

Youth Vulnerabilities to Radical Ideologies and Deradicalization in Quetta

Authors

Najeeba Syed¹ & Dilawar Khan²

Abstract

The radicalization of youth presents a pressing global concern, impacting societal cohesion and safety. Understanding the nuanced factors driving this phenomenon is paramount for effective counteraction. Employing a mixed-method approach, this study delves into the intricate dynamics of youth radicalization in Quetta. Existing research often offers generalized insights into youth radicalization in Pakistan, lacking regional specificity. Acknowledging the diverse nature of radicalization, this study explores the particular vulnerabilities linked to youth radicalization. Through thorough data collection and analysis, the research illuminates the underlying drivers of radicalization among young individuals. Results underscore the pivotal role of democratic deficits, wherein limited avenues for self-expression and civic engagement serve as significant catalysts. The study furnishes actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to formulate targeted interventions. It advocates for a multifaceted strategy, encompassing preventive programs, critical thinking promotion, and democratic values cultivation. Social welfare initiatives, parental guidance, and institutional backing are pivotal in bridging the disconnect between youth and societal structures. Additionally, the study underscores the significance of initiatives such as youth facilitation centers, dedicated local government seats, student union restoration, and support mechanisms like interest-free loans and scholarships for young entrepreneurs. These recommendations aspire to comprehensively address the multifaceted challenges posed by youth radicalization, fostering a more inclusive and resilient society.

Keywords: Youth, Engagement, Vulnerability, Identity, Radicalization

Introduction

The radicalization of youth is a global concern (Adam-Troian et al., 2021). It is of colossal importance to generate a constructive public discourse on radicalization and its prevention (Benevento, 2021). Because of the young people's susceptibility to extremist propaganda and recruitment, which can have severe societal consequences, it is important to aware the people about it(Orsini, 2020). Socio-economic marginalization is a key driver, making young people vulnerable to extremist ideologies (Nawaz, 2023). Political grievances, religious beliefs, and

¹ MPhil Scholar, Researcher and Development Practitioner

² Social Entrepreneurship, Researcher and Development Practitioner

online propaganda also contribute to radicalization. Extremist groups exploit social media to spread their message, recruit members, and promote violence, heightening concerns about online radicalization (Basit, 2021). The consequences are severe, including threats to national security and long-term impacts on youth prospects. Addressing youth radicalization requires a multifaceted approach, tackling root causes such as discrimination and inequality, promoting education and social inclusion, and countering extremist propaganda. However, solutions must be tailored to specific regional vulnerabilities (Ramasamy, 2021).

The 20th and 21st centuries can be called the centuries of conflict and violence. There were major but violent happenings in the 20th century including the world wars followed by the Cold War era. The onset of the 21st century marked the advent of terrorism, a new kind of war and violence. Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and other countries were shaken by terrorism and extremism. After the 9/11 event, radicalization among youth increased exponentially, particularly in western countries. Similarly, in the Muslim world, because of the United States and its allies' military interventions in different Muslim countries in response to terrorism gave birth to radicalization among the young people in these countries. Not just these countries that were affected by the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), but other countries also saw an increase in radical attitudes among their youths. Apart from these countries, several Western and European countries experienced radicalization in their youths. For instance, Germany and France were the most affected countries in this regard. Moreover, radicalization spread over other several countries such as Denmark and Holland (interview with Dr. Atta Ullah Khan, 2024).

Youth are likely to fall to radicalization and radicalism for violence around the world (Muxel, 2020). Anna Naterstad Harpviken (2019) in his research analyzed twenty-five peer-reviewed empirical studies to investigate the deep root causes of young peoples' vulnerabilities to endorse radical ideologies or engage in violence in Western countries. He has elaborated that these young people are inclined towards radical ideologies due to six main factors: mental illness, traumatic experiences, early socialization, perceived discrimination, social capital and delinquency. He argues that these factors are the root causes that create a conducive environment for Western youth to indulge themselves in extremism and adopt radical views and ideologies. The author focuses on adolescence. He points out that this age is the period of identity and ideology formation (Harpviken, 2019). All these factors are related to psychology. As there exist huge cultural, economic, political, and social differences between Western countries and Pakistan, radical tendencies of youth also vary in both societies. This research shows, as mentioned in the findings section, that the youth in Quetta are prone to radicalization due to a multitude of factors that are different from those mentioned above.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States and the subsequent events were turning points for Pakistan. Although, before that, Pakistan was a center for radical ideologies due to the Afghan Jihad. When the Soviet Union forces entered Afghanistan, a neighboring country on Pakistan's western border, in 1979, Pakistan was directly affected by what was happening there. The former tribal areas of Pakistan, particularly Baluchistan and Quetta as boarding areas have been significantly impacted by the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan became a destination for refugees following the US invasion in 2001. Among them were individuals with radical and extremist views. This proximity facilitated their influence on local youth, advocating for jihad against Western forces in Afghanistan. Despite subsequent political changes, radicalization persists,

prompting this research to investigate understanding the process and proposing viable solutions.

This study focuses on Quetta, where socio-economic challenges, political instability, and sectarian violence intensify youth radicalization. The city's strategic location near Afghanistan and Iran contributes to its economic significance, primarily driven by agriculture, livestock, and mining. Despite a substantial youth population, Quetta faces socio-economic hurdles, including poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure. Political instability and conflict, compounded by terrorist attacks and sectarian violence, further destabilize the region. The Hazara community, in particular, has suffered from sectarian violence (NCHR, 2018). This study aims to examine vulnerabilities to youth radicalization in Quetta, emphasizing the role of democratic values in countering radicalization. The comprehensive literature review and analysis of the primary data proposes counter-radicalization strategies.

Existing literature primarily focuses on national-level youth radicalization, overlooking regional perspectives and the role of democratic values, particularly in Quetta. This research addresses this gap by examining youth vulnerabilities in District Quetta, shedding light on local dynamics and proposing practical engagement strategies to instill democratic values and empower youth against radicalization. Current studies fail to capture the unique challenges faced by young individuals in Quetta, hindering a comprehensive understanding of evolving trends and their societal implications. The study aims to provide context-specific insights and policy recommendations to effectively prevent and address youth radicalization. Unlike existing literature, which lacks tailored methodologies, this research offers targeted strategies grounded in democratic principles, promoting youth involvement and resilience against extremist ideologies.

The findings of this study will help the Pakistani government's counter-terrorism and violent extremism agency to formulate a targeted strategy to combat radicalization. Readers will gain a better grasp of the issue and its detrimental effects on society over the long run. Due to the lack of a thorough and empirical study on the radicalization of Quetta's young, I consider this research to be of enormous relevance. Plus, people of many different religions and ethnicities call Quetta home. This research was my way of contributing my knowledge and filling a need. I saw a gap in scholarly research, and this paper filled it. Thus far, there has been a dearth of studies addressing this particular topic in this particular field. The purpose of this study is to lay the groundwork for future research on the mentioned topic.

This study will facilitate the formulation of a targeted policy on radicalization for the decision-makers and the counter-terrorism and violent extremism department in Pakistan. It will augment the comprehension of the readers regarding the matter and its enduring adverse consequences on society. For me, conducting a detailed and empirical study on young people's radicalization of Quetta is of immense significance, as no such research has been conducted thus far. Furthermore, Quetta is a cosmopolitan city with a diverse population representing various religious beliefs and sects. In order to fill this vacuum, I undertook this research to give my experience. This study addresses the identified deficiency in academic research. Therefore, there has been no investigation undertaken on this particular topic in this particular region. This research aims to establish a foundation for future investigations on the aforementioned topic for researchers.

The Questions of Research

- What does vulnerability mean to you?

- Why are young people vulnerable to violent extremism/radicalization?
- What are the indicators/elements of vulnerability to you?
- How do you see violent extremism and radicalization?
- Why does violent extremism/radicalization attract youth? Do you think violent extremism is justified? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- What do mean constructive opportunities to you?
- What are the available opportunities for youth engagement,? Or if none or less why?
- Who has to generate opportunities and what is the youth's role in it?
- How opportunities for youth can be increased politically, economically and socially?
- How do you perceive democracy?
- Where do you observe/practice democratic values in daily life If yes how, if not why not?
- Do you think democratic values and constructive opportunities can de-radicalize youth? If yes, how? If not, why not? Then what?
- What specific actions/programs/values do you suggest to de-radicalize youth as a counter-narrative?

Hypothesis

The lack of democratic values among the youth of Quetta increases vulnerability towards radical ideologies and extremism values, while the counter-narrative emerges if youth are constructively engaged in prevailing democratic processes.

Significance of the Study

This research examines the vulnerabilities of youth in Quetta youth to radicalization. It also sheds light on complex dynamics encompassing social, economic, and ideological factors. It empowers stakeholders to develop targeted interventions and emphasizes promoting democratic values to effectively counter radicalization and extremism values. The study provides recommendations to enhance approaches. Ultimately, it aims to create a safer, inclusive environment, nurturing youth participation in democratic processes and fostering societal resilience. Through these efforts, the research seeks to pave the way for a brighter future in Quetta.

Limitations

While this research study undoubtedly enriches scholarly understanding, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations for a more intricate interpretation. One such limitation lies in its specific focus on Quetta, which may potentially confine the applicability of its findings. Given the multifaceted nature of radicalization, influenced by socio-economic, cultural, political, and religious factors, the transferability of results beyond this locale may be compromised. Moreover, the accuracy and reliability of data sourced from Quetta's youth may be susceptible to biases, including social desirability, thus undermining the generalizability of recommendations. Resource constraints, encompassing temporal and financial limitations, have also curtailed the study's scope, hindering a more thorough examination of radicalization determinants. Recognizing these limitations is crucial for providing a more sophisticated understanding of the findings, discerning potential biases, and emphasizing the need for further longitudinal investigation into the sustained efficacy of proposed strategies.

Literature Review

Pakistan's demographic landscape has undergone significant changes, characterized by an expanding youth population. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2020) reports

that over 60% of Pakistan's population is under 30. However, realizing this potential necessitates addressing the manifold challenges associated with this demographic transition. The expanding youth cohort in Pakistan has complex challenges, particularly in the education, employment, and security domains (Imtiaz et al., 2020). The education sector grapples with accommodating the surging demand, resulting in limited access and completion rates. Employment prospects, particularly formal ones, remain scant, intensifying high rates of unemployment and underemployment, especially among marginalized segments of society (Ullah et al., 2023). Concurrently, Pakistan contends with a proliferation of terrorist activities, driven by religious extremism and sectarian strife (Ajmal, 2023). Despite global recognition of these challenges, youth political engagement remains submissive, impeding the country's democratic progression (Waris et al., 2023). Effectively tackling these issues demands holistic strategies aimed at strengthening the education system, fostering sustainable employment avenues, enhancing security measures, and promoting greater youth participation in the political sphere.

The burgeoning youth population in Pakistan presents complex challenges intertwined with terrorism issues (Shah & Khan, 2023). Economic disparities and social exclusion contribute to disenchantment among young individuals, increasing susceptibility to radicalization and extremist ideologies (Ali & Ullah, 2019). Regional economic disparities impair this vulnerability, fueling violent extremism nationwide. Inadequate access to quality education, particularly in certain regions, exposes many youths to extremist propaganda, exploited by extremist groups for recruitment purposes (Naseer & Shaheen, 2023). Political marginalization further compounds the issue, as disenfranchised youth turn to extremist groups for avenues of change (Basit, 2021).

Muhammad Makki & Syed Ali Akash (2023) suggest that violent extremism and radicalization in Pakistan are driven by economic, political, and governance factors, leading to alienation and deepening grievances. It also highlights the link between regional inequalities and violent extremism, as seen in the cases of FATA and South Punjab. The analysis highlights disparities in education and employment opportunities, worsening youth vulnerability to radical ideologies. Addressing radicalization at the provincial level, such as in Quetta-Baluchistan, is crucial given the varying scales of terrorism across provinces.

Khan, Qasim, Khan, and Uzair (2023) emphasize the need for Pakistan's government to consider the increasing youth population in formulating counter-radicalization policies. He attributes the rise in youth radicalization to the prioritization of religious identity over national identity, rendering them susceptible to radical organizations. Haque proposes solutions including promoting religious and sectarian tolerance, revising educational curricula, and reinstating student unions to combat youth radicalization effectively.

Evangelia Georgaki (2022) argues that the vulnerability of low-income youth to radicalization highlights the need for establishing schools tailored to this demographic in Pakistan. Non-governmental organizations, educational leaders, and private institutions should collaborate to provide educational opportunities for low-income students, especially in regions where government efforts fall short. According to Mohammed, Nesma Hewidy, and Merle (2024), promoting arts and music through expanded access to art councils, particularly in smaller cities, can offer creative outlets and foster cultural expression among youth. Developing interaction between diverse nationalities and religious groups is essential for promoting social cohesion and countering radicalization.

Macnair Logan (2020) examines youth radicalization in Afghanistan, attributing it to the country's conflict, insecurity, poverty, and unemployment. Extremist groups exploit the grievances of young Afghans, offering them a sense of identity and belonging. Social media plays a significant role in disseminating extremist narratives tailored to youth concerns.

Engy Abdelkader (2019) explores the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, linking it to the rise of extremist groups exploiting the persecution of the Rohingya minority. Identity politics, economic disparity, and social exclusion drive extremist ideologies among the Rohingya, with groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army capitalizing on their sense of victimization.

Sawyer Bannister (2023) explains that radicalization and violent extremism in Jordan are influenced by Salafist Jihadism, a school of thought within the Sunni Salafi movement, and the country's proximity to regional conflicts. Factors like sectarianism, oppression, corruption, and abuses of power have pushed those towards violent extremism. As of 2015, there were 6,000-7,000 jihadi sympathizers in Jordan, mainly concentrated in "hotbeds of radicalization." The rise of social media has led to a "culture of extremism" characterized by radical ideologies and behavior.

The coauthored work of Al-Badayneh, Al-Tarawneh, A. Lamchichi, and M. Ellamey (2023) reveals a significant impact of religion, religious devotion, observance, and compliance on violent extremism among young Arab students. Sunni Muslims scored higher on the scale of violent extremism, followed by Shiite Muslims and Christians. Females were found to be significantly higher on the violent extremist scale. The study suggests that religion plays a crucial role in developing violent extremist beliefs and actions, providing a source of collective identity and solidarity. It calls for the inclusion of religion in youth's education and recruitment to prevent the spread of terrorism. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between religion and violent extremism among young Arab students. Lukasz Zamecki (2018) investigates youth radicalization in Hong Kong, linking it to relative deprivation. His study finds that relative deprivation fuels radicalization among Hong Kong's youth, driven by feelings of injustice and inequality in society.

Basit (2021) notes the rise of educated radicals as a significant challenge in Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. These individuals possess advanced planning skills and use technology to forge transnational terrorist networks. They propagate narratives like Ghazwa-i-Hind and the revival of the Islamic Caliphate, exploiting grievances in the Muslim world. Basit suggests strategies such as vigilant monitoring of digital spaces, promoting critical thinking among students, and collaborating with religious scholars to develop counter-radicalization narratives. However, Basit's analysis overlooks regional disparities in radicalization, notably in Baluchistan particularly in Quetta where terrorist activities are more pronounced.

The literature predominantly focuses on religious extremism but overlooks ethno-national terrorist organizations, such as those in Baluchistan, contributing to youth radicalization. Asadullah Raisani (2022) explores youth radicalization in Quetta-Baluchistan, attributing it to factors like government project disparities, misrepresented education, limited access to education and employment, and poverty. Raisani highlights digital platforms' role in insurgent recruitment, alongside political ineptitude and administrative inefficiency. He suggests promoting employment, building trust between security forces and locals, revising the national curriculum, and involving Baloch perspectives in policymaking. Despite offering valuable insights, Raisani's work lacks empirical research, indicating the need for further

scholarly investigation into youth radicalization complexities and de-radicalization avenues. This study seeks to contribute to the literature by examining youth radicalization vulnerabilities in Quetta and avenues for de-radicalization.

There have been efforts made by the Government of Pakistan and civil society to engage young people in more constructive and positive interventions to channel their potential for an inclusive and peaceful society. In the meantime, a few significant operations have also taken place to eliminate the potential threats to the peace of society.

The National Action Plan (NAP) for countering terrorism and extremism initiated in December 2014, aimed to combat terrorism comprehensively in Pakistan. It led to a notable decrease in terrorist attacks, the dismantling of extremist networks, and the curbing of hate speech. Emphasizing national unity, NAP significantly promoted peace and stability. "Rad ul Fasad," an operation launched in February 2017 as part of NAP, focuses on targeted military operations to eliminate terrorists and restore security, demonstrating Pakistan's commitment to eradicating terrorism. Along side in January 2018, Pakistan launched "Paigham-e-Pakistan" a program to replace the extremist narrative with and more pluralistic, peaceful, and tolerant narrative. Central to this initiative was a fatwa (religious decree) against terrorism endorsed by 1,800 Islamic scholars. It employs education reforms and interfaith dialogue to tackle radicalization, fostering unity and resilience.

National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) along with its broader objectives has been making efforts for youth constructive engagement in Pakistan and is instrumental in mobilizing the younger generation as key stakeholders in promoting peace, inclusion and harmony. Through a variety of initiatives such as youth conventions, volunteer programs, educational efforts, leadership training, and social media campaigns, NACTA in collaboration with its local partners in communities actively involves young people in promoting peace, tolerance, and resilience.

In Quetta, civil society organizations are actively working to channel youth potential in positive activities and provide a leadership opportunities; to reduce youth radicalization through various initiatives such as youth leadership, peacebuilding fellowships, creative expression promotion, entrepreneurship, and skill development. These efforts empower young individuals, foster dialogue and understanding, encourage artistic expression, and provide practical pathways for economic empowerment, ultimately contributing to building resilient and peaceful communities.

Theoretical Framework

The study addresses the lacuna in regional specificity regarding youth radicalization in Pakistan, particularly in Quetta, Baluchistan. It aims to examine the complex drivers of radicalization, encompassing socio-economic, political, religious, and ideological factors, and evaluate the efficacy of democratic values in countering radicalization efforts. Drawing from Martha Fineman's vulnerability theory, Benson's positive youth development theory, and John Locke's theory of democracy, the research investigates the vulnerabilities of youth to radicalization and the role of democratic values in mitigating radicalization risks.

Fineman's theory emphasizes social structures' influence on vulnerability, suggesting marginalized youth may turn to extremism for empowerment. Positive youth development theory emphasizes the importance of providing resources and opportunities for positive growth to prevent radicalization. Locke's theory highlights democratic governance's role in

addressing grievances and promoting inclusion to mitigate radicalization risks. In Quetta, radicalization stems from socio-economic disparities, political marginalization, and lack of educational and employment opportunities, worsened by extremist groups' manipulation of social identities.

Research Methodology and Data Collection Method

The methodology employed in the study integrates a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate the manifold dimensions of youth radicalization in Quetta. This methodological choice combines quantitative surveys with qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights into the phenomenon. Through survey utilized a stratified purposive sample assessing attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to radical ideologies, while FGDs and KIIs investigated deeper into underlying factors and experiences shaping vulnerability to radicalization. In the data analysis, qualitative primary data underwent a careful manual data analysis approach involving successive stages of data familiarization, transcription, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, triangulation, and subsequent reporting. Meanwhile, quantitative data was subjected to rigorous statistical analysis utilizing conventional Excel tools to facilitate comprehensive data interpretation.

For the purpose of conducting an in-depth investigation into the study themes, the research makes use of a mixed-method technique. This methodology enables a variety of perspectives to be gained on the susceptibilities of young people in Quetta to radicalization and extremism. Interviews with key informants, focus groups, and questionnaires were used to collect data directly from young people in Quetta. These methods provided unique insights into the beliefs, motives, and interpretations of vulnerabilities held by the young people. This technique provides a comprehensive and contextually grounded assessment of the viewpoints of young people. It is particularly well-suited for the study of subjective and socially constructed phenomena such as vulnerability, radicalization, extremism, and democratic principles.

The purposive sampling technique is utilized in order to collect primary data at the saturation point from young people aged (16-30) who are judged to be relevant to the research question. This strategy ensures the selection of participants who are able to contribute insights that are valuable. There was a strong emphasis placed on diversity and inclusiveness so, youth having diverse backgrounds such as gender, language, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic approached for data collection. The respondents in the study comprised predominantly young individuals, primarily students, reflecting a diverse background encompassing both conventional and religious education systems. There were 69% male and 31% female respondents who participated in the study.

This study combined quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data, for the data collection survey, focus group discussion, and in-depth interview tools were utilized. These tools are developed through pre-testing and improvised. Upon careful refinement of the data collection instruments, inclusive of the survey questionnaire, FGDs, and KIIs questionnaire, the study initiated with a systematic and methodical trajectory. As a foundational stride, a precisely curated Google survey form was deployed among prospective participants, receiving 103 responses within the designated fortnight. This quantitative methodological approach stimulated a comprehensive outreach, facilitating the combination of diverse perspectives germane to the research inquiry. Simultaneously, the second step entailed the organizing of 05 FGDs, each comprising a sensibly selected cohort of eight participants.

Subsequent to the culmination of the FGDs, the ensuing phase unfolded with the conduct of 10 KIIs, strategically scheduled with a three-day interval post-FGDs.

The qualitative primary data was analyzed through a manual qualitative analysis approach considering the familiarization with data, transcription, coding, categorization, theme development, data interpretation, triangulation of data and reporting. Quantitative data analysis is made through statistical data analysis methods using conventional excel analysis tools.

The respondents were from various localities of Quetta from urban, semi-urban, and rural settings, which provided a comprehensive picture of the socio-economic circumstances. Furthermore, in the context of religious diversity populations of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs participated in the study. Ethnically with representations from Pashtun (33%), Baloch (22%), Punjabi (16%), Hazara (13%), Saraiki (5%), and Bravi (11%); the climax of the study highlighted the varied ethnic backgrounds of the individuals who participated in the research.

Main Analysis

Youthhood

The delineation of youth age is pivotal for legal, social, and cultural reasons, dictating rights, responsibilities, societal expectations, and cultural attitudes toward individuals. Globally, 183 out of 198 UN Member countries have articulated their youth policies, specifying the age range for youth, reflecting the significance of this demarcation (Bojana Pervovic, 2016). Diverse definitions exist across nations, ranging from 13 to 35 years, with the UN General Assembly standardizing the youth age bracket as 15-24, widely adopted in international contexts (UN General Assembly, 2001). In Pakistan, the National Youth Policy defines youth as individuals aged 15 to 29, aligning with the global norm (Government of Pakistan, 2019).

Pakistan, with a considerable youth population, faces both promise and challenge in harnessing their potential. A substantial portion of the country's populace, 64%, is below the age of 33, with 29% falling below 29 years (UN Population Fund Report, 2017; Khetran, 2022). In Baluchistan youth constitute 65% of the population with higher unemployment and lack of opportunities. This demographic segment exhibits potential susceptibility to youth radicalization if the potential is not harnessed through positive youth engagement.

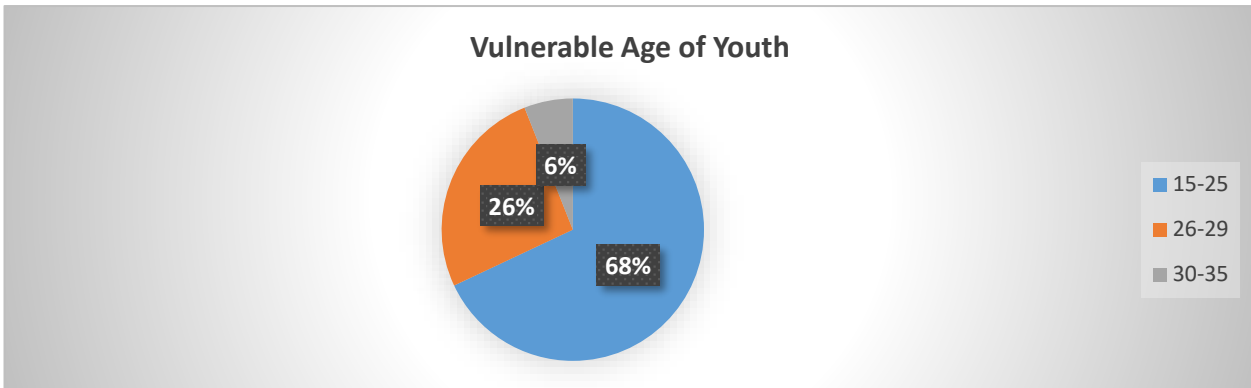
Vulnerable Age of Youth

The study examined how young people respond to the growing threat of radicalism and extremism across various age groups. A significant finding indicated that the majority of respondents aged 15 to 25, comprising 68%, were deemed most susceptible to these ideologies. The vulnerability decreased with age, with the 26 to 29 age bracket following closely behind 26%, and only 6% of those aged 30 to 35 falling into the vulnerable category.

Different factors contributed to the vulnerability across age groups. Younger individuals, aged 15 to 25, were found to be susceptible due to their impressionable nature, lack of real-life experiences, and exposure to prejudiced environments. Limited opportunities for constructive engagement and peer pressure further influenced their susceptibility. In contrast, older youth, between 26 and 35, were drawn towards radical groups as a means of asserting identity and amplifying their voices, often disregarding familial input in favor of peer influence.

Insights from focus group discussions echoed these findings, highlighting the naivety of younger individuals and the deliberate attraction of older youth towards radical groups. Key

informant interviews emphasized the role of parental neglect, exposure to religious teachings, and social media in aggravating vulnerability among young people. Early exposure to radical

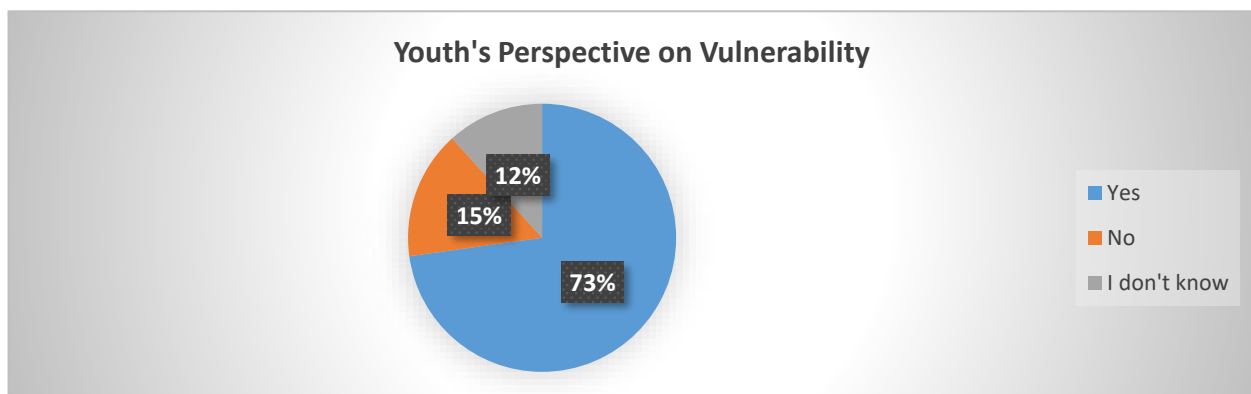


beliefs within families and biased school curriculums further contributed to radical and extremist perspectives.

(Sedgwick's 2010) study reinforced the vulnerability of young people aged 15 to 25, attributing it to their transitional phase in life, characterized by a search for identity and meaning. Marginalization and alienation in various spheres further heightened susceptibility to radical ideologies. However, the study also noted that not all youth are equally susceptible, with factors like critical education, supportive social networks, and familial guidance acting as protective measures against radicalization.

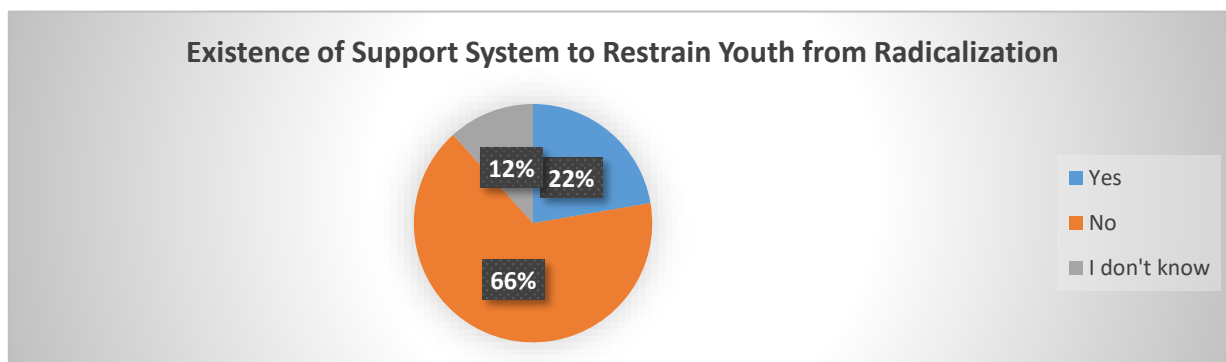
Youth’s Perspective on Vulnerability

The research analysis showed that 73% the majority of the respondents agreed that the young people of Quetta are vulnerable to radicalism. However, 15% of youth respondents replied youth are not vulnerable and 12% opt for don’t know. In a similar way, the analysis of key informant interviews revealed that 47% of respondents replied that youth are vulnerable to radicalization while 53% said youth are not vulnerable. Further investigations, the young people from the Hazara community, Saraiki and Sindi straightly responded yes to vulnerability while the responses of the Pashtuns, Baloch and Punjabi remained varied. 61% of the Pashtuns, Baluch and Punjabi in focused group discussion respondents that they don’t feel youth are vulnerable. The rational for not recognizing youth vulnerability was the higher level of grievance with the overall social fabric and governance system.



In other words, 61% of young people agreed to the existence of radical values among young people in Quetta but justified that it is the only way to deal with contemporary challenges around them. Otherwise, their existence of being would be invaluable in society neither they will have to be recognized as respectable members of the commune. 39% of respondent in the FGDs were very clear in their response that youth are vulnerable to radical ideologies which

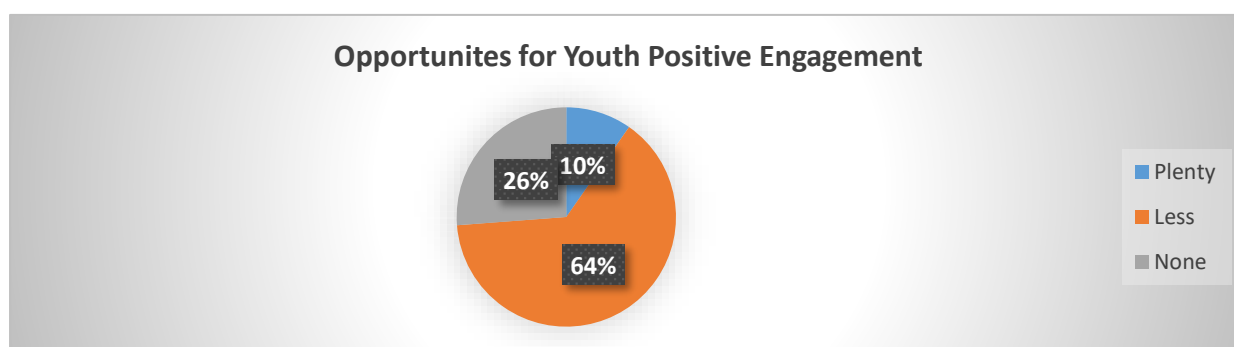
could be transformed if they are provided with constructive and positive youth engagement opportunities.



It is also explored that these young people had an inclination towards nationalism and religious radicalization. However, the young people having privileged and trouble less life compared to their fellows showed concern for youth vulnerability. While young people having weak socio-economic backgrounds and exposure to religious seminaries for studies doesn't show any concerns neither respondents that youth are vulnerable; as it is accepted that radicalization gives a sense of protection. Various factors were identified that directly contribute to the emergence of radicalization among young people such as discriminative socialization, peer pressures, socio-economic conditions, unemployment, weak governance, lack of access to justice differences in schooling (conventional and religious), and exposure to positive and healthy youth engagement interventions.

Youth Positive Engagement Opportunities

The survey results indicated that a significant proportion of 64% of respondents perceive a scarcity of opportunities for positive youth engagement, coupled with prevalent nepotism in their allocation. Contrariwise, 10% believed that ample positive engagement opportunities exist, with minimal nepotism. Notably, 26% remained neutral in their response, reflecting a spectrum of opinions within the youth demographic.



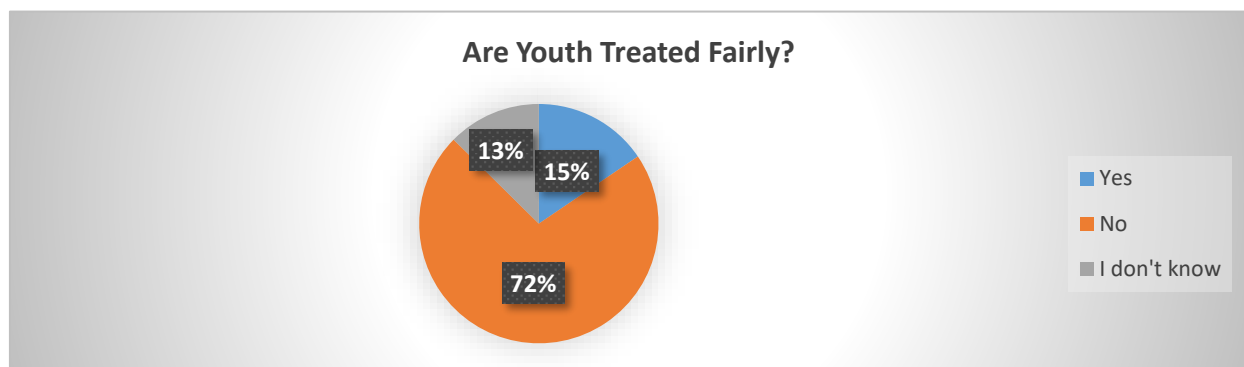
Further insights from FGDs revealed that despite possessing significant education and experience, the majority 77% of participants encountered barriers in accessing government-initiated programs, citing a lack of opportunities and neglect of meritocracy in distribution. However, 23% managed to participate in initiatives such as internship programs, sports, and cultural events. Key informant interviews highlighted the profound impact of exclusion on young people, fostering feelings of marginalization and disengagement. Such sentiments create fertile ground for radicalization, with young people seeking alternative affiliations, often through social media recruitment tactics.

FGDs and KIIs emphasized the importance of educational and sports opportunities in empowering youth while lamenting the dearth of business ventures, skill-based education,

and innovation centers. Examples cited, such as limited education scholarships and inaccessible incubation centers, highlighted systemic disparities between elite and non-elite youth.

Unfair Treatment of Youth

A pivotal aspect of the research is the examination of young people's perceptions of fairness in society. The findings divulged a staggering 72% of respondents expressed a sense of unfair treatment, leading to frustration. Only a mere 15% perceive society as treating them unbiasedly, with 13% remained neutral. This disparity in treatment raises a feeling of disconnection among young individuals, compelling them to seek recognition and fairness elsewhere, often leading to susceptibility to radical and extremist narratives. Further insights from focused group discussions and key informant interviews affirm the prevalent sentiment of unfair treatment among young people. A majority of respondents concurred with the notion of unequal treatment within society with young people. The respondents emphasized the expectation of fairness across various societal domains, including education, employment,



and legal aid.

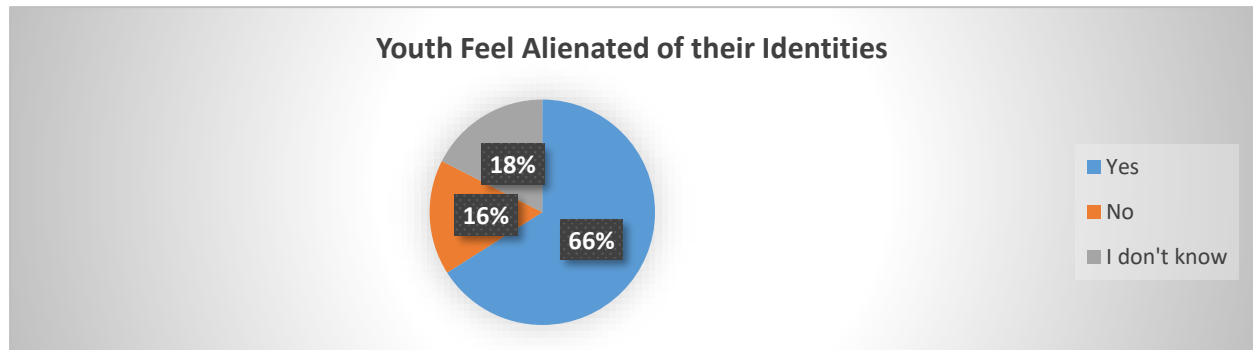
Moreover, the analysis sheds light on the inclination of young individuals to seek affiliation with groups that offer support and recognition. While materialistic gains may play a role, ideological alignment emerges as a prominent factor, particularly among those feeling marginalized by society. The research extends beyond primary data to examine real-world consequences, as evidenced by incidents in Quetta and Kenya. In both cases, young individuals, feeling alienated and unfairly treated, gravitated towards radical and extremist groups.

Key informant interviews shed light on the multifaceted nature of discrimination, attributing it to factors such as political and religious beliefs, socio-economic status, tribal backgrounds, and unfair resource distribution. Additionally, high societal expectations impair feelings of insecurity and inadequacy among young people, contributing to their vulnerability. The research also highlights the social isolation experienced by young individuals due to age and lack of experience, further aggravating feelings of neglect and frustration. These negative emotions, if left unaddressed, can culminate in anger and hopelessness, pushing individuals towards radicalization as a means of seeking validation and agency.

Alienation of Identities

Louis Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses posits that institutions like education, media, and religion serve to maintain social control and reinforce dominant ideologies (Althusser, 1996). This can lead marginalized groups to feel excluded from the broader national identity, potentially driving them toward radicalization. Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory further emphasizes the importance of collective identity for individuals, providing a sense of belonging and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

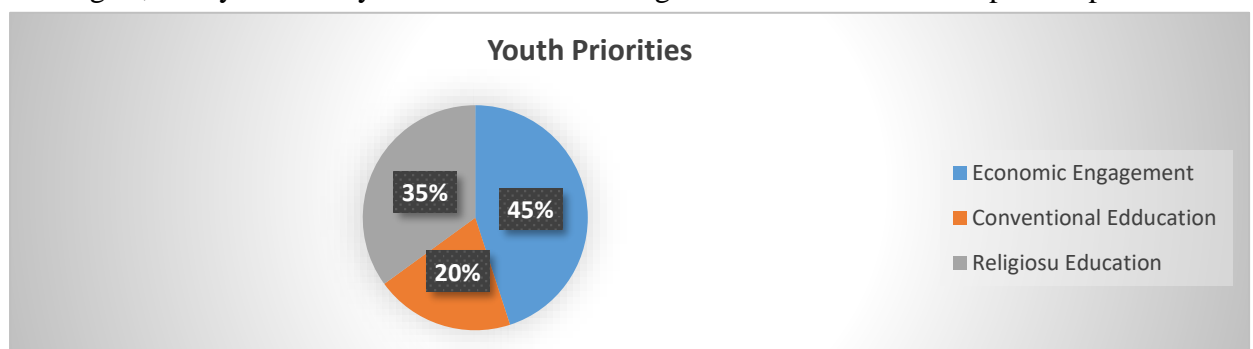
The study conducted in Quetta revealed a concerning trend among youth regarding their sense of identity. A significant portion, 66%, expressed feeling alienated or isolated in terms of their identities, while only 16% disagreed, and 17% were uncertain. This highlights a prevalent sentiment of disconnect and estrangement among young people in Quetta. What's particularly striking is that despite being in social environments, these young individuals still experience a profound sense of isolation. This suggests that the prevailing societal norms and structures might



not adequately accommodate the diverse identities within the community, leading to feelings of exclusion among youth. Moreover, the focus group discussions uncovered another noteworthy finding: 49% of the participants expressed concerns that their identities and uniqueness were under threat of being diluted over time. This fear underscores the complex interplay between individual identity and societal pressures, with many feeling that their identities may succumb to external influences. Interestingly, 22% of the youth acknowledged the possibility of their identities evolving to align with contemporary norms. However, a significant portion, 29%, admitted confusion about the implications of this potential identity shift, indicating a sense of uncertainty and ambivalence among the youth.

Youth’s Priorities

The findings indicated a diverse range of priorities among young people in Quetta. While 45% lean towards income-generating opportunities, 20% prioritize education, and 35% show inclinations towards religious activities, with 13% focusing on preaching and 22% showing interest in jihadist ideologies. This distribution features the complex landscape of youth aspirations in the region, with economic concerns intersecting with religious and social factors. It reflects a significant portion of young individuals are drawn towards extremist ideologies, likely driven by frustrations stemming from economic hardships and perceived



societal injustices.

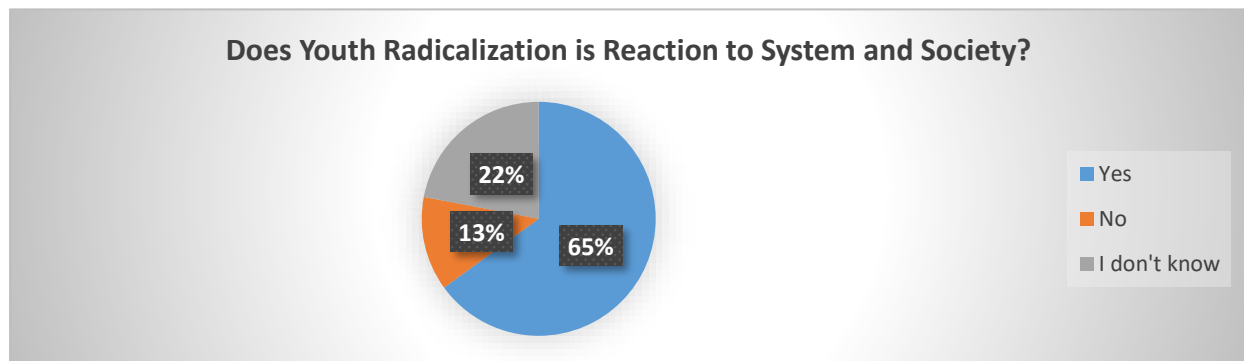
Youth’s Radicalization

The study investigated the factors driving youth involvement in radical groups, examining whether it results from a conscious choice or a reactionary response to societal treatment.

Findings reveal that 65% of respondents attribute youth radicalization to systemic and societal pressures, while 13% believe it to be a matter of personal desire and 22% remained neutral. Young people express disillusionment with the lack of support mechanisms and opportunities for constructive engagement. Key informant interviews underscore that youth often join radical groups out of frustration, hopelessness, and a lack of trust in societal institutions. Focus group discussions highlight the heightened vulnerability of adolescents who confront challenges without adequate support systems.

Discriminatory societal attitudes impair the situation, undermining youth confidence and decision-making abilities. The study advocates for life skills education to equip youth with tools for managing conflicts, stress, and peer pressure, fostering critical thinking and resilience. Additionally, youth engagement in local decision-making processes is proposed as a means to instill a sense of belonging and mitigate vulnerability to exploitation by extremist groups.

The research reveals that 74% of young people in the study have never participated in local decision-making processes, with only 26% having had the opportunity to engage. Those who did participate often faced obstacles such as favoritism and political pressures. Key informant interviews highlighted intense competition among youth to gain recognition and associate



with powerful groups, fostering feelings of superiority or inferiority and driving some towards radicalism to assert power. With limited youth engagement opportunities, the vulnerability to radical ideologies increases. Positive engagement initiatives, such as providing special seats in local government, forming youth parliaments, restoring student unions, and offering interest-free loans for business ventures, could deter radicalization by empowering youth.

Young people in Quetta express confusion and frustration with the governance structure, leading to disillusionment and susceptibility to radical ideologies. Lack of awareness and clarity exacerbates feelings of hopelessness, increasing vulnerability to extremist narratives. Restoring faith in democratic processes is crucial to preventing radicalization and countering extremist ideologies among youth. It is imperative to address the needs and concerns of young people, providing them with avenues for meaningful civic engagement and empowering them to participate in shaping their society's future.

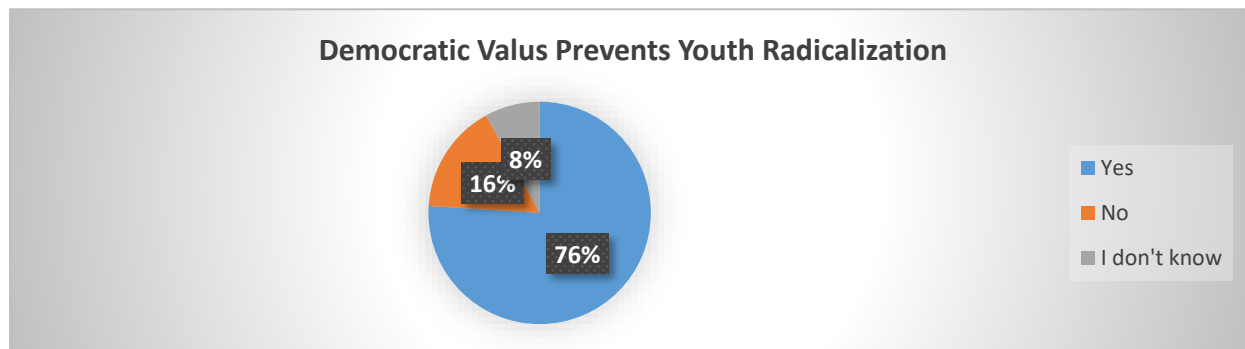
Prevention and De-Radicalization of Youth

76% of youth believe that engaging young people in democratic processes can alleviate youth radicalization, with 16% dissenting and 8% remaining neutral. This highlighted a strong correlation between democratic values and the prevention of radicalization, as those endorsing democratic principles are less likely to adopt radical ideologies, prioritizing fundamental rights and inclusivity.

Focus group discussions highlighted the importance of instilling democratic values in youth, with 74% of respondents recognizing its role in combating radical ideologies. However, 26% expressed reservations, particularly towards democracy as a Western ideology. Key informant interviews emphasized the marginalization resulting from the absence of democratic values like equal representation and freedom of expression, rendering youth susceptible to extremism. Participants stressed the need to promote democratic values across family, educational, and political spheres to curtail radicalization.

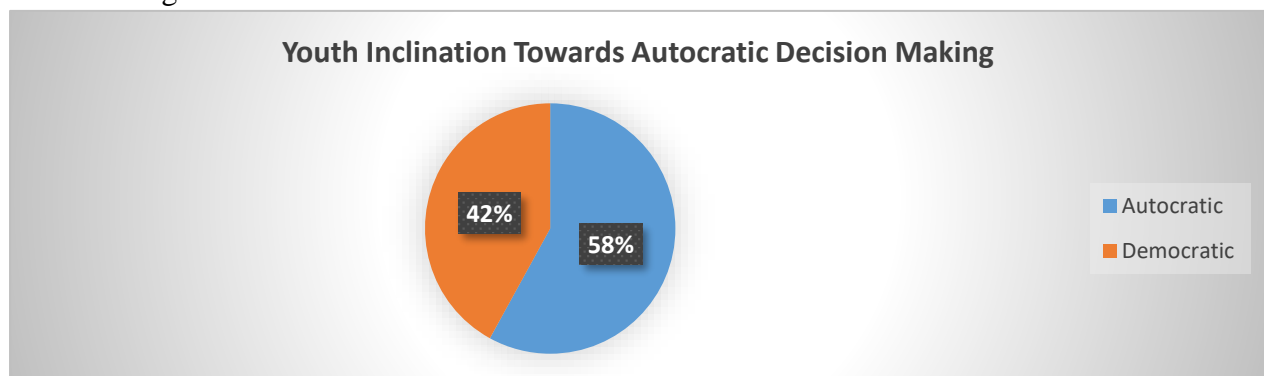
Primary data revealed an inverse relationship between democratic values and youth radicalization, as the presence of such values reduces susceptibility to radicalization by fostering tolerance and inclusion. Conversely, the absence or weakness in democratic values compels youth to seek alternative radical identities for belonging, exacerbating vulnerability to radical and extremist ideologies.

The study advocates for promoting democratic values, including equitable resource distribution and youth engagement, to mitigate radicalization. Citing examples from Sri Lanka and Nigeria, where youth engagement in democratic processes reduced marginalization and addressed radicalization, the research emphasizes the effectiveness of community-led initiatives in promoting inclusivity and de-radicalization.



Youth Inclination for Autocratic Decision-Making

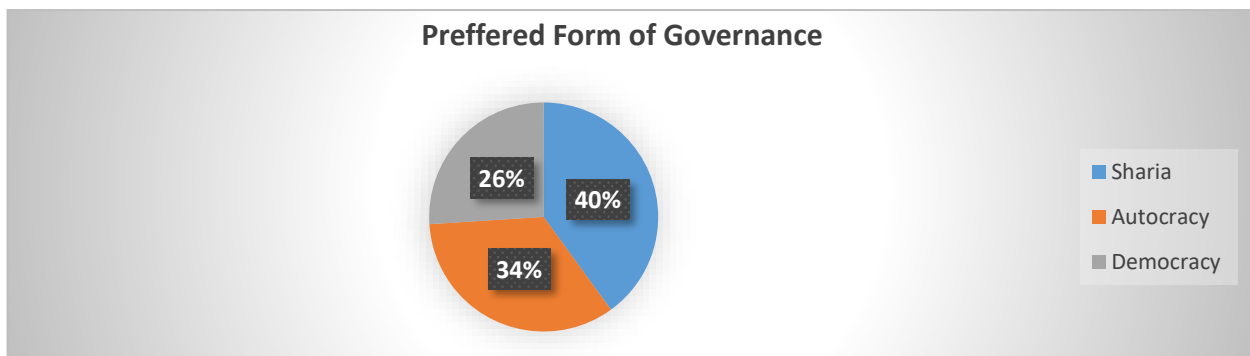
The study presents findings indicating that a majority of youth, approximately 58%, favor autocratic decision-making over democratic processes, with 42% expressing a preference for the latter. This inclination towards autocracy is attributed to limited experience in democratic engagement, as evidenced by 74% of respondents never participating in local-level decision-making processes. Furthermore, focus group discussions reaffirm these results, with 76% of youth believing in the effectiveness of autocratic decision-making, while 24% lean towards Islamic decision-making, resembling autocracy. Despite awareness of its limitations, such as lack of diversity and representation, youth still prefer autocracy, viewing it as a means of retaliation against societal exclusion.



Ideal Form of Governance for Youth

The study findings illustrated that a substantial portion of youth, 40%, favor an Islamic governance model, while 34% lean towards dictatorship, and 26% towards democracy. The analysis revealed disillusionment with democratic governance due to perceived unaccountability and corruption, leading many to believe justice is inaccessible. However, 85% of those initially preferring Islamic governance express openness to democracy under certain conditions, highlighting the correlation between governance and radicalization. Frustration, hopelessness, and economic constraints increase susceptibility to extremist ideologies among youth.

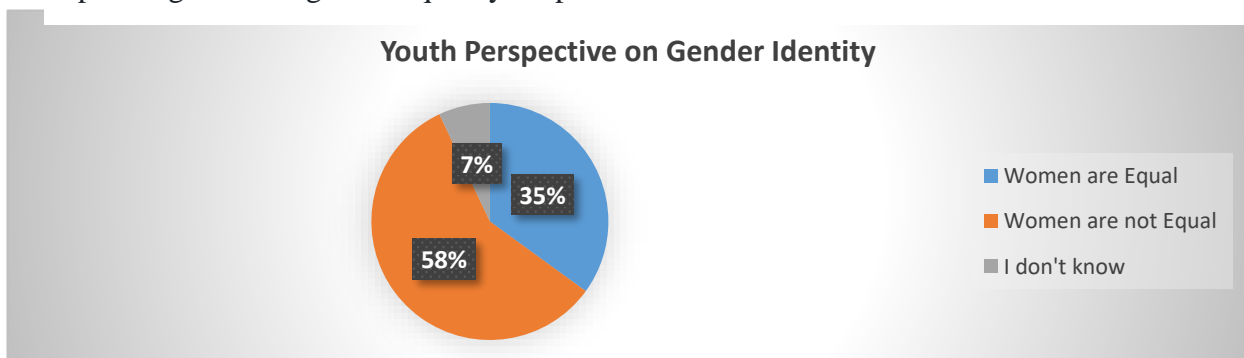
The security plays a crucial role in governance preferences. Those from feudal backgrounds tend towards military governance for its perceived impartiality, while those from business backgrounds favor Shariah law for its perceived security benefits. The emphasis on the rule of law, transparency, and accountability among youth signals a growing awareness of good governance principles, indicating a departure from blind adherence to tradition or religious



beliefs.

Youth Perspective towards Gender Equality

The study divulged that 58% of youth respondents believe women are unequal to men, while 35% consider them equal, and 7% find it debatable. This suggests a majority hold radical views influenced by traditional and religious values, even if not radical in other aspects. Those viewing women as equal often lack religious seminary education. The analysis showed that the majority of males believe the men's superiority, citing Islamic teaching. Women participants advocated for equality within Islamic principles, emphasizing inclusivity. They express frustration over limited opportunities and support, while few stress the importance of male allies. Discussions revealed women's awareness of their marginalized status in education, mobility, and political participation, calling for action to address these disparities. The study explored a complex picture of gender dynamics among youth in Quetta, with girls expressing belief in gender equality despite societal resistance.



Cultural and religious barriers impede progress toward gender equality, with 70% of respondents suggesting women should defer to male family members in decision-making. This belief stems from cultural norms that limit women's participation in various spheres of life. However, 30% of youth acknowledge women's decision-making abilities, highlighting a divergence in perspectives. Male respondents, particularly those with higher education levels, showed support for gender equality in principle but expressed reluctance to empower less educated female relatives.

Youth Engagement for Prevention and De-radicalization

The survey findings suggest diverse perspectives among young individuals regarding the prevention and de-radicalization of youth from extremist ideologies in Quetta. Political engagement emerged as a significant strategy, with 46% advocating for increased involvement in political activities to bolster participation. Additionally, 18% emphasized the importance of economic opportunities and employment prospects in deterring radicalization. Interestingly, 25% of respondents highlighted the combined significance of political participation, economic opportunities, and youth development programs.

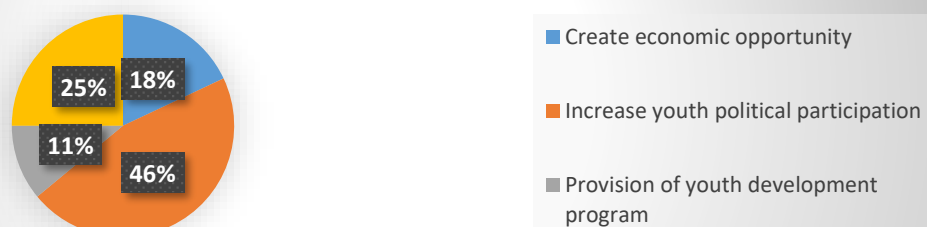
The analysis featured the pivotal role of youth engagement in peaceful political activities and local decision-making in countering radical ideologies. FGDs and KIIs emphasized the cultivation of a sense of ownership among emerging youth leaders, fostering trust in institutions, and addressing economic instability and unemployment as drivers of radicalization. Furthermore, inadequate youth empowerment programs were identified as potential contributors to radicalization.

The primary data recommended the prevention of young people from radical ideologies by enhancing existing programs to encompass quality education, critical thinking training, mentorship, creative arts, cultural activism, social entrepreneurship, and the imparting of democratic values

The findings from focus group discussions (FGDs) align with survey results, indicating varied preferences among youth for prevention and de-radicalization strategies. Economic engagement was favored by 56% of respondents, followed by political engagement at 30%, while 14% emphasized the importance of youth development programs in fostering community connections, restoring faith in institutions, and nurturing collective thinking for a peaceful society.

International examples support these findings. In Nigeria, youth empowerment initiatives focusing on education, economic opportunities, and political participation have reduced susceptibility to radicalization (Akinyemi & Ojo, 2020). Similarly, community-based initiatives in African countries have promoted social cohesion and dialogue, diminishing marginalization and exclusion (ACCORD, 2016). Psychological and social support for youth and their families addresses underlying grievances, as evidenced in studies (Bouzar & Kamal, 2017). In Somalia, dialogues and empowerment programs have effectively prevented and de-radicalized youth (Institute for Security Studies, 2017). These examples highlighted the efficacy of multifaceted approaches in combating radicalization.

Youth Engagement for Prevention and De-Radicalization



The positive youth development theory, (Benson,2006), emphasizes creating environments conducive to nurturing young individuals through supportive relationships, skill-building opportunities, and meaningful participation. This approach prioritized fostering supportive relationships among youth and various stakeholders, including government institutions, families, and community elders. Providing diverse engagement opportunities for youth across all sectors of life, not only can aid in preventing radicalization but also contribute significantly to community advancement.

Discussion

The study reveals age-dependent vulnerabilities to radicalism, with younger individuals (15-25) particularly susceptible due to impressionability and limited real-life experiences, while older youth (26-35) are influenced by identity assertion and peer pressure. The research analysis reveals varying perceptions among respondents regarding the vulnerability of young people in Quetta to radicalism, perspectives differ across ethnic groups, with some communities more readily acknowledging vulnerability than others. Contrasting views emerge regarding the role of radical values in addressing contemporary challenges, with some advocating for positive youth engagement opportunities. In addition to this, the research explores young people's perceptions of fairness in society, revealing widespread feelings of unfair treatment. This disparity fosters susceptibility to radical narratives, exacerbated by social isolation and high societal expectations.

The research discloses a troubling trend in the youth of Quetta concerning their sense of identity, with a substantial portion expressing feelings of alienation and isolation. Despite being in social environments, many young individuals experience a profound sense of disconnect, suggesting inadequacies in societal norms and structures in accommodating diverse identities. It reflects the complex interplay between individual identity and societal pressures, with significant uncertainty and ambivalence among the youth.

The study explores the intricate factors influencing youth involvement in radical groups, shedding light on whether it stems from conscious choice or reactionary responses to societal treatment. Findings reveal a predominant attribution of youth radicalization to systemic and societal pressures, underscoring the disillusionment with inadequate support mechanisms and constructive engagement opportunities. Discriminatory societal attitudes exacerbate the situation, impairing youth confidence and decision-making abilities.

Moreover, the research emphasizes the crucial role of promoting democratic values in preventing and countering youth radicalization. A strong correlation is observed between endorsing democratic principles and lower susceptibility to radical ideologies, highlighting the need to instill these values across family, educational, and political spheres.

The study's exploration of youth governance preferences unveils a shed landscape wherein a notable proportion favors autocratic or Islamic governance models over democracy. This inclination is attributed to limited exposure to democratic processes and disillusionment with perceived unaccountability and corruption within democratic systems. Despite acknowledging the limitations of autocracy, many view it as a means of retaliation against societal exclusion, highlighting the complex interplay between governance preferences and societal dynamics.

The study explores youth perspectives on gender equality, revealing a prevalent belief in women's inequality influenced by traditional and religious values. However, significant degrees emerge, with some advocating for gender equality within Islamic principles and others highlighting the need for male allies to drive progress. Cultural and religious barriers hinder the realization of gender equality, with the study underscoring the importance of addressing these disparities to foster inclusivity and empowerment among young women.

The study's examination of prevention and de-radicalization strategies among youth in Quetta reveals a spectrum of perspectives, with political engagement, economic opportunities, and youth development programs emerging as key focal points. International examples further support these conclusions, demonstrating the efficacy of manifold approaches in combating radicalization through education, economic opportunities, and community-based initiatives.

Conclusion

The research discussed a very significant phenomenon of youth vulnerability to extremism and radicalization, with significant implications for social, political, and economic well-being. In Quetta, 73% of respondents acknowledged this vulnerability among young people. Factors contributing to this vulnerability include socio-economic disparities, unemployment, inadequate education, peer influence, discrimination, and a deficit of democratic values. This trend resonates across countries like Somalia, Nigeria, and Kenya, where youth radicalization is also predominant, often linked to similar factors including unemployment.

Clarifying the age range for youth is crucial for legal and social frameworks. In Pakistan, the youth demographic spans ages 15-29, while the UN General Assembly defines it as 15-24. This variation reflects national and regional contexts. The study highlighted that youth aged bracket 15-25 are particularly vulnerable due to limited life experiences, biased systems, and scant opportunities, compounded by social isolation and inadequate family support. Nonetheless, protective factors such as critical education, social connections, and familial backing mitigate susceptibility. Understanding and addressing these dynamics are vital for effective interventions and safeguarding youth from the influences of radical ideologies.

The study explored the pivotal role of young people in shaping societal futures, emphasizing the need for constructive engagement and trust restoration with institutions. The findings revealed a lack of systems to deter youth from extremist ideologies, compounded by limited resources and opportunities. Martha's vulnerability theory highlights the multifaceted challenges youth face due to social, economic, and cultural factors, necessitating systematic preventive programs. Fair treatment and supportive social structures are crucial in preventing radicalization, with governments urged to prioritize social welfare, education, employment, healthcare, and legal protections. Fostering resilience and bridging societal divides, proactive measures can mitigate youth vulnerability and promote peaceful societal transformation.

The study highlighted the pervasive sense of alienation among young people in Quetta, emphasizing the importance of social identity and belonging to prevent radicalization. Neglecting this aspect increases the risk of youth involvement in extremist groups, given the presence of various radical ideologies in the region. Despite economic and educational aspirations, many youths prioritize religious identity, underscoring the influence of familial and societal structures.

Family and state institutions play crucial roles in counteracting radicalization, necessitating support mechanisms to empower young people and redirect their energies and strength

constructively. Life skills education, youth participation in decision-making, and initiatives like youth parliaments and interest-free loans foster engagement and democratic values, thereby mitigating the root causes of radicalization.

The research explained the interplay between democratic processes, identity formation, and governance structures in youth radicalization in Quetta. It revealed that young people embracing democratic values are less susceptible to radicalization, emphasizing the need to instill such values to deter extremist ideologies. Identity plays a pivotal role, with youths gravitating towards groups that provide representation and protection, often leading to radical perspectives. Strengthening democratic values and fostering inclusive platforms for youth engagement are vital preventive measures. Moreover, the preference for Islamic governance underscores underlying trust issues in democratic institutions, necessitating efforts to promote critical thinking and trust-building to counter religious conservatism and identity crises.

The research's findings concerning attitudes among young people in Quetta reveal prevalent radical perspectives toward women's gender identity and a preference for radical societal change. Addressing these issues requires open dialogue on gender roles, dismantling cultural and religious barriers, and promoting inclusivity. Despite this, many youths showed a willingness to engage in peaceful activism and advocate for positive change. Encouraging education, civic participation, entrepreneurship, and addressing social inequalities are key avenues for youth involvement in societal transformation. The study emphasized the importance of engaging youth in peaceful political activities, community initiatives, and empowerment programs to prevent radicalization.

Recommendations

The research emphasized addressing the vulnerabilities among youth to mitigate their susceptibility to radical ideologies. An intricate approach is recommended to both reduce the propensity for radicalization and facilitate the de-radicalization of those already indoctrinated. Central to this strategy is the establishment of comprehensive preventive programs aimed at fostering critical thinking, positive intervention, and the promotion of democratic values, thereby cultivating a societal ethos of inclusive diversity appreciation.

The implementation of social welfare programs for youth encompassing education, employment opportunities, healthcare provisions, and legal safeguards are deemed essential to bridge the gap between young people and societal institutions. Such initiatives not only bolster resilience but also serve to harness the potential of young individuals towards constructive societal contributions.

In addition, the study advocates for an acknowledgment of the pivotal role of parenting in shaping youth attitudes and behaviors. It highlights the necessity for a concerted effort involving both parental guidance and institutional support to counter radical ideologies effectively. Addressing the observed dearth of supportive structures for youth engagement, the establishment of "youth facilitation and empowerment centers" under the auspices of social welfare and youth development ministries at the union council level is proposed. These centers would serve as platforms for the provision of life skills education, youth participation in local governance processes, and the fostering of a sense of belonging within society. Furthermore, initiatives such as the allocation of special seats for youth in local government, the restoration of student unions, and the provision of interest-free loans for entrepreneurial endeavors are recommended to comprehensively address the multifaceted challenges posed by youth radicalization.

Policy-makers must engage constructively with youth to restore trust in institutions and promote multiculturalism, diversity, and identity awareness for positive societal change.

Transparency and fairness in resource distribution are vital for ensuring equal opportunities based on merit. Recognition of youth potential by both public institutions influences decision-making and social structures and governmental institutions should foster relationships that prevent radicalization.

Promoting gender equality requires inclusive dialogue and addressing cultural and religious barriers hindering women's participation. Further academic research is recommended to understand the reasons behind discrimination and frustration among Quetta's youth, as well as the roles of parents, families, and state institutions in preventing radicalization.

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