

Policy Journal of Social Science Review



**Empowering Youth for Peaceful Governance: A
Pathway to Stability and Social Cohesion in
Balochistan**

Dr. Zahoor Ahmed Lehri¹

Empowering Youth for Peaceful Governance: A Pathway to Stability and Social Cohesion in Balochistan

Dr. Zahoor Ahmed Lehri

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Balochistan, Quetta

Abstract

Balochistan, despite its strategic significance and rich natural resources, continues to face deep-rooted challenges of governance, marginalization, and social fragmentation. The persistent exclusion of youth from decision-making structures has weakened civic trust and limited prospects for sustainable peace. The problem addressed in this study centers on the underrepresentation of young people in governance processes and their untapped potential as agents of peacebuilding and reform. The purpose of this research is to explore how youth empowerment can serve as a catalyst for promoting peaceful, participatory, and accountable governance in Balochistan. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining quantitative surveys of 400 respondents across Quetta, Gwadar, and Khuzdar with qualitative interviews involving youth leaders, policymakers, and community activists. The study employs thematic and statistical analysis to identify the links between youth participation, social trust, and governance effectiveness. Findings indicate that empowered youth contribute positively to peacebuilding through civic engagement, community dialogue, and local problem-solving. However, barriers such as limited political inclusion, weak institutional support, and inadequate education hinder their transformative role. The study concludes that strengthening youth representation and integrating peace education into governance frameworks are essential for building institutional legitimacy and social cohesion. Genuine empowerment of youth is not only a democratic necessity but also a practical foundation for a stable and peaceful Balochistan.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment; Peacebuilding; Governance; Social Cohesion; Balochistan

1. INTRODUCTION

Balochistan is the largest province in Pakistan by territory, but the most underdeveloped with regard to human and institutional capacity and plays an essential role in the political, economic, and strategic situation in the country. The province is still faced with the challenge of endemic governance problems, social inequalities and political resentment despite having huge reserves of natural resources and geo-economic importance. The cycle of marginalization and mistrust between the society and the state has been perpetuated in the last few decades with weak institutional frameworks, a lack of civic engagement, and unequal allocation of resources. In this weak scenario, the young people in this province who form over 60 percent of its population form a challenge and an opportunity to change the way governance is in the state, and to ensure sustainable peace. There is a growing exposure of youth in community mobilization, education and community projects which points to a potential of positive change, but the potential currently lies largely untapped in official institutions of government.

Balochistan governance has been described as being typified by centralized decision making, poor representation and weak service delivery systems. These restrictions have not only acted as a problem to development but also added to the feeling of exclusion and

disenfranchisement especially by the younger generations. A large number of the youth in the province feel that governance structures are remote, unattentive or unresponsive to their needs and goals. The absence of constructive participation methods has undermined the feeling of civic ownership and intergenerational divisions. This means that the lack of interest by the youth in the governance processes is a big threat to the social stability and peacebuilding. Experience in similar post-conflict and marginalized areas indicates that youth who are not involved in the decision-making process may express frustration and alienation by developing social unrest or apathy, which negatively affects the reform of long-term peace and governance (Hassan, 2021; UNDP, 2023).

Simultaneously, youth empowerment has become the major focus of the global peacebuilding and good governance strategies. Researchers like Checkoway (2011) and Kurtenbach (2020) stress that when youth are viewed as partners of development and not as beneficiaries, they will become more inclusive and resilient societies. Youth empowerment goes beyond the learning of skills and education and involves the establishment of a platform where youths are given an opportunity to participate, take leadership roles and make decisions on different governance levels. Empowering young people can be used to mediate between the state institutions and communities in Balochistan where the level of social fragmentation and lack of trust is still high. It gives a platform of dialogue, civic education and transformation of conflicts and a culture of participation, which is a key element of peace-oriented governance.

The issue that this research aims to solve is the mismatch between the potential population in the province and the current structures of governance that cannot utilize that potential. In spite of various policies on youths and national commitments on inclusion, the practice is poor. Most of the youth projects are temporary, donor funded or have no relation to formal institutions of governance. Consequently, youths tend to lack institutional support, policy access and political agency to affect the decisions impacting their communities. It is a form of dependency that encourages no innovation in governance, and it slows down the peace consolidation process.

This study aims to discuss how youth empowerment can serve as a driver to peaceful and participative governance in Balochistan. It seeks to establish the connection between youth participation, social trust and institutional legitimacy through the lens of how the youth perceive the governance and how they assist in peacebuilding. The research also aims at determining the obstacles that hinder the successful inclusion of the youth and to propose ways of incorporating the youth voices in governance structures. This analysis means that the research performs a contribution to the theoretic and policy debate on the nexus of youth, peace, and governance in post-marginalized settings.

The research design adopted in the study is mixed-method research design, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative in order to develop a thorough understanding of the issue. Surveys will be carried out quantitatively with the youth in four selected districts like Quetta, Gwadar, and Khuzdar to obtain their attitude of governance, civic participation, and attitudes towards peace. Qualitatively, the in-depth interviews will be conducted with the

policymakers, youth leaders, educators, and the representatives of the civil society to understand the processes in which the empowerment can lead to the peace-oriented governance. This is a triangulation methodology where the breadth and depth are supported so as to be able to give a nuanced interpretation of the youth experiences in various socio-political settings.

The importance of this study is that the research would help redefine governance in Balochistan as a top-down administrative process to a young and participatory system. The study questions the traditional accounts of development by making youth subjects of policy instead of being peace subjects by making them agents of peace. Rather, it points out the transformational possibilities that the youth can have to transform cultures of governance, enhance accountability, and enhance democratic engagement. Youth empowerment here is not only perceived as a social welfare objective but as an institution requirement towards long term peace and responsive rule.

In addition, the research will add to the general theoretical discussions of participatory governance and social capital. It also builds on models suggested by Putnam (1993) and Galtung (1996) and conceptualizes youth empowerment as the process that helps develop trust, cooperation, and problem-solving. Such empowerment can develop feelings of belonging and shared responsibility to enhance the social foundations of governance especially in societies such as Balochistan where social cohesion is weak. Incorporation of both theories of empowerment and peacebuilding offers a complete way of looking at how micro-level engagement may affect macro-level institutional performance.

Other parts of the world have shown through empirical evidence that youth-driven peace work and community service work, as well as civic education work, can have a remarkable impact on local governance. To illustrate this point, Southeast Asian and Sub-Saharan African youth councils that were active in every way, especially through the participation of the youth, have been useful in mitigating local conflicts and enhancing transparency. Using the same insights in Baluchistan, the research hypothesis assumes that empowering the youths, in terms of civic education, entrepreneurship, and participation in policy formulation, can generate an ambient in favor of peace-oriented governance. This kind of participation would make the young people stakeholders in the government and not just spectators to improve the accountability and trust between the state and society.

Nevertheless, to achieve this potential, one will have to overcome some serious challenges. Political exclusion, poor education systems, inaccessibility to digital resources, and other socio-cultural limitations to participation are still some of the structural barriers hindering youth empowerment in Balochistan. Also, there is a tendency to have governance institutions that lack the ability or desire to include the voice of the youth in the policymaking process. These challenges require multi-dimensional approaches which entail policy reform, educational innovation and capacity-building that will be region-specific.

To sum up, the paper argues that youth empowerment towards peaceful governance is not an idealistic project but a practical proposal towards sustainable development and harmonious co-

existence in Balochistan. The future of stability of the province is pegged on its capacity to tap the potential of young population in terms of creativity, energy and aspirations. This research can contribute evidence-based information on how inclusive participation can revolutionize the governance systems internally by connecting the notion of empowerment to that of peace-oriented governance. Finally, youth empowerment is one of the avenues to institutional legitimacy, social cohesion, and establishing a fairer and more peaceful Balochistan.

Statement of the Problem

The province of Balochistan remains a problem in terms of governance, underdevelopment, and social disintegration despite its demographic potential and the presence of natural resources. The problem of poor institutional arrangements, political marginalization and low citizen participation has compromised the establishment of accountable and inclusive systems of governance. In this background, the high number of youths in this province is still marginal in the sphere of making decisions that directly impact their lives and communities. As much as there are a number of programs focused on the development of the youth by different government and donor organizations, these programs tend not to translate empowerment into long-term involvement in the governance and peacebuilding. This disparity between the rhetoric and practice of the policy has led to massive disillusionment of the youth, undermining social trust and voter turnout. Lack of organized ways through which the youth can participate not only curtails democratic consolidation, but also instability and polarization. Thus, the key issue of the proposed research is to understand how youth empowerment could be used as a strategic instrument of encouraging the peaceful, participatory, and accountable governance in Balochistan. The research aims to know the current obstacles to youth inclusion, as well as to determine viable solutions to incorporate the youth into the governance and peacebuilding systems.

Research Objectives

- To examine the current state of youth participation and empowerment in the governance processes of Balochistan.
- To analyze the relationship between youth empowerment, peacebuilding, and governance effectiveness in the province.
- To identify the socio-political, institutional, and cultural barriers that hinder youth engagement in governance.
- To propose evidence-based strategies for integrating youth empowerment into peace-oriented governance policies and practices in Balochistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of youth empowerment has gained a central place in the current social science discourse, and it is now focused on the ability of young individuals in shaping decision making processes, taking part in governance, and leading to social change. Most importantly, the term youth empowerment can be defined as a process in which youths acquire the skills, confidence, and access to institutions required to become engaged participants in the political, social and economic life (Zimmerman, 2000). It entails widening the agency of youth to able them make

informed decisions and take action on them to initiate the desired change. According to scholars like Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006), empowerment is not just about the personal development, but it is about structural change where power relations are renegotiated between the institutions and the youth. Such conceptualization is of great importance especially when dealing with the social marginalization situations where the young people are mostly excluded by the formal governance systems. The empowerment model does not place young people as passive receivers of the policy, but as co-producers of social change.

Conceptually, the issue of youth empowerment relates to the overall arguments concerning governance and peacebuilding. The concept of governance can be understood to refer to the exercise of power and the control of common interests using participatory, open, and responsible forms (Hyden, 2013). Peacebuilding, conversely, is used to refer to events that are geared towards correcting the causes of conflict, establishing social trust and establishing institutions which enhance peace (Galtung, 1996). The connection between governance and peacebuilding is mutually sustainable; good governance brings about stability, and peace gives participatory governance the space to thrive. In theory, the social capital theory and participatory governance theory are helpful in explaining this relationship. The idea of social capital put forth by Putnam (1993) as a network, norms, and trust, which facilitates cooperation, brings to light how civic participation improves performance of the institution. Equally, according to the theory of empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000), whenever individuals and people are included in decision-making processes to control their environment, they get more responsive governance, as it is known. In the literature of peacebuilding, these views are combined into the concept proposed by Richmond (2011) of peace formation, in which the bottom-up approach to the creation of legitimate governance structures is immensely important, and youth agency plays a major role there.

Youth have been identified as key players in peacebuilding and reform of governance across the world. According to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), the role of youth in ensuring international peace and security is recognized. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the involvement of youth into inclusiveness minimizes the risk of recurrence of conflicts and increases the legitimacy of policies (McEvoy-Levy, 2012). As an illustration, young people in post-conflict Liberia and Sierra Leone have shown that when the youth are engaged in decision-making in their community, it enhances social cohesion and accountability (Kurtenbach, 2020). Youth participation in governance has also assumed various shapes in the South Asian region: There has been the social entrepreneurship in Bangladesh and the civic technology movements in India. These experiences show that when youth are given a voice and resources they do not only become a source of innovation but also contribute towards resilience of peace. Nevertheless, the global and regional research also illustrates structural issues, such as tokenistic involvement, the absence of institutional support, and generational inequalities that limit the meaningful interactions (Honwana, 2013). These issues highlight the necessity of contextualized conceptualisations of youth empowerment that are in line with the realities of local governance.

To back up the discussion about the role of the youth in peace and governance in Pakistan and specifically in Balochistan, it is necessary to be exposed to the historical and political background of the province. The history of governance of Balochistan has been influenced by centralization, unequal growth, and provincial deficient autonomy. Natural resources and administrative control of the federal state, which prevailed in the governance arrangements since the independence of Pakistan, have left the provincial institutions in their weak and underdeveloped state (Siddiqi, 2012). The political instabilities and frequent rebels have also worsened the relationship between the state and the local communities and destroyed confidence and chances of participatory governance. Although power was devolved to provinces by introducing the 18th Constitutional Amendment, institutional deficits, low standards of service delivery, and citizen engagement remain a reality in Balochistan (Khan, 2020). In this regard, young people are usually excluded in the political affairs and they are not given fair opportunities to access education, jobs, and civic forums. It is on these governance challenges that the issue of youth empowerment can help bring in the aspect of peace-oriented reform.

Youth marginalization in Balochistan is complex and involves economic, social and political aspects. The poverty caused by high unemployment, lack of access to education, and poor civic architecture has given rise to what other researchers refer to as a disempowered generation (Jaffar, 2021). Most of the youths are disappointed in the political leadership and distrustful of the institute of the state considering it to be corrupt or unreachable. Gender inequality also practices this exclusion, where young women are limited to their cultural and mobility to enhance their involvement in governance (Shaheen, 2022). Failure to represent the youth in local councils and policy making forums also forms the basis of civic exclusion. The policy of participation is identified as valuable, but in practice, it is not uniform in Balochistan Youth Policy (2018). Lack of systematic youth engagement programs inhibits building social capital, undermining the strength of collective action and community. This may not only be a matter of governance but a peace and security issue since the disengaged youth are more prone to radicalization and social instability.

Empirical studies that have been conducted to connect youth participation and peace have demonstrated the power of transformation that can be brought about by empowerment. Indicatively, Urdal (2012) discovered that the probability of violent conflict reduces considerably when the level of youth population is involved in education, employment and governance. In the same manner, a UNDP (2023) study on the relationship between youth and social cohesion in fragile settings has shown that civic engagement leads to trust in the institutions and inter-group tensions. Regarding the Pakistani example, Malik (2019) found that among youth projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, community projects increased local peace by means of dialogue and service projects. According to these studies, involvement of the youth in the governance processes helps to bring about stability in the society because they have a feeling of ownership and belonging. However, success of youth participation is determined by nature of institutions and how much they allow new voices to be heard. In the context of

governments that are still inflexible and hierarchical, the process of empowerment might be symbolic, but not substantial (Ghaus-Pasha, 2018).

This study conceptual framework is based on the theory of empowerment, the theory of social capital, and the theory of participatory governance to understand the relationship between youth empowerment and peaceful governance in Balochistan. The psychological and social basis of a person gaining control of their life through participation and capacity-building is explained with the use of the empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000). The social capital theory (Putnam, 1993) describes how the networks and trust are involved in promoting cooperation and institutional performance. The concept of participatory governance theory (Fung and Wright, 2003) focuses on the representation of the marginalized voices in the governance and ensures that the governance results are based on the desires of the people. Combined, these models predict that empowering young people would increase individual agency and collective efficacy, which boosts peace-oriented governance. The Balochistan situation is further presented within the model which postulates that the empowered youth can help in peace-making by engaging in civic participation, community consultation, and institutional trust. This theoretical synthesis gives the concept a multidimensional approach to examining how the micro level of empowerment can affect the change of the macro level of governance.

Altogether, based on the read literature, it becomes clear that youth empowerment is not only a social welfare problem but a governance necessity. The argument concerning the use of empowered youth in peacebuilding and institutional legitimacy is supported both theoretically and empirically. Nevertheless, literature does not pay much attention to Balochistan as a specific region, and there is an urgent need to bridge the gaps in the current knowledge about the intersection of youth empowerment, peace, and government in this marginalized and complicated province. By filling this gap, the current study will produce context-specific findings that will inform the policy and practice and be used in furthering the larger agenda of inclusive and peaceful governance in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

This research on youth empowerment and peaceful governance in Balochistan is based on four interconnected theories, i.e., the Social Capital Theory, the Empowerment Theory, the Participatory Governance Framework and the Conflict Transformation Model. Collectively, the theories offer a powerful perspective of how youth engagement, trust, and institutional participation can be used to achieve peace and good governance. The theoretical perspectives are useful in explaining the relationship between social structures, individual agency, and institutional change in complex and conflict-affected regions like Balochistan where historical marginalization and governance deficits continue to exist.

The Social Capital Theory which was popularized by Robert Putnam (1993) focuses on the contribution of networks, norms and trust to the development of cooperation within societies. As Putnam states, communities that have a high social capital have an increased civic participation, institutional effectiveness and democratic accountability. The social capital

operates by bonding and bridging: bonding capital enhances ties between homogenous groups and bridging capital ties between different social groups based on class, ethnicity or region. In this case of Balochistan, where deep ethnic and tribal divisions have traditionally torn up at society, the construction of bridging social capital is essential to the peace and governance reform. The distrust that exists between the citizens and state institutions has left a governance gap, which is usually filled by informal networks of power or local patronage. Building social capital among the young people can thus boost civic participation, collective problem solving as well as accountability processes. Research has revealed that voluntary associations and civic dialogue as a collective activity in the society have enabled the young people to develop trust in the institutions they serve as well as a feeling of ownership in the governance processes (Putnam, 2000; Norris, 2011). In this way, the Social Capital Theory offers grounds on which youth empowerment could result in the creation of the relational networks, which would enable peaceful and participatory governance in Balochistan.

The Empowerment Theory is an addition to this view and is concerned with how individuals and groups acquire power over their lives and surroundings. Zimmerman (2000) defined the concept of empowerment as being multidimensional and functioning at the level of psychological, organizational and community. Psychological empowerment entangles self-efficacy and critical awareness, organizational relates to aggregate determination and resource availability and community concerns participation in larger structures of governance. The theory states that empowerment is not just a result but a continuous process of capacity-building and change. In this context, youth empowerment may be regarded as the improvement of the capability of the young people to affect the quality of governance by means of the knowledge, self-esteem, and institutional involvement. In situations like that in Balochistan where youths are challenged by structural issues due to unemployment, low education and political marginalization; empowerment is necessary to establish enabling conditions of voice, representation, and leadership. Through encouraging civic education, digital literacy and places of participation, youths are able to create agencies to undermine systems of hierarchy and be able to positively impact governance. The framework by Zimmerman emphasizes that there is reciprocity in empowerment and control, and the more the people have control, the more the community is reinforced with efficacy and the more the communities are empowered, the higher the capacity of the individuals. This mutual process is of special importance to the peacebuilding process, where institutional trust and social reconciliation depend on collective empowerment.

Participatory Governance Framework lends a structural and institutional aspect to this analysis. According to Fung and Wright (2003), participatory governance is a model which enhances democracy by involving the citizens in decision making procedures. This model criticizes old-fashioned top-down patterns of governing and introduces mechanisms of collaboration in which the actors of the state and the civil society share the power and the responsibility. Participatory governance commends the elements of transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness providing the marginalized groups such as youth to guide

policies that determine his/her lives. In Balochistan, the governance systems had been centrally set, and they had few citizen participation mechanisms. The local governments usually have poor institutional capacities and poor representation of the youth. The relevance of the participatory governance model when applied to this situation will mean a reconsideration of how decisions are made with the incorporation of the youth councils, community forums, and consultative platforms. This can be facilitated by such arrangements so that participation is institutionalized and the governance becomes responsive to the dreams of young citizens. Empirical studies have been able to establish that participatory governance produces better service delivery, citizen confidence and conflict resolution in Brazil, India and South Africa (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Therefore, by offering an institutional channel through which youth empowerment can be converted into real governance reform, this framework offers such a channel.

Although the three former theories describe the empowerment, participation, and institutional interaction, in Conflict Transformation Model by Johan Galtung (1996), the same processes are explained in the context of peacebuilding. When addressing the two forms of conflicts, Galtung believes that conflicts are not destructive but they can be constructed to be a powerful force of social change provided that it is handled through dialogue and structural change. Conflict transformation transcends conflict resolution since it focuses on the social, political and economic imbalance that violence breeds. It aims at transforming relationships, attitudes and institutions that perpetuate conflict and consequently creating circumstances that promote positive peace which refers to presence of justice and cooperation and not just the absence of violence. This model in Balochistan, where complaint of governance, representation and resource distribution has engulfed the area in constant unrest, may provide an analytical prism in the perspective of how empowerment and participation can change the dynamics of conflicts. The province can shift away the negative peace to the positive one by engaging the youth in peace talks, community mediation, and local governance. Young people with empowerment can have middle-ground roles between the state and the society, which enable trust, inclusion, and understanding in each other. The model Galtung has therefore given offers a normative approach to the relationship between empowerment and structural transformation and sustainable peace.

When these four theories are integrated, it is possible to have a multidimensional interpretation of youth-peace-governance nexus. Social capital theory emphasizes the social element, the relationship component, i.e., networks and trust form the elements of cooperation; Empowerment theory covers the psychological and social processes involved in enabling agency; the participatory governance framework focuses on the mechanisms of the institution of inclusion; and the conflict transformation model links empowerment and participation to peace and justice. The two imply that peace and good governance are complementary products of empowered participation. In Balochistan, this integration means that participation in the governance can be enhanced through strengthening youth networks

(social capital) and improving their capabilities (empowerment), which in turn will decrease the potential of conflicts and stability (conflict transformation).

Theoretically, the synthesized model on this research would envisage youth empowerment as a tool and an objective to peaceful governance. The model assumes that in a situation where the youth are empowered both psychologically, socially and institutionally, they have a role to play in developing trust-based networks that result in increased social cohesion. These networks promote participatory decision-making and minimization of structural inequalities which are key causes of conflict. Such a revolution of governance therefore becomes a continuous process in which the process of empowerment, participation and peace reinforce. Sustainable Development Goal 16 which aims at encouraging peaceful and inclusive societies, justice access, and effective institutions are also in sync with the theoretical synthesis. With this holistic approach, it has been realized that governance change in weak areas cannot be realized by administrative actions only; it must also entail developing the human and social capital that will lead to participatory and peaceful change.

In conclusion, this theoretical model provides an extensive platform of understanding the issue of youth empowerment as a driver of peaceful governing in Balochistan. It connects personal agency to larger forms, and it has insisted that sustainable peace is achieved when empowered citizens are allowed to play an active role in the process of governance and enhancing the institutions internally. The framework locates the study within a rich interdisciplinary tradition between sociology, political science, and peace studies by relying on the work of Putnam, Zimmerman, Fung, and Wright and Galtung. This synthesis comes with clarity of ideas and analysis focus, which allows the research to delve into the advantages of empowerment as a transformative force to stability, inclusion, and good governance in Balochistan.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The given research has a mixed-methods research design, as it combines quantitative and qualitative methods to offer a complex picture of the concept of youth empowerment as the tool of peaceful governance in Balochistan. The mixed-method design was chosen due to its ability to triangulate data, which is the measurement of the patterns and the underlying contextual significance of youth engagement in the process of governance and peacebuilding. Structured surveys will be used to collect quantitative data on the trends in the perceptions of young people, their levels of participation as well as the amount of trust they have towards institutes of governance. This element will assist in determining the relationships between the variables of empowerment, including education, civic engagement, and social trust, and peace and governance attitudes. The qualitative part will involve semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with youth leaders, policy-makers, teachers, as well as civil society representatives. These interviews will capture the lived experiences of the youths and how they relate to governance systems providing an insight on barriers, motivation and inclusion opportunities. It is with the combination of these two approaches that provides breadth and depth to the analysis that the study is able to reach the complexities of the empowerment and

governance within the Balochistan socio-political context. The design also indicates a pragmatic research philosophy, which focuses on using multiple sources of data to tackle the research problem in various levels and, therefore, enhance the reliability and validity of the results.

The population of the study comprises of three major groups; the youth; aged 18-35 years, the policymakers in the governance and development fields, and civil society members who are involved in the youth engagement or peacebuilding initiatives. The youth participants will be chosen in three large districts of Balochistan which are Quetta, Gwadar and Khuzdar that represent urban, coastal and semi-rural settings. In the quantitative survey, the study is bound to use a stratified random sampling method to provide proportional representation among the gender, education and regional stratas. This is a way of maximizing the applicability of the findings, as the different views of the youth population have been encompassed. In the qualitative aspect, purposive sampling will be applied to identify the information rich participants that will have direct experience or expertise on the area of youth empowerment and governance. Qualitative data collection instruments will entail structured questionnaire to conduct the survey, formulated using Likert scale and open-ended questions and interview guide to collect qualitative data focusing on issues of barriers to participation, empowerment approach and perception of peace. Such tools will be pre-tested so as to be clarified, reliable and sensitive to context. The various tools and sampling policies will support the research to generate a balanced and empirically-based knowledge on the role of youth empowerment in peaceful rule of Balochistan.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The research results indicate a multidimensional yet promising prospect of the youth empowerment and how it contributed to the enhancing of the peaceful rule in Balochistan. According to the quantitative data on the structured survey that covered 400 respondents in Quetta, Gwadar, and Khuzdar, the majority of the young respondents (approximately 68 people) said that they would love to take part in the governance and peacebuilding activities, but they perceived that they were bound by the institutional, political, and socio-economic factors. Only two out of five respondents said that they had any formal experience of being interacting with local government institutions, and one out of five said that they have interacted by community-based organizations or youth councils. This observation shows that there is a huge discrepancy between the youthful willingness and opportunities in the avenues of participation. The findings also indicate that education and access to information has a great impact on the level of civic awareness and empowerment. More educated respondents or those who had undergone some vocational training had more positive attitudes towards democratic participation and conflict management as compared to individuals who had undergone low schooling. The importance of education is emphasized in this relationship in creating a culture of peace and participatory governance.

The statistics as well indicate unequal gender empowerment and participation. Female respondents especially in the rural regions indicated that they had more socio-cultural restrictions and neglect of institutions. Approximately 73% of female youths interviewed said

their voices were not respected in the governance arenas, as opposed to a respondent of 45% male. These findings were further buttressed by interviews with female youth leaders who stressed the fact that structural patriarchy, lack of access to quality education, and security issues are still limiting the participation of women in politics in Balochistan. However, some of the participants in the coastal and urban regions talked about their local mobilizations, including social media campaigns by young people and forums within universities, which have started to approach the issue of gender norms. These new practices are an indication of a progressive transformation of inclusive civic spaces where women of young age can be involved in the more active discussions on the topics of governance and peace.

The qualitative data of the study contributes to a better insight on the role of youth perceptions towards empowerment as determined by the weak system of governance used in Balochistan. Empowerment was also characterised by many interviewees as the ability to make informed decisions, express opinions, and play a role in the welfare of the community, rather than as being involved in the formal institutions. Some of the participants also considered empowerment as a multidimensional process that entails education, economic self-reliance, and appreciation by political leaders. A Gwadar based youth respondent observed that, people in power should listen, rather than talk about youth policies when empowering them. This is an indication of a general feeling that the current youth development initiatives tend to be more of a formality, with minimal practical results or follow-up systems. Respondents pointed out the necessity to have a more inclusive governance model that acknowledges young people as official stakeholders as opposed to passive beneficiaries of development projects.

The other important conclusion is associated with the linkage between empowerment of youths and peacebuilding. Quantitative analysis found that there was statistically significant correlation between the scores of higher empowerment and the positive attitude toward nonviolent conflict resolution, tolerance and the intergroup cooperation. Those respondents who had indicated greater civic engagement and intercultural trust also believed more in peaceful government and interethnic communication. On the other hand, the young members who believed that they were not included in the political or economic processes were more alienated and distrustful about the state institutions. The correlation between these two points highlights the main idea of the paper, namely, empowerment is neither a developmental objective nor a peacebuilding instrument that can minimize the number of grievances and promote social unity. This correlation was supported by qualitative substances of interviews, as some respondents believed that this factor can lead to the prevention of radicalization in youth, as well as to the creation of stable conditions in the province in the long term through their participation in decision-making.

The results also reveal a number of institutional and policy obstacles that do not allow young people to engage in governance. These are bureaucratic inefficiencies, inefficiencies in the coordination of the various departments of the government, absence of youth quotas in local councils and insufficient funding of community level projects. Several respondents indicated lack of transparency in the recruitment into the public service and the culture of

patronage that does not favour youth merit to be involved. The actors of the civil society interviewed to participate in the study contended that the state applies the top-down approach to youth programs which do not resonate with the local realities, especially in the rural and conflict stricken districts. Moreover, the policymakers acknowledged that they cannot plan and make policies effectively due to lack of proper data on youth. Regardless of these issues, most of the respondents agreed that the growing accessibility of digital platforms has created new arenas of civic expression and activism. The social media, especially, was revealed as an influential tool with which young people are able to organize, relay information and make institutions accountable.

On the governance part, the results are found to have weak correlation between the youth participation and institutional responsiveness. The proportion of respondents who believed their participation resulted in tangible policy reforms or specific achievements of local governance was low. Nonetheless, the existence of youth-managed community initiatives in some locations, in particular, the education, environmental sustainability and women rights oriented ones, demonstrate how the gap in governance can be addressed by the empowerment of the grassroots. Indicatively, as an example, youth formations that organized clean-up campaigns along the coastlines in Gwadar indicated that there was better cooperation with the local authorities which resulted into minor but significant changes in policy. These micro level achievements show that empowered youth can become agents of participatory governance, in even difficult environments. The evidence, therefore, justifies the conceptual framework of the study which demonstrates the relationship between empowerment, peace, and governance in which they reinforce each other.

The other aspect of the findings relates to the contribution of the civil society and the education institutions in influencing youth empowerment. The participants regularly singled out universities, non-governmental agencies, and community centers as fundamental areas of culture building dialogue, civic capacities, and leadership. Nevertheless, such programs are usually limited by the lack of institutional support and funding. The authors of the study established that youth networks, which were affiliated to civil society organizations displayed greater confidence, skills in negotiations and awareness of governance issues compared to those not in these networks. This disparity supports the importance of joint ventures between the state apparatus and civil society to establish viable empowerment patterns. Moreover, the teachers interviewed in the research underscored the need to incorporate peace education and civic studies in the school curricula in a bid to develop a long-term culture of participatory governance.

The results also point to the differences in the region of Balochistan. The urban youth like the one in Quetta had more trust towards local government machineries and access to more opportunities of participation than rural and peripheral district youths. Rural Balochistan interviewees explained that tribal organization and socio-economic disparities usually marginalize them in formal governmental activities, and this repeats the dependency and disengagement cycle. In spite of these disparities, some of the rural participants suggested that

digital literacy and vocational training can be used as avenues to empowerment and social inclusion. This implies that regional and localized solutions are more efficient when compared to national youth policies, which are usually ineffective in dealing with regional differences in the dynamics of governance.

All in all, the results confirm that youth empowerment can be very important in enhancing governance and peace in Balochistan, as long as it is institutionalized in terms of inclusive policies and participatory systems. Empowered youth show increased civic responsibility, social trust and adherence to nonviolent conflict resolution all of which define sustainable peace. But empowerment should not be just symbolic but a mechanism of political participation, economic opportunity, and social mobility. The paper makes the conclusion that even though the Balochistan youth are exposed to many structural and cultural obstacles, they are becoming more aware, resilient and innovative, which makes them major participants in the process of transitioning the province to peaceful and accountable governance.

5. DISCUSSION

Applying the theoretical concepts of social capital, empowerment, participatory governance and conflict transformation to the results of this study, it can be stated that the youth empowerment in Balochistan is a social, as well as a political process that can have a serious impact on the peacebuilding, and the governance reform. The idea of social capital suggested by Putnam presents a helpful perspective through which one can analyse the purpose of trust, networks and civic participation in the creation of collective action. The findings show that communities that are characterized by more social trust and civic engagement of the youth have greater propensities of peaceful coexistence and participatory decision-making. The lack of institutional trust and the lack of interaction between citizens and the government actors in Balochistan have undermined these social ties, however. The empowerment theory proposed by Zimmerman supports the notion that empowerment is not a capacity, but a factor of access to resources, opportunities and recognition in governance structures. The results support this theoretical stance and indicate that although youths in Balochistan have motivation and potential, they are limited by institutional factors which hinder their capability of transforming their empowerment into meaningful political or social power. The conflict transformation model presented by Galtung also explains why empowerment when combined with positive civic engagement has the potential to deal with structural inequalities and transform the practices of governance to sustainable peace.

The result of this study is youth empowerment as an important governance reform mechanism that can fill the gap between the state institutions and marginalized groups of people. The data indicate that youth empowerment by means of involvement in the process of government increases accountability, transparency and social inclusion. Empowered young people will be better placed to have conversations, promote fair policies, and oppose divisive discourses, which tend to create instabilities in the conflict prone areas such as Balochistan. The research shows that when young people are actively involved in the local councils, community projects and policies making forums, there is better governance especially in terms of

responsiveness and legitimacy. The findings are echoed in the participatory governance framework which focuses on the involvement of the citizens as a pre-condition to effective and democratic governance. Institutionalisation of empowerment, however, has to be implemented in structural changes, including youth quotas in decision-making institutions, decentralized governance systems, and available civic education, to make the change long-term. In the absence of these reforms, the empowerment of youth can be reduced to mere verbal promises and not the actual change in policies.

The civic engagement and education as a means of peacebuilding also became one of the key aspects of the research. The results validate the fact that education, formal and informal also has transformative impact on young people with regard to attitude towards peace, tolerance and civic responsibility. The youths who are more educated were more dedicated to peaceful solving of problems and social collaboration, which supports the opinion that education leads to cognitive empowerment and moral responsibility. Furthermore, the civic engagement process such as youth forums, volunteer activities as well as local development projects, offers viable platforms through which the youth can demonstrate leadership and social cohesion. This kind of engagement is similar to Galtung model of conflict transformation that emphasizes on the need to deal with social and structural roots of conflict as opposed to simply dealing with the symptoms. Civic education and participation can be used to dismantle these vicious cycles of distrust and estrangement that tend to hold Balochistan together by encouraging dialogue, understanding and cooperation. The facts indicate that, in the case, where the youth are armed with evidence, ability to critically think, and participation opportunities, they will be peace agents, as opposed to being politically manipulated or marginalized.

Institutions and policy frameworks are also a crucial determinant in whether a youth empowerment initiative will work or not. The research discovered that institutional rigidity, bureaucratic inefficiency and other patronage networks are major challenges that halt meaningful youth participation in governance. Those results are an indication of a lack of alignment between national youth policy and local government realities. Balochistan institutions tend to be top-down institutions, which restrict innovation and participation by the citizens. This has been caused by the lack of inclusive institutional mechanisms, which have led to disconnection of policies, whereby the youth programs are carried out without proper consultation and follow-ups. However, this has been shown in the work of civil society organizations and grassroots efforts when institutions work with youth and incorporate participatory mechanisms in their work, governance results are more responsive and inclusive. This is emphasized in the empowerment theory, which focuses on the interactions between the agency of an individual and institutional structure. Real empowerment thus involves not just the capacity building of youths, but also a change of the institutional environment by making them appreciate and recognize their contributions. The inclusion policies concerning the youth should be concerned with the education, employment and leadership training availability, and

institutional reforms, which guarantee the youth can represent themselves in local and provincial systems of government.

By juxtaposing the Balochistan situation with other forms of governance, it is possible to identify the difficulties and potential reform opportunities. There are certain socio-political and cultural constraints peculiar to the province, but marginalization problems, as well as the lack of civic engagement and ineffective governance are not the sole cases of their kind. The same tendencies may be traced in other post-conflict or peripheral areas of the world, like the sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia, where the concept of youth empowerment has been applied as a conflict transformation and democratic consolidation tool. Here, participatory forms of governance which involve decentralization, community participation, and young leaders have shown positive effects of peacebuilding and social cohesion. To be able to apply the lessons to Balochistan, it is contextually important to understand that this province has a rich and varied ethnic diversity, as well as tribal and historical grievances. A blend of local culture of collective decision-making (jirgas and community councils) and contemporary frameworks of participation governance may be offered as a hybrid approach that would fit the Balochistan realities. The emerging digital youth culture in the province also opens new locations of engagement whereby the youth people can employ the social media and other online networks as alternative channels of expressing their political grievances and demanding accountability.

In general, the discussion highlights the fact that youth empowerment in Baluchistan is not only a developmental project but a political process that can change things. Placing the results of the study into the existing theoretical paradigms, it can be easily stated that empowerment, participation, and peace are interrelated processes. Governance legitimacy can be made stronger by building social capital, with the help of trust, networks, and civic engagement. The engagement of youth in policymaking and community development will make them more democratic and less prone to conflict. Education and institutional reform have been identified as major facilitators of this change, the connection between the empowerment of individuals and the building of peace at the collective level. The future of Balochistan in terms of peaceful governance lies in the realization that the youth cannot be viewed as passive receivers of the policy but as active contributors to the future of the province. Empowerment, not just rhetoric but also action, to establish sustainable ways of governing needs to take root in the institutions of inclusivity, policies of responsiveness and most importantly the willingness of all to contribute to peace and social justice.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Institutionalize Youth Participation in Governance:**

Establish formal mechanisms—such as youth advisory councils, consultative committees, and youth quotas in local and provincial governance—to ensure meaningful representation of young people in policymaking and implementation processes.

- **Integrate Peace and Civic Education into Academic Curricula:**

Introduce peace education, civic engagement, and leadership development modules in secondary schools, colleges, and universities to cultivate democratic values, critical thinking, and nonviolent conflict resolution skills among students.

- **Strengthen Youth Development Policies and Implementation Frameworks:**

Revise existing youth policies to align with local socio-political realities, ensuring that they include clear strategies for monitoring, evaluation, and long-term sustainability rather than short-term project-based interventions.

- **Promote Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Empowerment Programs:**

Design and implement empowerment initiatives that address the specific needs of marginalized groups, particularly young women and rural youth, by providing equal access to education, leadership training, and economic opportunities.

- **Enhance Collaboration Between Government, Civil Society, and Academia:**

Encourage partnerships between universities, NGOs, and government agencies to promote research, training, and community-based programs that foster youth participation and strengthen the link between academic knowledge and practical governance.

- **Invest in Digital Literacy and E-Governance Platforms:**

Expand digital access and literacy programs to enable young people to use technology for civic engagement, transparency monitoring, and social innovation. Digital tools should serve as inclusive platforms for dialogue between citizens and institutions.

- **Develop Community-Based Peacebuilding and Leadership Programs:**

Support local initiatives that promote youth-led dialogue, volunteerism, and inter-community collaboration to reduce mistrust and enhance social cohesion. Community-based leadership training can serve as a foundation for participatory governance.

- **Ensure Policy Accountability and Resource Allocation for Youth Empowerment:**

Allocate dedicated budget lines within provincial development plans for youth-related programs and establish transparent accountability mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness and inclusivity of empowerment initiatives.

7. CONCLUSION

The results of this paper confirm that the empowerment of youth is not only a form of development but the pillar that underlines the realization of peaceful and inclusive governance in Balochistan. This marginalization, the fact that the province was historically marginalized, there is limited institutional trust, and uneven opportunities access results in the youth population of the province having the potential to change the dynamics of governance and encourage sustainable peace. The research has shown that youths in the various districts are willing to participate in the process of making decisions public at a high level, though they are not doing so due to the structural, socio-economic disparities, and ineffective institutional frameworks. Such constraints reiterate the dire necessity of transformative policy changes and innovative participatory models that will help solve this gap between the institutions of governance and the continually increasing youth population in the province.

The study found out that empowerment is multidimensional, which means it has many dimensions including education and civic engagement, as well as access to decision-making platforms. By relying on the social capital (Putnam), empowerment (Zimmerman), participatory governance and conflict transformation theories, it was found that empowered youth may be used as catalysts of peace and accountability. More education and civic engagement had been linked to greater tolerance, cooperation, and nonviolent conflict management attitudes, which means that empowerment is directly linked to social stability. Gender differences were also noted in the study, as the female young people are exposed to even greater predicaments because of the cultural values as well as the restriction of movement. However, new efforts by young women activists and grassroots groups show increasing strength and are moving towards inclusion.

Moreover, the mixed-methods design gave useful information on where the two concepts of empowerment and institutional responsiveness intersect. The quantitative evidence supported the statistical correlation of the indicators of empowerment and positive governance results, whereas the qualitative stories shed light on daily struggle and hopes of young people who are seeking to be heard. The combination of the two views validated the fact that the process of youth empowerment and governance are reinforcing to each other- with inclusive governance enhancing youth empowerment and empowered youth enhancing democratic accountability. The results however also warn that a symbolic or tokenistic inclusion without actual decisional power can only serve to enhance alienation and disillusionment of the youth. Sustainable empowerment thus entails institutional reform, transparency as well as long run investment to human development.

The implications of the study are not only to Balochistan, as they can be applied to other areas with the same issues of underrepresentation and instability. A comparative analysis to world models of governance indicates that the best solution to conflict prone societies exists in localized solutions based on community participation, education and digital innovation. The plural nature of Balochistan, tribalism, and emerging digital society offer challenges and opportunities to governance transformation. Through ensuring the governing systems are integrated into the contemporary participatory structures, the province will be able to create a hybrid model of governance that fully incorporates the cultural realities of the province even as it enhances inclusivity as well as accountability.

To sum up, this paper supports the thesis that youth empowerment should not remain a mere rhetoric but should be institutionalized. The ability of the state and society to introduce young people as the main actors in the formation of the life of the population will be the key to peaceful governance in Balochistan. Trust between citizens and institutions, intergroup peace, and democratic resilience can be restored by empowering them through education, civic engagement, and digital participation. The policy reforms and civic education and digital inclusion proposed in the recommendations based on this study underline that youth empowerment is not a specific area of policies but a holistic approach to governance. Futuristic Balochistan needs participatory, transparent, and inclusive forms of governance, based on the

assumption that the young people of the province are not just inheritors of the issues faced by the province but they are the builders of its peace and development.

REFERENCES

- Ali, S., & Jamil, U. (2021). *Youth participation and governance challenges in Pakistan: Pathways to inclusive policy development*. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 36(2), 145–162.
- Bano, M. (2019). *Engaging youth for peace and civic participation in fragile contexts*. *Development Policy Review*, 37(3), 301–318.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The forms of capital*. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Dupont, C. (2020). *Youth, peace, and security: The missing link in governance reform*. *International Peace Studies Journal*, 42(4), 512–529.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Sage.
- Government of Pakistan. (2021). *National Youth Development Framework*. Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination.
- Haque, N., & Khan, T. (2020). *Youth empowerment and local governance reforms in South Asia*. *Asian Journal of Public Administration*, 42(1), 87–108.
- Hassan, M. A., & Ahmed, K. (2022). *Governance, social exclusion, and youth empowerment in Balochistan: A political economy perspective*. *Pakistan Journal of Governance and Policy*, 10(1), 25–48.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). *Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment*. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464.
- Khalid, R., & Saeed, F. (2021). *Education and peacebuilding: Youth as agents of social transformation in Pakistan*. *Peace and Conflict Review*, 13(2), 110–128.
- Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Rizvi, F. (2023). *Youth engagement and the politics of participation in Pakistan's democracy*. *Contemporary South Asia*, 31(2), 157–172.
- Sachs, J. (2015). *The age of sustainable development*. Columbia University Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Shah, Z., & Yousaf, M. (2020). *Governance challenges and youth marginalization in Balochistan*. *Pakistan Development Review*, 59(4), 521–540.
- UNDP. (2020). *Pakistan National Human Development Report: The Next Generation – Youth and the State of Human Development*. United Nations Development Programme.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

- Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). *Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational, and community levels of analysis*. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Psychology* (pp. 43–63). Springer.
- Zubair, S., & Javaid, U. (2022). *Digital citizenship and youth empowerment in Pakistan: Opportunities and challenges for participatory governance*. *Journal of Political Studies*, 29(1), 95–114.