



The Evolving Role of Political Parties in the development of Pakistan's Democracy (1947-2022)

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Abstract

This research paper aims to analyze the role of Political parties play in the development of democracy of Pakistan from 1947 to 2022. Political parties provide a platform for citizens to participate in the political process and express their views. In the case of Pakistan, political parties have been a major force in shaping the country's democratic trajectory since its independence in 1947. Therefore, this study utilizes the Qualitative research method under the auspices of analytical, descriptive, and historical approach. The study evaluates that over the past several decades, Pakistan has witnessed a proliferation of political parties, each with its own distinct ideology and platform. These parties have played a significant role in articulating public opinion, aggregating interests, and providing a channel for political participation. Through their campaigns, rallies, and public meetings, political parties have helped to raise awareness about important issues, mobilize citizens, and foster a sense of political consciousness. They have also provided a platform for marginalized groups to voice their concerns and advocate for their rights. However, this research recommends that to strengthen Pakistan's democracy, political parties must embrace inclusivity and diversity, enhance accountability through transparent practices, and ensure transparency in political processes to foster public trust and participation.

Keywords: Political parties, Democracy, Pakistan, Ideology, Participation, Mobilize, Advocacy

Introduction

The birth of Pakistan in 1947 ushered in a new era for the subcontinent, but the nascent democracy struggled to find its footing. Political parties, crucial to the functioning of any democracy, played a dynamic and often tumultuous role in shaping Pakistan's political landscape. From the early days of the Muslim League and its struggle for independence to the diverse array of parties competing for power today, the evolution of these organizations reflects the complex and often turbulent journey of Pakistani democracy (Ali, 2010). Initially, the dominant Muslim League sought to consolidate power, leading to the establishment of a parliamentary system. However, the early years were marked by political instability and the rise of military influence. The 1950s saw the emergence of new political parties, including the Awami League and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), challenging the Muslim League's dominance. These early decades were characterized by fragile coalition governments and a struggle to forge a national identity, often overshadowed by regional and ethnic tensions (Ayub, 2016). The 1970s brought significant changes with the rise of the PPP under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Although his tenure was marked by progress in social reforms and economic development, it was also impacted by political polarization and martial law imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977. The subsequent military rule further weakened democratic institutions and suppressed political parties. Despite the challenges posed by the military's influence, political parties continued to play a vital role in maintaining a degree of public discourse and mobilizing public support for democratic values (Jalal, 2010). The 1990s saw a return to democracy, albeit

with limited success. While multi-party elections were held, political instability and corruption continued to plague the system. Despite the efforts of parties like the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League (N), the political scene remained fragmented, hindering effective governance and contributing to a cycle of political turmoil. This period underscored the need for strong institutional reforms and a more robust system of checks and balances to ensure the accountability of political parties. Despite the historical setbacks and challenges, political parties in Pakistan continue to play a crucial role in the country's democratic progress. They serve as platforms for diverse voices, advocate for different ideologies, and hold the government accountable for its actions. While the journey has been arduous, the future of Pakistan's democracy hinges on the ability of political parties to evolve, prioritize national interests over personal agendas, and cultivate a culture of responsible governance (Khan, 2018).

Literature Review

Political parties play a crucial role in fostering democratic principles and institutions. In Pakistan, political parties have been instrumental in shaping the country's democratic trajectory since its independence in 1947. Numerous literatures have examined the intricate relationship between political parties and the development of democracy in Pakistan over the last seven decades. One notable review, authored by Rehman in 2012, analyzes the evolution of party systems in Pakistan. Rehman traces the formation of political parties from colonial times through the post-independence era, highlighting their ideological orientations and organizational structures (Rehman, 2012). Another comprehensive review by Cheema and Khan (2016) explores the impact of political parties on democratic institutions, arguing that party competition promotes accountability and strengthens representative government (Cheema & Khan, 2016). Moreover, several reviews have examined the role of political parties in the context of military interventions. Asghar (2017) argues that political parties have been instrumental in restoring civilian rule after military interludes, contributing to the resilience of Pakistan's democratic system (Asghar, 2017). On the other hand, Mehdi (2018) cautions that political parties have sometimes been complicit in the establishment of military regimes, undermining the democratic process (Mehdi, 2018). Furthermore, literature reviews have explored the influence of political parties on policymaking. Rehman and Khan (2019) assert that political parties play a central role in the formulation and implementation of public policies, reflecting the interests of their constituencies (Rehman & Khan, 2019). Additionally, Yaqoob (2020) examines the role of political parties in promoting sustainable development and addressing social and economic challenges in Pakistan (Yaqoob, 2020). It is important to note that these literature reviews provide varying perspectives and conclusions. Some argue that political parties have contributed positively to Pakistan's democratic development, while others highlight their shortcomings and challenges. However, collectively, these reviews underscore the multifaceted role of political parties in shaping Pakistan's political landscape and its transition towards a more consolidated and inclusive democracy.

Material and Methods

Understanding the role of political parties in Pakistan's democratic development requires a nuanced qualitative approach. Qualitative research method under historical, analytical, and descriptive approaches was used for this study. Examining and analyzing historical turning points, such as the 1958 military coup and the 1971 secession of Bangladesh, allows us to trace how parties have grappled with issues of national identity, governance, and economic development. This qualitative perspective reveals the complex interplay of political actors, societal pressures, and historical context that has shaped Pakistan's democratic journey. A qualitative approach delves deeper into the motivations, strategies, and limitations of individual political parties. This allows us to understand the nuances of party politics in Pakistan, including the influence of patronage networks, the role of charismatic leaders, and the impact

of societal divisions on party formation and functioning. By examining the evolution of party platforms on issues like religious freedom, women's rights, and economic policies, researcher has shed light on the ways in which political parties have responded to changing social realities and contributed to, or hindered, the growth of democratic institutions in Pakistan.

Political Parties and the Development of Democracy in Pakistan (1947-2022)

Political parties play a pivotal role in democratic governance, fostering accountability, representation, and policy implementation. In Pakistan, the evolution of political parties has significantly influenced the country's democratic trajectory since its independence in 1947.

Early Years (1947-1958)

Pakistan's political landscape during the independence movement was shaped significantly by the emergence of key political parties such as the All-India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. These parties played pivotal roles in advocating for the interests of Muslims and Hindus respectively within British India. The Muslim League, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, became increasingly influential in demanding a separate homeland for Muslims, which eventually led to the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Following independence, the Muslim League initially dominated Pakistan's political scene. However, the country soon faced challenges arising from ethnic and regional divisions, which gave rise to smaller parties representing various local interests and identities. These divisions often stemmed from differences in language, culture, and socio-economic factors among Pakistan's diverse population. Despite the pluralistic nature of the emerging party system, the Muslim League continued to exert significant influence, particularly in the formative years of the new nation (Riaz, 2017). The trajectory of Pakistan's political parties was interrupted by the imposition of martial law in 1958, which marked a turning point in the country's political history. The military takeover under Ayub Khan curtailed the growth and functioning of political parties, restricting their ability to operate freely and effectively. This period of authoritarian rule ushered in an era where political dissent was suppressed, leading to a significant setback for democratic processes and party development in Pakistan (Riaz, 2017).

Era of Democratically Elected Governments (1971-1977)

After the 1970 elections, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, emerged as the dominant political force and formed the government. This marked a significant shift in Pakistan's political landscape as the PPP implemented a series of ambitious reforms, including nationalization of key industries and land reforms aimed at redistributing wealth and power (Malik, 2019). Bhutto's populist rhetoric and socialist-leaning policies appealed to many segments of society, particularly the disenfranchised and working class, but also polarized the electorate and raised concerns among political opponents about democratic erosion and concentration of power. However, Bhutto's tenure as Prime Minister faced challenges, including accusations of authoritarian tendencies and suppression of dissent. His government's nationalization policies, while intended to reduce economic inequality, also created economic disruption and investor uncertainty, further polarizing public opinion. Despite these challenges, Bhutto's PPP remained a formidable political force, influencing the country's political discourse and policy direction throughout the early to mid-1970s (Malik, 2019).

The political landscape drastically shifted again in 1977 when allegations of electoral fraud during the 1977 elections led to widespread protests and political unrest, culminating in the military's intervention. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq seized power in a coup d'état, effectively ending the era of elected civilian governments in Pakistan and imposing martial law. This marked a significant setback for democratic governance and political stability in the country, as Zia-ul-Haq's military regime instituted strict censorship, curtailed political freedoms, and imposed Islamization policies that further reshaped Pakistan's socio-political landscape (Malik, 2019).

Transition and Martial Law (1977-1988)

General Zia-ul-Haq's martial law regime, which began in 1977 following a military coup, imposed significant restrictions on political activity in Pakistan. Under Zia's rule, political parties were banned, and he introduced a non-party election system aimed at centralizing power and limiting opposition influence. This period was characterized by strict censorship, suppression of dissent, and the imposition of Islamic laws through Zia's policy of Islamization, which aimed to bolster his regime's legitimacy among conservative elements of society. Despite these repressive measures, opposition to Zia's authoritarian rule began to coalesce, notably through the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Led by Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and other prominent opposition figures, the MRD sought to challenge Zia's regime and advocate for the restoration of democratic governance in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2018). The MRD mobilized widespread public support, leveraging discontent with Zia's authoritarianism and his government's failure to address pressing socio-economic issues. The MRD's efforts to resist Zia's regime gained momentum through a series of protests, strikes, and civil disobedience campaigns, demonstrating a broad-based opposition coalition united against military rule. Despite facing severe repression and crackdowns by Zia's security forces, the MRD persisted in its advocacy for democratic reforms and garnered international attention and support for its cause (Ahmed, 2018). This period marked a critical phase in Pakistan's political history, highlighting the resilience of civil society and political activists in the face of authoritarianism and their determination to restore democratic norms and institutions.

Return of Democracy (1988-1999)

The 1988 elections in Pakistan heralded the return of political parties to the forefront of the political arena after a prolonged period of military rule under General Zia-ul-Haq. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Benazir Bhutto following the assassination of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), led by various factions, emerged as major contenders in these elections (Jalil, 2019). This marked a significant shift towards democratic governance, with both parties competing vigorously for power and influence. Benazir Bhutto's PPP and the PML alternated in forming governments during this period, reflecting Pakistan's nascent but turbulent democratic landscape. Despite the restoration of elected civilian governments, political instability remained a pervasive issue. The alternating rule between the PPP and the PML was often marked by challenges such as coalition politics, legislative gridlock, and accusations of corruption (Jalil, 2019). These issues hindered effective governance and contributed to public disillusionment with political leadership, undermining efforts to consolidate democratic institutions and practices. Moreover, allegations of corruption further complicated Pakistan's democratic process during this period. Both the PPP and the PML faced accusations of mismanagement and graft, which eroded public trust in political institutions and deepened cynicism towards the efficacy of democratic governance. The prevalence of corruption scandals underscored the challenges of transitioning from military rule to a stable democratic system, highlighting the entrenched power dynamics and patronage networks that continued to influence Pakistani politics.

Military Rule and Political Realignment (1999-2008)

In 1999, Pakistan experienced another military coup that ousted the democratically elected government led by Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). General Pervez Musharraf took control of the government, citing concerns over political instability and allegations of corruption against Sharif's administration (Ghani, 2017). Musharraf's coup marked a return to military rule and suspended Pakistan's democratic processes once again, drawing international criticism while promising to focus on economic stability and anti-corruption measures. Under Musharraf's regime, efforts were made to stabilize Pakistan's

economy and implement anti-corruption initiatives. The military-led government sought to address economic challenges through privatization of state-owned enterprises and attracting foreign investment, aiming to bolster Pakistan's financial stability (Ghani, 2017). Additionally, Musharraf initiated anti-corruption campaigns targeting political and bureaucratic elites, although these efforts were criticized for their selective application and political motivations. During Musharraf's rule, new political alliances and parties emerged amidst the altered political landscape. The Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) (PML-Q) was formed by defectors from Nawaz Sharif's PML who aligned with Musharraf's military-backed government (Ghani, 2017). This faction of the PML supported Musharraf's policies and served as a key political ally during his tenure. Meanwhile, the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), primarily based in urban Sindh, also played a significant role in Musharraf's political calculus, particularly in coalition politics and maintaining stability in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city.

Democratic Progress and Challenges (2008-2018)

The 2008 elections in Pakistan marked a significant transition as the country returned to civilian rule following nearly a decade of military-led governance under General Pervez Musharraf. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Asif Ali Zardari after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by Nawaz Sharif, emerged as the dominant political forces in this period (Siddiq, 2018). This electoral shift represented a renewed commitment to democratic governance, with both parties pledging to introduce reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and restoring political stability. Under the civilian governments of the PPP and PML-N, efforts were made to initiate legislative and administrative reforms to consolidate democratic processes. The PPP-led government focused on issues such as constitutional amendments to decentralize power, judicial reforms, and social welfare programs aimed at addressing poverty and inequality (Siddiq, 2018). Similarly, the PML-N under Nawaz Sharif's leadership emphasized economic reforms, infrastructure development, and energy sector improvements to stimulate economic growth and alleviate chronic power shortages in Pakistan. However, despite these efforts, Pakistan continued to grapple with political polarization and allegations of corruption that hindered effective governance and national progress. Both the PPP and PML-N governments faced criticism and scrutiny over their handling of public funds, governance inefficiencies, and failure to fully implement promised reforms (Siddiq, 2018). These challenges underscored the persistent struggle to achieve transparency, accountability, and institutional integrity within Pakistan's political system, perpetuating public distrust in political leadership and institutions.

Emergence of New Voices (2018-Present)

The 2018 elections in Pakistan marked a significant turning point with the rise of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, to power. Imran Khan's PTI campaigned on a platform centered around populist rhetoric and a promise to combat corruption, which resonated strongly with a disillusioned electorate eager for change (Ali, 2022). This appeal was bolstered by Khan's charismatic leadership, his image as an anti-establishment figure, and his advocacy for socio-economic reforms aimed at addressing inequality and improving governance. Following PTI's electoral victory, Imran Khan assumed office as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, initiating a government focused on fulfilling its campaign promises of anti-corruption measures and economic reforms. The PTI administration embarked on ambitious initiatives, including efforts to strengthen accountability mechanisms, streamline government institutions, and attract foreign investment to stimulate economic growth (Ali, 2022). However, Khan's governance has encountered numerous challenges, notably economic instability exacerbated by factors such as inflation, fiscal deficits, and external debt pressures. Moreover, political confrontations and opposition criticism have also characterized Khan's tenure as Prime Minister. The PTI-led government has faced significant resistance and scrutiny from political rivals, leading to legislative gridlock and challenges in implementing its agenda.

effectively. Additionally, controversies surrounding governance decisions and policy responses have further contributed to public skepticism and internal discord within the ruling coalition, highlighting the complexities of governing a diverse and politically volatile country like Pakistan.

Conclusion

The political landscape of Pakistan since its independence in 1947 has been marked by a complex interplay between political parties and the evolution of democracy. While political parties have been instrumental in shaping the nation's political trajectory, their role has been fraught with challenges, ranging from internal divisions and dynastic politics to external pressures and instability. The initial years were characterized by a strong military presence, leading to frequent coups and suspensions of democratic institutions. Despite these setbacks, political parties played a crucial role in advocating for democratic principles and building a framework for political participation, albeit with limitations.

The 1970s witnessed a period of relative stability and political progress with the emergence of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which won a landslide victory in the 1970 elections. However, this period was short-lived, as General Zia-ul-Haq's military coup in 1977 ushered in a decade of authoritarian rule. During this period, political parties faced suppression and limited their influence. Despite this, they remained active underground, holding rallies and advocating for democratic restoration. The 1980s saw the rise of religious political parties, further complicating the political scene and introducing an element of religious fundamentalism.

The 1990s marked a return to democratic governance, but the process was marred by instability and political turmoil. Successive governments, formed by coalitions of various parties, struggled to maintain stability, facing challenges such as corruption, economic woes, and a resurgence of militancy. Despite these setbacks, the political parties continued to play a vital role in the democratic process, providing a platform for political discourse and promoting accountability. However, criticisms of corruption, dynastic politics, and a lack of accountability continued to plague the political system.

The 21st century saw Pakistan grapple with the challenges of terrorism, economic instability, and growing political polarization. Political parties continued to play a crucial role in navigating these challenges, but their effectiveness was hampered by internal divisions, weak institutions, and a lack of consensus on national priorities. The rise of social media and the proliferation of fake news further complicated the political landscape, adding a new dimension to political discourse.

Recommendations

Political parties play a pivotal role in shaping the democratic landscape of any nation. In Pakistan, political parties have often faced challenges in fulfilling their democratic mandate effectively. To strengthen Pakistan's democracy, it is imperative for political parties to adopt forward-looking approaches that prioritize inclusion, accountability, and transparency.

Firstly, political parties must embrace inclusivity and diversity. This means making concerted efforts to engage with marginalized communities, women, and youth, ensuring their representation and voice in political processes. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, parties can broaden their support base and build legitimacy. Furthermore, they should promote internal democracy within their ranks, empowering members to participate actively in decision-making. Additionally, political parties must enhance their accountability to the public. This requires transparent financial practices, regular reporting of activities, and open communication with

constituents. By embracing accountability, parties can build trust and credibility among citizens. They should also strengthen their internal mechanisms for enforcing ethical conduct and addressing corruption.

Lastly, transparency in political processes is essential for public confidence in democracy. Political parties should be transparent about their funding sources, campaign strategies, and policy decisions. This transparency can help mitigate the influence of special interests and promote informed participation of citizens. Open and accessible information enables the public to hold parties accountable and fosters trust in the political system.

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