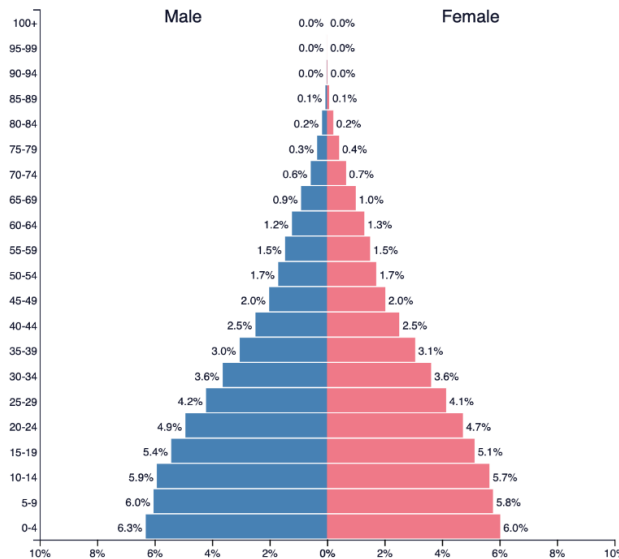


Pakistan's Youth Bulge: Its Impact on the Country's Politics

Pakistan, unlike many Western countries, has been a country whose vast majority of the population comprises of the youth, from the very beginning. Today, over 64% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 30, while over 70% is under the age of 35. Below is a graph of Pakistan's population in 2022 (PopulationPyramid.net):



The fact that Pakistan is a young population has, in history, caught the attention of populist leaders and political parties. It should also spark interest of anyone who is working to bring ideological change in Pakistan. Anyone who is interested in understanding and changing the political environment of the country cannot understand or change it, without acknowledging the impact of the youth on the country's politics.

Historically, the young, ambitious minds of the country have been addressed by populist leaders and politicians, whether from the right-wing or the left, for their own political agendas. One such leader was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. During the peak of student unions in Pakistan in the late 1960s Bhutto garnered support from the youth, particularly the left-wing student unions such as the National Students Federation (NSF). This was his initial rise and this faction of the youth felt like they found an ally in Bhutto, willing to fight against the dictatorship of Ayub Khan with them. However, after the general elections of 1970 happened and the celebrations of PPP's win ended, it was clear how they were only armed and used by Bhutto for his own political objectives. None of the promises he made to them were fulfilled. At the same time, there was JI and IJT as the right-wing that was against Bhutto and his narratives. IJT has always supported JI and has been its youth front. The youth have played an important role for these political parties in organizing their rallies, protests and executing their political campaigns. All of this speaks to the way that the youth have been used in the past by the politicians, as they understood the impact that the youth can have and how important it is to have them by your side.

Student unions were banned by Zia-ul-Haq in 1984. However, the quest to garner support from the youth by politicians did not end. In recent times, Imran Khan is one example of a populist politician who has focused on making the youth his main audience and support base. Not only through its youth wing, the ISF, but also through social media and the mainstream media, Khan has gained popularity among the youth as their voice. The slogan of change is generally popular among the youth of Pakistan who are fed up with the state of the country, whether it be political or economic. Khan has used that to create popular support and his politics is based mainly on this slogan. The truth, as harsh as it may be for some, is that Khan cares little about the youth and what it wants because at the end of the day. When he did come to power, no '*Riyasat-e-Madinah*' was established. No real change was seen as he too went to the IMF and other international institutions, he criticized his predecessors for going to. This proves that his politics was merely slogans to gain popular support and he did not represent truly, the youth and their voice.

On the face of it, it does seem like the youth of Pakistan have no say in or impact on the country's politics and that its politics is being controlled by the establishment and a certain ruling elite, and that the youth as well is only used by these politicians to push their own narratives. However, it would be unfair and devoid of sensation to not recognize how the public opinion in the case of Pakistan, being a young population, is shaped by the youth and how this public opinion affects the political narratives that are towed by the politicians.

There is a reason that the politicians have to use the 'religious card' to gain popularity among the youth. The reason for that is not that these politicians want Islam as a system to be implemented in Pakistan. You don't hear the '*Riyasat-e-Madinah*' (State of Madinah) slogan or see the anti-American politics because the politician wants the establishment of the political system of Islam in Pakistan, and an end to the American world order. Instead, the reason that they have to use Islam in shaping their political narratives is that the public opinion is for Islam in Pakistan. The youth want Islam. The youth hate the US and its international institutions. It is because the opinions and sentiments of the youth matter, that the politician is forced to incorporate Islamic slogans into his politics. This is the impact of the youth on the political narratives and the political environment.

It is true that the youth in the past have been used for the political objectives of politicians, and that their sentiments and emotions have never truly been represented by any political leader. However, at the same time it is important to understand that if armed with the correct ideas and concepts, it will be this same youth that will bring change in the country. As clichéd as it sounds, the future of Pakistan does lie in the hands of its youth. Today, the youth has lost all confidence in the systems of the country, as was evident from the low voter turnout in the 2024 General Elections. This youth needs change and it needs change on the basis of Islam.

Pakistan and its youth have an opportunity that might not be there for long. An opportunity to change the reality of the Muslim Ummah once and for all. I say this because a country with the majority of its population being young, will respond to change in a positive manner. Even more so when the change is emanating from its creed (Aqeedah), the Aqeedah of Islam. There exists an opportunity to implement a new world order, based on the Noble Quran and Prophetic Sunnah and challenge the existing colonialist rules based international order, led by the US, which is already dying a slow death.

From among the Sahaba (ra), the majority of the early Muslims, ready to take on the world order at the time, led by the Mushrikeen (polytheists) of Makkah, were young in age. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, Talhah ibn 'Ubaydullah, Al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Sa'id ibn Zayd, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, Sa'ud ibn Rabi'ah, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, Suhayb al-Rumi, Zayd ibn Harithah, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, Tulayb ibn 'Umayr, Khabbab ibn al-Arrat, 'Amir ibn Fuhayrah, Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr, Al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad, 'Abdullah ibn Jahsh, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah, 'Utbah ibn Ghazwan were all under thirty years old, when they embraced Islam. These were the young minds that struggled until, and even after, the Islamic State was established in Madinah.

Today, from among the youth of Pakistan, such ambitious and motivated individuals, who wish to walk the path that the Sahaba (ra) walked, must be sought out by those who have the details of the concepts of Islam and its ruling. They must be armed with these ideas so that they may take part in an intellectual conflict and political struggle against the West and the current world order imposed by the West, that is alien to Islam and Muslims. This is so that they may work to implement Islam and unify the Ummah under a single flag through the establishment of the Khilafah, representing the sentiments and emotions of the youth of Pakistan in particular, and the youth of the entire Muslim Ummah in general.

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «اغْتَنِمْ خَمْسًا قَبْلَ خَمْسٍ شَبَابَكَ قَبْلَ هَرَمِكَ وَصِحَّتَكَ قَبْلَ سَقَمِكَ وَغِنَاكَ قَبْلَ فَقْرِكَ وَفَرَاغَكَ قَبْلَ شُغْلِكَ وَحَيَاتَكَ قَبْلَ مَوْتِكَ» **«Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your riches before your poverty, your free time before your work, and your life before your death.»** (Shu'ab al-Imān lil-Bayhaqī 10250)

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