



RESEARCH PAPER

**Neo-Aristocracy in a Democracy: The Oligarchs of Pakistan's
Electorate**

¹Zahra Afzal Malik and ²Prof. Dr. Rehana Saeed Hashmi

1. Ph. D Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: zahramaliksikkedar@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Neo-Aristocrats are a group of diverse and elitist individuals with political ties and power as the modern equivalent of antiquated aristocracy. Electoral integrity is immersed in the politics of neo-feudalism, patronage, elitism, and bloodline politics and dynasticism. The objective of the study is to examine the traits and typologies of Neo-Aristocracy and how it exerts a disproportionate influence on electoral politics of Pakistan. The scope of this research is limited to case of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), specifically examining monopolization of elite candidacy. A qualitative case study method has been employed to see if electoral integrity is compromised when candidacy is elitist. The study's significance lies in understanding the dynamics of political representation and a compromised electorate. The results indicate that elite capture of the electorate have lasting impacts on political stability, policy continuity, and governance expertise. Recommendations include transparent intra-party elections, and merit based open calls for candidacy with no barriers, to strengthen upward mobility to enhance electoral integrity.

KEYWORDS Neo-Aristocracy, Electoral integrity, Elite capture, Democracy

Introduction

The emergence of the term, "neo-aristocracy" in political and social discourse does not have a specific individual attributed to its genesis, rather it is a term that developed overtime to capture the essence of a power that is concentrated in the modern contemporary world. This term has been used by various academicians, commentators and scholars to describe the power and privilege enjoyed by the modern-day elite class. Hence, the term "neo-aristocracy", can be employed to represent a collective understanding of the various writers and authors to present the modern-day aristocratic class.

Neo-Aristocracy can also be called as 'New Aristocracy', as 'neo' denotes 'new'. The concept of 'new' aristocracy emerged in the political and social domains to describe the influence and power of a small number of elites also known as the privileged class in the contemporary society as opposed to the remaining population with vast and growing income disparity. The traditional aristocratic class was often based on lineage and not just concentration of wealth, access to resources, or positions of influence across politics, or commerce. While neo-aristocracy is a composite of lineage and non-lineage based influence.

Perpetuation of Neo-aristocracy in modern societies is enabling formation of power structures that benefit the extremely rich exacerbating inequality. When inequality is being served in the economic platter, social mobility is extremely hindered, limiting opportunities for the rest of the population. Therefore, in this light, neo-aristocracy can be seen as emblem of the societal structures that favor the vast imbalance of resources allocation. Not only does it promote power and influence to the already rich, it gives them the edge over political decisions, social discourses and economic resources.

The presence of elites in the democratic sphere undermines the ideals of democracy as undue representation is given to those with existing privileges at the cost of the society as a whole. This leads to an unequal distribution of power and representation in the hands of a 'select few', where equal opportunity is also marred with ills of favoritism and nepotism. Mills believed that the 'Power Elite', command resources and come from the elite segment of the society, irrespective of the formal roles they play in the community (Mills, 1993; Fareed, Muzaffar & Riaz, 2019).

Mill's theory of 'Power Elite', highlights the concentration of power that exists within these select individuals, who also hold the reigns of political power, in addition to economic and military prowess. These positions of power allow them with the influence that they need, along with a privileged card that accesses resources and networks unavailable to outsiders. Maintaining the inner circles is integral to the longevity of the power seats that they hold. Their dominion extends beyond polity, into the domains of military and the corporate world. What connects these dominions is their monopoly over power, that lets their roles shape policies, and become key decision-makers for the remaining non-elite population. For Mills, it is the power elite, who are responsible for shaping outcomes even in a so-called democratic country like USA. Hence, Mill's work forms the theoretical framework for Neo-Aristocracy.

Literature Review

Katz, (2001) argues that candidate selection is integral to a party and this should be a more democratic process. *"An inclusive but unorganized selectorate may give the appearance of democracy without the substance"*, in the words of Katz, is a reality clearly reflected in the political structure of Pakistan. Political parties in Pakistan are explicit in their endorsement of democratic ideals: such as intra-party elections, vital member participation and engagement with a very coherent and transparent process for candidate selection. However, in practice these formal constitutions hold no merit against the backdrop of the democratic realities in these parties. Party tickets are mandated and awarded on grounds of neo-feudalism, patronage, elitism, bloodline politics, and dynastic elements, making the operational formal mechanism of candidate selection as superficial as possible against the ideals of true democracy. While grassroots outreach of political parties is very strong, yet the process of grassroots leaders branching out from the grassroots levels is rarely seen even in mass parties like Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

Dahl, (1971) identifies *"inclusiveness"* and *"public contestation"*, as the two essential dimensions of democracy, in which inclusiveness is only achievable when participation is distributed broadly and there are minimal to no barriers to entry. The barriers are present in the form of elitist manifestations: such as wealth, status or even institutional privilege. Thus, electoral inclusiveness demands that the due process of potential

representatives of democracy should be accessible to citizens, as voters, as well as potential candidates.

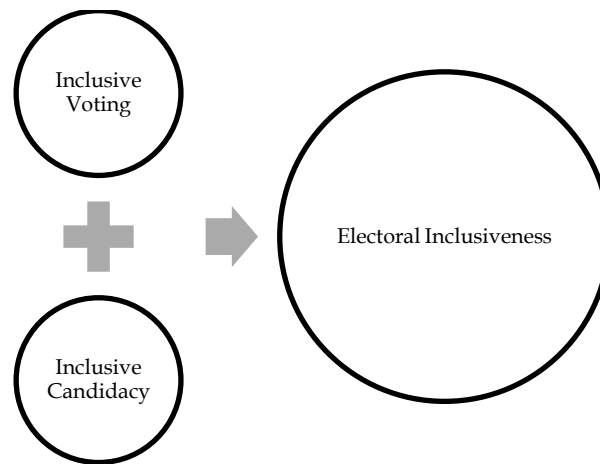


Figure 1 shows electoral inclusiveness as a summation of inclusive voting and inclusive candidacy Source: Designed by the researcher

Looking beyond the surface, the revelation occurs that electoral inclusiveness and neo-aristocratic dominance are mutually exclusive and yet coexisting. Although political parties claim democratic inclusiveness, the real decision-making power remains confined to an inner circle. The paradox appears with the coexistence of an electorally inclusive democracy and neo-aristocratic dominance. The system is formally inclusive yet substantively skewed towards the privileged, which in principle is incoherent. This broader electorate appears participatory, while functioning like an oligarchy. It clearly lacks in cohesion, organization, and autonomy to challenge neo-aristocratic control. This group becomes an echo of the past, the modern equivalent of antiquated aristocracy, albeit in political parties. They operate like closed-door aristocracies, and exploit the organizational weaknesses of political parties, which necessitates a need for transparency. The dominion of the neo-aristocrats restricts political representation and gives the illusion of pluralism by showcasing a diversity that comes from the multifaceted fronts of neo-aristocracy. The systematic perpetuation of neo-aristocracy continues at the behest of erosion of electoral integrity. Democracy is used as rhetoric for legitimacy rather than a genuine instrument of member empowerment, ensuring that neo-aristocratic continuity persists under the façade of inclusiveness.

Elite candidacy is a phenomenon where a pool of select individuals from strong socio-economic backgrounds, privileged circles are selected within the list of candidates nominated for political parties. This nomination occurs where these individuals either have closed ties to the leadership of a said party, or that they come from a long line of established political families. The access to the ballot is restricted to neo-aristocrats who are nominated for controlling significant positions of power within political parties. The choices are confined to the concentrated pool of neo-aristocratic candidates by the selection committee. This selection process compromises the electoral integrity as an erosion occurs covertly where the procedurally sound elections are not fair and free of an elite candidacy. This illusion of electoral inclusiveness is skillfully hidden in the form of an elite monopoly of candidacy by a default method of systematic gatekeeping.

Despite electoral inclusiveness, there is substantial neo-aristocratic dominance as there are barriers to entry, informal gatekeeping, and almost no support for newcomers, purposive and intentional exclusion, along with closed door operations lacking

transparency in the candidate selection process. (Katz, 2001) argues that candidate selection poses a dilemma between true democratic practice and giving the appearance of a democracy. True electoral inclusiveness remains a persistent challenge in Pakistan's political parties especially in PPP. Practical selection process reflects neo-aristocratic domination, where nominees are cherry-picked from among privileged circles of neo-aristocrats, rather than chosen through open and competitive processes. PPP exhibits dynastic tendencies, with nominations frequently reserved for established bloodline politicians, limiting the diversity and representation (Yaseen, Jathol, & Muzaffar, (2021). Moreover, the high financial cost of election campaigns imposes a financial burden on the average prospective Pakistani candidate which he or she cannot carry. In addition to that the restrictions to candidacy are more like disadvantages to average aspirants from lower-income groups hinting towards a structural exclusion that undermines the democratic ideal of equal access to political participation.

Material and Methods

This study follows a qualitative research design to examine electoral integrity, and if it is compromised when electoral inclusiveness is restricted to neo-aristocratic circles. Data were obtained from party documents, election reports, news sources along with academic journals. The study is limited to the case of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP): which is historically significant, resilient and a long-standing political party of Pakistan, rooted in political movements. The data were analyzed on the themes of neo-feudalism, patronage, elitism, bloodline politics and dynastic politics to examine the oligarchic tendencies of neo-aristocratic elite in PPP.

Results and Discussion

Multifaceted Neo-Aristocratic representation

To understand Neo-Aristocracy and its relationships with the dependent variables, a conceptual framework based on qualitative format has been developed. The dependent variable is represented by Neo-Aristocracy (N) while on the other end the independent variables are represented by Feudalism (F), Patronage (P), Elitism (E), Bloodline Politics (B), and Dynastic Politics (D), respectively.

Representation of the relationship of Neo-Aristocracy (Dependent variable) with Independent Variables (Neo-Feudalism (NF), Patronage (P), Elitism (E), and Bloodline Politics (B) and Dynastic Politics (D)) can be expressed through the following linear equation:

Linear Equation

$$N = a(NF) + b(P) + c(E) + d(B) + e(D) + X$$

Figure 2 representing the linear equation representing Neo-Aristocracy Source: Designed by the researcher

In this variable analysis, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables can be expressed effectively in a qualitative manner, that is without relying on the measurement of the numerical coefficients. This to allow for a rich understanding of the complex, layered and interdependent socio-political phenomena concerning Neo-Aristocracy. The numerical measurement of the coefficients of these variables is beyond the scope of this study and hence they are not measured but their coefficients are marked with a , b , c , d , and e respectively. The equation is thus presenting relationships, to be explored in this study via a qualitative assessment.

To formulate a comprehensive theoretical framework for “Neo-Aristocracy” in the context of Political parties, it is essential to define and reiterate the aforementioned variables: $a(NF)$, $b(P)$, $c(E)$, $d(B)$, $e(D)$ and X and define their fundamental roles in understanding the intricate dynamics of power and the complex social structures and the corresponding political environment in which Neo-Aristocracy thrives. While a , b , c , d , e are the coefficients that measure the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable (N), X represents the sum of factors which affect Neo-Aristocracy independently, but these factors either could be occasional, seasonal, or sensational factors related to media outlets, which may be one off instances. X could also contain other variables waiting to be discovered in perhaps another study directed towards this research.

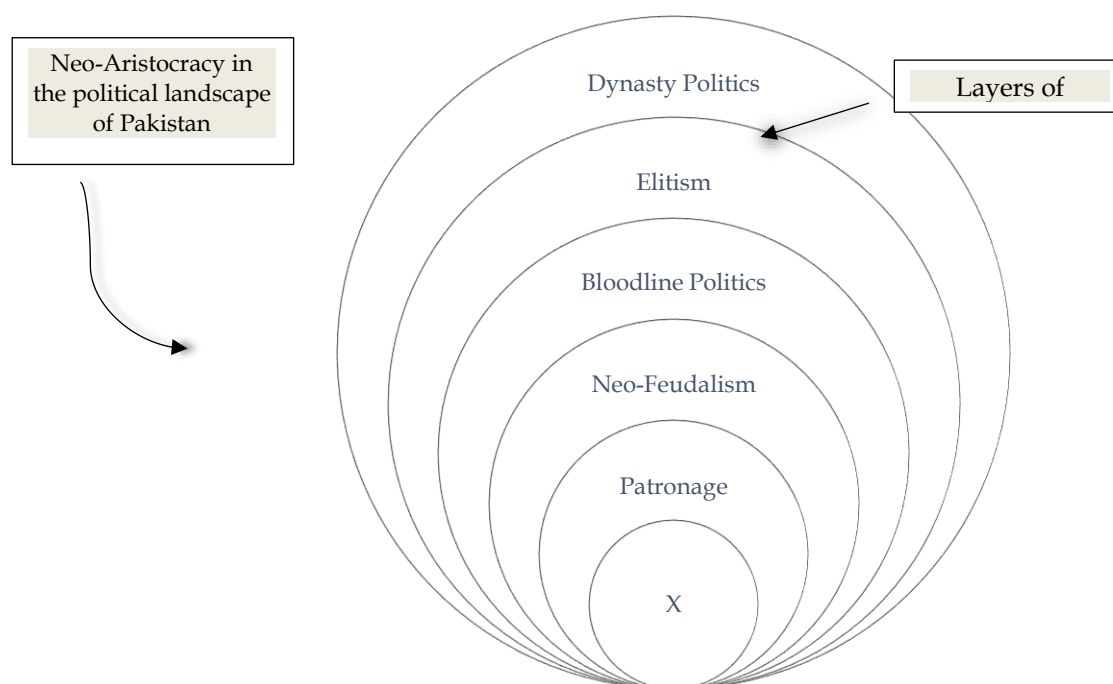


Figure 3 shows the layers of politics marked by the independent variables and their relationship with each other. Source: Designed by the researcher

Some form of Patronage is the common in amongst all variables, despite their independent character because of the use of patronage in the political landscape of Pakistan. Neo-Aristocracy cannot exist independently of Patronage, because of the layered dynamics of Pakistan's politics where patronage is the common denominator to almost all variables. It can be clientelist but patronage has shown to exist independently

of clientelism. Patronage networking is key to understanding power politics of Pakistan, be it from the religious domains like that of spiritual patrons or from clientelist neo-feudal land lords. Evidence suggests that a product of colonial past, neo-feudalism continues to dominate the political domain of agrarian politics in Pakistan. There have been evidence of Neo-feudal elites pulling the strings in PPP, especially in rural constituencies. Patronage has been defined as the practice sustained in the barter exchange of votes for public goods. (Jathol, Munir & Muzaffar, 2024). They are bargains made with elite groups to gain electoral advantage while state resources are utilized for payment to the clients such as jobs offered to people in return for votes.

This production of political authority through familial lineage undermines democracy. Inherited name recognition and symbolic capital create dynastic frameworks that are difficult to break especially in the light of historical associations such as neo-feudalism, patronage, and bloodline politics. The survey further confirmed this perception, with a majority of respondents acknowledging electoral biasness. The inheritance of leadership positions regardless of competence eats reaffirm the presence of neo-aristocracy within political parties. This understanding resonates strongly with Elite theory that emphasizes the continuity of political domination via dynastic political parties.

Table 1
Summary of Representation of the Variable Analysis

Variables	Variables represented	Description of Variables	Coefficients	Description of Coefficients
(N)	Neo-Aristocracy	Dependent variable e.g., a measure of elements of Neo-aristocracy in the socio-political hierarchy in the power dynamics of Pakistan's political parties.	-----	----- (not applicable)
(NF)	Neo-Feudalism	It is the dependent variable representing the impact of Neo-feudalism while (a) is the coefficient that is representing the degree of feudalism present in the society that contributes to Neo-Aristocracy.	a	a represents the coefficient of (F)
(P)	Patronage	It is the independent variable represents the influence of patronage in the social or political system.	b	b represents the coefficient of (P)
(E)	Elitism	It is an independent variable that indicates the presence or strength of elitism in the political environment.	c	c represents the coefficient of (E)
(B)	Bloodline Politics	It is an independent variable that quantifies the generational politics based on bloodlines, as it is a starting point with potential qualities to evolve into dynastic politics with sufficient influence	d	d represents the coefficient of (B)
(D)	Dynastic Politics	It is an independent variable that indicates the presence of families that have built dynasties over decades of monopolization over politics.	e	e represents the coefficient of (D)

(X)	Undetermined Factors	(X) is cumulative of the factors that influence the Dependent variable (N) and is represented by a constant only, to account for unknown factors or unexplainable phenomenon.	-----	----- (not applicable)
-----	----------------------	---	-------	---------------------------

Source: Compiled by the researcher

Table 2. In this qualitative equation, (a), (b), (c), (e), and (d) represent the coefficient of the hypothesized relationship between the dependent variable (N) and the interaction and influence among the independent variables. This equation is a linear representation that aims to measure the dependencies that reflect how changes in (NF), (P), (E), (B), and (D) could influence or give rise to conditions favoring (N) that is Neo-Aristocracy. This variable analysis serves as a general model, where the scope of this study could be extensive as even the above-mentioned dependent variables could be layered and have intricately interdependent and complex relationships with each other, makes this study a favorably qualitative inquiry.

Typologies of Neo-Aristocracy present in Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

Neo-Feudalism

Pakistan's political dynamics are not a straightforward sight, rather a very layered structure with each layer exploring a different angle of political aspect. One such aspect is neo-feudalism, as evident from its name, it can be seen as something that evolved from the term 'feudalism', which was a very prominent form of political system in mediaeval Europe. There are at least two reasons why the term 'feudalism' doesn't apply directly to the case of Pakistan, hence the use of the term 'Neo-Feudalism'. Firstly, it is embedded in the historical differences which are clearly distinguished from antiquated European history to modern developing world scenarios, therefore a direct usage of the term across different timelines would gravitate towards an erroneous application of the root term 'feudalism'.

Secondly, the living conditions and variations in cultural norms make it extremely difficult to allow such a blanket use of the term 'feudalism' as Pakistan is vastly different in terms of its ethnic diversity, its reliance on topography for political maneuvering, and its different religio-cultural aspects. Thus, it is far more reliable to explore the term "Neo-Feudalism", and explore it further in this study especially when it's a precursor to Neo-Aristocracy.

Pakistan People Party (PPP) was established with Islamic socialism and nationalism at its core in 1976 (Rasheed, 2023). Its ideological transition can be divided into three periods: where the first period after formation was rooted in its socialist credentials and a call for nationalization dovetailed with land reform policing in interior Sindh. This period saw numerous alliances with progressive landed feudal lords also known as '*waderas*' to strengthen the political basis of PPP beyond the urban mobilization. This period marked from 1972 to 1977 roughly ended with the death of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. The second phase of PPP began in 80's and continued till 1996 with a shift from a socialist stance to a more neo-liberal capitalist stance with the prime focus on privatization and Western investment. Ahmed et al argued that the ideological transformation of PPP transpired from a resistance force against the status quo to a reconciliation party primarily due to secure electoral success (Ahmed, Tumrani, & Ahmed, 2022).

PPP's standing in rural Sindh has been maintained by its network of neo-feudal members that are usually known as '*waderas*', who control and command the rural domain of entire Sindh province especially the interior. It is these dominating land-owning elites that are regularly given party tickets and they in turn secure electoral victories for the party in that region. It is a cyclical relationship, where party tickets are issued to dominating neo-feudal lords, who in turn perpetuate the system of dominance in rural areas impacting the electoral outcomes. '*Wadera*' dominance in the electoral apparatus of Sindh can be seen as reciprocated in South Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as well as Baluchistan with their own systems of neo-feudal dominance. Different names such as '*Sardars*' or clan leaders of tribal based communities in Baluchistan, KP, and South Punjab coupled with '*Biradari*' form of politics leads the electoral outcomes (Khalid, 2024). Neo-feudal dominance in PPP can also be marked by the number of party tickets issued to around 114 neo-feudal lords in their respective constituencies (Dawn, 2007). The sheer numbers indicate the dominance of neo-feudal lords in PPP.

PPP's political strategy is deeply intertwined with neo-feudal structures of rural Punjab. Its electoral strategy is dominated by operating through the networking of neo-feudal elements. This entrenchment leads to a cyclical system of perpetuation of neo-feudal dominance in the electoral system as well as systemic of rural patronage that is maintained via this system. The archaic influence of feudal politics should have waned, if not vanished overtime, however, it was systematically kept alive by developing feudal alliances to score victories being dubbed as strategic necessities. Especially after the coup de Etat in 1999, the blows to the mainstream leadership weakened democracy, and in the rebuilding efforts, a revival of feudal politics was done by re-engaging with the neo-feudal candidates, especially from Punjab (Asif et al, 2023).

Patronage

Patronage is a prevalent practice in the Pakistan's politics. a patron-client relationship is built on a give and take system. '*Clients*' who are beneficiaries, are at the receiving end of the bargain, whereas the '*patrons*' are the ones granting those benefits and favors in exchange for allegiance and support. Albrecht in her qualitative analysis has confirmed that the two most frequently cited goals of patronage are either to maintain governmental control or to garner political support or loyalty. Having also proposed the alternative typology to patronage where political individual patronage is distinct from political partisan patronage, political societal patronage, and personal patronage (Albrecht, 2024). Another typology that is relevant is in exploring is the presence of, '*non-clientelist*' forms of patronage networks (Lupu, 2023).

Patronage was an instrument utilized by the colonial masters to exert control and dominance of the feudal lords, enabling the system to be reliant on the frequency of exchanges. Patronage predates colonialism in the Indian sub-continent when Mughals used land grants as a tool for military service to maintain control over local population. The tracing of earliest political patronage can be seen in the coalition of All-India Muslim League in the 1946's, lacking majority it had to form a coalition with feudal elites underscoring the impact of patronage in political parties. In order to secure their backing for partition AIML had to avoid land reforms and take large land owners under their wing, opening doors of patronage to Pakistan's earliest political parties (Ahmad, 2020). This not only installed clientelism in a feudal setting but the practice has expanded to urban centers as well. Clientelism has further expanded to the informal realms of spiritual patrons (Gaddi Nashins) and their followers, as well as found its dwelling in the Biradari (kinship) networks of Pakistan.

To maintain PPP's political allies and patronage systems the local brokers have to be awarded benefits because the politics of patronage is not optional but deterministic in Pakistan's political playground. Ideally, it may seem political control can be gained without brokerage, but patronage has been quite instrumental in achieving goals like none other. This remains true for civilian and military rule in Pakistan.

PPP under the leadership of Asif Ali Zardari has seen clientelism as a core strategy. His leadership became to be associated with practices that rely on clientelist frameworks and networks of patronage. In Khan's words the party: "*became clientelism incarnate*". These patronage networks garnered by PPP over the years were very instrumental in the stronghold of Sindh province, but their sustenance has not been fruitful at national levels elsewhere (Khan, 2017). This has deemed PPP to be regional with waning electoral success in Punjab and the rest of the country.

Elitism

Political prowess has been a leading factor of power especially in the domain of electoral politics in Pakistan. It is easy to buy entries into parties by way of financing campaigns or even donating large sums of money into the political parties. It is very common place to find businessmen, merchants or even wealthy individuals to dive into the political domain at the behest of 'representation' of the masses, in terms of introducing new faces. Mahooney's power approach sheds light on the entrenchment of elites, which is founded in the strength of institutions, that perpetuate the same power of the elites, in a path dependent process. Javaid argues that the power structures become cemented in their exhibition of their deterministic nature in terms of the institution patterns that become institutionalized (Javaid, 2012). The presence of elites in politics has been solidified in the political structures and institutions such as political parties that by way of their initial representation of elites become far more accommodating and perpetuating neo-aristocratic elites in politics at the cost of mass representation of other classes. Thus, the political power that political parties hold in terms of elite representation is very difficult to reverse in light of the path dependence process of the institutional framework.

The presence of independent elite politicians (IEPs) stems from rural to semi-urban to urban areas, and their corresponding constituencies, where representatives of elites exert their power and domination at national and provincial levels. Pakistan's politics is layered and one of the layers is governed by the presence of independent elite politicians that use political victories to shape the outcomes for themselves as well as the citizens of Pakistan. PPP began as party with socialism at its heart but the idea of having a businessmen's quota in party tickets is contradictory to the early manifestations of the ideology of the party. According to a Dawn report, at least 26 candidates belonged to the IEPs category. Overall, 63 out of the 96 candidates of PPP belonged to elite circles (Dawn, 2007). This shows the systematic yielding to elite candidacy by PPP over the years against its ideological orientations.

Bloodline Politics

Bloodline politics is founded in kinship ties with its influences exacerbated on the foundations of ancestry. It focuses on authority and governance structures, which prioritize lineage and familial ties. In this particular sense "bloodline" serves as a marker for political legitimacy. Bloodline politics is often found in feudal politics as well and political networking of patronage.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's ascension to the position of party chairman in PPP, marked the transmission of the family legacy of the Bhutto's into the political bazaar of bloodline politicians. The extended family members of Bilawal including his father's sister Faryal Talpur and father's influence in PPP as co-chair has underscored the perpetuation of networks of families into the national leadership (Butt, 2024). PPP's breadth of lineage-based politics has been spread in terms of candidates ranging from nephews, nieces, daughters, sons-in-laws, and wives of established bloodline politicians. Examples include the inclusion of Nida Khuhro who is the daughter of Nisar Khuhro, and the nephews of Qaim Ali Shah (Amjad Shah and Javeed Shah), and Arsalan Shaikh, the son of Islamuddin Shaikh who in a bid to join the family business of politics have secured party tickets from PPP (Tunio, 2015). PPP's rebranding of familiar names on reserved seats have followed similar patterns for women who have served multiple terms in the parliament. To name a few, Shazia Marri, Sharmila Farooqi, Shazia Soomro, Naz Baloch, Dr Nafisa Shah, Shehr Kamran, Mehree Razzaque Bhutto, Mehtab Akbar Rashidi and Shagufta Jumani etc.

Dynastic Politics

The chief characteristics of dynastic politics in Pakistan is the transfer of political leadership within a particular family inter-generationally. This transfer process is devoid of any formal democratic process even though the inheritance is of substantial public importance. This is primarily important because the instrument of succession impacts not only the mechanism of political power but the control of entire political parties. Dynastic type of politics is sustained by a number of factors starting with presence of patronage networks that allow patrons to control entire constituencies, coupled with weak institutions enabling dynasts to have their way, even in political parties. as well. Neo-feudal politicians, spiritual hereditary politicians, elite politicians and bloodline politicians broker the deals to stay in power which perpetuates the dynastic nature of politics in Pakistan. Dynastic politics creates a system that concentrates political power in families and allows power sharing across generations. Rumi's work provides insights into the dynastic politics of Pakistan and how this has become the political framework accommodated for negotiation and legitimacy. He argues that the dynastic enterprises are formulated by legitimization through public narrative, as opposed to documentation: martyrdom as succession, uncontested heirship and Intra-dynasty rivalry.

PPP's history is forged in dynastic politics by way of the instruments of successions used to inherit power within a political party. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's judicial murder marked him as the first of his kind: a '*political martyr*', that led to the slogan "*Bhutto Zinda Hai*", which translated into an ideology and a legacy that has stood the test of time. This slogan translates roughly as '*Bhutto is alive*', which is present not only in the PPP's conscience but in the collective consciousness of Pakistan's public. His charisma earned him not only political support but a new emotional support in his ideology. It inaugurated a political dynasty in the name "*Bhutto*", the beneficiaries of whom would be select descendants of the Bhutto name. Rumi contends that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's political murder/execution became an emotional symbol which was utilized by Benazir Bhutto, second generation politician and daughter of the Bhutto family. Similarly, the symbolic authority was transferred to the third-generation politician, and son of Benazir Bhutto, Bilawal when the later was assassinated. Benazir's assassination in 2007 led her son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to the position of party chairman (Rumi, 2011).

Discussion

Neo-Aristocrats coming from neo-feudal backgrounds are loaded in terms of wealth and land ownership that translates into control over massive dominions such as multiple villages e.g. employment of manpower that includes entire households contributing than the man employed, which translates into existing vote banks. Controlling villages allows gaining electoral advantages by enticing entire baradaris (kinship networks) to vote for them. Similarly, the existing historical patronage networks and the resulting clientelist operations allows for banking more votes, making neo-aristocratic candidates as more favorable and advantageous to political parties as opposed to novel candidates with no backgrounds. Therefore, Neo-Aristocrats are already at an unfair advantage where they are outsourcing funds through elite circles, or links to bureaucracy, or by way of familial connections, their wealth or connections gives them an exposure that is lacked by a random meritorious candidate. Neo-Aristocrats usually have better education, better connectivity and support circles, and the mutual understanding within the elitist circles for the preservation of elite candidacy to political parties. Therefore, they come with strong references for nominations. Political training of neo-aristocrats, for most usually begins at home, especially those of bloodline politicians and the political dynastic families. Their newer generations are politically resilient and, more suitable as candidates in terms of political knowledge that gives them an advantage setting them years ahead of their competition. Their training alone sets them apart, while the placement makes it impossible for newbies to penetrate without serving for years at grassroot levels, making them seasoned enough to be considered for candidacy especially in parties like PPP. PPP has a habit of awarding reserved women's seats to bloodline politicians as favors than elevating grassroot workers. Often women are acknowledged by PPP, but they always carry their elitist bearings with them. The voices of the local workers rarely see the lights of the parliament. Lack of internal democracy and internal elections leads to domination of elitist politics. Thus, PPP's dynastic structure thrives on neo-feudalism, patronage, elitism, and bloodline politics.

Conclusion

Electoral integrity profoundly shapes the quality of democracy in Pakistan. When electoral candidates are selected on credibility and merit through a transparent procedure, it fosters political stability, ensures policy continuity, and resultantly strengthens public trust in institutions. With uncertainty reduced and political stability strong, Pakistan might just be able to complete its first democratic tenure. Conversely, compromised integrity breeds uncertainty, disrupts governance, and perpetuates structural inequalities by underrepresenting marginalized segments of society.

Recommendations

To promote genuine democracy within political parties, there should be no "selectorate" and more emphasis on fairness, meritocracy and transparency in intra-party elections. Furthermore, there ought to be open nomination calls and limits on campaign costs and more specifically no party ticket fees, which usually acts as barriers to limit inclusiveness and reduce elitism and nepotistic practice within parties. Additionally, establishing pathways for upward mobility from grassroot levels would allow to dismantle these covert barriers to entry. This structured promotional ladder could create healthy competition and balance the diversity, increasing electoral integrity in PPP, while challenging the oligarchic influence of Neo-Aristocracy.

References

- Ahmad, S. (2020, September 12). *The spillover effect of feudal mindset*. DAWN <https://www.dawn.com/news/1579292>
- Ahmed, J., Tumrani, S. H., & Ahmed, K. (2022). Ideological Transformation In Pakistan People's Party: From Z.A Bhutto To Asif Ali Zardari (1970-2013). *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(9).
- Albrecht, N. (2024, June 10). Parties Are Not the Only Patrons: Towards a New Typology of Patronage. *Parties Are Not the Only Patrons: Towards a New Typology of Patronage*.
- Asif, M., & Muhabbat, D. D. (2023). Political Strategies Of The Pml-N: Role In Opposition And Alliances During Musharraf's Rule. *Russian Law Journal, Volume -XI(1)*.
- Butt, R. (2024, March 9). Pakistan's lawmakers pick Asif Ali Zardari as the country's president for a second time. *AP News*: <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-president-asif-ali-zardari-imran-khan-ca74042f395b185cfeada5d7abaa133a>
- Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy; Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dawn. (2007, December 9). Feudal stranglehold. *Dawn* <https://www.dawn.com/news/1070725/dawn-editorial-december-09-2007>
- Fareed, G., Muzaffar, M., & Riaz, A. (2019). Enigma of Political Parties in Political Socialization of Pakistan: A Case Study of Muslim League, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3(II), 268-281
- Javaid, H. (2012). *Class, Power, and Patronage: The Landed Elite and Politics in Pakistani Punjab* (Phd Dissertation). The London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Jathol, H., Munir, A., & Muzaffar, M. (2024). Political Parties and National Integration: A Case Study of Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 8(3), 909-919
- Katz, R. S. (2001). The Problem of Candidate Selection and Models of Party Democracy. *Party Politics*, 7(3), 277-296.
- Khalid, S. (2024, February 22). Feudalism, rigging or performance: What makes PPP invincible in rural Sindh? *Geo TV*: <https://www.geo.tv/latest/531892>
- Khan, Z. (2017, December 11). *Is the party over?* *Geo News* <https://www.geo.tv/latest/171705-is-the-party-over?>
- Lupu, N. (2023, November 25). *A Review of The Politics of Patronage Appointments in Latin American Central Administrations*. <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/a-review-of-the-politics-of-patronage-appointments-in-latin-american-central-administrations/>
- Mills, C. W. (1956). *The Power Elite*. Oxford University Press.
- Rasheed, S. (2023, November 30). *From Vision to Progress: Celebrating the 56th Foundation Day of PPP*. <https://peoplesparty.pk/a/from-vision-to-progress-celebrating-the-56th-foundation-day-of-ppp?>

- Rumi, R. (2011, March 29). *Dynasties and Clientelism in Pakistan*. Raza Rumi: <https://razarumi.com/dynasties-and-clientelism-in-pakistan/>
- Tunio, H. (2015, September 17). Dynastic politics: Going back on their word. *The Express Tribune*
- Yaseen, Z., Jathol, I., & Muzaffar, M. (2021). Political Parties and their Participation in Pakistan's Democratic System, *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 8 (1), 65-71