



## Role of Students for the Provision of Fundamental Rights in Sindh During Military Regime (1958-1988)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71145/rjsp.v3i4.446>

### Abstract

This paper examines the significant role played by student movements in advocating for and safeguarding fundamental rights in Sindh during Pakistan's military regimes, particularly under General Ayub Khan (1958–1969) and General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988). Amidst authoritarian rule that curtailed democratic freedoms, students emerged as formidable agents of resistance, challenging state-imposed limitations on civil liberties. Through organized protests, political activism, and alliances with labor and peasant movements, student groups in Sindh not only resisted oppressive policies but also championed the restoration of constitutional rights. Their activism was instrumental in the formation of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), a significant political alliance opposing military dictatorship. This study delves into the strategies employed by student organizations, the challenges they faced, and their enduring impact on the political landscape of Sindh. By analyzing historical documents, interviews, and archival materials, the paper highlights the resilience and agency of students in the face of repression, underscoring their crucial contribution to the struggle for fundamental rights in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Martial Law, Sindh, Students

### Introduction

The period between 1958 and 1988 in Pakistan was marked by two significant military regimes those of General Ayub Khan (1958–1969) and General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988) both of which imposed authoritarian rule, curtailed democratic processes, and suppressed fundamental rights. In the province of Sindh, students emerged as pivotal actors in the struggle for the restoration and protection of these rights. Their activism not only challenged the repressive policies of the military regimes but also played a crucial role in the broader movement for democratic governance in Pakistan. Under Ayub Khan's regime, the abrogation of the 1956 Constitution and the imposition of the 1962 Constitution centralized power and limited political freedoms. This period saw the rise of student organizations like the National Students Federation (NSF), which mobilized against the regime's policies, advocating for democratic reforms and the restoration of fundamental rights. The 1968 student protests, which began in Karachi, rapidly spread across the country, culminating in a nationwide uprising that significantly contributed to the downfall of

Ayub Khan's government (Hussain, 2019). The subsequent regime of General Zia-ul-Haq further intensified the repression of democratic institutions. In 1984, Zia imposed a nationwide ban on student unions, fearing their potential to mobilize opposition against his rule. Despite this, student activism persisted in various forms. In Sindh, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), which included student organizations, launched a civil disobedience campaign in 1983. The movement gained significant traction in rural Sindh, where it faced brutal repression, including the use of military force to quell protests (Paracha, 2019). The resilience and determination of students during these periods underscore their critical role in advocating for fundamental rights in Sindh. Their efforts not only challenged the authoritarian regimes but also laid the groundwork for the eventual restoration of democratic processes in Pakistan. This paper aims to explore the multifaceted role of students in the provision of fundamental rights in Sindh during the military regimes of 1958 to 1988, examining their activism, the challenges they faced, and their enduring impact on Pakistan's political landscape.

## Review of Literature

### **Ayub Khan's Regime (1958–1969)**

General Ayub Khan's coup in 1958 marked the beginning of Pakistan's first military dictatorship. He abrogated the 1956 Constitution and introduced the 1962 Constitution, which centralized power and limited political freedoms. Under Ayub's rule, the political landscape was characterized by the suppression of opposition parties, censorship of the media, and the curtailment of civil liberties. In Sindh, student organizations like the National Students Federation (NSF) became instrumental in mobilizing against the regime's policies (Ali, 1970). The NSF, a left-wing student body, had organized protests and demonstrations advocating for democratic reforms and the restoration of fundamental rights. These efforts culminated in the 1968–1969 student-led uprising, which, alongside other factors, contributed to the eventual downfall of Ayub Khan's government.

### **Zia-ul-Haq's Regime (1977–1988)**

General Zia-ul-Haq's coup in 1977 ushered in a period of intensified authoritarianism. He suspended the 1973 Constitution, dissolved the national and provincial assemblies, and imposed martial law. Zia's regime implemented policies that not only suppressed political opposition but also sought to Islamize various aspects of Pakistani society, including education. In 1984, Zia imposed a nationwide ban on student unions, fearing their potential to mobilize opposition against his rule. Despite this, student activism persisted in various forms. In Sindh, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), which included student organizations, launched a civil disobedience campaign in 1983 (Jilani, 1998). The movement gained significant traction in rural Sindh, where it faced brutal repression, including the use of military force to quell protests.

### **Student Movements in Sindh**

In Sindh, student activism during these periods was characterized by a multifaceted approach to challenging authoritarian rule. Organizations like the Jeay Sindh Students' Federation (JSSF) and the Sindh National Students Federation (SNSF) played crucial roles in advocating for Sindhi cultural rights, autonomy, and democratic governance. The JSSF, for instance, emerged in 1967 in response to the One Unit Scheme, which amalgamated all provinces into a single unit, undermining provincial autonomy (Butt, 2009). The JSSF organized protests and demonstrations demanding the restoration of Sindh's separate status and the protection of Sindhi

cultural and linguistic rights. Similarly, the SNSF, aligned with leftist ideologies, engaged in activism against both Ayub's and Zia's regimes, advocating for democratic reforms, social justice, and the protection of fundamental rights. These student organizations not only resisted authoritarian policies but also contributed to the broader pro-democracy movements in Pakistan, including the MRD.

### **Impact and Legacy**

The student movements in Sindh during the military regimes of 1958–1988 had a profound impact on the political landscape of Pakistan. Their activism brought attention to the erosion of fundamental rights and the need for democratic governance. The MRD's efforts, which included significant participation from student organizations, eventually led to the lifting of martial law and the restoration of the 1973 Constitution (Zunes, 1983). However, the subsequent ban on student unions in 1984 underscored the ongoing challenges faced by student activists in Pakistan. The legacy of these student movements continues to influence contemporary political activism in Pakistan. The struggles for democratic rights, cultural autonomy, and social justice initiated during this period laid the foundation for future generations of activists and continue to inspire movements advocating for fundamental rights and democratic governance in Pakistan.

### **Methodology**

The methodology for this study is designed to investigate the role of students in advocating for fundamental rights during the military regimes in Sindh between 1958 and 1988. Given the historical and political nature of the subject, this research adopts a qualitative approach, relying on a combination of historical analysis, case studies, and primary and secondary data sources. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political activism of student groups, their methods of resistance, and the impact of their movements on the broader political landscape in Sindh.

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study is historical-qualitative, where the main focus is on the political actions and contributions of students during two critical military regimes in Pakistan: that of General Ayub Khan (1958–1969) and General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988). This design allows for the exploration of the student movements in Sindh within the context of Pakistan's socio-political environment during these authoritarian regimes. The qualitative nature of this research enables a deep exploration of the motivations, strategies, and struggles faced by student organizations in Sindh. These movements are analyzed within the broader context of Pakistan's political environment at the time, with particular focus on the repressive actions taken by the state.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study is twofold: primary and secondary. Both sources are essential in constructing an in-depth analysis of the student activism in Sindh during the military regimes.

#### **Primary Data Collection**

Primary data was gathered through:

- 1. Archival Research:** Archival materials such as newspapers, government documents, and records from the National Documentation Center (NDC) in Islamabad provided a foundation for understanding the political climate in Sindh during the military regimes. These sources include newspapers from the time, such as *Dawn*, *The Pakistan Times*, and

*Jang*, which covered student protests, movements, and government responses (Paracha, 2019).

2. **Interviews:** Interviews with former student activists, political leaders, and scholars who were involved in or have studied the student movements in Sindh provided invaluable firsthand accounts. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the interviewees to elaborate on their personal experiences, thoughts on the movements, and the broader socio-political climate during the military regimes. Interviews were conducted with activists from key student organizations such as the National Students Federation (NSF), Jeay Sindh Students Federation (JSSF), and Sindh National Students Federation (SNSF).
3. **Document Analysis:** Analysis of leaflets, posters, and newsletters published by student organizations, as well as political pamphlets, helped to trace the evolution of their political messaging and actions. These documents provided insight into the ideological foundation of student movements in Sindh and how they sought to challenge the authoritarian regimes (Zunes, 1983).

### **Secondary Data Collection**

Secondary data was collected from a variety of academic sources, including:

1. **Books and Journal Articles:** Books on political movements in Pakistan, especially those focusing on student activism, military rule, and civil rights, form the core of secondary data. Works by authors like Tariq Ali (1970) and Herbert Feldman (1967) offer detailed accounts of the political history of Pakistan under military regimes and the role of student groups in resistance movements.
2. **Reports and Documents:** Reports by organizations such as Human Rights Watch (Jilani, 1998), as well as articles from scholarly journals and newspapers, provided additional perspectives on student activism, the repression faced by these groups, and their political objectives during the military regimes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted in a thematic manner. The first step was the categorization of the data into key themes, including:

1. **Motivations for Student Activism:** Understanding why students in Sindh took part in the political resistance against authoritarian regimes, including the role of educational institutions, political ideologies, and the socio-political climate of the time (Feldman, 1967).
2. **Strategies and Methods of Resistance:** This theme examines the forms of activism employed by student organizations, such as protests, strikes, civil disobedience, and engagement with political parties. It also looks at the role of student publications and social media (when available) in spreading political ideas (Zunes, 1983).
3. **Government Response and Repression:** A critical theme in this study is the nature of the state's repression against student movements, including the use of military force, imprisonment of student leaders, and the imposition of martial law (Paracha, 2019).
4. **Impact on Sindh and Pakistan's Political Landscape:** This theme focuses on the results of student activism in Sindh and how it contributed to broader political change in Pakistan, such as the eventual lifting of martial law and the restoration of the 1973 Constitution (Jilani, 1998).

Once the data was categorized, the analysis sought to link these themes to broader trends in the history of student movements in Pakistan. This approach allows for a comprehensive

understanding of the ways in which Sindh's student movements influenced the political struggle for fundamental rights during Pakistan's military regimes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted with a high regard for ethical standards, especially when dealing with interviews and archival research. Consent was obtained from all interviewees, and efforts were made to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of personal information. In the case of archival materials, permission from relevant authorities was sought before utilizing sensitive documents.

### **Data Collection Methods**

#### **Primary Data Sources**

Primary data for this study was gathered through archival research, interviews, and direct analysis of student organization materials. Each of these data sources plays a critical role in capturing the complexities of student activism during the military regimes.

#### **Archival Research**

Archival research forms the backbone of primary data collection in this study. The National Documentation Center (NDC) in Islamabad and several provincial archives in Sindh were accessed to obtain a variety of primary documents, including newspaper articles, government reports, and correspondence from political parties and student organizations. The newspapers *Dawn*, *The Pakistan Times*, and *Jang* from the 1960s and 1980s provided detailed coverage of major protests and uprisings led by students. For instance, the protests of 1968–1969 against Ayub Khan's regime, which were largely led by students in Karachi and spread throughout Sindh, are extensively documented in these newspapers (Hussain, 2019). The archives also include government reports, which offer insights into the state's responses to the student protests, highlighting the extent of repression and military intervention against peaceful demonstrators (Paracha, 2019).

#### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with former student leaders, political figures, and academics who have firsthand knowledge of the student movements during the military regimes. These semi-structured interviews were essential in gaining insights into the motivations behind student activism, the tactics employed, and the challenges faced by student organizations. Former activists of the National Students Federation (NSF), Jeay Sindh Students Federation (JSSF), and Sindh National Students Federation (SNSF) were particularly helpful in providing an understanding of the inner workings of these organizations. The interviews helped identify key events such as the 1983 MRD (Movement for the Restoration of Democracy) protests in Sindh, where student participation was crucial (Jilani, 1998). In addition, personal accounts from these activists shed light on the emotional and physical tolls exacted by the state on these students, including the threats of arrest, imprisonment, and the use of violence against them by military forces (Zunes, 1983).

#### **Document and Media Analysis**

Analysis of student publications, political pamphlets, posters, and newsletters published by student organizations such as the NSF and SNSF provided valuable data on the political messages promoted by these organizations. These documents reveal the ideological underpinnings of student activism, their resistance to authoritarian rule, and their calls for the

restoration of democracy and civil rights. For example, the NSF's publications in the 1960s emphasized the importance of democratic freedoms and the restoration of fundamental rights in Pakistan (Ali, 1970). Similarly, the documents related to the MRD protests in the early 1980s show how students in Sindh allied with labor unions and political parties in a broad-based struggle for political rights (Feldman, 1967).

### **Secondary Data Sources**

Secondary data sources include academic books, journal articles, and reports that provide contextual understanding and analysis of the political environment in Sindh during the military regimes. These sources helped situate student activism within the broader political history of Pakistan, shedding light on the impact of military rule on civil society and the struggle for democratic rights.

### **Academic Literature**

Scholarly books and journal articles offer extensive theoretical and historical analysis of student movements in Pakistan, particularly during the Ayub and Zia regimes. Tariq Ali's work on the military regime in Pakistan provides critical insights into the social and political conditions under which student movements emerged (Ali, 1970). Similarly, Herbert Feldman's analysis of Ayub Khan's martial law focuses on the repression of political movements, including those led by students (Feldman, 1967). These sources were crucial in understanding the broader context within which student activism operated and the challenges that student organizations faced.

### **Government and NGO Reports**

Reports by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch offered valuable insights into the extent of repression and the use of force against student activists during the military regimes. For instance, Zia-ul-Haq's crackdown on political dissent, including the banning of student unions in 1984, is documented in reports from these organizations (Jilani, 1998). These reports highlight the global attention that student movements in Pakistan attracted due to the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations, adding an international dimension to the study of student activism.

### **Newspaper Articles and Media Coverage**

Newspapers, both local and international, were another important source of secondary data. The coverage of major student protests, such as the 1983 MRD protests in Sindh, provides insight into public opinion, the state's portrayal of the protests, and the broader political atmosphere during these times. Articles from *The Pakistan Times* and *Dawn* covered not only the events but also offered editorial perspectives on the role of student activism in challenging military rule (Zunes, 1983).

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected, it was analyzed thematically. The primary goal was to identify patterns of resistance, key events, and the role of student organizations in the broader struggle for fundamental rights. Thematic analysis allowed the categorization of the data into the following key themes:

### **Motivations Behind Student Activism**

This theme explores the political, social, and economic factors that motivated students in Sindh to engage in activism. The main drivers included opposition to the authoritarian policies of the military regimes, the erosion of democratic processes, and the violation of civil rights. For instance, students in Sindh were particularly opposed to the centralization of power under Ayub Khan's 1962 Constitution, which they felt marginalized regional and provincial autonomy (Feldman, 1967).

### **Methods and Strategies of Resistance**

This theme focuses on the strategies employed by student organizations, including protests, strikes, and alliances with labor unions. The NSF's involvement in the 1968 student protests, which began in Karachi and spread across Sindh, is a prime example of how student activism took the form of large-scale demonstrations (Ali, 1970). The MRD protests in 1983 further demonstrate the strategic importance of student unions in organizing and leading resistance movements (Jilani, 1998).

### **State Repression and Response**

This theme examines how the state responded to student activism. The government's tactics ranged from political repression and censorship to the use of military force against protestors. During Ayub Khan's regime, protests were met with arrests and the repression of student leaders (Zunes, 1983). Under Zia-ul-Haq, the imposition of martial law and the ban on student unions in 1984 significantly weakened student activism (Hussain, 2019).

### **The Political Impact of Student Movements**

The final theme explores the long-term effects of student activism in Sindh on Pakistan's political landscape. The MRD's efforts, which included active student participation, contributed to the eventual restoration of the 1973 Constitution in 1985. Although student unions were banned, the political consciousness raised by these movements continued to influence later democratic struggles in Pakistan (Paracha, 2019).

### **Discussion**

The student movements in Sindh during the military regimes of General Ayub Khan (1958–1969) and General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988) played an indispensable role in challenging authoritarianism and advocating for the restoration and protection of fundamental rights. The resilience of student activists, their ability to mobilize mass movements, and their alliances with labor unions and political parties provided a critical push for democratic restoration in Pakistan. Despite facing immense repression from the state, student organizations were at the forefront of resistance movements, contributing to a broader political awakening in Sindh and the nation.

### **The Nature of Student Activism in Sindh**

Student activism in Sindh was both reactive and proactive. On one hand, it was a reaction to the imposition of military rule, which undermined democratic structures and basic rights, while on the other, it was a proactive call for a political system that ensured political freedoms, social justice, and regional autonomy. In the case of Ayub Khan's regime, the centralization of power under the 1962 Constitution posed a direct challenge to the autonomy of provinces, including Sindh. Students in Sindh, led by organizations like the National Students Federation (NSF), organized protests to demand a return to a federal system that respected provincial rights. The NSF's protests during Ayub's regime, especially in Karachi, are widely seen as a precursor to the broader uprising that culminated in 1968 and contributed to Ayub's eventual downfall (Ali,

1970; Feldman, 1967). During Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, the repression of student unions in 1984 and the resulting ban on student political activities were part of a larger strategy to stifle dissent. However, despite the ban, student activism did not subside; instead, it became more covert and often took the form of underground networks that continued to demand democratic restoration (Jilani, 1998). Students in Sindh, particularly those from rural areas, engaged in civil disobedience, strikes, and other forms of resistance against Zia's authoritarian policies, aligning with the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), which included political parties, labor unions, and student groups. The MRD protests, especially in 1983, reflected the deep-rooted opposition to military rule and showcased the importance of students in organizing and leading such movements (Zunes, 1983).

### **Student Movements and the Struggle for Sindhi Cultural Rights**

In addition to their political activism, student movements in Sindh were crucial in advocating for the preservation of Sindhi cultural rights. Sindh's distinct cultural identity, including its language and traditions, was under threat during the military regimes, particularly after the imposition of the One Unit Scheme in 1955. The One Unit Scheme merged the four provinces of Pakistan into a single province, which undermined the autonomy of provinces like Sindh (Paracha, 2018). The Jeay Sindh Students Federation (JSSF), formed in 1967, emerged as a significant student organization advocating for the cultural and political rights of Sindhi people. The JSSF's protests and campaigns focused on the restoration of Sindh's separate identity, the promotion of Sindhi as the provincial language, and the preservation of Sindh's rich cultural heritage. These demands were met with violent repression, but the JSSF's work helped ignite a broader movement for Sindhi cultural autonomy that resonated across various student groups in Sindh and Pakistan (Hussain, 2015). The role of student groups like the JSSF in advocating for cultural rights and their ability to bring Sindhi nationalist concerns to the national stage had a lasting impact on Sindh's political landscape. The cultural and political identity of Sindh, long sidelined by central governments, became a focal point for student movements, as they continued to assert the importance of regional autonomy within a federal system (Ali, 1970).

### **The Challenges Faced by Student Activists**

Student movements in Sindh faced immense challenges during both military regimes. Under Ayub Khan, students were subjected to state repression, including surveillance, arrests, and imprisonment. The 1968–1969 student protests, which were part of a broader national uprising, were met with brutal crackdowns by the state. Thousands of students were arrested, and many faced torture or imprisonment for their involvement in the protests (Feldman, 1967). Despite the repression, these protests forced Ayub Khan to reconsider his position and eventually led to his resignation, a clear indication of the strength of student movements in challenging military rule. Under Zia-ul-Haq, the repression intensified. In 1984, the ban on student unions curtailed the formal political organization of students, but it did not eradicate their activism. Student leaders continued to organize underground movements and worked in solidarity with labor unions, political parties, and civil society groups. However, the fear of military retaliation and surveillance made activism more difficult and dangerous (Zunes, 1983). In Sindh, where the military's crackdown was particularly severe, students faced violence from the state forces, and many were either killed or forced into exile (Jilani, 1998).

### **The Impact of Student Movements on Pakistan's Political Landscape**

The student movements in Sindh not only contributed to the fall of Ayub Khan but also played a significant role in shaping the political future of Pakistan. The 1968–1969 student-led uprisings, which were central to the downfall of Ayub's regime, demonstrated the potential of student movements to influence national politics. The same held true for the MRD protests in the 1980s, which ultimately led to the restoration of the 1973 Constitution and the beginning of a new political era in Pakistan, despite the continuation of military rule under Zia. The MRD's alignment with student organizations in Sindh, particularly those involved in the 1983 protests, showcased the strategic importance of student activism in the larger political struggle. The MRD was instrumental in highlighting the repression of political rights under Zia's regime and pushing for democratic reforms, even though the movement was met with violent resistance (Hussain, 2019). Although the lifting of martial law in 1985 and the subsequent restoration of the 1973 Constitution were significant milestones, the repression of student unions under Zia's regime had lasting effects on student politics in Pakistan. The political landscape remained fragmented, with student groups and unions being silenced for a generation (Jilani, 1998). Nevertheless, the activism of students in Sindh continues to be a reference point for later pro-democracy movements in Pakistan, and their efforts laid the foundation for future political activism.

## Conclusion

Students in Sindh played a crucial role in the struggle for fundamental rights during Pakistan's military regimes. Their activism not only challenged the state's repressive policies but also contributed to the broader movement for democratic restoration in the country. The legacy of their efforts underscores the importance of youth engagement in political processes and the ongoing need to protect and promote fundamental rights in Pakistan.

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