**The Youth Bulge**

**Some politicians attack the state to further their vested interests.**

[Dr. Gul.i.Ayesha Bhatti](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-gul-i-ayesha-bhatti)

February 22, 2024

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns), [Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper)

young bulge has been estab­lished in Pakistan’s democratic transition with the general elec­tion of 2024. There were 128 million el­igible voters, and the majority of them—44% of the total vot­er base—were between the ages of 18 and 35. The recent increase in youth involve­ment in politics in Pakistan can be attributed to a grow­ing sense of political and social awareness among young people. With access to social media and other forms of communication, they are more informed and engaged in current events and political issues than ever before. This has led to a surge in youth activ­ism and participation in political move­ments, as they seek to bring about posi­tive change and have their voices heard in shaping the future of their country. As a result, the youth population in Pak­istan is increasingly becoming a power­ful force in driving political change and reform. Evidently, in the 2018-2024 general elections in Pakistan, young people played a significant role in or­ganizing campaign rallies, using social media platforms to spread awareness about candidates and political parties, and mobilizing their peers to vote.

[Thousands in Gaza suffering 'cruelty of hunger and malnutrition': UN](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/thousands-in-gaza-suffering-cruelty-of-hunger-and-malnutrition-un)

While keeping this trend in mind, po­litical parties often exploit the youth as pawns in their revenge politics, utilizing them for their agendas of rivalry and hate politics. Young and impressionable students, lacking experience in discern­ing political manipulation, frequently fall victim to their tactics. These politi­cal parties capitalize on the frustration and disillusionment of the youth, ma­nipulating them into participating in protests that often turn violent and dis­ruptive. Following the last two years, numerous protests erupted across the country led by young people. Instances of vandalism, clashes with law enforce­ment, and disruptions of public order were reported as frustrated youth, in­doctrinated by political factions, took to the streets, expressing their discontent with the state institutions.

Some political leaders consistently attack state institutions to further their goals, disregard the legitimacy of polit­ical opponents, use foul language, and lie with impunity. This abuse erodes the legitimacy of political institutions and causes people to lose faith in the democratic process. They further in­still the idea in their young followers that using any form of violence to vent one’s resentment is acceptable. Resul­tantly, this manipulation of the youth not only undermines their potential for constructive engagement in the politi­cal process but also perpetuates a cy­cle of unrest and instability within the country. They exhibit profound frustra­tion and disappointment towards the political system and state order. Subject to divisive rhetoric and conduct, young individuals feel disillusioned and be­trayed by those entrusted with gover­nance. Consequently, youth show a hos­tile demeanour and disenchantment in civic participation. This gives rise to further numerous problems, includ­ing increased social unrest as disillu­sioned youths resort to protest and ac­tivism violently. Moreover, the erosion of trust in democratic institutions fos­ters a breeding ground for radicaliza­tion and extremism, posing a threat to national security. Ultimately, the exploi­tation of youth by political figures not only undermines democratic principles but also perpetuates societal divisions and impedes the nation’s progress to­ward stability and prosperity.

[18 students held in Punjab University clash](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/18-students-held-in-punjab-university-clash)

In these crucial times, political leaders in Pakistan have a moral imperative to cease the exploitation of young follow­ers for their nefarious political agen­das and instead foster an environment conducive to their growth as progres­sive members of society. This entails re­fraining from engaging in divisive hate politics and instead providing guidance and mentorship to empower youth to contribute positively to the state. By promoting inclusive policies, and culti­vating a culture of tolerance and coop­eration, political leaders can harness the energy and enthusiasm of young followers to drive meaningful progress. Moreover, leaders must lead by exam­ple, demonstrating integrity, account­ability, and a commitment to the great­er cause. Through concerted efforts to uplift and empower the youth, political leaders can forge a path toward a more equitable, prosperous, and secure fu­ture for Pakistan. Many political figures in history have been imprisoned with­out inciting violent riots among their supporters. These leaders demonstrate nonviolence, endurance, and mor­al courage, even when facing challeng­es. Nelson Mandela, a respected anti-apartheid activist and former President of South Africa, was imprisoned for 27 years due to his stance against racial segregation. Even during his long im­prisonment, Mandela continually advo­cated for peace and forgiveness, memo­rably declaring, “The struggle is my life. I will persist in advocating for freedom till my last days”. Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese advocate for democracy and recipient of the Nobel Prize, was con­fined to her home for almost 15 years due to her resistance against Myan­mar’s military government. During her captivity, Suu Kyi remained dedicated to nonviolent resistance, encouraging her followers to peacefully advocate for democratic changes. These leaders ex­emplify moral leadership and the influ­ential impact of nonviolence in promot­ing social and political change.

[Two killed in petrol agency fire incident](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/two-killed-in-petrol-agency-fire-incident)

Martin Luther King Jr is a renowned civil rights leader in the United States. He was arrested numerous times for his role in organizing nonviolent pro­tests against racial segregation and dis­crimination. King famously advocated for civil disobedience and peaceful re­sistance, inspiring millions around the world with his message of nonviolence.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Our political leaders must prioritize the welfare and development of these young assets of our country, recogniz­ing their potential as agents of growth. The symbiotic relationship between national unity, prosperity, and securi­ty underscores a fundamental princi­ple in governance and statecraft. A co­hesive societal fabric, characterized by solidarity and collective purpose, not only cultivates an environment condu­cive to economic progress and social stability but also fortifies the resilience of the state against multifaceted chal­lenges. Political leaders should priori­tize instilling moral values and a sense of nationhood in the youth by setting a positive example through their actions and rhetoric. By promoting integrity, empathy, and civic responsibility, lead­ers can nurture a generation of socially conscious individuals committed to the welfare and progress of their society.

[Pneumonia claims five more lives in 24 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/pneumonia-claims-five-more-lives-in-24-hours)

**Dr. Gul.i.Ayesha Bhatti**

The writer is a current affairs analyst. She can be reached at guleayesha bhatti@ gmail.com