

# Civilian Leadership Rule in Pakistan from 1971-2013: An Analysis

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**Abstract –** Most part of Pakistan's history has been about military as the man on horseback. Civilian leadership seldom found chance to hold the reins of power and whenever it did it was only superficial. The actual reins have been held by Pakistan military in the country. Pakistan army has been, either in the back seat or front seat, but always steering the country's domestic and foreign policy. The formative years of Pakistan were marked by absence of general elections and weak political leadership cultivating a political culture of factionalism and opportunism and socio-ethnic conflicts that paved way for the rise of bureaucratic-military oligarchy. It is important to study the period under civilian rule after the long tenure under military regime from 1958 until 1971 which led to bifurcation of the country and subsequent formation of Bangladesh. The present problems of Pakistan can be traced to the demise of democracy and its failure to re-establish itself especially with the return of civilian rule after the military failure in 1971.

## 1.1 CIVILIAN POWER: 1971-77 AND 1988-99

The experiment with democracy in the newly created state of Pakistan came to an end with the military's direct take over in October 1958. In 1956, Pakistan had got its first constitution and Maj. General Iskander Mirza became the first president of Pakistan. Due to the political turmoil that followed and the controversial One Unit Programme, in October 1958 President Mirza abrogated the constitution of 1956 and declared martial law in the country. General Ayub Khan, who had become Pakistan's first army chief in 1951 under Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, became the first dictator of the country. He was appointed as the Chief Martial Law Administrator and new Prime Minister of Pakistan.

After ten years of martial rule, Pakistan experienced a brief phase of democratization during the 1970s. It was mainly due to the failure of military in the war against India in 1965 and the rise of Bengali nationalism in 1971. The defeat of Pakistan military in the war against India in 1971 and creation of Bangladesh provided golden opportunity for the political class. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to serve as ninth Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1973 to 1977 until he was overthrown and executed in 1979 to pave way for another military rule. He had served in the government and held many cabinet posts. It was in 1967 he founded the Pakistan People's Party. He was imprisoned for denouncing military regime under Ayub Khan. In the national elections of 1970 Bhutto and his party won but it was not recognized by the

military regime in power. This was followed by widespread riots in the country which denigrated into civil war. East Pakistan with the help of India bifurcated from West Pakistan and formed a new nation called Bangladesh. This led to humiliation of the military in the country and forcibly had to invite Bhutto to form the government. Under him, Pakistan adopted a new constitution in 1973. But Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in words of C. Jaffrelot, was "less a democrat than a populist, more an authoritarian than a parliamentarian, more a centralizer than a federalist and as much a product of his landlord background as a socialist..." (Jaffrelot 2015: 295) Bhutto turned out to be "the zealous incarnation of the viceregal political culture that Jinnah had initiated". (*ibid.*: 219) His failure opened the country to another military coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq.

It was the mysterious assassination of General Zia in 1988, August that welcomed "the third-wave"<sup>[1]</sup> of democratization in Pakistan. Benazir commented after sudden death of Zia in plane crash – "Zia's death has removed the shadow under which myself and all those dedicated to democracy have been living". (Syed 1992) The main political parties were Pakistan People Party, led by Benazir Bhutto and the Islami Jamhori Ittehad (IJI) led by Nawaz Sharif. Between 1988-1999 Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif continued to shuffle in the seat of power but as pawns in the hand of military. The democratization was rather superficial as the politicians proved to be corrupt or authoritarian while the actual centre of power remained with the

unelected institution of the state, viz. military. This was accompanied with fast changing governments, unstable political parties and lack of trust amongst the civilian leadership to rule. The ten years of civilian rule was spent in fighting each other and indulging in petty politics whilst ignoring the bigger vision of establishing democracy in country. In democracy opposition plays vital role and political leaders need to have a tolerant attitude towards each other. Nawaz Sharif refused to recognize authority of Bhutto's government (Lamb 1991) while vice-versa was also true. After a decade of experiment with parliamentary democracy the martial law returned. General Pervez Musharraf dismissed the government of Nawaz Sharif and took over the reins of power in October 1999. The smooth transition in power with no kind of resistance suggested absence of faith of citizens in the civilian government.

## 1.2 CIVILIAN POWER: 2007-2015

In the year 2007 Pakistan entered the latest phase of democratization with increasing political mobilization after the emergence of lawyer's movement, fall of Musharraf and restoration of the parliamentary system with the successful completion of elections in 2008. But by the end of the parliamentary term in 2013 Pakistani citizens were disillusioned by the prospects of democracy due to the increasing unpopularity of political class amidst corruption scandals and political factionalism that the PPP led coalition government faced. In a survey conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2012, on how many people preferred democracy in Muslim countries, it was found that only 42 percent of people in Pakistan prefer democracy. (Pew Research Centre 2012)[2]

The voter turn-out is also an indicator of the dwindling citizenry belief in the political system of country and democracy. In the 2002 elections, 41.8 percent of the registered voters cast their vote which increased to 44.6 percent during the 2008 elections. The voter turnout rate didn't increase substantially in the democratic elections of 2008 as compare to the elections held in 2002 under Musharraf's rule which reflects the lack of belief of the citizens in the prospects for democracy. (Oldenburg 2010: 79)

### 1.2.1 Political turbulence

The hope for democracy rekindled in the citizens in 2008. The elections in Pakistan were successfully held on February 18, 2008 which ended a decade's undemocratic rule under Musharraf. They were due for January 8, 2008 but because of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto (on December 27, 2007) elections got postponed. The PPP led by Benazir Bhutto's widower Arif Zardari secured the largest votes in the elections to be followed by PML(N) led by Nawaz Sharif. Both, PPP and PML(N) formed a coalition government with Jamiat Ulema-i-Islami-Fazl (JUI-F), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP). Yousaf Raza Gillani was

appointed as the Prime Minister of Pakistan by the new government. Democracy is a form of governance where holding regular elections is quintessential for its survival. The representativeness through elections ensures participation and accountability, the pillars of democracy. (*Dawn*, 8 November 2016) Democracy in Pakistan has suffered throughout the history due to political rivalry and factionalism, the advantage of which military leadership took. But this time civilian leaders shed their political rivalries to put up a united front against the military and joined hands to set a new precedence in the political history of Pakistan. However, before this Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif had joined hands against the military by together formulating and signing "Charter of Democracy" in May 2006. The charter was an attempt to topple the authoritative rule of Musharraf to restore parliamentary democracy. It suggested thirty-six points of reform measures condemning the military rule for the failure of democracy in the country: "terrorism and militancy are by-products of military dictatorship, negation of democracy are strongly condemned, and will be vigorously confronted". (State of Pakistan)[3] The civilian leaders thus banded together "in the name of a democratic process they had more or less faith in to reduce the ascendancy of the military". (Jaffrelot 2015: 263)

Unfortunately, the untied political front couldn't last for long and the fissures reoccurred. Nawaz Sharif pulled his PML(N) out of the newly formed coalition government due to the disagreement on a number of issues in particular restoration of deposed judiciary. (*Dawn*, 26 August 2008) The JUI(F), a right wing religious party was part of PPP-led coalition government until it developed differences and walked out in December 2010 to sit on the opposition benches. (*Dawn*, 05 April 2013) MQM, the second largest party in the coalition repeatedly threatened to quit the coalition over soaring fuel prices, endangering the majority status enjoyed by the PPP-led coalition government in the parliament causing political instability. It counted for 25 seats out of total 181 seats held by the coalition government. (BBC News, 03 January 2011)

The political leaders could not hold a united front for long despite of the constant emanating threat from the military take over. After joining the opposition group, Nawaz Sharif tried to settle score with his political rival, Zardari. Memogate scandal provided Nawaz Sharif with the golden opportunity. Though the case was handed over by the government to the Parliamentary Committee on National Security Nawaz Sharif petitioned the Supreme Court to call for an inquiry into the Memogate scandal that involved Zardari. (*The Hindu*, 02 December 2011) The political unity that was initially displayed could not sustain for long due to the short-sightedness and personal goals of the political class in

Pakistan. After the defection of JUI(F) and MQM, the PPP sought the support of Musharraf's PML(Q) to have majority in the parliament. The PML(Q) joined the PPP-led coalition government in 2011. This displayed erosion of democratic ideals of the ruling party to align with a military-sponsored party.

Despite the inter-party frictions, Zardari led government can be credited for few positive steps in the direction to restore democracy during the period. Iftikhar Chaudhary was reinstated as the Chief Justice of SC as well as other judges. The most important step taken was the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment on April 08, 2010. All the members of the national assembly voted to approve the bill. Prime Minister Yousuf Gillani declared: "We have been saying we will go to the Westminster-style parliament system... Today we removed the anomalies. We are giving you a parliamentary form of government with balance of power between president and prime minister". (*The Telegraph*, 08 April 2010)

The purpose of the bill was to restore the parliamentary form of government as outlined in the 1973 constitution, independence of judiciary and greater autonomy to the provinces. Jafar Ahmed, a Pakistani political analyst while praising the political class said, "The bill has been approved at a time when it appeared the nation was in total disarray which shows the politicians can reach a consensus". (*The Telegraph*, 08 April 2010) Another problem is the widespread corruption among the political class that endangers democracy. According to the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International (TI) which ranks countries based on the perceived corruption in their public sector, Pakistan ranked 117<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in 2017 which is abysmally low. (*The Express Tribune*, 23 February 2018) In 2017, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was disqualified by Supreme Court from holding the office for life on the charges of corruption linked to Panama papers. Though there were speculations that the judiciary "joined forces with the military using allegations of corruption against disobedient prime ministers" because there is absence of clear evidence that Nawaz Sharif abused the public office for personal gains. (*The New York Times*, 28 July 2017) This is not the first time that Nawaz Sharif had faced the allegations of corruption. In 2000, he was convicted on the charges of tax evasion and corruption. Benazir Bhutto and Zardari were found guilty in the Swissgate scam in 2003 but the verdict was suspended on appeal and later Bhutto allegedly negotiated a deal with Musharraf to close the case.

### 1.2.2 Elections of 2013

After the elections in 2008, the next general elections in Pakistan were held on May 11, 2013. It was the first time in the history of its existence that Pakistan witnessed transition of power from a democratically

elected government to another. This marked an important event in institutionalization of democratic process in Pakistan. In the elections of 2013, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) led by Nawaz Sharif emerged as victorious party with 124 seats out of 272 seats in National Assembly as compare to 68 seats in 2008. PPP, which led Pakistan coalition government between 2008 and 2013 was reduced from 89 seats in 2008 to 31 seats in 2013 due to the corruption charges and inefficiency. (*Foreign Policy*, 15 May 2013)[4] The elections of 2013 was marked as "one of the most widely contested elections in Pakistan's history, with all major national and regional political parties taking part in what appears to have been a genuinely competitive contest". (*ibid.*)

This smooth democratic transition was disrupted intermittently by the attacks carried out by the Taliban militants on the political workers and leaders participating in the elections. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) believes democracy as un-Islamic practice and vowed to attack the political parties with secular views, viz. ANP, PPP and MQM. But despite the violence unleashed by TTP there was high-voter turnout of 55 percent in the elections of 2013 as compare to 44 percent in the elections of 2008 as shown in the table below (Table 2A).

**TABLE 2A: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TURNOUT COMPARISON, 2008 AND 2013**

PROVINCE/AREA	VOTER TURN-OUT IN 2013	VOTER TURN-OUT IN 2008
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)	45%	34%
Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)	36%	31%
Federal Capital	62%	50%
Punjab	60%	48%
Sindh	54%	44%
Balochistan	43%	31%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>44%</b>

\*Source: Government of Pakistan, *National Assembly Turnout Comparison, 2013 and 2008*, Election Commission of Pakistan.

### 1.2.3 Challenge to Dynastic Politics

Pakistan politics, like the political culture of other South Asian countries, has been characterized by dynastic politics where most of the major political parties are dominated by powerful families. According to a research carried out by *Herald*, 597 families account for 3300 seats out of 7600 in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies since 1970. It also counted 44 percent of all seats in the National and provincial assemblies belonging to members of political families. (*Dawn*, 09 May 2013)

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been ruled by the Bhutto family for generations. Formed by

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967, PPP was later taken over by his daughter Benazir Bhutto who went on to become the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, son of Benazir and Zardari co-chaired the PPP after Benazir was assassinated in 2007. Nawaz Sharif led Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) is another important political dynasty of Pakistan. After Nawaz Sharif was disqualified (in 2017) by Supreme Court to hold the post of Prime Minister, he named his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif as his successor to the office of Prime Minister. (*Dawn*, 31 July 2017) Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the daughter of Nawaz Sharif joined her father's party during the general elections of 2013 and is seen as the political heir to her father. Hina Rabbani Khar, daughter of a politician became the first female foreign minister of Pakistan. She had contested her first election from her father's parliamentary seat at Muzaffargarh in 2002 and won. The Khars have dominated the electoral seat of Muzaffargarh since the 1970 (with only 2013 elections being an exception). Similarly, Awami National Party (ANP) was created in 1986 by Abdul Wali Khan, the son of Abdul Ghaffar Khan who started a movement *The Red Shirts*. Today, the party is led by Wali Khan's son, Asfandyar Wali Khan.

Dynastic politics is an undemocratic phenomenon which is held responsible for widespread corruption in the political class of Pakistan. Sarwar Bari, the chairperson of Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) during the briefing on the proposed Election Bill 2017 emphasised on the need for stricter measures "to make political parties more representative through term restrictions and transparent intra-party elections" while condemning the culture of dynasty politics which endangers democracy. (*Dawn*, 17 August 2017)

The elections of 2013 in Pakistan witnessed cracks in the dynastic politics. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party emerged as the national party against the mainstream political parties like PPP and PML(N). PTI was founded by Imran Khan in 1996 but gained popularity during the period of 2008 to 2013. PTI emerged as the third largest party in the national parliament in the elections of 2013. But the drawback is that PTI, like PPP and PML (N) is centered around a charismatic leader than the ideology or policies of the party. (*Foreign Policy*, 12 March 2014)[5] Presently no single political party in Pakistan enjoys wide support of the people. They drive their support base from the feudal structures and from the barracks of military. "At the base of all of Pakistan's current problems, both domestic and foreign, lies its inability to define its identity. The issue whether it is a Muslim state, an Islamic state, or merely a Muslim offshoot of India remains unresolved to this day." (*The Hindu*, 17 January 2019) Pakistan's immediate enemy is hiding within its own territory. Its survival hangs on its victory over the change in ideological narrative by removing the influence of the military and Islamic extremists in formulation of state policies.

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