

BRIEFING

National Survey on Student Politics, 2008

A vast majority of university students (63.6 percent) wants reserved quota for girls in the student unions, according to a recent national survey on student politics. 34.4 percent students oppose allocation of such quota.

The survey has been published by BARGAD a national youth forum based in Gujranwala and draws on research collected in the National Survey on Student Politics, 2008 - a nationally representative survey that scientifically gathered a sample size opinion of 5 percent students from all 23 public universities of Pakistan, which impart general education. It is the largest ever consultative study on student politics in the country. Iqbal Haider Butt is author of the national survey report.

The national survey says that more than 6 out of every ten students (61.2 percent) in the public universities are not favour of student politics. However, almost seventy percent (68.9%) students welcome the lifting of ban on student unions. Majority of students are blank and unaware of the situation of student politics before union ban in 1984. A total of 62.6 percent students indicated they had no opinion on pre-ban student politics. Only a fraction (1.8%) possesses highly positive opinion of such politics, with female respondents were almost none (.1%).

Analyzing the national survey results, the author says the students do not oppose politics per se, rather are wary of dominant campus politics and its violent past:

According to other key results of the national survey, the students believe that students should not take part in national politics and political movements either in individual or collective capacity. 42.2% and 49.8% students respectively support such participation.

There is a greater perception that student politics should be limited to educational institutions (52.4% vs. 41.3%).

Nearly two-thirds (72.3%) of the surveyed students reported that student organizations should not be allowed to affiliate with political parties. Only 28.1% indicated that the mainstream political parties should have their student wings, while 57.9% say No to this query. 45.7% students are also skeptical over same political loyalty of teachers and students in a certain campus and say that it would not have positive effect on the educational institutions. 36.2% students think positively about this same-loyalty scenario.

On rules of student unions and Code of Conduct for the student organization, the national survey results indicate that: Sixty nine percent students think the procedure of the student union elections should be indirect and the unions should be elected by departmental societies.

More than two-third (77.1 percent) students see it important that the university administration imposes a strict Code of Conduct on student organizations to ensure that there is no violence in campus. Only a very small minority of students (7.5 percent) take possession of weapons with campuses as Normal. 68.1% categorically say it is criminal.

Nearly two-third students are in favour of banning those student organizations which promote sectarian, religious, gender, caste and/or racial discrimination by their literature and actions.

Based on academic performance, 56.7 percent students support eligibility criteria for those who want to contest the student union elections.

A vast majority (70.3 percent) stands for open access of information regarding student union and university funds. Only 14.6 percent oppose easy access to information.

When asked to rate five key objectives of a student union, the students indicated that the first objective of the student union should be Quality Education. "Culture of Peace", "Leadership Development" and "Political Training" followed in the order set by respondents.

Foreword of the national survey report has been written by Dr. Kaiser Bengali, a renowned economist and Chairperson of BARGAD, who states that student politics has not been responsible for decline in educational standards. Otherwise, the quality of education should have shown some improvement after student unions were banned. Student unions cannot be made a scapegoat for the state's failures to prioritize education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Survey on Student Politics, 2008, has also provided detailed recommendations to regulate student politics and has presented a model code of conduct.

While stating that there is no currently policy framework for activating student unions in Pakistan, it recommends that if the government really wants to implement its decision of lifting ban it will have to formally notify and amend mid-term development framework of the Higher Education Commission, which at present says nothing on student unions.

The national survey scientifically gathered opinion of 909 students of all 23 public universities of Pakistan, which impart general education.

The survey further recommends that to regulate linkages between student politics and the political parties, donations from political parties, usage of university resources for student political activities outside the campus and participation of outsiders in union elections should be banned.

Student union elections should be held indirectly and through votes of elected departmental societies. Election campaign should be closed within ten days and a uniform electoral system for both public and private universities be adopted.

The national survey has also detailed out rules of student unions and the code of conduct, according to which eligibility criteria for the contesting candidates should be implemented i.e. fulltime studentship, age limit of 26 years, academic performance, minimum attendance, no previous criminal history, no readmitted student. Other rules include limit of maximum election expenditure, submission of audited report of expenditure, anti-discriminatory laws and protection of privacy rights in campuses, no electoral processions outside the campus, laws against possession of weapons, and detailed election-day procedure and regulations be implemented alongwith access of information to union funds and grievance redressal mechanism.

A wider consensus of the students of 23 public universities supports at least 33 percent representation for women in campuses.

ENDS