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Assessing the Pakistan Peoples Party's Reconciliation Paradigm and Impact on the political culture of Pakistan (2008-2018)

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ABSTRACT

This article is an analysis of how the politics of reconciliation as practiced by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) influenced the political culture of Pakistan in the years 2008-2018, during which Pakistan witnessed the end of military-led governance in favor of sustained civilian governance and democratic changes. It triangulates documentary evidence of reconciliation initiatives such as the National Reconciliation Ordinance, 18th Amendment, center-province accommodation such as the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan package, welfare expansion, and civic space using a qualitative-historical case study based on thesis research and interview-based enquiry, and triangulates with institutional and rights indicators and theory-directed analysis using the reconciliation framework of Lederach and the civic culture model of Almond and Verba. The results show process changes such as elite consensus-building, constitutionalism, and parliamentary continuity, and little in terms of accountability, tolerance, and citizen trust. The transformation was limited by impunity, civil-military imbalance, clientelism, and information disorder.

Keywords: Political Reconciliation, Political Culture, Civic Culture, PPP, Democratic Consolidation, Federalism, 18th Amendment, NRO, Rule of Law, Media Freedom.

Introduction

Political culture, consisting of common orientations regarding legitimacy, participation, authority, and acceptable conflict, determines whether the democratic institutions are practiced as routinized on paper or as routinized in reality. Political culture is widely conceptualized in political science as a collection of collective opinions and normative judgments by a population about its political system and its legitimacy, but not about individual leaders.

Pakistan has witnessed a rare succession of democracy between 2008 and 2018: the restoration of an elected government after many years of military rule, a full-fledged civilian federal term (2008-2013), and the first peaceful transfer of power between two elected civilian governments in the country in 2013. The reconciliation discourse of the PPP that was largely summarized in the idiom of compromise, coalition, and the politics



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of dialogue and not confrontation became a prominent effort to make the elite less polarized in a polity that had experienced a period of frequent democratic breakdowns and military interventions during this decade.

The fundamental question suggested by the chapter, which is answered in this article is as follows: to what degree did the politics of reconciliation help in making the political culture more democratic, tolerant, and participatory and what were the limitations to cultural change? The analysis does not merely consider the reconciliation as a moral ideal, but rather it is a political stabilization mechanism and institutional redesign, which are evident in amnesty discussions (NRO), constitutional rebalancing (18th Amendment), center-province accommodation (Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan) and the elite conflict management around courts and in the media and opposition (Zeb, M., Khan, 2024).

Theoretical framework

It employs one theory of reconciliation and one theory of political culture which are selected due to their conceptual fit in the elite-based reconciliation efforts in Pakistan and their ability to mediate between institutions and citizen orientations.

Lederach's reconciliation and conflict transformation theory

Theory selection

John Paul Lederach theorizes conflict transformation as a process in which conflict is viewed as a characteristic of relationships and structures and specifically focuses on intentional intervention to lessen violence, enhance justice and constructive change at personal, relationship, and systemic levels. In this larger perspective reconciliation is often discussed as dealing with the tension between truth, mercy, justice and peace, a particularly applicable tension when dealing with amnesty-based or clean slate political bargains.

Rationale and suitability

The Balance sheet of PPP has the following paradoxes in it:

NRO aspects The NRO perfectly encapsulate the mercy justice dilemma, explicitly intending to eliminate the legacies of political vendetta and victimization but being heavily criticized as contributing to impunity institutionalization and being later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

The peace truth dilemma is found in center-province reconciliation (e.g. Balochistan packages) in which political accommodation and development promises were forced to compete with truth-telling and accountability demands over enforced disappearances tendencies reported by human-rights groups (Paffenholz, T., 2014).

Application to this study

The framework presented by Lederach provides the analysis of whether PPP reconciliation:

- 1) invented longer-term (formal or informal) political discursive spaces of encounter and compromise;
- 2) less elite violence and risk of breakdown by constitutional and interparty rule-making;
- 3) greater justice and accountability- or rather exchanged accountability with stability, which strengthens impunity.



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Almond and Verba's civic culture theory

Theory selection

According to Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, in their book *The Civic Culture*, the stable democracy correlates with a moderate combination of participation and restraint, or a so-called civic culture. They identify three ideal-types of political culture, namely parochial, subject and participant.

Rationale and suitability

The political history of Pakistan is said to be defined by periods of skewed citizen experience that tend to shift towards the subject orientation (obedience with little influence) of authoritarian interventions through bursts of participation that are hard to institutionalize (and therefore episodic democratic openings). The PPP reconciliation project, which included the following; coalition governance, constitutional reform, media openness claims, and devolved governance, was specifically aimed at the normalization of democratic involvement, tolerance, and procedural continuity, which made civic culture theory an easy fit (Street, J., 1994).

Application to this study

The evaluation is organized on the theory of civic culture along the lines of the existence of reconciliation politics:

- 1) Enhancing citizen efficacy and participation (shift towards a culture of participant);
- 2) Better legitimacy of democratic institutions (parliament, courts, elections);
- 3) Encouraged patience to dissent and pluralism, such as minority concession and greater freedom of discussion.

Research methodology

This article is founded on the chapter given and fits with the methodology presented in the entire thesis as the qualitative design applied is the interpretive one, which fits the assessment of political culture (an intangible, slow-moving construct) by means of triangulation of institutional, discursive and behavioral data.

Qualitative historical case study of Pakistan, 2008-2018, where PPP reconciliation is considered the explanatory variable of interest, and change in political culture is the outcome domain. The design is appropriate since it focuses on meaning and narrative and institutional sequencing which lie at the core of reconciliation politics and culture shift.

Discussion

This study explains and evaluates how the politics of reconciliation of the PPP government influenced the political culture of Pakistan in the period of 2008 to 2018. This paper looks at how far PPP's initiatives contributed to this shift and addressed the issue by analyzing to what extent it enhanced a democratic, tolerant and participative political culture while noting the remaining tough issues.

PPP's Reconciliation Policy

During its parliamentary term of power 2008-2018 the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) policy of reconciliation was an attempt at maintaining political stability in a divided country and promoting national unity. Courtesy this policy, Pakistan's founding supreme principles were reinforced by Benazir Bhutto who desired a democratic nation wherein multiple and sundry personalities could competently work together effectively. After her murder in 2007, the PPP, under the presidency of Asif Ali Zardari, attempted to maintain



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the executor of her vision which propagated the politics of dialogue not war, unity not polarization, and integration not alienation (Saif, A., 2025).

Political Culture and Its Significance

Understanding political culture involves the sum of the related attitudes, values and beliefs that go to define the behaviors as well as expectations of actors and constituents within any given political system. It includes a society's rules on power, leadership, and participation in the political process, determining the way a society's people relate to authorities and vice versa. Political culture is a key to comprehension of the stability of the political systems' performance and the level of active citizenship (Welch, S., 2013).

Defining Political Culture and Its Key Components

There is therefore validity in this argument that political culture has relevance as far as the comprehension of the workings of a political system is concerned. It also interacts with the people's concern over the attitudes that they hold or need to hold about the beliefs and values they have and portray as citizens in the context of political activism and procedures. This broadly defined political culture is not a fixed and unchanging phenomenon: It is used in the context of describing the outcomes of historical events, socio-economics conditions, as well as activities performed by actors. To fully grasp the impact of PPP's politics of reconciliation on Pakistan's political culture, it is essential to break down its key components: Thus, I propose to separate the main components that constituted the PPP in order to see how the politics of PPP impacted the political culture of Pakistan through the 'developmentalism' of the PPP, as this approach would be more effective (Chilton, S., 1988).

Challenges of Measuring Changes in Political Culture

There are difficulties in assessing the changes in political culture because it is not a very tangible subject and because cultural transformations often develop gradually. First, political culture is integral to political socialization and, therefore, tends to have a long-lasting character since the factors that define people's beliefs are constants that cannot be easily altered. Also, political culture is determined by many factors, which sometimes makes it hard to describe its changes in relation to a specific policy or political figure. There are however several difficulties when estimating political culture which are that most rely on surveys, interviews and case studies. Although such methods are helpful, they are usually qualitative and can be affected by certain short-term factors (Pye, L. W., 1972).

Indicators to Assess the Impact of PPP's Policies

To assess the impact of PPP's reconciliation policies on Pakistan's political culture, several specific indicators can be employed. Hence, the following specific benchmark factors concerning reconciliation policies of PPP might be useful for measuring the extent to which that the political culture of Pakistan has been shifted or unshifted:

Public Attitudes Towards Democracy

There are some higher order data gathering instruments which are highly useful in determining the opinion that a given population holds regarding democracy and other institutional democratic carriers; these degrees include the frequency polls and the opinion polls. Therefore, transformations of such attitudes are fostered to be perceived as transformations of the relevant components of political culture, namely the legitimization



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of the political system, and public's confidence in democracy (Wu, X., 2020).

Civic Engagement and Participation

Among the features of Political Participation Political Culture are voting exercise, participation in civil bodies and authorities, belonging to civil organizations, and other political activities. Information concerning the accomplishment of the citizens' activity during the years PPP governed can be intensively scrutinized to find out some trends and represent the shifts that occurred due to the implementations introduced by PPP.

Media Freedom and Public Discourse

It was pointed out that the media freedom shares and the Openness as measures of the politeness of the Countries to the diversity and the dissent the polities. Therefore, it is possible to evaluate the results of PPP's policies in the sphere of media through changes as to media regulation, independent journalism, and politically oriented effect of social media (Akhtar, N., 2013).

Trust in Political Institutions

The aspect of political culture includes honesty of the political institutions, which comprises of judiciary, parliament, and the electoral commissions. Surveys that were conducted with an intention of arguing the confidence, which the citizen has on these institutions may be utilized to explain the efficiencies of PPPs that were engaged in the process of strengthening democratic governance in the transformation of the registrar's understanding of political legitimacy amongst men and women (Sayeed, K. B., 1975).

Positive Shifts in Political Culture

Impact of the 18th Amendment on Power-Sharing and Provincial Autonomy

The Eighteen constitutional amendment bill passed in the year 2010 during the PPP government remains one of the most remarkable legislation and historical milestones in the recent history of Pakistan.

Restoration of the Judiciary's Independence and Its Implications for the Rule of Law

Other important PPP's accomplishment includes judiciary independence was restored in 2009, and this is important in political culture of Pakistan. This restoration took place after a dramatic time when the judiciary was dominated by the country's military regime of Pervez Musharraf, which led to the removal and dismissal of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in 2007. The PPP and other political parties, NGO's civil society actively participated in the movement for the revival of the judiciary. It is imperative to remember that the restoration of judiciary was a very important step in the direction of rebuilding the rule of law in the Pakistan which is very much essential for any healthy political culture (Préfontaine, D. C., 1998).

Role of a Free Media in Fostering Public Discourse and Accountability

Media, thus, should be free and independent as it is a significant element in society, and it can act as the government's check and balance by exercising its freedom in the airport of democracy. During PPP's rule, many favorable actions towards the improvement of media freedom were observed in Pakistan, which in turn had an impact on the political context of the country. This was done with the help of one of the PPP's major programs aiming to liberalize the media which was limited due to the rules of the military leader



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Pervez Musharraf (Price, M., 2002).

Tackle Ethnic and Regional Complaints, Especially of Balochistan

Baluchistan is the largest yet one of the most backward provinces in the culturally diverse country of Pakistan with the Baluch's being one of the most restive ethnic groups in that country. Due to evident political marginalization, economic remarginalization and exclusion of any form of voice, the province has borne grudges of neglect and a protracted armed rebellion against the central government. Fulfilling these demands was also part of the PPP's politics of accommodation as the party strived to render Baluchistan accustomed to the larger Pakistani set up. Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Baluchistan package that was launched by the PPP led federal government in 2009 was one of the most conspicuous ones that was framed to solve the Baloch issue in the social, economic and political strata (Hashmi, R. S., 2015).

Enhanced Citizen Participation

Impact of Devolution on Local Governance and Citizen Engagement

Major achievements that were implemented and promoted by PPP include decentralization of power through the creation of local governments that were meant to empower the common man. Devolution process and especially when 18 Amendment was being implemented, power was to be shifted, provinces were to be empowered and central authoritative control, and other local governments to meet the ordinary citizens' basic needs without undue influence from central authorities. The impact of the devolution on the aspect of the political culture was immense, especially in regard to the aspect that involved the citizen (Prosser, B., 2017).

Limitations and Challenges in Ensuring Inclusive Participation

Although the PPP strived to increase the public participation by decentralization and the use of the social media platforms in the evaluation of services, the PPP had several drawbacks and constraints. Among the major challenges that emerged during my research journey, the most crucial one was trying to realize genuine inclusion in Pakistan's political life given the country's strongly patriarchal and highly unequal society. The first weakness was that political power and resources were not well distributed, and in many instances, political decisions mostly benefited dominant groups or persons and left many people behind, especially in the rural areas. Even though PPPs aimed at decentralizing power, local governance structures were even agents by local elites who rather used their powers to consolidate more power for their benefit and not for the ordinary citizens. This dynamic cut down the prospect of devolution in nurturing enhanced political culture that embraced diversity.

Elite-Centric Reconciliation

Focus on Elite Pacts and Top-Down Reforms

Therefore, while it is true that PPP set out to rule, and while the effectiveness of changes that the PPP tried to bring in the political culture assembly remains arguable by most, tangible improvements for altering a less-than-democratic political culture of the nation were met during the PPP's rule the 'politics of reconciliation' that the PPP practiced were largely criticized for their ability to look past the 'masses' and focus more on a cricket match, top It approached it politically most of the time as it sought to preserve and manage political balance of power between leading Liberian elites, which was not very helpful to a large and more diverse civil society and their inputs. The reconciliation



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strategy of the PPP was since the party aimed at coming up with the right structure of polity in a country which is split and, up to this time, continues to struggle with political unrest. This prepared the way for coalition and accommodation with other important political actors in Pakistan including, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the military.

Lack of Meaningful Public Participation in Reconciliation Processes

Although aimed towards conflict-solution for political polarization and the encouragement of national unity, the PPP's reconciliations regrettably lacked sufficient public involvement. Unfortunately, the reconciliation was an elite affair and did not involve common people, civil society and/or minorities. These efforts were however not very inclusive and as such questioned their effectiveness given that people with disabilities were excluded from these corporates. However, the self-reconciliation strategy of the PPP was severely deficient in the following: It did not bring the people, particularly the youths, into the mainstream of political discourse regarding the political future.

Persistence of Patronage Networks and Their Impact on Political Culture

It should be noted that one of the oldest sources of accumulation for the formation of the authoritarian and strictly pyramidal system of power with Pakistan people relates to the fact that until now the patron-client relations remain rather powerful in Pakistan. While the PPP was sensitive towards putting into practice the culture of reconciliation and integration of such networks in as much as such networks were still relevant and active during the reign of the PPP administration, the said networks would define the allocation of the political power and resources. The patronage politics of Pakistan or the king's party system means that organizational links established based on an exchange of political favors between political leaders and the support of those whom they want to build the expectations of voters.

Impact of Impunity on Public Trust in Institutions and the Rule of Law

Due to this culture of impunity in Pakistan, the people have the least amount of trust in the country's institution and the law. When high profile individuals and institutions are not disgraced for their misdeeds, it sends a message to the population that the law does not have to work, and justice does not need to be sought. This has a negative impact in the efficient working of the democratic polity and the making of proper political culture. Impunity remained one of the most significant problems throughout the term of PPP because some of the members of the societal elites abused the population's people and committed heinous crimes, even most of the PPP government had proofs against them. This included matters such as political intolerance, corruption, and violation of civil liberties of the people.

Challenges of Reforming the Security agencies

Out of all the challenges that the PPP had to face during its rule with the state institutions, undoubtedly, the reform of the security sector was probably the weariest, especially, by the extra judicial activities carried out by the military and security agencies. These extra judicial activities which included enforced disappearances, targeted killings and unlawful detentions made human rights abuses in the country and boosted the culture of impunity. Transforming the security sector in Pakistan was initially deemed pretty much a difficult and politically sensitive affair primarily because of the



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role played by the country's military. The military alongside other security organs has enjoyed systematic freedom and operational independence in carrying out its activities and is hardly accountable to other institutions of civil society (Rasheed, N., 2025).

Findings and Results

Constitutional reform as reconciliation and legitimacy-building

Constitutional reform as a legitimate and reconciliation. One of the key reconciliation mechanisms is the 18th Amendment that was a reversal of concentration of power and was used to enhance the parliamentary federalism. It (a) limited presidential dissolution by unilateral means by revising Article 58, (b) enlarged rights, including the right to information (Article 19A) and the right to education (Article 25A) and (c) required the elected local government systems by Article 140A, which makes express reference to accountability by the electorate. The amendment also put devolution into practice having left out the Concurrent Legislative List with a devolution schedule and a devolution vehicle¹ institutional path to the transitional of the governance expectations of non-centralized arbitrariness.

Interpretation through civic culture theory

These reforms are plausibly conducive to the process of moving towards a more participatory political culture, through the establishment of additional loci of power and claims to rights (information, education, fair trial) and thus increasing the perceived space of agency by the citizen. However, civic culture theory also stresses that stable democracy should not only have formal rights of participation but routinised trust and compliance, in Pakistan deep-seated civil-military dominance and selective restrictions on the liberties are structural inhibitors.

Judiciary restoration as a symbolic shift in rule-of-law expectations

This was signaled by the reinstatement of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March 2009 under the pressure of the lawyer's long march and the pressure put on the executive by politicians who started to view courts as a valid restraint on the executive. According to Almond-Verba words, courts can enhance system legitimacy and make citizens believe that institutions do not only matter in the personality rule. This was subsequently the same dynamic which facilitated the Court to invalidate the NRO and implied that the reconciliation-through-amnesty might be fought in constitutional adjudication but not necessarily by elite bargaining or by military action.

NRO and the reconciliation–impunity trade-off

The NRO (proclaimed on October 5, 2007) clearly placed itself as being aimed at national reconciliation and the elimination of political victimization legacies. But in December 2009, the Supreme Court said the NRO was unconstitutional and invalid and reinstated cases that had been shut down under the ordinance and ordered measures to be taken in reopening foreign money-laundering cases.

Interpretation through Lederach

This chain is an example to explain the paradox of peace-making by institutions which Lederach provided in the form of an amnesty as an institutional means of peace-making can be in conflict with the needs of justice, which may lead to the loss of long-term legitimacy in this case. Politically-culturally, when reconciliation is seen as elite immunity, it may enhance cynicism, and strengthen subjects' orientations (powerful



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people are above law), despite possible reduction in short-term elite conflict.

Expanding participation through elections and information space

The 2013 election in Pakistan, the first full civilian elected government in twenty years, was both historically the first and had high turnout, officially at about 55 per cent, but widely reported at about 55 to 90 per cent. This qualifies a participant-culture indicator: citizens who employ elections as serious, habitual change processes, which resulted in the first civilian-to-civilian transference of power.

Attitudes remained skeptical about democratic efficacy

Reporting by Pew surveys around the 2013 election discovered that there was low support to democracy as compared to a strong leader, and the general feeling of low citizen engagement in government- which demonstrates that the participatory events may occur with subject-culture notions of powerlessness.

Media and internet freedom show mixed signals

In 2018, Freedom House once again rated Pakistan as Partly Free, noting multiparty competition, military influence and limitation of the civil liberties. On the online front, Freedom House indicated that in 2018, its online freedom score was Not Free, alluding to online shutdowns, restrictions of content, prosecution on online speech and online surveillance pressures. Such tendencies complicate the argument of progressively growing civic culture: the more expressive public culture is able to grow, the more it is also able to both polarize and generate fear, as well as be selectively repressed.

Conclusion

Collectively, the evidence is of a mixed legacy. The normalization of democratic processes at the elite level through the policies of PPP, with its most apparent forms being constitutional reforms (18 th Amendment), parliamentary continuity, and a political setting in which judicial restoration and constitutional adjudication became the focal points of conflict resolution as opposed to an actual institutional break. These trends are in line with a partial move to civic culture indicators, which include the increased acceptance of elections, institutional rule-making, as well as a limited expansion of rights.

Reconciliation, however, had a strong elite-pact nature as well, and in those cases when the reconciliation was conducted in the form of amnesty or non-accountability its cultural implications plausibly strengthened cynicism and/or subject orientations. The long-term limitations - impunity in the conflict areas, structural civil-military asymmetry, limitations on the freedom of the internet, and violence against pluralism - limited the intensity and spread of political culture change between provinces and strata of society.

Recommendations

In order to enhance a democratic, tolerant, participatory political culture, as an alternative to elite accommodation the one that builds on the reconciliation legacy, but overcomes the weaknesses thereof, the following recommendations are based on the evidence base:

Institutionalize reconciliation beyond elite bargaining

Formal deliberative mechanisms (complementing elite agreements, coalition, charters, interparty pacts) should be used to include civil society, local representatives, women, and minority communities in policy formulation and monitoring, particularly on Centre-



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province conflicts.

Reconcile peace with justice through credible accountability pathways

Reconciliation policies cannot be based on blanket amnesties which undermine legitimacy. Rather, reinforce legal accountability procedures independent inquiry, witness security and legalization where justified, especially enforced disappearances, extrajudicial homicide, which annihilate trust and breed fear.

Make devolution real through capacity and fiscal clarity

Turn devolution into a reality in terms of capacity and fiscal transparency. Promise of the 18th Amendment of devolution and local government needs to be implemented in the long term: it needs fiscal rules and open transfers, accountability on performance, or decentralization will become elite capture at provincial/local level.

Protect civic space in the digital and traditional public sphere

Participatory civic culture is based on a free discussion with the protection against violence and censorship. Enhance the protection of journalists and activists under the law, mitigate the use of arbitrary shutdowns, and enhance accountability toward the content restrictions and surveillance authority, which is in line with rights commitments and the risk patterns known in Freedom House.

Build tolerance through policy continuity and security for pluralism advocates

Inclusion of minority should not be based on tokenism and temporary ministries. Enact minority rights safeguards and interreligious protections, and provide a plausible security and legal safeguard to activists in recognition of the great danger as evidenced by political violence and extremist retaliation.

Strengthen citizen efficacy through transparency and local service delivery

Due to the ongoing attitudes of perceived low power and distrust of democracy, governments must focus on high-salience service provision and transparency particularly through right-to-information access to their operations as a means of realizing formal constitutional political forms into civic capabilities.

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