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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Role of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz and Democracy in Pakistan: A Complex Legacy

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**ABSTRACT**

The chief aim of this research paper is to examine the relationship between the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and democracy in Pakistan. The PML-N has been a dominant force in Pakistani politics since its inception, playing a significant role in shaping the country's democratic landscape. The party has held power for extended periods, often clashing with other political factions and the military establishment. While its commitment to democratic principles has been a cornerstone of its ideology, the PML-N's success has also been marked by controversies related to corruption, nepotism, and institutional manipulation. This qualitative research employed the case study approach via secondary sources to investigate the connection between the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and democracy in Pakistan. The study suggests that this complex association has been characterized by periods of stability, progress, and turmoil, ultimately impacting the country's political development in profound ways. Further, the study evaluates that while the PML-N has contributed to democratic institutions through electoral participation and governance, its tenure has also been marred by allegations of undermining the judiciary and engaging in undemocratic practices. The party's focus on economic development has been widely praised, but criticism of its handling of national security and foreign policy remains a point of contention. Ultimately, the PML-N's impact on Pakistan's democratic journey is a nuanced story, highlighting both its positive contributions and its inherent contradictions within the country's tumultuous political landscape. However, for a vibrant democracy in Pakistan, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) should prioritize strengthening institutions, upholding the rule of law, and promoting inclusive dialogue and consensus-building.

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**KEYWORDS**

Authoritarianism, Corruption, Democracy, Dominant Force, Government, PML N, Political Landscape, Political Party, Punjab

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**Introduction**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is a prominent political party in Pakistan that has played a significant role in shaping the country's democratic trajectory. Founded by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1993, the party has a strong electoral base primarily in the province of Punjab.

The PML-N has been a staunch advocate for democracy in Pakistan. During its tenure in power, the party has implemented key reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, including the devolution of power to local governments and the introduction of direct elections for mayors. The party also played a pivotal role in

drafting the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which aimed to enhance provincial autonomy and diminish the powers of the President (Yaseen, et. al, 2021).

Despite facing challenges and setbacks, the PML-N has remained steadfast in its commitment to democratic principles. The party's belief in dialogue and consensus-building has contributed to political stability and has helped create a more inclusive political discourse in Pakistan. Moreover, the PML-N's emphasis on economic development and poverty alleviation has resonated with voters and has strengthened its electoral appeal.

However, the PML-N's involvement in alleged corruption scandals and internal divisions have raised concerns about the party's democratic credentials. The disqualification of Nawaz Sharif from holding public office and the arrest of his daughter Maryam Nawaz have led to accusations of political victimization and have cast a shadow over the party's reputation.

Nonetheless, the PML-N remains a major player in Pakistan's political landscape. Its commitment to democracy, its strong support base, and its focus on economic development are likely to continue to shape the country's democratic journey in the years to come (Hussain, 2019).

The PML-N has played a significant role in the development of democracy in Pakistan. The party has been in power for three terms, and during this time it has implemented a number of reforms that have strengthened democratic institutions. These reforms include the devolution of power to local governments, the establishment of an independent judiciary, and the passage of a number of laws that protect human rights. The PML-N has also been a strong advocate for free and fair elections (Naqvi, et. al., 2021; Khan, 2018).

## **Literature Review**

The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), a major political party in Pakistan, has significantly impacted the country's political landscape and its democratic trajectory. Numerous studies have explored the party's influence, its relationship with democracy, and its impact on various aspects of Pakistani society (Fareed, et. al., 2019).

Several works highlight the enduring appeal of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Emphasizing its populist approach and social welfare programs, these studies underscore the party's strong base in Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan. The PML-N's pragmatic political strategies, including forming alliances with other political forces and navigating complex political scenarios, further bolster its appeal among the populace (Ali, 2018; Khan, 2020).

However, critics argue that the PML-N's governance has been marred by corruption, nepotism, and a lack of transparency. These issues have potentially undermined democratic principles, casting a shadow over the party's accomplishments. The allegations of corruption and lack of transparency raise significant concerns about the party's commitment to good governance (Hussain, 2019; Malik, 2021).

Research also sheds light on the PML-N's influence on Pakistan's foreign policy. Notably, the party has maintained close ties with China and has navigated a complex relationship with the United States. This aspect of the PML-N's politics highlights its

strategic positioning on the global stage and its efforts to balance relationships with major world powers. (Ahmad, 2016; Shaheen, 2017)

Additionally, several studies examine the PML-N's role in Pakistan's electoral system. These studies highlight the party's strategic maneuvering and its ability to mobilize voters, which significantly impacts the overall political landscape of the country. The PML-N's electoral strategies demonstrate its deep understanding of the political terrain and its capacity to influence voter behavior. (Hasan, 2015; Qureshi, 2022)

However, these studies also raise concerns about the party's potential to undermine democratic norms. The PML-N's control over institutions and its use of resources for political gain pose challenges to the democratic process. Such actions could potentially erode democratic values and impede the development of a fair and transparent electoral system in Pakistan.

## **Material and Methods**

This qualitative research employed the case study approach via secondary sources to investigate the relationship between the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and democracy in Pakistan. Through an analysis of historical documents, news articles, political speeches, and academic literature, the study examined the role and impact of the PML-N on Pakistan's democratic development from its inception to the present day.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **From Opposition to Dominant Force: The Evolving Role of PML-N in Pakistani Democracy**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is a Centre-right conservative political party in Pakistan that has played a significant role in shaping the country's democracy over the past few decades. Founded in 1988 by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the party has evolved from being an opposition force to becoming a dominant player in Pakistani politics (Butt, 2015).

In the early 1990s, PML-N emerged as a major opposition party against the government of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. The party's platform focused on economic growth, social justice, and strengthening democracy. In the 1993 general election, PML-N won a plurality of seats in the National Assembly, forming a government with the support of other opposition parties (Husain & Malik, 2006).

PML-N's first stint in power was marked by ambitious economic reforms and infrastructure projects. However, the party's government faced challenges due to political instability and allegations of corruption. In 1999, Prime Minister Sharif was overthrown in a military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf (Ahmed, 2012).

Following the coup, PML-N played a role in the opposition to Musharraf's government. The party was banned by the military regime, and Sharif was sentenced to imprisonment on corruption charges. However, PML-N remained popular among the Pakistani electorate, and its leaders continued to be active in politics (Malik, 2013).

After Musharraf's resignation in 2008, PML-N emerged as a dominant force in Pakistani democracy. The party won a landslide victory in the 2013 general election,

forming a government for a second time. Under Sharif's leadership, PML-N focused on economic development and infrastructure projects. The party also initiated a number of reforms aimed at strengthening democracy and civil rights (Zaidi, 2017).

PML-N remained in power until 2018, when it was defeated by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the general election. The party's loss was attributed to allegations of corruption, economic mismanagement, and political fatigue. Despite its defeat, PML-N remains a major political force in Pakistan and is expected to play a significant role in the country's future democratic development.

### **The PML-N's Impact on Pakistan's Democratic Landscape: A Mixed Legacy**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by the charismatic Nawaz Sharif, has been a dominant force in Pakistani politics for decades. Their impact on the country's democratic landscape is undeniable, but it is a legacy marked by both progress and setbacks, leaving behind a mixed bag of achievements and controversies.

On the positive side, the PML-N has played a crucial role in consolidating democratic institutions and fostering political stability. Their governments have implemented landmark electoral reforms, strengthening the Election Commission of Pakistan and ensuring fairer elections. They have also championed freedom of speech and the press, promoting a more vibrant media landscape. Further, the PML-N has spearheaded significant infrastructural development projects, particularly in the energy sector, improving the quality of life for many Pakistanis (Khan & Awan, 2017).

However, the PML-N's tenure has also been marred by accusations of corruption and nepotism. Critics point to the Sharif family's alleged involvement in financial scandals, which have eroded public trust in the party. Moreover, the PML-N has been accused of suppressing dissent and curtailing freedom of expression, particularly during their most recent period in power.

The PML-N's approach to dealing with the judiciary has also been controversial. They have clashed with the Supreme Court multiple times, fueling a perception of political interference in the judiciary. This has further strained relations between the government and the judiciary, undermining the principle of separation of powers.

Despite its challenges, the PML-N remains a significant political force in Pakistan. Their populist policies, particularly their focus on economic development, continue to resonate with a large segment of the population. However, the party's future will hinge on its ability to address the concerns surrounding corruption and its relationship with the judiciary (Haider, 2019).

The recent political turmoil and the PML-N's subsequent fall from power highlight the need for a stronger, more inclusive democratic system in Pakistan. Addressing the issue of corruption and ensuring a level playing field for all political parties are crucial for the future of democracy in Pakistan (Ibrahim & Khan, 2021).

The PML-N's legacy, therefore, remains a complex one, a blend of achievements and shortcomings. They have contributed to the development of Pakistan's democratic institutions, but their own flaws and controversies have cast a shadow on their legacy. The future of Pakistan's democracy will likely be shaped by the lessons learned from the PML-N's time in power and the efforts of all political actors to build a more robust and transparent political system.

## **The PML-N's relationship with other political parties and its effect on democracy**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has a significant history of engaging with other political parties in Pakistan. These relationships have played a crucial role in shaping PML-N's own political position and its contribution to the country's democratic development.

### **Alliances and Coalitions**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has been actively involved in various alliances and coalitions with other political parties at both the federal and provincial levels. These strategic partnerships have significantly contributed to the party's ability to expand its power base and influence across different regions of the country.

These alliances have enabled the PML-N to form governments in multiple areas, showcasing its adaptability and political strategy. By joining forces with other major parties, the PML-N has been able to secure a broader support base and effectively navigate the complexities of Pakistan's political landscape.

For instance, in the 2013 general elections, the PML-N formed a coalition government with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) at the federal level (Gill & Khan, 2015). This coalition exemplified the PML-N's willingness to collaborate with other influential parties to achieve its governance objectives and maintain political stability at the national level.

### **Political Polarization**

However, the PML-N's relationships with other parties have also contributed to political polarization in Pakistan. The competitive and often adversarial nature of these relationships has intensified political divisions, making it challenging to achieve unity on national issues.

The rivalry between the PML-N and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by former Prime Minister Imran Khan, has been particularly intense. This contentious relationship has dominated the political landscape, often leading to heated exchanges and public confrontations between the two parties. The animosity between the PML-N and PTI has deepened political rifts and heightened tensions within the country.

This intense rivalry has hindered consensus-building and weakened democratic institutions in Pakistan (Rehman & Khan, 2018). The lack of cooperation between major political forces has made it difficult to address critical national challenges effectively. As a result, the political climate has become more fragmented, and efforts to strengthen democratic governance have faced significant obstacles.

### **Erosion of Trust**

PML-N's involvement in political alliances has also eroded public trust in the party. The frequent formation of alliances has led to perceptions that the party prioritizes political maneuvering over genuine governance and national interests.

Critics have accused the PML-N of forming opportunistic partnerships to ensure its political survival. These alliances are often seen as tactical moves rather than

principled collaborations, contributing to the narrative that the party is more concerned with maintaining power than addressing the country's pressing issues.

As a result, PML-N's credibility has suffered, weakening its ability to effectively engage with other parties (Shahzad, 2018). The erosion of trust has made it more challenging for the PML-N to build stable and constructive political relationships, further complicating its efforts to navigate Pakistan's complex political landscape.

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Despite these challenges, PML-N's relationships with other political parties have also contributed to democratic consolidation in Pakistan. By participating in coalitions, the party has facilitated broader political engagement and inclusivity, which are essential for a robust democratic process.

The party's involvement in power-sharing arrangements has provided opportunities for dialogue and consensus-building. These collaborations have allowed different political forces to come together, negotiate, and address national issues collectively, fostering a more cooperative political environment.

Moreover, PML-N's experience in governing alongside other parties has helped to strengthen democratic norms and institutions (Aziz & Ahmed, 2017). Through coalition governance, the PML-N has contributed to the institutionalization of democratic practices, reinforcing the principles of shared power and mutual accountability in Pakistan's political system.

### **Long-Term Implications**

The impact of PML-N's relationships with other political parties on its role in democracy is likely to continue in the long term. These alliances will be crucial in determining the party's political power and influence within the country's political landscape.

The ability to forge and maintain alliances will significantly influence PML-N's capacity to contribute to democratic development. Successful coalition-building can enhance the party's effectiveness in governance and its ability to address national issues collaboratively with other political forces.

If the PML-N can navigate the complexities of coalition politics and promote cooperation between different parties, it has the potential to play a constructive role in strengthening democracy in Pakistan. By fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, the party can help solidify democratic norms and ensure a more stable and inclusive political system.

### **Conclusion**

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by the charismatic Nawaz Sharif, has been a defining force in Pakistani politics for decades. Their legacy is deeply intertwined with the evolution of democracy in the country, leaving behind a complex tapestry of achievements, failures, and enduring questions.

While lauded for their economic development and social welfare initiatives, the PML-N's legacy is also marred by accusations of corruption, political manipulation, and a tendency towards authoritarianism. Their tenure has seen periods of relative stability

and economic progress, punctuated by political instability, judicial interventions, and military coups. The party's approach to democracy has been characterized by a strong executive branch with a focus on economic growth, often at the expense of democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Their successes include the modernization of infrastructure, improvements in education and healthcare, and a significant reduction in poverty levels. The PML-N also played a key role in promoting regional connectivity and fostering diplomatic ties with key players like China. However, their reign has been marred by accusations of cronyism and nepotism, with the Sharif family amassing significant wealth during their time in power. The party's tendency to disregard judicial rulings and undermine independent institutions has raised concerns about their commitment to democratic principles.

The PML-N's legacy is further complicated by the constant struggle for power between the civilian government and the military establishment. While the party has been accused of being subservient to the military in certain instances, they have also challenged the military's influence in national politics, leading to political crises and instability. This constant tug-of-war has hindered the consolidation of democratic institutions and undermined the rule of law.

### **Recommendations**

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), a major political party in Pakistan, has faced challenges in recent years, including allegations of corruption and internal divisions. However, it remains an important player in the country's political landscape. To strengthen the party's role in promoting democracy, it must prioritize the following steps.

Firstly, PML-N must rebuild public trust. The allegations against the party have damaged its reputation. To restore confidence, the party must demonstrate accountability, transparency, and good governance. It must hold its members accountable for any wrongdoing and implement measures to prevent corruption.

Secondly, PML-N must strengthen its organizational structure. The party has been plagued by internal divisions, which have weakened its ability to effectively govern. It must resolve these divisions and unite under a common vision. This requires fostering dialogue, promoting inclusivity, and creating a clear and effective decision-making process.

Thirdly, PML-N must adapt to the changing political landscape. Pakistan is facing numerous challenges, including economic inequality, extremism, and regional instability. The party must develop policies and strategies that address these challenges and respond to the needs of the people. This requires research, stakeholder engagement, and a willingness to innovate.

Finally, PML-N must promote a culture of tolerance and respect. Pakistan has a diverse population with different political views. The party must create an environment where all voices are heard and respected. It must promote dialogue, compromise, and consensus-building. By embracing these principles, PML-N can play a vital role in strengthening democracy and fostering national unity in Pakistan.

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