

## **Party Democracy in the Light of Party Statutes: A Case Study of Two Parties in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*This study is an analysis of the concept of intra-party democracy of two leading political parties of Pakistan namely, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) and is based on the minimalist approach of Schumpeterian conception of democracy. Qualitative data technique with party-oriented approach was adopted for this study. Representative democracies involve the public in selecting their leadership and candidates to public offices through open primaries. The current study is an analysis to see the extent of participation of rank and file members in the selection of leadership and candidates to public offices provided by the Political Parties Order 2002 (PPO2002) and party bylaws (party constitutions). The study covers a 28 years period from 1988 to 2016, which is divided into two sub-periods i.e. 1988 to 2005 (18 years) and 2006 to 2016 (10 years). The study period is further divided into three categories with 'full', 'partial', and 'no' categories, to know that which party falls in which category. The study found that in the first sub-period both the parties totally bypassed the provisions brought forth by the PPO 2002 and party bylaws by not conducting intraparty elections. In the second sub-period though, intraparty polls were conducted but were found to be severely flawed and against the democratic principles.*

**Key Words:** Intra party democracy, leadership selection, candidate selection, internal party organization, Political Parties Order 2002

## **Introduction**

The leading political parties in Pakistan lack democracy within (Bora, 2010). Scholars are of the view that democracy is in need of strong and stable political parties which is possible only if these parties are itself democratic (Teorell, 1999). Political parties, through elections, create a connection between the government and the governed (Sartori, 2005). These are the building blocks of any political system. If the institution of political parties is found to be feeble, masses will suffer. Unfortunately, the worldwide party system is in decline (LaPalombra & Weiner, 1966). Katz is optimistic about its revival and opines that intraparty democracy may reverse the process of party system decline (Katz, 2013). This will happen only if member's participation is made an incumbent part of that process because in that case party leadership and members would come closer and a link would be established.

Intra Party democracy in possible terms is a process which refers to the participation of members as well as of the different classes and groups of the party organization in the deliberative and decision making processes. Croissant and Chambers also emphasized over the deliberative and decision-making powers between members and the leadership, and the organizational structures of parties. They said it is indispensable for transparency and inclusiveness in these parties (Croissant & Chambers, 2010). Saeed says periodic, transparent intraparty elections could not be established in Pakistan as yet. This not only spoils the image of the party leadership but also keeps democracy at arm's length (Saeed S. , 1997). The democratization of party system is on the rise in the established democracies (Wintour, 2011). In parliamentary systems, one of which is under study, both leadership and candidate selection are two different institutions as against the presidential systems where the difference is unclear (Rahat, 2013, p. 2) so the focus is on the former. Earlier, leadership selection was treated as an offshoot of candidate selection but in the current literature, both the two are treated differently (Rahat, 2013, p. 3). In the current paper, two of the most acknowledged aspects of intra-party democracy, like, leadership selection and candidate selection in the two major political parties in Pakistan are considered.

Pakistan came into being as a result of the struggle by the All India Muslim League. Later it was named Pakistan Muslim League which was a single strongest party in the state. Internal feuds and its weak structural organization led to weak and unstable political institutions as a result democracy could not flourish in Pakistan in a real sense (Saeed K. b., 1967; Fatima, 2013). The current study is a case study of two parties (PPP & PMLN) (study both PPP & PPPP as PPP) and is an endeavor to know that how intraparty democracy in Pakistan is influenced by the processes of representative democracy. The later is a process that involves the citizenry in selecting their leaders during elections who in turn represent them in the parliament. In democracies membership participation occurs through the processes of leadership selection, candidate selection, and policy formulation, which political parties in Pakistan lack. That is why Pakistan is going through the drought of strong and stable political parties. It, ultimately, results in taking collective decisions by a single individual and factionalism, but also to the low level of internal conflict management systems and use of discretionary powers and authority. The research is intended to provide some empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that ‘Political parties in Pakistan do not follow an inclusive and decentralized way provided by the Political Parties Order 2002 & party bylaws to elect their leadership and candidates for public offices’.

Abraham Lincoln’s definition of democracy has been widely cited and understood where he stated it as, “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. We see he accentuates on the participation of masses in the candidate selection process. Robert Dahl deemed it “the rule by demos, a citizens’ body, consisting of members who are considered equal for the purposes of arriving at governmental decisions” (Dahl, 1989). All we can say is that membership participation is a must in the deliberative and decision making process of the party without which we cannot think of democracy (Croissant & Chambers, 2010).

The idea of intraparty democracy can be found in the writings of Moisey Ostrogorski (1902) and Robert Michels (1911) when the mass parties emerged on the political horizon. They set out means for the members to take part in the internal decision making. What they wanted was that parties must be based on inclusive participation; otherwise, it will be counter-

productive for the democracy in the respective country. Efficacious intraparty democracy will enhance the party image which will ultimately have an appealing electoral impact over voters (Mair, 1995). Intraparty democracy provides for an open and deliberative platform whereby a man in the street will be able to take part in elections openly. Leadership selection is to be democratized if leaders in Pakistan have to maximize their electoral acceptance in masses. It will not only improve their image in the eyes of the public but also will keep down the internal conflicts in the party. Furthermore, it will play a role in the legitimization of the distribution of power and will boost up the responsiveness of the party leadership through the party membership.

### **Theoretical Background**

Sartori defines a political party as “any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office”. To Sartori competition for political parties in the system have a high ground to survive but it is considered an old-fashioned definition of political parties because he did not utter a word regarding its organization. Definition by Maliyamkono and Kanyongolo will hold ground here for its wide inclusion of aggregation of interests and its articulation (Maliyamkono & Kanyongolo, 2003). It says “a political party is an organized association of people working together to compete for political office and to promote agreed upon policies”. Political competition and participation are the two dimensions Robert Dahl thinks political parties should categorize the political processes on them (Dahl, 1971). Forst believes that representative institutions should provide for “a fair and effective participation and argumentation” (Forst, 2012).

Lapalombara and Weiner give much importance to political parties and wrote that a political party can be found even in authoritarian regimes (LaPalombra & Weiner, 1966) Samuel P. Huntington is of the view that political parties are the sine qua non of the state without which political system would not function. He considers the former a key to political stabilization (Huntington S. P., 1993). He says institutional decay in the developing nations lead to a vacuum of leadership which further led to military intervention (Huntington S. P., 1968). Diamond (1997) attaches

high importance to their functions they perform in democracies of linking the public to their government. Almond and Powel (1966) wrote ‘the Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach’ wherein they write the functions of political parties in length. They pursued the extent of political parties to a conclusion and declared it incumbent for the political socialization, recruitment, nominating members to governmental offices (Almond & Powel, 1996). Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) is an independent, non-governmental research and training institution brought about to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. Its reports are of prime significance for the scholars working on intraparty democracy in Pakistan. In its reports of 2014, 2015 & 2016, on ‘assessing internal democracy of major political parties of Pakistan’, it studied eight political parties and was concluded that the two parties which are under consideration here, were the least democratic.

Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) through its publication of 2005 acknowledged that quality of democracy and participation is a prerequisite for each other and democracy does not mean the mere rule of law and safeguard of human rights. People must be given their due role to play (IDEA, 2005). Shaista & Zia consider that political parties in Pakistan are playing a role which is more a factor of division than unity due to family-oriented parties. According to them, that is one of the reasons that masses in Pakistan are wary of the political system (Taj & Rehman, 2015). Syed Ali Shah in one of his papers wherein he studied three parties PPP, PMLN & ANP, concluded that these parties are highly centralized. In this survey, 90% of the people declared these parties very centralized when it comes to decision making and candidate selection (Shah, 2015).

### **Methods of Analysis**

A party-oriented approach was employed to see mass participation in the political process. This is 28 years study i. e. from 1988 to 2016, which is based on empirical research into the two political parties of Pakistan (PPP & PMLN), and is further divided into two sub-periods; 1) that is from 1988 to 2005, and 2) is from 2006 to 2016. The paper is divided into further three categories with the names ‘full’, ‘partial’ and ‘no’ categories, to see that

the respective parties either fully adhere to the rules and regulations under the PPO 2002 and party bylaws, or give a lip service to them, or ignore them altogether. The party that provided ample opportunities to their members to participate in intraparty elections while selecting leadership and candidates to public offices are included in the 'full' category. In the 'partial' category though party elections took place but were against the rules under consideration, and so kept their members totally aloof of the party affairs and decisions were taken by the kitchen cabinet alone. 'No' category will indicate that party members were deprived of their right to select their party leadership as well as their representatives to the legislature by not conducting the intraparty polls. Qualitative data collection technique was employed to collect data for this purpose. Most of the data were collected from the primary sources. However, the study is also based on secondary sources. Constitution of Pakistan, constitutions of the respective parties (party bylaws), party manifestoes, and Political Parties' Order 2002 will be given precedence. We will also go through the standards and norms followed by the previous parties. Moreover, among the secondary sources leading journal articles, newspapers and reports of the PILDAT will be considered for this purpose.

### **Evolution of Political parties in Pakistan**

Pakistan came into being due to the struggle of All India Muslim League. After independence, it was transformed into Pakistan Muslim League and formed government in Pakistan (Aziz, 1970). However, due to intrigues and leg pulling by the politicians after the demise of Jinnah, the party lost its direction. The party split into many factions and sub-factions. Islamic parties like Jama'at Islami and Jamiat I Ulama I Islam adopted a little different path but they served the Muslims of India in one way or another. Later, they played an active role in the politics of Pakistan. Secular parties have been an incumbent part of the political process. They included the Communist Party of Pakistan, Awami League, United Front, the Republican Party, Pakistan Socialist party, Pakistan Congress Party, and some other small parties. Ayub Khan promulgated Electives Body Disqualification Order (EBDO) and Public Offices Disqualification Order (PODO) through that he debarred politicians and their parties from participating in politics. Suharwardi and Qayum Khan were among the

victims (Rizvi, 2000). Parties in Eastern and Western wings had severe differences with each other along with some other prominent factors led to disintegrations (Khan, 2005). Pakistan People's Party was formed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which later played a prominent role in the political development of Pakistan. Due to his efforts, the constitution of 1973 was passed with consensus. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz was formed by Muhammad Nawaz Sharif in 1988 and today it plays an important role in Pakistani politics. Pakistan Tehrik I Insaf, a newly emerged party though it was formed in 1996 by the cricket turned politician, today the party enjoys the support of youth & educated class in Pakistan.

### **Leadership Selection Process**

In the established democracies leadership is selected either through an Electoral College, parliamentary caucus, or then through open primaries. The last one is the most accepted mechanism of party leadership selection which encourages participation. Here, usually, the most popular leader is selected who sometimes may lack the requisite experience. It is practiced in the USA.

In the first sub-period, no intraparty election took place in both parties. Though intraparty elections were conducted in 2006 by both these parties the process was neither according to the Political Parties Order 2002 nor was it in consonance to their own constitutions. PMLN should conduct intraparty polls after every three years (PMLN Constitution). Crisis Group in its 2005 Asia report writes that "PPP & PMLN refused the Political Parties Order 2002 which calls for all political parties to hold elections for all party offices including party leader" (Group, 2005, p. 19). Even party members in both these parties criticized their leadership and felt dissatisfaction with unelected leadership (Group, 2005, p. 20).

Intraparty elections were conducted on 2 July 2011 in the PMLN General Council at the Islamabad Convention Centre. Nawaz Sharif was elected the president of PMLN unopposed. He replaced his brother, Shahbaz Sharif who became the party head when the former was in exile (Zia, 2016).

The PPP intraparty elections for the top leadership held in 2013 were being challenged by Senator Safdar Abbasi and Nasir Ali Shah for its lack of authenticity. They hold the view that elections were conducted to fulfill the formality only and that elections were totally undemocratic as no one was

informed about the election schedule and voter lists (Today P. , 2013). They declared these elections against the Political Parties Order 2002. They called it a farce because no one filed nomination papers against the incumbent leaders and were elected unopposed (News t. , 2013).

Party leaders in both PPP and PMLN are selected in an extreme exclusive way with high centralization and low level of members' participation (Taj & Rehman, 2015, p. 362). Around 2000 members of the PMLN National Council gathered together on 18 Oct 2016 and elected the office bearers including Nawaz Sharif, who was elected the president unopposed. The leader of the Senate Zafar ul Haq was elected unopposed as the chairman of the party. Nawaz Sharif nominated PMLN provincial chiefs in stark contrast to the party constitution which provides that they should be elected through a secret vote (PILDAT, 2014). Intraparty elections conducted by the PPP for leading party posts in 2016 were conducted secretly in Bilawal House in Karachi. Most of the leaders were absent from them including Bilawal Bhutto, who was elected the Chairman of the party (DUNYA NEWS, 2017, SUCH TV, 2017). Fewer electors were given the opportunity to participate (Today E. o., 2017). Obaid ur Rehman writes that decision making power and party matters are in strict control of family members of their leaders are some of the reasons that parties are undemocratic in Pakistan (Rehman, 2016).

### **Candidate Selection**

Across the world candidates are selected either through party members, by the delegates who themselves are selected by the rank and file membership; party elites who are non-selected, or by the single individual (Rahat, 2013). Political parties have democratized their selection process of candidature to public offices in the last five decades by giving their rank and file members a prominent role (Scarrow & Kittilson, 2006). Political parties have to connect the masses with the government which is considered one of their primary functions. That is why such parties are obliged to provide opportunities for the masses to participate in decision making processes. Candidate Selection process usually employs two patent devices, i.e. primary elections, and party caucuses. So, the process of candidate selection in the established democracies is based on competition for elected



positions and members or their representatives are included in the deliberation process. Under favorable conditions, a boost has been observed in the loyalty of members and supporters towards the party. The most acceptable and open selection of candidates in those societies is through open ballot or primaries. In this way party members select candidates for the general election after a pre-selection procedure which determines their eligibility. In candidate selection, if a candidate is appointed by the party leader or a small number of influential, often called 'caucus', as is referred to earlier, high cohesion is noted. Conversely, if the selection of candidates is carried out through a process where members or followers participate the legislators are found to be more responsive and less cohesion in the party is seen (Rahat, 2007).

In Pakistan political parties have to follow their own constitutions, Political Parties' Order 2002, and the constitution of 1973 while managing their party affairs. But to my surprise when I came across the procedure the two parties practiced was quite naïve. Political Parties Order 2002 says the selection of candidates for both, National Parliament and provincial assemblies should be through a transparent and democratic process (PPO 2002, Article 8). Political Parties Order 2002 requires from the parties to have an elected General Council at all the three levels e.g. federal, provincial and local. According to the said Order, the party shall provide an equal opportunity for members to contest election even for topmost slots (PPO 2002, article 11). For this purpose, all members will constitute an electoral college for the party's General Council.

Likewise, the PMLN constitution gives special prominence to democracy ideals; like tolerance, freedom, equality, and social justice (PMLN Constitution) but they never brought such ideals in practice. A Central Parliamentary Board having 20 members which are itself constituted by the Central Working Committee with the president of PMLN the ex-officio chairman of the Board picks candidates for the national parliament and provincial assemblies. The board is acting just like a kitchen cabinet who selects candidates without caring for the views of the locals. This is even against the very constitution of PMLN. Furthermore, the PMLN constitution says that party candidates for the provincial assemblies will be selected by the Provincial Board. However, central apparatus plays a

dominant part in determining and nominating candidates for party positions and public offices at a lower level (Jabbar, 2003). Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance conducted a survey in 2004 to retrieve membership data of the political parties but the latter did not have even exclusive membership lists (IDEA, 2004). All powers in PMLN are concentrated in the president. He can nominate anybody for any office anytime he wishes so (Constitution of PMLN, article 13).

In the reports of PILDAT for 2014, 2015, and 2016 PMLN stood last in engaging local party organizers in the nomination of candidates. Even party parliamentary meetings could not take place regularly which are usually expected before parliamentary sessions. The National Council of the party is to meet once a year but it met after almost five years on 18 October 2016 (PILDAT, 2016). The Central Working Committee of PMLN which is to meet every three months could not meet since July 2015. The same CWC allots tickets to the candidates. Similarly, most of the major decisions were usually taken without institutional consultation (PILDAT, 2015).

In the case of PPP, party co-chairman nominated provincial party heads arbitrarily (PILDAT, 2014, 2016). In one of the PILDAT reports, PPP got 25% score in respect of involving the local party organization in deciding candidates for the national and provincial assemblies (PILDAT, 2014). In the same report, the score to discourage the tradition of dynastic politics was only 14%. People's Party local workers felt discontent over candidates selected for PS-106 and PS-117 and said that they were not taken into confidence by the central leadership (Baloch, 2016). Roger et al. write that the process of candidate selection in both, PPP and PMLN is highly centralized and exclusive (Long, Samad, Singh, & Talbat, 2016). Party tickets are usually allotted to candidates who are faithful to the central leader and can finance their electoral expenses.

### **Discussion & Recommendations**

In the first sub-period (1988-2005) both the parties kept their members aloof from party affairs including decision making, candidate selection, and leadership selection. No intra-party elections took place in both these parties which put them in the 'No' category. Party leadership was nominated through arbitrary decisions by the respective party president.

Owing to that people got tired of these parties which resulted in low turnouts in the four elections took place in that period (Shahid, 2013). Different surveys indicated that political institutions lost their prestige and people started looking towards the military. Both the parties did not follow PPO 2002 and their own party constitutions by not holding intraparty elections. In the second sub-period, although, intraparty elections were conducted by the respective parties but they not only violated their own constitutions but also Political Parties Order 2002, and the Constitution of Pakistan by not conducting it in the given time frame. That is why these parties were kept in the 'Partial' category. According to Political Parties Order 2002, every party should hold an election after every four years. PMLN and PPP constitution provides to hold intra-party elections after every three and two years respectively. Constitution of Pakistan emphasizes over the participation of the public in political affairs which is one of their fundamental rights. The respective parties did not follow the considered rules.

Party Chairman in case of PMLN has no powers although in the hierarchy it comes first. All the provincial presidents were elected unopposed which give evidence of lack of competition in the party. Husnain views lack of intraparty election in PPP in the 1980s as the principal reason that later gave rise to dynastic politics and politics of personalities which ultimately weakened the party's roots (Husnain, 2008). If we look at the PILDAT's report on intraparty democracy in 2014 and 2015, PMLN in both these reports stood last. This indicates how far the PMLN is from democratic values.

After the demise of Makhdoom Amin Faheem, the party decided in a meeting of the Central Executive Committee to install Asif Ali Zardari as the president of PPP without any election. Even before that when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated back in December 2007, the former produced a will which according to him was left by Benazir Bhutto wherein she advised him to look the party affairs himself till Bilawal Bhutto come of age. He is now the co-chairman but ultimate powers are with him. The constitution of PPP is found to be incomplete because it does not have the requisite detail. Powers and functions of the Chairman, president, and secretary general are not elaborately stated (PPP Constitution). The

Constitution is silent about any amendment if the need arises. In books, the chairman is a nominating authority but is widely used by Asif Ali Zardari. The unconsummated constitution creates problems for party operation. That is why Asif Zardari is using it arbitrarily. Party constitution stresses that party election to be held after every two years but we have seen intraparty elections in the PPP held first in 2006 and then 2013 (PILDAT, 2015). Similarly, there is no provision in the party constitution for the party convention. Article 4 of the PPO 2002 provides that every political party shall formulate its constitution with clear aims and objectives and complete organizational structure at all levels. The same article emphasizes the parties to come with a procedure for the election of party leader and other office bearers. The organizational structure is present just in name in the case of PMLN because they hardly meet. The Central Executive Committee of PMLN is supposed to meet after every three months but they did not meet that criterion. Similarly, the National Council which is an electoral body of the party is to meet at the end of every year but it did not meet for almost five years (PILDAT, 2014).

The PPP manifesto of 2002 pledged to restore the free will of the people including the right to vote. They also pledged to address the issues of holding of transparent elections. In the manifesto of 2008, they again promised with the masses of Pakistan to give them the freedom to vote and to accentuate on other fundamental rights. It was written that all power belongs to the people and only people have the right to determine their destiny. It is a dilemma that they could not fulfill their promises. The problems remain the same even today.

Pakistan People's Party was found in 1967 by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and he remained its head until his death in 1977. Later his widow, Nusrat Bhutto, took control of it in 1977 and remained its chairperson till 1984. She was followed by her daughter Benazir Bhutto. The latter enjoyed the highest slot until her assassination in 2007. The party is now in the hands of her husband and son from December 2007 onward. We can see the dynastic and family politics in PPP (Taj & Rehman, 2015). According to PILDAT report in 2014, the party was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> only above the PMLN, which stood 8<sup>th</sup> in respect of change in topmost leadership (PILDAT, 2014, p. 12).

Leadership remained (in the same family) the same in later years and will remain the same as no change is expected.

The party leadership due to such strong centralization in these parties never let themselves face accountability. Members were never consulted, decisions were made arbitrarily and almost no presence of local or regional leadership was found, and candidates were selected in nontransparent and fraudulent way (Salih, 2006). In established democracies, these are considered the prime responsibilities and the building blocks for internal democracies in political parties. Furthermore, well-established party structure is indispensable for the internal functioning of political parties in a smooth and stable way. But the constitution of PPP is not a complete document that is why problems arose in its functioning.

Mair (1995) says intraparty democracy has an appeal for the electorate. In this way, the institution of political parties in Pakistan, which is in decline, will get an impetus and will ultimately be on the way to stability. This will cause to raise party acceptance in the masses which will ultimately result in high turnouts during elections. Leadership will also get acceptance and masses will be more confident of the electoral process.

Scarrow (2000) conceived a sharp increase of members in the candidate selection process between the 1960s and 1990s. Similarly, Kittilson along with Scarrow in a comparative study in 2003 affirmed that a mild trend can be seen in this way (Kittilson, 2003). It is safe to say that Pakistan is going through the same phase and a gradual glimpse could be seen as the three largest parties (PMLN, PPP & PTI) in Pakistan have conducted their intraparty elections after the lapse of four years against the culture prevalent in the 1990s, though, the process was quite exclusive.

### **Conclusion**

From the discourse, it is evident that political parties in Pakistan are at the crossroads. Both parties violated Political Parties Order 2002, party constitutions, and the Constitution of Pakistan, by either not conducting intraparty elections as is testified in the first sub-period, or not holding it according to its provisions (second sub-period). Lack of intraparty democracy strengthened dynastic politics and fortified the role of personalities further. PPO 2002 obliges a party to formulate its constitution with clear aims and objectives and complete organizational structure at all

levels. The two political parties studied above were found to have weak organizational structure. Pakistan People's Party has a weak constitution having only nine articles which lack the basic details regarding its structure. Its constitution mentions the name 'Council' only and lacks membership structure and procedure. Role, powers, and functions of the General Secretary are not specified in the constitution. The party constitution does not divulge the procedure of leadership and candidate selection which is a provision of the PPO 2002 and the Constitution of Pakistan, by not engaging local party members and supporters while nominating candidates for the legislature. Elections to party positions were just in name. There were no voter lists, no schedule, and were conducted in total secrecy where leadership was elected unopposed. PPO 2002 provides that parties should come with an elected General Council at central, provincial, and local levels but leaders of both parties appointed its members to the General Council in an autocratic way. It shows high centralization and authoritarianism in these parties. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz constitution was found to be complete and concise but it had bypassed the PPO 2002 and its own constitution by not convening party conventions regularly. In the PMLN constitution, it is written to provide an equal opportunity for their members to participate in elections as voters or contest election for party positions but the constitution is violated every time. Party bylaws bind party leaders to provide a mechanism to elect provincial party heads through a secret ballot but we found that leaders of both parties appointed them in a whimsical manner. Top to bottom approach in decision making process and noncompetitive leadership selection are some of the problems that eroded the value of the basic institution of political parties in Pakistan. This approach has to be reversed to fortify the institution of political parties and to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. On the institutional and organizational front, the capacity of both parties is very weak. Legal regulations and its implementations are the need of the day to ensure accountability, transparency, competitiveness and inclusiveness in these parties.

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