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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Constitutional and Political Development in Pakistan: An Insight into the Political Context and Legislative Performance of the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan (2018-2023)**

<sup>1</sup> Zobia Afzal and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Abdul Basit Khan\*

1. M. Phil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Faisalabad  
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

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**\*Corresponding Author:** [abdulbasit@gcuf.edu.pk](mailto:abdulbasit@gcuf.edu.pk)

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**ABSTRACT**

Following the general election of 2018, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerged as a leading parliamentary political party in the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan (2018-2023) which formed a coalition government at the center headed by Imran Khan. The Assembly functioned in a highly polarized and intricate political settings and the term of Mr. Khan was marked by unprecedented political upheavals finally witnessing the passage of the first-ever no-confidence motion against a sitting Prime Minister in the country's history, leading to a change in the executive leadership. Moreover, besides ordinary issues in relation to the working of any parliament, the Assembly confronted with the problems of excessive dependence upon presidential ordinances, lax parliamentary control, absenteeism of members and the ever-persistent quorum problem which collectively hampered the quality of the performance of the Assembly and representativeness of the laws. Accordingly, the study at hand investigates the political environment within which the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly functioned as well as its legislative productivity. The qualitative approach is applied to examine political happenings/events in the Assembly, legislative enactments, and institutional performance in order to understand and illuminate the changing nature of the democratic landscape of Pakistan. It finds that notwithstanding outside interference, the legislative productivity of the National Assembly improved when compared with the earlier legislatures.

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**KEYWORDS** 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan, PTI Government, No-Confidence Motion

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**Introduction**

The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan was elected as an aftermath of the 2018 general election. The PTI emerged as a leading parliamentary party after the election. The members of the Assembly took oath of their offices in wake of growing expectations of the people and political change. The PTI government led by Imran Khan promised to implement accountability, transparency, and structural overhaul (Khan, 2025). It might be safely added that the said political change was not a mere leadership switch but also reflected a broader transformation in the public mood, which grew disillusioned with the conventional parties, the principal two being Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) (Fareed, et., al., 2019). Hope and high-policy promises dominated the early months of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly. But before one could utter, "all's changed now," the assembly's own existence was conditioned by political confrontation, polarized discourse, and institutional confrontation (Yadav, 2020). The government's anti-corruption and reformist agenda soon came into conflict with hardwired political blocs, with the opposition parties branding the government for using

accountability institutions as instruments of political retribution. Meanwhile, political rhetoric was observed to be governed by the judiciary and the army, with implications for the independence of democratic institutions (Waseem, 2022).

In legislative domain, the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly exhibited great efficiency but some inefficiency had also been recorded. To its credit, more bills were enacted into laws than did the other assemblies; though notably, important legislation was enacted into law on economic reforms, national security, and social welfare (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023). Conversely, matter of seriousness in dispute, parliamentary attendance frequency, and overdependence on presidential decrees were raised by the political commentators and the civil society (Haleemi & Shah, 2024).

### **Formation and Political Context**

The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan was formed after the general elections of July 25, 2018. The elections were conducted under the watchful eye of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), which tried to make them transparent and credible. Despite this, the election process was tainted with allegations of pre-poll rigging, selective accountability, censorship of the media, and security agency intervention to influence political outcomes (Yadav, 2020). The electoral results represented a major political change in the democratic progress of the country. For the first time in Pakistan's history, the PTI, which was headed by ex-cricketer Imran Khan, emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly by winning 156 general seats and, with the support of the allied parties and independents, established a majority government (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

Another significant event was the ascension of Imran Khan. To counter the dynastic politics of the PML-N and PPP, he initiated an anti-corruption campaign. Most sections of the voters, particularly the urban and young middle classes, were attracted to his vision of a "Naya Pakistan" (New Pakistan). The 2018 elections therefore brought a government change and also a test of the democratic resistance of the nation against institutional pressures (Shah, 2014).

The 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly was constituted in a highly polarized political environment. The PTI enjoyed popular mass support, but not the two-thirds majority required to unilaterally amend the Constitution. This was a reality that necessitated coalition-making hence PTI entered into coalitions with regional minor parties like the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q), and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA). These coalitions were transactional in nature and had a tendency towards internal conflict, something that future political developments would illustrate (Khan, et al., 2023; Siddiq, 2020).

The general political context of the era was characterized by continued civil-military relations, judicial activism, and an ailing economy. The role of the military continued in foreign affairs, national security, and political realignment within the country. The PTI government was initially viewed as being on good terms with the military establishment, and it was credited as one of the reasons PTI came into power (Rahim, 2023) but over time, this coalition weakened, especially as policy differences and political instability gained hold. During that time, the judiciary was acting in celebrity style, as fit for judicial-political activism. Opposition leaders including former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and the other PML-N leadership were facing the court cases brought against them by the accountability organs such as the National Accountability

Bureau (NAB). Though the government presented it as an anti-corruption drive, the opposition parties charged the ruling party for political victimization and selective justice (Ghani & Amin, 2024).

Economically, Pakistan experienced a balance-of-payments crisis, inflation, and the problem of a crashing currency. The PTI government's initial reluctance in opting for an IMF bailout package created financial market's instability. Thereafter, Pakistan entered an IMF program in 2019. Instead of bringing in austerity measures and structural reforms, the IMF bailout resulted in costly and unpopular measures in the form of higher taxes to generate revenues (Ikram, et al, 2023).

The PTI government also faced stiff opposition from within the National Assembly. The opposition had formed the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) in 2020 which was a broad multi-party-political movement to challenge the PTI government monopoly and stranglehold. The PDM kept on orchestrating mass rallies while criticizing government policies (Haleemi & Shah, 2024; Corsi, 2022). Moving forward along with that traditional political instability faced by the country during the democratic regimes, the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly made history by successfully executing Pakistan's first-ever no-confidence motion against a sitting Prime Minister. In a politically charged and polarized atmosphere, the Assembly managed to fulfill its constitutional duty and transition power peacefully. This event reflected the institutional maturity of parliament and its ability to operate within democratic norms, even under pressure (PILDAT, 2023b).

The political climate within and outside the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly was thus characterized by aggressive politics, shifting allegiances, and extra-institutional pressures. This climate played a dominant role in influencing legislative dynamics, agendas of governance, and general performance of the Assembly (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017). The character of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly must be understood not only in electoral terms, but as an articulation of underlying structural and institutional tensions of the Pakistani political system.

### **Structure and Composition of the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly**

The composition and structure of the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan were central to identifying the legislative dynamics, coalition politics, and effectiveness of the institution. The Assembly had 342 members, made up of 272 general seats, 60 women's reserved seats, and 10 non-Muslims' reserved seats, as mandated by Article 51 of the Constitution of Pakistan (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023). The PTI took over the ruling throne of Assembly with 156 general seats. As mentioned earlier, the PTI did not enjoy an absolute majority but was able to establish a government by strengthening coalition alliances with a few of the smaller parties like the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q), Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA). These coalition members were given important ministerial positions and served important roles as parliamentary agenda supporters and parliament quorum observers within the house (Khan et al., 2023). Important opposition parties included the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 84 seats, followed by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with 56 seats. Other important opposition parties included the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), Awami National Party (ANP), and some independents. In total, the opposition maintained a large number and utilized parliamentary platforms to log protest, inquire about governance, and raise objections to policies (Haleemi & Shah, 2024).

Women's representation in the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly was ensured by virtue of their reserved quota of 60 seats, distributed among parties according to their strength against general seats. Apart from this, some women were also elected directly against general seats. All parties such as PTI, PML-N, and PPP had actively involved their women parliamentarians in parliamentary discussion as well as leadership roles (Khan & Naqvi, 2020). The representation of minorities was secured through 10 non-Muslim seats that were proportionately elected by non-Muslim members through party lists. They made use of their positions to raise issues of religious freedom for minorities, and social cohesion but their legislative impact was constantly diluted by more comprehensive party politics (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020). The committee structure was yet another crucial feature of Assembly's functioning. Standing committees were set up for each ministry which had the mandate to scrutinize bills, exercise control, and hold the officials accountable. The activities of these committees varied, with some performing better than others. To note, the opposition members held the chairmanship for many influential committees, enhancing their ability to make the government answerable and accountable (Haleemi & Shah, 2024).

### **Political Challenges and Leadership Changes**

Pakistan's 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly was marked by political instability, internal fragmentation, leadership crisis, and worsening trust-deficit among state institutions. During its term from 2018 to 2023, the Assembly witnessed successive leadership crises, political polarization, and institutional stalemate, all of which collectively weakened its legislative prowess and democratic durability. The ever-lasting political challenge that characterized the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly was the weak coalition government led by PTI. Although, the PTI remained the single largest party, but its majority government was on the back of the coalition of small parties. The reliance would always leave the government vulnerable to coercion from coalition partners on important votes and significant decision-making (Aaqil, et al., 2023).

Civil-military relations continued to be a contentious matter throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly's tenure. It was thought in the beginning that the government of PTI was aligned with the military establishment, however, both started to lose confidence in each other incrementally from 2021 onwards. The PTI government's differences with military with regard to the appointment of the Director-General Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and political interference resulted in public fissures, undermining the position of the ruling party (Rahim, 2023).

After Khan's ouster through no-confidence motion, opposition leader and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) member Shehbaz Sharif swore as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan. His government faced legitimacy crises, economic emergencies, and the issue of holding together a diverse coalition under the umbrella of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). The Assembly hence worked under the two successive coalition governments and with them faced internal instability as well as a populist wrath (Imran, 2024). The Assembly was also hit by leadership crisis at the institutional level. Constant changes of leadership in the Assembly, as in the Speaker's resignation and appointment of new individuals to pivotal roles, unsettled the process of parliamentarism. The changes, in the usual circumstance of political calculation, weakened the Assembly to effectively operate as a separate and intact institution. The lack of firm and stable leadership also contributed to weakening the ability of the Assembly to cater to the needs of the nation. The position of women within the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly was also a matter of concern.

## **Legislative Performance**

In an exceedingly polarized political environment, the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly made a record passage of bills, ordinances, and resolutions. In the light of National Assembly records, more than 200 bills were enacted in this term, and notable contributions were made to criminal justice reforms, women's rights, regulation of the cyber universe, and economic policy (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023). Moreover, the Assembly showed a notable rise in legislative participation by individual lawmakers. Around 30% of all passed bills were introduced by private members which number was far more as compared to the previous terms. This shift also indicates a growing role of parliamentarians beyond government-led legislation. However, despite greater involvement, several private bills were symbolic or repetitive, showing a need for improved legislative drafting (FAFEN, 2023). It might be observed that the quality, transparency, and consultative character of such legislation were very uneven. Among the most notable achievements was the enactment of the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020, which was to strengthen children's protection systems following widespread outcry at the repetitive stories of abused children. The Assembly also endorsed various amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act and enacted laws controlling social media under the Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules, although the latter was denounced by civil society for limiting online freedoms (Imran, 2024).

Despite these achievements, the parliamentary process was criticized for depending too much on presidential ordinances. During its term, the PTI-led government relied heavily on presidential ordinances, bypassing standard parliamentary procedures. Between 2018 and 2022, the government issued 72 ordinances, many of which were controversial. This approach drew criticism for undermining legislative checks and balances, as well as for weakening parliamentary debate (Dawn, 2023). Overall, nearly one-third of the whole legislation enacted was first introduced as an ordinance and then converted into acts of Parliament without undertaking customary vigorous parliamentary debate or committee scrutiny (Shah, 2023).

Not only did this undermined the democratic deliberating process, but it also raised eyebrows regarding the executive taking over the legislative affairs. Secondly, the Assembly's legislative agenda was prone to appear as reactionary rule-making rather than affirmative law-making. Most legislation appeared as a response to crisis, whether from the COVID-19 crisis, regulation of digital data, or international pressure for human rights. Such a response-oriented strategy limited long-term thought and planning needed in structural changes. Emergency laws, naturally, are sometimes unavoidable, but frequent reliance on them suggests shortcomings in policy planning and foresight. Moreover, legislative agendas also vary regionally. Regions like Balochistan and the newly merged tribal districts into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained under-represented in key national debates. Economic growth, infrastructure investment, and education transformation bills in such provinces were infrequently brought under consideration, hence the accusation of centralization as well as legislative imbalance prevailed.

## **Parliamentary Conduct and Functioning**

As mentioned earlier, the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly functioned amidst a highly polarized political environment which affected its procedural integrity, institutional conduct, and etiquette in direct terms. During its tenure, the Assembly had come into question regarding its professionalism, discipline, regard for constitutional traditions, and parliamentary supremacy. If the parliamentary behavior of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly would

be critically examined in terms of decorum, attendance, rules of procedure, adjournment, and well-being of parliamentary committees, it might be found that the most glaring issue that hung over the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly was the persistent deterioration of decorum. Parliamentary proceedings were typically characterized by physical altercations, sloganeering, personal insults, and brutal attacks. Rising culture of verbal violence exhibited by treasury and opposition benches undermined seriousness and credibility of parliamentary debates. Instead of constructive deliberations, the proceedings were marred with partisan speeches, walkouts, and counter-protests. These strategies not only reduced the time available for serious legislation but also adversely impacted the institutional respect of the Assembly in public and media (Lodhi, 2024).

Another humongous failure of parliamentary functioning was the persistent phenomenon of poor attendance and no quorum. There were a few sessions of 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly adjourned or put on hold for the lack of required minimum number of members' presence. The experience was not limited to the opposition alone; ruling party members and ministers too made habitual absences at sessions including Question Hour. More than 50% of the sessions were impacted because of the absence of quorum, which severely hindered the parliamentary oversight role of the Parliament, as per the Free and Fair Election Network (Haleemi & Shah, 2024). The average ratio of the members' attendance during the Assembly's term stood at 61%, with key leaders like Imran Khan and Shehbaz Sharif attending only 11% and 17% of sittings, respectively. More than 50% of parliamentary time was consumed by points of order, and about 59% of scheduled agenda items were left unaddressed. Furthermore, financial oversight remained weak, as the Assembly spent only a few days per annum on the budget, limiting scrutiny of national spending (PILDAT, 2023a). The patterns of absences reflected the parliamentarians' lack of seriousness towards performing their duty and responsibility, which led to delays in legislation and causing erosion of people's trust in the efficiency of the Assembly. The behavior of the Speaker and committee chairpersons was also criticized during this term. Despite the fact that the Speaker was supposed to be impartial in maintaining parliamentary conventions, certain events in the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly raised questions about partisanship of the Speaker while conducting sessions e.g. the delay in convening the session for the voting on no-confidence motion in early 2022, and rulings on floor-crossing under Article 63(A) that were criticized for putting constitutional discourse into jeopardy. Perception of bias tarnished the Speaker's image as a custodian of parliamentary neutrality and helped fuel political tensions in the Assembly. The working, role and effectiveness of parliamentary committees (which possess an inherent characteristics of scrutiny by parliamentarians) were also undermined in the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly. Although standing committees had been constituted in terms of the Rules of Procedure, their functioning was frequently marred by non-attendance of the participants, absence of quorum, and political gimmickry. The reports of the committees reached late or were taken no notice of, and seldom did their recommendations influence the end product of the legislation (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

A majority of committees were dominated by members of the ruling coalition parties whereas the opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) complained of exclusion. The committee system, created actually as a bridge for expert review and bipartisan consultation, but was treated pervasively as merely a symbolic mechanism with comparatively slight actual impact on lawmaking or executive accountability. In addition, question hour, an important tool for accountability, became meaningless due to the routine absence of ministers and delayed responses from government ministries. Questions asked by members in parliament often went unheard or were answered by

evasive, non-committal replies (Haleemi & Shah, 2024). In addition, privilege motions, notices of calling attention, and adjournment motions were handled in a lackadaisical manner, with very little follow-up on content. The overall lack of seriousness in handling parliamentary business was a reflection of the absence of institutional checks on the executive which, in turn, was deemed as one of the fundamental functions of the legislature in a parliamentary system. The 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly fell short of the transparency and accessibility requirements that a contemporary legislature must possess. The Assembly website contained some legislative papers, reports by committees, and members' lists of attendance, but there were large loopholes in real-time access to debates, video clips, and performance monitoring. Civil society organizations complained of a lack of access to full information about Assembly proceedings, budget debates, and performance goals of individual MNAs (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

The inability of the Assembly to grow with digital and procedural transformation also hindered its functioning. Even during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), when most parliaments globally relied on hybrid sittings and remote committee hearings, Pakistan's National Assembly lagged far behind. Minimal digital content existed for MNAs, and institutionally, efforts were not even made to introduce training for members or staff on virtual parliamentary business. This implied that the bulk of legislative business was either stalled or carried out by a limited number of working members, which further exacerbated the gap between symbolic representation and legislative participation (Haleemi & Shah, 2024). Inter-party coordination remained the worst aspect of parliamentary operation. Although there were forums for coordination like the Parliamentary Leaders Conference and inter-party committees, they were seldom utilized to quell tensions or build consensus on important issues of national concern. Budget sessions, constitutional amendments, and national crises in the guise of floods or economic crises could well have been facilitated by broader cross-party consultations, nevertheless, these moments were wasted in mutual distrust and zero-sum political competition, much of which carried over into the parliament hall (Khan, et al., 2023).

### **Key Legislation and Constitutional Amendments**

The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly was characterized by a legislative agenda which was driven by political polarization, institutional instability, and imperative socio-economic challenges. Despite such constraints, the Assembly was still active enough to enact important bills and constitutional amendments. While some of the legislative events were of a historical nature, others were contentious because of procedural issues, controversies, or claimed executive abuse of power. This segment of the study covers the most important legislation and constitutional amendments enacted by the Assembly, their substance, politics, and enduring legacy. The Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020, was one of the most widely recognized legislative achievements of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly, so-named after a notorious child abuse case which shook the whole nation. The Act aimed to legislate a complete alert system and professional agency for missing or abused children, with greater cooperation between law enforcement agencies and social welfare groups. The Act also demanded tougher punishment and introduced mechanisms for faster response to emergencies in child protection. The Act was greeted with enthusiasm on a party line and by civil society and was a moment of consensus on a contentious human rights issue (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

Another key area of legislative attention was regulation in the digital space and cyber governance, specifically with the passage of the Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules, 2020. These rules, enacted under the auspices of the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-Organization) Act, sought to control online spaces, mandating social media platforms to establish local offices, keep user data in Pakistan, and act on content removal requests. But these regulations came under severe criticism from journalists, human rights activists, and opposition parties as infringing on online freedom and facilitating state monitoring (Ahmed, 2023).

On the economic governance front, the Assembly enacted a number of Finance Acts and tax bills which sought to broaden the revenue base, bring in digital documentation, and restructure the Federal Board of Revenue. Yet, most of these fiscal initiatives were brought in via supplementary finance bills or ordinances and were not based on broader consultation. For example, the Finance Act 2021 made amendments to income tax slabs and digital sales tax collection but was criticized for affecting small professionals and traders disproportionately. In Constitutional domain, the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2019 (25<sup>th</sup> Amendment) was a milestone that merged the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) by formal decree, fulfilling the longstanding demand for mainstreaming those historically marginalized regions (Khan et al., 2023).

The Assembly passed Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Acts, which further extended the scope of preventive detention and expanded powers of freezing assets. The acts, though justified on national security grounds, caused concern among civil rights groups because they were so loosely phrased and could so readily be abused. The rapid passage of such acts, in most instances without full committee hearings, demonstrated the commanding role of the executive in setting security policy.

A recurring issue throughout much of this legislative work was the lack of proper deliberating debate and excessive reliance on presidential ordinances. An estimated one-third of legislation enacted during this term was originally proposed as ordinances, which caused concerns of circumventing Parliament and undermining institutional restraints. This was especially unsettling in cases like the Pakistan Medical Commission Act, which dissolved the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council with a dearth of proper consultation with stakeholders, leading to protests by doctors' associations and being legally challenged. Furthermore, many legislative bills passed during this Assembly's tenure were discovered to be redundant and overlapping in nature. Tax reforms, civil liberties protection, and administrative law controls were increasingly amended through piecemeal legislation instead of grand reform packages. Such fractional amendments created legal ambiguities and enforcement difficulties to government agencies and courts alike, predisposing to undermining the certainty and transparency of law (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2023).

### **Analysis in the Political Context**

The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan (2018–2023) was characterized by both unprecedented democratic continuity and marked institutional instability. The instant portion tries to shed light on how political context shaped legislative performance and what patterns emerged regarding institutional functionality, lawmaking trends, and democratic accountability. It might be cautiously submitted that at the core of the politics of this legislative assembly lay a very divided political atmosphere. The PTI government was forced to endure consistent opposition, which reached its peak with the removal of



Prime Minister Imran Khan by a no-confidence motion. This was an aggressive atmosphere that affected virtually all of life in Parliament from bill approval to work in committees and even the behavior of members in sittings. Polarization did not only create walkouts and legislative boycotts but also frustrated attempts at making consensus on national legislation. Also, these tendencies were congruent with worldwide academic research regarding democratic failure, which stressed that political fragmentation will discourage purposive lawmaking and lower the overall rate and quality of parliamentary debate. A more obvious result of political tension was abuse of presidential ordinances. As described above, nearly one-third of the legislation enacted throughout the term of 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly originated in the form of ordinances. Even as the Constitution allowed ordinances in cases of exceptional circumstance, this clause was now widely used as a short-cut circumventing parliamentary debate and committee scrutiny. This eroded parliamentary supremacy and narrowed avenues of public and technical input, ultimately eradicating deliberating features of legislation. This practice also bodes for a trend in administration that is executive-led and betrays the core of parliamentary democracy (Khan, et al., 2023).

While the Assembly was legislating, the quality and consistency of such efforts were spotty. Several significant laws were passed that tackled child protection, governance of the digital world, and criminal justice reforms. But much of these laws were ad hoc and responsive, often drafted as a consequence of public or external pressure. There was little effort to present comprehensive or structural reforms that would address root causes of social problems. For example, while the Zainab Alert Act addressed a pressing societal need, it was not embedded within a child protection strategy and had inadequate implementation mechanisms in place. This trend of symbolic law without supporting policy reflects a recurring problem in the legislative history of Pakistan. Another domain the Assembly fell short was in making effective use of parliamentary committees. In theory, committees ought to be the backbone of parliamentary business, providing time for scrutiny by experts, stakeholder consultation, and bipartisanship. In reality, under the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly, committee systems were underfunded, inadequate, and politicized to a large degree. The bills bypassed consideration by committees or, in the course of debates at the floor level, ignored committee recommendations. In addition, ministers regularly absented themselves during question hours, and reports of committees were withheld for longer periods of time. This undermined Parliament's role as an executive watchdog and negatively impacted the legislative integrity. Besides, there had been a glaring imbalance in the representation of various areas and groups in the legislative system. Although the merger of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a behemoth constitutional measure, no true legislative and administrative changes in the merged areas could be seen. Key issues such as infrastructure development, education, and health in Balochistan and the tribal belt were accorded scant legislative attention which fact was reflective of centralist inclinations and negated the federalist spirit of the Constitution. Moreover, even while the number of female representatives grew with reserved seats, their active involvement in meaningful debates and their presence on key committees were still limited. Gender disparities in legislative power continued to be a great hindrance to inclusive governance (Shakir, 2022).

Technological inadequacies further compounded these problems. As parliaments across the globe rode out the COVID-19 pandemic by turning digital, the National Assembly of Pakistan fell behind. There were no actual provisions for virtual sittings, electronic voting, or remote deliberations. This inability to be digitally prepared not only disrupted legislative business during the pandemic but also pointed to a general lack of

institutional flexibility since the crisis was actually a chance to enhance parliamentary standards and render the governance more transparent and accessible to the people. The most significant finding out of this analysis is the reactive nature of the Assembly's legislative agenda. Most legislation came as a response to crises in the form of public outrage, international condemnation, or shattering emergencies rather than a systematic process of policy making.

## **Conclusion**

The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan (2018–2023) operated in an era of increased political polarization, leadership change with frequency bordering on routine, and record institutional tension. The current study provided a general overview of the Assembly's genesis, political environment, structure, and legislative behavior, besides pointing out the challenges for its working and major enactments. It establishes that although the Assembly was successful in achieving some legislative milestones such as enactment of the Zainab Alert Act and amending anti-terror and digital governance bills, its tenure was characterized by endemic instability, which undermined the credibility and efficiency of the democratic process. The political context under which the Assembly operated, with the rise of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as a ruling but coalition party, shaped its performance. Coalition fragmentation, routine political interference, and the breakdown of civil-military relations not only rendered executive authority invalid but also ruled out serious parliamentary debate. The no-confidence vote that brought down Prime Minister Imran Khan was a moment of history, but also one that deepened partisan polarization and raised questions about the long-term institutional health of Pakistan's democracy.

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