
The Role of Political Parties in Political Development of Pakistan

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Abstract

Political parties are the most imperative element of political system in determining the direction, nature and level of political development. Political history of Pakistan is marred with military interventions and for the first time a smooth democratic transition of power was made possible after general elections in 2013. This study evaluates the role and functions of political parties in Pakistan regarding political development. For this purpose, survey was conducted among the research scholars at post graduate level and faculty members at political science departments of different universities. In survey, questions were asked about the perceived role and functions of political parties, concept of political development and role of political parties in political development of Pakistan. Most of the respondents are convinced that the role of political parties in political development of Pakistan is imperative but not appreciative yet. They are of the view that political parties have not even played sufficient role towards the political, social and economic development of the country. Results of survey also illustrate that the political setup of Pakistan needs substantial reforms, capacity building and institutionalization.

Introduction

Political parties are the most imperative element of the political system in determining the direction, nature and level of political development. The goals and objectives of political development cannot be achieved without political parties (Akhtar, 2011). They are basically institution of society, while military and bureaucracy are institutions of the state. In the developing countries, like Pakistan,

few state institutions are strong enough to counter the influence of society and its representative governments (Hussain & Kokab, 2013).

If the representative institutions are weak, they will be unable to protect the interests of society. Natural result of this weakness will be the domination of other institutions of the state. This successively weakens the political system of society. Political development also suffers due to such state of affairs. According to Weiner (1962), political system of any country depends on the fact that who is controlling and allocating the resources. In countries with empowered democratic institutions, political forces take control of resources and lead the country towards political development. The political history of Pakistan clearly indicates the dominance of state institutions over political parties. Since getting independence in 1947, Pakistan has witnessed three different martial law periods from 1958 to 1971, 1977 to 1988 and 1999 to 2007. Even, military dictators nurtured few political parties to gain political support and manipulated them to prolong their dictatorships (Cohen, 2004). But mainstream political parties like Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Awami League and Awami National Party (ANP) did pose resistance to dictatorial regimes. Due to the struggle of such parties, for the first time a smooth transition of power from Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) was made possible after general elections in 2013. This study attempts to evaluate the role and functions of political parties in Pakistan. It specifically analyzes the role of political parties in Pakistan regarding political development.

The term “political development” was used in 1960s to explain the process of “political modernization” of newly emerging independent states after decolonization. The conception of political development implies that there is "underdevelopment" and "development". The underdevelopment of societies indicates that both human and material resources are not utilized properly to fulfill the needs of that society. Due to this, poverty and joblessness become widespread and people lead depressed lives (Rudebeck, 1970). The goals and objectives of political development cannot be achieved without political parties. To some degree, political parties allow people to preserve their rights, and the support of the people reinforces political parties. Hence, political parties promote the welfare of society as a whole. One basic need is to develop political ideology and democratic roots within a state, which is an essential method of political development (Akhtar, 2011).

Political parties are often explained as institutionalized mediators between civil society and those who decide and execute decisions like parliamentarians. By this, they facilitate their members and supporters, and represent their demands in front of parliament and government. Although parties play numerous fundamental roles and perform some functions in a democratic society, but the selection and presentation of candidates in electoral campaign is the most obvious function. Several scholars have written about political parties and highlighted their significance in democracy (Bryce, 1889; Schattschneider, 1942; Muller & Strøm, 1999; Stokes,

1999; Strøm, Müller & Bergman, 2006). There are various scholars who have worked on the area of political development as well (Deutsch, 1961; Pye, 1963; Packenham, 1964; Hah & Schneider, 1968; Huntington, 1968; Pye & Verba, 2015). Huntington (1968) discussed institutionalization of political parties and their role in both political development and political decay. He argued that it is not necessary that political development leads towards progress only, political decay is always another possibility. In order to avoid political decay, political organizations and procedures must have achieved institutionalization in the form of *value* and a certain level of *stability*.

There is a strong connection between political parties, political system and public (La Palombara, 1963). There is an interactive relation between political parties and public, resultantly parties have a deep impact on overall political system. This impact can be in the form of political, social and economic development of the state.

Like other concepts in social sciences and political science, there is lack of consensus among scholars about the description of political development. For instance Huntington (1968) mentioned the level of political stability in a country as an indicator of its degree of political development, but later Huntington and Nelson (1976) pointed out that political participation is an important element of this process. Differences can also be found in terms of studying political development, for instance Almond and Coleman (1960) employed structural functionalism approach, but Moor (1993) utilized class analysis to do so. Binder (1961) thinks, country's development lays in its capability to resolve certain crises of development such as penetration, participation, legitimacy, and so on. Some other researchers and scholars have tendency to differentiate between political developments in western and non-western scenarios.

Pye (1966) explained several aspects of political development but he also argued that there is no single scale to measure the level of political development. Based on the following dimensions explained by him, role of political parties in political development of Pakistan is also analyzed:

- a) Significance of political development in promoting political modernization.
- b) Role of political development in economic development.
- c) Importance of political development in enhancing political participation.
- d) Political development as a stimulus of political stability.
- e) Political development reinforces democratization.

Following research questions are formulated in order to ascertain the role of political parties in political development of Pakistan:

RQ1: What role do political parties play in Pakistani politics?

RQ2: How do political parties affect political development in Pakistan?

RQ3: How can political parties ensure to enhance political development?

Method

Survey method was adopted to evaluate the role of political parties in political development of Pakistan. Survey was conducted among the students of MPhil and PhD and faculty members of political science departments of different universities in order to collect reliable data. Political development is a complex concept which is not easy for laymen to understand therefore purposive sampling technique was used and survey was conducted in universities of Lahore city. Respondents from Lahore College for Women University, Government College University, Kinnaird College for Women, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), and University of the Punjab were included in this research. Total 104 respondents from these universities filled the questionnaire. There were 78 female and 26 male respondents while there were 25 university teachers and 79 students, 93 either got MPhil degree or were MPhil students and 11 got PhD degree in political science. Furthermore, 79 respondents belonged to the age group 21-30 years, 15 to the age group 31-40 years and 10 to the age group 41-50 years and above.

For this study, we particularly focused on years after 2008. This time is of utmost importance as for the first time a democratic government of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) completed its five years tenure and Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) came into power after elections of 2013.

In survey, questions were asked about the perceived role and functions of political parties, concept of political development and the role of political parties in political development. While administering questionnaire, researchers were present to elaborate the context of questions and seek better understanding of the opinions of respondents.

Findings and Analysis

The role of political parties in political development of Pakistan is assessed according to the five dimensions explained by Pye (1966). In order to get the answer of RQ1, first four questions in the questionnaire were asked about the role of political parties in politics of Pakistan. First question was about citizens aspirations which meant that whether political parties played their role in fulfilling the desires of citizens or not. This question was necessary to evaluate the overall perception of the respondents about the productivity of political parties, before asking about the working of political parties in detail.

Table 1 indicates that 74% respondents answered in favor of political parties that they played a significant role in fulfilling the desires of citizens. 20% respondents disagreed with the statement that means political parties did not play

role according to the public demands. 5.8% respondents were uncertain about the role of political parties.

Table 1
Political Parties Play a Significant Role in Articulating Citizens' Aspirations.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	77	74.0
Disagree	21	20.2
Uncertain	6	5.8
Total	104	100

Second question of survey was about political parties serving as a link between the state and society (public). 63.5% of respondents agreed that political parties worked as a connection between state and society and they actually provided a way for public towards stable political development (see Table 2). 32.7% respondents didn't agree with this point of view. It means they think that though political parties gained electoral vote yet it didn't mean they were a vital link between state and society. After gaining electoral trust they were indulged into lust for power and did not focus on real demands of society. While 3.8% respondents were not sure about this.

Table 2
Political Parties Serve as a Link between State and Society (Public).

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	66	63.5
Disagree	34	32.7
Uncertain	4	3.8
Total	104	100

Another question was about the state institutions like military and bureaucracy that whether these institutions are stronger than political institutions like political parties in Pakistan or not. Purpose of this question was to know the importance of political parties in Pakistan as there had been dominance of the state institutions over representative institutions in Pakistan due to which political development has always been affected.

Table 3
The State Institutions are Stronger than Political Institutions.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	73	70.2

Disagree	6	5.8
Uncertain	25	24
Total	104	100

Table 3 reveals that 70.2% respondents agreed that the state institutions have been more developed and influential than political parties in Pakistan. Therefore, political institutions were not able to work freely and at times they are pressurized by the state institutions too. A very small number of respondents i.e. 5.8% indicates that the state institutions are not much stronger than political parties or legislatures, while 24% were uncertain. Hence, being stronger than political institutions, the state institutions of Pakistan like bureaucracy and military have an impact on Pakistan’s political, economic and social aspects.

In order to further evaluate the political leadership in Pakistan, a question was asked about the division of leadership on the basis of ethnicities, sects or ideology.

Table 4

Division of Leadership in Pakistan into Communities, Sects or Ethnicities rather than Ideology.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	88	84.6
Disagree	2	1.9
Uncertain	14	13.5
Total	104	100

Table 4 shows that 84.6% respondents agreed that leadership in Pakistan is divided on basis of sects or communities rather than ideology. This may be the reason that political leadership is not effective at all. Without political ideology, political development is not possible. But in Pakistan top leadership is ruling on the basis of parentage or patronage and not on merit. Only 1.9% did not agree with the statement and 13.5% were not sure.

In order to assess the performance of political parties, some questions in questionnaire were also asked about the concept of political development. As there are various definitions of political development given by different scholars, therefore these questions were important to know the perception of respondents about the political development. One of the concept about political development states that it is a pattern of change in the state structure and society, so question was asked about it.

Table 5

Political Development as a Pattern of Change in the State Structure and Society.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	84	80.8
Disagree	8	7.7
Uncertain	12	11.5
Total	104	100

Table 5 shows that 80.8% of the respondents supported that political development is a continuous change in society by creating a relation between the state and society. 7.7% respondents didn't have the same opinion and 11.5% respondents were not sure.

It was also necessary to ask about the perception of respondents that political development is actually harmonization of growth in different sectors of a nation through political parties and their assimilation in political system as one nation.

Table 6

Political Development as the Capability of Political Parties to Synchronize Growth of Different Sectors.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	66	63.5
Disagree	10	9.6
Uncertain	28	26.9
Total	104	100

Table 6 discloses that 63.5% respondents were in favor of this statement and they believed that growth in different sectors can be harmonized by political development. A little more than 9.6% replied that harmonization of growth in different sectors has no link with political development and 26.9% respondents were unsure about it.

In order to get the answer of RQ2 about the role of political parties in political development, two questions were asked specifically. One question was asked about the focus of political parties on the development of rural or urban areas of Pakistan. For political development, social and economic progress of society is necessary and that is possible only when rural and urban areas are focused equally by political leadership.

Table 7

The Primary Focus of Political Parties is on Urban rather than Rural Development.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	65	62.5

Disagree	17	16.3
Uncertain	22	21.2
Total	104	100

62.5% respondents agreed that political parties focused on urban rather than rural development in Pakistan due to which political development was affected badly. 16.3% respondents did not agree with this statement and 21.2% were not sure about it.

Another weakness in political leadership that can hamper the political development is trust deficit. If there is no more public trust in their representatives then they cannot become part of collective effort for the progress of society. It was asked from respondents that whether this trust deficit in political parties can still initiate this collective consciousness or lead people towards individualistic efforts.

Table 8

Trust Deficit in Political Parties Leads towards the Pursuance of Individual Interests.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	77	74
Disagree	10	9.6
Uncertain	17	16.3
Total	104	100

Table 8 shows that 74% respondents agreed that mistrust of people in political parties of Pakistan leads people to pursue their individual goals and ultimately impede political development. 9.6% disagreed with the statement and 16.3% were not sure about it.

In order to answer RQ3 that how political development can be ensured by political parties, few more questions were asked in questionnaire. Stability in political system generates prosperity of society and economy and then both lead ultimately towards political development. So, it was asked from respondents that how much stability of the political system was necessary. Table 9 reveals that 76.9% respondents favored that without stability in political system there will be no prosperous society and stable economy. 10.6% respondents did not agree with it and 12.5% were not sure about it.

Table 9

The Prosperity of Society and Economy is Dependent on Stability of Political system.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	80	76.9
Disagree	11	10.6

Uncertain	13	12.5
Total	104	100

Stability of political system relies on the strength of representative institutions. Once that strength is achieved only then political development is possible. Table 10 specifies that 84.6% respondents agreed with this notion that it is a way towards political and economic development. 5.8% respondents did not support this idea and 9.6% were not sure about it.

Table 10
Political Development through Strengthening Representative Institutions.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	88	84.6
Disagree	6	5.8
Uncertain	10	9.6
Total	104	100

As democratization is an important indicator of political development, so another question was about democracy within political parties of Pakistan. Democracy within party structure does not mean to just hold elections within a party but it also includes a democratic atmosphere where all party members from top to bottom are given equal opportunities to express their opinions and take part in decision making. For prevalence of democracy in a country there is a need to strengthen democracy within political parties.

Table 11
Political Development through Democracy within the Party Structure.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	80	76.9
Disagree	6	5.8
Uncertain	18	17.3
Total	104	100

Table 11 shows that 76.9% respondents agreed that political development in Pakistan also depends on democracy within the structure of political parties. 5.8% respondents did not agree with it and 17.3% were uncertain about it.

Democracy within party structure guarantees the strength of political parties and election within party are epitome of institutionalization of political parties. Institutionalization also means that political parties and the state institutions are independent of each other and work in accordance to their designated roles and

functions under the constitutional provisions. So respondents were asked whether strength and stability of a country depends on institutionalization or not.

Table 12
The Strength and Stability of A Country Depends on Institutionalization.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	73	70.2
Disagree	22	21.2
Uncertain	9	8.7
Total	104	100

Table 12 indicates that 70.2% agreed with this statement. They believed that country's strength and stability depends on institutionalization. 21.2% did not agree with this statement. On the other hand, 8.7% were not sure about it.

Huntington (1968) argued that political stability in a country and political participation of the general public are directly proportional to each other and they affect political development. So, a question was also asked to know respondents' opinion about this notion. Table 13 shows that 51% respondents validated this point. They agreed that there will be more political stability if there is more political participation. 24% respondents did not agree with the statement, while other 25% were not sure about it.

Table 13
The Political Stability is Directly Proportional to Political Participation.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	53	51
Disagree	25	24
Uncertain	26	25
Total	104	100

Political participation is not only related to political stability but it is considered an important element for both political parties and political development. It was necessary to know about the perception of respondents regarding relation of political participation with political parties and political development.

Table 14
Political Participation is Vital for Political Parties and Political Development.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	71	68.3

Disagree	17	16.3
Uncertain	16	15.4
Total	104	100

Table 14 shows that 68.3% respondents agreed that political participation plays a vital role and without it political development cannot be ensured and political parties cannot become true representative of people. 16.3% respondents did not have the same opinion and 15.4% were not sure about it.

Political awareness among public can bring better results for political development of a country. So, a question was asked about the need to create political awareness through education. Table 15 indicates that overwhelming majority of 95.2% respondents supported the statement. They agreed that political awareness is an important indicator of political development and it can be enhanced by education. This political awareness helps in forming public opinion and resultantly people become able to elect political parties of their own choice. Only 1% did not agree with the statement. 3.8% respondent showed uncertainty towards the statement.

Table 15

Need to Create Political Awareness through Education.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	99	95.2
Disagree	1	1
Uncertain	4	3.8
Total	104	100

Lastly, respondents were asked about political setup of Pakistan. They were asked that whether Pakistan needs to implement changes in the state as well as representative institutions or not. These changes are needed in the context of institutionalization rather than changing ruling party only. Change does not mean to weaken democracy but bringing reforms related to political system and functioning of the state institutions so that political institutions can be strengthened.

Table 16

The Political Setup of Pakistan needs Substantial Changes.

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	84	80.8
Disagree	6	5.8
Uncertain	14	13.5
Total	104	100

Table 16 shows that 80.8% respondents agreed that political setup of Pakistan needs to be changed. 5.8 % did not favor reforms in political setup of the country while 13.5% were uncertain.

In answer to RQ1 about the role of political parties in politics of Pakistan, most of the respondents believe that political parties articulate wishes of people to parliament and serve as a link between the state and society. On the other hand, they accepted that political parties and representative institutions are weaker than the state institutions. Leadership in Pakistan is divided on the basis of sects or ethnicity rather than on ideology. Leaders are elected not on their ideology or capability but patronage or parentage due to which people have to see same faces in every election.

For RQ2, it can be inferred from the results of survey that political parties in Pakistan have not played sufficient role towards the political, social and economic development of the country. Political parties do not focus on rural development. They are not trusted by the general masses also and this leads public towards individual endeavors rather than collective action for development of Pakistan.

In answer to RQ3, respondents were convinced that political development can be ensured if representative institutions like parliament and political parties play their role in flourishing democracy within a country. Democratization is important indicator of political development and without it political development cannot be ensured in Pakistan. Furthermore, democracy within political parties is also important. There is a need to take steps at a grass root level to prevail democracy in a country. Respondents also agreed that Pakistan current political setup needs reforms. Institutionalization may strengthen representative institutions and political parties in Pakistan. Political stability is a stimulus of political development and political participation is its essential indicator.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of political parties in political development of Pakistan after 2008 because for the first time in history of the country, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) completed its five years term from 2008 to 2013 and Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) came into power after general elections of 2013. This smooth democratic transition was made possible only because of political parties. Opposition parties must be credited as they did not try to derail democratic government. So, the role of political parties during this time is very significant as they demonstrated mature politics unlike the politics of leg-pulling in 1990s.

Without political parties, democracy cannot be strengthened in a country. Survey results show that political parties are the representatives of people who actually put forward demands or wishes of people to the government. Political parties of Pakistan have played some role in political development and no matter

how small but their role cannot be ignored at all. Political development can be ensured in Pakistan through effective political participation. Public opinion matters a lot in this regard and without it democracy cannot flourish in a country.

Political parties should institutionalize themselves through gradual democratization in party structure specially holding party elections. Political parties should represent all sections of society and their office bearers should be elected not nominated. In this way, political development can be enhanced because new faces will emerge as new leadership. These new faces may bring stability and corruption-free system which is not possible if political parties will keep following family politics.

Economic development is also an indicator of political development and economic prosperity is dependent on stable political system. Political stability not only enhances political participation but also stimulate political development. But for stable political system, Pakistan needs substantial reforms, capacity building and institutionalization.

People of Pakistan, despite several incapacities and inefficiencies, still believe in the strength of democracy and intend to strengthen it. Political development is a pre-requisite to the success and strength of democracy. Political parties are an essential component of democratic system and a major catalyst of political development. Their productive role not only enhances the level of political development in the country but also promotes a sense of ownership and belonging among the masses. Their strength breeds political development and their inefficiency surely promotes political decay.

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