

**ROLE OF LIBERAL POLITICAL PARTIES DURING THE
STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN (1970-2008)**

Political Science

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a federation of five provinces and some federal administrative tribal areas. It has parliamentary democracy with multi-party system. The regular politics of the country is moderate and is focused on the economic and social development. Since Independence Pakistan has experienced various government styles. The democratic institutions in the country, some time have faced experimental challenges due to undemocratic interference towards democratic path. The people of Pakistan have always been demanded democracy. The Pakistani public believes that democracy is the only way to solve their problems and strengthen the country politically, defense, economically, and socially.

The proposed paper mostly concentrates on the role of liberal political parties in the democratic process and formation of new government in the present era in Pakistan. The role of liberal political parties including Late Benazir Bhutto's political party "Pakistan Peoples Party" or PPP and a semi liberal Mr. Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League PML (N) are the main components of nowadays Pakistani politics. This is third time when Pakistan Peoples Party has form federal government in Pakistan. These parties are playing an important and effective role to making the country towards democratic path and make it progressive in the present era. Liberal political parties have more effective role in the Pakistani politics than the religious and regional parties in the parliament.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan was established on August, 14 1947 through a democratic process as a dominant Muslim state. It also had emerged on territorial-cum religious' bases. Pakistan is a strategically important country having world's

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largest Muslim population. The history of democracy in Pakistan is a distressed. Power struggles among Presidents, Prime Ministers and Army Chiefs has always been remained a main issue. Military regimes have ruled Pakistan for more than half of the country's 62 years of existence. Effective parliamentary democracy in Pakistan has always been interrupted by non democratic forces and due to these interruptions democracy in the country has not been succeeded to make powerful its roots.

DEMOCRACY

“Democracy and the institutions of liberal democracy are the gifts of the Western world not only for Pakistan the rest of the Asian countries. Despite the fact that different social, political, and economic environments demand different political systems which could be based on democratic norms, but not the same as in the US or the Great Britain political systems. Some time elected governments misgoverned the countries and lost their legitimacy. Democratization is not an easy process. It would take at least a generation. There is no lasting democracy if the participant political culture fails to develop. The popular trust in the institutions is vital to democracy. But in such countries popular distrust for democratic institutions is widespread, and prospects for generating increased political trust are uncertain. Some times these countries stand at a crossroad. They face many basic problems including how the ongoing process ensures the maintenance of a democratic system, which would prevent the dictatorship and military interventions. Because these forces always overthrow the elected political governments”.(Jaspal: 1994)

There are many countries in the world where political parties have lost their mandate to function through their own mismanagement of the political system. In such countries political parties effectively waste their credibility to the point where the non democratic forces' overthrow of the established political order is accepted or welcomed. “These actions are certainly a cause of grave concern and underscore the crisis for the political parties. Some times this type of coup is also regarded by many as an acceptable solution to undemocratic and unresponsive political parties.(Ivan: 2001)

POLITICAL HISTORY OF PAKISTAN

The movement for the creation of Pakistan among other things was aided by the acceptance of the demand of the Muslims as a religious minority. Since Muslims were a substantial minority about 25 percent of the population in

undivided India. The objective was to have proportionate representation in the elected assemblies under the British rule. For this, they demanded and achieved a system of separate electorates under which Muslims electorates voted only for the Muslim candidates. **(Rais: 2004)**

Although the founder of Pakistan Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, made religious differences between Hindus and Muslims the main argument to justify the claim to a separate Muslim state for the Muslims in the subcontinent but at the same time in an address to the members of the Pakistan Constitution Assembly on 11th August, 1947 he said:

You are free, you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques, or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state..... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we all are equal citizens of one state (Speeches of Quaid-i-Azam:1976: 403:4)

Jinnah's death on 11th Sep, 1948 closed the chapter on secularism and universal citizenship. On 7th March 1949 Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan moved as Objective Resolution in Constitutional assembly. It declared God as the sovereign in Pakistan, not its people or elective representatives. The first Pakistani constitution of 1956 declared Pakistan as an Islamic Republic and its president could only be a Muslim.

ISLAM AS A POLITICAL WEAPON IN PAKISTAN

“The role of Islam has always been difficult in Pakistan. Pre-partition there was a strong demand to the necessity of having a nation for the Muslims, but the question of whether such a nation for the Muslims of the sub-continent would also be an ‘Islamic’ nation has remained unresolved, and is an ongoing debate even today. The distinction has been raised by the local and international scholarship, and various cases have been made to support the possibility and desirability of having the state of Pakistan as one based on Islamic ideas of secularism, even as retaining its character as a Muslim state. Having lived through its infancy and now in its 62nd year, Pakistan has witnessed various degrees of importance to the role of Islam in Pakistani politics by a host of leaders, often using the unsettled nature of the debate to support their personal preferences. This has further provoked the conflict in both theocratic and secular camps” **(Mubarak:2008)**.

President Ayub Khan (1958-69) showed clear modernistic tendencies; yet retained a modest complacency towards a degree of pre-existing Islamic ideology legitimized by the Pakistan movement, but took it no further. The trend of predominantly religion-free politics continued with Yahya Khan (1969-71), who similarly showed little sympathy for the religious parties. Till the rise of Pakistan People's Party in the 1969, the political stance regarding religious parties had been unsympathetic. (Mubarak:2008)

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the major secular and progressive party in the country had won the 1971 elections on a heavily leftist map for governance; entrenched as it was in socialist ideals and thereby enjoying massive support. However, "It was not until Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to power at the end of 1971 following the secession of East Pakistan that any elements of Islamic ideology began to appear in Pakistan's substantive foreign policy". Islam came to the forefront of all policy and law-making decisions, and, ultimately, a vast host of issues, economic, policy-related etc. were increasingly dressed in Islamic colors. Religion soon after became the official legitimizing strategy for all political exercises. Z.A Bhutto for instance, was "arguably Pakistan's most secular leader", but even before he reverted to the politicization of religion the central PPP slogan was, "Islam is our ideology, socialism our economy, and democracy our politics" (Mubarak:2008).

The non democratic powers under Zia-ul-Haq entered the political field in 1977 as a "caretaker" ninety-day government whose "sole aim" was "to organize free and fair elections". But this regime continued ruling over the country more than a decade about eleven years. They have been granted legality by the Superior Court. It soon experienced a remarkable shift in policies, with religious reform becoming a top priority.

In Pakistan some time Religion has served as a main justification for the non democratic regimes. The Afghan war proved another catalyst {means} for this support, "The Afghan war in the 1980s once again raised the prospects of communism reaching the shores of Pakistan, and the Persian Gulf was quick to respond. (Mubarak:2008)

PAKISTANI POLITICS POST 9/11

Soon after 9/11 Pakistan once again become to the status of a front line state in the war against terrorism. This far-sighted move not only put Pakistan on the right side of the U.S., but also helped it in crushing the undesirable radical

religious parties and getting rid of several sectarian groups which were promoting religious terrorism in Pakistan itself.

“On October 7, 2001, the U.S. launched a major offensive against the Taliban government of Afghanistan and the al-Qaeda network indiscriminately killing thousands of people in carpet-bombing attacks. This was a turning point in Pakistan's political history. The U.S. occupation of Afghanistan in alliance with Pakistan and its declaration of war against terrorism, which in fact is a indirect threat to millions of fundamentalist Muslims all over the world, particularly Palestinian freedom fighters and all Muslims countries which are supporting the Palestinian cause. All these factors caused a severe repercussion among the people of Pakistan against the U.S. and rallied them round religious parties, which have always opposed the U.S. policies against Muslims freedom fighters, in Palestine and Kashmir. The US attack on Iraq also added fuel to the fire and people all over Pakistan, particularly in the provinces of NWFP and Balochistan, bordering Afghanistan that is why, in election 2002 they voted for MMA, which was an effective power in the previous National Assembly”.

(Burhanuddin:2002)

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES IN THE LAST TWO ELECTIONS

The religious parties of Pakistan formed an alliance under the title of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) to contest the 2002 elections. They never imagine that they would get 45 seats in the National Assembly, next to PPP and Muslim League (Q) the former ruling parties. This group of Islamic parties, which never had any role in the formation of government in the country except during the period of President General Ziaul Haq who found his mandate to rule the country in the slogan of 'Islamisation' which would not only give legitimacy to his rule but also gave him to some popularity among the masses. With the support of some Ulema of the Islamic Ideology Council, he declared that the concept of political parties did not exist in Islam and the democratic system of governance was un-Islamic. He changed the entire ideological complexion of Pakistan from a modern liberal and progressive state to a theocratic state. The religious political parties have always been rejected by the people of Pakistan, now came around General Zia and became his defenders and source of power. According to Gen Zia concept Pakistan was created for the enforcement of Nizam-e-Islam based on the Qur'aan and Sunnah.

“After Zia's death in 1988 Pakistan reverted to the normal democratic mode and was ruled by the governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif

respectively. Although, during the period from 1988-1998 religious political parties did not play any major role in Pakistani politics. Throughout eleven years of Ziaul Haq's rule, religious extremism spread. However, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, after taking over power in October 1998, made it clear that Pakistan will remain a liberal and progressive Muslim nation as conceived by Quaid-i-Azam, the founder of Pakistan. The elections 2002 were a landmark event in the political history of Pakistan for many reasons. It placed the country back on the rails of democracy, returned it to constitutional politics, though within a drastically altered framework. Two major elements are visible One is that none of the traditional mainstream political parties is likely to return with a majority to form government at the federal level. With the split within the Muslim League that the military take over caused, the electoral mandate appears to be fragmented. With this {Pakistan entered} (we may be entering) into a new era of coalition politics, or else into chaotic {disordered} conditions”(Daniel Twining:2007).

ELECTIONS 2008 AND AFTER MYTHS

“The elections 2008 are the outcome of the struggle of liberal democratic political parties. Due to the Martyr of Ms. Benazir Bhutto the big winner in the 2008 elections is PPPP or Pakistan Peoples party parliamentarian which (42.7% of the seats) and PML-N or Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Shairf which won (32% of the seats) was the the runner. Surprisingly, with the decline in Musharraf popularity as marked by polls since his crackdown against Islamic Extremists, the party that supports him the strongest, PML-Q, still managed to hold on to 38 seats (down from 64 in the previous election in 2003). Not surprisingly, ANP a progressive and liberal Pashtoon Nationalist Party controls the assembly in Northwest Frontier Province. This was good news for those who were worried about religious party control of this very volatile region of Pakistan. In other words, the will of the people may have rejected the more radical Islamic ideals, but the radicals are trying to use fear and violence to overturn the election in a more practical sense”. (DAWN:2008)

The Party position in the National and provincial assemblies.

Party position National Assembly & provincial assemblies -2008					
Party	NA	PP¹	PS²	PF³	PB⁴
PPPP	88	77	66	18	7

PML(N)	66	102	0	4	0
PML(Q)	38	64	10	4	17
MQM	19	0	36	0	0
ANP	10	0	2	29	2
BNP(A)	1	0	0	0	5
MMA	5	2	0	8	5
Others	40	39	11	16	10

1. Provincial Assembly Punjab
2. Provincial Assembly Sindh
3. Provincial Assembly NWFP
4. Provincial Assembly Balochistan

Source: www.dawn.com, February 19, 2008

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 2003 AND 2008 ELECTIONS.

National Assembly Seats after February 2008 Election, 206 seats

Party	NA- 2008	% of Seats	Last Election (2003)
Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPP)	88	42.7	81
Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)	66	32.0	19
Pakistan Muslim League - Qaumi (PML-Q)	36	17.5	126
Mutahida Quomi Movement (MQM)	19	9.22	14
Awami National Party (ANP)	10	4.85	--
Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)	5	2.42	63
Balochistan National Party – Awami (BNP-A)	1	0.48	1
National Alliance Party (NAP)	?	--	16
Pakistan Muslim League - Functional (PML-F)	?	--	5
Pakistan People's Party – Sherpao (PPP/S)	?	--	2
Pakhtun-khwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP)	?	--	1
Jamhoori Wattan Party (JWP)	?	--	1

Balochistan National Party – Mengal (BNP-M)	?	--	--
Balochistan National Movement (BNM-H)	?	--	1
Mutahida Quomi Movement (MQM-H)	?	--	1
Pakistan Awami Tehrik (PAT)	?	--	1
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	?	--	1
Pakistan Muslim League – Zawaf (PML-Z)	?	--	1
Independents (current figure includes "others")	40	19.4	3

Source: Daily "Dawn" Karachi February 19, 2008

THE MAIN LIBERAL AND PROGRESSIVE PARTIES IN PAKISTAN.

It appears, to even a brief analysis, that the Pakistani have a tendency to create a new political party with slightest differences. Indeed every few election cycles, parties disappear and new ones are formed. For instance, several small parties won seats in the 2002 legislative elections, but did not appear to win seats in the 2008 elections. Or if they did, they were reformulated (and renamed) parties of the original. The main progressive and liberal political parties in Pakistan are:-

Awami National Party (ANP): Active in the 2008 Legislative Elections when it gained a reasonable number of seats in National Assembly as well as formed Government in NWF province.

Balochistan National Movement: (BNM) The party believes in the right for national autonomy for the peoples of Balochistan.

Balochistan National Party (BNP). BNP is a liberal and progressive party. There are two derivatives of this party, Balochistan National Party - Awami and Balochistan National Party - Mengal. Nationalist party focusing on the province of Balochistan.

Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) Founded in March of 1984. The MQM "established a virtual monopoly over representation of the Urdu-speaking community in urban Sindh". The party influence in non-Urdu speaking regions is negligible. Party changed its name from Muhajir Qaumi Movement to Muftahida Qaumi Movement in 1997 to "further the programme of national development" and to carry out "a nation-wide campaign against feudal domination.

Pakistan Tehrik I Insaf (PTI):- Literally, "Pakistan Movement for Justice", have a major influence in middle-class families and has remained dead-set against the military regime. Its leader Imran Khan due to a cricket legend is also well known in the west he wants "economic development of Pakistani people through justice at all levels of the society through moderation while keeping in mind golden Islamic principles. PTI aims at taking Pakistani people out of this plight through education and enlightenment" Party is also a great supporter of free judiciary in the country.

Pakhtoon-khwa Milli Awami Party, (PKMAP): Formed in 1970, Pashtun-based nationalist party. Strong in North West Frontier Province and Pushtoon areas in Balochistan. The Pashtun tribes reside in the northern provinces of Pakistan and retain feudal tribal customs. Party believes on genuine democracy, federalism and social justice.

Pakistan People Party Parliamentarian (PPPP): Pakistan People Party was established in 1967 in the reaction of the dictatorship of General Ayoub Khan Formed in 1967 by Zulfqar Ali Bhutto, whose daughter, Benazir Bhutto served as prime minister twice, was exiled and then returned to run in the 2008 campaign, and then was murdered by a suicide bomber. The PPP was suppressed by a third military government in 1977 but then returned to power in 1988. The party is "centre-left" and affiliated to the Socialist International, and reports that the party creed is "Islam is our faith; democracy is our politics; socialism is our economy; all power to the people." The Pakistan Peoples Party is considerably more liberal than other political parties in Pakistan and is known to fight for such issues as women's rights (its previous leader was a woman) and the rights of the poor, minorities and the oppressed. A small splinter group of the PPP is known as PPP-S. It should be noted that the 2008 manifesto for the PPP cites clearly that relations will be improved with the U.S. and the European Union as well as states the PPP will focus on eliminating the Taliban's use of Pakistan as a base for attacking across the border into Afghanistan

Sindh National Front (SNF): Led by a cousin of former Prime Minister and headman of the PPP, the late Zulfikar Bhutto, its focus is on the Sindh Province. The main objective of the party is 'confederation', or a state where there is genuine provincial autonomy for each of the four provinces of Pakistan (Sindh, Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province and Balochistan). The SNF has never won a parliament seat; however has reasonable influence in the Sindh province.

THE MILITARY REGIME IN PAKISTAN

“The Pakistani military is one of the largest and best-trained armed forces in the world. The Military service in Pakistan is also viewed as prestigious, respectable, and soldiers both in-service and retired can expect numerous benefits from service. In Pakistani politics since late 1950s, every military ruler had tried to transform himself into a civilian president. They employed different constitutional strategies to reintroduce the civil rule and enable their policies. The military in Pakistan had always sought to find the appropriate formula to enhance democracy in the country and try to support the ‘non-armed forces involvement solution’ to the political crisis. The armed forces participation in the state affairs was limited to their role in the defence sector or to some extent where the civilian governments need its assistance, according to the constitution. Popular policies of political leaders generate political crisis that some time threatened the survival of Pakistan and necessitates the interventions of the armed forces. Ironically, political leaders appeal army to take over. In 1997, for example, Ashgar Khan the leader of PNA, appealed to the army to take over³. History reveals that people welcomed the armed forces decisions to govern the state in 1958, 1969, 1977 and 1999. On October 12, 1999 when Pakistan’s army chief suddenly took over the government, popular relief at the coup reflects the failure of four successive democratically elected governments over 11 years”.

(Yunas Samad:1994)

CONCLUSION

Pakistan has remained a state between dictatorship and democracy neither has democracy proved to be durable nor has dictatorship remained stable. After elections 2008 there is hope for continuity of democracy in the country. But first its citizens including political and military leadership to tolerate each other and respect their own laws and constitution. The Pakistani nation not wants the non democratic powers to interfere in the country's political life. The Pakistani nation after last year elections is undoubtedly a step closer to the advent of democracy. Election 2008 not only constitutes a vital step in the country's journey towards a new era of a democratic dispensation, but will also lead to good governance and sustained democracy in view of the constitutional reforms providing for checks and balances on the country's centres of power.

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