



RESEARCH PAPER

Politics of Reconciliation: The Pakistan People's Party and Parliamentary Political Culture in Pakistan, 2008–2018

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the approach to reconciliation of the Pakistan People Party (PPP) since 2008 to 2018 and the effects it had on parliamentary culture in terms of consensus-building, coalition governing and legislative output, and finally what it contributed to the democratic consolidation. After decades of civil-military crises and political hostilities, the PPP and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz welcomed the 2006 Charter of Democracy and the conciliatory model following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The strategy of reconciliation was designed to protect the survival of the regime, uphold electoral mandates and reconcile societal differences, which resulted in unparalleled unity on major constitutional amendments. The qualitative research design that examined parliamentary proceedings, the dynamics of coalitions, and media discourse allowed the study to conclude that the PPP strategy produced broad-based coalitions, higher levels of legislative output, and crucial reforms. Nonetheless, there have been threats since 2013 following populist demonstrations of PTI and military interference in the form of Hybrid model. Recommendations focus on the urgency of broadening reconciliation beyond elite agreements to include all democratic players.

KEYWORDS Reconciliation Politics, Parliamentary Culture, Coalition Governance, Consensus in Pakistan

Introduction

The restoration of democracy in Pakistan in 2008 has ushered in a new chapter of political reconciliation. The Pakistan People Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) wanted to go past confrontational politics to cooperation after decades of civil-military crises, truncated civilian governments and ingrained rivalries. This led to the climax when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated tragically in December 2007 after which PPP Co-Chairperson Asif Ali Zardari vowed to abandon the politics of vengeance and made reconciliation the watchword of governance (Fareed, et. al., 2019; Yaseen, et. al., 2021). This vision was similar to the *Charter of Democracy* (CoD) that Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif signed in 2006, and that committed both leaders to eschew undemocratic means of attaining power and involvements in military collusion. Therefore, the CoD also established the model of a new parliamentary culture of tolerance, power sharing, and consensus (Chawla, 2017).

Reconciliation here did not only mean being cooperative but also mutually recognizing the mandate of the other. This was a significant departure with the 1990s where both the parties used to plot with the military in overthrowing each other's governments. This shift was seen in PPP government (2008-2013) which constructed broad coalitions with regional and even erstwhile opposing political parties, whereas PML-N did not virtually engage in destabilization, thus including even the controversial resolution of the movement of judicial restoration (2009). The new *modus vivendi* enabled the PPP to fulfill its entire five years tenure- the first time in Pakistan history- and see a smooth transition of power to PML-N in 2013. This spirit was continued by the following PML-N Government (2013-2018)

which respects the terms of the rival provincial mandates, such as that of PPP in Sindh and PTI in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Why has such a reconciliation agenda been adopted, and what impact does the agenda have on how the parliament is run? In essence, this transition was anchored in the common histories of political victimization under the military rule of General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008). Bhutto and Sharif found themselves both in exile and persecuted and the two men came to the conclusion that their mutual hostility only provoked a military takeover. Her Philosophy of Reconciliation characterizes the last years of Bhutto as she was focusing on dialogue and collaboration. When she passed away, Zardari institutionalized this philosophy and encouraged unity with the help of politics of coalition and the rallying cry: Pakistan khappay ("Long Live, Pakistan"), a notion of healing during national mourning (Sangi, 2018; Jathol, et. al., 2024).

This was the time when the disagreement began to be directed more towards the use of democratic institutions, and less towards extra-parliamentary maneuvers. This progress underlines one of the stabilizing processes characterized by scholars of democratization as elite pacting: in which opposing political elites strike mutual agreements to guarantee one another against extinction and to initiate a dialogue of collaboration (Muzaffar & Choudhary, 2017). The case of Pakistan would therefore provide good lesson about how settlements led by elites can instill normalcy of democracies even in weak polities.

The paper explores the role played by the reconciliation policy of PPP between 2008 and 2018 in building parliamentary politics and democratic culture. We multi-methodologically examine parliamentary debates and voting records, committee reports, and Speaker rulings to follow cross-party agreement. We analyze manifestos and speeches of the parties to chart out competing stories of reconciliation, and make use of PILDAT and FAFEN reports to evaluate the work of institutions. The discourses in the media and the public opinion information further clarify on whether the issue of reconciliation contributed to civility within the elites and the perception of the parliament by people.

By so doing, this paper makes a contribution to the larger argument regarding what is elite political culture and norm contestation in transitional democracies. The question it poses is; did reconciliation mean institutionalization of long-term norms of collaboration or a veil to cover deep-rooted hostilities? How did it impact legislative output, governance and democratic legitimacy? And how did the advent of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), pushing the idea of reconciliation as an act of collusion (*muk muka*) challenge this political culture? The responses to these queries offer not just lessons on how to study democratization process in Pakistan, but also lessons on how to study reconciliation politics in polarized societies.

Literature Review

Reconciliation Concepts and Empirical Approaches

Reconciliation is a term with a rich but problematic history of meanings in political language. Generally, reconciliation denotes the activities of fixing the strings of any deweighed-out relationship and creating fraternity following war. Nonetheless, according to Rettberg (Ugarriza, 2016), it has turned into a blanket term applied to describe a tremendous number of peacebuilding practices and aspirations. They found at least 5 common forms of use of the concept in their extensive survey of the literature, which are: (i) the use of reconciliation as a rhetorical symbol (called into discourse without supplying any concrete definition), (ii) solution used interchangeably with peace or harmony, (iii) multi-vocal umbrella-term (recognizing the existence of varied meanings), (iv) an ultimate goal or the end-state of peace activities, and (v) a process that lacks any definite resolution.

Instead of picking one specific definition of reconciliation, these authors suggest dividing the term into dimensions and be able to reflect on the multidimensionality of the concept by dividing it into dimensions: perspective (religious, psychological, political, etc.), depth, actors, mechanisms, etc.

This means that empirical study on reconciliation in this context entails studying the variability in behavior and norms change across the elites. In Pakistan it is well to speak of reconciliation at the level of elite political society (among the leaders of the parties in parliament), but this will not necessarily trickle down to civil society or the trust that is between people. Reconciliation may progress at one level (e.g., parties collaborating at the parliamentary level) and not at another (e.g. mistrust existing among common men, or unresolved historical resentments in conflict torn areas).

Elite Political Culture and Democratic Norms in Pakistan

The second major literature source that could be used in the research is on political culture, in particular, the influence of elites and institutions on the norms of democracy. Citizens attitudes (parochial, subject and participant orientations) became pillars of democracy as identified by classic political culture theory (Almond & Verba, 1963). Nevertheless, recent literature, especially South Asian literature, shows that political parties and party leaders are engaged in transmitting and modifying political culture. Farhan (Siddiqi, 2020) is convinced that in Pakistan, the concept of political culture cannot be discussed as a mere bottom-up sum of individual attitudes but rather as an actor who introduces some values and narratives.

By the late 2000s, Siddiqi opined, both the PPP and the PML-N had arrived at an elite political culture of being pro-democracy mainly due to the influence of Charter of Democracy and the common experience of military repression. The CoD (2006) marked a shift: it, according to writers, “embodied the coming of a new elite political culture”; two notoriously estranged political rivals would not plot against each other anymore with subversive and extra-constitutional solutions.

The impact of this new knowledge was realized post 2008. According to Siddiqi, Siddiqi observes that the past 10 years in contrast to the 10 years before that, democratic politics in Pakistan was marked by governments elected to full term of office and some semblance of continuity in the political process.

Meanwhile, norm contestation is one of the elements of the evolution of political culture. New norms are not always internalized by every actor in a similar or simultaneous manner. In Pakistan, in this process, PPP and PML-N both merged, but a new party appeared whose anti-status-quo message was confronted by PTI led by Imran Khan.

Moreover, the civil- military relations play a very significant role in the elite culture in Pakistan. When speaking about parliamentary norms, one cannot but mention the fact that the military establishment is yet another powerful, non-democratic force that has its own preferences.

Norm Contestation and Media Discourse

Another last thread of literature that fits here is that of media in terms of representing and constituting political norms. Media also frequently turn into combat zone of opposing frames e.g. frames on reconciliation such as cooperation vs frames on conflict and these may strengthen or weaken reconciliation initiatives. The findings of the studies focusing on political communication indicate that a hostile discourse (personal insults, hate, name-calling) may lead to even more polarization and mistrust in governments, whereas transgressions that focus on bipartisan agreement or courteous communication may

contribute to a greater institutional legitimacy (Mutz & Reeves, 2005 on televised incivility; Gervais, 2017).

Material and Methods

In order to assess the role of the politics of reconciliation pursued by PPP in shaping political culture in parliament, this manuscript incorporates diverse types of evidence which are qualitative in nature. The underlying methodology is mixed-method and mainly qualitative-interpretive (involving a shift beyond behaviorally-oriented measures only), although it does use some quantitative measures (e.g., numbers of bills, how a particular senator votes, how often a Parliamentarian uses selected words in documents).

Results and Discussion

Parliamentary Consensus Behavior (2008–2018)

A particularly visible expression of the politics of reconciliation pursued by the PPP was the development under it of a consensus-based pattern of parliamentary business between 2008 and 2013, which has remained broadly in place since 2013. Signs of this consensus behavior are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1
Parliamentary Consensus Indicators, 2008–2018

Indicator	2008–2013 (13th NA)	2013–2018 (14th NA)
Government's tenure completed?	Yes (5 years, PPP-led coalition)	Yes (5 years, PML-N-led government)
Peaceful transfer to next elected government?	Yes (to PML-N in 2013)	Yes (to PTI-led govt in 2018)
Constitutional amendments passed	3 (18th, 19th, 20th Amendments – all unanimously passed)	1 (22nd Amendment 2016 – unanimously passed)
Total bills passed (Nat. Assembly)	135 (record high output)	52 (lower output, but many lapses due to political crisis)
% of bills passed unanimously or with opposition support	~85% (estimated; 15 bills unanimously passed in last session alone ; opposition rarely voted no on most legislation)	High for consensus issues (e.g., all parties supported the National Action Plan legislation in 2015); however, more frequent boycotts by PTI on other bills due to its partial NA boycott 2014-2015.
Major bipartisan initiatives	- 18th Amendment (2010): All parties on board, drafting committee had all parliamentary parties' reps. - NFC Award 2009: Federal and all provincial governments agreed (Punjab ceded share as reconciliation gesture). - Military Operations oversight: Resolutions passed with consensus backing army against terrorism.	- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) parliamentary committee included opposition. - 2014 Electoral Reforms Committee: included PTI, PPP, all parties (established in aftermath of PTI protest, delivered a consensus Electoral Reforms Act in 2017). - Joint stance against coup/technocrat govt rumors: PPP and PTI both supported continuity of system during 2017 crisis (despite differences).

Source: Pildat and Fafen reports (2008-2018)

Unprecedented Unanimity on Constitutional Reforms

A crowning moment in reconciliatory politics was the approval of the 18th Amendment in April 2010. According to the lawmakers, the 18th Amendment is a role model of political reconciliation in Pakistan because parties did not pursue partisan interests (PML-N conceded devolution of presidential powers, although it was nearly the turn to get the presidency, and PPP accepted the demand to change the name of NWFP to Khyber-

Pakhtunkhwa). An academic consideration also points out, passage of 18th Amendment has phenomenal input in Pakistan process of political reconciliation, which resolves the decades old imbalance of powers.

Legislative Productivity and Opposition Participation

The 13th Parliament (2008-2013) recorded one of the most legislative productivities in the history of Pakistan by passing 135 bills. More importantly, most newsworthy legislations did not pass on slim government margins, but on a bipartisan basis. This was unlike in previous parliaments where the oppositions used to seek to stall activities using means.

Coalition Governance and Inclusivity

Reconciliation is advocated by the PPP, which has formed a broad coalition government in 2008, not only involving its traditional partners (ANP, MQM) but even including the PML-N (for a few months) and, yet, even the PML-Q (in 2011, PPP brought lawmakers of the party, which had been the supporters of Musharraf).

Peaceful Transfer and Opposition Restraint

In March June 2013 hallmark of the new political culture was observed. The government that was led by the PPP ended its tenure peacefully. In May 2013, PML-N which is headed by Nawaz Sharif trounced elections. After that, the first democratic transfer of power happened to an opposition winner and was presided over by the President Zardari. Here was one of the high instances of placing principle (continuity of democratic government) over personal party advantage at the moment.

Post-2013 Continuity with Some Cracks

The government of PML-N in 2013 to 2018 still followed a consensus-seeking approach in various fronts of legislations. It (now with the begrudging support of PPP and PTI) passed the 21st Amendment (2015) to do so, setting up short-term military courts to deal with terror cases (a tough compromise all around since human rights are at issue, but consensus was achieved on national security grounds as there is a terror threat).

PTI's Partial Boycott

An additional complex in 2013-2018 was the strategy of PTI. PTI went to the National Assembly the first time in 2013 as the third-largest party. However, during the dharna period (August 2014 to early 2015) and subsequently intermittently, the PTI lawmakers boycotted parliament by not attending it at all. But behind this success, tensions and the new polarizations simmered, especially between PTI and the establishment, that will now be evident in party manifestos and media discourses.

Manifesto Language and Elite Discourse Reconciliation vs. Confrontation Cues

The political manifestos and statements by the leaders can be used as a glimpse of values and priorities that each party wanted to convey. Looking at the manifestoes of PPP, PML-N and PTI:

Table 2 Comparative Manifesto Themes (2018) and Reconciliation-related Rhetoric			
Theme/Issue	PPP Manifesto 2018 (Opposition party, incumbent 2008-13)	PML-N Manifesto 2018 (Incumbent govt 2013- 18)	PTI Manifesto 2018 (Challenger party)

Stance on Democracy and Governance	Strong emphasis on democracy as "Pakistan's lifeblood" ; explicit reference to protecting democracy from derailment. Cites Charter of Democracy as foundational, and pledges to uphold it and democratic governance. Regrets that momentum of democratic reforms (18th Amend, etc.) stalled after 2013. Criticizes "patronage model" of governance and calls for change towards public interest, reflecting introspection and renewal.	Extremely strong pro-democracy language. Opens with Jinnah's quote "Democracy is in our blood... the marrow of our bones". Slogan "Vote ko izzat do" ("honor the vote") explicitly confronts military interference. Frames 2013–18 as struggle for civilian supremacy (mentions sanctity of ballot, opposition to conspiratorial cliques). Nawaz Sharif's message recounts fight against undemocratic forces (references his ouster as unjust). Overall, PML-N manifesto is imbued with a tone of resistance to military/judicial intrusion and pride in completing term.	Minimal direct mention of "democracy" or "federalism" . Instead focuses on <i>"good governance"</i> , <i>"institutional reform"</i> , and anti-corruption. Begins with a Jinnah quote emphasizing an Islamic welfare vision over explicit democratic principles. PTI's narrative centers on rescuing Pakistan's "fractured and corrupt polity" by establishing <i>"Islamic social justice"</i> . It implicitly downplays the 18th Amendment and parliamentary norms, focusing more on the need for a strong, clean government. Indeed, PTI's manifesto omits any reference to the 18th Amendment or the word "democracy" in policy sections . This omission aligns with a view that <i>"Pakistan requires good governance... more than democracy and federalism"</i> . Democracy is not rejected, but PTI frames previous democratic regimes as failed due to corruption.
Charter of Democracy / Reconciliation	Proudly recalls PPP's role in CoD and 18th Amendment. The manifesto explicitly states commitment to CoD's ideals. Uses language of reconciliation : e.g., calls for <i>"inclusive politics"</i> , mentions working with other parties on national issues. PPP positions itself as the party that brought parties together (cites 18th Amend, NFC as joint achievements).	Also claims credit for CoD indirectly; for instance, references that PML-N and PPP together did 18th Amendment. PML-N manifesto doesn't mention "CoD" by name as much, but emphasizes <i>its own commitment to democratic continuity</i> which was essentially CoD in action. It takes a reconciliatory tone towards other parties only to an extent – mostly it focuses on <i>civil-military reconciliation</i> (bringing army under civilian rule) rather than praise of working with PPP. However, by listing achievements like FATA merger and GB reforms, it acknowledges cross-party support in those.	Unsurprisingly, no mention of CoD (which PTI was not part of). PTI positions itself as <i>outsider</i> to PPP-PML-N understanding. The manifesto implicitly criticizes PPP/PML-N "status quo parties" who engaged in power-sharing by promising a "Naya Pakistan" that breaks from that mold. It accuses traditional elites of <i>"misrule and misery"</i> that must be thrown in the "dustbin of history". There is <i>zero positive reference</i> to working with other parties; rather PTI promises accountability "irrespective of political affiliation" – a hint that it will pursue rivals for corruption. Essentially, PTI rejects the reconciliation narrative, branding it as collusion.

Federalism & Provincial Rights	<p>Very strong on provincial autonomy. PPP touts the 18th Amendment and NFC Award as signature achievements. The manifesto vows to resist any rollback of 18th Amendment, and even proposes deepening devolution (e.g., creating a new South Punjab province reflecting Seraiki rights). PPP also uniquely supports linguistic and cultural rights of smaller ethnic groups (mentions supporting Brahvi, Balti, etc.) – a pluralistic vision. In essence, PPP embraces a consociational vision, accommodating diversity, which is part of its reconciliation ethos to keep disparate groups content.</p>	<p>PML-N also supports federalism, but frames it as something <i>it delivered</i> via CCI (Council of Common Interests) meetings and FATA merger. However, its 2018 manifesto has a paradox: on one hand it defends 18th Amendment, on the other, it centralized some powers in GB Order causing protests. PML-N did not push for new provinces like South Punjab in its tenure (though in campaign Nawaz flirted with the idea). Overall, PML-N is pro-devolution in principle but emphasizes national integration under a strong center (hence its slogan also includes “khidmat – service – to earn vote”, focusing on central performance).</p>	<p>Centralist tendency: PTI’s manifesto virtually ignores provincial autonomy; it highlights <i>local government</i> reform instead. Analysts noted PTI is comfortable with a strong central government directing affairs, which is “<i>in consonance with Pakistan’s political culture that prefers centralisation...as opposed to provincial autonomy</i>”. <i>PTI did support a South Punjab province*</i>, but notably “on administrative, not ethnic, lines”, carefully avoiding endorsing the Seraiki identity argument – reflecting a mindset that ethnic assertions are suspect for national integration. PTI’s omission of “federalism” and focus on unitary solutions indicates it was less in tune with the reconciliatory approach that valued accommodation of Pakistan’s ethno-regional diversity.</p>
Inter-party Tone & Incivility	<p>PPP’s manifesto tone toward opponents is measured. It critiques the “outgoing government” (PML-N) for policy failures like debt accumulation, but it does not use slurs or question PML-N’s legitimacy. In fact, by upholding CoD, PPP implicitly maintains respect for PML-N as a partner in system preservation. PPP also condemns the “politics of hatred” in society and calls for unity against extremism. Overall tone: constructive opposition.</p>	<p>PML-N’s manifesto, given it was under siege (with Nawaz ousted), was combative toward the establishment but still relatively civil toward other parties (except PTI by implication). It doesn’t directly abuse PTI; rather it contrasts PTI’s style (dharnas) with its own governance. There is some implicit rebuke of PPP’s prior government in mentioning how PML-N had to fix energy crises left by predecessors, but PML-N largely saved its fire for the “cabal” interfering in democracy. Tone: defiant against undemocratic forces, but not overtly hostile to PPP – indeed, PPP and PML-N were aligning in 2018 as later events showed.</p>	<p>PTI’s tone is populist and aggressive. The manifesto itself uses strong words, e.g. it pledges to end the “legacy of misrule and misery” of a “small elite”. Imran’s public rhetoric (though not fully detailed in the written manifesto) around that time was laced with personal attacks (calling opponents thieves, etc.). The written text focuses on reforms but the context it sets is that past rulers (PPP/PML-N) ruined the country. It promises a corruption crackdown explicitly targeting those in power before. Thus, tone: confrontational and anti-establishment (where “establishment” = established parties). PTI presents itself as a clean break, reflecting zero interest in reconciling with PPP/PML-N whom it sees as corrupt status quo.</p>

From the above comparison and the content of manifestos, a few key insights emerge:

PPP’s Self-Image as Reconciler

The PPP (in opposition, as of 2018) strongly held on to the idea that the party was the defender of democracy and reconciliation. Its manifesto virtually amounts to a

lamentation over the opportunities lost with the past five years in which, as PPP conceives, the consensus of 2008-2013 had stopped. It clearly states that problems were created due to the recurrent efforts to derail democracy.

PML-N's Embrace of Democratic Norms (and Some Reconciliation)

PML-N was arguably being louder than PPP by 2018 concerning the sanctity of democracy, though this was largely driven by the sense that Nawaz Sharif was victimized by violations of it by non-democratic forces. The manifesto of PML-N drummed home the slogan of "respect the vote" and civil supremacy.

PTI's Counter-Narrative

The rhetoric of PTI was polar opposite. Quite contrary to hailing a decade of democratic rule, to a large extent, Imran Khan used to scorn at the democratic rule saying "they say it is a democratic rule, to me it is a kleptocracy".

Shared and Divergent Values

Interestingly, all of the parties were converging rhetorically on some issues of norm. As an example, fight against terrorism and extremism all three manifestos embrace pluralism and harmony among the religions.

Evolution over Time

It can be mentioned that PPP and PML-N did not always move hand-in-hand in love during the decade, there was tension with the situation especially when fell in 2013. PPP at certain instances criticized PML-N sternly on areas such as managing protests or governing failures, and conversely PML-N accused PPP of past corruption (particularly when Asif Zardari would be implicated in instances).

The manifesto and party rhetoric discourse analysis demonstrates that two different political cultures in Pakistan during the time period of 2008-2018 were competing:

1. *A Reconciliatory, Elite, Consensual Culture*, embraced by PPP and PML-N, which privileged the notion of democratic continuity, toleration of diversity, inclusion of the provinces (18th amendment as its keystone).

2. *Populism-Confrontational Culture* represented by PTI (and implicitly backed, at least by parts of the establishment and certain elements of the society (which saw a norm of the established parties as a self-servicing cartel).

Media Discourse Cooperation vs. Incivility Frames in Major Political Events

The Pakistani media of 2008-2018 largely tended to express the segregations in its political culture and swing between praising political collaboration and increasing rudeness and enmity. Some of the most important episodes during which media framing played a decisive role are outlined in our content analysis:

2008 Transition and Coalition Formation

When the PPP-led coalition government was first formed with PML-N cooperation, it was welcomed in the press generally with approval. In March 2008, the editorials of Dawn made reference to a new beginning and political leaders are praised to have displayed maturity and unity following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

Charter of Democracy References

The Charter of Democracy was frequently referred to during the decade. Positive frames: when PPP and PML-N worked together (as in passing an amendment or fighting off a coup rumor), the commentators would state that this was per the Charter of Democracy—a good omen. Negative frames: each time it was seen to be flouted by one of them (e.g. if PPP took PML-Q turncoats into its ranks, it would be criticised as going against CoD). On the whole, CoD became quasi-religious in political discourse where it was regarded as the foundation of the democratic change. This implies that the normative reconciliation ideal was an ideal that became acceptable and worthy in mainstream discourse though not necessarily followed.

Frames around 2014 Crisis

The attention that the PTI/PAT dharna gained in the media in 2014 was sharply divided into two frames. Most media (particularly those in English and certain liberal Urdu dailies) focused on unity of all parliamentary parties (except protesters) in order to save the system. This kind of framing reaped its own cynicism, part of the citizenry learned to think not of the unity of parliament in 2014 as saving Democracy but upholding a mutual monopoly.

Panama Papers and 2017

Similar lines were followed when it came to discourse around the case of corruption involving Nawaz Sharif and his subsequent disqualification (2016-17). PPP was at crossroads: it was politically advantageous to it that Nawaz was in trouble; yet it did not want to go loudly in the cause of judiciary since, Zardari and others were also being dealt with in cases. PPP openly put up a platform of due process.

Language and Personal Attacks

The specification of incivility by the qualitative patterns can be obtained through media transcripts. Imran Khan of PTI employed un-Parliamentary epithets on regular basis in mass rallies (addressing opponents as daku, chor, godfather referring to The Godfather to Nawaz since Panama etc.). These were being sources of news that were not significantly filtered.

Public Perception and Media Influence

The media war of frames had consequences. A significant number of Pakistanis still had doubts about politicians, which can be, perhaps, supported by the fact that they were always reported in the media when they were involved in corruption scandals.

Discussion

The above empirical evidence shows that the politics of reconciliation advanced by the PPP (and the same phenomenon was reciprocated by the PML-N) had marked impacts on the parliamentary political culture of Pakistan.

Democratic Consolidation via Elite Pacts

Among the most obvious legacies of the era of reconciliation was the strengthening of a continuous democratic process. This was the first instance when back-to-back elected governments have survived and transferred power in Pakistan with full power. It is a traditional sign of democratic consolidation, that is, the concept that democracy turns into

the sole game in town. This PPP-PML-N elite accord embodied in the Charter of Democracy was a guarantee against undemocratic nuisance.

Norm Internalization vs. Instrumentalism

Nonetheless, was this conduct essentially normative or only practical? It may be said that a shared threat motivation (Musharraf who was the shadow of the army at that time) pushed PPP and PML-N towards each other. As soon as that threat transformed (e.g., in 2017 when Nawaz saw that he was being overthrown by judiciary and some generals), the unity fractured with PPP failing to rally behind Nawaz in his disobedience. In the same manner, after the rise of PTI threatened the political hegemony of both PML-N and PPP, it was accommodating to both to re-join hands (against the post-2018 rule).

Exclusion of PTI and Norm Contestation

The inclusiveness of this consolidated culture was its major weakness. Since it had not signed CoD and was, in fact, created as a reaction to the tainted administration of PPP/PML-N, PTI proved to be an attraction to people disillusioned with conventional politics. The emergence of PTI brought a strong out-party which was not a seller in the reconciliation norm. Indeed, PTI viewed the PPP-PML-N lulling as a dysfunctional system (in their perception a veiled agreement to turn in turn and rob). This gave rise to a similar political tradition that celebrated confrontation as a polity purification style.

Impact on Governance and Policy

The other point of view is whether reconciliation politics brought in improved governance or a mere political tranquility. Other consensus reforms like the 18th Amendment did help the institutional structures (e.g. a more independent election commission, devolution of more decisions to provinces). Other critics assert that besides these structural corrects, the tenure of PPP had a governance problem (critical energy crisis, corruption allegations) and even the tenure of PML-N did not fare well (Muzaffar, et. al., 2024).

Role of the Military and Judiciary

The discussion should recognize that although PPP and PML-N had claimed to agree not to involve the military, the military had never been neutral. It also played behind the scenes (e.g. memo gate scandal 2011 was arguably an attempt by the military to embarrass the PPP, and in 2014 many say members of the military actively lurked on the side of Imran during his protest to weaken Nawaz).

Public Attitudes and Future Outlook

Was public political culture transformed during this decade of reconciliation? Superficially, levels of the cynicism towards the state were still high, and the anti-establishment, charismatic narrative established itself among the significant portions (especially the urban young people with the PTI). Nevertheless, it can be said that there was increased bonding of the Pakistani people at large to the concept of democracy.

Conclusion

Politics of reconciliation involving the PPP (2008-2018) offered a stronger democracy in Pakistan because it transformed the interaction among political elites in the country in marked ways: no longer conspiring against one another but maneuvering to excel within a set of established rules. It presented the strength of elite agency in norm-building and proved that even a polity with a tradition of coups and confrontations can turn around

when leaders opt to cooperate rather than to fight. This happened at the same time when the situation in Pakistan provided a warning that such improvements were easily reversed, unless they were done with very wide inclusion as well as satisfy the concerns of the population the result could be contestable by the multitude of the people. The politics of reconciliation thus needs to be ever-changing and expanding: this should eventually not only involve parties numbering more than two, but all democratic actors, and not only parliaments, but the whole society. Only or so can a genuinely healthy parliamentary political culture, in which civility is combined with accountability, unity with diversity, be brought to flower.

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