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Mobilization of Second-Generation Refugees and Migrants and Their Socio-Political Identity

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Abstract

Second-generation refugees and migrants—individuals born to displaced parents—are increasingly becoming influential actors in shaping socio-political spaces within host societies. Their identities are neither fully aligned with their parents' countries of origin nor entirely shaped by the host nation's cultural and political frameworks. This study examines how second-generation Afghan refugees and internal migrants in Balochistan form and understand their socio-political identities and explores the processes, motivations, and contextual factors underlying their political mobilization and civic engagement. Unlike first-generation migrants who struggle primarily with legal, economic, and survival-focused challenges, second-generation groups navigate hybrid identities shaped by belonging, exclusion, intergenerational aspirations, and localized power dynamics. Using a qualitative research design, this study draws on in-depth interviews with fourteen participants—seven Afghan second-generation refugees and seven second-generation internal migrants residing in Balochistan. Thematic analysis was applied to explore experiences, identity negotiations, political motivations, and patterns of civic participation. Four major themes emerged: identity negotiation between inherited and localized experiences; the role of discrimination and social exclusion in strengthening political consciousness; intergenerational aspirations and community-based responsibilities; and emerging pathways to mobilization shaped by education, digital spaces, and local grievances. Findings indicate that socio-political identity for second-generation groups is a dynamic, contextually embedded process influenced simultaneously by family history, host-society interactions, opportunities, and constraints. Political mobilization emerges both as a coping mechanism and as a proactive strategy for asserting belonging, achieving representation, and navigating marginalization. The study concludes that understanding the political agency of second-generation displaced groups is critical for designing inclusive policies that acknowledge their hybrid identities and civic potential.

Keyword: Refugee; Migration; Social Identity; Political Identity.

Introduction

The concept of Second-Generation Identity significantly influences global mobilization and social movements by fostering hybrid, fluid identities that transcend traditional national and cultural boundaries. This phenomenon is particularly evident

among second-generation youth, who navigate complex transnational social spaces, as seen in the activism of Tamil and Tibetan youth in Canada. These individuals often hold dual identities, balancing cultural roots with the demands of a globalized world, which allows them to engage selectively in transnational practices and political activism (Nyanang, 2023; Szolnoky, 2023). The emergence of these hybrid identities is facilitated by globalization and migration, which blur national borders and encourage the development of new modes of belonging and citizenship that are not confined to nation-states (Afzal, 2023; Hébert et al., 2013). This fluidity in identity is not only a personal experience but also a strategic tool in social movements, where identity can be deployed performatively and rhetorically to achieve mobilization and goal attainment (Bernstein & Olsen, 2009). Furthermore, the concept of identity has been instrumentalized in various ways across different movements, from the progressive global justice movements to the conservative identitarian movements in Europe, which use identity to challenge or defend against perceived threats to cultural homogeneity (Eschle & Alexander, 2019; Nissen, 2020; Sima, 2021). Thus, Second-Generation Identity plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of global mobilization, enabling individuals and groups to navigate and influence the socio-political landscapes of both their countries of residence and their ancestral homelands.

Second-generation identity formation in developing countries is a multifaceted process influenced by various socio-political, cultural, and familial contexts. In Taiwan, second-generation youths of Chinese immigrant mothers navigate complex identities shaped by geopolitical tensions, employing strategies such as emphasizing cultural authenticity and engaging in community networking to manage their ambivalent identities (Lan, 2024). Similarly, in Malaysia, second-generation Myanmar refugee youths negotiate their identities by strategically contesting common refugee stereotypes, thus asserting agency in their identity formation (Lee & Don, 2021). In the Gulf, second-generation Malayali migrants face challenges due to their non-resident status, which complicates their cultural assimilation, yet social media provides a platform for exploring multiple community affiliations (Abraham, 2022). In the United States, second-generation Nigerians and Bangladeshis grapple with identity negotiations influenced by family, school, and peer contexts, often adopting broader ethnic identities like "desi" to navigate cultural expectations and community dynamics (Awokoya, 2012; Rahman, 2021). The Brazilian second generation in the U.S. experiences a similar identity dilemma, balancing between their Brazilian heritage and American cultural influences, highlighting the globalized nature of identity formation (Assis et al., 2007). These diverse contexts underscore the non-linear and complex pathways of identity development among second-generation individuals in developing countries, where geopolitical, cultural, and familial factors play significant roles in shaping their sense of belonging and identity (Lan & Kim, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the transnational engagement of second-generation diasporas, emphasizing their role in supporting both their host and origin countries during crises (Ferdous, 2023). Overall, these studies reveal that second-generation identity in developing contexts is a dynamic interplay of local and global influences, requiring nuanced understanding and support to foster positive identity development.

Second-generation identity in the context of Pakistan is a multifaceted construct influenced by various socio-political and cultural dynamics. The identity of second-generation British Pakistanis, for instance, is characterized by a strong sense of British citizenship, contrasting with the first-generation's perception of themselves as 'denizens' who live in but do not fully belong to the UK (Hussain & Bagguley, 2005). This generational difference highlights the complex interplay between national identity and ethnic roots. In Pakistan, identity is a social construct shaped by regional, caste, and linguistic affiliations, which often resist the state's attempts to forge a unified national identity (Sevea, 2023). The Pakistani national identity has evolved through a post-colonial lens, grappling with the tension between religious and secular narratives, and striving for an inclusive, diversity-acceptant identity (Siddiqi, 2022). Education policies in Pakistan have historically been used to construct national identity, with varying ideological discourses impacting nation-building and contributing to an identity crisis (Qurban & Amin, 2019). The second-generation South Asian diaspora, including Pakistanis, often faces identity struggles due to their position between ancestral and dominant cultures, leading to psychological and social challenges (Ullah, 2024). This is similar to the experiences of second-generation Bangladeshi-Canadian youth, who navigate hybrid identities influenced by both their ethnic culture and the dominant society (Ahmed, 2024). In Pakistan, the intersection of identity and politics further complicates the identity landscape, as ethnic and religious identities play significant roles in communal behavior and civil strife (Mishali-Ram, 2015). Overall, second-generation identity in Pakistan and its diaspora is shaped by a complex web of cultural, political, and historical factors, reflecting both continuity and change across generations.

This study explores how second-generation Afghan refugees and second-generation internal migrants in Balochistan understand their socio-political identities and how they engage in political mobilization. The topic is significant because second-generation groups increasingly participate in local politics, social activism, community leadership, and advocacy networks. Their voices remain under-researched in Pakistan's migration scholarship, which focuses largely on first-generation migrants and refugees. Second-generation refugees and migrants in Balochistan develop hybrid socio-political identities shaped by structural exclusion, community expectations, and their own aspirations. Their political mobilization arises not only as a response to marginalization but also as a sign of growing agency and self-definition. This argument supports the study's objectives by explaining how these individuals understand their identities and what drives their civic engagement and political participation.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Conceptualizing Second-Generation Identity

Second-generation identity is a complex construct shaped by various factors, including cultural heritage, social mobility, and personal experiences. Research indicates that individuals in this demographic often navigate multiple identities, balancing their ethnic backgrounds with the mainstream culture of their host countries. For instance, second-generation youth in Quebec exhibit diverse identity choices, with many not strongly identifying with their immigrant parents' ethnic origins, yet maintaining a civic allegiance to their current society (Gallant, 2010). Similarly, second-generation

professionals in Europe leverage their educational and social mobility to actively define their identities, often negotiating between their familial heritage and their professional environments (Lima, 2022). Furthermore, the cognitive construction of identity among second-generation Chinese immigrants highlights the importance of language and education in shaping their self-recognition and integration into mainstream society (Chen, 2024). Overall, identity formation in this group is fluid and influenced by societal perceptions, personal aspirations, and historical contexts, as seen in the experiences of Bosnian-Americans who seek to preserve their heritage while adapting to their new environment (Dikyurt, 2023; Noh, 2013).

2.2. Hybridity, Belonging, and Identity Negotiation

Hybridity, belonging, and identity negotiation are intricately linked concepts explored across various contexts in contemporary literature and research. In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, the protagonist Nazneen embodies the struggle of a Bangladeshi immigrant in London, navigating the tensions between traditional values and modern influences, highlighting the complexities of cultural hybridity and assimilation (Dohan, 2025). Similarly, Boland's study of Muslim youth in Madrid reveals how these individuals construct hybrid identities by blending cultural and religious elements with their Spanish identity, asserting their rights to express plural identities despite facing discrimination (Boland, 2020). He's analysis of *The Lonely Londoners* illustrates how West Indian immigrants employ linguistic and culinary hybridity to negotiate their identities in post-war London, showcasing the diverse strategies for belonging (He, 2024). In Brunei, Chinese-Malays negotiate their bicultural identity amidst state-imposed assimilation pressures, revealing the challenges of existing in a liminal space (Hoon & Sahrifuhafiz, 2021). Lastly, Dong's research on Chinese migrants in Geneva emphasizes the role of ICTs in shaping a hybrid sense of belonging, illustrating how migrants tactically navigate their identities through digital communities and everyday practices (Dong, 2025). Collectively, these studies underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity negotiation in hybrid contexts.

2.3. Discrimination and Socio-Political Consciousness

Second-generation individuals often navigate complex identities shaped by their socio-political contexts and experiences of discrimination. Research indicates that many second-generation youth, particularly those from racialized backgrounds, develop hybrid identities that reflect both their ethnic heritage and their Canadian citizenship, with identity perceptions varying significantly based on situational factors such as location and social interactions (Janetz, 2023) (Janetz, 2023). Discrimination plays a crucial role in shaping their socio-political consciousness; experiences of racial bias, particularly in educational and law enforcement settings, can lead to distrust of authorities and a heightened awareness of their marginalized status (Fernandez-Barutell, n.d.). Furthermore, the nature of discrimination is not uniform; it varies across different ethnic groups, with some facing more systemic barriers than others, complicating their integration into society (Waters & Kasinitz, 2010). This multifaceted experience underscores the importance of recognizing the diverse identities and challenges faced by second-generation individuals in contemporary Canada (Gallant, 2010).

2.4. Political Mobilization of Migrant and Refugee Youth

The political mobilization of migrant and refugee youth has emerged as a significant force in advocating for rights and inclusion across various contexts. In the United States, undocumented youth have played pivotal roles in movements against anti-immigrant legislation and have successfully campaigned for educational access, exemplified by California's Assembly Bill 540, which allows in-state tuition for undocumented students (Khillare, 2022). Similarly, in Italy, youth of migrant descent have mobilized to reform citizenship laws, framing their activism around legal rights and deservingness, thereby asserting their political agency despite lacking formal recognition (Milan, 2022). Furthermore, the broader landscape of migrant and refugee activism highlights transnational solidarity movements that challenge oppressive border regimes and advocate for human rights, illustrating the interconnectedness of these struggles across different regions (Ataç et al., 2016). In Greece, the transformation of youth activists into NGO representatives reflects the complexities of solidarity and the impact of economic austerity on migrant advocacy, revealing how former activists navigate their roles within institutional frameworks while maintaining connections to their political roots (Pendakis, 2021). Overall, these mobilizations underscore the critical role of youth in shaping the discourse on citizenship and rights within the global migration context (Però & Solomos, 2010).

2.5. The South Asian and Pakistani Context

The second generation of South Asian immigrants, particularly Pakistanis, navigates a complex interplay of cultural identity, socioeconomic status, and acculturative stress in various contexts, including the United States and the United Kingdom. Research indicates that second-generation South Asians often achieve higher educational levels than their White counterparts, although Pakistani and Bangladeshi youth may experience unexpected poverty due to family dynamics (Raza & Sakamoto, 2024). In the UK, second-generation Pakistani individuals face acculturative stress while engaging in modern practices like online dating, which conflict with traditional cultural values, leading to a preference for ethnically congruent partners and long-term relationships (Khadhijah & Nodin, 2023). Parenting styles among second-generation families also reflect a blend of cultural expectations, with parents emphasizing religious continuity and educational success, sometimes resulting in intergenerational tensions due to differing motivations for academic achievement (Iqbal & Golombok, 2018; Smalley, 2002; Somerville & Robinson, 2016). Overall, these dynamics illustrate the challenges and adaptations faced by second-generation Pakistanis as they balance their heritage with contemporary societal influences.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how second-generation refugees and migrants in Balochistan construct their socio-political identities and the factors that motivate their political mobilization. The study was conducted in Quetta Balochistan where Afghan refugee communities and internal migrant families have been residing for more than a decade. The population consisted of individuals directly engaged in or affected by issues of identity formation and political participation, including individuals from policy-making institutions as well as members of migrant and refugee communities. From this population, a purposive sample of fourteen participants was

selected, comprising seven second-generation Afghan refugees and seven second-generation internal migrants. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant to gather rich, detailed narratives based on personal experiences, perceptions, and social interactions. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed the researcher to explore core issues related to the objectives while also giving participants the space to elaborate on themes they considered important. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the stages of familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns across the transcripts, and developing overarching themes. This analytical approach was appropriate for capturing the complexity and diversity of identity construction and political mobilization among second-generation migrants and refugees in Balochistan.

4. Data Analysis and Discussions

4.1. Hybrid Identity Formation and Negotiation

Participants described their identities as complex, layered, and continuously negotiated, particularly in contexts of displacement and migration. Afghan second-generation refugees emphasized a dual sense of belonging: socially integrated into Pakistani society yet excluded from legal recognition and formal rights. Similarly, internal migrants highlighted the adjustments they make to navigate ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences in new communities. As one participant articulated, “Our identity is not one thing; it is pieces of our parents’ story and our own life here. We are always negotiating who we are because society keeps reminding us that we are not fully accepted or fully understood.”

The accounts suggest that identity among migrant youth is neither static nor singular. Participants reported that daily interactions, societal expectations, and structural barriers require ongoing negotiation of self-concept. They explained that experiences of inclusion and exclusion coexist, producing a hybrid identity that combines inherited cultural elements with locally acquired social practices. One participant noted, “I speak the language, celebrate local festivals, and go to school here, but when it comes to documentation or formal acceptance, I am reminded that I don’t fully belong.” This highlights the tension between social integration and legal or institutional recognition.

Participants also emphasized the emotional and psychological dimensions of hybrid identity. Navigating multiple cultural spaces often entails internal conflict, stress, and efforts to reconcile competing expectations. Many described identity as a fluid construct shaped by context-specific interactions and relational dynamics. One participant stated, “Sometimes I feel more like my parents’ child, sometimes more like a local youth—but never completely either. I am always adjusting.” This illustrates how identity negotiation is a continuous process influenced by both personal and societal forces.

The findings indicate that hybrid identities are not merely symbolic but have practical implications for everyday life. Participants described strategies to balance cultural retention with adaptation, including selective use of language, participation in community rituals, and modulation of behavior in diverse social settings. These strategies demonstrate resilience, creativity, and agency in managing complex social realities.

Overall, participant narratives reveal that hybrid identity formation among migrant youth involves continuous negotiation shaped by social belonging, structural constraints, and intergenerational legacies. Their accounts underscore the dynamic, multifaceted nature of identity in migration contexts and highlight the interplay between individual agency and societal boundaries.

4.2. Discrimination and Social Exclusion as Catalysts for Political Awareness

Participants highlighted that experiences of discrimination and social exclusion played a significant role in shaping their political awareness and consciousness. Afghan refugees frequently described barriers related to legal documentation, restricted access to services, and societal suspicion, which limited their participation in mainstream social and political life. Internal migrants, on the other hand, reported encountering linguistic discrimination and cultural stereotyping in their new communities. One participant explained, “People treat you differently if you speak a different language or don’t have proper papers. It makes you feel like an outsider, and you start noticing how rules and policies favor some while excluding others.”

Participants emphasized that repeated experiences of marginalization encouraged critical reflection on the structural causes of exclusion. Many reported that they began to connect personal experiences of discrimination to broader social, political, and economic inequalities. As one participant noted, “At first, I felt frustrated and angry about being treated differently, but over time I realized this is not just about me. It is how the system works, and that made me more aware of politics and my rights.” This demonstrates that exclusion functions not only as a constraint but also as a catalyst for socio-political consciousness.

Participants also described how exclusion shaped their sense of identity and belonging. They reported that being treated as outsiders prompted questions about citizenship, social justice, and representation. For Afghan second-generation youth, this often meant negotiating the tension between social integration and legal invisibility, while internal migrants grappled with cultural and linguistic hierarchies. One participant explained, “When people constantly remind you that you don’t fully belong, you start paying attention to who holds power and why some groups are privileged over others.”

Moreover, participants highlighted that these experiences fostered collective awareness and solidarity. Interactions with peers facing similar discrimination reinforced recognition of systemic patterns and motivated engagement with advocacy, support networks, or community initiatives. A participant stated, “We started talking among ourselves, sharing experiences, and realizing this is bigger than one person. That’s when you start understanding politics in a new way.”

Overall, participant narratives indicate that discrimination and social exclusion act as powerful catalysts for political awareness. Their experiences reveal that marginalization, while challenging, can enhance critical understanding of structural inequalities, influence identity negotiation, and encourage socio-political engagement within both refugee and migrant communities.

4.3. Intergenerational Expectations and Community Responsibilities

Participants emphasized that intergenerational expectations significantly shape their sense of responsibility and political engagement. Second-generation individuals, particularly

those from Afghan refugee families, described carrying the legacies of their parents' displacement histories, which instilled a strong sense of duty toward their communities. One participant explained, "My parents sacrificed so much when they came here. I feel I owe it to them and to my community to speak up, to represent us, and to make sure our voices are heard."

Participants reported that these inherited expectations often translate into active participation in community affairs, student politics, advocacy initiatives, and other forms of collective engagement. They described a deep-rooted motivation to address injustices, improve access to resources, and strengthen communal solidarity. One participant remarked, "Even when it's difficult, I try to be involved in local groups and campaigns because someone has to stand up for our people. That sense of responsibility comes from my family and their history."

The accounts indicate that intergenerational influence not only shapes personal values but also provides a framework for political mobilization. Participants explained that the lessons, stories, and sacrifices of older generations create awareness of systemic inequalities and inspire proactive approaches to social challenges. As one participant noted, "Hearing about what my parents went through makes me more conscious of the issues we face now. It motivates me to do something rather than just accept the situation." Moreover, participants highlighted that these responsibilities are negotiated alongside broader societal pressures. While societal exclusion, discrimination, or legal barriers can constrain opportunities, the internalized sense of duty fosters resilience and persistence. Participants often framed their engagement as both a personal and collective mission, linking individual efforts to wider community welfare. One participant stated, "It's not just for me—it's for everyone in our community who doesn't have a voice."

Overall, participant narratives suggest that intergenerational expectations and community responsibilities are critical drivers of political consciousness and mobilization. They highlight how historical experiences of displacement are transmitted across generations, fostering a commitment to advocacy, representation, and collective well-being, which sustains engagement in socio-political processes.

4.4. Emerging Pathways of Political Mobilization

Participants highlighted diverse and evolving pathways for political mobilization, emphasizing that engagement extends beyond formal political structures. Many described using education, social media, community organizations, and informal youth networks as platforms for activism and civic participation. One participant noted, "We may not all be part of a political party, but we are organizing, raising awareness online, and working in our communities. That is our way of being politically active."

Participants emphasized that their mobilization is closely linked to personal and collective experiences of marginalization. Social exclusion, discrimination, and structural inequalities serve as catalysts, motivating youth to advocate for rights, representation, and recognition. One participant explained, "Seeing how our community is treated unfairly pushes us to act. We want to be seen and heard, and that's why we get involved in community initiatives and advocacy." This suggests that political engagement is often a response to systemic grievances rather than mere interest in formal politics.

Social media was frequently cited as a critical tool for expanding reach and connecting like-minded individuals across geographic and social boundaries. Participants reported using digital platforms to share experiences, mobilize peers, and highlight injustices. One participant stated, “On social media, we can speak to many people at once. It helps us organize and makes our voices harder to ignore.” Similarly, participation in community-based organizations and informal youth groups allows for collaborative action, skill-building, and collective problem-solving.

Education was also identified as an important avenue for mobilization. Participants described schools and universities as spaces where awareness is raised, political debates are encouraged, and networks are formed. A participant remarked, “Being in school or university exposes us to new ideas, and it gives us tools to challenge inequalities in our communities.”

Overall, participant accounts reveal that political mobilization among second-generation refugees and internal migrants is multifaceted, blending formal and informal, online and offline strategies. Their engagement reflects both responses to structural exclusion and proactive efforts to claim recognition, rights, and agency. The findings underscore that political consciousness is translated into action through innovative pathways that transcend conventional political participation, highlighting the adaptability and resilience of marginalized youth communities.

5. Conclusions

This study explored how second-generation refugees and internal migrants in Balochistan understand their socio-political identities and the processes through which they mobilize politically. Findings reveal that identity formation is a negotiated and multidimensional experience shaped simultaneously by inherited displacement histories, lived interactions in the host society, and structural constraints. Second-generation Afghan refugees and internal migrants develop hybrid identities that reflect both cultural continuity and adaptation to their social environments. Political mobilization among these groups emerges through lived inequalities, discrimination experiences, and aspirations for representation. Exclusion—whether legal, social, or cultural—acts as both a challenge and a catalyst that strengthens socio-political awareness and encourages activism. Participants described political engagement not merely as a response to injustice but also as a proactive strategy to claim belonging, participate in community upliftment, and influence local political discourse. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing second-generation individuals as socio-political actors with agency and vision rather than passive recipients of structural constraints. Their emerging civic engagement represents an important shift in Balochistan’s political landscape, where marginalized groups are increasingly advocating for rights, inclusion, and social justice. Understanding their identity negotiations and political trajectories is essential for policymakers, civil society, and researchers. The study underscores the need for inclusive policies that acknowledge hybrid identities, reduce discrimination, and encourage civic participation among second-generation populations.

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