



RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of PML-N in Democratic Consolidation as an Opposition Party (2008–2013): A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to critically examine the role of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in democratic consolidation during 2008–2013, focusing on its performance as a major opposition party. Democratic consolidation in Pakistan has historically faced challenges due to weak institutions and confrontational politics, making the 2008–2013 period significant for parliamentary cooperation and constitutional reform. The study employs a qualitative analytical approach utilizing primary sources such as party manifestos and parliamentary records, and secondary sources including books, research papers, and journal articles. The findings indicate that PML-N's constructive parliamentary engagement in the 18th, 19th, and 20th Constitutional Amendments, its role in the 7th NFC Award, leadership of the Public Accounts Committee, and governance initiatives in Punjab under Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif contributed to accountability, strengthened federalism, enhanced institutional resilience, and fostered public trust in democratic processes. The study recommends promoting consensus-based opposition politics, strengthening parliamentary oversight, and encouraging cooperative federalism to further consolidate democracy in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS PML-N, Democratic Consolidation, Parliamentary Opposition, Constitutional Amendments, 7th NFC Award, Federalism in Pakistan

Introduction

The 2008 general elections represented a crucial turning point in Pakistan's political history, marking the transition from prolonged military-led governance to the restoration of democratic rule. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) emerged as the largest party in the National Assembly and formed a coalition government with the PML-N and the ANP. However, this coalition was short-lived, as the PML-N withdrew within five months due to disagreements over the restoration of the judiciary. Subsequently, PML-N assumed the role of the principal opposition party, with Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan serving as Leader of the Opposition.

The PML-N had played a constructive and issue-based role in strengthening democratic consolidation in Pakistan. It also participated in legislative and constitutional processes which gave rise to the significant amendments to the Constitution, one of the which the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Amendment. The inclusion, national based and extensive agreement in these reforms were the result of its intervention as opposed to partisan concerns. Besides the parliamentary activities, PML-N was also involved in some of the major political activities that included the Charter of Democracy, Lawyers Movement to restore the judiciary, 2008 Murree Accord, the 2009 Long March, and the 7th NFC Award.

Furthermore, the governance of Punjab by the PML-N led by Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the leadership of Public Accounts Committee (PAC) led to institutionalization of transparency, accountability, and policy that focused on development. PML-N enhances democratic norms and practices through parliamentary activism and effective provincial politics at a critical point of democratic transition in Pakistan. This paper is a critical analysis of the role of PML-N as a major opposition party from 2008 to 2013 in democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Rizvi (2024), in his book *Pakistan: Political and Constitutional Engineering*, provides an in-depth discussion of the political development of PML-N, especially its ability to act as a constructive opposition between 2008 and 2013. He states that the party has been very critical of the PPP led government on matters relating governance and corruption, but has also been collaborative when matters concern the national consensus, especially the 18th Constitutional Amendment. Rizvi sees this moderate position as an important one in fortifying parliamentary democracy and institutional continuity in Pakistan.

In *Between Dreams and Realities: Some milestones in Pakistan's history*, Aziz (2020) highlights the role of PML-N in promoting democratic norms by the Charter of Democracy and constitutional reforms. He argues that civilian consensus and constitutionalism as advocated by the party contributed to mitigating authoritarianism in the Pakistani political system. In spite of the fact that Aziz concentrates more post 2013 era, the analysis highlights the preconditions, which were made during the opposition stage, especially in fostering democratic development.

In *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, Khan (2023) critically reflects on the involvement of PML-N in constitutional development, its contribution to significant constitutional changes, such as the 18th, 19th and 20th Amendments and the other reforms. He says that the involvement of PML-N in constitutional restructuring was an indication of its seriousness in institutional development despite the civil-military tensions. The work by Khan places PML-N as a significant parliamentary party in democratic consolidation via legal and constitutional mechanism.

In the *Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience*, Jaffrelot (2015) contextualizes PML-N in the larger context of democratic resilience and structural instability in Pakistan. He recognizes the presence of the party in the first democratic transfer of power in 2013 but criticizes its form of governance and its continued civil-military imbalances. The analysis provided by Jaffrelot helps to situate the political opposition of PML-N in the framework of the long-term institutional barriers restricting the process of democratic consolidation.

Mumtaz et al. (2024) also examine the legacy of PML-N on democracy as paradoxical and multidimensional, pointing to both the role of PML-N in ensuring democracy continuity and the development of institutional weaknesses. Although they acknowledge the party in ensuring electoral politics and governance reforms, they also state problems of patronage and central decision-making. Their analysis supports the statement that the role of PML-N in democratic consolidation needs to be evaluated with a critical eye towards both the institutional contribution and the abiding governance issues.

Material and Methods

The research method used in this study is a qualitative research in order to analyze the role of the PML-N as a major opposition party in the democratic consolidation process in Pakistan within its 2008-2013 tenure. To guarantee depth of analysis and validity, both primary and secondary sources of data are used in the study. Primary data are obtained through the interview, government reports, party manifestos, parliamentary publications, and legislative documents. Secondary data involve academic books, scholarly journal articles and research publications by reputable think tanks and policy institutes that evaluate political and institutional development in Pakistan. To analyze the data, the study uses the thematic analysis, which is a qualitative method used in the systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of textual data.

Results and Discussion

The General Elections 2008

The National Assembly completed its term and was dissolved on November 15, 2007, with general elections initially scheduled for January 8, 2008. However, the political situation was radically altered when former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated on December 27, 2007. Her comeback had created some hopes, but her sudden tragic death had increased the political uncertainty and violence and the elections were postponed to February 18, 2008. The elections were peaceful even in the tumultuous environment, and the majority of the parties, including the PML-N, had accepted the results (Aziz, 2020).

The PPP emerged the biggest party and they established a civilian government with Yousaf Raza Gilani as the Prime Minister. PML-N, which initially part of the coalition, soon became the main opposition, which coincided with the priority of the Charter of Democracy to political cooperation and democratic consolidation (Shafqat, 2020). Independent observers then documented that there were small irregularities that arose but also stated that the elections were very representative of the popular will (Rangachari, 2011).

The 2008 elections were a decisive shift from military to civilian rule, and the restoration of the 1973 Constitution and parliamentary democracy. Although military continues to play a role in defense, foreign affairs, and civil matters, PPP and PML-N worked to bolster democratic institutions, legal autonomy, and enforce democratic norms in Pakistan, with the assistance of the smaller opposition parties (Jaffrelot, 2015).

The Murree Accord

On March 8, 2008, the PML-N and PPP reached the Murree Accord (also known as the Bhurban Accord), which enabled the formation of a coalition government following the 2008 general elections. In accordance with the accord, PML-N entered the federal government and helped reinstate judges undermined by General Musharraf under the state of emergency of 2007, and PPP ensured that Yousaf Raza Gilani was reinstated as Prime Minister. They also agreed on power-sharing in Punjab, with the National Assembly speaker and the deputy speaker from PPP and the speaker and deputy speaker of the Punjab Assembly from the PML-N (Khan, 2023).

One of the main common goals was to oust Musharraf who was seen as a threat to democratic stability. The coalition started the process of impeachment in August 2008,

backed by provincial assemblies' resolutions (Moskalenko & Nikolaevich, 2013; Aziz, 2020). The refusal of Musharraf to resign at first was the manifestation of his belief in the need to have the military rule, but the unanimity of the civilian community, as well as the refusal of the military to defend him, was a historic shift in Pakistan's power dynamics (Hoffman, 2011).

With the threat of imminent impeachment, Musharraf stepped down on August 18, 2008, and the way was cleared to civilian rule. The coalition then helped elect the 11th President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, the first politically seasoned civilian president (Malik, 2010). Zardari publicly declared he would repeal Article 58-2(b) that permitted presidential dissolution of the National Assembly.

The opposition to Musharraf rule reflected the increasing power of the civilian institutions and democratic forces. It was successful due to a wide range of political parties and civil society organizations aiming at judicial independence and rule of law. The return of exiled leaders such as Nawaz Sharif and the active involvement of the private media strengthened popular mobilization, and the Charter of Democracy offered the framework of the end of military rule (Aziz, 2020).

The PML-N's Long March for the Restoration of Judiciary

The 2007 lawyers' movement in Pakistan presented a critical opportunity for strengthening democracy and the rule of law, though it later became a point of contention between the PPP and PML-N, with each party accusing the other of delaying the restoration of judges. Following the 2008 general elections, the two parties formed coalition government with little experience in working together in governance. They together freed political prisoners, lawyers and judges who had been detained during the emergency rule of Musharraf and they colluded in ousting General Musharraf. Nevertheless, controversies surrounding the reinstatement of the judges of the Supreme Court, including Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, caused tension and public disappointment, which eventually led to the collapse of the coalition (Aziz, 2020).

In 2007, Justice Hameed Dogar was appointed Chief Justice, replacing Chaudhry who was ousted forcefully. The PML-N headed by Nawaz Sharif insisted on the immediate reinstatement of all the judges, as they considered their removal illegal. The PPP offered a constitutional amendment to restore the judiciary, but the PML-N was against it and viewed it as a stalling tactic (Aziz, 2020). The disagreement on the process stagnated the coalition government and the withdrawal of PML-N on August 25, 2008 (Naqvi, 2010). As the PPP was still determined to restore the judiciary, it demanded a constitutional package because an executive order alone would resemble the unconstitutional behavior of Musharraf. PML-N, however, demanded immediate reinstatement, referring to the agreement made in the past and the principles of the rule of law (Shafqat, 2020).

PML-N then, after leaving the government, held a Long March, which took the party to Islamabad, where it demanded the restoration of judges who had been ousted by Musharraf. Nawaz Sharif was also an active participant even when he was on house arrest which proved that the party is devoted to democratic standards. Thousands of people took part in the march putting pressure on the government. However, it was decided to restore the deposed judges, including Chief Justice Chaudhry, on March 16, 2009, following the negotiation with the leaders of the opposition, as the judges

appointed by Musharraf were dismissed (Sprague, 2020). This was largely considered to be a big success to the pro-democracy movement in Pakistan.

The episode also improved tensions between the ruling party and opposition that has provided an atmosphere where democracy consolidation was possible through cooperation, as stipulated in the Charter of Democracy (CoD). The rule of Governor was suspended on March 30, 2009, and the provincial government of PML-N in Punjab was reinstated (Talbot, 2012).

Even though the PPP government had some initial failures, it made progress in regard to democratic institutions by establishing Gilgit-Baltistan province, negotiating a new NFC award, and meeting the demands of Balochistan. Its greatest success was the unanimous enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment, which reinstated the parliamentary system, devolved more powers to provinces, and put in place clear processes in the appointment of Election Commission members, representing a wide majority that was brought on board through active involvement of the parliament.

The Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment

The Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment (2010) represents one of the most transformative reforms in Pakistan's constitutional history, amending 102 articles of the 1973 Constitution to restore parliamentary sovereignty and decentralize power. Drafted and deliberated extensively by the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms (PCCR), which included 27 members from major political parties and was chaired by Senator Mian Raza Rabbani, the amendment was passed by Parliament in April 2010 and signed into law by President Asif Ali Zardari on April 19, 2010 (Khan, 2023).

The passage of the amendment was not solely a government initiative; the opposition, particularly the PML-N, played a critical role. Ahsan Iqbal of the PML-N pointed out in the National Assembly that the amendment was an expression of the Parliamentary supremacy and political consensus and credited Nawaz Sharif with his endeavor in facilitating such reforms despite being in opposition (The National Assembly of Pakistan Debates, 2010). People were keen on cooperation between treasury and opposition benches, and the amendment witnessed PML-N actively engaging in the deliberations, compromising with smaller parties, and influencing key provisions to strike a balance between provincial autonomy and national interests (Adil & Afridi, 2020; Haider and Faqir, 2023).

The support of PML-N was essential in making sure that the amendment corrected some of the constitutional distortions that had been brought up in the military rule, especially the Seventeenth Amendment and the Legal Framework Order of 2002. It promoted the limited presidential authority, such as the one to dissolve the National Assembly, and made executive appointments open and accountable, which would restore the initial parliamentary spirit of the 1973 Constitution (Riaz et al., 2020; Hussain and Kokab, 2012). Another provision of the amendment was the abolition of the Concurrent Legislative List, which devolved legislative authority to provinces and allowed them to make decisions in key areas including education and health, which smaller provinces had long sought to achieve (Nasir and ur Rehman, 2024; Bhatti et al., 2021).

Another major focus was financial decentralization. The amendment changed the NFC award, increasing provincial shares from 49% to over 57.5% of divisible federal

revenue, and to add indicators of poverty and backwardness to ensure fair development. This gave the provinces the autonomy to formulate development plans and initiatives, which boosted local governance and diminished regional inequalities (Munawar et al., 2023; Jaffrelot, 2015).

Traditionally, the military and presidential authorities in Pakistan had challenged parliamentary democracy and the different civilian governments were overthrown by Article 58-2(b) frequently with military support as in the case of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s (Rangachari, 2011). The Eighteenth Amendment limited such powers, and reinforced the powers of the parliament, as part of encouraging the supremacy of the civilian in line with the Charter of Democracy. Its overwhelming vote indicated widespread political agreement, indicating the active participation of PML-N in saving the democratic rule (Abbas, 2023).

Essentially, the Eighteenth Amendment re-equipped the federation with much more power being given to parliament and provinces, with increased provincial autonomy, legislative power, and financial jurisdiction. The amendment became a historical move towards democratization of Pakistan since it overturned dictatorial amendments, empowered democracies and also fostered inter-party relations. The principled involvement of the PML-N and the ability to negotiate and adhere to parliamentary supremacy played a key role in the process of amendment and guaranteed that both the ideals of democracy and the political consensus were taken into consideration (Cohen, 2013; Grare, 2011).

The 7th NFC Award 2009

Pakistan governance system is based on fiscal federalism, which is a system that provides equitable allocation of resources between the federation and provinces. The NFC Awards that are mandated by the Constitution in Article 160 have historically had an impact on the provincial autonomy and national development. The introduction of several criteria to allocate resources to the states, population, poverty, and inverse population density, became a landmark in fiscal federalism when the 7th NFC Award was announced on December 31, 2009, which reflects the historical concerns of smaller provinces, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan (Ahmad, 2015; "7th NFC Award signed in Gwadar", 2009).

For the first time since 1973, the Award shifted resource distribution from a purely population-based formula to a more inclusive approach. Key reforms included reducing federal collection charges from 5% to 1%, guaranteeing KPK 1% of the divisible pool for its role in the war on terror, increasing provincial shares from 46.25% to 56% in 2010–11 and 57.5% thereafter, ensuring a minimum Rs 83 billion allocation for Balochistan, and directly transferring GST on services to provinces. The Award also resolved critical issues such as Gas Development Surcharge (GDS) and hydel royalties for KPK (Faisal & Ahmad, 2021).

Table 1
Revenue Sharing Formula for the 7th NFC Award, 2009

Indicators	Weight	Punjab	Sindh	KPK	Balochistan
Population Share	82.0	57.36	23.71	13.82	5.11
Poverty/Backwardness	10.3	23.16	23.41	27.82	25.61
Revenue Generation/Collection	5.0	44.0	50.0	5.0	1.0
Inverse Population Density	2.7	4.34	7.21	6.54	81.92

Total Share	100	51.74	24.55	14.62	9.09
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Source: Compiled by Research Scholar

The 7th NFC Award settled the claims of smaller provinces on fiscal front and minimally diminishing the portion of Punjab, which represented a crucial concession. The allocation of Punjab decreased from 57.9 percent to 51.74, Sindh to 24.55 and KPK to 14.62, whereas Balochistan's share rose to 9.09% (Sabir, 2010; Mustafa, 2011). The provincial share was similarly increased to over Rs 850 billion, which was originally of Rs 550 billion, and is expected to grow to over 1250 billion in the coming 5 years, which will help make resources allocation more favorable (Ahmad and Khan, 2023).

The PML-N that is the leading opposition party also played a decisive role in the 7th NFC Award. The PML-N was also representing the interests of Punjab and in its early days it opposed the reduction of population-based quota but finally accepted the new formula as it favored inclusion of multi-dimensional factors like the poverty and income generation and inverse population density. The provincial government led by Shahbaz Sharif and the leadership of Nawaz Sharif ensured that the Award was upheld despite financial limitations, strengthening the federal unity and the bipartisan status (Ahmad, 2015; Mustafa, 2011).

Nineteenth Constitutional Amendment

The 19th constitutional amendment was enacted to change the manner in which judges were selected in the superior courts through the instructions of the Supreme Court of Pakistan that stressed that judges would appoint the Chief Justice as the ultimate judge in the selection procedure (Hassan et al., 2024). The parliamentary committee on constitutional reforms approved the proposals of the Supreme Court, and came up with amendments to Articles 81, 175, 182, 213 and 246. The Judicial Commission under this amendment was raised to four positions, with three of them being serving judicial positions including one retired judge, the federal law minister, the attorney general, and also a member of Pakistan Bar Council of at least fifteen years' experience. Candidates would be proposed by the Chief Justice after consulting the commission and once the parliamentary committee had ruled him out in a particular instance it was impossible to hear him again without justifiable reasons. The parliamentary committee on nomination of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) was also increased to twelve members with nomination being made by the Senate in case the National Assembly was suspended (Khan & Khan, 2023).

Mian Raza Rabbani brought the bill to the National Assembly which was passed by a majority of two-thirds. The amendment was hardly met with opposition, as the only opposition came from Kashmala Tariq of PML(Q) who stated that the amendment failed to include a process of creating new provinces. The opposition party PML-N welcomed the amendment; Ahsan Iqbal termed it an achievement, noting that it institutionalized the method of appointing judges in terms of merit, transparency and administrative uprightness (Akram et al., 2020). The bill was also introduced in the senate by Raza Rabbani and was passed unanimously.

Twentieth Constitutional Amendment

The Twentieth Constitutional Amendment was a historic step in the constitutional history of Pakistan, which put into place mechanisms of the installation of caretaker governments and free and fair elections with a strengthened Election

Commission of Pakistan (ECP) (Rizvi, 2024). The amendment strengthened the ECP by establishing a system in which four members of each province are elected and can only be ousted using the same method as used in ousting the High Court judges. This clause restricted the state interference in the commission and gave the opposition parties a voice in the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), the appointment of whom is subject to the members of the ECP (Rizvi, 2024).

This was also formalized in the process of forming caretaker governments. First of all, the Prime Minister and the opposition leader in the National Assembly will agree on appointments. Where no consensus can be reached in the next three days, an eight-member committee of parliament, without discrimination between government and opposition, steps in. In the event that the committee also manages to fail, the ECP takes over the burden of appointing the caretaker government, which is replicated at the provincial level. The amendment also enabled political parties to include in lists of women and minorities reserved seats their names ("20th Amendment", 2012).

In the pre-legislative consultations, there were major negotiations between the leading PPP and the leading opposition party, the PML-N. The PML-N was headed by Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, who wanted guarantees of an independent ECP and a caretaker government that was neutral to promote credible elections. At first, no agreement was easy to be reached, but after a few days of discussions, the two sides agreed to constitute a parliamentary committee to choose caretakers and effect the rest of the reforms requested by the opposition (Khan, 2012). PML-N also insisted on the appointment of a new Chief Election Commissioner and extension of tenure of ECP members and CEC from four years to five years which were endorsed by the treasury benches.

The presence of the PML-N was central to the amendment as it offered bipartisan legitimacy as well as safeguarding electoral transparency. Chaudhry Nisar emphasized that not only several opposition parties and government supporters were consulted, but also the most important aspects were resolved like which caretaker government to select, which CEC to appoint and which newly elected parliamentarians to validate. The amendment easily passed through the National assembly by a vote of 247, and in the senate, it got two-thirds support, with only two senators voting against it (Khan, 2023). Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani and President Asif Ali Zardari acknowledged PML-N's cooperation, noting that the amendment strengthened democracy and enhanced public trust in the ECP.

Role of PML-N in Legislative Oversight during PPP's Government

Under the PPP-led administration (2008-2013), 116 government and 18 private members bills were passed by the Parliament of which 94 were enacted, and of those, around 80 percent of the bills were sponsored by the treasury benches (Akram et al., 2020). Although most bills were enacted without debate or any amendments, the opposition especially the PML-N who were the main opposition party critically influenced legislations scrutiny. Other opposition parties were JUI-F and PML-Q that entered the treasury benches in 2011, but JI only participated in the Senate (Akram et al., 2020).

The PML-N was a proponent of the opposition to the government policies and held the government to accountability as well as drawing attention to the legislation that appeared to contradict the interest of people or provinces. The party did not just criticize

controversial bills but also presented alternative policies and amendments to make the legislation to conform to the welfare of the people. By doing that, the PML-N showed that it is acting as a responsible opposition, striking the right balance between criticism and cooperation. Other opposition parties also helped by suggesting amendments, as well as, proposing policy alternatives, although maintaining a limited level.

The relationship between the treasury and the opposition benches was characterized by a mix of opposition and cooperation. The PPP government was responsive, and the PML-N was successful in its efforts to affect legislative results because almost half of the recommendations of the opposition were implemented. The PML-N is two-fold in its performance as it aims to hold the government held to account and to engage in consensus-building on key policies in the legislature. This interaction is a classic example of the role of a major opposition party in enhancing parliamentary democracy and quality of legislations at a very important time when Pakistan was consolidating democracy.

The Punjab Government's Development Model under Shehbaz Sharif

The PML-N government of Punjab (2008-2013) had a system of governance that was development-oriented and focused on efficiency of the administration, development of infrastructure and services delivery. Although the party acted as the primary opposition nationally, its rule on the provincial level in Punjab enabled it to enact its vision, thus uniting political legitimacy and demonstrating its governance abilities (Yousef et al., 2022).

The development of infrastructure was one of the main aspects of the model created by Shehbaz Sharif. The big projects such as flyovers, under pass and road networks were directed to enhance connectivity and movement in the city. A successful example of the speed of project implementation was the Lahore Metro Bus Service, which became the icon of the development agenda of the government, and whose implementation resulted in both praise and criticism regarding its price and priority, but increased the political capital of PML-N (Yousef et al., 2022). Southern Punjab Development Programme was also a scheme that focused on rural and regional connectivity, which aimed at working on the regional disparities but critics claimed that development was still mostly Lahore-centric.

Another key ingredient was education and health reforms. DFID UK supported the Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (PESRP) which improved the rate of enrollment, retention and school performance by monitoring teacher performance and student performance via data. The Daanish Schools program offered quality education to the disadvantaged learners in underserved districts (Hussain et al., 2016). Some of the achievements in the healthcare sector were hospital redesign, mobile health units and the Dengue eradication campaign of 2011 which attracted international interest due to effective coordination of the public sector.

IT and energy were also of priority. The Punjab government funded solar projects, one of which is the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park, and encouraged the digital administration through the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), executing e-governance solutions, including internet-based complaints, e-land records, and administrative monitoring on data (Khan et al., 2024). Public-private partnerships was used to support education, health and infrastructure projects and schemes such as the Punjab Youth Laptop Scheme encouraged the use of digital literacy by students (Sehar

and Shahzad, 2021). The leadership of Shehbaz Sharif in Punjab was characterized by the integration of infrastructure, services delivery, administration, and innovation, and therefore exemplary in the performance of the public sector.

PML-N's Leadership of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

The period between 2008 and 2013 was pivotal for Pakistan's democratic consolidation, following nearly a decade of military rule under General Pervez Musharraf. In this regard, institutional fortification and parliamentary control came into the center stage as critical to the continuation of the rule of civilians. Another significant occurrence during this time was that the PML-N, the major opposition party, was at the forefront of the PAC of National Assembly (Mufti, 2023).

Among the PAC vital institutions of parliamentary accountability is required to play the role of reviewing the government expenditures, identifying finance anomalies, and maintaining financial accountability. In the mature systems, the opposition was given the chairmanship of the PAC based on democratic principles and this shows sign of a maturing of democratic practices in Pakistan. It became the first institutional milestone because Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan of the PML-N took this position.

The PAC was proactive and assertive during the leadership of Nisar. It has taken an unbending examination of audit reports in government departments and state-owned enterprises, revoked bureaucrats and officials and refunded stolen money. This Committee oversight was associated with corruption, unlawful expenditures, and non-observation of the procedure, which suggested a dramatic shift in contrast to the previous assemblies when PAC was either slumbering or very ineffective (Akram et al., 2021).

In a bigger context of democratic consolidation, the leadership of PML-N in the PAC enhanced the parliamentary check and balances system in Pakistan, authorized opposition involvement in the accountability of the executive, and narrowed the democratic gap brought about by decades of authoritarianism. It also strengthened popular trust in institutionalized forms of government by showing that the opposition parties could play a significant role in the governing process beyond electoral competition or extra-parliamentary agitation (Akram et al., 2021).

It is significant that during the period of tenure of the PML-N in the PAC, 2008-2013, the institutionalization of accountability and parliamentary supremacy in the country occurred. The challenges and opposition of the ruling government notwithstanding, the active scrutiny of the Committee of the spending by the government strengthened the principle of transparency, fiscal responsibility, and the overall principle of democratic rule, which had a long-standing impact on the opposition-based oversight of the government in the political landscape of Pakistan (Mufti, 2023; Akram et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This paper highlights the essential role of the PML-N in democratic consolidation in Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 as both a proactive opposition party at the federal level and a ruling party in Punjab. The party strengthened political institutions, transparency, and financial fairness through positive involvement in major constitutional amendments, including 18th, 19th and 20th amendments, active involvement in legislation, leading the

Public Accounts Committee, and supporting the landmark 7th NFC Award. At the same time, the government of Punjab led by Shehbaz Sharif demonstrated a model of development-focused governance, improving efficiency in the delivery of public services and the effectiveness of administration. As a whole, these efforts demonstrate that a principled opposition, combined with effective provincial governance, can reinforce democratic norms, institutional stability, and popular trust, establishing models of sustainable democratic development in Pakistan.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen democratic consolidation in Pakistan. It is the responsibility of the political parties to promote consensus-based opposition politics through prioritizing parliamentary cooperation on constitutional and electoral reforms. Parliamentary oversight systems, especially parliamentary committees like Public Accounts Committee, need to be strengthened in order to promote transparency and accountability in the administration. The political parties should also observe the federal principles by advocating the equal distribution of resources using the institutional structures such as the National Finance Commission. Moreover, the opposition parties are supposed to employ positive strategy by balancing criticism with the cooperation of the institutions in an effort to enhance democratic stability. Lastly, provincial governments need to integrate development projects with democratic accountability to create public trust and enhance the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

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