The background features various light blue hand-drawn scribbles, including circles, ovals, a star, a zigzag line, and checkmarks.

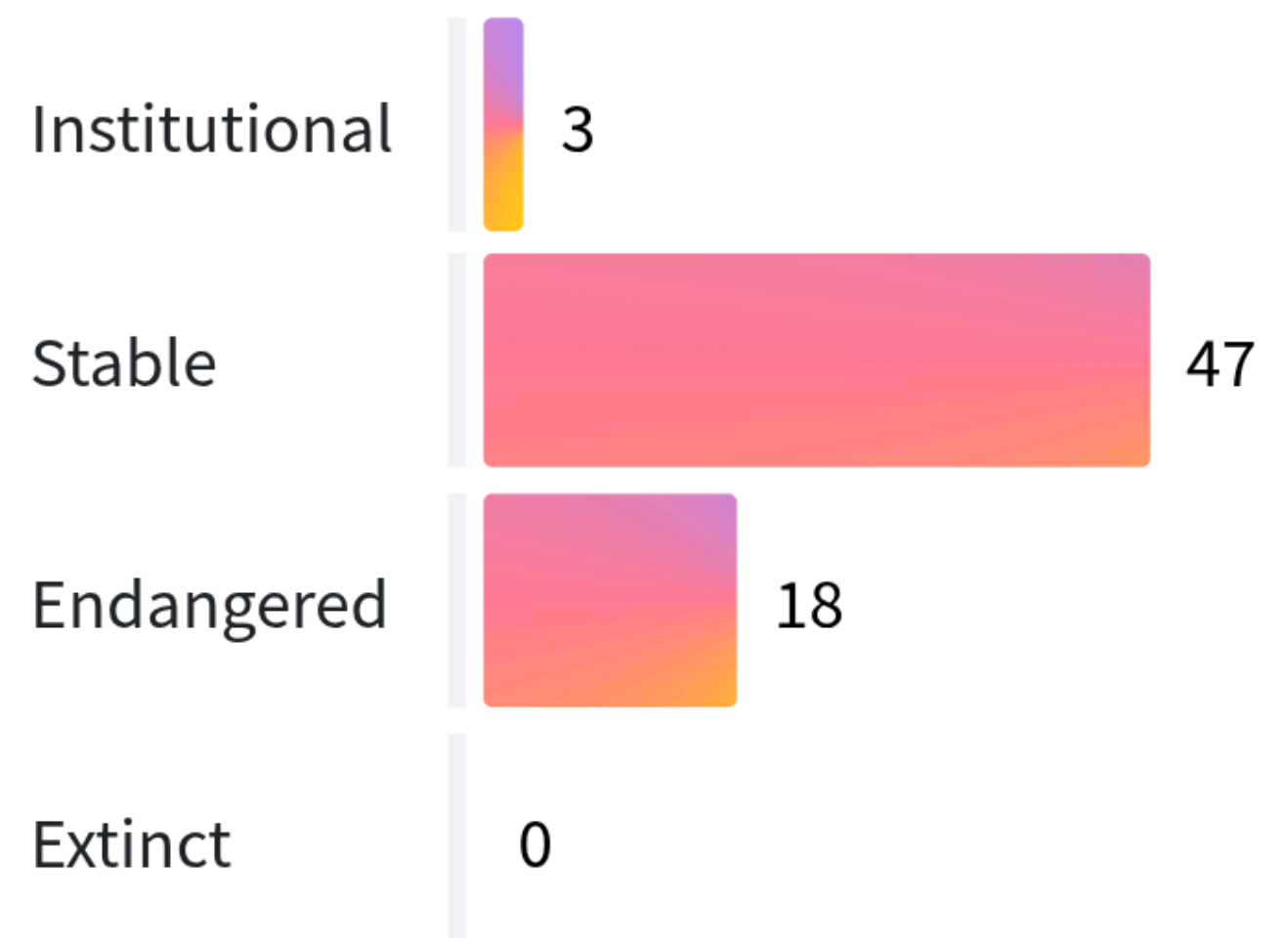
Invisible Linguistic Firewalls: Pakistan's Digital Inclusion Challenge

Presented By: Arshia Rifat

Problem

- Over 90% of online content exists in fewer than 10 languages
- Pakistan has 70+ languages, but less than 2% of online platforms support Urdu or regional scripts
- English-only interfaces exclude millions from participating in e-learning, business, and digital governance

Indigenous Language Vitality Count



Why It Matters!!!

Access Barriers

Linguistic barriers prevent equitable access to e-services and local information

Branding Limitations

Local entrepreneurs face branding restrictions, they can't register domains or emails in native scripts

Language Exclusion

Educational materials and public data remain English-only, alienating rural and low-literacy populations



Representation Divide

It's not a digital divide alone, it's a representation divide





ICANN's Role in Building a Language-Inclusive Internet

- 01.** ICANN has introduced Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), allowing users to register and navigate domains in their native scripts
 - 02.** Through the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG), ICANN is actively promoting global readiness for all domain names and emails, across every script and extension
 - 03.** ICANN works with regional groups, including in Pakistan and South Asia, to develop script rules and localization policies for a more inclusive DNS
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The State of Linguistic Inclusion in Pakistan

Pakistan's "پاکستان" IDN was approved in 2011, but uptake is low (<1% of registered .pk domains)

Most Pakistani registrars are not UA-ready (source: UASG Readiness Report 2023)

Government and educational institutions rarely use Urdu or Sindhi domains

Language inclusivity isn't integrated into Pakistan's Digital Transformation Roadmap (2021–2026)





ICANN and Pakistan's Ministry of IT can assess compliance in public institutions



Integrate IDN/UA modules in computer science and engineering curriculum



Offer reduced-cost Urdu or Sindhi domain registrations



Awareness drives led by ICANN APAC and Pakistan Internet Governance Forum (PIGF)

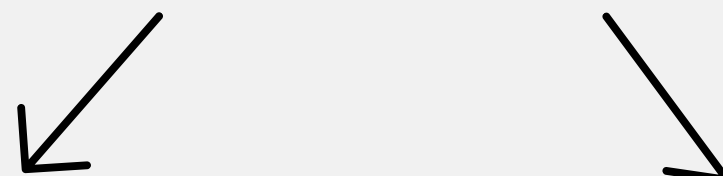
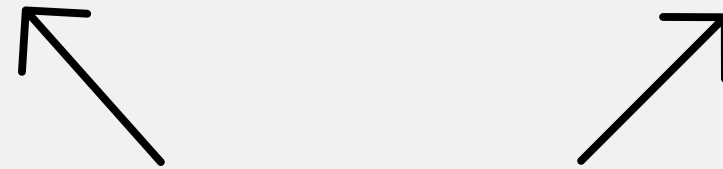


Encourage the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) to include UA compliance in licensing



Fund studies and pilot projects on local script usability and multilingual internet access

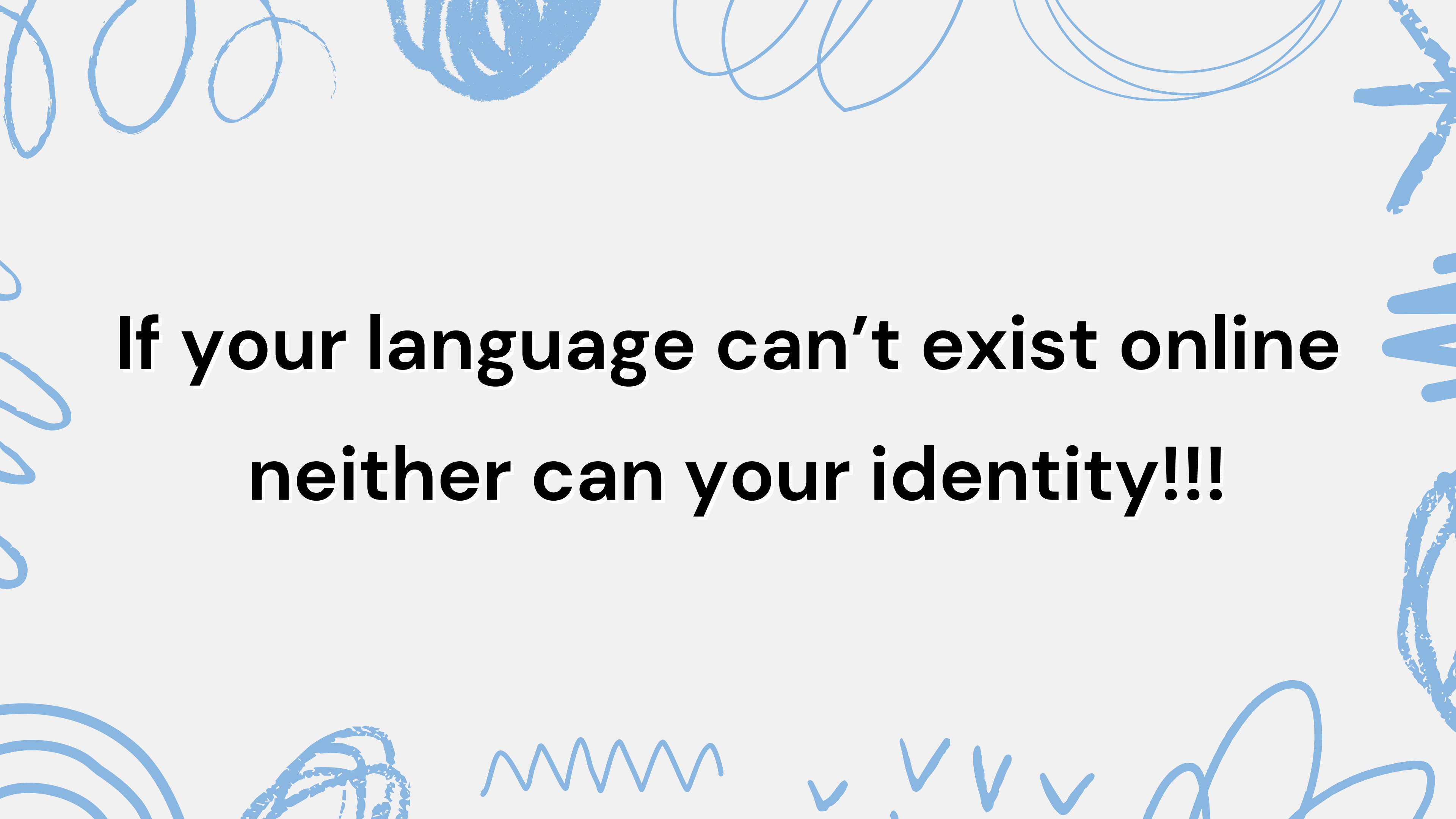
Solutions & Path Forward



Conclusion

- The internet can only be “universal” when all scripts, languages, and users are represented
- Pakistan’s case shows that policy, technical readiness, and awareness must progress together
- ICANN’s leadership in IDNs and UA can transform linguistic diversity into a foundation for digital equality



The background of the slide is white, decorated with various hand-drawn blue scribbles and shapes. These include loops, swirls, zig-zags, and abstract patterns scattered around the central text.

**If your language can't exist online
neither can your identity!!!**

The background features various hand-drawn blue scribbles and shapes, including loops, swirls, and zig-zags, scattered around the central text.

Thank you!