

Politics Of Reconciliation In Pakistan And Political Parties: An Analysis

Muhammad Shoaib Jamil¹, Dr. Muhammad Azhar²

Abstract

Political reconciliation within Pakistan is crucial for guaranteeing stability, cultivating growth in the economy, fortifying democracy, and advancing social harmony. This study investigates the importance of political reconciliation in present-day Pakistan, with a specific focus on the key role played by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the complex link between the politics of reconciliation and political parties in the Pakistani context. The research employs a qualitative descriptive-explanatory methodology¹ to examine party strategies, political actions, and public discourse to comprehend the impact of political reconciliation on the political landscape. This research seeks to offer a thorough comprehension of the methods by which political reconciliation can be effectively attained and maintained through the active engagement and cooperation of political parties. The findings elucidate the tactics utilized by PPP in the pursuit of reconciliation through the foundation of COD resulting the reconciling model of 18th amendment, as well as their accomplishments and challenges, which in turn contribute to the stable political environment and democratic progress of Pakistan.

Key words: *Politics of reconciliation, Political Parties in Pakistan, Contemporary politics, Foundation of reconciliation (COD), Model of Reconciliation (18th amendment), Inclusive Politics (PDM), Democratic stability.*

Introduction

The turbulent past of Pakistan is characterized by the conflicts between democratic and dictatorial forces, with the former employing ballots and the latter resorting to bayonets (Waseem M. , 2022). Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan has alternated between military-dominated and civilian-led governments. The struggle has deeply embedded the military inside the country's societal, political, and economic structures. However, the citizens of Pakistan consistently demonstrate a widespread inclination for democracy, and political parties maintain a significant level of popular backing (Shafqat, 1998) (Shafqat, 2002). To fully grasp the processes that form Pakistan's governance and democratic progress, it is crucial to understand the role and importance of political reconciliation in the country's contemporary political environment. The dynamics of party politics in Pakistan have historically been shaped by inherent social structures, religious affiliations, familial ties, and regional affiliations. Furthermore, comprehending Pakistani political history necessitates a thorough understanding of civil-military ties. The PPP and PML-N held

¹(PhD Scholar) Political Science Department Government College University, Faisalabad. muhammadshoaibjamil@gmail.com

²(Chairman) Political Science Department Government College University, Faisalabad. Muhammad.azhar@gcuf.edu.pk

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government positions twice from 1988 and 1999 and were in opposition twice respectively. Both parties actively participated in the political dynamics of the troika during the whole decade, engaging in ongoing conflicts with the president, opposition, military, judiciary, and other entities (Sultana, 2011). The politics of reconciliation is the result of the influence of democratic transitions at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries (Shah A. A., 2020). In 2006, Benazir Bhutto entered into an agreement known as the "Charter of Democracy (COD)" with various political parties, notably the PML (N), with the intention of implementing her original proposals. In 2007, she endorsed the National Reconstruction Ordinance (NRO) with the aim of reinstating democracy in the nation, but also adopting a pragmatic approach (Chawla, 2017). After Benazir's tragic assassination, Zardari and Mian Nawaz Sharif promoted the politics of reconciliation that Benazir had advocated. Nawaz Sharif experienced a sense of despair during the Musharraf regime and intended to abstain from participating in the elections. However, Zardari convinced him to still run and made a commitment to fully support the Charter of Democracy (COD) alongside him. A coalition led by the PPP successfully passed the significant 18th amendment to the 1973 constitution. This amendment transformed Pakistan's political system from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary republic, garnering the support of all parties in the parliament (Khan, 2021). Pakistan's political landscape has recently seen the emergence of a third party that has gained significant influence in the country's electoral system. Imran Khan's populist movement was orchestrated by the establishment itself, positioning him as a party leader to fight the influence of the two major political parties in Pakistan, namely the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Since 2008, it has transitioned into a structured two-party rotation. Following the victory of PTI in the 2018 general elections, the party has gained significant influence in both the federal and provincial levels, leading to significant changes in the political landscape of Pakistan (Wu, 2020). In the 2014 PTI protest, the opposition parties, including PPP, ANP, JI, and others, united with the government to prevent any unconstitutional involvement. Against the backdrop of significant constitutional reforms spanning from 2013 to 2018, the PPP also made a constructive contribution to the political growth of Pakistan. Between 1988 and around 2013, the political landscape in Pakistan was primarily controlled by two political parties, namely the PPP and the PML-N. In recent times, the PTI, which garnered the greatest number of votes in 2018, has demonstrated itself as a feasible alternative as a third-party. Collectively, these parties can be seen as the main "mainstream" parties in Pakistan's political system, different from parties that primarily target a certain ethnic group or region, or those that openly identify as Islamist (Mufti, 2020). Between 2008 and 2018, Pakistan's parliamentary democracy experienced the peaceful transfer of two regimes, each successfully completing their constitutional terms. Throughout their various tenures, both parties have achieved significant advancements in areas including political stability, economic expansion, diplomatic collaboration, and counterterrorism efforts (Wu, 2020). Despite its electoral strength being limited to Sindh in 2013, the PPP will remain a dynamic political party and play a substantial role in Pakistan's political development in 2022. From late 2020 to early 2021, Nawaz Sharif made significant progress in challenging the functioning of discursive democracy by openly questioning the covert influence of the military, as a member of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) (Waseem M. , 2022). This study aims to examine the importance of political reconciliation in the current political environment of Pakistan. It specifically focuses on the strategies and approaches employed by prominent political parties: mainly the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Each of these parties has had a crucial impact on the country's political history and still exerts influence on its future direction. This study seeks to clarify how these parties negotiate the intricate dynamics of power, politics, and public sentiment by analyzing their efforts towards

political reconciliation. The period following the conclusion of the 2024 general elections provides Pakistan with a chance to reshape its political landscape by fostering peace and unity. The political parties' pursuit of political reconciliation not only reflects their ideological positions but also indicates their strategy to sustain relevance and power in a fiercely competitive and frequently unpredictable political landscape. This research will examine the approach of the PPP towards reconciliation efforts, as well as her achievements and obstacles. It will also consider the broader impact of these efforts for Pakistan's political stability and the strengthening of its democratic system. The case of Pakistan provides evidence that political power and stable regimes play a crucial role in promoting economic development, especially in emerging nations (Nazeer, 2021). Political parties play a crucial role in connecting the government and the public, acting as conduits for the communication of public interests and grievances (Nisa, 2024).

Research Question(s)

What are the driving forces, accomplishments, and challenges linked to Pakistan's efforts for political reconciliation in contemporary political environment in Pakistan?

Objectives

The study examines the correlation between political parties and political reconciliation in Pakistan, a country characterized by political volatility, military intervention, and socio-political rifts. This study emphasizes the crucial importance of political reconciliation in preserving stability, promoting democratic processes, and nurturing national unity. This research investigates how the PPP strategically manages power, politics, and public opinion to achieve and maintain political reconciliation. It plays a significant procedure in bringing stability, encouraging democratic procedures, and developing national cohesion. Political reconciliation encompasses the endeavors to resolve disagreements, bridge ideological gaps, and promote collaboration among disparate political entities.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative descriptive-explanatory methodology to examine the process of political reconciliation and the influence of political parties. The data gathered from reputable academic journals, books, and papers has been examined using an interpretivist methodology. This approach enables a comprehensive comprehension of the intricate socio-political issues in Pakistan.

Politics of Reconciliation

Political reconciliation refers to the process of resolving conflicts and restoring harmony within a society. It involves the establishment of a peaceful and cooperative relationship between different factions or groups that have been in conflict. Reconciliation is the condition in which previous enemies treat one other with mutual respect, recognizing the moral worth and dignity of one another. Political reconciliation is achieved when the divides and conflicts that were present during a period of political turmoil no longer have a significant impact on influencing political dynamics. Consequently, individuals form new identities that go beyond the previous divisions. Minimalist approaches characterize reconciliation as the straightforward coexistence of former enemies, rooted on a rejection of violence. The maximalist approach to reconciliation involves imposing more comprehensive requirements for ethically acceptable coexistence. Maximalists advocate for abusers to openly own their responsibility, demonstrate genuine regret, and ultimately pursue absolution from those they have harmed. Reconciliation does not advance uniformly across social domains. Alternatively, it can be more accurately characterized as an intricate

procedure that functions at various tiers, each with its distinct rationales and tactics. The levels encompassed in this framework are political society, institutional, civil society, and interpersonal. Curiously, a substantial part of the current body of literature on reconciliation fails to establish the link between individuals, approaches, and societal processes with their particular social and political contexts. Consequently, it provides an ambiguous and inadequate elucidation of the actual process of reconciliation (Verdeja, 2013). Reconciliation is the act of healing harm in a way that enables the restoration of trust (Nordquist, 2007). Reconciliation refers to the process of improving ties between those who were previously engaged in conflict or dispute. The process involves facing the harm caused, acknowledging responsibility, and working towards restoring trust, understanding, and harmony. Reconciliation involves various approaches, such as apologies, disclosure of truth, compensation, and forgiveness. The relationship between justice and reconciliation is complex and contentious, as there are varying viewpoints on whether they are compatible or conflicting values. Reconciliation is the process of repairing relationships and promoting healing and understanding after acts of wrongdoing or conflict. The different approaches and ideas about reconciliation include: reconciliation as a nation-building project; reconciliation as a religiously inspired confessional Endeavour (Will Kymlicka, 2008); reconciliation as mutual respect (Verdeja E., 2009); the restorative idea of reconciliation; the constitutional idea of reconciliation (Schaap, Reconciliation as ideology and politics, 2008); the realistic idea of reconciliation (Dwyer, 1999); the concept of building civic trust as a form of reconciliation. (Moon, 2008) Reconciliation, in the context of transition democracies, pertains to the Endeavour of attaining justice within a period of political transformation and is a fundamental component of constructing a durable democratic government. (Bashir, 2012) Nevertheless, reconciliation inherently conflicts with politics. Politics encompasses elements such as transparency, conflict, and opposition, whereas the goal of reconciliation is to attain resolution, unity, and agreement. Schaap's work on political reconciliation was published in 2004. Reconciliation is a tactically beneficial approach that is frequently utilized during times of democratic transitions. Post-conflict regimes frequently seek to bolster their legitimacy and gain support by distancing themselves from their predecessors, while also aspiring to heal past injuries (Jeong, 2002). Reconciliation involves the following components: (1) resolving the conflict by addressing the fundamental needs and national aspirations of the involved parties, (2) mutually accepting and respecting the welfare and existence of the other group, (3) promoting a sense of security and dignity for each group, (4) developing patterns of cooperative interactions across different areas, and (5) establishing formalized mechanisms for resolving conflicts (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). As Pakistan progresses in its democratic development, comprehending the intricacies of political reconciliation among its prominent political entities remains a crucial subject of academic and practical concern. (Schattschneider, 1952) has famously stated that political parties are essential for the existence of democracy, and modern democracy cannot be imagined without them. In her work, (Strokes, 1999) has expressed the view that political parties are inherent to the functioning of a democratic system. To assess the potential for future democracy in Pakistan, it is crucial to comprehend the significance of political parties in the country.

Structure and Reconciliation

Political reconciliation is a complex procedure that entails the establishment of mutually respectful relationships, where both parties acknowledge and value one other's opinions. Political reconciliation focuses on the ideas of depolarization, recognition, and reparations for wrongdoing, indicating a major difference. Horizontal reconciliation is a process that takes place between individuals or groups who are deemed equal in all significant elements,

such as experiences, resources, political roles, and the number of people involved. Organizations that can participate in horizontal political reconciliation in real-life scenarios include guerrilla groups, political organizations, civil society groups, and religious institutions. Vertical political reconciliation is a process that occurs between parties who have unequal economic status, differing levels of insight or knowledge, and varying capacities for exercising power. Common illustrations consist of reconciliation procedures in which a political leadership actively interacts with a marginalized community, occurrences where an army general expresses remorse for needlessly endangering soldiers, or scenarios where a country apologizes for wartime atrocities committed against other populations.

Some conclusions for Theorizing

From the present analysis, two propositions can be formed concerning the structural influence on political reconciliation: When conducting horizontal reconciliation procedures, it is beneficial to understand the dynamics of the parties involved in terms of their interpersonal connections, including trust, recognition, and mutuality. Understanding the connections between the parties involved, specifically in terms of justice, reparation, and inclusion, helps improve vertical reconciliation efforts. Reconciliation, as a notion, pertains to the profound transformation of attitudes within a political framework. Democracy, in contrast, offers a nonviolent method for a society to acknowledge and settle its disagreements. The political reconciliation process comprises four essential components: meetings, compensation, accountability, and truth (Nordquist, 2017). Reconciliation is a thorough and all-encompassing process that addresses past disputes and establishes a path for the nation to achieve enduring peace. The process involves the pursuit of truth, the establishment of justice during a period of transition, the provision of compensation or restitution, the granting of amnesty, and the guarantee that earlier violations would not happen again (Singh, 2014). The strategy of reconciliation is of great importance in transitional democracies that are controlled by authoritarian regimes that value the safeguarding of human rights (Bloomfield & Darnes, 2013).

Bridging the theoretical gap between political parties and Politics of reconciliation

Political parties play a crucial role in the functioning of democracy. Parties are discrete entities that fulfill multiple interrelated functions crucial to the democratic process of governance. The primary functions of a political party include participating in and winning elections to gain control over government agencies and institutions, uniting and advocating for the interests of society, proposing alternative policies, and evaluating and training political leaders who will take on governing roles. The scholarly literature on political parties explores different facets, including their makeup in terms of socioeconomic class, membership, and election systems (Duverger, 1951). The relationship between political parties and the wider population is fundamentally important. Political parties serve the interests, values, and needs of society, influencing and modifying them to attract voters and acquire political power. According to (La Palombara & Weiner, 1966) political parties enable the participation of many persons who are not part of the dominant political elite. Political parties serve multiple functions, including the collection and representation of diverse interests, mobilization of the voting populace, influence on public policy, accountability of politicians, and cultivation of prospective future leaders (Janda & Kwak, 2013). (Siddiqi, 2020) Elections and political parties, which are universally recognized as essential elements of democracy, have served as instruments for facilitating reconciliation and advancing communal cohesion. The data given indicates that democratic political institutions have had a substantial impact on fostering reconciliation and social cohesion.

(Mershon, 2016) Political parties in Pakistan represent the existing patterns of conflict. Political parties operate within the established and changing rules of the political system, providing direction to understand its internal dynamics. The first section of this chapter presents a comprehensive introduction to political parties, encompassing their positions on different problems and policies, as well as the methods they employ to express themselves, which range from legislative debates to active political involvement (Waseem, 2016).

Legacy of Political Conflict and Reconciliation in Historical Context

Pakistan People's Party has the legacy of being the only political force since the 1970's that has acquired the political power consecutively after the end of each authoritarian regime in Pakistan. It was PPP who succeeded to hold political power after the end of Yahya regime in 1971, later when Zia's repressive regime was ended in 1988, it was again the PPP who got transfer of power, recent transfer of power from fourth military dictator General Musharraf to a civilian regime in 2008 was also made to PPP. So, PPP had a long experience of Political reconciliation and democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

The Pakistan People's Party and Constitution of 1973

The Constitution of 1973 of Pakistan is not just an important and significant document but also considered as a reconciliatory constitution to address all the factions and different views prevailing in the country to have a coherent framework of the government which is capable to address all the need and demand for every section of the nation. It defines the basic liberties, defines the authorities of distinct tiers of government, and underscores the values of democracy and rule of law; in this way, it creates the necessary preconditions for developing a more tolerant society (Aziz Sadaf, 2018). Furthermore, it deals with the questions of social justice and economic equality aiming at optimizing development processes that will improve the positions of vulnerable populations and promote unity of the nation (Choudhury, 1974). Thus, the document is not only the legal basis but also the set of moral values aimed at the formation of a society in which every person would realize his potential and be an active participant in the development of the country.

The historic passage of the 1973 constitution and the consensus that led to its adoption is one of the significant events that took place in the history of the country and depict how different group of politicians come together for the noble cause (Zubair Malik, 2020). This consensus was not a mere political ploy; it was the desire of all people to have orderliness and prosperity in their nation with the spotlight given to the populace's input and incorporation of their opinions into the system. This document describes an important role of political reconciliation for such a transformation process and indicates that dialogue and cooperation as the main instruments for overcoming the past conflict and constructing a new society were crucial at this stage. This constitution has been changed over time, for instance the 18th Amendment that was passed in 2010 to strengthen the provincial governments and resolve the imbalance of power.

Political Conflict and the Search for Reconciliation (1988-2006)

The political transformation in Pakistan during 1988-2006 was characterized by fierce power politics between two main political parties: Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. This bitter enmity with many-rooted historical animosity, ideological antipathy and desire for supremacy shadowed the political development of Pakistan and obstructing the growth of democracy and paved the way for military intervention.

There were many preconditions to the conflict that started much earlier than 1988. The PPP founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for instance was a socialist, populist party whose main

political strategy was to sell the dreams of economic justice and social order to the people. The PMLN the party derived from the Muslim League have more conservative tendency and had support of the establishment and business class. These ideological differences were foundational and rendered Pakistan politically fissiparous or in other words set the stage for a major cleavage in Pakistani politics.

The political situation changed immediately after Zia and the PPP and PMLN had a hostile rivalry for power. Both sides, headed by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in turns, were guilty of instability and blamed for corruption. Every government was dismissed prematurely on corruption and managerial incompetence, usually through a coup executed by the other parties, but more significantly, with the assistance of Pakistan's omnipotent military force.

This continued tussle for power had very severe effects on the political landscape as well as the democracy of Pakistan. This led to political instability and the void thus created was readily filled by the military junta. Realizing that the threats coming from abroad and the emergence of extremism the need for internal stability in Pakistan by both PPP and PMLN decided to work for the terms of engagement. This realization came to a pinnacle with the signing of the Charter of Democracy in 2006. The deal that BB and NS inked was the first move towards this direction though not very perceptible. The agreements that the two of them signed in the COD were to take appropriate measures to support and enhance democracy, observe and protect the Constitution, guarantee free and fair elections, and limit the military's political influence.

The Charter of Democracy as Foundation of Political Reconciliation

The Charter of Democracy that was signed in 2006 by the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz is seen as a defining historic document of Pakistan. It was not only a simple deal about sharing power but about supporting the democratic values, making changes to the institutions and stopping the tendency of confrontation which was characteristic for the country.

The COD was not signed in the comfort of the palaces and mansions, but in the uncomfortable throes of being in the wilderness. Benazir Bhutto of the PPP and Nawaz Sharif of the PMLN were political leaders living in Musharraf's military regime in exile. It was therefore this kind of oppression that they jointly underwent and the common struggle of finding democracy that brought them together as amigos.

The COD put an end to the decade's long animosity between the PPP and the PMLN, which was evident mostly in the media using race and abusing each other. This rivalry over the years had time and again served the interests of authoritarian muscularity and so, democracy's march had regressed. The Charter was a turning point in a way of cooperation where the national interest of the parties was put above the partisan advantage.

In principle, the COD restated or confirmed its adherence to the original and continuing constitutional framework of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan as the polity's supreme legal-political document. It demanded the reversal of all orders passed by the successive military regimes which were unconstitutional including those that weakened the provincial government and distorted the checks and balances system of the country.

Being fully aware of the fact that Parliament is the heart of a working democracy, the COD suggested some major overhauls to strengthen the legislature. These were to include an impairment of electoral democracy through provisions for free and fair elections, a reinstatement of the powers of the Prime Minister and an empowered Parliament which had been stripped of its powers by military dictators; and setting up of an assertive Parliamentary system of check and balances on the executive.

With this, the COD understood that an independent judiciary was essential in history in the preservation of people's rights and the application of the legal regime in the country. It demanded the procedure of selection of judges based on the principles of democracy rather than being directly controlled by the executive arm of the government and for enhancement of capacity in the provision of speedy justice by judicial arm of the government.

To deal with one of the major sources of tension and instability for many years, the COD recognized the need for increased provincialization. It put forward the suggestion of devolving a lot of powers from the center to provinces especially in finance, education and health. This decentralization of power was to be done with the lookout for addressing problems faced by smaller provinces and, hence, instituting a good federation.

Accepting the effects of the past aggressions, the COD demanded to create a body for study of human rights violations during the times of military juntas – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This commitment to accountability and justice was to both foster reconciliation for the past divisions and permanently put to an end human rights abuses in the country.

In fact, the importance of the COD, is not really in what it said or provided but in what it symbolized in Pakistani politics. This transition of the political system went from positional, which involved political parties as adversaries, toward a model of negotiated cooperation when dialogue, compromise, and decision-making were of the highest value.

The COD was not only an ideal type. It provided a basis for comprehensive political changes; among which, the most prominent is the achievement of the 18th Amendment in 2010. This interesting amendment that delegated much power over the country's affairs to the provinces was clearly a result of the COD stamp on provincialism.

The scenario painted by the COD is certainly a beautiful dream, but the images must be worked out; the dream of a new, more democratic and a reconciled Pakistan represented by the COD is only partial. Some issues have, however, persisted in the actualization of its provisions, especially in the areas of enhancing the democratic governance, which is characterized by the tussle of power between the military and the civilians.

The Charter of Democracy is a clear indication that political dialogue and reconciliations are very potent solutions to perceived hardened political differences. It underscores the fact that the attainment of enduring peace and stability in Pakistan advance not simply in ink on paper, but through abiding adherence to the principles of democracy, continued enhancement of the country's institutions and improvement on the vision to forge a society that is tolerant and progressive and free from suffering.

The 18th amendment as a model of political reconciliation

It is relevant to mention here that passage of 18th Amendment in the 1973 constitution in the year 2010 has a remarkable contribution in Pakistan's process of political reconciliation. It is much more than the sum of the legal novelties; it reflects the Charter of Democracy, turning the conflictual relations of history between center and province into the model of a new federalism.

To really figure out what the 18th Amendment means, one must come to terms with the fact that for decades there was too much power in Pakistan's central government. Military governments and the One Unit policy had created a feeling of deprivation and being unfair especially to the smaller provinces.

While the PPP and the PMLN have not always been friendly with each other, the 2006 Charter of Democracy did go against this trend. It understood that real democracy could only involve rectification of the problems as were being voiced by the provinces, the essential preoccupation being decentralization of power.

Most importantly its passage was not forced through by the kind of law 2006 by which certain laws are passed in acrimony through springs drugs. This included consultations with ALL major political parties in the CO Depute; dialogue is the key to the COD. Its broad-based ownership was essential for it to have a footing in law as well as for its sustainability. The amendment removed Concurrent List and transferred purely legislative and executive subjects such as education, health and local government upon provinces. This was not a process of decentralization but a vindication of the principle of provincialism.

The reader may not be aware that the Congress which passed the 18th Amendment understood that control of money is necessary for real independence. It enhanced the provinces' share in the NFC Award, whereby they would have more autonomy in determination of the resources and development corridors.

Among all those elements the symbolic change of the name of the territory called North-West Frontier Province into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa struck a chord. It addressed a longstanding complaint of regionalism, something that the debate had recognized was an important aspect of the region and showed that the government respected people's wishes. The change was not for the purpose of meeting the promises of the COD alone; it was to support and bring into effect the improvements derived from the reconciliation spirit. It spoke to a major bone of contention between provinces; it was an affirmation of federalism and cooperation.

Thus, the 18th Amendment can touch the life of a citizen by decentralizing power and resources. It opens the progressive pathway and makes possible efficient human and financial resources development that come from the local government taxation, efficient local governing style, as well as puts emphasis on one of the pillars of democracy, that is the grassroots democracy.

However, what can be attained in terms of prohibitionist temperance through constitutional action during the amendment process is not the end of struggle, but the next step toward it – the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States is symbolic of this. It is therefore crucial that there be commitment to the principles, overcoming of implementation issues and promotion of participation and collaboration among all stakeholders in the success of the framework.

The 18th Amendment can therefore also be seen as a model for political restoration in Pakistan. So, it shows that using reconciliation and bringing to life existing grievances, dialogue and practical implementation of the agreements, it is possible to leave the legacy of conflict behind and switch to the creation of a common future for both countries and their people.

Challenges and Prospects for Reconciliation in Contemporary Pakistan

Pakistan today is a country bearing the political instabilities that occurred in the past and is in the state of confusion regarding the future. Unfortunately, the Charter of Democracy which was signed in 2006 by PPP and PML (N) was a hope of a better future for both the parties to share a common ground that was a more democratic way of working but can it be considered whether it impacts the modern-day politics of Pakistan? This is followed by the discussion of the main threats to the feeble reconciliation process in Pakistan and identification of potential ways in increasing such process.

Measuring reconciliations in Pakistan is not merely a question of stating 'We are willing to reconcile,' but it is a question of understanding the political interaction of some of the actors. While the formal reconciliation process was established under the COD, the concept has been only occasionally implemented in politics.

One major disadvantage, therefore, is that COD tends to look at the organization from the top. Since this was primarily an agreement between the political élite, there is barely any

room for a social divide. As both polarization and connection have been analyzed with reference to media more frequently than anything else, it seems to require more dedicated actions of civil society, and similar dialogue projects to promote the processes of reconciliation on the local level.

Below are some of the difficulties that persist and act as a hurdle in the direction of enhancing the abortive reconciliation in Pakistan and can replicate hostility:

Electoral politics and smooth transfer of power (2008-2024)

The sign of democratization was witnessed when PPP handed over power to PMLN through a smooth transfer of power after the general elections held in 2013. But other elections have been accompanied by allegations of vote rigging and no regard of the results particularly by the losers. This is counterproductive to the processes of rebuilding goodwill which reconciliation process is anchored on.

The recent electoral events in Pakistan depict a complex and intricate portrayal of the country's democratic progression, characterized by both difficulties and possibilities. The continual presence of electoral anomalies, as seen in the fiercely disputed elections of 2024, serves as a clear reminder of the ongoing barriers that impede the establishment of democratic governance. Furthermore, the impact of undemocratic entities, such as the military establishment, and accusations of deceit has prompted significant concerns regarding the credibility of the election procedure and the durability of democratic principles in Pakistan. The future of democracy in Pakistan ultimately depends on the combined resolve of its population, political leaders, and institutions to defend democratic principles, safeguard basic rights, and guarantee that the people's choice is accurately represented through unbiased, just, and trustworthy elections. Although, facing difficulties and obstacles, the endeavor to establish democracy continues to be a collective desire that offers the potential for a more optimistic and comprehensive future for Pakistan. Pakistan may overcome its democratic obstacles and achieve its full potential as a democratic nation by consistently and persistently working towards this goal, both within the country and on the global stage (Arshad, 2024). From 1988 to 1999, and then again from 2008 to 2013, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) were in power. Although both factions, under the leadership of prominent individuals like as Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, expressed support for the reinstatement of democracy, they frequently disregarded the rights of the general populace, especially those belonging to minority groups, in terms of their access to fundamental needs and the implementation of legal principles. As a result, both parties unintentionally continued undemocratic standards in society and politics (Bibi, 2018). We now face, therefore, the necessity of comprehensive electoral reforms if one wants to vouch for free, fair and inclusive elections. This involves electoral malpractice such as rigging, accountability of the election commissions and the 'political representation of the minorities.

Entry of PTI in National politics and the Resurgence of Political Polarization

New faces in combination with new political parties including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf introduced new ideological perspectives in the political framework. While challenging the two-party system dominance of Pakistan politics, PTI has enviously negotiated the existing political divide by carving a persistent aggressive attitude and aggressive rhetoric rather than the COD. Political parties serve as intermediary entities that connect citizens with the institutions of the state, allowing them to enjoy their fundamental rights to association and expression. Political parties create and establish policy positions and programs by actively involving their members and supporters. Similarly, by means of internal procedures, they function as mechanisms for choosing people to be elected to democratic institutions.

Therefore, they assist in guaranteeing that the desires of the populace are accurately represented in democratic procedures. Simultaneously, political parties give explicit avenues for individuals to exercise their entitlement to scrutinize those in authority, by presenting alternative policy choices and the potential for a nonviolent transition of power via democratic elections. Democracy gains its fundamental energy, transparency, and ability to generate new ideas from the rivalry between political parties and candidates (Dalton, 2011). Peace, in a positive context, denotes a profound change in the connection between persons and groups that were before engaged in violent conflict, but now coexist harmoniously and engage in constructive interactions. What is the definition of positive peace building as a process of fostering relationships in a society when political factions are highly separated and hold irreconcilable political beliefs due to previous political injustices? Is it still fair to strive for constructive peace considering a history marked by structural inequality and discrimination against specific groups? If that is the case, then which element of positive peace can be linked to political efforts towards reconciliation? This chapter seeks to examine the methods by which societies can attain constructive peace in situations where historical political injustices shape the current state of animosity in political relationships. Therefore, analyze ongoing debates about political reconciliation within the context of post conflict rebuilding and explore their relationship to the concept of positive peace. Specifically, exploring how both concepts emphasize the need of fostering relationships to establish a fairer society (Kang, 2022). However, there is still some potential to make the world, including Pakistan, more reconciled, or at least less irreconcilable.

Political reconciliation and economic growth

Despite decentralization of powers to provinces as provided in the 18th Amendment to apparently reduce regional disparity, whether the fruits of development are being so divided are still an issue of debate. Regional grievances are provoked by slow economic growth especially from the former colonial masters hence reverse the gains made in reconciliation. Besides, if political reconciliation is regarded as beneficial for the arm-wrestling politicians more than the public, the latter will have nothing to gain from populism but disillusionment, which cannot be fixed to revive cooperation.

The primary problem that the government will encounter is ensuring the continuous operation of the economy. The nation is currently facing a severe economic crisis. The underlying causes of the current economic crisis are widely recognized. These factors encompass a tax system that is restricted and unfair, a limited range of products for export, a debt cycle in the energy sector, financially insolvent Public Sector Enterprises (PSUs), a burdensome regulatory framework, and insufficient levels of savings and investment. According to figures from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the inflation rate in January 2024 was 28.34 percent. In February 2024, the inflation rate dropped to 23.06%, marking the lowest level since May 2023, when it was at 37.97%. While this may be positive news in the short term, the government still has persistent and long-standing debt issues that need to be addressed. It is required to oversee around \$30 billion in yearly foreign debt responsibilities.

As per the State Bank of Pakistan, the nation needs \$6.1 billion to fulfill its debt obligations by the conclusion of the fiscal year in June 2024. The Stand-By Agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is set to expire in April 2024, necessitating the government to get a multi-year IMF financial support package. Pakistan is familiar with the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF), but the current help would come with strict terms that demand long-term political dedication. Additionally, this will further diminish the

government's popularity and facilitate the PTI in mobilizing public protests and expanding its support base (Behuria, 2024).

Institutional harmony in era of hybrid system and Judicial politics (2018-2024)

Their impact persists in this aspect of civilian political cooperation, especially in the case of Pakistan where it has been suggested that the military in Rawalpindi effectively controls a 'hybrid' political system. This influence can foster the atmosphere of mistrust and thus has a potential of undermining formation of credible civilian authorities hence the key pillar to sustainable democracy. Besides, the process, which includes political radicalization and intolerance, goes on and does not correspond to the democratic discussion and reconciliation, which the COD was to promote.

Political polarization reveals the extent to which perspectives on political matters in society divide and may depend on the progression of economic outcomes. Political polarization exacerbates policy gaps, hinders governance, and hampers policy implementation. Political parties and governments should aim to promote reconciliation and dialogue among different groups to alleviate tension and promote the wisdom of harmony (Hanif, 2024).

The principle of democracy emphasizes the significant role of institutions and law in exerting moral authority over entities and institutions. These institutions must acknowledge and respect each other since each institution seeks authority but cannot work independently; they must collaborate with one another. If an institution aims to expand its influence by undermining others or exerting control over them, or if it assumes the responsibility of correcting all other institutions, it will lead to significant institutional inequality and unrest, which is detrimental to democracy (Sajid, 2024).

This is particularly the Parliament, Judiciary and the accountability actors within the Democratic state. From this point of view a good institutional setting can encourage responsible political debate and supply the check and balance of powers as well as the framework for an open and competitive political struggle which should rule out the possibility of a political crisis when the governing party attempts to eliminate its rivals through non-democratic means.

Politics of alliances (PDM 2022-2024) and Pakistan's perpetual crisis

Pakistan's profound social, political, and economic disparities seem improbable to cease soon. The economy's widespread unhappiness and the lack of possibilities for Pakistan's youthful and expanding population have led to the emergence of populist parties. Populism impedes domestic political reconciliation and obstructs the implementation of a reasonable foreign policy that prioritizes Pakistan's economic interests (Haqqani, 2024). The escalating political polarization in the nation presents a significant obstacle as it heightens the perceived threat of political instability, thereby reducing the ruling elite's long-term planning capabilities. To tackle this difficulty, it is imperative to establish a fresh political agreement that fosters agreement among both the political and governing elites over the fundamental principles and processes of power transfer. The significance of this issue lies in the fact that implementing extensive reforms requires a considerable amount of time to establish them as part of the system. However, this can only be achieved if the political system allows the ruling class to have adequate long-term perspectives. The political agreement must guarantee equitable distribution of power, robust federalism, and smooth and uninterrupted transfers of power. It is crucial to foster political stability in a divided political system such as Pakistan, where political parties have support that is divided along regional lines. This will require developing long-term perspectives that allow the ruling elite to take political risks and implement structural reforms that can lead to higher levels of income and prosperity (Cheema, 2024). The current Pakistan Democratic Movement

(PDM) government heavily depends on the establishment to secure its survival, whether it be in terms of the economy, political cohesion, national security, or foreign policy, particularly relations with India. It is worth noting that in the three elections following the restoration of democracy in Pakistan in 2008, none of the prime ministers served a full five-year term, despite the legislature being permitted to complete its term. It is uncertain whether Shehbaz Sharif, a Prime Minister (PDM) who speaks softly and is known for his amicable attitude towards the Army unlike his brother, will be permitted to serve his full term. The leaders of the PML-N and PPP signed the 'Charter of Democracy' in London in 2006, which included a discreet commitment to refrain from undermining one other's governments by aligning with the Army. Nevertheless, it is uncertain if they would adhere to the same standard while operating within a coalition (Behuria, 2024).

Charter of Economy for coherence in economic policies

The Charter of the Economy is obligatory as it is the sole means of guaranteeing coherence in economic policies, irrespective of the political party in power. The notion of the Charter of the Economy was proposed by Shahbaz Sharif during his time in opposition. It was derived from the Charter of Democracy, a document that was signed between the PPP and PMLN parties. The design of the Charter of the economy should aim to foster political consensus among political players. Given the current political landscape in Pakistan, no political party possesses the capability to secure a majority of seats. Each political party gained power through a coalition arrangement, and no party was able to remain in government for more than two or three years. These are the issues that can be prevented only by endorsing the Charter of Economy and Democracy (Hassan, 2024). Instead of focusing on specific economic concerns often addressed in an economic charter, such as increasing exports and taxation, political parties must prioritize reaching a consensus on a comprehensive development agenda. Considering our capabilities and limitations, it is necessary to pursue advancement that is guided by a less privileged group rather than an exclusive elite. Hence, the essential essence of this charter is for prominent political parties to acknowledge that although their vote-winning factions (PPP and PML-N) or individuals (PTI) play a crucial role in their electoral triumph, they all exhibit inadequate governance. Given the gradual emergence of superior political parties, the imperative remedies we require can only be provided by these three exceedingly inadequate parties, with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) being the most deficient (Murtaza, 2023).

Need for a new Charter of Democracy

Considering the evolving social and political circumstances, it is imperative to establish a fresh social agreement that is founded upon a broader consensus across political parties, social groups, and institutions. The current Charter of Democracy should be used as a starting point for discussion and development of the future iteration. The revised Charter of Democracy should include a comprehensive and well-established plan for reform that focuses on gradually but effectively transforming institutions in a sustainable manner. Currently, the accord has the support of political parties that collectively received 37% of the public vote and hold 40% of the seats in the National Assembly. The PPP and PML-N leadership have emphasized the necessity of a new Charter of Democracy (COD) that is unanimously agreed upon by all political parties. The PDM expressed the same sentiment. The Lahore Declaration of the movement places emphasis on its support for the unexecuted provisions of the COD. The opposition alliance has established a committee to revise the Code of Conduct (COD) in response to emerging concerns. Although it may be possible for the opposition parties to reach a consensus on a new Charter of Democracy, it remains doubtful whether the PTI will agree to such a charter. With only 32% of the votes in the

2018 elections, the party's uncertain future does not support the mainstream Institutional reform program in the country (Mahar, Malik, & Bakhtiar, 2021).

The current democratic structure in place is defined by a multiparty system and politically aligned factions that are rooted in specific regions. As a result, province governments have been formed that represent and reflect the interests of their respective territories. At the national level, a coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League oversees directing the central administration. The PTI-SIC coalition has established itself as a powerful opposition within the National Assembly, demonstrating the ability to cause disruption during the body's first session. Amidst a climate filled with opposition rallies, Shehbaz Sharif offered a proposed charter of reconciliation as a gesture of peace, with the goal of reducing the deep-rooted political division and creating an environment of economic and political calmness (Ali, 2024).

Political Stability and Peace

The presence of political instability in Pakistan greatly increases the likelihood of social unrest, emphasizing the necessity for a process of national reconciliation to establish stability once again. The Islamabad Policy Institute (IPI) has identified political instability as the primary challenge facing the country in its report titled 'Mapping the Policy Agenda 2024 - 2029'. The report emphasizes that resolving this critical issue is essential for implementing necessary economic reforms and attracting foreign investment. The think-tank emphasized the importance of ensuring that the process is comprehensive and goes beyond mere political maneuvering within the assembly or on the streets. Given this context, the paper proposes that the conversation should primarily involve the major parties. (Dawn , 2024)

Discussion and findings

The study discovered that the PPP has utilized different approaches to achieve political reconciliation, such as engaging in discourse, forming alliances, and actively involving the people. Nevertheless, the progress of these endeavors is frequently impeded by political animosity and external interferences.

The Charter of Democracy (COD) is an important document signed in May 2006 between the two major political parties of Pakistan namely the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). It was a reaction to the extended tendencies of Militabishment and political uncertainly which became the culture of the country. It laid the groundwork for general changes and adjustments that were made to strengthen democracy and make up for the hurts endured in the previous years.

The fresh Eighteen Constitution Amendment Bill was approved on April 19, 2010, is indicative of a solid march towards federalism and devolution. Consistently, this amendment is widely believed to stem from the Charter of Democracy and is considered as a reconciliation model. People from the different parties and stakeholders developed approval towards the amendment of the 18th amendment. This working together is typical of reconciliation and unites people's desire to follow democratic values and improve federalism. Serving as the theoretical source for the restored democracy and civil politics in Pakistan, the Charter of Democracy was followed by the practical means of change, the 18th Amendment of the Constitution. The amendment itself is a classic example of

reconciliation and therefore the political will exists to support foundational change, to create devolved power, to bolster federalism in this country. It corrected longtime grievances of centralization, improved the authority of provinces, and rebuilt the structure of the independent democracy; thus, it was the groundwork for the moderate participation in the governance of Pakistan.

This research also found that through talks, understandings, and having the PPP using different formulas of reconciliation this research identified and documented different steps made by different Pakistani political parties. These strategies are not only dictated by each party's position, but also consider the situation and the operations that each party has taken to solidify their ever-shifting state. For instance, the PPP's goals are reactive as they stem from the party's political battle against military dictatorship that resulted in the signing of the Charter of Democracy or COD, Benazir Bhutto, Asif Ali Zardari, and later Nawaz Sharif's continuation of her fight for democracy. In a similar manner, the PML-N has also sought reconciliation processes most of the time which often are shaped by its competitive relationship with the military regimes for achieving civilian control and democratic transformation. Because PTI is a comparatively fresh political actor it has relied on anti-incumbency, sovereignty, 'change' and rampant promises of non-corruption to offer itself as an option to the two-party system.

Unfortunately, there are still huge barriers that prevent the further implementation of political reconciliation in Pakistan. Such a nature is found in the politics of Pakistan where these tensions are heightened by the rivalry between political parties, all in the quest to get their agenda passed and consolidated, regardless of the damage it may cause in the long run. Also, the military interjection in politics poses another challenge to reconciliation with civilians who have little power to challenge the military since they seek to work with them.

Discussing the further potential of the study, it is possible to underline the necessity of political reconciliation for the stabilization and the democratization of Pakistan. The positive impacts of reconciliation include reducing the level of polarization; reducing instances of unconstitutional changes of government; and improving positive political culture. For example, the enactment of the 18th amendment through which Pakistan's system of governance shifted from Semi-presidential to parliamentary system, was a great achievement that could not have been done without the support of the different parties.

Policy Implications and Future Directions

The study also concludes that efforts to bring consistency of policies including for implementers as well as establishing a strong conflict resolutions department should be improved according to the difficulties realized. People's associations cannot be at loggerheads and bent on hostilities all the time; political parties must learn to cooperate. For the same reason, more structural engagement to ensure that institutions become responsible to the masses, are committed to reconciliatory processes, and are more open to describe can also be observed missing here. The above stated barriers should continue to be the focus of future research while efforts should be made for studying how these barriers can be eliminated to create a favorable environment in the political fields in Pakistan with reference to the ever-transforming political landscape in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be also stated that political reconciliation is also needed to set the ground and strengthen the process of recent democratization in the context of Pakistan. PPP and PML-N important political parties of Pakistan both managed to demonstrate that they have also

been able to balance the reconciliation process as was vice versa they also experimented with failures and strife. Thus, it is necessary to set the process and step-by-step plan for launching and building up the inclusive political participation and governance arrangements to jointly promote and maintain the sustainable political stability and democratization. Although the Charter of Democracy brought the light and the map to the existence of a truly democratic and a stable Pakistan, it will remain an empty promise and an illusion if the ruling PDM and the Opposition parties do not set aside their 'blood feud' and put the national interest before their parties' interest.

In the end, political reconciliation is crucial for ensuring the stability and fostering the democratic progress of Pakistan. The endeavors of the PPP towards reconciliation demonstrate both advancement and hindrances. Subsequent investigations should prioritize the development of tactics to surmount these obstacles and foster a more comprehensive political milieu.

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