**Universities and national politics**

[**Dr Abdus Sattar Abbasi**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-abdus-sattar-abbasi)

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Universities in the 21st century have undoubtedly become transnational actors interplaying among strategic, social, cultural, and academic stakeholders including both state and non-state domestic and international actors. Universities have started influencing almost every segment and aspect of society while engaging relevant clusters to promote carefully designed programs. Grantsmanship, mobility programs, scholarships, and collaborations have enhanced exposure and learning of the academic community on one hand and increased the influence of countries that extend financial support for these programs. It brings a whole new dimension to the role of universities in influencing the social, economic, technological, and political structure of our society in the current millennium and beyond. Funding programs and universities have connected local universities, business interests, civil society actors, and government agents in recipient countries with counterparts in Western societies facilitating the transfer of ideas, information, people, and money across borders. These transnational relations are the basis of the soft power of funding universities in beneficiary nations. Affluent countries have strategically utilized this vehicle to shape national discourses, especially in developing countries to strengthen their agendas. Therefore we can’t ignore recent happenings in an institution of higher learning.

[Imran Khan seeks pre-arrest bail in prohibited funding case](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/imran-khan-seeks-pre-arrest-bail-in-prohibited-funding-case)

The uproar on Imran Khan’s address at GC University Lahore, an institution with a stellar academic reputation, both from opponents and proponents ha opened a new aspect for us to consider how these institutions of higher learning can contribute to shaping our societal challenges. According to James J. Duderstadt from the University of Michigan, “The unique characteristic of higher education is the strong bond between the university and society. Historically, universities have been shaped by, drawn their agenda from, and been responsible to the communities that founded them. Each generation has established a social contract between the university and the society it serves. Today, an array of powerful social, economic, and technological forces is driving change in the needs of society and the institutions created to respond to those needs. In an increasingly knowledge-driven society, more and more people seek education as the hope for a better future, the key to good jobs and careers, and meaningful and fulfilling lives. The knowledge created within universities also addresses many of the most urgent needs of society, including health care, national security, economic competitiveness, environmental protection, and social & governance issues.” Therefore, today it will be a little unrealistic to disassociate universities from the depth of societal concerns.

[Oil bounces higher in early Asian trade](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/oil-bounces-higher-in-early-asian-trade)

The history of students’ political activism is not new; there is a track of student activism in several countries around the globe from the United States to the EU, China, Africa, and the Subcontinent. Philip G. Altbach suggests, “Student activism is generally oppositional in nature, but it was not always on the left. In the colonised 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. This 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-focussed, the impact frequently extends beyond the university.”

[Dollar continues to gain ground against Rupee](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/dollar-continues-to-gain-ground-against-rupee)

There are several successful politicians in the Country in all mainstream parties who started their political careers in student politics. Unfortunately, we deliberately curbed political activities in the universities of Pakistan and deprived this capable and compassionate segment of society of contributing to the political culture of the society. This deprivation led to the vacuum depriving a generation, which is in the learning phase, to understand and adopt political norms where negotiations, exchanges, collaborations, competitiveness, and considerations shape positions and preferences. Political activities for the political upbringing of educated youth have been prohibited for decades now. Some cosmetic measures have been taken to establish youth assemblies but that didn’t serve the purpose. Discussions, exposure, heated debates, counter-arguments, and freedom available in the university environment can inculcate political maturity in the youth to take that learning to their constituencies where they can serve politics in a much more constructive manner.

[Pakistan likely to exit FATF grey list this week: sources](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/pakistan-likely-to-exit-fatf-grey-list-this-week-sources)

In the words of Adela Coman and Catalina Bonciu from Romania, “Political dynamics can be sordid and destructive. But politics can also be the vehicle for achieving a noble purpose. 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 have to consider the potential for collaboration, the importance of long-term relationships, and most importantly, their 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, there are continuing differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.

[Sheikh Rasheed challenges Lal Haveli’s evacuation orders](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/sheikh-rasheed-challenges-lal-haveli-s-evacuation-orders)

Therefore, instead of criticising the visit of any political leader to a university, we should open the doors of institutions of higher learning to the political leaders of all parties to openly interact with the educated young generation and the future of our Country for their political grooming. We should end the ban on students’ unions which are available in several countries across Europe and Asia with slight differences. We need to provide opportunities for university students to interact and raise questions on issues and policies which have lasting impacts on their lives because it is they who have to take this country forward i.e. this millennium and beyond.

We should also learn from India’s example of allowing university teachers to take part in mainstream politics. According to Kritika Sharma, “The University Grants Commission (UGC) has decided to allow MPs and MLAs who are college or university teachers to continue teaching. They will continue to draw their salaries from their respective higher educational institutions, in addition to their wages as MPs or MLAs. When the MPs or MLAs attend legislative sessions, they will be marked present at their educational institutions as well.” This kind of policy will allow the participation of relevant experts and intellectuals to directly contribute to the development and uplift of the nation.