



RESEARCH PAPER

Politics of Pakistan in 1990s Conundrum: A Historical Analysis into Intrinsic Socio-Political and Electoral Dichotomies

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ABSTRACT

The research in hand deals with the turbulent 1990s political milieu of Pakistan. Parliamentary democracy, as a matter of fact, sustains through continuity of the electoral process so the elections must be held on regular intervals which is missing in prevailing Pakistani Democracy. That's why the gradual decline in the response of the electorates between 1970 and 1997 raises serious questions on validity and efficacy of the prevailing system which ultimately leads to the weak democratic institutions, complexity of the power-play and political instability. The research is based on careful scrutiny of records of the Election Commission of Pakistan and is equally supported with the published secondary sources. It reveals that the prevailing situation divided society into regional, provincial, ethnic and sectarian dichotomies which created further chaos, anarchy and political instability followed by economic deterioration and terrorism. This study recommends to avoid the follies discussed in order to build a healthy political system in the best interest of the state.

KEYWORDS Parliamentary Democracy, Electorates, Socio-Political Dichotomies, Instability, Political Alliance, Election Commission of Pakistan

Introduction

The fresh episode of political revival starts with the abrupt change in political scenario after sudden demise of President of Pakistan General Muhammad Ziaul Haq in air crash near Bahawalpur on 17 August 1988. (Dawn, 18 August 1988) President Zia, in the last resort, had planned for new elections after skirmishes with the 'elected' Premier Mr. Muhammad Khan Junejo, arising after signing Geneva Accord for the settlement of decade long Afghan Issue on 14 April 1988. (Dawn, 15 April 1988) Surprisingly; Zia termed it as an 'independent move' by the democratic government and viewed that the said agreement was signed without consulting him and deemed it signed in haste without ensuring any guarantees for the future multifold arrangements in Afghanistan, essential for its reconstruction, stability and sustainability. Afghanistan, later, true to his apprehensions came down with civil war and maladministration. For these and other reasons, President Zia under the Article 58-2 (b) of Constitution of Pakistan 1973 dismissed National Assembly on 29 May 1988 and called for fresh elections to be held within 90 days as per limit set by the constitution. (Waseem, 1989, pp. 248-249) This move, although viewed differently by political pundits, sparked new political fervor among MRD—Movement for Restoration of Democracy, launched in 1981 by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in collaboration with other opposition parties. This political alliance was considered leftist for its populist orientations due to the presence of PPP, Awami National Party (ANP), Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) and Mazdoor Kisan (Labor-Peasant) Party. However; the presences of rightist parties

like Jamiat Ulama e Islam (JUI), Tehreek e Istiqlal (TI) and Awami Tehreek balanced the equilibrium and to coup the propaganda against it for its extra terrestrial links. They demanded party-based elections and stressed for reversal of previous announcement of deceased President Zia who bid for holding of non-party based elections. Later the Supreme Court of Pakistan decided in favor of party-based elections to curb any move for electioneering and coercion which had become a normal practice in the past to appease the establishment. However; this electioneering was equally managed by launching *Islami Jamhoori Itehad* (IJI)—an electoral alliance to counter PPP, a strong candidate and most likely winner to enter power corridors.

Prior to this game changer, PDM had announced boycott of these non-party based elections. Now it had to reverse its strategy as it had done last year by participating in Local Bodies Elections. As per aspirations of democratic forces party-based General Elections were held on 16 November 1988. (Dawn, 17 & 18 November 1988) As far as the behavior of voters was concerned, it gradually turned 'cold' and turnout was declined from 1970 to 1988. In 1988, it was 42.7 %; while it was 58% in 1970, 55% in 1977, 53% in 1985 respectively. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, pp. 19-20)

Literature Review

The literature available on General Elections has been found in forms of evaluation reports, pre-polls and post-polls gallop surveys, opinion polls, interviews, seminars, published reports of seminarian outcomes in newspapers, discussions on TV Shows and YouTube Channels, e-blogs and V-logs, etc. Traditionally in past some printed material in forms of research papers and books is also available. Hence; an effort has been made to collect authentic literature produced by experts and consult them through the aforementioned research methodology. As far as the books are concerned the material is scanty and serves the purpose little, so the scope of outreach was extended to the research papers available in both hard and soft forms. Some important books in this connection throw a fair light on the theme on anvil and the details are as under:

First significant effort in this connection has been made by Ishtiaq Ahmad (1976) in the form of "*Pakistan: General Elections 1970* (South Asian Study Centre, Punjab University Lahore) is although a detailed study yet is specific to the results and implications of the 1970 elections only. Likewise Professor Khurshid Ahmad's "*Aur Election Na Ho Skay*" in Urdu (And Elections Could Not Be Held...) is an account of 1977 Elections and aftermath and is a plain study on the topic. Thus traditionally after every elections relevant literature is compiled to fulfill the timely needs of the readers. Hence, there are many books like, Tariq Ismail's *Elections 1988*, Zahid Hussain Anjum's *Election 1990*, Muhammad Waseem's *The 1993 Elections in Pakistan* (Vanguard, Karachi, 1994), Anwar Hussain's *Elections 1993* (Academy of Writers, Islamabad, 1994), Dr. Yasin Rizvi's *Election 1993* (Shirkat Press, Lahore. 1993), Zahid Hussain Anjum's *Elections 1997* are important to quote. Moreover; there is no other option except to rely upon the reports of national and foreign agencies and NGOs which do not reflect the true picture of the election results. All these works provide valuable details, facts and figures about the electoral process but they provide material as per partly study.¹⁰Hence; one can safely conclude that no work of objective and real scholarship has been rendered on the theme under investigation. All the attempts mentioned above and others have been made on the political process, leadership and institutions, neglecting the vital role of voters. Hence, it is a need of the time to launch a research to fill this gap. The objective of this research paper, however, is to give an extensive and all-inclusive analysis of the voter and his response in the broader sense.

All the aspects regarding the electoral process will be discussed in summative terms. This study hopefully will be helpful in developing a better understanding between leader and a voter in specific political conditions of Pakistan leading to an ultimate development of a healthy political process in the country.

Research Methodology

The research in hand is a discursive study of a number of electoral phenomena including socio-political dichotomies and the factors behind their appearance on the electoral as well as political landscape. Hence; the tool is a historical research method which allows evaluating critically a number of available documents in the forms of reports and the data provided by ECP and independent foreign observers. The national organizations like PILDAT, IPRI, Gallop Pakistan and Human Rights Watch etc provide several reports which can serve the purpose and through internal and external criticism and discursive approach this data has adeptly been manipulated, evaluated and interpreted.

Results and Discussion

In the wake of 1988 General Elections, Pakistan People's Party though reached the victory stand but its margin of attained votes over contesting IJI was mere 8%, clearly manifesting split of the public mandate. Among many other reasons, the main reason was electioneering. However; PPP managed to win 93 NA seats as compared to 55 seats of IJI and no party got decisive majority in the National assembly. Punjab surprisingly supported PPP with 52 NA Seats as compared to its stronghold Sindh with 31 NA seats. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, p. 20) In rural Punjab, Zia's Islamization Card helped IJI do fairly well. Provincial Assemblies Elections were held three days later on 19 November 1988, giving ample time to parties to move affect voter's opinion on local issues, also provided an opportunity to manipulate the situation through bribery and coercion. (Wilder, 1999, pp. 74-77)

Moreover; in 1988 the situation for PPP was different as compared to 1970 when it got clear majority in Western Wing by sweeping the polls; while in Eastern Part, it didn't get even a single seat giving way to 'regional dichotomy' which ultimately claimed the integrity of the country. The mandate of Mujeeb-ur-Rehman was clearly denied which later resulted into the cession of the East Pakistan on 16 December, 1971. In 1988 Provincial Assemblies Elections, the PPP's lead was reversed due to the aforementioned reasons. Due to lack of clear majority in NA, Mirza Aslam Beg (b. 1931), the then COAS floated the idea of broad-based national government for better political stability but the democratic forces paid no heed to it (Azfar, 1991, pp. 53-54) and PPP was ultimately invited to make government by the Acting President Ghulam Ishaq Khan (1915-2006). Benazir Bhutto (1953-2007) took oath as first women PM of the country and faced a number of difficulties in running government due to a coalition government and strong opposition. She had to compromise on her decisions due to lack of experience and self-centred approach of her allies. Moreover she could not develop good relations with Ghulam Ishaq Khan. These adverse circumstances claimed her government at the hands of President who used his discretionary constitutional powers to dissolve National Assembly on 6 August 1990 and announced fresh polls to be held on 24 October 1990. (Ziring, 1997, p. 412)

As far as PPP's political performance was concerned, albeit its premature exit from the power corridors, it performed fairly well by introducing land, labor, education and health reforms. Foreign Direct Investment was meager and its alleged corruption

and policy over nuclear issue enraged the power brokers. Resultantly; on corruption and mismanagement charges, it had to face the consequences. Besides PDM, IJI, another effective political role-player appeared on the urban landscape of Sindh in the form of Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM). It not only acted fairly well in 1988 but also repeated its performance in 1990 General Elections. (Dawn, 7 August 1990)

The IJI won 105 National Assembly seats in the polls of October 1990. The PDA won 45 seats in (24; 14; 5 and 2 in Sindh, Punjab, NWFP and Balochistan respectively) while MQM appeared as the 3rd largest party in National Assembly. The IJI and PDA shared almost equal percentage of vote i.e. 37.37 and 36.83 respectively. The IJI performed well in PA polls by grabbing 260 out of 460 PA seats while the PDA was able to score mere 64 PA seats. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, p. 21) The international observers and even the losing leaders of many parties not only accepted the results but also rejected PDA's allegations of election rigging. In Punjab Assembly elections, the IJI won marvelously by securing 211 out 240 seats while PDA made its voters desperate by mere getting 13 seats with much below average as compared to National Assembly elections. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, p. 22) However; in Sindh, the power-centre of PPP, the PPP appeared as the single sole power broker. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, pp. 22-23)

When the Election fervor was over, the President Ghulam Ishaq Khan invited Nawaz Sharif of IJI to form the government. However, the undemocratic forces soon came into action against the Nawaz Government and it was not allowed to work with the full ease due to its simple majority in the Assembly. Hence, Nawaz Government was a failure in the later months of 1993 when Nawaz-Ishaq differences eventually led to the dissolution of the National Assembly on 18 July 1993. (Dawn, 19 July 1993) Provincial assemblies were also dissolved simultaneously.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was given full responsibilities to discharge in order to hold fair and free elections, which were held on 6 October for National while on 9 October 1993 for provincial assemblies. (Dawn, 20 July 1993) As per tradition of previous elections of 1988 and 1990, various foreign teams of election observers were called upon by the government to watch the 1993 elections. There were 5,23,26,021 registered voters for the 1993 elections as compared to 4,80,61,670 voters in 1988 and 4,86,48,960 voters in 1990. The voter turnout was 40.32% (200, 20, 538 out of 4, 96, 48, 821 registered voters). (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, pp.24-25)

These elections too experienced a decline in the voters' turnout (40.32 %; see table below). Out of four provinces, Punjab's voter turnout was 47.68 per cent, followed by the NWFP at 33.95 per cent, Sindh at 27.82 per cent and Baluchistan at 24.10 per cent. The low turnout in Sindh was the outcome of the MQM (A)'s boycott of the National Assembly elections and the uncontested election of Amin Fahim from NA-167. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, p. 25) The presence of multiple candidates contesting elections from each constituency pointed to low level of institutionalization of electoral politics. 1451 candidates were in the field for 202 seats of the National Assembly of Pakistan. In Sindh the number of candidates per seat was 10.39 per cent with the corresponding figures for Baluchistan, Punjab and the NWFP at 8.54 per cent, 5.27 per cent and 4.84 per cent respectively. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, pp.26-27)

In 1993 General Elections, a number of new voting pattern with astonishing results were appeared:

- PPP and PML-N both consolidated their constituencies in these elections and one could not penetrate to other's constituency.

- However; PPP got more NA seats but with lesser votes as compared to PML-N which remained runner up but grabbed more votes as the vote count was concerned throughout the country.
- Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF) led by Qazi Hussain Ahmad of JIP showed pathetic performance with one NA seat from Karachi, although the Religious Right had appended a lot of expectations to PIF.
- General Election 1993 results demonstrated many surprises and upsets. Other religio-political parties failed to attract country's electorates. The route of religious parties was generally welcomed by the followers of the mainstream parties on the one hand and ethnic parties on the other.
- The MQM's election boycott led to non-representation of the country's third largest party and most of urban Sindh in the National Assembly. This boycott highly benefitted to the mainstream PPP and PML-N which grabbed 7 extra seats each due to the boycott of MQM.
- The 1993 elections in Pakistan proved "the elections without change". In General Elections of 1970, the PPP had won the elections from cities and towns as well as relatively developed rural areas from central Punjab while in 1993, the electorate showed a U-turn. As per post-election analysis, the PML (N) got 19 out of 20 urban seats in Punjab with the PPP left with only 1. The PML (N) got 9 rural-cum- urban seats as opposed to the PPP's 15. No third party or independent candidate won from these constituencies. In addition, it meant that polarization between the PML (N) and PPP was essentially party-based. The PPP's vote in south Punjab went up by 9045 per seat but the PML (N)'s rise was sharper at 16,365 per seat. The PML (N) increased its urban vote in central and northern Punjab by 11,396 and 13,757 per seat respectively. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, p. 27)
- The continuity pattern of voting was reflected in the PPP's tally of 33 NA seats out of 46 from that province, including 26 from rural Sindh and 7 from urban Sindh. The 1990 elections again returned the PPP as the largest party in Sindh, which enjoyed an absolute majority among rural Sindhis. It had got 47 per cent vote in rural Sindh in 1988, but only 41.23 per cent in 1990 from the platform of the PDA as well as 31 and 24 NA seats respectively. However, the 1993 elections eliminated the MQM (A)'s role as the political actor at national level. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, pp. 65-66)

The period between 1993 and 1996 was full of chaos and instability with ever increasing tensions in the Karachi, the economic life line of the country. Undemocratic forces once again played their ever obnoxious role against the wilting democracy and the mandate given by the electorate was once again wrapped. Also Benazir Bhutto did not learn any lesson from her previous rule and role in the country politics and there was no option left for the President Farooq Laghari, the PPP-backed echelon to dissolve the National Assembly on 6 November 1996. (Dawn, 7 November 1996) He dismissed Benazir's Premiership and Chief Ministers too. The country's fate once again was to be decided by the electorate which had been disappointed with the bad performance of the political parties. (Dawn, 8 November 1996)

As soon as the plan for the General Elections 1997 was publicized, some 80 political parties applied for election symbols but only 54 political parties managed to remain in the field. As per norms of the previous elections PPP and PML-N were the major contesters in these elections. The PPP alleged that the caretaker government had technically rigged the election by violating the election rules. However, it was

considered a free and fair election by the caretaker government, the contesting political circles, the ECP and both national and international media and public at large. (Baxter & Kennedy, 1997, pp. 212-213)

The elections results, setting a healthy tradition, were accepted by almost all political parties and leaders. The PPP got only 29847 votes as opposed to 49518 votes in 1993. The PTI got 5.66 per cent of votes while the MQM-Haq Parast Group got 0.55 per cent of votes. As far as the Province of Punjab was concerned, the PML-N, by winning 107 seats out of 113 National Assembly seats contested with 60 per cent of total vote of Punjab, topped the list whereas the PPP, which managed to win 56 seats in of National Assembly from Punjab as compared to the PML-N 58 seat in 1993, failed this time to retain a single seat this time. (Rizvi & Gillani, 2013, pp. 68-69) The close analysis of election results shows that the PPP supporting electorate showed a clear disgust with the policies of its self-centered leaders.

Here in this piece of work an effort has been made to analyze the overall summative conditions, norms and traditions that led to the evolution of the electorate, right from the times of India in the Pakistani perspective after the partition. The modern concept of democracy introduced by the British in the subcontinent gave way to the beginning of the democracy in both India and Pakistan. However, the case study of the role of the electorate in Pakistan is different from the rest world due to its inherent social structure which was passed on as the legacy to the Pakistani nation. Tracing the political history of Pakistan one can easily identify neocolonialism as the single most destructive force that set all the forthcoming political conditions, norms and principles of the nascent state of Pakistan. Here the social structure gets its resources from the land lord aristocracy, oligarchic bureaucracy, the emerging industrial groups, underlying permanence of the armed forces and the grimly uneducated masses.

The civil-military bureaucracy always remained deeply scared and allergic to the power of the masses and the electorate and took different measure to keep the same perplexed and ill-focused leadership devoid of vision and purpose. The time and again interruptions in the course of democracy resulted into selfish power game, unconstitutional concoctions, formation of shadow or fake political parties, disruption of national institutions, high jacking of democracy and patronization of highly corrupt pressure groups and political orphans in order to bring them as puppets to power. As a result the electoral process was delayed as lately as 1970s. However, masses welcomed this move with open arms but this experiment of democracy was made an exemplary failure through intrigues and conspiracies against the newly emerging civil institutions. Political parties being devoid of any political experience, fell prey to the relentless power hunters time and again and resultantly lost confidence of the masses. The elections of 1970, 1977, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1997 tell the same story with different shades of meanings. Resultantly the people grew fed up and showed their disgust time and again in the form of low turnout . (Raza, 1998, pp.103-106)

However, the people never lost their hopes and elected their representatives with some reservations and fears. They even in 1997 gave their full confidence to the democratic representatives. But their mandate was honored by the establishment of the country and resultantly the effort went wasted at the hands of another coup in 1999. The nexus of the political maneuvering not only weakened the democratic institutions but also led the country the chaos and confusion. Hence, without promoting the democratic norms and respect of the people's mandate, the true ends of the democracy cannot be materialized. Hence; the stakeholders of the prevailing system must chalk out a transparent policy to avoid the follies discussed here.

General Elections 1970-1997: Voter's Turnout in National Assemblies

General Elections	Held On	Registered Voter's Turnout	Total Votes	%	Summative Analysis
1970	17 December 1970	56941500	33004065	59.8	Endorsed by Independent, Foreign and Local Print and Electronic Media. PPP formed the government for the term
1977	7 March 1977	30899152		64.1	PPP ensured the overwhelming victory in National Assembly Elections by sweeping (more than two-third) majority. The International Media showed reservations about the results. Reportedly; the results of key-constituencies were declared from PM office, instead of ECP's. Some observers noticed the continuous interruptions on in the polling stations of certain constituencies where the PNA candidates were strong. As a result PNA boycotted the forthcoming 10 March 1977 Provincial Assemblies Elections and went on countrywide strike.
1985	25 February 1985	17,250,482	32589996	53.7	Non-Party basis; landed aristocracy and business class of the country got benefit of the situation. Soon an 'in-house' presumably establishment-backed political under the headship of Premier Junejo appeared. PPP, as a party boycotted these elections.
1988	16 November 1988	20361057	47629592	42.75	Held after Zia's death (17 August 1988); PPP vs. IJI (9-party alliance (rightwing; Islamic instance) , allegedly establishment-backed to counter PPP and stop it from getting a decisive position in NA). PPP formed the government for an incomplete term.
1990	24 November 1990	21882104	48952991	42.5	This time IJI was able to win more seats than PPP and formed government in the Centre. The continuation of hide-and-seek game between right and left wing parties.
1993	6 October 1993	20758179	51867876	40.02	This time PPP for the first time in its political history went into an electoral alliance with anti Nawaz Sharif splinter group of Pakistan Muslim League PML-J of Hamid Nasir Chatha. PPP won the race this time and made a 'hung parliament'; PML-N (a major party of former IJI) remained the runner-up but the PPP government like its predecessor IJI could not complete the term. It was assumed as the initiation of 'two-party competition'; a revolving chair/jig-saw game.
1997	3 February 1997	1949269	55737177	35.79	Since 1985 no Parliament and Government completed its fixed term. All the governments were dissolved at the hands of President under the Constitutional Article 58.2 (b), with the 'blessing' and 'support' of the Establishment. PML-N grabbed a 'land-sliding victory' by securing 135 out of 217 seats vs. its archrival PPP which managed to get mere 18 seats. It got seats from all the four provinces and appeared as the 'nation-wide' party. The voters' turnout was at the low ebb of electoral history which was alarming and disastrous to the healthy democratic traditions. That's why, it was termed here as " Heavyweight Dilemma".

Conclusion

In modern day democracy, the electorates being the back-bone of the electoral process have attained the focal position in terms of 'power' and 'significance'. They not only elect members for the legislature but in some countries they elect the head of the states. In some democracies they can elect the judiciary, and have powers of law-making. Thus they have been made enable through constitutions to keep check and control over government affairs. They are permitted to use the tools of 'initiative', referendum, and election in order to 'recall' the members of the legislatures. On continuum; they can use the power of "public opinion" (actually the "electorate's opinion") on any burning issue in order to gain desirable results. This exclusive aspect gives them the status of "the fourth bastion" of any state, after the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. Keeping in view their role and importance, the electorates, irrespective of gender, social position, color or creed should be allowed freely their right-to-vote in order to make the decision making process more broad-based and effective.

Recommendations

Based on concurrent research, following recommendations can be made:

- As the status and bearing of the Pakistani electorate is not up to the mark and a long term absence of the political process gives way to chaos, confusion and deteriorating law and order situation, so the stakeholders of the system are suggested to chalk out a transparent, clear-cut strategy to hold elections on regular intervals which will definitely establish healthy democratic norms in the best interest of the nation.
- Election process in Pakistan is both complex and complicated especially the Electorate has been denied their rights to live in peace and dignity for long. They have often been terrified because of the dangers posed to their security. But more than this, what makes them despondent is the absence of an alternative system that could provide for policies that benefit the people. This situation is required to be handled through a comprehensive legislation in order to with the trust of the electorates.
- Even the change of government sometimes brings no change in the national and foreign policies adding more confusion to the present dilemmas faced by the electorate. Pakistani electorate, as sovereign inhabitants of a sovereign state have very rightful demand for the assurance of their sovereign rights as defined in the constitution. Their demand for a true, genuine, transparent and uninterrupted democracy through mainstreaming them and the right use of their votes must be given weight and due consideration.

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