

Students' Perception Regarding the Role of Student Politics and Unions in Consolidation of Fragmented Political Culture of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The student politics and unions have played a significant role throughout Pakistan's history, but there has always been a disagreement about whether they truly and devotedly serve the purpose of training young politicians or are misused by political parties at national level. A quantitative survey design was employed to statistically assess and evaluate opinions of the students of Political Science considering their relevance in the field and study. The students expressed their belief in the purpose of student unions, particularly in training students for political participation and shaping their political perceptions. They acknowledged that political instability—endangering collective identity and national integration—is in fact the effect driven by the cause of fragmented political culture that harms political development (causal explanation). The majority shared a highly affirmative view that students who participate in such bodies have comparatively better political awareness and perception.

Introduction

Controversies on the role of student politics, especially of student unions, has been around since Field-Marshal Ayub Khan's era. Discussions are frequent, in political elites' chambers as well as among populace, regarding the impact of student politics on youth, shaping their political perception and acumen.

Political culture is the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and ideas prevalent in a population of a country. Political culture is said to be fragmented when population is divided into several groups having different political attitudes and beliefs (Powell, 1966).



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This is the condition of fragmented political culture which is an open secret in Pakistan. The political culture, like society of Pakistan, is divided into several subcultures namely Baloch, Punjabi, Pashton/Pakhton, Sindhi, and Kashmiri subcultures (Rauf, 2020).

A research was done in United Kingdom on the impact and relation of student unions and student led projects. The study focused on the specific case of Keele University's student unions and their projects in United Kingdom. The research found out that the outcomes of the student led projects can be made better with the collaboration of student unions with other stake holders (Briggs, Robinson, Hadley, & Laycock Pedersen, 2019). Another study was done in India about the student politics of Dalit students and their role in the agenda of anti-caste food utopia. The study was focused on Jawahrlal Nehru University Delhi's students and series event took place. Findings illustrated the nexus of food, caste, and community sentiments (Garalyte, 2023). A wide gap in literature exists when it comes to the relation of student politics and fragmented political culture. Specifically, no study has been conducted to analyze the case of Pakistan's student politics and its role in conjoining the diverse and shattered political culture's landscape.

This research is aimed to study the perception of students of University of the Punjab regarding the role and impact of student politics and unions in conjoining and consolidation of fragmented political culture of Pakistan. The study will explore the participation as well as the awareness of students about unions in university and political landscape in the country. The questions such as what students perceive about the student politics and unions at university level, their role; either positive or negative, and impact of national level politics on them and vice versa would be answered, evaluated and analyzed in this research. Student politics playing either positive or negative role in amalgamation of diverse and disintegrated political culture will be found out.

The significance of the study lies in the Pakistan centered objectives of finding what student

perceive about their own democratic political role (in the form of student politics and unions). Youth of any nation is the catalysts of change; how they see their society and their own role as well as participation in it, is very crucial in predicting the directions of youth and country's future. Political perceptions create either peace or conflict in a democratic state. In Pakistan where youth comprises of more than sixty percent, their perception regarding political culture and their own institutions' and organizations (unions) role in it is very significant. What they perceive is likely to be the current scenario or the future prospects. Additionally, their role is undeniable in shaping the social and political culture in the future. Since University of the Punjab is the biggest institution fostering huge number of young minds of Pakistan from nearly all strata of society, this study will be a significant contribution in the literature. Basic quantitative research comprising simple questions would be asked to achieve and evaluate above given objectives.

Literature Review

Arfan & Usman (2024) concluded in a study that since 1984, the ban on student unions at state level was suggested to be removed by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Sindh province in 2008 but it was met with severe opposition by Higher Education Institutes (HEI'S). This is an indication towards the suppression on the role of student unions in Pakistan and its roots in the last century. Another study displays that student unions play a pivotal role in participate of youth in the mainstream politics of a country especially a developing country like Pakistan. Youth being more than 60% of population comprises of a huge segment of vote bank as well as stakeholder in politics as well (Shehzad, & Ullah, 2024). Thebo (2023) concluded that dictatorial regime and authoritative rule pushed students away from political participation but in recent years due to more awareness of their rights, the revival of the student unions is imminent.

Mullick (2008) discovered the relation between civic culture and students activisms in Pakistan a source to bridge the gap between of national

disintegrating of political culture. The author claimed that student unions and politics played significant role in both pre and post partition history of Pakistan. Another study claimed that even after being banned twice in the history of Pakistan, student unions showed great resilience but always faced political and bureaucratic hurdles. The researcher claimed that the lack of attention paid to student unions has created a situation of “leadership draught” in the politics of Pakistan. (Habibullah, 2024). The study (Javid, 2019) highlights the role played by the political patronage of the student unions and its effect on the growth of these bodies. The author highlighted both progressive and regressive sides of this patronage in era of political populism in Pakistan. The research (Zaman, 2020) highlights the importance of the growth of student unions and their political participation along with the regressive outcomes of such bodies in educational institutions as well such as unions being misused as pressure groups and organizations strikes and marches. This study (Ali, 2023) adopted a sociological approach to study the role of both genders and their participation in student unions and political activism by taking Quaid-I-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad as a case study. Authors find out that unions in QAU were highly patriarchal in their functions with women given very limited agency.

Syed (2025) features the significance of youth in the future political leadership of Pakistan which is undermined since 1984 ban on the union. The author claims that the country would remain a land of dynastic politics until youth, which is the biggest stakeholder of this country being 64%, doesn't take their due share in the politics. PILDAT (2008) voiced for the revival of the unions as the core agent of change in the political landscape of Pakistan giving right of political participation to students and youth throughout their own students bodies. The institution reinforced uplifting of ban and the chronological retrospective view of student unions being targeted in Pakistan in different eras. A research was done in Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain, about the implementation of

sustainable development goals (SDG) at university level by the participation of students. Findings came out to be in the form of several difficulties and hurdles in *UIC's* students' participation in sustainable development (Tiana, 2017). Garcia (2017) focused on the issue of Mexican-American student writers' struggles regarding the “topic of race and power, and how they have been addressed”. Mexican-American students made huge struggle to bring the attention to their plights during their whole career and lived experiences.

A study was conducted on the student-led competition of energy saving measures in universities. The findings suggested that students could lay a significant role in awareness as well as success of energy saving projects and campaigns as youth of any nation is the future of that nation specially the educated youth (Bull et al., 2018). The participation of students of College of Atlantic (COA) in campaigns drew conclusions that student bodies especially unions have great potential to work at domestic as well as international levels if supported well by the state and educational institutions. (Stabinsky, 2017). Another significant research (Keele, 2018) reaffirmed that huge resentment was discovered in the students participating in unions and political activism in the university regarding the colonization of the curriculum. The study also illustrated the efforts made by student unions in decolonizing the curriculum. Another research was conducted in India on the series of events of Dalit activism in 2020 which discovered the historic, religious, and cultural background of the problem and tension on the issue of social space in the campus based on few recent happenings. (Garalytė, 2020).00

Another study was conducted by Hawamdeh (2020) to evaluate and analyze women students' participation in Jordan which indicated that “despite quotas for female inclusion in national and municipal bodies, women political participation remained limited”. Dixon (2020) conducted on student led Afro-American History club's (AAHC) effort of changing system by reconstructing curriculum specific academic programs based on fundamental principle of

Black Power. Main focus of the study was to identify and evaluate the major reasons and their root causes of Afro-American students' resentment. All of the above given researches covered on construct of my research issue that is students' politics and unions. These researches were conducted in different countries and also in different circumstances targeting specific and precise issues or topics. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, there is a gap in the literature regarding second construct that is "the consolidation of fragmented political culture of Pakistan". Author's research is designed to precisely cover this aspect too.

Research Methodology

The purpose of the study was to find and analyze the understanding and opinion of the students regarding the functional role of student politics and unions in consolidating the fragmented political culture of Pakistan. The study was precisely focused on the students of Department of Political Science University of the Punjab Lahore. After carefully inspection of the basic purpose of the research and consulting the seasoned researchers available, author chose the quantitative research methodology to conduct this explanatory research (Keele, 2018). For the data collection, questionnaire is developed due to the reason that the author could not find a relevant research conducted on topic which had direct resemblance. The target population selected for the purpose of data collection was the students of Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore. The rationale behind this selection was the primary knowledge needed in the study. The students of political science and international relation have comparatively better relevance and understanding of the basics of the politics at university level as well as national level.

The data was collected from 111 students out of 343 total on campus students. Administration of the department gave the information regarding the total students and the number of students available as well. This data set is basically covering nearly one-third of the total students present in the department due the consent of the

participants. Additionally, the data was collected during the summer vacations and majority of the students were not in the university. The sampling is done randomly without any predefined criteria to participate in data collection other than being a student of Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Lastly, there is no other criteria of inclusion or exclusion other than stated previously.

Data collection is done using survey questionnaire comprising of 24 questions and it was further divided into 3 groups (basics knowledge and perception regarding students' politics and unions, political culture special reference to Pakistan, and national level politics) of 8 questions each. Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree) is used throughout the questionnaire to get the comprehensible and consistent responses of the participants. Scale was not changed in order to make data collection easy. This also increases the validity and reliability of the questionnaire as it is easy to understand for even first year student.

After getting the questionnaire evaluated by experts, it is reiterated on google forms for online data collection. The variables were the perception of the students regarding role of student politics and unions, and its impact on the fragmented political culture of Pakistan respectively. Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) is used in the interpretation and analysis of the collected data. Other than simple frequencies comprising of mean, median, and standard deviation; independent sample t-test was applied on all three groups of questions. The significance level (α) taken is 0.05.

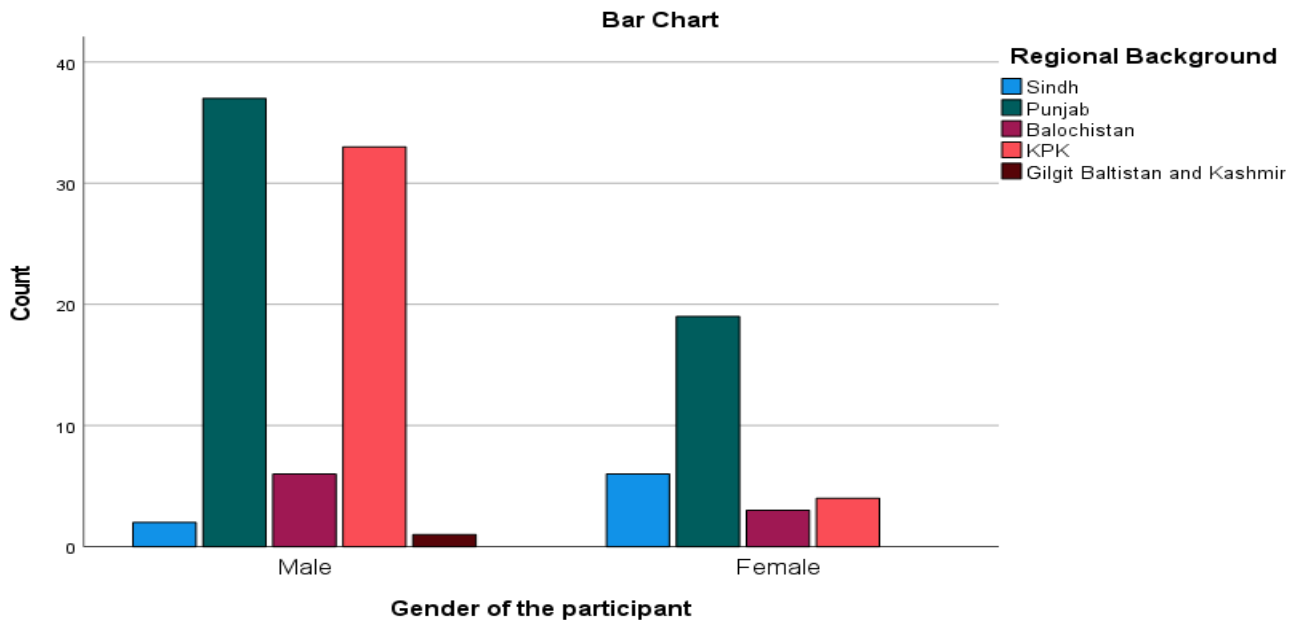
Other than 24 questions; gender, year of study, and regional background was asked from the participants. Their consent to participate in the study was taken before their filling the survey questionnaire. All of the data given by the participants is confidential and it doesn't contain anyone's name or other identification. As the data is collected from google forms mostly, even the email addresses of the participants are not taken on google forms. Concluding the methodology of

the study, quantitative survey method using Likert Scale was applied for data collection. Specific target population was selected for the purpose of data collection. Google forms services are utilized during the collection of data. SPSS was used for the interpretation and further analysis of the data collected.

Interpretation

The research is conducted to evaluate the perception of students of Department of Political

Science, University of the Punjab, Quaid-e-Azam Campus Lahore about the role and performance of student politics and unions in the coalition of shattered and fragmented political culture of Pakistani politics. Quantitative data is collected to analyze this approach of the students. The data is collected from the total of one hundred and eleven students including both male and females. The male students are 79 making 71.2% of the data set while female participants of the research are 32 making 28.8% of the total data collected.



The students enrolled in bachelors are 72 (64.9%) in numbers while those enrolled in masters are 39 (35.1%). Majority of the students are in their final year (30.6%) or in senior (27% in third year and 24.3% in second year). The data is collected from the all five provinces and regions of Pakistan namely Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir. The researcher will first present the overall view of the gender representation of all provinces. The researcher gathers the data from Punjab comprises of total 56 participants (37 males and 19 females) making 50.5% of the total data.

There was 37 (33.3%) participants (33 males and 4 females) from KPK, 8 (7.2%) participants (2 males and 6 females) from Sindh, 9 (8.1%) participants (6 males and 2 females) from Baluchistan, and 1 (0.9%) male student from Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir region.

The questionnaire comprises of three different portion. In first portion, students are asked about the role in politics and to what extent they have the knowledge of the student unions in University of the Punjab (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Table 1.00

Participants' knowledge about student politics and unions	Mean	SD
Students should participate in Politics	3.64	1.28
Student unions should be encouraged	3.57	1.18
Punjab University's unions trained students for political participation	3.53	1.17
Student politics and union train students for political participation	3.53	1.09
Student unions play an important role in shaping Political perception	3.49	1.14
Participant's knowledge about student unions in Punjab University	3.42	1.10
Punjab University's Unions have played a positive role	3.24	1.18
Have participant been actively participating in students' Politics at university level	3.02	1.24

SCALE: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree

The participants showed slight agreement in response to the first question asked that students should participate in politics with mean value of 3.64 and standard deviation of 1.28. In the same sequence, participants agree that students' unions should be encouraged with the mean value of 3.57 while standard deviation being 1.18. In the third question, the participants of the research showed agreement on that Punjab University's student unions train students for political participation with mean value of 3.53 and standard deviation of 1.17. The participants of the research displayed

agreement on the stance that in general, student unions train students for political participation with mean value of 3.53 and standard deviation being 1.09.

The second portion of the questionnaire deals with the one of the most significant aspect of this research which is the political culture with special focus on the case of Pakistan. In response to the first question, students agreed that they had knowledge about the reasons of political instability of Pakistan with the mean value of 3.73 and standard deviation of 0.93.

Table 2.0

Participants' knowledge about political culture (especially of Pakistan)	Mean	SD
Knowledge about the reasons of political instability of Pakistan	3.73	0.93
Fragmented political culture is cause of political instability	3.63	1.00
Pakistan's Political stability is compromised	3.60	1.05
Participant has sufficient knowledge about the political culture of Pakistan	3.58	1.13
Fragmented political culture is due to fragment Pakistani society	3.49	1.03
Pakistan's political culture is well developed	3.48	1.11
Pakistan's political culture is fragmented	3.48	1.07
Knowledge the reasons of fragmented political culture of Pakistan	2.26	1.10

SCALE: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree

Students showed agreement on the view of political culture of Pakistan being fragmented with value of mean being 3.63 and standard deviation of 1.00. With mean value of 3.60 and standard

deviation of 1.05, the participants agreed that Pakistan's political stability is compromised. Additionally, participants agreed upon having significant knowledge about political culture of

Pakistan with the mean value of 3.58 and standard deviation of 1.13. Additionally, the participants agreed upon the statement that

fragmented political culture is due the fragmented Pakistani society with the mean value of 3.49 and standard deviation of 1.03.

Table 3.0

Students' perception about role of student politics in national level politics of Pakistan	Mean	SD
Promotion of students' politics can lead towards the progress of Pakistani politics	3.83	1.01
National level political parties are involved in misleading student politics	3.70	1.01
Students participating in politics have better political perceptions	3.62	1.21
Student Unions and politics have played significant role in consolidation of fragmented political culture of Pakistan	3.41	1.10
National level political parties in Pakistan are involved in student unions	3.35	1.13
Fragmented political culture can be adhered with Students' Politics	3.23	1.00
National level political parties should be involved in student unions	3.21	1.24
National level political parties have constructive role in student politics	3.10	1.24

SCALE: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree

The third and the last domain of the question investigated the knowledge and perception of students regarding the impact of students' politics and unions at national level politics of Pakistan. The first question inquired the perception of students on whether the promotion of students' politics can lead towards the progress of Pakistani politics. On this, they displayed agreement with the mean value of 3.83 and standard deviation of 1.01. In the same sequence, students also agreed upon that national level political parties are involved in misleading student politics and unions

with the mean value of 3.70 and standard deviation of 1.10. When the participants were asked about their perception that whether students participating in politics have better political perception, they agreed with the mean value of 3.62 and standard deviation of 1.21. In the coming statement, participants agree that student unions and politics have played significant role in consolidation of fragmented political culture of Pakistan with the mean value of 3.62 and standard deviation of 1.21 (Farid & Ashraf, 2025).

Table 4.0: based on Independent Sample T-Test of first group of questions.

Gender	n	Mean	SD	T	p
Male	79	3.56	.78	2.94	.004
Female	32	3.06	.77		

There can be seen a significant difference ($p=0.004$) of opinion between the perception of male and female participants. Additionally, the difference is 0.05 in respective means.

Table 5.0 based on Independent Sample T-Test of second group of questions.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	79	3.46	.48	1.63	.105
Female	32	3.28	.60		

There can be seen an insignificant difference ($p=.105$) of opinion between the perception of male and female participants. Additionally, the difference is 0.18 in respective means.

Table 6.0 based on Independent Sample T-Test of third group of questions.

Gender	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	79	3.47	.59	1.15	.109
Female	32	3.32	.53		

There can be seen an insignificant difference ($p=.109$) of opinion between the perception of male and female participants. Additionally, the difference is 0.15 in respective means.

Discussion

The study is based on finding and evaluating the perception of the students regarding the role of students' politics and unions. Specifically, their role in conjoining the national political culture which is fragmented in the case of Pakistan. In the findings, the researcher found out that students understand as well as press upon the need of the promotion of student politics and unions for the progress of the national integration and politics. Their views are clear about the huge importance of the unions. In the first group of questions, participants are asked simple questions to know their opinion regarding the student politics and unions in University of the Punjab. As stated, they agreed with the basic conception and ideology of the unions and their views are clear on the stance that student unions are important, and they should be encouraged. Majority also agreed that they have significant knowledge of the unions functional in campus. Comparatively, lesser participants had been participating in the student unions in campus because the understanding that these bodies are exploited by the national level political parties for their own interest. Majority of the male participants have participated in the unions.

In the second group of questions which is basically regarding the political culture of Pakistan,

participants displayed relatively lesser clarity as showed in the first group. Students agree that they have knowledge regarding the political culture of Pakistan but they disagreed that it is well developed. Majority of the participating students agreed that the political culture of Pakistan is fragmented and there exists a need for the consolidation. They consider that the reasons behind this fragmentation actually lay in the society of Pakistan. In the coming question, the participants considered that the political stability of Pakistan is compromised. Lastly, they consider that the fragmentation of culture is one of the major reason behind the political instability in Pakistan.

In the third and last part of the survey, the participants are asked comparatively more defining questions which resonate with the basic purpose of the research. They showed clear opinion that the fragmented political culture can be adhered and conjoined with the help of student politics and unions. They agree that national political parties should be involved in the political training of the students participating in student unions but they also demonstrated that these parties are not playing constructive role. On the other hand, they opined that national political parties have played negative role and misguided the student politics for their own interests. Lastly, students believe that the role of student politics and unions are very crucial and defining in the progress of the politics at state level. They see a great potential in such bodies in fostering the young minds in political training and setting

ideological basis. In the end they showed clear agreement on the stance that such bodies at various levels can help consolidating the fragmented political culture of Pakistan which was the primary purpose of the research.

There exists a significant difference of opinion of male and female participants of the research. The nature of the research was very much well focused on the case study of Pakistan so there was not any specific literature available having direct relation with the topic. After carefully gathering the studies from multiple data bases, having direct or indirect relation with the topic of author's research, especially the second construct, a few studies having significantly results was found.

Conclusion

The study is focused on finding and evaluation of the perception of the students of Department of Political Science University of the Punjab Lahore regarding the role of students' politics and students under unions in consolidation of the fragmented political culture of Pakistan. The purpose was to analyze their perceptions and understanding regarding the existing students' political structure such as unions and their contribution in national level politics. The quantitative analysis displayed the difference in opinion in both genders regarding all three sections of questions namely knowledge of unions, political culture, and national level politics. This provides us with significant gap of understanding of both genders (Sarwar & Farid, 2024). The study highlighted that a huge number of students believe that student politics and unions play vital role in the progress of national level politics by contributing in political culture.

This perception was comparatively stronger in male participants than female participants due to the socio-cultural difference in Pakistan. The study also revealed that students had strong belief about the role of students' politics in political socialization of young minds. Lastly students had firm belief that these unions have great potential of bridging the political divide in Pakistan. Their beliefs include the negative role of political parties which is evident in the form of frequent riots and

protests throughout the country. If student politics and unions taken seriously, these can play huge role in fostering the coming generation's political ideologies which will eventually support the essence of democracy.

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