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Title The Process of Democratization and Role of Opposition Parties in Pakistan (2013-2018)

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The Process of Democratization and Role of Opposition Parties in Pakistan (2013-2018)

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Abstract

Pakistan, after its creation, has witnessed many hurdles in establishment of democracy. Although the opposition parties tried their level best to strengthen democracy but the hybrid democratic rule and direct military rule has hampered the process of democratization in the country. It is evident that the military rule in Pakistan is driven by political motives i.e., to seize political power and disrupt political development. Significantly, democracy faced a blow by the unconstitutional and undemocratic actions of the non-political forces for political control. Despite all these challenges the opposition has had its crucial role in the restoration of the democracy. It's their effort which has prevented the complete elimination and subversion of democracy in Pakistan. The democratic transition in Pakistan took place in 2008 election resulting in a peaceful transition of power to the elected representative. This situation paved the way for a better and more reliable democratic system in the country. It was for the first time that the opposition and government emerged on the same page. Consensus politics between the two major political parties feared the deep state, which in return disturbed their partnership by backing a third political party and religious groups and judiciary as non-political oppositions. The paper examines the role of opposition parties in the democratization process in the said particular period in a chronological way and highlighting the constructive and destructive approach of the two important entities inside and outside the parliament.

Key Word: National Assembly, Political Leaders, General Elections 2013 and 2018, APS episode, Opposition Solidarity

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Introduction

The 11th general election in May 2013 ensured peaceful shift of political power from one government to another. It gave vent to the idea that Pakistan is determined and committed to turning back to democracy. Moreover, these elections show the support of democracy by Pakistani in millions against the undemocratic forces and element which Pakistani political history has witnessed and experienced. (Dawn, A quick peek at general elections in Pakistan, 2013). Despite the serious attempts made by militant and extremist groups for disrupting election the 55% turnout of people for voting favorite political parties is an evidence of people driven to democracy. According to ECP 46 million people had exercise their right to vote in 2013 election. This number of people participating in voting is indeed a glorious victory for democracy in Pakistan (Mirza, 2013).

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz had swept the elections in the Centre, which won one hundred and ninety seats in the total of three hundred and forty-two seats for the lower house, the National Assembly of Pakistan. Mian Nawaz Sharif, the party head, was elected Prime Minister of Pakistan for the third time. Furthermore, the elections resulted in the Pakistan People Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) becoming the second and third biggest parties consecutively. On June 1, 2018, the formation of a federal government by the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) ensured the fair transition of political power from one elected government to the next in the country. In Punjab, PML-N secured the maximum number of seats for the provincial assembly, while the PPP swept the provincial election in Sindh. Both PML-N and PPP formed their provincial governments in Punjab and Sindh. In KP, the PTI received the most seats in the provincial election and formed a coalition government with other political parties (Haider K. , 2020).

Political Transition and Challenges Ahead

The impact of the 11th general election of 2013 was twofold. On the one hand it paved the way for the continuity of the democratic principles and on the other hand it sat the stage for future events of national significance including presidential election, the retirement of the COAS and Chief Justice of Supreme Court. There were challenges of serious concern: lack of women access to casting vote, the presence of militants and extremist groups in the peripheries, the weak role of ECP, the peaceful conduct of elections and the shift of power to the elected government shows improvement of democratic culture in Pakistan.

Rigging Allegations in the Elections

Though the elections were peacefully conducted yet there were rigging allegation against the PML N by the chairperson of PTI. Consequently, Imran Khan demanded the formation of inquiry commission to look into the matter. In addition, Imran Khan came up with strong evidence against the rigging which, according to him, were conspired by Najam Shethi, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, the then caretaker chief minister of Punjab and the ex-chief justice of supreme court to facilitate Nawaz Sharif for winning general elections of 2013. Furthermore, the returning officer were also considered playing suspicious in favoring and facilitating PMLN (ULLAH, 2020)

At the outset, Imran Khan demanded the federal government and state authorities for the initiation of a proper inquiry and investigation into the four alleged constituencies but government intended delay compelled him to go for protest. He raised question in front of the protester about the conspirer of the rigging in election against PTI. He had continuously persuaded the authorities to look into the rigging mantra in just four constituencies but his request was ignored. Moreover, PTI also issued a white paper that brought into light all the major evidence of rigging in the general elections of 2013. Imran Khan said that the federal government as well as supreme court proved failure in the issue of rigging (Khan, Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2023).

The PML-N-led federal government subsequently rejected PTI allegations of rigging and declared them baseless and illogical. As a result, PTI, being the third largest opposition party in the parliament, resigned from the national assembly and started a long March at Lahore, which later on turned into Azadi March reaching at the state capital Islamabad. This march was categorically declared as against the planned rigging. The march started from Zaman Park in Lahore, the residence of the chairman. Slowly and gradually the multitude of people joined the march while passing through different regions of Punjab. The CM of KP, Pervez Khatak gathered a huge number of people to move to Islamabad for Azadi march. It is ironical that PTI mustered its muscles after fourteen months of the general elections. Initially the march was launched against rigging but later on other issues of social injustice, corruption and lack of accountability were also included in the demands list (Hassan, Refocusing on Agitational Politics of Pakistan, 1977-2017: Causes and Consequences, 2022, p. 156).

Pakistan Tehreek Insaf Protest Marches against the Alleged Rigging in the Elections 2013

The chairman announced the continuity of the march till his demands were fulfilled: the resignation of the PM and the announcement of fresh elections.

According to Khan as the government is the result of the rigging so the PM has no right to rule the country morally and constitutionally. Moreover, the institutions and individuals involved in this fraud of rigging were demanded to be brought in front of court for justice and accountability (Hassan, *Agitational Politics in Pakistan: A Case Study of the PTI's Dharna 2014, 2022*). Both the government and opposition parties in the parliament unitedly denounced Pakistan Tehreek Insaf PTI demands. The opposition parties advised the then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, to allow the PTI protest in the federal capital, Islamabad. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, after consulting the opposition parties in the Parliament House, had straight-forwardly rejected PTI allegations of rigging and consequently rejected the demand of resignation and fresh election (AAP, 2014).

On August 16, 2014, Imran Khan warned the federal government that their sit in is not planned for a long period of time as the people are fully charged and if failed to control the protester he might not to be blamed for any mishaps in the country. Their demand is for the restoration of democracy and if the authorities don't give heed to their constitutional and fundamental demand then the protester can cross any red line in this regard. PM clarified the heavy mandate in his favor and rejected surrendering to one party unconstitutional demand. PTI put all their demands before the federal government. Moreover, the party demanded the federal government to immediately dissolve the federal and all the provincial assemblies and announce a fresh election. In addition, a neutral and impartial interim government to ensure free and transparent elections in the country was also demanded (Hassan, *Agitational Politics in Pakistan: A Case Study of the PTI's Dharna 2014, 2022*).

Tahir-Ul-Qadri Politics of Agitation

Allama Tahir-Ul-Qadri is one of the most famous vocal religious and political scholars and leaders in Pakistan. He is the acknowledged head of the religious and political Awami Tehreek movement in Pakistan. He leads the Minhaj-ul-Quran institution. Though it's a religious institution yet it revolves around political and social activities too. Allama Tahir-ul-Qadri permanently lives in Canada but his visits to Pakistan are few and far between, he interacts with his followers through live broadcasting (Boone, 2014). He has published a huge stock and his published materials has many readers in various countries. The financial assistance comes mostly by his followers.

He joined PTI protest in Islamabad. The reason of his participation is many fold. The most important was the incident of Model Town where his fourteen supporters were killed. The revolutionary March or Inqilab March, started from

Lahore to Islamabad on August 15, 2014, by him. He publicly announced that the Inqilab March would spread throughout the country and an open participation was encouraged irrespective of sect and ethnicity as it was against injustices of the corrupt and dynastic rulers. The timing of Allama Tahir ul Qadri and the PTI chairman came out at the same time (Hussain D. , 2016). He demanded the formation of joint investigation team to inquire and investigate the incident of Model Town. Furthermore, the immediate arrest of the CM of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif, and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was also demanded. He was supported by none except PTI. Furthermore, he announced that his march would identify and expose the corrupt rulers of the country. He repeatedly claimed that the PML-N government headed by Mian Nawaz Sharif is illegitimate and corrupt, and it is essential to end his rule in the country (Jan, 2014).

The Inqilab march was started from the Party Headquarters, Minhaj Ul Quran, located in Lahore, the capital city of Punjab Province. It then moved to Islamabad. Allama Tahir Ul Qadri warned the government that the march and the sit-in will continue unless and until his demands are not accepted by the authorities. He also demanded the resignation of PM and the installation of the national government consisting of trustworthy government officials, technocrats and politicians. He announced that the march is constitutional right of them to peacefully pressurize the government to meet their legal demands.

He also announced the enforcement of the first forty articles of the constitution including all fundamental rights of the citizen: the right to life, protection, food, shelter, health, etc without discrimination. As the federal government fails to win the trust of the people and to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities, it has not right to rule the country. He declared the government as illegitimate, immoral, unconstitutional. He urged his supporter to continue the march until bringing all the culprits to justice and ensure peaceful revolution.

Government and Opposition Parties Unanimity against Undemocratic Forces

Both the ruling and opposition parties in the parliament unitedly and unanimously denounced the undemocratic efforts of the PTI and PAT, which wanted to overthrow the elected government that had a clear people mandate. The sovereignty of the parliament got a glorious victory in the country. In this regard, the Pakistan People Party (PPP) parliamentarian and opposition leader in the National Assembly, Syed Khurshid Shah, categorically told the parliament that his party strictly believes in the democratic order in the country and that will be maintained in any form. His party will never surrender to the anti-democratic forces. The democratic and constitutional issues will be settled and resolved in

the parliament under the proper guidance of the Constitution of Pakistan. No one has the right to pressurize the elected government and compel it to resign. Furthermore, he said that his party respects the people's mandate and will not support or favor the suspension, overthrow, or conduct of a fresh election of the PML-N government headed by the elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (Ahmad, 2014).

The head of the Pashtoon Khwa Mili Awami Party (PKMAP), Mahmood Khan Achakzai, also agreed with the PPP stance in favor of democracy. Moreover, he said that Pakistan's Tehreek Insaf PTI has strong backing from the undemocratic forces and its dharnas, protests, and marches are supported by hidden hands. And now its time that all the opposition and ruling parties should join hands to stand in this difficult situation. Aftab Khan Sherpao also categorically denounced Pakistan Tehreek Insaf PTI demands. Jamaat-I-Islami tried to mediate the political tension between the federal government and the opposition party PTI by bringing them to the negotiation table. The party delegation met Imran Khan, in order to convince him to peacefully de-escalate the political deadlock in the country. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif welcomed Jamaat-i-Islami efforts and assured them of his full support to continue the democratic efforts. The MQM head, Altaf Hussain, also ensured his full support for the government (ULLAH, 2020, p. 79).

The demands of the PTI and PAT were denounced by The Provincial Secretary of the Awami National Party, ANP Mian Iftikhar Hussain, ensuring full support to the federal government and The Jamiat Ulema e Islam JUI, led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Maulana Fazlur Rehman saw this union of ruling and opposition party as a good sign of protecting democracy, constitution and parliament against undemocratic forces. He straight-forwardly denounced the PTI unconstitutional and undemocratic demands and ensured the government's full support and favor (ULLAH, 2020, p. 80).

The parliamentarians denounced these marches and dharnas enforcing unconstitutional and undemocratic program. The opposition requested the government to open dialogue with the protestors and also take steps to ensure its' writ against those violating the law of the country. The parliament made it clear that PTI and PAT were not allowed to use force and intimidation to meet their demands as every government has the right to complete its five-year tenure. The opposition showed their full support to the government for the sake of democracy and supremacy of the parliament. They clarified that everyone has the right to demonstrate and protest but not at the expense of disrupting the political and democratic order.

The unparalleled unity among the ruling and opposition parties ensured the protection of the supremacy of the parliament and the constitution which obstructed the threats emanating from the PTI and PAT undemocratic exercises (Ahmad, 2014). Finally, after the tragic incident of (APS) on December 16, 2014 in Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PTI chairman Imran Khan announced the end of his party *Dharna* that continued for 126-days in the federal capital Islamabad. PPP as opposition party and PML-N, JUI (F) and Pk-MAP of Mahmood Khan Achakzai from government side attributed the *dharna* politics of destabilization with hidden hands suggesting the interference from the establishment. Throughout these four months the country (Zaman, 2014).

The PTI and PAT 126 days sit-in have completely paralyzed life and function of the government machinery in country in general and in capital territory and Rawalpindi in particular. Historically in Pakistan opposition considers its "sole responsibility to topple down the government by hook or by crook. The parliament was disgraced as PTI workers attacked on the parliament. There was a chance of coup once again for military and Imran Khan regularly gesturing the raise of finger of third umpire mean for the coming of hidden forces, but political parties did not make it possible by uniting against them (ULLAH, 2020).

The APS Massacre: Changing the Entire Political Landscape of Pakistan

On December 16, 2014, the militant faction, TTP attacked the heavily fortified Army Public School (APS), located in the cantonment area in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The terrorists brutally killed 141 innocent school students and teachers. The inhuman attack had received massive condemnation, both on a national and international level. Immediately after the terrorist attack, almost all segments of society rushed to various communication forums, such as electronics, print, and social media, to express unconditional solidarity with the innocent students and teachers martyred by the terrorists. The brutal APS episode transformed the entire political and security landscape, which determined and united all the national stakeholders against militancy and insurgency in the country (Salma Kalim, 2018).

In response the Army Public School massacre in Peshawar, the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, immediately called a Multi-Party Conference (MPC) in Peshawar. Taking all the political differences aside he invited all the stakeholder including PTI to join hands against terrorism and extremism threatening the state. Moreover, Information Minister Pervez Rashid had reaffirmed and repeated the Prime Minister's commitment and determination against the terrorist and extremist factions in the country (Dawn, 2014).

Opposition Solidarity with the Government

A PTI spokesperson announced Imran Khan's affirmation of attending the multi parties conference and the statement was given in presence of Shah Mahmood Qureshi and CM of KP Pervez Khatak. A meeting of parliamentary committee was called by PTI to review and revisit the security situation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where his party was in power. The parliamentary committee of the PTI had ensured its full support for the federal government, despite its serious political differences with them (Raza, 2014).

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairperson, Asif Ali Zardari vehemently condemned the brutal terrorist assault on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar. Moreover, he said that it is the most inhuman and barbaric act in the history of Pakistan. He immediately announced three days of mourning in Sindh, showing solidarity with the innocent martyrs of the army public school in Peshawar. Syed Khurshid Shah, the then opposition leader in the national assembly stated that the terrorist groups involved in the Army Public School massacre must be given severe and exemplary punishment. The killers of innocent school students and teachers have no right of mercy, and they must be made liable for their brutal and inhuman act. Furthermore, he said that our prior responsibility is to utilize every single forum to pressurize the government to root out terrorism and extremism once and for all in the country. Such brutal terrorist acts had no precedents in Pakistan's history, and we will never tolerate such inhuman acts in the future (Raza, 2014).

The then CM of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif stated that terrorism is certainly the biggest menace in the country and needed a united response and efforts to be countered and eliminated. He emphasized national unity among all the state stakeholders. He added that the need of the hour is that all the political stakeholders forget their political and ideological differences and must come together to win the war against terrorism and extremism. Moreover, (ANP) head Asfandyar Wali Khan argued that unlike in the past, this time, the political parties must show practical strength and commitment to root out the menace of terrorism and extremism in the country. The solution lies in practical solidarity against the menace of terrorism (Qayyum, 2015). After the tragic APS incident, on December 17, 2014, PTI chairman Imran Khan announced the end of his party 126-days long dharna in the state's federal capital, Islamabad. (Zaman, 2014). There were certain measures taken after the APS incident in the shape of National Action Plan.

Twenty First Amendment Bill

This bill was about the establishment of special military courts for the

prosecution of terrorist for the period of two years. The bill was brought in line with the brutal attack of terrorist on Army Public School on 16 December 2014. The Federal Information Minister Pervez Rasheed presented the said amendment bill in the lower house earning majority votes from both sides. However, members from JUI (F), JI and PTI did not take part in voting process. Khursheed Shah, the leader of opposition in the NA told the house that though PPP was against the creation of military courts in the past, but the menace of terrorism and extremism on highest point, therefore PPP is going to support the bill for the best interest of people. The PPP and other opposition parties were ensured by the ruling party that such courts will not be used against common people except terrorists. Resultantly it was passed from Senate also after some positive debates on it (Islam, 2018).

Senate Election 2015

On March 5, 2015, a total of 84 candidates contested for 33 general seats from the provinces, the federally administered tribal areas, and the federal capital, 22 for eight seats reserved for women from the provinces and the federal capital, and 18 for eight seats reserved for technocrats, including ulema. Eight candidates contested for two seats reserved for minorities, one each from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. In Punjab, the ruling party, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, had won the most seats in the 2015 Senate elections. The party won all 11 seats in Punjab province for the upper house of parliament. Moreover, in the federal capital, Islamabad, the party stood victorious by winning the general seat and the seat reserved for women.

Polls for Senate in Provincial Assemblies

In the provincial assembly of Sindh, (PPP) swept the Senate elections and won five seats in the upper house of parliament. The Sindh total 11 seats for the Senate in 2015, PPP won seven seats, followed by MQM, which secured four seats for the Senate. Regarding the Senate polls in the Sindh assembly, PTI claimed that four members of the party did not take part in the Senate elections in the province (Rizvi, 2015). In the province of Balochistan, the PML-N candidate won a general seat in the Senate elections. Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party and PML-N candidates stood victorious on the seats reserved for women in the Balochistan provincial assembly. Balochistan National Party's (BNP) candidate Ashok Kumar, declared victorious on the reserved seat for minorities. Moreover, Usman Kakkar member of PK MAP also stood victorious on the senator seat from the provincial assembly of Balochistan. JUI-F candidate Maulana Ghafoor Haidari and BNP backed candidate Dr. Jahanzaib Jamal Dini declared victorious in the Senate Polls. Moreover, independent candidate Yousuf Badini also secured

a seat in the senate elections from the provincial assembly. Dr. Jahanzaib Jamal Dini, also secured his entry into the upper house of parliament (Fahad Chaudhry, 2015).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PTI secured the maximum number of seats for the senate. PTI and JI being an alliance partner in the province won seven seats for the upper house, Senate. PML-N secured two seats. The other political parties, including JUI-F, ANP and PPP only managed one seat each for the upper house of parliament from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial assembly. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ANP and PTI candidates stood victorious on the seats reserved for women. On the seats reserved for technocrats, Noman Wazir from PTI and Barrister Jawed Abbasi from PML-N were declared victorious. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, John Kenneth Williams won the seat in the senate reserved for minorities (Fahad Chaudhry, 2015).

Rigging Allegations

Senate elections conducted in March 2015 received serious objection from PPP, a major opposition party in the parliament. The PPP Parliamentarian and the then opposition leader in NA argued that the elections were fixed match between PTI and PML-N. Instead of telling the truth to the people both parties are involved in blame game of rigging and irregularities against each other. While talking to media persons outside the Parliament House, the opposition leader criticized the controversial Presidential Ordinance, issued just a day before the Senate elections. He argued that it had withdrawn the right of the parliamentarians from the Ex-Tribal Region to cast their votes in the Senate Polls. Moreover, he clarified that the PML-N-led federal government's midnight coup in the form of a Presidential Ordinance had made the Senate elections controversial and fraudulent (Manan, 2015).

Syed Khurshid Shah, also criticized the PTI coalition government in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa for allowing massive irregularities in the elections for the Senate. He said that the PTI had directed its MPs in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly to show their stamped votes to the party high command before casting them in the elections. He said that PTI's act in the senate elections in the KP assembly were a blatant violation of the Election Commission of Pakistan's rules and regulations. In the province of Punjab, Pakistan People Party Senate candidate Nadeem Afzal Chan also raised a serious objection to rigging over the ruling party PML-N. He complained that Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz had illicitly and illegally favored their party candidates for securing maximum seats for the Senate in the Punjab provincial assembly (Manan, 2015).

Jamiat Ulema-I-Islam-Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F), alleged PTI for rigging in the

Senate elections in the province of KP by taking ballot papers out of the provincial assembly premises, which is a sheer violation of the prescribed rules and principles of the Election Commission of Pakistan. JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman stated that it was the most controversial Senate election ever in the history of Pakistan. PML-N accused PPP Sindh government record rigging in the provincial assembly for the Senate elections. The party also suspected the disqualification of PML-F MPA Jam Madad Ali by an election tribunal just one day before election, and the declaration of Asghar Ali Juenjo, the PPP candidate for the senate seat, a winner. This was a fixed game that deprived the opposition parties of the numerical strength to elect one senator. So here, the blame game politics, of the political parties have seen at large and as usual. It also indicated that majority in Senate, nomination of candidate by any political party is not practiced through merit but through his/her status of wealth. Resultantly, horse trading/rigging chances also increased.

The Allegations of Opposition and Government Response

PML-N government senior minister Khawaja Saad Rafique rejected all the allegation and called them baseless. He argued that PPP the main opposition party has made the election controversial. He further highlighted the proposed plan of party for the 22nd constitutional amendment to stop horse trading and other illicit practices in the senate polls but the move was opposed by the Pakistan People Party (PPP) and Jumiat Ulema e Islam (JUI-F) leadership. While defending the presidential order, Khawaja Saad Rafique said that for the said purpose the presidential issue is essential to block people entering senate through material strength and resources. He clarified the complaints about the ex-FATA members and said that out of the 11 MNAs from the Ex-Tribal Region, some six members had formed a separate group and finalized a deal with four ex-FATA candidates for the senate elections. This illicit bargaining made the rest of the members of the ex-tribal region irrelevant. He said that the Presidential Order smashed that clique (Fahad Chaudhry, 2015).

Parliament Calls for Neutrality in Yemen Conflict

Immediately after the outbreak of the Yemen crisis, the then President of Pakistan, Mamnoon Hussain, summoned a joint session of the Parliament on April 6, 2015, to discuss the vulnerable security situation in the Middle East. The decision was made after a high-level meeting headed by Mian Nawaz Sharif at the PM's house. The meeting was attended by both the civil and military high commands, where they discussed the prevailing security tension between the Saudi-led coalition and Iran over the Yemen conflict and its possible impact on Pakistan. The meeting announced that Pakistan condemned and criticized the

undemocratic role of the non-state actors, which unconstitutionally overthrew the elected government in Yemen. Moreover, it stressed all the conflicting parties to resolve the conflict through peaceful means so as to avoid a direct conflict among the states. The official also added that Pakistan's national interest will remain the guiding principle of the country's policy both in times of war and peace. It was added that any threat to Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity, especially Harmain Sharifan, will receive a quick and strong response from Pakistan (Haider M. , 2015).

Parliament Passed Joint Resolution about Yemen Crisis

The Yemen crisis had emerged and intensified tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The parliament of Pakistan passed a resolution on 10th April 2015 ensuring Pakistan's neutrality in the situation. Moreover, Pakistan will play a proactive strategic and diplomatic role not military role in subsiding the crisis peacefully. Pakistan's also stated the readiness of the country in case of Saudi Arabia territorial integrity is at stake. Pakistan had offered good offices to both Saudi Arabia and Iran for reducing the security tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran triggered by the Yemen conflict (Faisal Mahmood, 2015).

Pakistan advised both countries as well as the regional states to curb the situation to save the region from the possible curse of war. In addition, the proper solution lies in peaceful talk rather showing the muscles. The situation if not tackled will lead to sectarian war which would provoke sectarianism in other regions generally and in Pakistan particularly as it is a country of multi-ethnic social order. Moreover, it was also stated that besides mediating role Pakistan government should approach "UN Security Council and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)" for the peaceful solution in form of ceasefire accord in Yemen. Pakistan aims to promote the integrity and unity of the Muslim Ummah with the prior consultation and cooperation of all Muslim countries (Ghouri, 2018).

Khawaja Asif, The Defense Minister of Pakistan, told the parliament that Saudi Arabia wanted Pakistan's role in the Yemen crisis. In this regard, the Saudi Kingdom had exchanged its wish list' with Pakistan asking for Pakistan's fighting airplanes, warships, and military personnel. He argued that the Yemen crisis is linked with state national security, and in case of any security misadventure in the region, Pakistan would have to pay a huge price. He suggested a peaceful settlement of the issue. Moreover, the defense minister said, Pakistan always stands with Saudi Arabia, being a sincere friend and a Muslim brother. He also applauded the consultation and guidance of all the parliamentarians on the issue of high national importance. Khwaja Asif added that Pakistan, without the prior

support of any country, has fought the long war against terrorism and extremism at its own cost and strength.

The Opposition Raised Important Questions on the Yemen Crisis

In response to the statement of the defense minister the opposition raised question on the role of Pakistan in the Yemen crisis. Pakistan People Party (PPP) Senator Aitzaz Ahsan asked for the clarification of Pakistan's policy and position in the Yemen crisis as well as the clarification of assertion regarding the protection of Saudi territorial integrity. besides the fact that Saudi Arabia has supreme land and air defense mechanism and has capability of defending its territory, located at a distance of some 2,000 km from the war-affected Yemen. He stressed the need of consulting all national stakeholders to find a reasonable solution to the Yemen crisis. MQM senior parliamentarian Dr. Farooq Sattar had addressed the Parliament, saying that joining any alliance in the Yemen conflict would put Baluchistan's future at risk. He warned the state to get ready for long-term repercussions if it joins the controversial conflicts of other states (Dawn, 2015).

The Vice Chairman of PTI, Shah Mahmood Qureshi objected the defense minister role in the Yemen crisis. He asserted that it's the right of Pakistani nation to know what type of assistance Saudi is asking for and whether there is serious threat to Saudi territorial integrity. He stated that if Pakistan seeks the policy of intervening and siding with any conflicting countries then the repercussion for the nation would be server. He further said that Pakistan had already fought war against terrorism and raised the questions whether

1. is it in position to proceed with Saudi Arabia's led offensive against the Houthi rebels in Yemen?
2. Has United Nations approved any resolution in favor of the Saudi Arabian military offensive against the Houthi rebels in yemen?

He further added that Pakistan should make sure that Saudi Arabia's offensive will not be seen as a war crime in the future. He explained that what is happening in Yemen is the result of power politics and the power struggle, which have a long track record in the Middle East. He said that the main question is: when Saudi Arabia decided to launch the military offensive against Yemen, was Pakistan informed before launching the military escalation against Yemen, or had Pakistan just been informed to fill the formality? Shah Mehmood Qureshi advised the parliament that serious and mature consultations and deliberations should be taken and followed before taking and passing any strategy or decision on the issue. The people have given us a mandate, and we cannot escape from that. Before taking any decision on the issue of high national interest, we must consult

and consider the wish list of the people of Pakistan."

JUI Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman argued about the futility of relating Yemen crisis with Pak-Iran bilateral relations. He appreciated the collective debate on the issue in parliament. He said that support of Saudi Arabia is acceptable but it should be made clear what type of support is being asked for. He also favored the mediating role of Pakistan in this regard. As the Muslim countries are facing war and it should be Pakistan prime concern to play as a mediator among them.

PTI chairman Imran Khan expressed his views on the Yemen crisis saying that he has no cognizance about the actual situation as well as the accord of agreement signed by Nawaz Sharif with Saudi Arabia but it should be noted that we are confronting internal threat and challenges joining external war is not welcoming. Moreover, he highlighted the brotherly relation with Saudi and close neighborhood with Iran and also said that the only choice lies in the peaceful settlement of the security tension between the conflicting countries through diplomacy rather than siding with any one of them. (Dawn, 2015).

Twenty Second Constitutional amendment Bill

This amendment bill in the 9th article of the constitution of Pakistan is related to the method of becoming the chief election commissioner and members of the Election Commission of Pakistan. Initially the retired judges of the apex court become part of the office of EC but now the amendment bill opened door for retired bureaucrats and technocrats as well (Khan, Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2023). The age limit was also changed in the proposed amendment and it should not exceed 68 years. The bill was brought by Zahid Hamid in NA, from treasury benches which was not opposed by any member of the house so passed very easily. In the upper house the bill was presented by the Law Minister. However, majority of the senators were unhappy for they were short of time to evaluate the bill. It had many mistakes in the first draft. After rectification the bill was passed in the senate as well. This too was a sign of cooperation among the parties and government and the bill was passed on mutual consensus (Amir, 2016)

Dawn Leaks Controversy

On October 6, 2016, Dawn-based journalist Cyril Almeida revealed and published the confidential minutes of a high-level meeting happening between the civil and military leadership. The story publicized the political leadership warning the army high command to act indiscriminately against the militant factions; otherwise, the country would face isolation on a global level. Moreover, the civilian leadership emphasized the need to develop collective and meaningful

consensus on some key issues of national importance. These leaks provoked the military top brass and once again brought the civilian and military leadership in open confrontation. The leaks had also burst forth a storm in media circles, which they declared the most sensitive issue linked to national security interests (Almeida, 2016).

The Prime Minister Office gave a prompt reaction declaring it distorted and fabricated leaks and that the government has no role in it. It further added that leaking highly confidential information directly linked to state national security had curtailed the universally acknowledged principles of reporting on issues and matters of national security interest. Further it was ensured that the perpetrators will be punished according to the law of land. Consequently, On October 10, 2016, Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif called General Raheel Sharif, the then Chief of Army Staff, to his office to discuss the issues and matters pertaining to the national security of Pakistan. After the meeting, the dawn leaks were mutually declared as fabricated and a malicious attempt against the national security interests of the state (Dawn, 2023).

Chaudhry Nisar, the then Interior Minister of Pakistan, confirmed putting Cyril Almeida's name on the Exit Control List (ECL) as the alleged journalist was planning to leave the country. he added that a proper investigation will be carried out against him to find out the actual facts behind the controversy. He declared that no one will be allowed to leave the country having played a role in the leaks. He argued that the fabricated leaks were an attempt to threaten the state's national security interests by publishing the most sensitive information that had created misunderstandings among the state's institutions. The fabricated story was in favor of Pakistan's enemy's policies and intentions.

On October 14, 2016, the top military brass at the Corps Commanders Conference expressed serious concern over the dawn leaks and declared them a fabricated and malafide attempt to disrupt the national security infrastructure of Pakistan. The conference participants committed to continue indiscriminately intelligence-based operations against the militants and terrorist organizations in the country with full determination. Due to huge media pressure, the name of Cyril Almeida was removed from ECL on October 14, 2016 by the Interior Ministry, on the condition that he would cooperate in the investigation pertaining to the Dawn Leak. the Interior Minister was given assurance by the delegation of the all-Pakistan's Newspapers Society (APNS) and the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) that the alleged journalist will fully cooperate with the relevant authorities and institutions in the investigation regarding the leaks (Baseer Ahmed, 2017).

On October 27, 2016, the then PML-N government senior leadership met with the chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif and briefed him on the status and progress of the investigation regarding the Dawn leaks. The Director General of ISI also attended the meeting. The accused journalist, Cyril Almeida, left for the United States leaving the investigation proceeding in between. The initial investigation resulted in the removal of Pervaiz Rasheed from his position as minister of information and broad casting. As per Musadiq Malik, the then spokesperson of Prime Minister, Pervaiz Rasheed was responsible for the leaks which resulted in his removal. The Interior Minister, Chaudhary, also blamed him for fabricated leaks.

On November 7, the federal government formed a investigation commission on Dawn Leaks headed by a retired judge of the Lahore High Court, Amir Raza and accompanied by other members of the commission including Secretary Establishment Tahir Shahbaz, Muhtasib Punjab Najam Saeed, and Director Federal Investigation Agency Dr. Usman Anwar. In addition the commission also included one member from each of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence (MI), and Intelligence Bureaus (IB). The inquiry commission proved a failure for it couldn't complete its task within specified period of time. Though the additional time was also given for the completion and conclusion of proper investigation (Sikander, 2017).

On April 29, 2017, a notification was issued by the federal government about the findings of the Dawn Leaks investigation, which triggered a counter-attack from the military top brass. The notification was issued by the federal government on the special directives of the prime minister, who had approved the directions of the inquiry committee into the Dawn leaks scandal. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had directed the concerned ministries to immediately enforce and implement the directions and recommendations of the committee. The inquiry committee recommended that the role of Daily Dawn newspaper owner Zafar Abbas and the alleged journalist Cyril Almeida be immediately referred to the All-Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) for taking necessary disciplinary action with immediate effect. The Prime Minister Office issued a notification announcing the dismissal of Tariq Fatemi, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, over the fabricated Dawn leaks story (Mailk, 2017).

The military reacted aggressively to the government notification and rejected it categorically on the ground that the military proposal and recommendations were not incorporated into the inquiry committee according to the then DGISPR, Asif Ghafoor. Moreover, the DG ISPR said that the government

notification on Dawn Leaks is neither complete nor in line with the proposals and recommendations of the Inquiry Board (Hashim, 2017). In response to the military's rejection of the federal government notification, Chaudhary Nisar, the then interior minister, declared that the notification was not formal and explained that once the proposals and recommendation of the inquiry committee are incorporated it will be issued. It was unfortunate at this time that the chasm between the government and the army widened and the opposition sided with the Army instead of civilian government. There was meeting between COAS, general Qamar Bajwa and PM, Nawaz Sharif giving an impression that the leaks were no longer relevant. Media circles also confirmed the settlement of the Dawn Leaks between the civil-military leadership. The PTI leaderships termed this settlement as deal between civilian government and military and along with the opposition parties demanded such kind of sensitive issues to be resolved in the Parliament. But the years of 2014 and 2015 saw what PTI had done with the parliament which was a clear hypocrisy in this case. Military again became triumphant over political government. It is clear indication that military is not in favor of giving control of internal security affair of the country to the civilian government. On the one hand the country is saved from military coup but on the other hand the opposition parties weakened the civilian government against strong military. It is pertinent to mention here, that while the issue was settled, but still the original report has not been made public so far. During the recent interview the former COAS General (ret'd) Qamar Bajwa had given to Journalist Shahid Maitla in which he claimed that Dawn Leaks was an engineered controversy, which was generated by the former COAS Gen Raheel Sharif to get an extension from the then prime minister Nawaz Sharif. Later Irfan Siddiqui (ex-advisor of PM Sharif) also accepted the fact of extension. It was a direct move on the non-political opposition actor to dismantle the civilian government. (Today, 2023) (Hussain I. , 2017)

Panama Paper Scandal

On April 3, 2016, the International Consortium of Investigative intelligencers (ICIJ) made some 11.5 million secret documents available to the public for the first time. The documents belonged to the Panamanian law establishment, Mossack Fonseca. The establishment kept private attorney-customer information for further than 214,488 coastal units. Unexpectedly, the report revealed that eight out-reinforcement companies were possessed by the Sharif family, including the peremptory Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, and his family, Chief Minister of Punjab, Shahbaz Sharif. The ICIJ report further bared that the high minister Nawaz Sharif's children, Maryam Nawaz, Hassan,

and Hussain Nawaz, also own companies and have the right to authorize deals for several companies (Cheema, 2016).

In response to the Panama leaks, the son and daughter of Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif, twittered where they denied the possession of any property and companies mentioned by Panama Gate and called it a fabricated story. Taking into account the seriousness of issue the PM decided to address the nation on Pakistan television to show his readiness to face the judicial commission to look into the alleged finances against him and his family. He further said that his late father established a factory in Makkah defying the wrath of Musharraf in 1999 which was later sold out and the fund was given to his sons for investment in their own businesses. He'd altogether rejected the allegations revealed by the Panama Gate and assured the nation that he and his family aren't reticent to any legal disquisition or scrutiny whenever it's needed (Desk, 2016).

Panama Gate strengthened PTI chairman Imran Khan's accusations of corruption against the Sharif family in Pakistan. He claimed that the leaks against the Sharif family were actually God's will. He'd incontinently demanded an applicable and accurate response from the PML- N government regarding the leaks of corruption revealed by Panama Gate. he stated that the government should form an inquiry committee headed by the serving Chief Justice of Pakistan, justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali whereas the government wanted the ex-judges of supreme court in the inquiry commission. He had requested the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to look into the matter.

On the 22nd of April, 2016, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, once again addressed the nation and informed them that their government has formally asked the chief justice for the formation of inquiry commission. He further said that the accusation against his family should be supported by solid proofs and attestation and if his family is proved guilty he would resign. PPP, PTI, MQM, and PML-Q, straight- forwardly rejected the government's proposed TORs for the inquiry commission on the ground that the TORS of commission needs to be drafted after discussion with opposition. And demanded that the TORs of any similar commission be drafted after proper discussion with the opposition. PPP speaker Bilawal Bhutto- Zardari demanded Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's resignation until inquiry is completed. He said that Nawaz Sharif could take charge of his office again if he proved innocent. The government argued that the common TORs should concentrate on the elimination of corruption generally not the Sharif family should be dealt particularly.

The Supreme Court rejected the government's request and formed inquiry commission to look into the Panama paper leaks of corruption for which Sharif

family was alleged. The Court added that the conformation of an inquiry commission under the “Pakistan Commission of Inquiry Act 1956 (Act VI of Page 1 of 3 1956)”, looking at its limited compass, will affect in the conformation of a helpless commission. The Court communicated that the proposed TORs by the civil government for investigations are so wide and open that it would be time consuming for the commission to conclude the matter.

Finally, the government and opposition agreed on the conformation of a commission comprising 12 members, six from each side, which will define and frame the common TORs for an inquiry commission pertaining to the Panama Papers leaks. The 12- member administrative commission failed to develop a collective agreement on the issue, as both sides stuck to their positions on the issue of initiating a disquisition into Panama Paper scandal. The opposition claimed on starting the Panama Gate inquiry against Sharif and his family, whereas the government wants that the compass of the disquisition extends to all those enterprises and individualities whose names are revealed by the Panama Gate (Hussain, Danish, 2016). After the deadlock, PTI, filed a reference with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), demanded Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's disqualification for intentionally hiding fiscal beyond means.

After PTI, PPP also filed a reference with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to immediately dis-qualify the PM Nawaz Sharif, and his family members for hiding property beyond means from the nation and courts. So he is no more Sadiq and Ameen; thus, he's not eligible to hold the position of premiership and also a seat in the National Assembly. The opposition has decided not to negotiate anymore with the government over the TORs issue. The Jamaat- I- Islami (JI) Emir Sirajul Haq shifted the Panama Papers leak reproach to the country's Apex Court. He filed a solicitation in the Supreme Court to initiate a proper inquiry and disquisition into those whose names were revealed by the Panama Paper leaks. He didn't name Nawaz Sharif directly. “The solicitation filed by the JI Emir had been declined by the Supreme Court, pertaining to it as futile and frivolous within the contemplation of Order XVII Rule 5 of the Supreme Court Rules 198 (Iqbal, Nasir, 2023).” PTI also approached the Supreme Court and filed a writ solicitation with the Supreme Court seeking disqualification of Nawaz Sharif from the premiership as well as from the seat of the National Assembly. Exerting pressure on the government, PTI chairman Imran Khan blazoned a massive demonstration on September 25, 2016, at Raiwind Lahore. On September 30, 2016, PTI organized a massive kick march outside Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's hearthstone, Raiwind, in Lahore. The party protestors demanded Nawaz Sharif's immediate resignation from the premiership. Again, on October 7, 2016, PTI

chairman Imran Khan announced the Islamabad lockdown. He called PTI workers to siege the capital on October 30 until Nawaz Sharif abnegated from the premiership. Imran Khan also requested the Supreme Court hear Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his son-in-law, retired Captain Safdar, and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar disqualification desires on precedence in the corruption and Panama Gate dishonors.

Supreme Court Acceptance of Petition

Eventually, The Supreme Court accepted the petitions against Nawaz Sharif and his family members for their alleged involvement in the Panama Papers reproach. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif added that now the court has been pacing into the matter, it would be better to stay for its decision into the matter. Regarding the Panama Papers reproach, the Supreme Court has formed a five-member bench, headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The court is presently considering whether or not to form and appoint a judicial commission to probe the Panama Papers reproach. The main question before the court is how did Nawaz Sharif's children pay for their London parcels? The quality of the substantiation presented by PTI was questioned by the court, which told the applicant that their 680-runner submission before the court had nearly nothing to do with the Sharif family's London apartments. Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed observed that it sounded as if the pleaders were trying to bury the verity under their substantiation, which comported substantially of review parings, which were only good for dealing pakoras the day after publication (Dawn, 2017).

After the retirement of chief justice Zaheer Jamali, the Panama Gate case was continued by a five-member bench, headed by Justice Asif Saeed Khosa. The Supreme Court bench in the Panama Gate case asked which side the burden of evidence might be placed on. Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, who presided over the bench, placed the burden of evidence on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's family, while Justice Azmat Hayat and Justice Ejaz dissented with it. Nawaz Sharif's counsel was questioned about the fiscal footmark of the London apartments. He was asked to prove and defend that there were no contradictions in the Prime Minister's speech that he delivered to Parliament last time. The Prime Minister's Council was also asked to explain the money trails of the fiscal deals possessed by Nawaz Sharif, how did the capital shift from Jeddah to London? Moreover, how was the capital transferred from Dubai to London and also to Qatar?

Conformation of JIT Against Nawaz Sharif Alleged Involvement in Panama Gate

After both the defense and execution completed their arguments, the SC said it would reserve its verdict on the Panama Gate case and issue a detailed judgment.

The Supreme Court had given a split 3- 2 verdict on the Panama Gate case. The Court was directed to form a five- member (JIT) comprising ISI, MI, NAB, SECP, and SBP officers. The JIT was to probe whether PM Nawaz and his family members had amassed wealth beyond their known sources of income.

After the majority verdict, Nawaz Sharif remains PM but faces an in-depth JIT probe into the money trail issue in what could be a lengthy process. Justice Khosa, who presided over the trial, and Justice Gulzar Ahmed both issued dissenting opinions in the 548-page judgment written by Justice Ejaz Afzal, with additional notes by Justice Sheikh Azmat Saeed and Judge Ijaz ul Ahsan.

Justice Khosa, in his dissenting note, said that Prime Minister Nawaz should be disqualified for being dishonest before the nation, parliament, and courts. In this regard, he issued directions to the ECP to cancel the notification immediately to the Prime Minister, an opinion echoed by Justice Gulzar Ahmed. The JIT has to submit periodic reports to the SC court every two weeks and must complete the investigation and submit the final report before the special court within 60 days. The investigation team was formed on May 5 after some discussions about who should be part of the team. The JIT is headed by FIA Additional Director Wajid Zia. The court issued four orders during the hearing: A criminal case was initiated against SECP Chairman Zafar Hijazi for alleged FIA falsifying records of Sharif's Chaudhry Sugar Mills. Submitted transcripts of all speeches by Minister of Railways Khawaja Saad Rafique, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Asif Kirmani, PML-N, and MP Talal Chaudhry in the past two months (Dawn, 2017).

Supreme Court Verdict against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif

During the Panama Gate hearing, Ishaq Dar, Finance Minister and the Sharif family's lawyers raised separate objections to the JIT report. The Supreme Court ended the trial of the Panama Gate case. On July 28, 2017, the bench removed Nawaz Sharif from public office. The court ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan to send notice to the Prime Minister removing him from his seat in the National Assembly to fulfill the technicalities of implementing the order. The Supreme Court said the ECP should impeach the prime minister for not revealing his role at Dubai-based Capital FZE in his nomination papers, which meant that he did not remain "honest anymore". Resultantly Sharif lost his position as PM and his seat in the NA and from the presidency of PML-N. Shahid Haqqani Abbasi who was working as the Minister of Petroleum was nominated as the new PM on Aug 01, 2017 for the remaining few month of the government constitutional term. After removing from the post so awkwardly, Nawz Sharif launched public rallies and political gathering in various cities of Punjab with

slogan (*Why I was Ousted?*) and new narrative (*Respect to Vote*). He vehemently criticized the judiciary which was again used for the ouster of elected PM. The PTI and judiciary here establishment. The political stability which was achieved after the end of long, 126 day sit-in of PTI and PAT, jeopardized again after this wrong verdict of judiciary against the PM Sharif (Ahmad R. Q., 2014).

Accountability Decision in the Avenfield Reference

After seven months of proceedings since the defendant was charged, the Accountability Court in Islamabad upheld the verdict in the Avenfield Properties case against Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, and his son-in-law, retired captain Mohammad Safdar. The court sentenced Nawaz to 10 years and his daughter Maryam Nawaz seven years in prison for hiding asset more than means and conspiring to buy high end property in London respectively. she was given one year imprisonment for non-cooperation with the Bureau. Nawaz's son-in-law, Captain Safdar, was sentenced to one year in prison for not cooperating with NAB. Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz returned to Pakistan to face prison sentences after being convicted in the Avenfield verdict. They were arrested by NAB on arrival in Lahore, taken to Islamabad on a charter flight, and then transferred to Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail (Haider K. , 2020).

PECA Act 2016

It is an Act relating to the cybercrime and technological abuse of society. The debate over the formulation and framing of laws pertaining to the cybercrime and defamation started in 2014 during the PLMN government. In February 2015 the government drafted a bill and presented it in the parliament for discussion. After receiving few modifications, the bill was sent to parliamentary committee. It was heavily criticized by the media circles and civil societies. finally, the draft bill was passed in national assembly in april, 2016. It was sent to the senate in July 2016. The senate added 50 modifications and sent back to the national assembly for discussion and approval. Amid strong objection from the opposition benches the bill was passed on 11th August 2016. The president gave his assent to the PECA act on 18th August 2016.

Anusha Rehman, The then Minister of State for Information Technology justified the bill on the ground that prevalent regulations and laws cannot cater to the modern complicated and challenging cybercrime practices: cyber terrorism, detecting, identity theft, and more importantly, the practice of hacking etc. She added that the new PECA law would ensure the citizens' protection from modern cyber threats, equipping and training them to prevent cybercrimes attacks, policing the national security infrastructure and lastly, making and providing a credible and secure working environment for the

Information Technology industry in the country.

Criticism on the Bill

This justification of the bill was profoundly criticized by the opposition parties, civil society and media circles declaring it draconian and rushing legislation. The act was intended to continue the status quo by discouraging dissent voices. State authorities had always been involved in the illegal and illicit measures: forced disappearances, extra judicial killing, missing people, declaring the dissents as anti-state and traitors. Immediately, after the PECA Act came into effect, the authorities arrested politicians, journalists, social and political activists and even ordinary citizens were also not spared. The critical voices were warned not to raise finger on the state authorities. This autocratic Act curtailed the freedom of speech, expression in the country. Anyone who dared to raise voice, would be banned and arrested on the pretext of threatening the state writ.

The FIA under the draconian Act initiated unclear proceedings and inquiries against the dissents in the country. Moreover, under the “(PECA) act 2016, provisions of the PPC and other laws, including the FIRs and ATA, followed by unwarranted raids and arrests, by the FIA and other law enforcing agencies primarily, for silencing the critical voices against defaming, complaining and questioning public officials and state powerful institutions in a live public debate and conversation.” The then Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar warned the critics that in the name of free speech, any sort of anti-state propaganda would not be tolerated in any form”.

The FIA claimed that they find out and identified the suspects who had launched an organized mala fide campaign against the state institutions especially, against military personnel on digital and social media. On May 17, 2017, FIA summoned a human right activist and lawyer Jibran Nasir. He shared the agency summon on his social media forum on twitter. Followed Jibran Nasir, on the same date, PTI social media activist and worker Salar Kakar, was summoned to attend the proceeding in the FIA’s Islamabad office. PTI Chairman condemned the illicit and illegal harassment of his party workers by the government through FIA. He accused the government by using PECA laws for political victimization. After few days, various PTI workers and activists engaged with the party social media wing were summoned and arrested by the law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the party offices were raided and closed (Khan, Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2023).

Twenty-Third Amendment Bill (2017)

This bill is related to the extension of military courts for two years. The bill was presented in the national assembly by Zahid Hamid the minister of law.

Interestingly the bill was opposed by the coalition partners of PMLN, PKMAP and JUI-F. However, all other opposition parties supported the bill with several amendments. The JJ members of parliament suggested changes for the omission of miss-using the word religion and sect from the bill. Sahibzada Tariq ullah (JI) pointed out that religion has no connection with terrorism. The same changes were suggested by the government ally party JUI, which were not endorsed by the house. Ghulam Ahmad Bilour from ANP suggested that for eradicating terrorism the mindset of terrorism need to be eradicated (“National Assembly votes overwhelmingly in favor of military courts” , 2017). PPP as major opposition party though did not bring any proposal in the bill inside the house, however they demanded several changes in bill outside the parliament. Their demands though were not accepted by PML-n, however through joint collaboration they both been able to incorporate four new clauses in the draft bill showing maturity and consensual approach of ruling and opposition parties. In Senate the twenty 3rd amendment bill was supported by almost all the parties except the government ally party Pk-Map (Irfan, 2017).

Twenty-Fourth Constitutional Amendment Bill (2017)

This amendment is about the delimitation of new constituencies on the basis of provisional results of Census 2017, for the coming general election 2018. Due to decrease in the population of Punjab from 56 percent to 52 percent its seats would be decreased. Similarly, the seats of KP and Baluchistan would be increased due to their increase in the population. While the seats of the province Sindh would be the same. The PPP and MQM having objections on the census report demanded that the concerned bill should be discussed in the forum of Council of Common Interest (CCI) first and then brought to the parliament. It also demanded that a third party services to be taken for the removal of errors from the population census 2017. The 24th amendment bill was introduced in the NA, on 16 March 2017. MQM, started opposition of the bill at the very start because of their objections over the census. MQM have reservations over one percent block audit a decision made earlier in the decision of the meeting of CCI. They wanted five percent census block to be audited. Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, removed their reservation who arranged meeting of PM with them, who assured them, that a meeting of CCI would be called very soon in this regard. After this the MQM supported the bill in the NA. After some debates and some trivial changes in the draft the bill was passed from NA very easily (Wasim, "CCI breaks deadlock on Delimitation", 2017). The amendment bill was brought to the senate on 19 December, 2017 and passed on the same day without any difficulty as the consensus was already built on between the ruling and opposition after

long discussion Senator Aitizaz Ahsan (opposition leader) had told the house that the concerned amendment bill was passed consensually. We all have been agreed over the formation of the team demographers who would work under the auspices of PM, Abassi to re-audit the census within thirty days ("Breakthrough as parties reach consensus on delimitation bill", 2017)

Election Act 2017 and Issue of Khatmi -e- Nabuwat Clause

The Elections Act 2017 represents the most important electoral reform legislation after the initial electoral laws passed in the 1970s. The Elections Act 2017 is a comprehensive electoral reform effort, which consolidated eight separate laws. It empowered the ECP with financial autonomy and invested it with quasi-judicial powers comparable to a high court. It defined the role and powers of caretaker governments, placing limitations over their ability to make policy decisions. Another significant initiative under the electoral reform law is the "legally binding timeline for the conduct of local elections, which must now be held within 120 days after local councils complete their tenure or are dissolved." By passing the 24th amendment, the parliament also allowed for the fresh delimitation of constituencies on the basis of provisional census results before the general elections on 25 July 2018. As article 51 of the constitution was amended, the National Assembly seats were proportionally re-allocated among the provinces, though the total number of seats was not increased. The Act increased the submission of nomination fee for contesting candidate to twenty thousand rupees so that he/she may take serious interest in the election process. It also increased the expenses a candidate contesting the election of NA, PA and Senate to 40 lakh, 20 lakh and 15 lakh respectively. The act have clause related to the cast of votes from women folk in a constituency which may not less than 10% of the whole concerned population. For quick declaration and submission of election results, an App called RTS (Result Transmission System was introduced for the first time (Bashir, 2022).

The Elections Act 2017 contained many important electoral reforms, which were long overdue but it took at least a few decades to address the gaps. Amendments in the various electoral laws remained a major area of legislation before the passage of the Elections Act 2017. It was mainly to amend the changes brought in by the military government of General Pervez Musharraf. The first amendment in the electoral laws was to do away with the condition of education up to the graduation level for the contesting candidates. This condition was introduced in the Conduct of General Elections Order 2002 (Chief Executive Order No.7 of 2002) as article 8A.79 Earlier, in 2008 the Supreme Court declared the provisions of Article 8A and clause (cc) of the Sub-section (1) of the

Representation of the People Act, 1976 null and void for being “inconsistent with Articles 17 and 25 of the Constitution”.

The parliament amended the Representation of the People Act in 2009 to address the issue of pending cases in the election tribunals. Just before the 2013 general elections, the parliament again amended the elections laws to allow candidates to file nomination papers through authorized individuals rather than appearing before the returning officer in person. The condition introduced by the military government in 2002 was intended to bar the leaders of PPP and PMLN from taking part in elections.

Finally, the 20th Constitutional Amendment provided for an independent Election Commission and a neutral interim government set-up to oversee polls. Its passage “paved the way for a consensus appointment of caretaker governments in the center and the provinces to oversee future polls. The term of ECP members was also fixed at five years.

A sum of total 105 total alternative suggestions were presented by the opposition parties among which 44 were approved by the treasury benches. Federal Law Minister, Zahid Hamid, appreciated the 33 members’ parliamentary committee for electoral reforms, having presentation from both treasury benches as well as opposition benches. He gave credit not only to the government but to the opposition also (Assembly, 2017).

After approval of the said bill, a controversy surfaced over the social media about the oath of politicians while taking charge as public representatives. The TLP and some other religious groups started their protest for the reinstatement of Khatm-e-Nabuwat clause in the oath taking documents of nomination papers and resignation of Law Minister for his post. Accepting this sensitive issue the government declared it as a clerical mistake so reinstated the clause in its original form in the nomination papers. But instead of that development, the TLP arranged a sit-in at Faizabad Rawalpindi, on November 8, 2017, utterly demanded the resignation of Zahid Hamid from his ministry. The sit-in protest continued for more than two weeks which disturbed the routine day to day activities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The protests were continued in other parts of the country also. Many protesters died at Karachi and Lahore. They also sieged the houses of PML-N members of parliament. To avoid more casualties’ police was withdrawn from many areas. The sit-in was ended after the intervention of high Military officials and the resignation of Law Minister. The Supreme Court have also taken the suo-moto on the sit-in on 21 November 2018. The verdict issued by Justice Faiz Issa in Feb 2017, criticized the role of military and intelligence agencies for its encroachment policies from their vested domain.

TLP actually have the potential to break the vote bank so he raised the issue outside the parliament through agitation a campaign of religious group which weakened and defamed the government of PML-N (Editorial, 2021)

Election for Chairman and Deputy Chairman Senate (2018)

Elections for the post of Chairman and Deputy Chairman were held in March 2018. Surprisingly, the PPP which was the biggest opposition party and second after the ruling party PML-N did not nominate its own candidate for the slot of Chairmanship. The PTI, the second largest opposition party in the senate after PPP did the same. Both parties supported the independent candidate from the province of Baluchistan. Sadiq Sanjrani won against the ruling PML-N candidate Raja Zafrul Haq a seasoned politician. The PPP nominated candidate Saleem Mandviwalla also won the deputy chairmanship election against the Usman Kakar of Pk –MAP of ruling coalition. It has said that PML-N first contacted with PPP before the election for a deal. The ruling party wanted that Chairmanship to be given to the PPP Raza Rabbani while the Deputy slot will be filled through its own candidate. But PPP's Co-Chairman Asif Zardari refused to do so. The question arise here that why a major shift in the policy of PPP occurred? Many analysts said that actually Asif Zardari wanted to close his party with Military Establishment for getting surety to get large number of seats in the up-coming 2018 general elections. The election was also unique in the sense that the two arch rivals' opposition parties i.e. PPP and PTI which were not on the same page supported the same candidates in the field (Hussain J. , 2018).

FATA Merger with KP and the Role of Opposition Parties

On 24 May, 2018, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed 25th Constitutional Amendment seeking the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The Amendment was favored by 229-members of the National Assembly. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal Rehman (JUI-F) and the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), had dissented to the amendment and staged a walk out from the national assembly before the bill initiated for voting. PTI member in the national assembly Dawar Kundi deviated from the party policy and casted vote against the bill. Following the national assembly, the Senate of Pakistan passed the FATA merger bill on May 25, 2018. After the senate, the FATA merger bill was passed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly on May 27, 2018, which was then signed by the President on 31st May, 2018 (Amir Wasim, 2018).

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that FATA mainstreaming had been in the works for four years. He appreciated and thanked the opposition parties for offering full support to the historical Amendment bill. He added

today, parliament collective consensus has proved that on issues of national importance, all political parties are on the same page. He said, that we must stand united for protecting our national interest and today, the parliament had practically demonstrated it. PTI chairman Imran Khan had warmly welcomed the FATA merger bill. He also congratulated the parliament for successfully passing the bill despite of political differences among the political stake holders. He added, since long the people of the tribal areas have been seeking for a system of justice, working in KP province (Wasim, National Assembly green-lights Fata-KP merger by passing 'historic' bill, 2018).

Member of MQM in the national assembly, Dr Farooq Sattar said that only for the sake of prevailing a greater national and political unity, his party favored the FATA Amendment bill. However, he clarified that despite supporting the bill, his party still believes that Federally Administered Tribal Region (FATA), should be given a status of separate province. Abdul Qahar representing PkMAP, in the house, argued that his party firmly believes that the people of the tribal region should have given the right, wither they want a separate province or merger with KP province. He added that imposing decision on people of tribal region will always be remained controversial. Moreover, he said that the people of the tribal region demanded their own province, Chief Minister and Governor on the same pattern which the rest of the state federating units have had.

JUI-F, parliamentarian Maulana Jamaluddin said that today is a "black day". He added that the parliament intended to expunge the word FATA from the Constitution of Pakistan which is regrettable. Jamaluddin continued to say that FATA merger with KP is the continuation of the foreign agenda, which our party fully reject. He said that both the ruling and opposition parties especially, PML-N and PTI didn't want to see each other, but today, they had joined hands with one another, when they had the opportunity to usurp the rights of the people of Tribal Areas (Haq, 2018).

Shah Gee Gul Afridi, an independent member in the National Assembly from FATA, welcomed the FATA merger bill. He said that JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Pk Map chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai opposing the FATA merger for the sake of protecting their personal agendas. They both feared that after merger, they would have lost the major share in the financial aid, which the federal government release for the region. Moreover, he added that today, the FATA merger bill exposed the conspirators before the nation on the floor of the national assembly, who wanted to keep division in the tribal areas for securing their personal agenda. He argued further that the nation would reject the opponents of the FATA merger bill in the upcoming elections.

Before tabling the FATA merger bill, PTI Vice- Chairman, Shah Mehmood Qureshi told the house that Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Mehmood Khan Achakzai had opposed the FATA merger bill for the sake of their own political agendas. In this regard, they have just wasted two years of the nation by opposing the constitutional and legitimate move of the parliament. He added that the merger of FATA with KP is a historical initiate resembling with actual demands of the people of tribal region. He said that the merger of FATA would be the completion of Pakistan (Khan, Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2023)

Conclusion

The five-year completion of democratic government from 2008-2013 brought a sign of happiness and hope for the continuity and strengthening of democracy. The completion of the tenure proved successful for the democracy lover but soon the situation went upside down. The PTI Chairman Imran Khan and his political cousin Tahirul Qadri staged a massive protest and sit in against the elected government on the pretext of rigging in the general elections of 2013. The opposition parties condemned the actions of both parties as undemocratic and unconstitutional and asked them to play their just role inside the parliament. Finally, IK abolished 126 days' sit-in, after the brutal attack of militant on APS on 16 December 2014 at Peshawar. The government of Nawaz Sharif survived very narrowly. All parties' conference summoned by Nawaz Sharif decided strict action against the militants and unanimously approved the twenty-point National Action Plan. It is an evidence to the fact that there was a mutual consensus on the national issue among the political leadership. This unanimity is also witnessed inside the parliament on the significant constitutional amendment bills and legislation. The 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th constitutional amendments bills serve best examples of parliamentary efficacy throughout the period from 2013-2018. The consensus politics between PPP and PML-N was very good. But PPP disappointed PML-N on the issue of Dawn Leaks when the relationships between the strong army and civilian government became abnormal. It was a war which was lost by the civilian government against the military in the field of internal security, the prerogative of establishment. Then again the Imran Khan and his party was used against the civilian government in Panama Paper Scandal in 2017, who filed a case in the court only against Nawaz Sharif the then PM of Pakistan, although Panama Papers have mentioned the names of so many off-shores companies of other Pakistanis as well. The disqualification of Nawaz by Judiciary have weakened the civilian government. Though Shahid Haqan Abbasi became new PM of Pakistan but he proved himself very weak in front of the Military that his term of nine-odd months was tagged as hybrid democratic government. And then we witnessed this hybrid model of democracy in the future governments also hence marked the weakness of democracy in Pakistan.

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