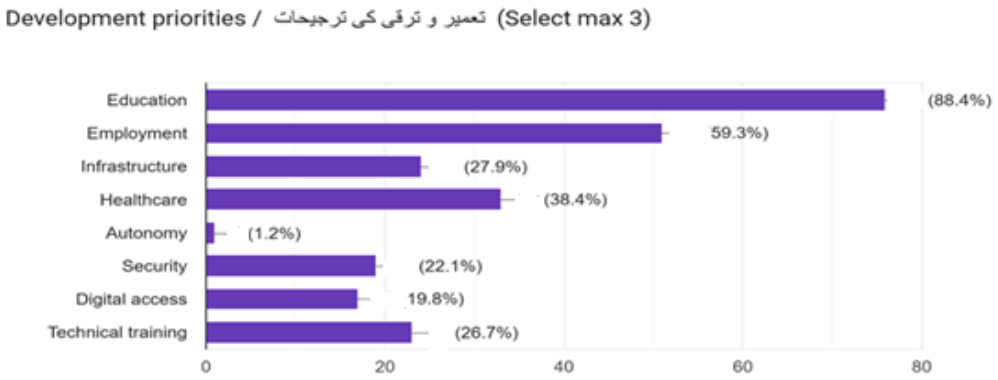


Figure 25: Perspectives on Key Priorities of Youth (n = 1096)

Interpretation: Education is dominant (88.4%), followed by employment (59.3%), healthcare (38.4%), infrastructure (27.9%), and technical training (26.7%).

Analysis: This is perhaps the clearest policy table in the file. Youth priorities are overwhelmingly developmental, not ideological. Education and jobs dominate everything else. Healthcare, infrastructure, and training follow. The message is straightforward: if policymakers want legitimacy, they must respond to these practical priorities.

Development Priorities: The Necessities of the Youth

Responses about the requirements for the province's growth extend beyond just infrastructure. The "Youth Profile" delineates three fundamental needs:

1. Human Capital Investment: Transitioning from just constructing schools to delivering "Quality Education" that corresponds with the global labor market.
2. Economic Inclusivity: Guaranteeing that natural resource riches and foreign investments, like as CPEC, implement "local-first" employment policies.
3. Political Agency: Transitioning from nominal young representation to genuine engagement in the policymaking processes of Quetta and Islamabad.

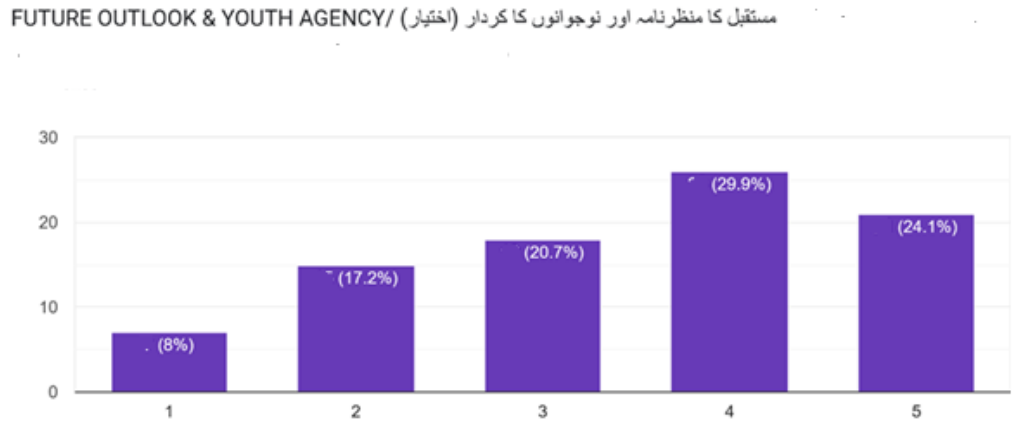


Figure 26: Future Outlook of Respondents (n = 1096)

Interpretation: Responses are moderately positive overall, though not overwhelmingly so.

Analysis: Despite strong grievances, youth have not lost hope. This is important: structural frustration has not yet turned into complete pessimism. There remains psychological room for policy intervention and confidence-building.

Table. No 1. Role of Social Media

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Aspect	Key Insight
Platforms	WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Influence	Awareness, political views
Risk	Misinformation

Interpretation: Social media shapes youth awareness and attitudes.
Analysis:

Social media has become the primary source of information for youth, especially in regions where traditional media access is limited. Platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook provide quick and accessible information, enabling youth to stay informed about national and global developments. Studies show that social media plays a crucial role in enhancing political awareness among youth in Pakistan, making them more engaged with governance and policy issues.
The findings of the study indicate that the majority of respondents primarily use Twitter and Facebook as their main social media platforms. These platforms were identified as the most common and widely used for information sharing, communication, and engagement. As one respondent, Ms. Saba Faizal, noted, "Actually, Facebook is the most common platform and widely used; however, for girls especially, Instagram is more popular." This response highlights a gender-based preference in social media usage patterns, where Instagram tends to be more favored among female users.



Figure 27. Preferred Information Sources among Stakeholders and Youth
However, the information consumed through social media is often selective and influenced by algorithms. These platforms tend to show content that aligns with users' existing beliefs, reinforcing specific viewpoints. Research highlights that algorithm-driven content can shape political and social perceptions by filtering information exposure. This creates echo chambers, where youth are exposed to limited perspectives.



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72.2%	61.9%	8 options	7 categories	100%
WhatsApp	**Social Media**	**Survey Q1**	**Survey Q2**	**All**
#1 Social Platform	*#1 News Source*	*Platforms Tracked*	*News Sources*	*Respondents Using Social Media*

Q1. Social Media Platforms Used Most Frequently

Platform	% of Respondents	Visual	Rank	Insight
WhatsApp	**72.2%**	▇▇▇▇▇▇	**#1**	Dominant
Facebook	**41.2%**	▇▇▇	**#2**	High
YouTube	**40.2%**	▇▇▇	**#3**	High
Instagram	**36.1%**	▇▇▇	#4	Moderate
TikTok	**23.7%**	▇▇	#5	Moderate
Twitter / X	**18.6%**	▇▇	#6	Lower
Other	**8.2%**	▇	#7	Low
I do not use social media	**0.0%**	—	#8	Zero

Q2. Primary Sources for News & Information

Source	Share (%)	Visual	Rank	Category
Social Media	**61.9%**	▇▇▇▇▇▇	**#1**	Digital
Religious Institutions / Websites	**14.4%**	▇	**#2**	Community
Newspapers / Magazines	**9.3%**	▇	**#3**	Print
Instant Messaging Apps	**7.2%**	▇	#4	Messaging
Television	**4.1%**	▇	#5	Broadcast
Family and Friends	**2.1%**	▇	#6	Social
Radio / Broadcasting	**1.0%**	▇	#7	Broadcast

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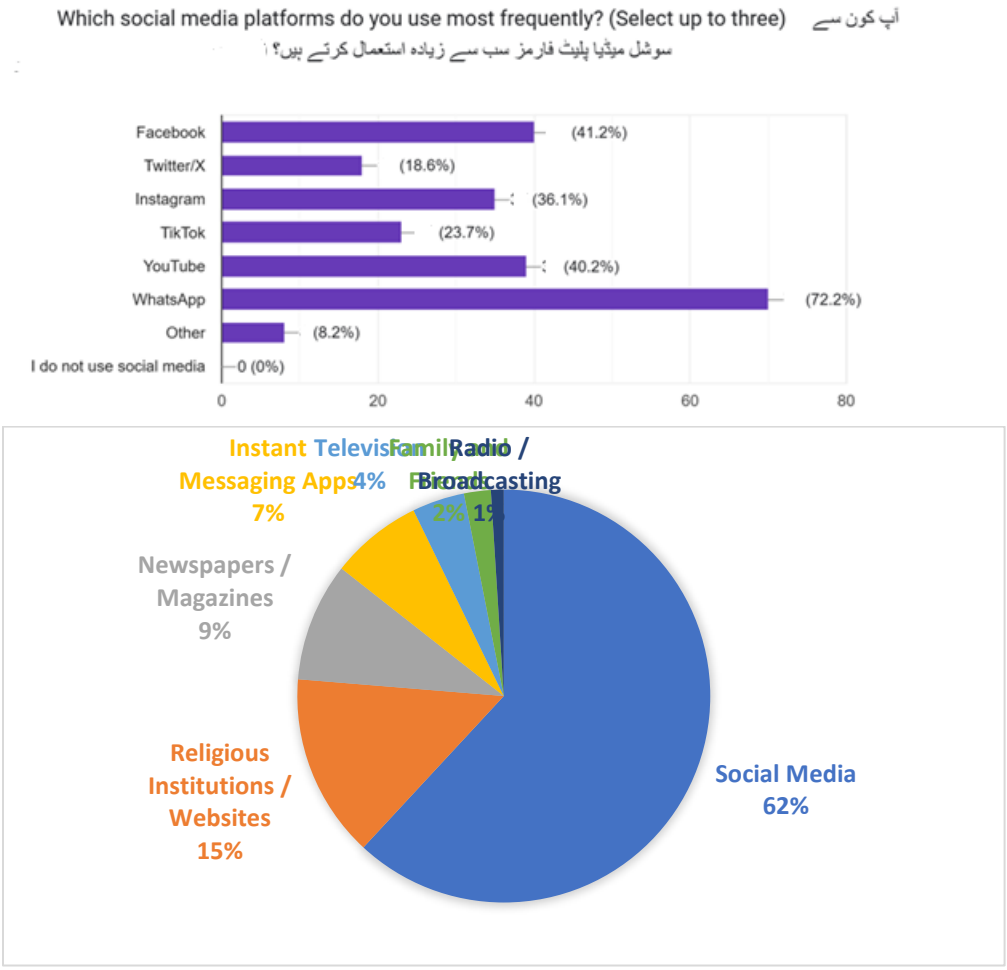


Figure 28. Comparative Analysis of Leading Social Media Platforms by Usage

Another critical issue is the spread of misinformation. Social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and YouTube, are known for rapid dissemination of unverified information. This can distort understanding of complex issues such as CPEC, governance, and foreign relations. Misinformation often spreads faster than factual content, influencing youth perceptions in ways that may not reflect reality.

Social media also contributes to the formation of political and geopolitical narratives. Youth perceptions about China, the United States, and India are often shaped through online discussions, videos, and shared content. In the context of CPEC, media narratives can either promote optimism about development or reinforce fears of exploitation and marginalization.

The findings show that Facebook is the most widely used social media platform among respondents, followed by Twitter and Instagram. This indicates that Facebook continues to dominate as a primary source of communication and information sharing among youth. Twitter is also significantly used, particularly for news, political discussions, and public discourse, while Instagram is comparatively more popular among younger users, especially female respondents.

As highlighted by Ali Abbas (personal communication, 2026), social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, are widely used for staying informed and connected. Similarly, Naseem

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Sabzal (personal communication, 2026) noted that platform preferences vary depending on user interests, with Instagram being more popular for visual content and social interaction. Overall, the data reflects a diversified but highly engaged social media landscape among youth.

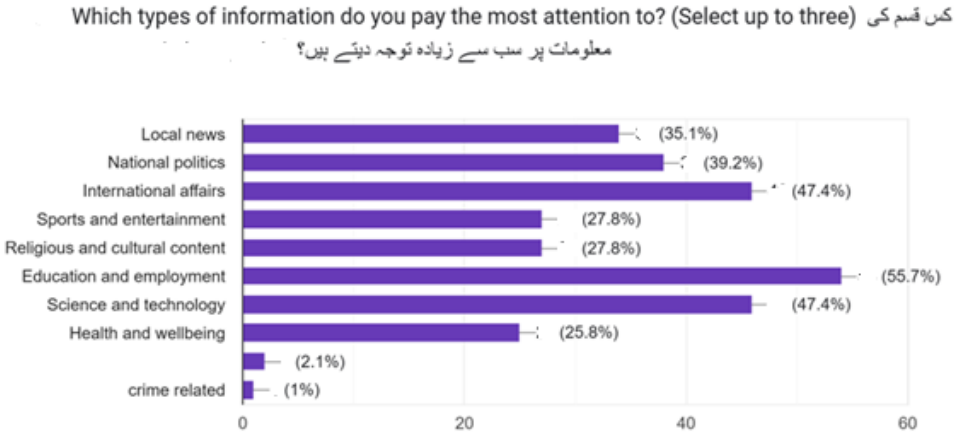


Figure 29. Distribution of User Interest by Information Category

Despite these challenges, social media remains a powerful tool for engagement and awareness. It provides a platform for youth voices, enabling them to express opinions and participate in discussions. If used effectively, it can promote informed decision-making and civic engagement. However, there is a need for digital literacy initiatives to help youth critically evaluate information and reduce the negative impact of misinformation.

Table. No 2 Perceptions of China, US, and India

Actor	Perception
China	Mixed
USA	Mixed
India	Negative

Interpretation: Youth perceptions reflect geopolitical narratives.

Analysis:

The mixed perception of China among youth reflects a balance between optimism and concern. On one hand, China is viewed as a key development partner through initiatives like CPEC, which promises infrastructure and economic growth. On the other hand, skepticism arises due to limited local participation and unequal benefit distribution. As highlighted by a respondent, Iram Baloch (personal communication, 2026), “China is seen as a development partner, but the benefits are not equally reaching local communities.” Research indicates that attitudes toward CPEC are shaped by both positive expectations and perceived marginalization of local communities.

Similarly, youth perceptions of the United States remain mixed due to its inconsistent engagement in the region. While some view the US as a global power offering educational and economic opportunities, others associate it with political instability and selective involvement in regional affairs. Ajmal Kakar (personal communication, 2026) noted that “the US provides opportunities, but its policies in the region are often seen as inconsistent,” reflecting a dual perception shaped by broader geopolitical narratives and historical interactions.

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In contrast, perceptions of India are largely negative, shaped by long-standing political tensions and security concerns. Youth tend to associate India with regional instability and adversarial policies toward Pakistan. These perceptions are reinforced through national discourse, media narratives, and geopolitical conflicts, which frame India as a strategic threat rather than a cooperative partner.

The differences in perceptions of these actors highlight the role of geopolitical narratives and local experiences. While China and the US are evaluated through the lens of economic and developmental engagement, India is primarily viewed through a security perspective. This suggests that youth perceptions are not uniform but are shaped by the nature of each country's interaction with Pakistan and Balochistan.

Overall, these perceptions demonstrate that youth in Balochistan are highly aware of global dynamics but interpret them through local realities. Mixed views on China and the US indicate cautious engagement, while negative perceptions of India reflect entrenched geopolitical tensions. These attitudes emphasize the need for inclusive development and transparent policies to address concerns and strengthen positive international engagement.

8. Discussion

8.1. Interpretation of Findings: Patterns and Key Insights

The findings reveal a consistent pattern of socio-economic deprivation among youth in Balochistan, particularly in education, employment, and access to services. A majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with employment opportunities, indicating structural economic constraints. Similarly, perceptions of inadequate educational quality and limited health services highlight systemic developmental gaps. These patterns suggest that youth challenges are deeply embedded in institutional weaknesses and uneven resource distribution. The data also reflects a clear prioritization of education and employment, reinforcing the developmental orientation of youth aspirations rather than ideological or political radicalization.

Another key insight emerging from the findings is the disconnect between youth expectations and governance outcomes. Respondents reported low levels of trust in political and administrative institutions, indicating dissatisfaction with service delivery and representation. This lack of trust is not merely political but reflects everyday experiences with ineffective governance. Moreover, the perception that Balochistan youth do not receive equal opportunities compared to other provinces strengthens the sense of relative deprivation. These findings align with broader research that identifies inequality and governance deficits as critical determinants of youth dissatisfaction.

The findings also highlight the growing awareness of youth regarding national and global issues. High levels of engagement with digital platforms and social media indicate that youth are informed and connected. This exposure shapes their perceptions of governance, development, and geopolitical dynamics. Youth are not isolated; rather, they actively compare their conditions with national and global standards. This awareness further intensifies dissatisfaction when local realities fail to meet expectations, reinforcing the demand for improved governance and inclusive development.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that youth aspirations are overwhelmingly constructive. The majority prioritize higher education, employment, and skill development, reflecting a desire for socio-economic mobility. This counters narratives that portray youth as inherently prone to instability. Instead, the data suggests that youth are motivated by opportunities and development. However, the gap between aspirations and available opportunities creates frustration, which can have broader social and political implications if not addressed effectively.

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Overall, the findings indicate that youth perceptions are shaped by a combination of socio-economic realities, governance experiences, and exposure to broader narratives. The dominant pattern is one of unmet expectations rather than rejection of the system. Youth continue to show interest in participation and development, but their trust in institutions is conditional. This underscores the need for policies that address structural inequalities and align governance outcomes with youth aspirations to ensure sustainable development and stability.

8.2. **Link Youth Identity, Political Attitudes, and Development Needs**

The findings reveal that youth identity in Balochistan is complex and layered, combining strong ethnic attachment with a moderate sense of national belonging. Many respondents expressed pride in their identity while simultaneously highlighting concerns about recognition and inclusion. This dual identity structure reflects the socio-cultural diversity of the province and the historical context of marginalization. Identity, therefore, is not merely a cultural attribute but a political and developmental factor influencing how youth perceive their role in society.

Political attitudes among youth are closely linked to their experiences of development and opportunity. Limited access to education, employment, and public services shapes a critical perspective toward governance and state institutions. Youth who perceive inequality and exclusion are more likely to express dissatisfaction and reduced trust in the system. This relationship highlights that political attitudes are not formed in isolation but are deeply connected to material conditions and lived experiences. Research also suggests that youth political behavior is shaped by social environments and institutional interactions.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that development needs play a central role in shaping identity and political engagement. Youth prioritize education, employment, and infrastructure as key areas for improvement. When these needs are unmet, identity becomes more localized, and perceptions of national inclusion weaken. Conversely, improved development outcomes can strengthen national integration and positive political attitudes. This demonstrates that development policies have direct implications for social cohesion and identity formation.

The role of socialization agents such as family, peers, and media is also evident in shaping youth identity and attitudes. Increased exposure to digital media has expanded the awareness of youth, allowing them to engage with broader narratives of development and governance. This exposure influences their expectations and perceptions, often leading to critical assessments of local conditions. As a result, youth identity is dynamic and continuously shaped by both local experiences and global influences.

In conclusion, the link between identity, political attitudes, and development needs is central to understanding youth perspectives in Balochistan. Identity is both a source of belonging and a lens through which development and governance are evaluated. Addressing youth development needs can strengthen positive political engagement and foster a more inclusive sense of national identity, contributing to long-term stability and cohesion.

8.3. **Relationship between Youth Marginalization and Perceptions of Stability**

The findings clearly establish a strong relationship between youth marginalization and perceptions of stability in Balochistan. A significant proportion of respondents associated unemployment, lack of opportunities, and socio-economic deprivation with instability. This indicates that youth perceive instability not as an isolated phenomenon but as a consequence of structural inequalities. Economic exclusion, in particular, emerges as a key factor influencing perceptions of insecurity and social unrest.

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Marginalization also affects psychological and social dimensions of youth experience. Feelings of exclusion from development processes and governance structures lead to frustration and disillusionment. This emotional response can weaken social cohesion and reduce trust in institutions. Studies have shown that perceived marginalization negatively impacts youth engagement and can increase vulnerability to instability. The findings of this study reinforce this relationship, highlighting the importance of addressing both material and psychological aspects of marginalization.

Another important aspect is the perceived link between unemployment and extremism. Many respondents indicated that lack of economic opportunities increases the likelihood of youth involvement in negative or destabilizing activities. This reflects an awareness among youth of the broader consequences of economic deprivation. It also suggests that employment generation is not only an economic priority but also a security imperative.

Despite these challenges, the findings also reveal a preference for peaceful conflict resolution. A majority of respondents supported dialogue over the use of force in addressing conflicts. This indicates that youth are not inherently inclined toward instability but rather seek constructive solutions. However, without addressing the underlying causes of marginalization, these positive attitudes may not translate into sustainable outcomes.

In summary, marginalization is a critical factor shaping youth perceptions of stability in Balochistan. Addressing socio-economic inequalities, improving access to opportunities, and enhancing inclusion in governance processes are essential for reducing instability. By tackling the root causes of marginalization, policymakers can strengthen social cohesion and promote a more stable and inclusive environment.

8.4. Implications for Governance, Development, and Regional Security

The findings have significant implications for governance in Balochistan. Low levels of trust in institutions and perceptions of ineffective governance highlight the need for reforms in public service delivery and accountability. Youth expect transparent, responsive, and inclusive governance systems that address their needs. Strengthening institutional performance is therefore essential for rebuilding trust and enhancing legitimacy.

From a development perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of prioritizing education, employment, and skill development. These areas are consistently identified as key youth concerns. Investment in human capital can not only improve individual outcomes but also contribute to broader economic growth. Research on youth empowerment highlights the role of inclusive development strategies in promoting peace and stability.

The findings also have implications for regional security. The strong association between economic marginalization and instability suggests that development and security are closely interconnected. Addressing socio-economic grievances can reduce the risk of conflict and enhance stability. Conversely, failure to address these issues may exacerbate tensions and undermine security efforts.

Furthermore, the role of youth as potential agents of peacebuilding is a critical insight. The majority of respondents believe that youth can contribute positively to conflict resolution and community development. This highlights the importance of involving youth in decision-making processes and development initiatives. Empowering youth can transform them from passive recipients of policy to active contributors to stability.

In conclusion, effective governance, inclusive development, and youth empowerment are essential for achieving long-term stability in Balochistan. Policymakers must adopt a holistic approach that

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integrates economic, social, and political dimensions of development. By aligning policies with youth aspirations and addressing structural challenges, it is possible to create a more inclusive, stable, and prosperous future for the region.

9. Policy Recommendations

The preceding analysis of findings highlights that youth in Balochistan face multidimensional challenges rooted in socio-economic deprivation, limited opportunities, weak governance, and issues of identity and inclusion. At the same time, the data reveals strong aspirations for education, employment, and constructive engagement, indicating that youth possess significant potential to contribute positively to development and stability. The gap between these aspirations and existing structural constraints underscores the need for targeted, inclusive, and evidence-based policy interventions. Therefore, the following policy recommendations are proposed to address these challenges, enhance youth empowerment, and promote sustainable development and peace in Balochistan:

9.1. Enhancing Local Participation in CPEC

Local youth particularly Baloch must be actively involved in CPEC planning and implementation to ensure equitable benefits. Inclusion can reduce feelings of marginalization and build trust in development initiatives. Engaging communities through consultations and employment opportunities will strengthen ownership, improve project outcomes, and ensure that development is inclusive, sustainable, and aligned with local needs and expectations.

9.2. Promoting Youth Employment Opportunities

Creating targeted employment programs linked to local industries and CPEC projects is essential. Skill development initiatives and vocational training should align with market demands. This approach will reduce unemployment, enhance economic participation, and empower youth to contribute to regional development while minimizing socio-economic frustrations and instability.

9.3. Improving Education Quality and Relevance

Education systems should be reformed to meet modern economic and technological needs. Improving curriculum quality, teacher training, and infrastructure is vital. Emphasis on technical and professional skills will prepare youth for employment opportunities and ensure long-term socio-economic development in Balochistan.

9.4. Strengthening Digital Literacy

Digital literacy programs are necessary to help youth critically assess information on social media. This will reduce the spread of misinformation and enable informed decision-making. Educated digital engagement can positively influence perceptions about governance, development, and geopolitical issues.

9.5. Institutionalizing Youth Participation

Establishing formal platforms such as youth councils can ensure representation in policymaking. Youth inclusion enhances trust in governance and encourages active civic engagement. It also allows policymakers to better understand and address youth concerns.

9.6. Ensuring Transparent Communication on CPEC

Providing clear and consistent information about CPEC projects can reduce uncertainty and skepticism. Transparency will improve public trust and ensure that youth understand the actual benefits and challenges of development initiatives.

9.7. Equitable Distribution of Development Benefits

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Development policies must ensure fair distribution of resources across regions. Addressing regional disparities will reduce inequality and strengthen social cohesion, promoting balanced growth.

9.8. Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Programs that encourage inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation are essential. Strengthening national integration while respecting cultural diversity will enhance unity and reduce tensions among youth.

9.9. Addressing Security Concerns through Inclusion

Community-based security approaches should be adopted to build trust. Involving youth in peacebuilding initiatives can reduce conflict and enhance stability.

9.10. Managing External Narratives and Influence

Policies should address external influences and narratives shaping youth perceptions. Promoting accurate information and balanced perspectives will protect local interests and improve understanding of international relations.

9.11. District-Specific Development Planning

Development strategies should be tailored to district-level socio-economic realities instead of adopting a uniform provincial approach. Each district in Balochistan has unique challenges related to infrastructure, health, and economic opportunities. Localized planning, combined with transparent fund allocation and monitoring, can reduce regional disparities and improve service delivery, ensuring that marginalized and remote areas benefit equally from development initiatives.

9.12. Strengthening Youth Centers and Community Spaces

Establishing youth centers at district and tehsil levels can provide safe and constructive spaces for engagement. These centers should offer sports, cultural, and skill-building activities, promoting leadership and social cohesion. Such initiatives help reduce alienation and create opportunities for youth to channel their energy positively, contributing to peacebuilding and community development.

9.13. Promoting Geopolitical Awareness and Critical Thinking

There is a need to enhance youth understanding of regional and global dynamics through education and media literacy programs. Encouraging critical thinking will help youth distinguish between misinformation and factual narratives, particularly regarding CPEC and foreign actors. This will lead to more informed opinions and reduce the influence of biased or polarized narratives shaping youth perceptions.

9.14. Prioritize Local Employment

Introduce mandatory 80 percent quotas for Baloch youth in CPEC and other projects to ensure direct economic benefits and reduce unemployment.

10. Recommendations for China:

10.1. Guarantee Local Employment for Baloch Youth

China should ensure that a significant share of jobs in CPEC projects is reserved for local Baloch youth. Skill training programs linked to project needs can enhance employability and ensure that economic benefits directly reach local communities.

10.2. Strengthen Community Participation Mechanisms

China must actively engage local communities in planning and implementation. Regular consultations with Baloch stakeholders will improve trust and reduce perceptions of exclusion.

10.3. Invest in Social Sector Development

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Beyond infrastructure, China should invest in education, health, and local welfare projects in Balochistan. This will ensure inclusive development and improve quality of life for local populations.

10.4. Ensure Transparent and Equitable Benefit Sharing

Clear mechanisms should be developed to distribute economic gains fairly among local communities. Transparency in contracts and benefits can address concerns about exploitation and marginalization.

10.5. Promote Education Exchange Programs

China can offer scholarships, technical training, and exchange programs specifically for Baloch youth. This will build human capital and strengthen positive perceptions of China among local communities.

10.6. Improve Local Communication Strategies

China should establish local information centers to directly communicate project goals, benefits, and progress. This will counter misinformation and build transparency in Baloch communities.

10.7. **Support Community Development Projects**

China should fund small-scale community projects such as water supply, schools, and healthcare centers. These visible and immediate benefits can improve trust and demonstrate commitment to local welfare beyond large infrastructure projects

11. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to give voice to the youth of Baluchistan through the analysis of their identity, socio-economic realities, views on governance, and attitude on geopolitics in the context of regional development and strategic value. Being the largest but the least developed province of Pakistan, Balochistan offers an unusual mix of both geographic significance and resources potential, as well as socio-political complexity. In this setting, young individuals become a key player whose expectations, complaints, and views will play a major role in the future development of this territory. Knowing what they go through is not just a social requirement but a strategic requirement as well.

The results highlight the fact that the youth in Balochistan continue to struggle with structural factors, especially those that affect education, employment, and governance. Lack of access to high standards of education, high unemployment levels, and unequal distribution of developmental resources still determine how the youth perceive marginalization and lack of care by the institutions. Such issues are also influenced by inequalities in the region among districts which leads to differences in the provision of infrastructure, government services and economic opportunities. These conditions have some consequences regarding identity formation, the trust in institutions, and civic engagement among the youth. To solve these intersecting problems, both provincial and national governments have to be committed and pay more policy attention in the long term.

Simultaneously, it also emphasized the positive prospects of the youth as a source of development and social change. Although they are faced with numerous limitations, a number of youths show their educational, employment, and effective inclusion in the governance processes. Their views regarding development priorities are focused on the necessity to have better infrastructure, more working places, and better educational establishments. Also, the attitudes of the youth towards the international actors and geopolitical situation in the region can be discussed as the manifestation of the increased awareness of the global factors on the local development. These lessons support

the need to involve the youth not only as the beneficiaries of development initiatives but also as stakeholders whose opinions will help in shaping more relevant policies.

Finally, the future viability and success of Balochistan will be achieved by the capacity of policy makers, development professionals and the leaders of the community to appreciate the youth as a strategic resource and not as a potential burden. Demographic pressures can be converted into sustainable growth opportunities through investments in education, creation of employment, inclusive governance and equity in the region. Besides, by incorporating the youth into the decision-making process, trust can be built, and the integrity of the nation will be enhanced, and chances of alienation or instability will be minimized. By prioritizing the youth in policy formulation and development systems, Balochistan will be on the road to a more inclusive, resilient and prosperous future, whereby the youth population of Balochistan will be a source of future development as opposed to a mirror of wasted potential.

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