
Democratic Crisis and Political Change in Pakistan: Role of Pakistan People Party (PPP)

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The aim of this paper is to explore the causes of democratic crisis and analyses the contribution of Pakistan's People Party in handling democratic crisis by taking efforts to restore democracy derailed by military takeovers by General Zia and General Musharaf. It also examines the importance of democratic alliances for electoral victory. Further the paper will contribute to our understanding of the fragile nature of political system. It will demystify the factors of political change and generate new ideas about new political thoughts, improvement of political parties' performance and effectiveness of leadership.

Key Words: Political System, democratic crisis, Leadership, Parties alliances & Electoral politics

Introduction

Democracy triumphed in the twentieth century because of the democratization process which was propelled by two major political events: the Second World war (1939-1945) and the fall of Soviet Empire (1979-1989). Democracy spread its wings and became stable force by ensuring basic rights of people including adult suffrage, referendums, and a wide range of legal, economic, and political rights. (Newton et. al., 210) It secured participation of people in political process through electoral system. Political parties were considered pillars of political structure. Their leadership was not only able to organize party workers, mobilize masses, but also inspired their followers. Party politics was a lifeblood of political process necessary for smooth running of political system. Nevertheless, in present 'post-democratic' century, political systems of many democratic countries remain fragile without the active participation of political parties causing a crisis in statehood and democracy. Further the failure of institution to adapt new circumstances caused inability of states to enforce political order. (Fukuyama. 2015)

State and its sovereignty are withering away, party clashes and leadership crisis are exacerbating, and democratic culture is deteriorating. Emergence of non-state organizations and challenges posed by globalization to state sovereignty, traditional political structures, and the issues of poor organization of political parties and evaporation of political power by bureaucracies are still hard to handle by political systems around the world (Newton et. al., 210).

In developing countries including Pakistan, people are rapidly losing their faith in the system primarily due to the inability of political parties to deal with the fierce party conflicts and impending erosion of democratic beliefs and values which has resulted disillusionment with democracy. In Pakistan, the political order remained weak mainly due to the absence of rule of law, good governance and the lack of accountability which caused decline of institutional capacity to enforce the will of state. Political change in the state institutions remained largely unfavorable to democracy. Thus, democracy survived on the cost of compromises due to weak bargaining power of political elites.

Research Methodology

This Paper is based on the Qualitative data collected through variety of sources including the archival documents. In addition, secondary sources have been used for this study. The researchers have used the historical method to analyze the role of Pakistan's Peoples Party in bringing political

change and handling the political crisis. The historical method has been used to respond the research questions about the specific period and to analyze how things have changed over time. Further this method has been used to interpret the data and explain the causes and effects of historical events which generated political change.

Research Analysis

Political instability and Democracy

Pakistan's political system is characterized by low level of public participation, weak party structure, elite domination, growing ethnic divide, religiously inspired intolerance, conventional methods of electorate, feudal dominancy, traditional methods of holding power, dynastic control of politics and bureaucratization of political process. Growing role of bureaucracy and its intervention is one of the notable features of political systems of our country. (Heegar 1973).

Electoral system's big picture shows the absence of impartial voting administration and fair counting of votes, low voting turnout, restricted freedom of people to contest elections, disenchantment of people with electoral system and its intricacies, absence of true intra party elections, the lack of unflinching loyalty to the party.

Political parties of Pakistan offer a bleak picture of Pakistan's political spectrum and blame powerful institutions for the maladies of democratic deficiency not to mention colonial legacies unleashing political expediency. Political institutions of Pakistan have not been able to adapt new circumstance and thus failed to engage people to solve their own problems. It is argued that political parties have been unable to link society and state in adequate manner (Manor 1989).

Political instability is one of the most serious challenges faced by democracy in Pakistan. Pakistan's political system is incapable of creating political stability mainly due to low level of public interest in political process, weak party structure, elite domination and political intolerance generated by feudalistic values and bureaucratic norms. Further vulnerable economic situation, ineffective electoral system, and the lack of respect for constitutionalism are major causes of Pakistan's democratic crisis and political decay.

After the creation of Pakistan as an independent country, the efforts were made to frame a new constitution. However, delay in constitution-making caused democratic failure. It took almost a decade to frame first constitution of Pakistan. The 1956 constitution was passed by an indirectly elected

constituent assembly. Nevertheless, the constitution was replaced by 1962 constitution which was prepared by military regime of Field Marshall Ayub Khan. This kind of turbulent relationship with democracy was developed since the independence and continued under military regimes (Mariam 2020).

Emergence of Pakistan's People Party (PPP)

In the 1960s the major collaborator of military regime led by General Ayub Khan was bureaucracy. The elite civil service played political role and established its dominance in the country. Monopolization of state power by bureaucracy since the inception of Pakistan in 1947 was at peak during this period. Bureaucracy entered in politics and sabotaged the efforts for strengthening democracy at local level. Further, they did not implement reforms which could radically change their prestige and powerful position in society (Birkhead 1966).

Emergence of middle classes during this period was one of the important political changes that were generated by use of technology in agriculture sector. Although middle class was weak across the country yet, it actively participated in political activities organized by major political parties. Zulfikar Bhutto, an intelligent politician, was able to read the situation and formed a political party in 1967 with the help of political thinkers such as Jalaluddin Abdul Rahim and Dr Mubashir Hassan. Manifesto of the party was blend of Islamic socialism and egalitarianism. It introduced a new political culture and spread new political ideas which motivated people to participate in political activities. As a result, in the 1970 elections, Pakistan People Party (PPP) achieved electoral success in agricultural prosperous regions of Pakistan (Zaidi 1999).

PPP's Electoral success (1970-2008)

Bhutto's victory in 1970 elections was ascribed to socialist pledge of *Roti, Kapra aur Makaan* "Bread, Clothes and House." However, understanding of economic factor for Bhutto was crucial because performance of government was measured in terms of food prices. Thus, Bhutto's government kept the price of food stable by using consumer subsidies programs. Inflationary pressure was decreased mainly because of reduction in prices of commodities as an outcome of higher crop productivity. The Bhutto government poured funds to support farmers through subsidizing the cost of farm inputs. The agricultural statistics indicated that inflation rate was significantly decreased from 25 % in the year 1972-1973 to 6% 1975-1976. Further agriculture productivity was increased after several years of

its decline. During this period 8.6 million tons of wheat was produced, and Pakistan was able to export rice over 700, 000 tons. These indicators increased the optimism of PPP leadership for winning elections (Weinbaum1977).

Bhutto's role in restoring self-esteem of nation after the dismemberment of East Pakistan in 1971, subsequently establishing diplomatic relations with India, nuclear development, and leading Muslim world towards becoming powerful stakeholder in international politics boosted Bhutto's confidence. His popularity was further increased with convening economic summit conference of developing countries in 1976.

The above factors also included improved domestic security and improved law and order in Baluchistan and various other pre-election development initiatives launch of industrial units and relief works played significant role in bringing landslide victory of PPP in parliamentary elections of 1977 against Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) a coalition of nine opposition parties. In these elections Peoples party again got landslide victory. It captured more than 80% of the 200 general seats in national Assembly and demonstrated that it will continue to dominate electoral politics in Pakistan (Weinbaum 1977).

PPP's success in the Punjab where it won 93% of seats was a big surprise for its opponents. Election victory of PPP was also made certain by PNA's unclear policy and vision of their future government. However, PNA's manifesto announced that it would promote Islamic way of life by putting ban on liquor and obscenity. It signaled that, it would stop co-education and policy of family planning will not be implemented. Further they declared that they will not repay foreign loans. They will not continue Pakistan's membership in CENTO and their government will not accept Simla Accord. However, the PNA was responsible for military takeover in 1977. PNA leadership expected that Zia would arrange free and fair elections within stipulated time of ninety days. Delay in elections caused disappointment among PNA parties. Thus, the major parties of PNA came to conclusion that they could join Movement started by PPP for restoring democracy derailed by Zia (Rais, 1985).

In 1981, the PPP formed alliance of ten parties against Zia regime and started a Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Its leaders were detained, and their political workers were arrested, tortured, and killed at various places including Dadu in Sindh where several university students were killed. Nevertheless, the party-less elections of 1985 boycotted by MRD leaders were conducted. Turnout at polling day remained 52.9% considerably higher than the mainstream leaders had anticipated.

Nevertheless, the satisfying indicator for MRD leadership was the defeat of Zias's ministers and advisers. Electoral setback to Jama'at Islami the champion of Zia's Islamization program was translated as popular verdict against the Zia regime's experiment of Islamization. (Rais 1985)

In 1986 Benazir Bhutto received unprecedented reception at her arrival. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto began to restructure the party. She was aggressive in easing out the close associates of his father including Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, Mumtaz Bhutto and Abdul Hafeez Pirzada. Simultaneously, she was promoting young political workers to make them loyal to her within organizational structure of PPP. The notable loyalists included Aitzaz Ihsan, Jehangir Badar who remained loyal to party throughout their political career. However, Faisal Saleh Hayat and Sherpao later joined Musharaf regime.

She led the party in the difficult times and challenged the military dictatorship of Zia ul Haq. She played vital role in organizing the MRD and mobilizing masses. PPP leadership was able to wake people up from slumber and attracted large crowds. It was observed that despite its lethargy, MRD continued to be known as symbol of resistance to authoritarian rule. In 1988, after the demise of General Zia, Senate Chairman Ghulam Ishaq Khan became the acting president. This time, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto began to be described as one of the more recognizable world leaders. Her leadership was emerged uniquely in the sense that she did not emerge from the obscurity that surrounds the other leaders (Ziring 1991).

Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's charismatic appeal to people significantly increased her popularity and the enthusiasm of people was spacioously converted into electoral support. She was threatened that she would not be able to participate in elections as woman leader because women were not supposed by religious clergy to be considered fit in the politics. She demonstrated her skills of negotiations and consensus-building. As a result, she was able to keep her party united despite the IJI's anti-Bhutto campaign and efforts of establishment and caretaker government for preventing her to come in power (Saeed 1996).

Benazir Bhutto became first woman prime minister of Pakistan on December 2, 1988, after her party's landslide victory in 1988 elections. PPP secured 93 seats out of 207 compared to 55 and 13 seats secured by IJI and MQM respectively. She said in her address.¹

"Victory in elections led her to form the government in a very difficult time. She said: 'I am proud to be elected Prime Minister of Pakistan in this critical time. It is an awesome obligation. But in the words of John Fitzgerald Kennedy- I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it.'"

During the next general elections of 1993, PPP emerged second largest party in the Punjab and won highest number of seats.

Following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007, elections were held in February 2008. This was fifth time that PPP got electoral success. It established coalition government consisting of itself (124 out of 340 National Assembly Seats), the PML-N (with 91 seats) and several other parties. PPP constructed two-thirds majority across the National Assembly and Senate with support of MQM, ANP and JUI-F and independents (Nelson, 2009).

Political Compromises

- Notwithstanding, the party was criticized for making various compromises to avoid unacceptable consequences. It made several amendments in the constitution to deal with threats that shook the government. For instance, under the second amendment, Ahmedis were declared non-Muslims because of anti-Ahmediya movement started in 1950s. It erupted again in 1974 and posed serious threat to government of Bhutto. Islamist parties such as Jamaat Islami, Majlis-e. Ahrar, and the Khaksars backed agitation. Bhutto attempted to deal with issue calmly and prudently. Nevertheless, Bhutto's assurances were not acceptable to Ulemas including Mufti Mahmood, head of the JUI. Tahaffuz-e-Khatam-e Nabuwat" demanded for passing a bill for declaring Ahmedis non-Muslims.
- After assuming power as a PM, she compelled to make several compromises. She showed flexibility in bargaining for their position. According to terms and conditions she had to accept Ishaq Khan as a president and to continue policy and decisions of caretaker government regarding International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Shafqat 1996).
- Further she was not allowed to run foreign policy according to her political acumen and vision. Thus, scheme for destabilizing her government was prepared before she took charge. However, during her stay in power she asserted her authority and took actions which deteriorated civil-military relations. Conflict with military elites and differences with president on the issue of major appointments as well as constitutional matters caused stress in civil -military relations.
- Moreover, during her first tenure ethnic conflict between old and new Sindhis culminated in the form of Pacca Qilla incident in May 1990. This situation was manipulated to produce reason for winding up her rule. Promises were not fulfilled and thus eventually her government was dismissed in August 1990 by the president who had already

developed personal grudge against PM and thus justified the dismissal by blaming government for misconduct of power, corruption, and inefficiency (Shafqat 1996).

- During her second tenure too MQM again became major source of trouble in Karachi. Thus, after the end of “Operation Clean Up” in Sindh, Benazir Bhutto accepted the advice of the security agencies and organized paramilitary forces i.e., Rangers under the command of Major General Mushtaq Ahmed to eliminate all politically and religiously motivated terrorist activities.
- Retaining Sahibzada Yaqoob Ali Khan as foreign minister was the part of the compromises she was compelled to make before taking the position as a prime minister. However, Bhuttos’s way of managing foreign affairs was acceptable to power-sharing stake holders. She tried to improve Pakistan’s relations with India, The visit of Rajiv Gandhi’s visit December 1989 in to Pakistan was opposed by power sharing elites. Regarding Afghanistan issue she continued the policy of Junejo Government. During this time, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar and his resistance force was being supported by Pakistan. She was able to skillfully conduct foreign policy (Shafqat 1996).
- Moreover, unlike her previous tenure, civil and military relations were improved considerably during her second tenure. The major appointments including joint chief of staff committee and selection of naval and air chiefs were done carefully and smoothly.

Major Achievements

Constitutional Development

In 1970s a new written constitution of 1973 was framed without delay, and it was adopted with the consensus of all the political parties. Thus, conflicting demands for Islamic provisions, provincial autonomy and strong Centre were accommodated. New constitution replaced the constitution of 1962 made by military regime without subjecting it to parliamentary vote. National Awami Party (NAP) was main opposition party in the national assembly with its support from Jamiat-i-Ulema-i- Islam (JUI). It advocated for provincial autonomy. Bhutto’s democratic rule faced bitter opposition from NAP which was declared unlawful organization in 1975. Its offices were shut and its leaders including Wali Khan was arrested on the basis that the party was acting in a manner prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan.

Benazir became the first woman prime minister of Pakistan – indeed, of the entire Islamic world – after her party’s victory in the 1988 elections. Her first tenure, however, was cut short when President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, using powers vested in him under Article 58(2)(B) of the Constitution, dismissed the National Assembly. This was the first time he had used the said clause, but he would use it again in 1993 to send Nawaz Sharif home. Benazir Bhutto was fully supported by USA, thus it was not easy to remove her from power. However, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, helped powerful elements to justify the dismissal of Benazir Government on the ground that Benazir Bhutto as a woman leader would not be able to handle situation as an outcome of Gulf crisis (Ziring 1990).

Within eight years, from 1988 to 1996, the country went to the polls four times. It was as if we were compensating for all the elections that we had not held in our history. These elections threw up four governments; two each headed by the PPP and the Nawaz faction of Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N).

In political terms, the concoction of Islami Jamhoori Ittihad (IJI) remains the most remarkable factor; in later years it exposed the scale and dynamics of the machinations that go behind the curtains to have a ‘government if choice’ (Mahesar 2022)

After the flurry of elections, however, came the fourth military intervention when Gen Pervez Musharraf sent the PML-N government packing after the Kargil episode.

Mr Asif Ali Zardari took charge of PPP leadership after the demise of Benazir Bhutto. In the wake of general elections in 2008, PPP emerged largest party in the parliament and formed alliance with Awami National Party (ANP) and became first ever ruling party since independence to complete its 5years tenure and it was able to create political and economic stability by abandoning use of powers under article 58 (2)(b). Further it was able to introduce a landmark 18th amendment for ensuring provincial autonomy and de-concentration of power, resources, and authority. Further, under the PPP government reforms were introduced to ensure rights of people of Baluchistan and Gilgit Baltistan.

Reforms

PPP Government under Z A, Bhutto’s six years rule made several changes in social structure. Land Reforms Act 1972 was passed soon after he assumed his position. Nevertheless, it had an inherent fault of being unable to define ownership. As a result, big landowners exploited this loophole and further divided their land among members of their families. Same was the

case with 1976 laws which however, provided for launch of new agricultural tax.

Bhutto also began to reform bureaucracy. These reforms enable Bhutto to exercise his maximum control over elite service. Later this service played crucial role in elections of 1977. Government took full advantage of its elite services which worked for ruling party and provided vehicles and other stuff. Elections were monitored and controlled by civil servants with the aid of police. This was further exploited by opposition parties to claim that election was rigged at large scale.

Nationalization

PPP's leader ZA Bhutto introduced policy of nationalization which was welcomed by farmers in the hope that this would end their exploitation by private operators and urban middle classes accepted it in the hope that this policy will help to increase the availability of quality food. Urban lower classes expected the provision of cheaper food.

Nevertheless, PPP's government under Benazir Bhutto, economic policy remained unclear. The government started privatization policy by abandoning socialist program. Economic issues including unemployment was not properly handled by the government (Shafqat1996).

Nuclear Development

In the 1970s Pakistan's threat perceptions further increased by India's growing military strength by upgradation of its conventional arms. The development of unconventional weapons tested by India in 1974, further increased Pakistan's sense of vulnerability. Indian nuclear explosion intensified threat perception and generated an impetus to develop nuclear weapons. Lukewarm attitude of international community towards India's intentions to achieve hegemonic goals in the region further justified the Pakistan's nuclear weapons development which aimed at creating nuclear deterrence (Mahesar 2022).

Social Development

It can be argued that Zia era virtually ignored female education. Instead of focusing on educational improvement Zia regime kept insisting on establishment of separate educational institutions for male and female students. The Zia government allocated only 3.2% of total expenses to education and only 1.0% to health (World Bank 1988). Zia government had idealized the image of women faithful to customs which confined women to remain within four walls of her home. However, under the PPP's 1988 manifesto it was made clear that all forms of discrimination against women

would be eliminated. Benazir Bhutto reiterated this pledge in her following words:

“I like to think I'm carrying on my father's vision of a federal democratic Pakistan. He set the way for a society in which there should be no discrimination based on sex, race, or religion, and I too am fighting for this.”

In the beginning of the year 1989, Benazir expanded the federal cabinet to 43 members, including five women. Out of 19 ministers of state, four were women.² Thus women were encouraged to participate in public life (Weiss 1990).

PPP leader Benazir Bhutto set up women police stations to deal with domestic violence against women. The start-up loans were given to women for their economic empowerment. PPP leadership also took efforts to get women's rights recognized as human rights in the 1993 Vienna Declaration. Female judges were appointed to the superior judiciary for giving women relief in cases of violation of their rights.

Conclusions & Way forward

- The latest political nomenclature in the country is the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) which is a combination of political forces tried to counter the PTI narrative.
- Political parties are central to statecraft, and it is, therefore, a travesty that we not only have an inept political system, but a looming crisis of leadership. Most parties remain reluctant to promote intra-party polls, which discourages the emergence of new leadership.
- Political parties generally have three objectives: secure public support, capture power, and deliver services to the people as per the aspirations of the voters and supporters. In Pakistan, political parties are more focused on the first two objectives and less concerned about the last one, which is more important for their survival.
- Debate on public issues, constructive criticism and political tolerance needs to be promoted by PPP. Likewise, indecency in political behavior, needless political confrontation, and a culture of character assassination rampant in our prevailing political culture must be discouraged through available democratic, legal and media forums by political workers and leaders of PPP.
- Further, respect for the principle of constitutionalism is a collective responsibility of all political parties including PPP. It must demonstrate

courage and stop any major or minor constitutional violation by the power elite.

- The prospects of democratic system and political stability, political parties need to institutionalize dialogue between executive, legislature, judiciary, civil and military leadership. In the absence of this initiative, formation of alliances and counter alliances unleashed by political expediency has remained disturbing and devastating factor for democracy in Pakistan throughout its history of 75 years.
- PPP must take efforts to regain public support in Punjab by promoting new leadership. It should work out a plan for restructuring and improving party's performance.
- In Sindh the recent abnormal monsoon downpour has created both difficulty and opportunity for PPP. The devastation caused by torrential rains has brought difficulty in terms of loss of life and property. However, it opens an opportunity for PPP to take initiatives and start 3-R activities of rescue relief and rehabilitation for flood victims. PPP led government in Sindh must save populations from hunger and avoid harrowing situation that may bring crisis. Successful relief and rehabilitation work carried out by the party will significantly improve its credibility and popularity.

Mishandling of disaster caused by heavy rainfall in Sindh has exposed the negligence of ruling elites and bureaucratic inefficiency in dealing with crisis. Inept political parties with democratic deficiency are not engaged in crisis-handling due to their dynastic control, ethnic divide, and bureaucratization of decision-making. Thus, the party must engage its political networks in floods-hit areas of Pakistan to improve its connection with masses.

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¹ Address by her Excellency Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan at US House of Representatives-June 7, 1989

² Begum Shahnaz Wazir Ali (Minister of State for Education); Begum Rehana Sarwar (initially appointed as Minister of State for the Women's Division, now heading the Ministry for Women's Development); Dr. Mahmooda Shah (Minister of State for Special Education and Social Welfare); and Begum Khakwani (Minister of State for Population Welfare).