Democratizing Political Parties – A Case Study of Intraparty Elections and Factional Politics from Pakistan

Jawad Tariq
Ahmed Usman, Amal Sajjad, Aaisha Amjad

Abstract

The role of intraparty elections is central to the process of institutionalization and democratization of a political party. This article analyzes the case of intraparty elections conducted by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf with an aim to investigate its impact on the democratization of that party. Employing grounded theory approach, fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted along with analyzing relevant data from ten newspapers. It was found that the PTI conducted intraparty elections to resolve political differences, manage distribution of power, and encourage democratic political culture within the party. However, the challenges such as factional politics and timing, transparency, management, and procedure of elections appeared to have hindered the institutionalization and democratization of PTI.

Introduction

Political parties are considered as the major actors to inculcate democratic values in politics by engaging citizens in the political processes and thus serve as prerequisite for political institutionalization in a society (Tariq, Usman, & Sajjad, 2015). For democratization, scholars argue that the political parties need to establish a democratic political culture in their ranks to

encourage the participation of general public in the political process. Intraparty democracy challenges status quo by circulating elites (Putnam, 1976) and providing opportunity to aspiring politicians and dissatisfied groups (Schlesinger, 1966) for transforming existing political structures (Brady, 1988).

Political parties in Pakistan remained weak and unstable due to prevalence of undemocratic culture in state politics (Usman, Munawar, & Amjad, 2013). While discussing the weaknesses of Pakistan People's Party during 1980s, Hasnain (2008) highlights the absence of intraparty elections as one of the strongest reasons that gave rise to the politics of personalities and dynasties and thus weakened the party internally. He further stressed that the intraparty elections are inevitable to strengthen the political parties both internally and externally. To counter the dynastic politics, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (henceforth, PTI) announced intraparty elections in June 2012 scheduled to be conducted by Mid December 2012. The announcement of these elections was overwhelmingly appreciated by the public in general and media in particular. These were considered to be the first formal democratic intraparty elections in the history of Pakistan. The major reason propagated by PTI for these elections was to democratically entrench the political party among masses and set a precedent for other political parties. This study is the first attempt to examine the process of intraparty elections in Pakistan. Although the intraparty elections in Jamat-e-Islami (JI) and Awami National Party (ANP) were regularly conducted, there is scarcity of literature about their transparency and democratic nature (Khan, 2012). The present study analyzes the intraparty dynamics of PTI by examining various aspects of their electioneer process. The study also attempts to explain the role of these elections in intraparty democratization of PTI with reference to its ideology and identity.

Methodology

The present study employed grounded theory technique to examine the process of intraparty elections in PTI in an inductive

way (Strauss, 1987). The study started immediately after the announcement of intraparty elections in early June 2012. At the outset, three interviews were conducted with the secondary leadership of PTI. The analysis followed a line by line coding (Glaser, 1978). For further data collection, theoretical sampling technique was employed and the preliminary three interviews served to identify twelve more respondents. Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory, whereby the researcher jointly collects, codes, and analyses data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges (Glaser and Strauss, 2012: 45). Out of these twelve respondents, nine were interviewed face to face while three of them shared their insights through Skype video conversation. One of the respondents also shared his personal writings with the researchers by providing a link to his facebook blog. All the interviews were then analyzed collectively and different codes were constantly compared against each other to identify and refine emerging concepts. The concepts emerged from the analysis were then compared to identify different categories and look for patterned relationship among these categories.

To fill the gaps in these categories, newspapers were used as an alternate data source. The newspaper stories (n = 400) and opinion articles (n = 100) on PTI's intraparty elections published in 5 English and 5 Urdu newspapers (from 1 June 2012 to 15 April 2013) were analyzed. The newspaper reports helped to develop and understand the relationship between theoretical concepts and later emerging categories. The analysis of newspaper discourse became important in this study as *"news is a product (that is) manufactured, sold, and consumed daily"* (Tuchman, 2002: 82). The use of this alternate data also enhanced the credibility of this study as scholars prefer using data from multiple sources in qualitative studies (Glaser and Strauss, 2012). An attempt was made to focus more on newspaper reports than opinion articles. The data from opinion articles was only used when it corresponded with theoretical concepts achieved from the

interviews. The division of newspaper data corresponding to name of newspaper, its language and type of story analyzed whether article or opinion column is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Newspapers, Language and Type of News Used

Language	News Paper	Type of News		Total
		News Story	Opinion Column	
Urdu	Daily Jung	36	20	56
	Daily Nai Baat	60	14	74
	Daily Express	37	15	52
	Daily Dunya	44	29	73
	Daily Nawa-i-Waqt	33	09	42
Total		210	87	297
English	Dawn	23	02	25
	The News	27	01	28
	The Daily Times	40	00	40
	The Express Tribune	58	10	68
	The Nation	42	00	42
Total		190	13	203
Total		400	100	500

Findings

The findings of the study are analyzed under the following major themes: intraparty elections procedure, crafted image of intraparty elections, factions directed intraparty elections, factional dynamics, factional activities and delay in elections, allegations of mismanagement in elections, post-intraparty election scenario.

Procedure of intraparty elections

The idea of intraparty elections in PTI emerged as an important development in the political history of Pakistan. It was believed to set an example for other political parties to establish democratic culture in politics in general and within political parties in particular. The elections were considered to be the first formal initiative by a party that involved mass participation and thus regarded as a crucial counter measure against deeply ingrained undemocratic political culture within political parties. One of the senior members of PTI explained that the intraparty elections were to be conducted on indirect basis except at the

union council level where party workers would directly elect the office bearers. These elected representatives would constitute the Electoral College that would elect the tehsil (town) level leadership which would further elect district office bearers. The elected leadership of district would elect the regional level leadership which would vote for the provincial candidates. The elected provincial leaderships would then elect the central leadership. The role of Electoral College appeared to be significant as it was responsible to recommend the candidates for Provincial and National Assembly tickets.

Crafted image of intraparty elections

The projected image of intraparty elections by the party leadership was to immensely infuse democratic values in the political culture in general and party in particular. These intraparty elections were expected to abolish dynastic politics by enabling common workers to cling to party portfolios. PTI affirmed that every basic decision would be taken by the true representatives of workers. As per the narrative of core leadership: *"the purpose of these elections was to demonstrate PTI as a democratic party truly established on merit"*. Few respondents were of the view that "*PTI being the focal point of media's attention had no margin to make even a single mistake as the trivial mishandling might be blown out of the proportion by media".* Therefore, it was the foremost responsibility of the leadership to successfully organize the elections to demonstrate the competency and proficiency of PTI. Several PTI members believed that the transparent and timely conduct of intraparty elections could pave way for PTI to have ingress to the core issues of the public. On the other hand, they were also of the view that lack of transparency in intraparty elections would dent the entire credibility and political standing of PTI among masses.

Factional politics in intraparty elections

An overwhelming majority of the respondents considered that these elections were being conducted to sort out the growing

differences within the party. The recognition of PTI as a viable political force in October 2011 led many people to join the party, including many renowned politicians from other political parties. This joining of electables was considered as a major political success for PTI and reinforced the perception that the party would emerge as one of the strongest political forces after the General Elections in 2013. However, this premonition of success bearded a cost. Party faced a strong criticism by a few senior party members, contemporary opposition, and media for relying on a flawed political strategy. To restore the declining graph of PTI, intraparty elections were announced by the party chairman to revitalize the stated goals of changing the political culture and revamp the eroding popularity of party after elections 2013.

The study found that the rift between the party members and the subsequent protests by the senior members compelled the chairman to announce intraparty elections. One of the respondents highlighted that *"the senior leaders of the party were not satisfied with the decision of awarding key posts to the recently joined members who were not the part of party's political struggles"*. Many participants considered that these intraparty elections were the outcome of conflict within party over power distribution. One of the study participants mentioned that *"the purpose of these elections was to bring the true representatives of the party to the front"*. On the other side, a few termed these elections as a friendly contest. It was observed that the announcement of intraparty elections transformed the divisions within the party to the organized factions. It was believed by many PTI members that factions are a usual consequence of elections and create a healthy competition to strengthen the party rather than disintegration.

Factional dynamics in PTI

After holding a successful public procession in October and December 2011, PTI being an emerging political power has been successful to attract several politicians from other parties. Initially, this inclusion of politicians was considered as an indicator of triumph but later it resulted in defragmentation within the

party members. Divergent views of members led to the emergence of different factions. The ideology advocated by PTI lost its true essence as every faction considered itself the actual torch bearer of party's dogma and thus started to overshadow other party members. Announcement of intraparty elections further underlined the rifts between party members. Party in Punjab was divided into three main factions that included Nazriyati (ideological) Group, Unity Group, and Tsunami Change Movement. Nazriyati Group mainly consisted of those politicians who were not that much resourceful and previously remained associated with those parties that did not enjoy executive power. Conversely, the Unity Group consisted of those resourceful politicians who were previously part of powerful parties.

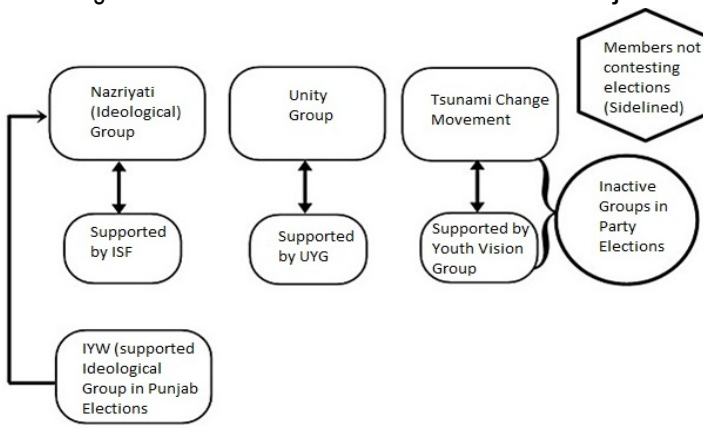
Nazriyati Group chanted a slogan "*we made the party popular and now we will protect it*" to depict itself as ideologically committed group. The members of this group took the credit of establishing the party and considered themselves as the defenders of the party's ideology. They alleged the unity group as opportunists who, according to them, joined the party after its success. One of the members of Nazriyati Group stressed that: *"Unity Group consists of those who joined party only for political benefits. They are not sincere with the party's ideology rather have polluted its political culture".* On the other side, Unity Group members held the same stance by presenting themselves as real ideologues of PTI. The main slogan of this group was to "*create unity amongst the ranks and files of party by resolving the conflicts between senior and newly joined party members".* The data from later interviews revealed that Nazriyati group also facilitated the inclusion of a few defected politicians based on their previous political affiliations.

Few respondents furthermore informed that a strong ex-Jamaat-e-Islami group exists within PTI that mainly abides by the leadership of Nazriyati Group. However, Nazriyati Group neutralized this allegation by propagating that the Unity Group also comprises of such members who have been closely affiliated to ex-Pakistan Muslim League-Q group. Polarization amongst the youth was more intensified and dynamic as compared to these two

groups. It was pertinent to study the divisions amongst the youth as majority of the PTI supporters was young people of the country. The youth were divided into following factions: Insaaf Student Federation (ISF) and Insaaf Youth Wing (IYW) supporting Nazriyati Group, Unity Youth Group (UYG) supporting Unity Group and Vision Group supporting Tsunami Change Movement. Youth factions along with their affiliated groups are illustrated in Figure 1.

Nazriyati Group that mostly comprised of senior workers successfully fostered an alliance with youth group of ISF and IYW that later supported Nazriyati Group in provincial level elections. The reason for this alliance was the supportive attitude of leaders of Ideological Group towards leaders of youth groups, sharing of a common workplace, financial backing and the mutual acceptance of party's ideology along with the negative perception against Unity Group. The Ideological Group and their alliance groups used the strategy of depicting themselves as true tsunami team (the team responsible for success of October 2011 procession) and factual ideologues to mobilize masses. Another strategy employed by Ideological Group aimed to defame the other group members as opportunists, corrupt, incredible, and defected politicians, who according to them can never resort to the ideology of PTI.

Figure 1 Factions and their alliances in PTI Punjab



The Unity Group remained successful in attracting another youth group that held anti-JI sentiments. This youth group received favours from the Unity Group in the form of resources for intraparty elections. The strategies used by Unity Group to mobilize voters revolved around projection of group members as philanthropists who actually supported the Party Chairman's non-political philanthropic activities through allocating funds. The group also presented itself as amalgamation of senior and junior members who are politically experienced enough to fulfill the dream of revived Pakistan. Another strategy to mobilize voters was to disrepute other group as non-cooperative, unaccommodating, and inexperienced thus lacking the potential to revive the party despite being part of it for several years.

Factional activities and delay in elections

The factional activities gained momentum because of the delay in intraparty elections over and again. Meanwhile, a perception was created through the print media that the delay in intraparty elections has caused erosion of PTI's support. It was found that the elections were being delayed due to the lack of coordination between center and provincial leadership, unchecked interference of Central Executive Committee in provincial matters and differences over assigning key party portfolios. The intraparty elections were supposed to be held in June 2012 as per direction of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). PTI also announced its intraparty elections in June but the elections were delayed to September 2012. The first phase of elections to be conducted in Islamabad was again postponed in September 2012 that provoked a severe criticism. Internal rift between factions, flaws in electoral lists and vague electronic voting procedures were described as the reasons for the delay in elections. The office bearers of PTI negated all these allegations stating that the delay was due to incomplete voter lists. Election process was to be initiated in mid October 2012 however it was again delayed. Information Secretary of PTI revealed that incomplete electoral lists for electronic voting served as the main reason for the delay in

elections. The elections were announced to be starting from 2 November 2012.The elections were divided in three phases: the first for Islamabad, the second for KPK, and the third for rest of provinces. However, the elections were again rescheduled to be held on 18 November 2012 owing to the late securing of electronic voting system.

Allegations of mismanagement in elections

The former office bearers of PTI held the party election commission responsible for not ensuring the transparent conduct of elections. They rejected the elections held at UC levels in Punjab being rigged and conducted against the stay order of election commission. A factional leader of Nazriyati Group who lost the Lahore election mentioned that:

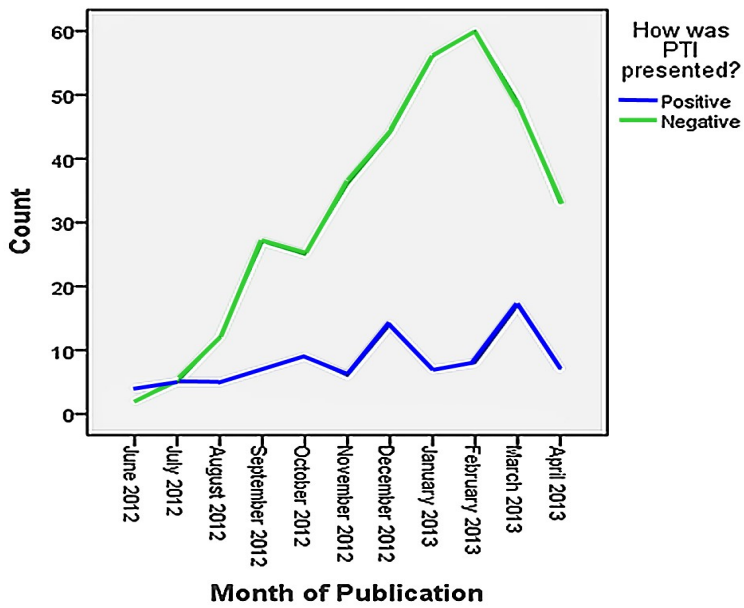
> Party election commission failed to conduct transparent elections. Financial resources were misused by the candidates but Election Commission did not pay any heed despite a complaint was also filed against it. Even on elections day, Election Commission failed to be unbiased and a huge vote bank was dismissed.

Many violent clashes took place between Nazriyati Group and Unity Group during Lahore Elections for UC's. They raised allegations of torture, physical assaults, and rigging against each other, which resulted in arrest of many workers. Nazriyati group lost the elections at UC level conducted on 11 February 2013 and blatantly criticized Unity Group in media.

The Lahore elections for electing district and town office bearers scheduled for 8 March 2013 were delayed for the third time. The delay was due to wrong printing of serial numbers on ballot papers by Central Election Commission of PTI. It was found that many incidences of mismanagement were reported in other districts of Punjab including Rawalpindi, Multan, Gujranwala and Hafizabad. In these districts, many new voters and candidates did not find their names in final voters list that led to

protests, scuffles and exchange of indecent words. Intraparty elections in Rawalpindi that were scheduled to be held on 10 February 2013 were directed to postpone by a court order. However, these elections were held against the court order which led to protests and sit-ins by the members of Unity Group. The incidents of scuffles, violent clashes and allegations of bribery, mismanagements and ticket distribution were given media coverage. The graph 1 highlights the print media depiction of PTI from June 2012 to 15 April 2013.

Graph 1 Depiction of PTI in print media



Post-intraparty election scenario

The intraparty elections of PTI were ended by late March 2013. Intense labeling and severe criticism of factions against each other unfolded the divisions within party, which was blown out of proportion by the media. The expectations to minimize the factional differences through intraparty elections ware not fulfilled. The disputes that arose during party elections were

further intensified during the ticket distribution phase of National Elections. Protests by party members against unfair allocation of tickets were highlighted by media. One of the stated purposes of the intraparty elections was to constitute an Electoral College at district level to recommend candidates to Parliamentary Committee of PTI for allocating tickets for general elections. However, office bearers at many districts complained that their recommendations were not given due importance by the Committee and tickets were allocated to those candidates who did not comply with party ideology. The media alleged the party leadership for distributing tickets on the basis of favoritism and nepotism.

The analysis revealed that the party after the intraparty elections was confronted with the issues like politics of factions. These factions constantly struggled for getting tickets for general elections for them as well as their blue-eyed people. This tension resulted in further defragmentation of PTI. Many ticket-aspirants, who did not get ticket, resigned, contested as independent candidates or joined some other parties.

Discussion

Academics argue that the desire for increased democratization may lead to significant changes in the political parties and direct them to undergo involuntary consequences (Pennings and Hazan, 2001). Similarly, in an attempt to challenge status quo and undemocratic political culture in Pakistan, PTI appeared to be highly influenced by the politics of factions, personalities, and defection during intraparty elections. Rather than struggling against the prevalent political culture, the party members were found to employ it during the intraparty electioneering process. Due to internal party conflicts, elections were delayed several times and were finally ended in March 2013. This delay created many problems for PTI in the form of factions, severe media criticism, and delay in awarding tickets leaving no time for general election campaign. The mismanagements, allegations during these elections, and increased role of factions in the distribution of

tickets resulted in defection which damaged the movement of PTI for political reforms.

Another key finding of the study suggests that the intraparty elections in PTI were not primarily announced to entrench the party in democratic tradition but rather aimed at ending the dispute between old and new workers on account of their share of power in party. Arguably, the intention behind conducting intraparty elections also determines whether it would democratize the party or obstruct the route to democratization. This finding corresponds to the study of De Luca, Jones, & Tula (2002) who argued that the primaries in any political party are not conducted due to external influences but rather due to intraparty politics. Another key finding of this study revealed that the PTI after accepting the defected politicians from almost all major parties became a heterogeneous party, which made the electoral process unfeasible. Academics suggest that the parties that are heterogeneous deliberately try to withhold intraparty elections (Obler, 1974). Conversely, in order to end heterogeneity within its political ranks, PTI leadership decided to conduct intraparty elections that resulted in dynamic factions within party. Ceron (2015) found that the intra party polarization due to heterogeneous factions can bring disharmony in party. The negative effects of this heterogeneity can be reduced by enforcing a strict discipline in the electioneering process (Ceron, 2015).

After the announcement of intraparty elections, the factions in PTI became more vigorous and dynamic. The factions were largely based on 2p's formula i.e. prior affiliations and prior conflicts along with the desire to acquire power in the party. Factional members struggled to achieve position in the party in order to grasp prestige, power, and financial benefits attached with that position (Roemer, 2004). The desire for power serves as a strong stimulus that enforces candidates to establish their electoral base by developing reputation in their constituency rather than relying on the party membership to win elections (Roy, 1966). When a candidate is not the only one who is aspiring for a post, he must be popular enough to mobilize people to vote

for him (Babeiya, 2011). The culture of attending wedding, funerals, and helping voters in their personal affairs is an important component of political culture in Pakistan (Latif, Usman, Kataria, & Abdullah, 2015; Usman, 2011).

The factional leaders, as main figures in the struggle for power, convince the candidates to join their faction by offering advantages like campaign funds and important portfolios in party. In this way, the intraparty elections encourage factions to engage in corruption in order to win the support for candidates and maintain factional activities. Chang (2005) argues that the institutional structure allows interest groups to use corruption to influence policies when political actors are placed in vulnerable situation like intraparty competition. It is argued that the intraparty competition raises more political corruption as compared to interparty competition. For example, in the case of PTI, different interests groups were allegedly involved in manipulating conditions for ensuring the electoral victory for candidates.

Another important consideration for the political parties conducting intraparty elections should be the selection of appropriate procedure on the basis of prevalent political culture. The procedure of direct elections for electing candidates at union council level followed by indirect elections at other levels induced the factions to strengthen themselves by increasing their activity and offering patronage to candidates to join their faction. Selection of factional leaders at town, district, regional, and provincial level became dependent on the electoral bodies that would be elected at union council level. Ranney (1981) and Epstein (1967) argue that the shift in US parties from caucus to direct primaries caused significant decline in the power of political parties. Direct primaries have been related to weakening, instability and decline in cohesiveness of the party by establishing a direct association between candidates and members.

In terms of timing for intraparty elections, the study found that it was an unwise decision to conduct intraparty elections in the year of general elections, especially for a party that was yet

weakly institutionalized. To turn potential supporters into voters, a considerable time along with efficient mobilizing strategy is required e.g. door to door campaign by the candidate (Karp & Banducci, 2007). The intraparty elections brought to limelight the factional divisions and struggle for power within the party members and leaving short time for election campaign that could possibly turn the potential supporters into voters. It resulted in issues like defamation and defection prior to general elections. One of the purposes stated by the leadership for these elections was to devise a body that can recommend candidates for general election tickets. But it was widely reported that most instances of the ticket distribution did not follow the recommendations of the district bodies rather tickets were distributed on the basis of money, funds, and nepotism.

Conclusion

Political parties may try to achieve democratization in their ranks through intraparty elections however it may result in involuntary cost in the form of factions, disorganization, declining popularity, and defection. Many studies in the past have found an association between reformatory measures and decline of political parties. The study has found decision making as the most crucial factor that either facilitates or obstructs the route of political parties towards the goals they are striving to achieve. The decision making related to timing, procedure, factional activities, transparency and management of intraparty elections determine whether they will promote the process of democratization or obstruct it. Although the experience of intraparty elections in PTI could not achieve the desired results, it does not suggest that the prospect for democratization in societies like Pakistan is bleak. PTI should be commended for taking an initiative to democratize its political ranks. A comparative study on the basis of next intraparty elections would be useful to test the theoretical groundings achieved from this experience. It is expected that the political parties like PTI would learn from their first experience and would guarantee steps to enroute Pakistan to a democratic

pathway. This study can be useful for other political parties to consider the factors that may potentially detriment the process of intraparty democratization. It may help them to entail a detailed study on their intraparty dynamics for designing an effective procedure before attempting to democratize their respective parties.

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