



Student Unions as Catalysts: Identifying Their Role in Fostering Political Awareness in Universities

Dr. Omme Asma

Research Supervisor, FUUAST, Karachi, Pakistan
hayat5002@gmail.com

Dr. Maroof Bin Rauf

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Karachi, Pakistan
maro_of@yahoo.com

Abstract

Student unions play a significant role at universities as catalysts for developing political awareness in today's ever-changing political landscape. These organizations provide a place for students to discuss ideas and actively affect campus politics. Student unions create an exciting environment that encourages students to become informed and engaged citizens by hosting conferences and meetings and inviting guest speakers. They encourage conversation and promote social responsibility and critical thinking abilities among students. Pakistan is a democratic country, but due to a lack of political awareness and power politics, we have suffered political instability and military involvement in politics. It has resulted in extortion, corrupt political leaders, inflation, unemployment, poverty, abuse of authority, and many issues that have affected Pakistan's social, economic, and political situation. Political awareness encompasses civic responsibilities and citizen rights. Citizens must understand a thorough legal and political education to comprehend their fundamental rights. This paper investigates the students' key role in shaping political perceptions and how their actions contribute to their political education.

Keywords: *Students Union, Political Awareness, Role of Universities, Political Education, Political Environment.*



Introduction

Political awareness is necessary for the development and accomplishment of every democratic state. It enables citizens to participate actively in politics, make better choices, and contribute to a flourishing nation. "Institutions of higher learning provide leadership to contemporary societies in the process of social transformation. Students are an important part of the thought leadership provided by academic institutions. Universities are sanctuaries of idealists and dreamers." (Baqir, 2023)

University is a center of knowledge, and critical thought provides an ideal environment for developing political awareness. The Student Union's tasks include collaborating with academic departments, inviting guest lecturers to conferences or seminars, and organizing events to help students understand political opinions, laws, and current events. It provides a forum for raising political knowledge and encourages students to actively participate in shaping it.

Student unions are the backbone of campus life and offer a platform to express their ideas and concerns while campaigning for change for students. Student unions promote a healthy political environment by organizing political events, debates, and campaigns that allow students to have meaningful conversations about social issues and challenge the status quo.

In an ever-changing political environment, universities play a vital role in shaping the next generation's political understanding and participation. Student unions play a salient role in this process by serving as catalysts for political education and activism. Student unions play their unique way as the student's voice and can increase political understanding and empowerment.

In an age of cultural and political upheaval, student unions have become effective catalysts and change agents within universities. They intend to prepare citizens to give direction to the complexities of the political environment by increasing political awareness and active citizenship. In Pakistan, where political involvement has declined, universities must take the lead in raising political consciousness among the youth. This study examines the role of educational institutions in creating political awareness and proposes a line of action for increasing youth political participation.

Significance of the study

Like every research it has its own importance. Notably, this research adds to the existing body of political socialization knowledge by focusing on the often-overlooked role of student



unions. Likewise, this study integrates political science, sociology, and educational sciences, offering a multidisciplinary perspective on how educational institutions contribute to the political development of young adults.

This research highlights the role of student unions in political awareness for youth empowerment. It shows how student unions have served as platforms for students to engage in political discourse, activism and leadership. Similarly, this research can support curriculum development by integrating political education and student union activities into broader educational programs and, consequently, this integration can enhance students' critical thinking and civic consciousness.

Insights from this study can guide university administrations in creating policies that support the role of student unions and encourage student political participation. University administrators, academics, and policy makers can use the research findings to better support student unions, ensuring that they have an effective role as a catalyst for political awareness. Obtain the necessary resources and autonomy to function properly.

This research concludes that by promoting political awareness at the university level, student unions contribute to the overall health of democratic societies. This research highlights the long-term impact of politically aware and engaged graduates on the national and global political landscape. Overall, this research emphasizes the important role that student unions play in the formation of politically aware and active citizens, offering valuable insights for academic institutions, society and policy makers.

Objectives of the study

- To Investigate student unions' historical evolution in universities and development for current functions in fostering political awareness.
- To Examine the leadership and governance systems within student unions and how they affect their potential to create political awareness among students.
- To Analyze the impact of student union initiatives on university students' political literacy, considering their understanding of political topics, procedures, and institutions.
- To Identify and investigate specific initiatives, events, and campaigns organized by student unions to increase political awareness and engagement among university students.



Literature Review

The Role of The Universities in Shaping Political Awareness

Universities play a significant role in educating young people's political awareness, encouraging civic engagement, and teaching democratic values. These organizations provide platforms for youth to discuss, analyze, and critically think about political theories and policies. Universities provide students with a comprehensive environment for education that includes political science, history, and law subjects, preparing them to participate actively in the political process.

Universities provide one of the primary ways to foster political awareness by having students participate in open discussions and debates on political subjects. Understanding these arguments, students consider multiple points of view, question their beliefs, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the political system. Universities assist youth to become more knowledgeable and sensitive individuals capable of shaping well-informed decisions by exposing them to diverse perspectives. Universities regularly hold conferences, seminars, or training workshops on political and civic duties. Students can interact with experts, politicians, and activists who share their experiences through these events. By creating these sessions, universities allow students to engage in meaningful discussions about prospects and problems.

Furthermore, universities play a significant role in raising political awareness by encouraging students to participate in extracurricular activities such as student unions and events. Students can use these platforms to participate in social and political issues by organizing protests, awareness campaigns, and community service projects. Universities promote a sense of civic responsibility and encourage students to become active members of society by providing people with the opportunity to act on participation that interests them.

The Culture of Student Unions

Students' political activism has a long history, extending from the United States to the European Union, China, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. Philip G. Altbach suggests, "Student activism is generally oppositional, but it was not always on the left. In the colonized nations, students were a more constant force and had a greater impact. Students are frequently not struggling for their direct benefit but rather for idealistic causes.

It may mean that they are less deeply committed to the struggle than if they were fighting for an issue that would directly affect their lives. The often-idealistic nature of student



movements may be both a stimulus and a limiting factor for sustained student activism. Student movements seldom function in a pure campus environment. They are often concerned with wider political or social issues and consciously try to influence developments beyond the university. Even when the movement is camp-focused, the impact frequently extends beyond the university." (Abbasi, 2022)

United States of America

"In the United States, it's the shortened term for 'student union building,' also known as the student center, a central campus building with a wide array of purposes and services. The first student union in the United States, Houston Hall, opened in 1896 at the University of Pennsylvania. The fact that this building is still in operation after more than a century is a testament to how essential the student union building is to the American college experience!" (Team, 2020).

The Students Union of the United States of America has highlighted on their official website "Our mission is to preserve, promote and defend a student's right to a high-quality education so that Students can compete and excel in the global economy. Student Union USA will serve as the Guardian for Students of the United States of America." (A Voice in Education, 2021) Their primary objective is to safeguard, advocate for, and champion the right of every student to receive a top-notch education. By doing so, they aim to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive and outperform in the worldwide economy. Serving as the ultimate protector and advocate, Student Union USA ensures that students across the nation are provided with the opportunities and resources they need to succeed academically.

"The American Student Union (ASU) is a national student organization with an anti-imperialist and working-class political orientation. We seek to build a new America—of the people, by the people, for the people, and not for the big capitalists and imperialists. With the decline of American unipolarity and the devastating economic crisis we are in, the students of America need solutions. American students find themselves caring for their parents, brothers, and children. They find themselves working multiple jobs for little pay while in school. They find themselves in serious debt and with little prospects. Facing these titanic struggles, American students, now more than ever, are ready for socialism. The ASU seeks to unite the students of America through peace, jobs, and democracy." (About Us, 1935)

The Student Union is an integral part of the University of Connecticut community in the USA. The Student Union arranges a program, events, and services for all community



members. Students are assigned real-world duties and learn job skills that future employers desire. Problem solving, teamwork, communication, and leadership are just a few of the skills youth can gain while working here.

China

The University CPC committee is guided and led by connecting the students and the organization like a bridge. It firmly supports Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought," and other theories while conducting an in-depth study and practice of implementing the scientific concept of development and following and implementing the Communist Party's education principles and policies. Its primary goal is to provide unwavering support to students. The student union actively enriches campus life by preserving student rights and interests and guiding students. The student union benefits students' "self-education, self-management, and self-service."

In Sichuan University, "under the student union, there are 12 departments including the Learning Department, Rights and Interests Department and Quality Developing Center. These departments play an active role in maintaining fine school discipline and school spirit. Besides, they also promote the harmonization of teaching order and the living and learning environment. Many colorful, healthy, and beneficial academic and practical activities are organized by the student union. It also participates in the democratic management of student affairs in school. It maintains the legitimate rights and interests of students as well. In the meantime, the student union leads positive, realistic, and innovative ideas for young people in the twenty-first century. It mobilizes and organizes the students to make their due contribution to develop our university into a "first-class research institution in China". (Students Union).

At Tianjin University they work as a Student Union, Student Union of Associations, and Young Volunteer Association. "The Student Union of Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology's mission is: to promote the all-round development of students in morality, intelligence, and physique and to unite and guide students to become qualified and talented people who love their motherland and meet the requirements for the modernized construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics by abiding by and carrying out the educational guideline of the Party; safeguarding the overall interest of the whole nation and expressing and safeguarding students' specific interests by playing its role as a bridge that links the Party and our university with students; developing healthy, beneficial and



diversified extracurricular activities and social services by advocating and organizing self-services, self-management and self-education, to serve students industriously.” (NUIST Student Union)

In China, international students can participate in union activities. “The International Students Union (ISU) is a non-profit, non-religious, and non-political student organization under the supervision and management of the School of International Education (SIE). The union aims to enhance communication between administrative authority (i.e. SIE) and international students and to help with their self-management and self-service.” (International Students Union, n.d.)

“In Wuhan University International Students Union (WISU) is the representative body of international students at Wuhan University, China. WISU was founded in 2001. Now it has developed into a well-organized student union. We are the bridge between the international and the local students at Wuhan University, and the bridge between international students and the School of International Education. WISU is the umbrella organization for all clubs and societies handled by international students, like Model United Nations (WISMUN) or the WISU Press Club. Our range of activities includes educational events, like lectures or language corners; recreational activities like sports competitions or cultural activities like performances, fashion shows, or our biggest event: the annual Wuhan University International Culture Festival.” (Students Union and Activities, n.d.)

European Students Union

“The European Students Union (ESU) is the umbrella organization of 45 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 40 countries. ESU’s mission as adopted at its 61st Board Meeting: ESU’s mission is to represent, defend, and strengthen students’ educational, democratic political, and social rights. ESU will work for sustainable, accessible, and high-quality higher education in Europe.” (About Mission, n.d.)

“ESU has a democratic structure based on the primacy of its members – 45 national unions of students from 40 different countries across Europe. ESU’s highest governing body, the Board, meets twice a year and elects ESU’s representatives for a one-year mandate, where each member country is given two votes. ESU’s representative structure consists of an elected Executive Committee (EC), whose work is supported by three coordinators, experts’ pools, and working groups.” (Elected Representatives, n.d.)



They have developed their policy, as well as an annual work plan. Its headquarters are in Brazil, and its network spans 40 nations. All educational institutions participate in activities within this category.

Russia

“There are over 1,400 student organizations at Ohio State and over half of all students join a student organization. Students who choose to get involved achieve many positive outcomes - leadership skills, better grades, friendships, and mentors, and make a big campus seem small. Use the tools below to search for, find, and get involved with student organizations.” (Student Activities, n.d.)

“Students’ Union is the core body of students’ self-government at Ural Federal University; more than 50% of the students are members of the Students’ Union. The main goals of the Union are to protect students’ rights, to improve education quality, to give students possibilities for project implementation and creative abilities development, and to unite students in solving the university’s self-governmental problems. There are 22 commissions in the structure of the Students’ Union. Union Section functions in each institute. In 2004 Students’ Union became a laureate of the All-Russian Contest of Self-Governmental Bodies of Russian Universities.” (About, n.d.)

Arab Countries

“Arab Student Union is an organization that has been established to promote an understanding of Arab history, culture, and heritage at the University of Miami. As well as, raising awareness about the Arab world while serving and supporting the UM community on campus.” (Arab Students Union, n.d.) Students in Arab countries' educational institutions lack political freedom. In America and Europe, student organizations formed to preserve the rights of Arab students, but in Arab countries, students are not allowed to students get involved in political activities.

African Countries

“The All-Africa Students Union (AASU) organizes all students in Africa – from the basic level to Institutions of higher learning; in essence, the Union is the umbrella organization for all students of Africa. Since its inception in 1972, AASU now has a presence in 54 Countries in Africa. As the Continent’s largest student group, AASU played an important role in the struggle against colonialism and the ending of apartheid. Today, AASU is at the forefront of the fight for equal access to quality education, quality assurance in higher education, and



harmonization of higher education systems – with key emphasis on the mobility of academics and comparability of qualifications, democratic governance, defending students’ rights, promotion of gender and African culture, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, fostering of academic freedom, freedom of research and autonomy of higher institutions of learning, and the promotion of peace and democratic values, and other noteworthy objectives. In the year 2000, the UN awarded AASU a certificate of merit in recognition of the Union’s efforts at advancing students’ rights and championing the democratization of education across the African Continent.” (Education Must Be a Right Not a Privilege, n.d.)

The Union's Executive Committee, the second-highest organ is responsible for carrying out all policies and programs agreed upon by Congress. The Executive Committee meets yearly and contains Secretariat members and representatives from each sub-region, including West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa. In their preferences education, student rights, environment & climate action, gender equality, capacity building, Pan-Africanism and African culture, democracy and good governance, migration, and mobility.

Japan

“The Japan Society at the University of Sussex organizes many events not only to know Japanese culture but also to make friends from all over the world. We are welcoming every student regardless of their nationality.” (About Japan Society, n.d.)

The student union or council do not participate in political activities in Japan. They focus on gatherings like culture events, sushi nights, film nights, and language exchange programs.

"The Education Zone of the Union Council is a core democratic function of the Students' Union where a group of elected student representatives discuss, ideas and policy proposals relating to the academic experience at UCL." (Education Zone, n.d.) All students are welcome to attend these sessions and provide suggestions, but only elected representatives can vote on policy.

India

“Section 43 of the Constitution gives the right to the students.

(1) There shall be a union of students at the University consisting of all the students at colleges and departments of the University.

(2) The organization and function of the University Students' Union shall be prescribed by the Statutes.” (Union of Students)



Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), an All-India student organization, was founded in 1948, and today is the largest student organization in the world. With the motto of “Knowledge, Character & Unity”, ABVP draws its inspiration from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the premier Hindu nationalist organization of the country. AISF was created on August 12, 1936, under Nehru's leadership, with the motto "Study and Struggle". It holds the distinction of being the first student body to play a direct role in achieving Indian independence.

The All-India Democratic Students' Organization (AIDSO) is affiliated with the Socialist Unity Centre of India (communist). AIDSO's motto is to combat injustice, oppression, and exploitation while advocating for social reform. Students Federation of India (SFI) SFI, a socialist organization, has the slogan "Independence, Democracy, and Socialism!" SFI thinks that education is the only way to free India from the constraints of backward ideology. “Student Union members are in a very important position to bring about a change for the better, and through experience gained, lead India in the political capacity in the future. They must strive to remain as apolitical as feasible and work towards maintaining their ideology and achieving their objectives.” (Athreye, 2016)

Pakistan

“Students’ organizations and students’ unions have existed on college and university campuses since the independence of Pakistan in 1947. Muslim Students Federation (MSF) existed even before the creation of Pakistan and played an active role in the Pakistan Movement in close association with the Pakistan Muslim League. Democratic Students Federation (DSF) and Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) were formed soon after the creation of Pakistan. The IJT was established on December 23, 1947, at Lahore. Head of Jamaat-e-Islami, Maulana Abul aala Maudoodi addressed its founding meeting. The DSF was founded in Gordon College Rawalpindi in 1948 and was later extended to Karachi in 1950.” (Revival of Students’ Unions in Pakistan, 2008)

Student unions were critical in defining Pakistan's political discourse in the early years after independence. Student unions were critical in defining Pakistan's political discourse in the early years after independence. They were training grounds for future politicians and functioned as a platform for new political leaders.

“Gen Zia was a wily man and understood that the threat to his survival came from an organized student body. The progressive student parties had swept the polls in 1983 when the last student unions’ elections were held. Zia saw which way the wind was blowing and



reacted by imposing a clampdown on the unions. For precisely the same reason as prompted by Zia, the political parties have found it expedient to keep the ban in place.” (Mustafa, 2023) “Before the ban, there were several student unionists who rose to prominence in politics, and some of them are now ministers or have positions in their respective parties. Asad Qaiser, the speaker of the National Assembly; Syed Amin Ul Haq, the information technology minister; Ahsan Iqbal, the secretary general of the main party of Pakistan named Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz; Raza Rabbani, the former Senate chairman; and Ameer-ul-Azim, the secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, are among them.” (Agency, 2022)

“If we look at the history of student politics in Pakistan, we see that it was not only student unions but college magazines, debates, mushairas, dramatic clubs, and sports that created an atmosphere for the holistic development of our youth. Student unions hardly paid attention to the real issues of students related to curriculum development, pedagogy, scientific research, development of the local body of knowledge, aligning learning with career development, and nurturing critical thinking. Improving the quality of education was also never on the agenda of union politics.” (Baqir, 2023)

The restriction on student unions and campus politics has weakened public trust in the political system and contributed to a leadership crisis. Youth are disillusioned with the political process and frequently choose to stay at home rather than cast a vote. The absence of student organizations has exacerbated Pakistan's political culture's deterioration. In the literature review, the objectives of the research highlight the historical evolution of student unions and their contemporary roles in raising political awareness among university students. Student unions have an extensive history of action and advocacy, working in every university in many countries. They've evolved into important hubs of campus life, providing services, organizing events, and protecting students' rights and interests. In this discussion, they provide insights into student unions' role in promoting political awareness by examining their historical context and contemporary activities.

The other objective is the importance of leadership and governance mechanisms within student unions and their impact on increasing political awareness. After discussion, we understand that effective leadership and transparent governance mechanisms are required for student unions to achieve their full potential in developing political engagement among students. Another objective highlighted in the review demonstrates the effect of student union actions on university students' political literacy. Student unions support youth in comprehending political themes, procedures, and institutions by hosting open talks, debates,



conferences, and campaigns. The literature study focuses on numerous activities, events, and campaigns organized by student unions to raise political knowledge and engagement among youth. These include conferences, seminars, workshops, demonstrations, public awareness campaigns, and community service programs. Through these activities on behalf of the student unions, the aim is to increase political knowledge and engagement among the students and prepare them to participate in the political process.

In conclusion, the literature analysis gives a thorough overview of the historical evolution, functions, leadership, governance, initiatives, and influence of student unions worldwide in raising political consciousness among university students. This study intends to contribute to the knowledge base about the role of student unions in shaping political engagement in higher education institutions by aligning its objectives.

Research Methodology

Examining the role of student unions in raising political consciousness in universities is indeed a vast and lengthy task. Especially in a country like Pakistan where its history exists but its importance is negligible at present. Therefore, the qualitative research method has been adopted in this study. Due to the lack of familiarity with the student union of the new generation and its lack of acceptance at the government level, the method of document analysis has been adopted in this research. Under this method, the situation of student unions in developing countries along with the developed countries of the world has been evaluated from the situation of Pakistan. This methodology aims to provide important and contextually appropriate insights into the broader understanding of the study design by incorporating qualitative data throughout the analysis.

Discussion and Analysis

Criticism and Controversies Surrounding University Involvement in Political Awareness

University engagement in political awareness has been controversial and discussed over the past few decades. Some claim that universities are morally obligated to raise political awareness among their students, while others argue that such activity blurs the line between education and political indoctrination. This argument emphasizes the importance of universities' role in influencing students' political beliefs and the potential implications of such involvement. One of the most common arguments against university involvement in political awareness is that it may influence students' political attitudes. Rather than pursuing a particular political goal, opponents argue that educational institutions should emphasize



providing students with a well-rounded education that encourages critical thinking and independent thought. They insist that by actively participating in political awareness efforts, colleges risk undermining their credibility as unbiased educational institutions.

“Politics is wrought with chaos. When students feel that their rights are being interfered, they resort to revolts. Now this is a legitimate cause but mostly results in a barbaric scenario. There are riots, chaos, and people getting beaten up and injured. Sometimes they are taken to jail which is any how is not good for the academic health of students. This has also led to groups based on religion, racism, geography, language, and other related reasons. To gain power they use unfair means including instigating students to get the vote bank.” (Hussain, 2019)

Another issue with university involvement in political awareness is the danger of partisan prejudice. According to opponents, Universities, particularly those with strong ideological leanings, may use their position to promote a specific political agenda and suppress dissenting ideas. As a result, students may be exposed to just either end of the political spectrum, limiting their ability to engage in informed and balanced discourse. This situation undermines fundamental academic freedom and intellectual diversity ideals.

Proponents of university involvement in political awareness argue that students must develop a sense of civic responsibility and participate in the political process. They reason that universities offer students the unique opportunity to learn about key social and political concerns, allowing them to become involved and informed citizens. Universities can assist well-rounded individuals capable of making informed judgments by exposing students to many perspectives and encouraging open dialogue.

According to Adela Coman and Catalina Bonciu from Romania, “Political dynamics can be sordid and destructive. But politics can also be the vehicle for achieving noble purposes. Institutional effectiveness depends on leaders’ political skills. Constructive politicians recognize and understand political realities. They know how to fashion an agenda, map the political terrain, create a network of support, and negotiate with both allies and adversaries. In the process, they encounter a practical and ethical dilemma: when to adopt an open, collaborative strategy or when to choose a tougher, more adversarial approach. They must consider the potential for collaboration, the importance of long-term relationships, and most important, their own values and ethical principles. The parties in political processes have different preferences. As they interact through negotiations, compromises, and coalition



formation, their original objectives change. Since the groups with which they interact are also modifying their positions. This can be conveniently learned in universities because universities are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups, and there are continuing differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.” (Abbasi, 2022)

The Decline of Political Participation in Pakistan

The student union's primary aim was to handle students' problems on campus, but they also took on a role of active political opposition against authoritarianism and the establishment. Student unions organize different academic and extracurricular events on campuses, helping to create a necessary atmosphere for middle-class students' sociopolitical mobility and training them in debating and critical thinking abilities.

“In the 1980s, student activism soared in Pakistan. The left-leaning groups led demonstrations against the military dictator Zia ul Haq, who ruled the country with an iron fist. To counter the young and energetic anti-regime students, Haq launched a brutal clampdown on the left-leaning student parties, arresting their key leaders and campaigners. The move polarized the country into two groups: one-sided with the anti-regime student politics, and the other, ideologically aligned with Haq, opposed them. The climate of intense hatred in universities and colleges led to violence and between 1982 and 1988 at least 80 student leaders lost their lives, according to a report published by Jinnah Institute, an Islamabad-based think tank. Haq's government eventually deployed paramilitary troops in the various universities and colleges of Karachi (which continue to exist in some universities until today) and imposed a countrywide ban on student activism. The brazen confrontation between the state and student bodies triggered a culture of violence in Pakistan's educational institutions, which had far-reaching consequences in the following decades.” (Rehman, 2019)

Even now, violent fights between student groups are a common feature of Pakistan's state-run educational institutions. Consequently, Youth voting turnout in Pakistan has dropped significantly in the last few decades. “In the 2013 general election, only 36% of eligible voters aged 18-29 cast a ballot, a significant decrease from the 52% turnout among young people in the 2007 election.” (Fatima, 2023)

In Pakistan's 2018 general election, just “51.5% of eligible voters cast ballots.” (Percentages of Segregated Male/Female Voter Turnout Based on FORM-47, 2018) This pattern implies a



lack of trust in the political process and a lack of understanding of the importance of voting. The outlawing of student unions and the outlawing of politics on campuses have compounded the leadership crisis, further eroding public trust. The younger generation accounts for more than 68% of the population, and many modern leaders struggle to connect with them. However, according to a British Council report “57% say they have little or no trust in the political system.” (Farooq, 2023) As a result, many young people believe voting is worthless and avoid it altogether.

Conclusion

After Pakistan's independence, Quaid e Azam advised students to avoid politics. “In Pakistan, political parties with a limited following and weak presence in the parliament used students as a proxy for street power and turned academic institutions into hotbeds of political confrontation. As a result, student unions emerged as an important vehicle for politics of dissent and unfortunately, violence became an integral part of student politics. Engaging in violence simply means crossing the boundaries of the discourse of knowledge and entering the discourse of ignorance.” (Baqir, 2023) Student unions are important in promoting political awareness and education among university students. These organizations provide opportunities for students to debate, exchange ideas, and actively impact the political environment on campus. Student unions foster a dynamic environment that encourages students to become knowledgeable and engaged citizens by hosting events and workshops and inviting guest speakers.

In Pakistan, where political upheaval and a lack of understanding have created many obstacles, student unions are important for encouraging civic responsibility and critical thinking among young people. As institutions of higher learning, universities play a vital role in shaping political consciousness and equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to comprehend their civic duties and rights. Student unions contribute to students' overall political education by boosting their political consciousness and empowering them to navigate the complexities of the political landscape. To create a more politically informed younger generation, universities must take the lead in promoting political participation and encouraging discussion of social and political issues. Student politics has devolved into a realm devoid of meaningful debates and active intellectual exchanges, culminating in shallow sloganeering, empty language, and violence as a form of political expression. It gradually and secretly produced a culture of vigilante justice, in which student organizations saw themselves justified in acting as plaintiffs, witnesses, attorneys, judges, jurors, and executors in the face of opposing viewpoints.

A lack of actual issues to focus on and a lack of robust intellectual debate weakened the core of student politics. Instead, it became highlighted by superficial techniques and aggressive posturing.



Promoting political knowledge among youth is critical for Pakistan's dynamic democracy, social cohesion, and long-term prosperity. Universities play a significant role in raising political awareness by incorporating political education into the curriculum, organizing seminars and workshops, encouraging student participation, promoting debates and discussions, collaborating with civil society organizations, and utilizing digital platforms. Pakistan may pave the way for a brighter future if it invests in education and raises political awareness.

Recommendations

First and foremost, Pakistan must eliminate the ban on student organizations because raising political awareness of student unions plays a significant role in universities. These organizations catalyze students' participation in political conversations and actions. Student unions provide a forum for students to express themselves and learn about various political ideas by organizing events, debates, and seminars. This exposure enables them to develop critical thinking abilities and participate in the political process. Furthermore, student unions frequently collaborate with outside organizations and invite guest speakers to debate political issues. It permits students to learn from professionals and broaden their understanding of different points of view. Overall, student unions increase political awareness and help students become informed citizens.

One recommendation for student unions to increase their role in spreading political awareness is to establish relationships with local governments. Working with these institutions, student unions can plan programs for students to meet elected officials and understand how politics affects their lives. It is possible to accomplish this through internships, mentorship programs, or even town hall gatherings where students can communicate with government authorities. Such programs would not only improve students' political awareness but would also help to bridge the gap between academia and politics.

Another recommendation is that student unions concentrate on problems that affect students' lives. Student unions can engage more students who would otherwise be disinterested in politics by tackling issues such as affordable housing, student debt, and mental health support. This strategy teaches students the importance of politics in their daily lives and encourages them to take an active role in developing policies that affect them personally. Moreover, student unions can collaborate with advocacy groups to create campaigns to raise awareness and advocate for policy changes on these issues.

References

A Voice in Education. (2021). Retrieved from Students Union USA:
<https://www.studentunionusa.org/>



- Abbasi, D. A. (2022, October 17). *Universities and National Politics*. Retrieved from Pakistan Today: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/10/17/universities-and-national-politics/>
- About. (n.d.). Retrieved from Ural Federal University: <https://urfu.ru/en/activities/social-life/student-organizations/students-union/>
- About Japan Society. (n.d.). Retrieved from Students Union Sussex University: <https://sussexstudent.com/activities/view/japan-society>
- About Mission. (n.d.). Retrieved from European Students Union: <https://esu-online.org/about/>
- About Us. (1935). Retrieved from American Student Union: <https://americanstudentunion.org/>
- Agency, A. (2022, February 08). *Ban on student unions causes 'political drought' in Pakistan*. Retrieved from Tribune: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2342582/ban-on-student-unions-causes-political-drought-in-pakistan>
- Arab Students Union. (n.d.). Retrieved from University of Miami: https://events.miami.edu/group/arab_students_union_asu
- Athreye, V. (2016, February 20). *Students Union in India*. Retrieved from My India: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/india/student-unions-in-india>
- Baqir, F. (2023, October 14). *Student Union*. Retrieved from The Nation: <https://www.nation.com.pk/14-Oct-2023/student-unions>
- Education Must Be a Right Not a Privilege*. (n.d.). Retrieved from All Africa Students Union: <https://aasuonline.org/>
- Education Zone*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Students Union Council: <https://studentsunionucl.org/make-a-change/zones/education-zone>
- Elected Representatives*. (n.d.). Retrieved from European Students Union: <https://esu-online.org/about/elected-representatives/>
- Farooq, U. (2023, February 23). *Next Generation Pakistan*. Retrieved from British Council: https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next_gen_report_as_on_23_feb_2023_-_brief.pdf
- Fatima, A. (2023, December 4). *How engagement & political activism can empower youth in Pakistan?* Retrieved from Pakistan Today: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/12/04/how-youth-engagement-political-activism-can-empower-pakistans-future/>
- Hussain, S. T. (2019, February 19). *Effects of politics on student life*. Retrieved from Chitral Today: <https://chitraltoday.net/2019/02/19/effect-of-politics-on-student-life/>
- International Students Union*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Study in Chongqing University: http://study.cqu.edu.cn/HOME/ORIENTATION/Useful_Information/Life_on_Campus/International_Student_Union.htm
- Mustafa, Z. (2023, February 10). *Student Unions*. Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1736357>
- NUIST Student Union*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Nanjing University Information Science & Technology: <https://en.nuist.edu.cn/4206/listm.htm>
- Percentages of Segregated Male/Female Voter Turnout Based on FORM-47*. (2018). Retrieved from Election Commission of Pakistan: <https://ecp.gov.pk/storage/files/1/gw-13.pdf>



- Rehman, Z. u. (2019). *Pakistan's trouble with accepting campus politics*. Retrieved from TRT World: <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/pakistan-s-trouble-with-accepting-campus-politics-32797>
- Revival of Students' Unions in Pakistan*. (2008, September). Retrieved from Pildat: <https://pildat.org/publications/Publication/Youth/Updated-ProposedRevivalofStudentsUnionsinPakistanSep2008.pdf>
- Student Activities*. (n.d.). Retrieved from The Ohio State University: https://activities.osu.edu/involvement/student_organizations/find_a_student_org/?i=6c0da9bd-2ae0-4606-9268-0b0f975a509a&l=R&c=Columbus&page=3
- Students Union*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Sichuan University: https://en.scu.edu.cn/Students1/Students_Union.htm
- Students Union and Activities*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Wuhan University: <http://admission.whu.edu.cn/en/?c=content&a=list&catid=115>
- Team, H. (2020, September 16). *5 Reasons Why Student Unions Exist and How They Help Students Cope with College Life*. Retrieved from Higher Education Review: <https://others.thehighereducationreview.com/news/5-reasons-why-student-unions-exist-and-how-they-help-students-cope-with-college-life-nid-1546.html>
- Union of Students. (n.d.). In *Constitution* (p. Section 43). Dehli: Government of India.