

REVIVAL OF STUDENT UNIONS: A PATHWAY FOR DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND LEADERSHIP IN PAKISTAN

Talha Jadoon

BS Student of Political science GPGC No 1, Abbottabad

mrjadoon313@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *
Talha Jadoon

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15781225>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
10 May, 2025	10 June, 2025	23 June, 2025	30 June, 2025

ABSTRACT

A country where more than 60% of the population is young cannot separate them from politics, a citizen who is eligible to cast vote at the age of 18 is still a student have right to engage himself in political activities, student unions are the platform where students learn political behavior, polish leadership qualities and learn how to lead and address the issues. Students have played a significant role in shaping the country's policies before and after the formation of Pakistan, and launched countrywide movements. This platform provides strong leadership to the country, banned on February 9, 1984, many efforts were made for the revival of union but couldn't revive it as in the era of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, many promises were made by high officials, lot of decisions were made for the revival of student unions but none were implemented. This paper discusses the historical role of student unions before the ban in 1984 and the crises that emerged after the ban, discusses how the ban created a leadership drought, and how students lost democratic values. A comparative analysis of casualties in educational institutions before and after the ban is also discussed. Data has been collected through secondary sources, research papers, media reports, books, and critically analyzed to provide some suggestions. A qualitative and descriptive approach is applied in the research. This is an under-researched topic; not much work has been done on this topic. This research will demonstrate the true value and need of student unions, not only for students but also for the country.

Keywords: student unions, civic engagement, democratic values, leadership development, student politics.

INTRODUCTION

Manja Klemenčič defines student unions as a formal student organization that represents students, participates in university policy making, and also extends their influence to societal issues (Klemenčič, 2024). Union members are elected representatives chosen by students who are also a part of the syndicate and influence decision-making in educational institutions. Some significant objectives of student unions are to ensure quality education, efforts for students' rights, maintaining a peaceful environment in educational institutions, providing political

training for students, and fostering leadership development (Hashmat & Zaman, 2020). Relating it with politics, the term politics defined by different scholars in different meanings like Leacock says "it is the study of government" and Garner defined it as "it begins and ends with state" (Shehzad et al., 2024), more precisely we can define politics as, "the art of getting power, administer state and other political units, society and gain own ends" (Collins dictionary). Students have always played crucial roles in national politics and have been behind many

revolutions in history (CERAPA, 2005), so it requires training and a platform where leadership can be developed. When we see in history not only in Pakistan but all over the world where educational institutions are present, students unions were present and playing vital roles in affairs of university (Klemenčič, 2024), in Pakistan Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto developed student's union structure in educational institutions and also involved students in many decisions regarding state affairs (PILDAT, 2008). But unfortunately, dictators cannot tolerate the growth of democratic values in a country and try to suppress every voice that they feel can go against their interests, so President General Zia ul Haq imposed a ban on student unions in Pakistan on 9th of February 1984, through martial law order (PILDAT, 2008). This was not only an attack on democracy but also against the basic fundamental right granted in article 17 of the constitution of Pakistan which gives all the citizens of Pakistan the right to form associations or unions subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the supreme sovereignty or integrity of Pakistan, public order or morals (Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973). February 9 is considered a black day for students. In a country where rickshaw unions exist, they can elect their representative and advocate for their rights, but students who are the future of every nation are restricted from exercising their fundamental right (Shehzad et al., 2024). In Pakistan, a significant portion of the population consists of youth as 64% of the total population of Pakistan is below the age of 30 while 29% between the ages of 15 and 29 years (UNDP survey report), if we ignore this huge portion of population we ignore the future of the country. Historically, students have played a key role in many revolutions, like the French Revolution, Iranian Revolution, resistance movement in Kashmir, and Gaza, all were initiated by students (CERAPA, 2004). In the independence movement of the subcontinent, students also played a key role (Talaba Tehrekeen, vol 1). The Muslim Student Federation was established in different regions of the subcontinent to engage youngsters in the Pakistan movement. Quaid-e-Azam also stated that *"You (the students) are the main nation builders of tomorrow, and you must fully equip yourself by discipline, education, and training for the arduous task lying ahead of you. You should realize*

the magnitude of your responsibility and be ready to bear it" (Waris et al., 2021). Soon after the independence, Islami Jamiat e Talaba was established with purpose to create an Islamic society, prepare future leadership from educational institutions based on the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah (IJT official website), other student organizations emerged after independence like democratic student federation (1950) National Students Federation (1953), Imamia Students Federation (1972) All Pakistan Muhajir Student Organization (1978), Insaf Students Federation (2007), these are the main students association working according to their ideology (PILDAT, 2019). Students have achieved many successes in the past through collective efforts, vigorously resisting Ayub Khan's military government, and protesting against his educational policies, including the 3-year degree program and the University Ordinance 1963, and achieved successes (Ahmad, 2000). These students' bodies provided prominent leadership, and during the era when unions were working properly, they polished their abilities, learned democratic values, and prepared for future leadership. This ban had a very negative impact on student development, confining them to books only, and all other activities were deemed illegal, the notion was instilled in the minds of students that if they want a bright future, they should stay away from politics, today we witness a lack of strong leadership in the country. If we compare politicians who started their political careers before 1984 with those who entered politics after that and did not experience the union, we see a significant difference in their personality and leadership qualities. Many efforts have been made to revive the student unions, with numerous decisions, resolutions, and SC orders in favor of revival, but none of them have been acted upon. There are different opinions regarding student unions; some consider it a dire need for students, and some are against it. In this research paper, the researcher tried to determine how these unions can contribute to students' lives and future leadership and how they can strengthen democratic values by analyzing past contributions of student unions and the period after the ban.

Research Questions

- 1) What was the role of students before the ban of February 9, 1984?
- 2) How can student unions play a role in strengthening democratic values and producing good leadership for the country??

Research Methodology:

In this paper, a qualitative approach to the study is used. This method involves synthesizing and analyzing existing works of scholars and researchers. Research is based on secondary data. Research papers, media reports, books, and historical documents are analyzed and build a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

A descriptive approach is also adopted in research. This method involves detailed accounts of phenomena without manipulating variables and aim to address questions like what, when, and how.

Theoretical Framework:

In this research, theories are applied, including civic engagement theory and transformational leadership theory. Robert D. Putnam presents Civic engagement theory defines it as the active participation of individuals in community life through voluntary associations, social networks, and civic activities, which strengthen democracy and social capital and foster trust and cooperation (Putnam, 2000). Another theory, transformational leadership theory, presented by James MacGregor Burns in his book "Leadership", focuses on the leader who inspires and motivates his followers to mobilize and align them to achieve collective goals, polish their abilities, and build moral values (Burns, 1978). Student unions are the legitimate bodies that fully engage students in all activities related to them, have a large impact on policies which not only related to education but also all those that can affect society. These were students who launched a nationwide movement against Ayub Khan and dethroned him. Unions counter the leadership drought, give vision to the students, shape democratic values, provide leaders who can influence others to achieve big goals, and launch mass movements.

Literature Review:

In today's world, where the government is elected by the people to manage the country's affairs and international relations, making politics an inescapable reality, individuals cannot detach themselves from politics; directly or indirectly they are engaged with politics. Quaid-e-Azam, in his speeches, considers students as the future of a country and asks them to equip themselves with education and leadership qualities to serve the country. As for Pakistan is concern, every government ignores the huge portion of the population which is students (Arfan & Usman, 2024), the country where we live today and enjoy sovereignty, students played a significant role (Arfan & Usman, 2024). The independence movement started from the two-nation theory. After 1887, many movements started, like Tehreek e mujahideen, started by Syed Ahmad Shaheed, which significantly contributed in the movement against the British colonies. 70% of its members were students (CERAPA, 2005). Saleem Mansoor Khalid in his book "Talaba Tehreeke" briefly discussed the role of students in the early independence movement, like Tehreek e Khilafat, Bazam e Shibli, Tehreek ul Mujahideen, and all efforts which were initiated for a separate homeland, students stood on the front line (Talaba Tehreeke, vol 1). Many student organizations were specifically established for this purpose most prominent is all India Muslim student federation(1936), Quaid e Azam appreciated the organization struggles, aim of which is to prepare and mobilize students so that they start their efforts for separate federation in south western region of sub-continent where Muslims can enjoy their sovereignty(Talaba Tehreeke, vol 1). Not only in Pakistan but all over the world, the governments acknowledge the real strength of students and utilize this strength for the benefit of their country, with the students having an important role in university governance. In Europe students involve in making public policy and most unions existed from early 20th century(Klemenčič, 2024), there are also regional students associations such as All-Africa Students Union (AASU), the European Students' Union (ESU), the Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA) and the Latin American and Caribbean Student Organization (OCLAE), all of them unitedly created a global union namely Global student

federation(GSF) which protect the interests and represent students in global policy making(Klemenčič, 2024). Mrs. Manja briefly discusses student politics globally and analyzes the shift of democratic elements in universities and their effect on students.

Pakistan, soon after its independence, faced many issues. A movement started in 1952 from the students of East Pakistan, present-day Bangladesh, to demand Bengali as the national language (Arfan & Usman, 2024). Leadership used students to achieve different goals because they witnessed their active role in the independence movement, but when it comes to students, advocating their educational and political rights ruling elite are always interested in controlling student activism in universities(Ziring et al., 1971). Numerous educational policies were implemented after the struggle of students like commission on national language(1959), commission on student issues and wellbeing(1966), The Manpower And Education Commission(1969) (Arfan, Usman, 2024), In 1968 student demand resignation of dictator Ayub khan after Tashkent pact which were against the national interest of a state(Ali, 2008) students played a crucial role in rise and fall of different government, all this cannot be done without political training and organized efforts. After Ayub khan Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto appreciate students unions as he saw the activism of students and strong national movement against Ayub khan, Bhutto were idealized by huge community of students and he empower student unions and made student unions a part of university governance structure like president of university student union were member of the syndicate which were the highest decision making body of any university, member of university senate, academic council and disciplinary committee (PILDAT, 2008) It was a legitimate body and had a role in every important decision, If any policy related to students was formulated, no final decision was made without the students' opinion. If there were ever a problem of fee hikes or harassment cases, the union members, as an authority, would look into these matters and ensure resolved. students were also involved in shaping the state policies and crafting state narratives, Bhutto invited elected office bearers of union members from all universities to consultate with them before going to India to

negotiate over the prisoners of war after 1971 war (PILDAT, 2008), this shows the importance of student's unions that a president of the state involve them in shaping state policies. Students also launched great movements that changed the whole scenario of the country. Khatam e Nabawat Tehreek,1974, was started by the students of Nishtar Medical College, and pressurized the government to revise the constitution, which led to the 2nd amendment in the constitution of Pakistan. After the decline of the civilian government of Bhutto, a military dictator, Gen Zia ul Haq seized control, and he imposed a ban on student unions on February 9 1984, through MLOs no. 1371, marking this day, a black day in the history of students. Mr. Taimoor Shehzad conducted interviews with numerous people and asked their opinions regarding students' unions, and mentioned it in his thesis. There are two opinions regarding ban, one is in favor and other is against it, who favors it they argue that educational institutions are places to acquire education not for politics, parents pay heavy fees for their education and students should not risk their future, student protests can stop educational activities for weeks, this problem still happening in certain main universities like PU, IIUI, Peshawar university, QAU. Unions bring violence in the institutions and introduce gun culture, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of innocent students and make educational institutions a battle ground and many students who were once member of these unions aligned themselves with militant groups who created an environment of terror in a country, political parties gives funds to these student groups to achieve their party agenda. These are the arguments by people who are in favor of ban(Shehzad et al., 2024), but a group who oppose the ban also have arguments they say that educational institutions are not only for reading textbooks and pass the exams these are the nurseries for cultivating future leadership, developing skills and prepare them for serving outside the campuses, all of these can be achieved by some platform which is administered by students. Before ban we see numerous student unionists who rise to become prominent politicians like Asad Qaiser, the speaker of the National Assembly; Syed Amin Ul Haq, the information technology minister; Ahsan Iqbal, the secretary general of the main opposition

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz; Raza Rabbani, the former Senate chairman; and Ameer-ul-Aziz, the secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami Ahsan Iqbal, Liaquat Baloch, Javed Hashmi and Qamar Zaman Kaira, late Munawar Hassan (Student politics: a brief history, 2008). Pro unions argued that Article 17 of the country gives the right to every citizen to form associations or unions, so students and politics are inseparable. unions educate students to accept defeat and nourish democratic behavior, Introduced a debate culture that not only provided an opportunity to explore different ideas but also cleared up many ideological misconception, promote political tolerance, If one group believed that it could not win the presidency seat it would support the opposing group in the hope for gaining support

for the position of General Secretary, despite having opposite ideological bases.

There was a criteria for candidate to conduct election, minimum 75% marks and attendance were required to conduct the election so if a person want to conduct election he must concentrate on his study, Mr. Liaquat Baloch said in his interview with Mr. Taimoor Shehzad that I was the president of union as well as central president of IJT and I was also a gold medalist. Campus violence increased after the ban. Many ethnic groups emerged, and students got affiliated with political parties, and they used them for their own gain. Conflicts arose among different groups, statistics show that casualties increased after the ban, and gun culture and drug supply also started after the ban.

	1947-1984(36years)	1984-2004(20years)
Student clashes	151	525
Murder students	13	165
Injured students	284	1210
Arrested students	800	7235
suspended	110	985

Source: Report released by “Education Times”, on March-April 2004 in students' rights special edition, mentioned in the research published in February 2005 on student unions by CERAPA, Islamabad.

In 1988, the Benazir government lift the ban on student unions and in 1989 repealed the MLOs and announced the elections in all universities(PILDAT, 2008).

On July 1 1992 supreme court passed an interim order that parents/guarding will give an undertaking during admission that student shall not involve himself in any political activity, any violation will lead to the cancellation of admission, however in march 1993 a bench of supreme court allowed the restoration of legitimate students groups/union’s activities though it does not mean the directing the formation of classical unions and left it to the institutions to devise its name, purpose, aims, morals and work under guidance and umbrella of institution. In 1995, elections were held in Lahore and central Punjab, but after ban of 1984, the true spirit of unions was dead; no country-wide elections were held. In 2008 PM Yousaf raza Gillani announced the restoration of unions on

assembly floor but it never came into force(PILDAT, 2008), when Imran khan assumed power he announced that his government will restore student unions and will give comprehensive code of conduct to develop youth as a future leader, but this was never implemented.

In 22nd august 2017 senate of Pakistan passed the resolution calling for the revival of student unions in educational institutions and members of the senate acknowledged that student unions played important role against dictators in the past and murder of Mishal khan in Mardan would not happened if student unions were active(Guramani, 2017) it shows not just the importance of unions but also proves that unions minimizes the campus violence, help student to get mature and show tolerance towards any issue rise in the campuses. In 2024 Supreme Court of Pakistan passed a judgment regarding the revival of students’ unions, binding QAU Islamabad to conduct union elections, and all other public sector universities should emulate the example set by QAU, but till today, elections have never been conducted. Sindh student union bill 2019 passed by the assembly on 2nd march 2022

outlining the code of conduct for conducting elections and mention that student unions must be established in every educational institution of Sindh comprising the bona fide students, and chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto while addressing the student convention in Karachi said that Political activism in educational institutions would not only empower the voice of student demanding their rights but also strengthen the discipline and quality of education and also strengthen the institutions (Amjad, 2022). Sadly, elections have never been conducted in any institution of Sindh.

Conclusion:

Students play an important role in politics landscape of democratic countries. These states provide a platform for students to engage themselves in politics. Pakistan, being a democratic country, states in Article 17 of the constitution gives the right to every citizen to form associations and unions. Historically, students played an important role in the establishment of Pakistan, and after independence, students were deeply involved in state politics and achieved notable successes. Student unions served as a platform to fostering mature leadership for Pakistan, but a dictator Gen Zia ul Haq on February 9, 1984 banned student unions which not only deprived them from their fundamental right but blocked the path of future leadership, political training of students, ban limited student's activities and just tying them to the textbooks and keep them away from extracurricular activities. Many voices rose against this decision though Benazir govt announced unions elections, elections were held in 1989, but it was last election no further election conducted since then, however many decisions were taken to hold elections supreme court issued an order, Sindh assembly passed bill to restore union election, ex PM Imran Khan promised to restore unions, special committee of senate were formed to resolved the issue but all exercises were remained merely theoretical. But today we observe that students get matured and even after the decade passed after the ban, they can realize their rights, importance of unions and started struggling for the restoration of unions. The internet and social media has played a significant role, raising awareness among the students, Through this tool, students can also be brought together on one platform and a great

movement can be launched. We cannot claim that student unions are 100 percent transparent and free from flaws, it has many negative aspects that we have faced in the past. incited violence on campus, which could be exploited as a blackmailing tool. Political parties and university administration used them for their interest but due to all these flaws we cannot ignore its positive contributions, there should be proper rules and code of conduct to regulate It properly and keep an eye on all negative activities occur in the shadow of this platform. With the passage of time, some modification to the structure and code of conduct ought to be implemented to align with the evolving political landscape and shifts occurring in the country. After the ban, we see drought in leadership, people consider politics as an evil business and advise youngsters to keep themselves away from politics, every CNIC holder is eligible to casts a vote, and no one restrict them, which means it is impossible to keep them away from politics. Students started to ignore the campus activities, leading to administrative corruption. In educational institutions, we see many harassment cases, blackmailing by teachers, and huge corruption scandals have surfaced, but no one has been there to ask and inquire. Students are being suppressed when they speak up for their rights. Except for a few institutions, they do not organize extracurricular activities, due to which the hidden talent of the students is not visible, and the country remains deprived of truly trained leaders. If a country lacks young, sincere, dedicated, and trained leadership, it destroys the political structure of the state and affects everyone's life.

Suggestions:

- The revival of student unions is the need of the hour to prepare the future leadership of Pakistan. The government and all relevant departments should take this seriously for the future of the students and the country.
- A comprehensive study and research is required to make new code of conduct because after ban about 4 decades have been passed since the ban was enacted we can see significant changes in the education system, many private universities have been established which have different administrative structure than public sector universities and the students who study

there are mainly from elite families and also there is variation in school systems different schools follow different study scheme and education system, Cambridge schools have different teaching methods in contrast to traditional schools, so all these factors should be in consideration before proceeding unions elections.

- All student organizations must be free from the influence of any political party and operate independently.
- All the negative aspects that were responsible to create tension and chaos in the past, such as drug culture, gun violence, the negative role of pressure groups, and the negative use of power, should be taken into account. establish rules and regulations to avoid them in the future.
- Civic education and leadership camps should be started in every institutions to cultivate a sense of responsibility among students.

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