

YOUTH AND DEMOCRACY: AN ASSESSMENT STUDY OF EDUCATED YOUTH IN PESHAWAR CITY

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ABSTRACT: Youth constitute a major portion of the population of Pakistan. Over 110 million of the 180-odd million Pakistanis today are under the age of 29 of whom over 50 million are classified as youth between ages 15-29. Unfortunately, there are very few opportunities for them to participate in the political, social and economic life besides having no forums to make their voices heard. Also, often, the youth themselves are very unaware of their own roles and responsibilities vis a vis socio-political development and thus unable to contribute towards meeting the challenges that they or/and their communities face. This study comprised 112 students from different education institutions of Peshawar city. Respondents were selected by using the purposive sampling method regarding their age. It also concludes that the youth is disappointed with the political leadership to a significant degree and consider them part of the problems and not part of the solution to the challenges Pakistan is facing today. On a positive note the end line survey reflects the positive impact of the project that youth who underwent the trainings learned about the significance of good leadership and how to help create and promote good leadership.

Key words: Democracy, social responsibility, general election, democratic development

INTRODUCTION

Youth constitute a major portion of the population of Pakistan. Over 110 million of the 180-odd million Pakistanis today are under the age of 29 of whom over 50 million are classified as youth between ages 15-29. Unfortunately, there are very few opportunities for them to participate in the political, social and economic life besides having no forums to make their voices heard. Also, often, the youth themselves are very unaware of their own roles and responsibilities vis a vis socio-political development and thus unable to contribute towards meeting the challenges that they or/and their communities face.

Besides this lack of awareness of their role, they also lack the skills to meaningfully engage in socio-political life. As a result, rather than contributing constructively, when faced with challenges or issues they get involved in destructive activities resorting to violence, rampage and damages to lives and public properties. E.g. the recent mob violence across the country as a result of the blasphemous film by an American citizen claimed nearly 30 lives in a day while causing damages of hundreds of billions of rupees of public and private property across the country. This shows how uncalculated and irresponsible their reactions are to situations that otherwise can constructively be handled. But, that can only happen if there are capacity building and training programmes available to youth.

Realizing the need to engage young people in socio-political and economic development of the country, the proposed intervention selected youth from the volatile regions of KPK and FATA to raise awareness among them to understand their role as 'harbingers of change'. They were also provided skills in leadership development, public speaking and social action to become practioners and multipliers of the messages of peace, pluralism, democracy and respect for others.

Meaningful democracy requires the meaningful participation of youth. Young people have much to offer societies – from innovation to creativity to new thinking. Their participation

in democracy promotes active citizenship, strengthens social responsibility and can enhance democratic processes and institutions. And today's young citizens are tomorrow's leaders and decision-makers. Yet young people's engagement with democracy faces significant challenges—threatening the future of healthy democracies (IPU, 2014).

According to former secretary general of the United Nation Mr. Kofi Annan (2014) young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies." [2]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The basic method used in this survey for the collection of primary data was questionnaire. The data collection was done by developing a pre-structured questionnaire comprising of 12 questions with a majority of close ended questions that allowed respondents to express their views without any difficulty or confusion on the issues. This study comprised 112 students from different education institutions of Peshawar city. Respondents were selected using the purposive sampling method regarding their age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Do you have a clear understanding of the concept of democracy?

Responses	Base line survey		End line survey	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	44.60%	74	66%
No	14	12.50%	3	3%
Somewhat	46	41.10%	33	29%
Idon't know	2	1.80%	2	2%
Total	112	100.00%	112	100%

44.6% of the participants think that they have a clear idea of the concept of democracy. 41.10% believes that they are “Some What” clear about the idea of the concept of democracy. 12.5% responded that they are not clear about the idea while 1.8% don’t know anything about it.

While taking the end-line survey from the same participants it was observed that a significant increase in the understanding of the participants regarding the concept of democracy was enhanced. More than half of the respondents i.e. 66% now had a clear picture of the concept of democracy. This clearly indicates the positive impact of the sessions taken on democracy during the youth voices project. In the sessions the participants were sensitized on the concept of and importance of democracy. Participants took great interest in the session delivered and realized what wonders can be possible with the existence of a true democracy.

The bar-chart below also indicate the proportion of the responses made by the respondents in both base-line and end-line surveys.

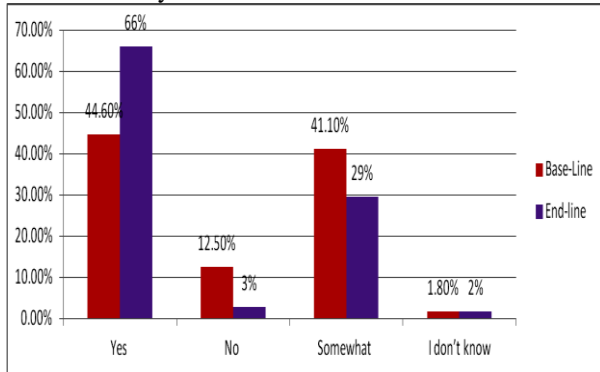


Figure 1: Respondents In Both Base-Line And End-Line Surveys.

Table 2. Do you think education and trainings are needed to promote democracy?

Response	Base line survey		End line survey	
	Frequ ency	Perce ntag e	Frequ ency	Perce ntag e
No, it is unnecessary	8	7.14%	38	34%
Yes, it is necessary	87	77.68 %	53	47%
No use even after education and trainings	8	7.14%	15	13%
Don't know	9	8%	6	5%
Total	112	100.00 %	112	100%

While responding to this question 77.68% of the participant believe that “Yes, it is necessary” to have a Proper training for democratic development. 7.14% believe “No, it is unnecessary”, similarly 7.14% of participant respond that no use Even after Trainings while 8 % of participant respond that they don’t know anything.

Interestingly, the responses vary in the end-line survey with majority 47% of the respondents still considering that proper training is required for democratic development. Similarly a

significant increase is observed with the respondents not in favor of proper trainings for democratic development. It is assumed that the respondents believe that for democratic development the democratic practices are essential. Sincerity of political leadership and their understanding and commitment to address the public issues can bring democratic development of the country.

The bar-chart gives a clear picture of the comparison in the responses of the participants in both the surveys.

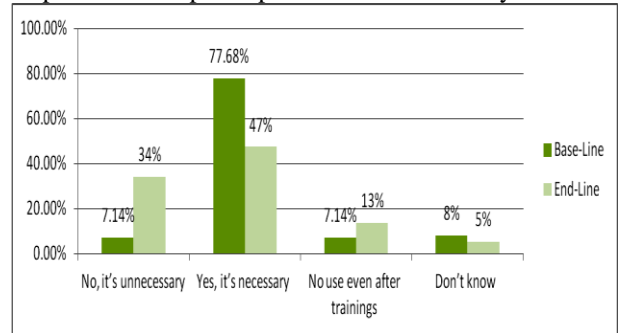


Figure 2: Comparison In The Responses Of The Participants In Both The Surveys.

Table 3. In your opinion, what are the responsibilities of youth in democratic processes?

Response	Baseline Survey		End line Survey	
	Frequ ency	Perce ntag e	Frequ ency	Perce ntag e
Understand the process	16	14.30 %	46	41%
Follow a political party	6	5.40 %	0	0
Participate in the general elections	8	7.10 %	23	21%
Educate and encourage their peers regarding democratic development	41	36.60 %	16	14%
All of the above	38	33.90 %	27	24%
Don't know	3	2.70 %	0	0
Total	112	100.00%	112	100%

In response to Q. 3, 36.6 % of the participants are of the opinion that “Educate and encourage their peers regarding democratic development” is the main responsibility of youth in the democratic process. 33.9% of participants think that “all the statements” are the responsibility of youth. 14.3% of the participants think that “understand the process” is the main responsibility of youth in the democratic process while 7.1% suggest that “participate in general election” are the responsibilities of youth in the democratic process. 5.4% of the participants respond that “Following a Political party” is the main responsibility of Youth in democratic process. 2.7% of participant responds that they didn’t know about the responsibilities of youth in democratic process.

A remarkable response was observed in the responses of the youth after the conclusion of the project “Youth Voices”. The end-line survey shows that a tremendous increase was observed with 36.6% of the participants considering that the main responsibility of youth in the democratic process is to understand the democratic process. The previous proportion of response was 14.3% for the same question. This clearly indicates the involvement of Youth in democratic process and is suggesting to understand the process for fruitful intervention of youth in the said process. It is also interesting to know that in base-line 5.40 % of the participants were of the opinion that the responsibility of the youth in democratic process is to follow a political party but in end line survey the sense has completely changed and the respondents boycott the following of any political party. Similarly, after attaining sessions on voter education, where the participants were sensitized about the power and importance of an individual’s vote in democratic process, 21% of the respondents now believe that the main responsibility of the youth in democratic process is to participate in the general elections. This indicates the positive impact of the project on the youth, who now consider and interested in participating in the general elections and making an effective use of their vote for bringing a change they have desired for.

Bar-chart shows the results of the base-line and end-line survey.

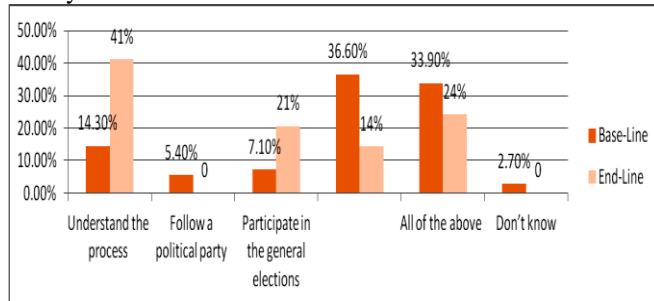


Figure 3: Base-Line And End-Line Survey

CONCLUSION

The survey concludes that the students are quite aware of the security situation of the country as they themselves have witnessed the extreme violence and terrorism in their own areas during the past few years. It also concludes that the youth is disappointed with the political leadership to a significant degree and consider them part of the problems and not part of the solution to the challenges Pakistan is facing today.

On a positive note the end line survey reflects the positive impact of the project that youth who underwent the trainings learned about the significance of good leadership and how to help create and promote good leadership. Moreover session on democracy, conflict resolution and religious freedom also had a very positive impact on the participants as can be seen in the pre-training responses compared to the post-survey responses.

The survey also concludes that youth has great hope that good and sincere political leaders can improve the situation of the country and believes that with proper training of the young males and females through educational programmes, the country can move towards a democratic and pluralistic culture in the country.

REFERENCES

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