

From Military to Civilian Rule: Political Evolution in Pakistan

Dr. Sreya Chatterjee

SACT 1, Sivanath Sastri College

Abstract: This paper examines the changing patterns of rule in Pakistan, focusing on the dynamic relationship between military and civilian governments since its independence in 1947. Pakistan's political history has been marked by frequent transitions, including military coups, democratic reforms, and periods of political instability. The study explores the key factors that have influenced these shifts in governance, such as constitutional developments, leadership struggles, economic challenges, and external pressures.

The paper also highlights the role of major political institutions and leaders in shaping the country's governance, while analysing how these changes have impacted democratic processes and public trust. By tracing the evolution of political power from military dominance to democratic governance and back, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of Pakistan's political landscape.

Ultimately, this paper aims to assess whether Pakistan is moving toward stable democratic rule or continuing a cycle of political change. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of governance challenges in developing nations and the complexities of maintaining political stability.

Keywords: Civilian Rule, Military Government, Political Challenges, Public Trust, Democratic Process

South Asia stands for Indian subcontinent and Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Afghanistan. Afghanistan acts as a buffer state between South Asia and West Asia. The region as whole is home to one fifth of humanity. As a geographical unit, South Asia is bounded in the north and north-west by the mighty Himalayan and the Hindu Kush mountains, in the south by the Arabian Sea, in the east it shares its borders with the ASEAN Region, and in the west it links up with West and Central Asia.⁽¹⁾ The whole of South Asia had been under the colonial rule either directly or indirectly. Nepal and Bhutan were the exception as they were

under patronage of the British rule. "However from the power and potential and politico-diplomatic significance India and Pakistan are the two paramount states in South Asian subcontinent."⁽²⁾

Five decades after the end of colonial rule, the states of South Asia are still faced with problems related to democratic governance, social identities, development and welfare and territorial security. The South Asian states reveal a significant amount of change since the achievement of independence. The evolving relationships between various branches of the state-the civil with the military, the executive with the legislative and judicial, the central with the regional or local- have all contributed to defining the nature and cohesion of the state entity as a whole.⁽³⁾ All the nation o South Asia followed the liberal democratic set up while constructing their state structure, several nations faltered in doing as contrary to it autocratic, extra-democratic, and anti-democratic set up came into existence. Among all the nations in South Asia the two prominent nations namely India and Pakistan, we found that democracy has survived well in India and still democracy is considered to be the most important feature in the Indian sub-continent. But the picture is quite different in Pakistan.

Pakistan is the second largest of the South Asian subcontinent, one-fourth of the size of India. Long a land of transition between the rugged steppes of Inner Asia and the plenteous plains of India, Pakistan is today a nation caught between the legacy of a glorious imperial past and the project image of an ideal theocratic future. Its goal to become a exemplary modern religious state, a truly Islamic republic, is affirmed by the name Pakistan, given by the Muslim poet Muhammad Iqbal in 1930- it means "LAND OF THE PURE".⁽⁴⁾ Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has undergone a tumultuous process of nation-

building, struggling to create both a sufficient consensus and the political institution necessary for a stable polity. The struggle to establish a Parliamentary democracy in a federal settings have been handicapped by inter-ethnic strife, social strains, a fragmented elite, praetorian rule, and the influence of external powers both regional and global. Since independence ‘**the men on horseback**’ have four times administered governments by martial law, seeking to gain legitimacy through the so called ‘civilianisation’ and ‘democratisation’ of the military regimes. The state born of partition itself suffered partition in 1971. In other words, “Pakistan’s traumatic uncertain political history exemplifies a struggle between the forces of authoritarianism and constitutionalism, a conflict between the state and the civil society at the core”.⁽⁵⁾

“Pakistan, unfortunately, is not a flowing river: it has to be only a lagoon by the very circumstances of its creation” – Nirad C. Chaudhuri⁽⁶⁾ Pakistan’s record as an independent nation-state is not a happy one. The very birth of Pakistan was based upon a fallacious theory- the ‘TWO-NATION THEORY’. The British divided the Hindus and the Muslims along religious lines. As a result Pakistan was created, but after its creation it could not come out of the dilemma whether to be an Islamic state or a Modern state. Pakistan politics is a bizarre alternation between military rulers and civilian government. The army in Pakistan has played and continues to play a vital role in shaping up the country since 1947. Pakistan was founded as a democratic country after partition, but did not last for long due to corrupt chaotic and anarchic rule of the feudal and capitalist politicians who could not formulate a proper constitution for their country.⁽⁷⁾

The colonial masters before leaving, left a liberal kind of democratic structure by taking the help of which the country can set their constitution. Pakistan inherited a state structure basing upon the 1935 Government of India Act. On 14th August 1947 Pakistan was created Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the Governor General. His trusted Prime Minister was Liaquat Ali Khan, but Jinnah had all the powers in his own hands. He wanted Pakistan to be a modern, democratic, liberal and secular state. Jinnah couldn’t survive for a long period, he paved the way for an unhealthy democratic process. By keeping all powers in his own hand, he virtually left open the prospect for an autocratic rule in Pakistan.

In 1951 the first drop of hatred in Pakistani politics was found Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated power shifted to Ghulam Muhammad who was the former bureaucrat. The West Pakistan based military had shared power with the civil bureaucracy since the mid 1950’s. The period from 1951-1958 remained uncertain there was a tussle between pro-democratic and over centralised forces. The political party leadership was increasingly sidelined by the unholy alliance between the powerful bureaucracy and the emerging military. In 1954 Ghulam Muhammad first took the historic decision, formed a new assembly to frame the Pakistani constitution. He even appointed the new Prime Minister but also nominated ministers of the cabinet and assigned them their portfolios. The function of the new assembly was reduced merely to rubber stamping his actions.

The time from 1958-1968, there was a formal military takeover by General Ayub Khan in 1958. Ayub Khan began to constitute a civilian structure of government which was formally established with the introduction of the system “BASIC DEMOCRACY”. Under this system the President was to be elected not through popular vote but indirectly through an electoral college of individuals called BASIC DEMOCRATS, who in turn had been elected by elections of the local bodies at the village level. During Ayub Khan’s regime there was a power sharing arrangement between the army and bureaucracy, with the bureaucracy being the dominant partner.⁽⁸⁾ “Ayub Khan placed high priority on economic and social progress. The government under Ayub Khan became the stimulator of economic activity through its ability to mobilise domestic and international resources, provide the proper incentives to large private investors for the purpose of industrial development and manage the economy. His tools were the civil bureaucracy, the basic democracy system, centralized planning through the central planning commission and provincial planning departments. The governments confined itself to economic growth. The participation by the people was limited, significant progress was made in terms of macro-economic growth. By harnessing the energies and skills represented both in civil and military bureaucracies as well as in the private sector, Ayub was able to design and implement successful schemes for economic growth.”⁽⁹⁾ This lasted for a decade, it began to crumble when the international environment changed

and became hostile as a result of the 1965 Indo-Pak war and Ayub Khan himself became weak physically. By 1969 opposition to Ayub Khan's continuation in office could not be controlled and he was ousted by General Mohammad Yahiya Khan. He was bent upon to destroy the demands of East Pakistan, which demanded freedom from its western part as East Pakistan wanted Bengali to be their national language but West Pakistan strongly rejected it and kept Urdu as the national language for the entire nation of Pakistan. In 1970 first General Elections took place, one had the idea that Muslim League which represented the west will win but quiet contrary happened Awami League which represented the east won the elections. The Military junta did not allow the Awami League to take over. In 1970-72 Pakistan was concerned with the question of retaining their Eastern part. Yahiya regime went in total suppression of the eastern part. But finally in 1972 they had to surrender to the demands of the eastern part and finally Bangladesh was formed. It was a great humiliation for West Pakistan, the military junta became unpopular and Yahiya Khan had to quit and transfer power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

“The Bhutto era lasted for five and a half years, during which the economy was reconstructed, the public sector was given a great deal of prominence, Pakistan's approach to the outside world was redefined on the basis of a relationship with India that no longer sought equality with it, and a new consensus was developed on constitutional issues among different political layers. It was a period of remarkable dynamism- a period during which a great deal was accomplished.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Mr. Bhutto's style of governance was a combination of the cultural attributes of populism, liberal democracy and feudal despotism. He reconstructed the constitution of 1973 and also a number of universities, autonomous industrial corporations and progressive labour laws. He galvanised mass consciousness and unleashed powerful popular forces in his early years.⁽¹¹⁾ Bhutto helped Pakistan to come out from the humiliation of 1972 and the loss of economic power. Zia-ul-haq was appointed the general of army, the bureaucracy was separated. Under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Pakistan came under civilian rule, the rights and demands of the people were taken into account. He helped to create a federal Parliamentary democratic structure for Pakistan. But it

didn't last for long, from 1975-77 he went against his own sayings and created a personalised administrative system.

This situation once again infused the military to take over, in 1977 started military rule in Pakistan. Zia-Ul-Haq came to rescue Bhutto and once again people of Pakistan came under the rule of the military. Zia-Ul-Haq regime depended primarily on its own constituency, the armed forces, which were inducted into every civilian institution. The Zia regime forged alliances with sections of the socio-political elite, including the Ulemas, religious parties and other groups. Pakistani Muslim League entered into the alliance of convenience with the military regime against the liberal and left opposition led by Pakistan People's Party. The regime was also supported by small and medium industrialists and merchants, they benefitted from the state patronage and they in turn helped in increasing the economy of the state. There were also challenges to this regimes, the strongest challenge came from Mr. Bhutto's home province Sindh where support for federal pluralism and the restoration of democracy was widespread. Adopting a policy mix of coercion and co-option, the Zia regime launched military operations against the Sindh opposition while tacit support was provided to the Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM) a party that emerged in 1986 out of the All-Pakistan Muhajir Student Organisation. Zia also attempted to gain constitutional sanction for his regime by distorting the 1973 constitution that had been suspended, and not abrogated following the military takeover. In 1984 referendum conducted by the military administration, Zia led stress on the status of elected President.⁽¹²⁾ The President was given a lot of authority and powers. Despite all constitutional safeguards the government under Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo proved to be independent. Zia dissolved the National and Provincial Assemblies and promised to have fresh elections but before that he died in an airplane crash. Zia's sudden death left Pakistan without a President, Prime Minister, National Assembly, Chief Ministers or Provincial Assemblies.

Ghulam Ishaq Khan became interim President, under him in November 1988 elections took place and Benazir Bhutto became the Prime Minister. She proclaimed for the restoration of 1973 Constitution. In

1982, Benazir Bhutto became the chairwoman of PPP democratic socialist, centre left party, making her the first woman in Pakistan to head a major political party. In 1988, she became the first woman elected to lead a Muslim state and was also Pakistan's first female Prime Minister. Benazir Bhutto drove initiatives for Pakistan's economy and national security, and she implemented socialist capitalist policies for industrial development and growth. In addition, her political philosophy and economic policies emphasized deregulation particularly of the financial sector, flexible labour markets the denationalization of state-owned corporations, and the withdrawal of subsidies to others. Benazir Bhutto's popularity waned amid recession, corruption, and high unemployment which later led to the dismissal of her government by conservative President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. In 1993, Benazir Bhutto was re-elected for a second term, she survived an attempted coup d'état in 1995, and her hard line against the trade unions and tough rhetorical opposition to her domestic political rivals and to neighbouring India earned her the nickname "Iron Lady". In 1996, the charges of corruption levelled against her led to the final dismissal of her government by President Farooq Leghari. On 16 November 1988, the first open political elections in more than a decade were held and Benazir Bhutto won major provinces of Pakistan and had the largest percentile for seats in the National Assembly- a lower house of Parliament. During her first term, Benazir Bhutto had strained relationship with the Pakistan Armed Forces. In 1988, shortly after assuming the office, Benazir Bhutto paid a visit to Siachen region, to boost the morale of the soldiers who fought the Siachen war with India. This was the first visit of any civilian leader to any military war-zone area since the country's independence in 1947. In 1988, Benazir appointed Major-General Pervez Musharraf as Director-General of the Army Directorate General for Military Operations (DGMO). She deposed all leaders of the military who had close connection with Zia-UI-Haq regime. She established a complete new pattern by replacing them with officers who were educated in Western military institutes and academies, generally the ones with more westernized democratic views. During her second term, Benazir Bhutto's relations with the Pakistan Armed Forces took a different and pro-Benazir approach, Benazir Bhutto enjoyed a strong relations with the Pakistan Armed Forces, and President who was hand-picked by

her did not questioned her authority. She hand-picked officers and promoted them based on their pro-democracy views while the puppet President gave constitutional authorization for their promotion.⁽¹³⁾ After nine years of self-exile, she returned to Pakistan on 18 October 2007, after having reached an understanding with Military President General Pervez Musharraf, by which she was granted amnesty and all corruption charges were withdrawn. Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a bombing on 27 December 2007. "Nawaz Sharif had received a convincing majority of seats in the 1997 election far more than-two-thirds necessary to revise the constitution."⁽¹⁴⁾ Sharif reverted to viceregal practices: ruling by decree, exercising centralised control over the provinces, overlooking the need for consensus with the opposition in parliament, and forcibly curbing political dissent. Sharif failed to use the newly gained powers to strengthen democratic institution and norms. Prime Minister Sharif however seemed more concerned about retaining the military goodwill than reaching political accommodation with the opposition.⁽¹⁵⁾ Pervez Musharraf is a retired four-star general who served as the 13th Chief of Army Staff and tenth President of Pakistan. Musharraf headed and led an administrative military government from October 1999 till August 2007. He ruled Pakistan as Chief Executive from 1999–2001 and as President from 2001–08. In the face of impeachment, he preferred to resign on 18 August 2008. After years of military service, he rose to prominence when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appointed him as the Chief of Army Staff in October 1998. Musharraf was the mastermind behind the controversial and internationally condemned Kargil infiltration, which derailed peace negotiations with Pakistan's long standing enemy India. After months of contentious relations with Sharif, Musharraf was brought to power through a bloodless military coup. Subsequently Nawaz Sharif was placed under a house-arrest. He was credited with the development of Pakistan's economy during the early years of his rule. He is also credited to be the first president of Pakistan who accepted Supreme Court rulings and who organized free and fair elections. The last two years of his rule were marred by controversies, including the suspension of the Supreme Court Chief Justice and the Lal Masjid siege. In February 2011, a Pakistani court issued an arrest warrant for him because of his alleged involvement in the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.⁽¹⁶⁾ As of June

2011, he lives in self-exile in London but has vowed to return for the next election. General Musharraf has depicted his coup and regime as being different from the earlier episodes of military intervention. He spoke for the need for “good governance” and government to “serve” rather than to “rule” the people.⁽¹⁷⁾ His regime faced severe challenges after the 9/11 were on hand he pretended to be helping the U.S and on the other hand supplying weapons to his allies in Afghanistan. Then on 22 March 2008, the PPP nominated Gillani for the post of Prime Minister. PPP completed consultations with coalition partners about the Prime Minister and its allies endorsed the nomination and till now Yusuf Raza Gilani is serving as the prime minister of Pakistan and Asif Ali Zardari as the President and the co-chairperson of the PPP. He strongly had the backing of the U.S.

In an interview of Tariq Ali who is an unrepentant Marxist, writer, journalist, filmmaker and political campaigner he said that the country Pakistan has gone from bad to worse. He further says that army isn't done with politics. It sees itself as the only force which is organized and disciplined enough to run the country. But every time it has, it has left the country into big mess. He further says that people in Pakistan does not want any kind of military intervention in politics. The people are very much aware that corrupt practices are preset in the army, whereas on the other hand the army if given a chance will defiantly continue to rule. According to him Ayub's dictatorship led to the breakdown of Pakistan, General Zia's dictatorship saw the country obscurantist and saw the emergence of Jehadi groups supported from above. Musharraf who started on with a promise, but then he picked a huge fight with the Judiciary.⁽¹⁸⁾ Pakistan is facing its most serious political crisis in years, with rapidly escalating conflicts between the civilian government, the military and the judiciary, against the backdrop of a faltering economy. The country was founded in 1947 as a democracy, but in times of crisis the army-Pakistan's most powerful institution has overthrown the civilian government on the grounds that the leadership had been unfit and corrupt. Rumours of another coup have been swirling around the current crisis in economy, widespread poverty, corruption and the bloody war with Islamist militant groups Pakistanis support a strong military for defence and security-related issues, but analysts say a history of failed military dictators

has sapped much of the public's confidence in the army's ability to solve Pakistan's political problems. The reigns of military leaders like Generals Ayub Khan, Zia Ul Haq, and, most recently, Pervez Musharraf, were plagued by accusations of corruption and ineffective leadership. Foreign powers, like the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, hold considerable influence over Pakistan because of economic, political and military support.

Democracy postulates certain norms for its proper functioning like certain amount of education, law and order, voters enjoying adult franchise, and certain homogeneity of race, all of which are absent in Pakistan.⁽¹⁹⁾ Pakistan from time from its creation is facing a dilemma between which type of government to have- a military government or a civilian government. “The army in Pakistan has remained one of the most powerful institutions and has on a number of occasions overthrown democratically elected government on the basis of mismanagement and corruption.”⁽²⁰⁾ “Pakistani politics are ephemeral, displaying a bewildering array of shifting allegiance and alliances. Pakistan's post-independence political history has thus been a fruitless search for stability with frequent changes of government and regime.”⁽²¹⁾ Pakistan Supreme court has failed to provide proper justice, it has openly supported the autocratic rule of the military. “The gun is on hire and so the vote in Pakistan, only its price tag is low, for the voters are by and large poor people and they have to be content with the crumbs thrown at them by their feudal lords who really rule the roost with the patronage of the army.”⁽²²⁾ The political culture is marked by so much conflict and diversity that a proper democratic structure cannot develop. Constant governments are changing but no government are stable in Pakistan. Due to the changing nature of Pakistani politics from 1947 till today, the country is not able to develop itself the people are not able to fulfil their demands. The rift between civilian and military rule plays havoc with the country's proper development and advancement. Thus, Pakistan remains a country where democracy in the proper sense of the term has never been stable. The tussle between the military and the civilian rule is very much present in Pakistan and it stands in the way of proper development of the country in the real sense of the term.

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