The Politics Of Representation: An Analysis Of Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf And Pakistan Muslim League (N)

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ABSTRACT
Political representation unfolds in Pakistan's hybrid political system, marked by institutional fragility, military influence, patronage networks and populist mobilization. This study comparatively analyzes Pakistan's two leading parties i.e. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, hereafter referred to as PTI, and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz hereafter referred to as PML-N examining how each party constructs, negotiate and perform political representation. Data for the study were obtained via fieldwork conducted in Peshawar, Karak, and Bajaur districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Eighteen semi-structured interviews and three focus group discussions were held with the party workers in these three districts based on the logic of purposive sampling. With a theoretical framework combining Pitkin's typology of representation, populism by Mudde (2004), hybrid regime by Levitsky & Way (2010), and patron-client theory by Chandra (2004), it was found that PTI's representation incorporates a populist-symbolic mode rooted in a discourse against the elite while PML-N's a patronage-developmental model grounded in elite brokerage and infrastructural governance. It was further found that the political system yields a personalized and institutionally mediated rather than programmatically institutionalized political representation.

Keywords: PTI, PMLN, Populism, Hybrid Regime, Democracy, Representation

INTRODUCTION
A democracy's strength is thought to be grounded in strong political representation. Pitkin (1967) argues that in classical liberal democratic tradition, citizens' preferences are linked to the decision-making bodies of the state via genuine electoral competition and its accountable institutions. Nonetheless, in hybrid or semi-democratic regimes, representation of citizens' interests is mediated by informal power structures, negotiations among elites and asymmetries found in their institutions (Schedler, 2006; Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Since independence of Pakistan in 1947, the governments have remained alternatively civilian and military regimes what scholars have termed as a "praetorian" or hybrid political system (Jalal, 1995; Shah, 2014). Owing to such a situation, political parties, as the linchpin of democracy, operate striving for both electoral legitimacy and support from extra-parliamentary forces. This makes it academically interesting to examine these tensions and comparatively analyze the representation by Pakistan's two largest political parties i.e. PTI and PML-N. PTI was founded in 1996 by former cricketer Imran Khan

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while PML-N by Mian Nawaz Sharif currently led by Mian Shehbaz Sharif.

Rooted in anti-corruption, reformist and anti-dynastic politics, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), frames itself as the representative of "ordinary people" while Pakistan Muslim League (N) framing itself as a pragmatic developmental model with focus on infrastructural modernization and governance experience.

This study pursues answers to the following questions.

How do PTI and PML-N perceive political representation and how do they perform it?

What are the social classes and identities that both the parties claim to represent?

How do their workers perceive political representation?

How institutional constraints bear on their representational practices?

And finally, what does this tell us about the democratic consolidation in Pakistan?

Grounded in a qualitative field work, this study, unlike the existing ones which are primarily based on either elite discourse or electoral data, brings forth evidence to analyze the political representation from below.

Literature Review
Representation in Postcolonial Democracies

Colonial administrative legacies, uneven state formation and elite continuity play a key role and shape political representation in postcolonial states (Jalal, 1995; Almod & Verba, 1963). According to Talbot (2012), Pakistan's legacy shows that she inherited centralized bureaucracy and indirect rule mechanisms which have greatly privileged intermediaries over participatory politics. Therefore, politics is mediated by elite who play the linkage functions between citizens and the state in Pakistan (Rizvi, 2000).

Populism in South Asia

Anti-elite rhetoric and charismatic leadership are often merged in South Asia rendering it into populism (Weyland, 2001). Populism is understood as a thin-centered ideological behavior resulting into the division of society in "pure" versus "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004). Some scholars are of the opinion that PTI in Pakistan symbolizes a recent populist formation mobilizing the young urban middle class who are disillusioned with the dynastic politics.

On the other hand, PML-N's organizational strength falls within the patron-client scholarship (Chandra, 2004; Cheema & Mohmand, 2016). In their politics, constituency service, building biradari alliances, and allocation of developmental funds win them electoral loyalty. Patronage, however, does not negate ideology, it mainly focuses on service delivery as a materialized representation.

Hybrid Regimes and Civil-Military Relations

Levitsky and Way (2010) view hybrid regimes as those political systems where elections occur, however, structurally skewed. Shah (2014), in the case of Pakistan, argues that military has historically shaped electoral and hence political outcomes. This situation renders political representation constrained.

Theoretical Framework
Pitkin's Four Dimensions

Applying Pitkin (1967):

The emphasis of PTI is on symbolic representation i.e. moral leadership claiming substantive representation i.e. grounded in the slogan of anti-corruption. PML-N on the other hand relies on descriptive representation i.e. local elites mirroring constituency and

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formalistic authorization (electoral mandates). Pitkin's framework shows that both the parties not only differ in respect of policy preferences but their mode of representation as well. PTI construct politics as moral and ethical struggle (particularly after the fall of their government in 2022). PMLN more rely on formalistic and descriptive representation wherein focusing on developing socio-economic and institutional structures. However, Pitkin's four dimensions of representation in Pakistan's context is not exclusive. Party politics (in Pakistan's like hybrid democracies) fluctuate between all these dimensions. Parties maneuver through all these dimensions but with different emphasis and intensity. The variations and the intensity shape the voters' predisposition, mobilization and affiliation, determining their genres of political legitimacy.

Mansbridge and Surrogate Representation
According to Mansbridge (2003), representation may well extend beyond the limits of electoral districts. PTI's claim of representing overseas Pakistanis and national moral will falls within this argument. Such claims of representing overseas Pakistanis demonstrates how surrogate representation redesign political and democratic legitimacy. This has expanded relationship/attachment of the people with political parties, political processes and leadership outside the institutional boundaries. PTI thus provides an interesting case study within Mansbridge's framework in Pakistan's context.

Charismatic Authority
The leader of PTI Imran Khan's mobilization falls within the charismatic authority of Max Weber (1978). PTI political mobilization strategy and its political outcomes draw energy from charismatic leadership and authority. It revolves around a peculiar belief that only Imran Khan can transform Pakistan into a social welfare "Islamic" state. Imran's leadership style and charisma in Pakistan's democratic trajectory, accountability and representation style, becomes a fashion of political legitimacy.

Development as Representation
Keeping in view the argument of Huntington (1991) that development projects may also function as evidence of governance, PML-N seems to have institutionalized the model through politics of infrastructure.

Historical-Political Context
The indirect rule by British has led to entrenchment of centralized administration and landlord intermediaries (Talbot, 2012). Shah (2014) argues that military coups in Pakistan in 1958, 1977, and 1999 have reshaped party systems thereby reinforcing extra-parliamentary power structures. Political parties had to change their strategies in order to survive in the new normal in the post 1999 development. With the introduction of private electronic media channels, mobilizational strategies of the political parties significantly changed. PTI compared to other political parties has significantly capitalized on the liberalization of electronic media post-2002 and then specifically the emergence of social media for mobilization (Zia, 2018). It projected itself as a reformist and anti-elitest party. However, the removal of Imran Khan through vote of no confidence in 2022 bears on transforming PTI's reformist narrative into that of resistance.

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Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative interpretivist research design. The design basically incorporates constructivist epistemological orientation. Since political representation is not treated as a fixed institutional category, rather it is a socially constructed and discursively understood phenomenon, therefore, the goal is to understand as to how party actors i.e. PTI and PML-N interpret, perform and experience political representation in their everyday political practices and not to measure it quantitatively.

Pakistan presents an example where representation is mediated through informal networks, and institutional constraints. This renders it into a hybrid political system where formal political institutions bypass lived realities and where an interpretivist methodology is required to explore its dynamics qualitatively.

This study relies on triangulating

documentary analysis i.e. carefully analyzing manifestos, speeches, and election records; data through conducting semi-structured interviews and finally focused group discussions which are significant steps for making the study credible.

Field Sites and Rationale

This study bases itself on data obtained from three districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa i.e. Peshawar, Karrak and Bajaur. The primary rationale for selection of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is that PTI has shown strong performance in the province since 2013. PML-N has selected pockets of influence in the province, however, weaker in the province than the performance it has shown in Punjab. Moreover, basing this study on data from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa makes it distinct from studies based on Punjab- centric narratives regarding examination of political representation. The rationale behind selection of Peshawar district is based on certain characteristics: being capital of the province, strong student and media presence which collectively make it ideal site for analyzing mobilization and youth politics. Further, district Karrak was selected for its clan networks and traditional politics which renders it into a useful site for studying patronage versus ideological mobilization. Finally, district Bajaur, a post-merger tribal district, was included for its characteristics of representing peripheral integration in to mainstream electoral politics post FATA-KP merger, thereby allowing for exploring of dignity and recognition-based representation.

Sampling Strategy

This study employs a purposive sampling strategy aided by snowball techniques. The participants selected were district-level office bearers, union council mobilizers, youth wing members and women's wing representatives (wherever they were available). A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 PTI workers, 9 PML-N workers and 3 Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were held one in each district with 8– 10 participants in each Group Discussion. A total of 44 individuals participated in the study with their ages ranging from 22 to 55 and a gender distribution of 32 male and 12 female.

Data Collection Procedures

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was used to obtain primary data from the participants. Interviews were conducted in Pashto. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed into English. Questions were related to the

participants views about what do they think of political representation? Why do they support their party? How is their party doing at representing the ordinary citizenry? What role does leadership play in their party? How important do they see development versus accountability? What perceptions do they possess about the role of military in politics in the country? In what ways have social media impacted their party politics?

Focused Group Discussions (FGDs)
Focused Group Discussions was the next tool with which primary data were obtained focusing on collective discussion on the issue at hand. Each FDG lasted for around one and half hour. Discussion prompts pointed at:
How does party of the participant perceive services at the grassroot level? What was that which distinguished their party from the rival party? Who are the ones whom he/she sees benefits from his/her party policies? What was the take of their party on women and minority representation?
FGDs were conducted after the interviews to cross verify the data obtained through interviews. This triangulation helped the researchers complement the procedure of obtaining data and validate/contest the data obtained through interviews conducted earlier. The FGDs also stimulated some new insights and helped the researchers identify consensus versus divergent opinions. It was made sure that all participants receive time to express their responses.

Ethical Considerations
A significant ethical considerations protocol was followed given the Pakistan's polarized political environment. Confidentiality of the participants views was crucial. Certain measures were taken to ensure impartiality and confidentiality of the participants e.g. participants were anonymized and coded as PTI-Pesh-01, PML-N-Karak-03, PTI-Baj-02 etc. Sensitive affiliations were not asked and exact addresses not recorded. Informed verbal consent was obtained. If any participants wanted to withdraw, it was respected.

Data Analysis
Coding Process
Data were coded following thematic analysis procedures. A three-stage coding was performed. Coding started from Open Coding including identification of recurring concepts e.g. "development," "justice," "stability," "corruption," "respect." The second phase was that of Axial Coding linking codes into thematic clusters: material representation, moral representation, youth empowerment, centrality of leadership, institutional distrust and patronage mediation. The third phase was based on Selective Coding which included development of core analytical categories: patronage-development representation, populist-symbolic representation and hybrid regime constraints.

Analytical Framework Integration
Empirical findings extracted through three-stage coding were interpreted employing the theoretical framework. Drawing on Pitkin's typology (symbolic versus substantive), framework on populism by Mudde, patronage logic by Chandra and hybrid regime constraints by Levitsky & Way the empirical findings were thus interpreted.

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Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

Since this study is qualitative, it required acknowledgment of positionality. In this regard, the researchers' familiarity with the context and Pakistan's political discourse facilitated establishment of rapport with the participants, caution to avoid interpretive bias, and demanding a balanced representation of both the parties. Substantial efforts were made to analyze the rhetorical narratives critically rather than normatively. Privileging one party's claims were avoided and efforts were made to cross-check the narratives.

5.8 Limitations of the Methodology

The geographical scope of the study is limited to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province only. Punjab or any other province was not studied directly. Party workers may promote official narratives avoiding independent views. Further, the study was limited to grassroot workers and excluded senior leadership. Despite these limitations, employing triangulation significantly enhances the credibility of the study.

PART III

6. Field Findings: Grassroots Conceptions of Representation

6.1 PTI Workers: Moral Legitimacy and Symbolic Ownership

PTI workers' expressions on representation were found to be grounded in moral and symbolic terms than in material ones in all the three districts i.e. Peshawar, Bajaur and Karrak.

6.1.1 Peshawar: Youth, Justice, and Systemic Cleansing

Urban youth mobilization in Peshawar seemed strong as PTI workers recurrently framed representation as something symbolizing "system change."

PTI-Pesh-03 (Male, 27, Youth Wing Member):

It was found that perceptions of representation in the urban center by PTI workers do not take into consideration service delivery. Rather narratives reveal a focus on moral purification. In their view true representation means resisting corruption and that roads and infrastructure do not matter if a nation's leaders are "corrupt," and "thieves." Their leader is an embodiment of honesty. These views strongly align with Mudde's (2004) populist framing which is something denoting a struggle waged on moral grounds between the virtuous citizenry and their corrupt elites. Another perception of PTI workers was that their leader gave a political voice to the educated young citizenry leaving behind politics that only incorporated certain families. This narrative seems focusing on symbolic inclusion rather than taking into consideration the issue of tangible redistribution.

Karak: Hope, Dignity, and Anti-Dynastic Sentiment
PTI-Karak-02 (Male, 35, Local Organizer):

It was found that in Karak, the discourse is grounded in pragmatic politics. The statement, "we do not need politicians from certain families who have a lion's share in politics, rather leadership based on merit" reflects a Weberian (1978) charismatic legitimacy and anti-dynastic populism. Interestingly, however, when the same participant was asked about district level support mechanism, the participant admitted, "definitely, we do help people in their jobs or transfers which is politics of the day." This statement tells about the tension between rejecting patronage and pragmatic politics.

Bajaur: Recognition and Post-Merger Identity

It was found that in Bajaur, representation is framed as something pointing at dignity and inclusion following the merger of FATA into KP province.

PTI-Baj-01 (Male, 31):
Notably, development was discussed less frequently than respect and voice.
The participant spoke about inclusion in politics, "it is in the country's history for the first time that we take part in the mainstream politics. Our party always speak about equal rights for all." This seems closer to a descriptive-symbolic inclusion sort of representation unlike that of youth-focused in Peshawar or dynastic politics in Karak. Development made less attention in their view of representation than respect and giving voice to the people.

PML-N Workers: Development, Stability, and Brokerage
Comparatively, it was found that PML-N workers mainly focused on governance, experience and hence development in their perception of representation by their party.

Peshawar: Experience over Emotion
PML-Pesh-04 (Male, 44, District Office Bearer):
The participant emphasized, "experience is the base of governance. A country cannot be run with slogans. Building infrastructure and managing the economy are crucial which we do." Perception of a "true" representation here focuses on technocracy and sound administration closely aligning with Hungtington's (1991) emphasis on institutional capacity over charisma. "In times of inflation, people need economic stability. They do not care about hot speeches." This statement clearly focuses on representation as something that ensures sound economic management.

Karak: Constituency Mediation
It was found that workers of PML-N in Karak openly acknowledge politics of patronage.

PML-Karak-01 (Male, 50):
A statement, "we intervene when someone needs help with hospital admission, police or other official matter. We think of it real representation," shows a patron-client management by Chandra (2004). Representation in such scenarios stand transactional but normalized. It was found that unlike PTI workers, PML-N workers think of brokerage politics as justified hinting at it as the real service.

Bajaur: Weak Organizational Penetration
Although the presence of PML-N workers in Bajaur is meager, they emphasized a rhetoric based on development rather than grassroot inclusion.

PML-Baj-02 (Male, 38):
The statement, "people will witness development projects, businesses, electricity etc., were we even allowed to complete our full term in office" points at a futuristic infrastructural development.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
Focus Group Discussions provided significant insights into formation of collective identity.

PTI FGD – Peshawar
Discussion in FGD echoed an anti-elite rhetoric. It was asked as to whether their party i.e. PTI makes any use of electables? One of the participants hesitated while replying, "it

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becomes sometimes inevitable to field a strong candidate in order to win elections. It is done keeping in view our bigger mission." It is a perception embedded in cognitive dissonance between purity in populism and pragmatic electoral politics.

PML-N FGD – Karak
Participants of the FGD highlighted developmental project e.g. roads, supply of gas, and administrative ease and access. One of the members remarked, "people do not vote empty slogans, they vote the one who work." All participants criticized the online politics of PTI suggesting that digital activism does not bring any tangible development.

Mixed Political Sentiment in Bajaur
Data from FGD in Bajaur show a mix of skeptical sentiments against all parties. They questioned the discrimination meted to the tribal districts by all parties. One participant commented, "it is in elections that they remember us only." This suggests that representation in their view is something not clear and continuous engagement, however, rather episodic.

Comparative Thematic Analysis
Moral vs Material Representation
PTI workers' perception of representation focuses on moral purification, anti-corruption and dignity while PML-N's on infrastructure development, material delivery and mediation. This bifurcation seems closely aligning with symbolic versus formalistic representation by Pitkin.

Leadership Centrality
Institutionalization of party democracy seemed no concern to workers of either party. Both emphasized on centralized leadership with PTI terming Imran Khan as charismatic mobilizer while MPL-N declaring Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif as experienced administrative leaders.

Institutional Distrust
It was found across the interviews data that both the parties' workers show distrust of institutions. The intervention of establishment in 2022 was seen by PTI workers something hostile to the political environment showing distrust of institutions. Even PML-N workers despised judicial interventions. It shows that hybrid regime constraints play a key role in shaping representation than ideology.

Gendered Dimensions of Representation
A total of 12 female participants from both parties spoke about structural barriers. Workers from PTI described enthusiasm in rallies, however, hinting at their limited power in decision making authority. Workers from PML-N highlighted inspiration from some of their female leaders, however, pointing at the male dominated hierarchy in their party. It can be derived from the statement of one of the PTI workers, "we work hard to mobilize voters in Peshawar, however, it is the ticket decision time when we are not listened to," there is only symbolic and not a significant gender representation (Mansbridge, 2003).

Media and Digital Politics
Workers from PTI emphasized on the democratizing potential of digital media. However, on the other hand workers from PML-N were found critical and skeptical of digital politics. They highlighted the digital divide, the reinforce expansion of urban voice against those in rural areas. It also gives rise to polarization. This finding closely aligns with Zia (2018) who noted that liberalization of media only amplified competition among elites instead of promoting a deliberative democratic environment.

Post-2022 Political Crisis and Representational Shift
It was found that the "regime change" in 2022 ousting Imran Khan has transformed the narrative of PTI. Their focus seems to have changed from reforms in governance to that of resistance, hence a change in representation. The event was termed as institutional betrayal which seems to have further intensified populist framing expanding symbolic martyrdom. On the other hand, workers from PML-N termed it a constitutional procedure. Representation, thus, seems tied to institutional interpretation.

Democratic Implications
Polarization
Keeping in view Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017), it can be argued that populist mobilization causes deepening of division.

Patronage Entrenchment
It can be argued that material mediation has led to strengthening of clientelism, however, stabilizing loyalty at the local levels.

Hybrid Constraint
While keeping in view Shah (2014), imbalance in civil-military relations leads to limitations on party autonomy.

Institutionalization Deficit
It was found that personalities play a key role in shaping representation perceptions among both the party workers with party program playing a meager role in this formation.

Conclusion
The study finds that political representation in the country, in the case of two major parties i.e. PTI and PML-N, rests on two distinct yet intersecting models: a populist-symbolic representation by PTI and a patronage-development representation by PML-N. Field work in the target districts indicate that although workers from both the parties have internalized these narratives, however, hinting at the acknowledgment of contradiction. It can further be argued that political representation in both the parties seems personalized, based on mediation through informal rather than formal networks highlighting structural constraints and unevenness at regional level. Neither of the parties show programmatic democracy institutionalized inclusively. It is recommended that future research may be carried out on the lines of comparison between KP and Punjab provinces, both being strong constituencies for PTI and PML-N respectively. Further, both the larger parties may be examined for women leadership pathways.

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