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The Politics Of Electable(S): A Hurdle To Democracy In Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The term electable refers to a group of politicians with their own clout who shift their loyalty with regime changes. They get their place in almost every parliament. Mainstream political parties need them to form government. This research explores the nature of electable(s) and the impact of the politics of electable(s) on democracy in Pakistan. Both primary as well as secondary data have been analyzed through thematic analysis. The study has found that Electable(s) are influential and experienced politicians who have a strong family background and money. Electable(s) are status quo-oriented politicians who cause stagnation in democracy. The politics of electable(s) is not based on any ideology. It is based on the self-interest of electable(s). Electability can also be discouraged by introducing a proportional representative system in Pakistan, which means people will not vote for a candidate, but they will vote for a party.

Keywords: Electable, Democracy, Election, Patronage Politics, Political Culture, Elite, Ideology.

Introduction:

The term electable means a person capable of being elected to a public office (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Electable is a term used in Pakistani politics for a group of politicians who have clout of their own and change parties and loyalties with the change in regimes. These are those seasonal politicians who fly in the direction of the wind irrespective of anything. They get their place in every cabinet or parliament (Kazmi, 2018).

They are needed in every election by mainstream political parties to form the government, and that is why nobody questions their undemocratic and unethical practices (Haleem, 2020). The art of electable(s) is the art of power. They are used to shift power from one party to another (Abbas A., 2018). Their vote bank is independent of any political party. They have personal clout in their respective areas, making them and their party win the elections (Malik & Ghauri, 2016). Electability is a tool of the establishment to make a party of its own choice win elections. It is a hurdle in the way of ideological politics because they can win or have the ability to win elections regardless of their adherence to a particular ideology or affiliation with a party (Khan S., 2020). They support different governments (Hassan, 2020).



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Literature review

According to Warraich (2018), electability is an international phenomenon and exists in the strong political cultures of the UK and USA. In Pakistan, the politics of electable(s) is not concentrated in a single part of the country. Electable(s) belong to all four provinces of the country. Political parties give them tickets to win elections irrespective of their ideology and manifestos. This culture developed during district board elections right after partition and got further strength during local bodies elections of 1962. This phenomenon was discouraged in the elections of 1970 due to charismatic leadership but reemerged in the elections of 1985. Initially, it was a rural phenomenon, but after 1985, the business community, especially traders and real estate actors, occupied the political scene.

Mehdi (2018) states that in our parliamentary system, the independent winners have to join any political party of their choice. Usually they prefer to join the winning party. Before elections, these independent candidates try to get the tickets of the expected majority party, but if they fail to do so, they go to contest elections as independent candidates. Sometimes the air of victory is not blowing in a single direction; uncertainty takes hold. In this situation, these seasonal politicians prefer to contest elections as independent candidates.

Islam, Zubair, & Muhammad (2019) discuss that due to the lack of principles and morality in our political culture, the phenomenon of electability is on the rise. Some politicians do not want to stay in opposition, join the expected winning party, and are considered important in the process of making government. They are also called fasli pareende (seasonal birds). They are given tickets because of their strong financial positions, which make them win the elections.

According to Abid S. (2018), in Pakistan, democracy is still passing through the process of evaluation. Electable(s) are strongly supported by the establishment. They influence their constituency and can win elections easily without the support of their parties, so they focus on their own interests instead of common interests.

Rae (1992) states that in Pakistan, the roots of democracy have been spoiled by feudalism. In the world, democracy has flourished with the end of feudalism, but in Pakistan, there is still a strong role of feudal lords in politics. They make up a small portion of society but are dominant over the rest of society. In Pakistan, 5% of feudal lords have occupied 95% of seats in the parliament.

Din (2018) Electability is a decisive factor and a tool of the establishment. It makes it possible for any party of its choice to win. It is a hurdle in the way of ideological politics. Political awareness and system reforms within the political parties are needed to eradicate this case.

Methodology

The study answers two questions, i.e., (i) who are electable(s)? (ii) and is the politics of electable(s) a hurdle in the way of democracy? This study has two objectives, i.e., to know about electable(s) and investigate its implications for democracy in Pakistan. The study is qualitative in nature, using both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data has been collected through interviews. The data has then been analyzed through thematic analysis.

Elitist Democracy

In Pakistan, political parties are under the control of certain individuals and families, while in developed countries like America, rank-and-file voters choose the candidates for elections (Haq, 2018). Out of 272 seats of the last National Assembly, 190 seats were rural, which were decided based on clan, tribe, individual, family influence, local grouping, and money. In rural areas, poor people, landless peasants, and small farmers follow the orders of feudal lords, tribal chiefs, rich and influential families, and police officers while casting their votes (Bhatti, 2017). In rural Sindh, Baluchistan, and southern Punjab, a large number of feudal-dominated people cannot use their right to vote democratically. Feudal lords, capitalists, prominent businessmen, and tribal heads control the means of production and wealth. Their economic strength makes them superior in



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society, and hence they control the electoral politics. In Pakistan's elitist democracy, the working class is confined to casting votes and participating in rallies and public gatherings to make their masters glad (Bhatti, 2017). In response, people are helped by their masters in the offices of patwaris and tehsildars in their due works. They are also helped in cleaning their streets and muhalas, providing clean water, providing a sanitation system, admitting their children in schools, providing health facilities, and resolving small disputes among them (Haider, 2018). These electable(s) have a stronghold over the government machinery and help the people in the thana kachehry (Khan S., 2017).

In Pakistan, common people do not take interest in politics due to economic disparity, illiteracy, famines, and other evils and consider politics as an elite's job (Kazmi, 2018).

Electable(s) are status quo-oriented politicians who do not want the ordinary people to get the fruits of real democracy and oppose every political reform. In this regard, various left-wing political parties and the Worker Party of Pakistan had filed a petition in the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2011. The main purpose of which was to urge the government to legislate for electoral reforms that would allow a common man to be a part of the political process. The Supreme Court on that constitutional petition 87/2011 gave a detailed decision that could have led to far-reaching electoral changes. For this reason, in elections of 2013, the National Assembly's expenditure limit was set at 0.5 million rupees, and the provincial assembly's expenditure limit was set at 0.2. In the elections of 2018, these limits were increased to 4 million rupees and two million rupees, respectively, and thus, the contest of election was made impossible for ninety-nine percent of the people of the country (Malik, A. 2020).

Undemocratic Political Culture

In his article "Comparative Political System," Gabriel Almond has written that every political system is embedded in a particular orientation pattern to political action. He categorized this pattern as political culture. Different theorists have defined political culture as a combination of moral attitudes and judgments, political myths and practices, and ideas and beliefs that shape the masses' political behaviors in a particular society. Political culture is a dynamic process that transforms, slowly but gradually, through different intervals in history. Thus, every nation-state has its own political culture characterized by definite values, norms, and beliefs. The social culture of a state plays a vital role in shaping the political culture. The social structure of Pakistan, which is characterized by castes, ethnicity, tribes, and clans, and has been retained through the generations, influences the national as well as the local political culture of the state. The political landscape of Pakistan has been dominated by businessmen, landlords, and civil and military bureaucracies. On the other hand, the political leadership, which has mostly encompassed the people who migrated from the areas not included in Pakistan, had no roots. These aspects not only stimulated undemocratic norms in the political culture but also led to the emergence of the clergy as a strong pillar in the society (Mateen, 2016).

Pakistan's political culture is swinging between democratic aspirations and authoritarian realities, and seems to stand on the verge of hypocrisy. Democracy was one of the roles of the Father of the Nation and one of the guiding principles of the Pakistan Movement, but later on, authoritarian realities and dictatorial regimes hollowed out the roots of the democratic spirit in Pakistani society, resulting in growing unrest and the emergence of contradictions in political culture. Neither the army nor the civilian rulers fulfilled the expectations of the people. Dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, fears, and anxieties continued to grow in every government (Rasheed, 2020).

Pakistani politics has been quite tumultuous, in which new loyalties and alliances continue to emerge, and political affiliations change according to specific circumstances. Individuals, rather than ideologies or party institutions, play a key role in our political culture. Undoubtedly, the politics of the country revolves around personalities. Another aspect is that we have a few influential families in politics and especially in electoral politics who consider the tremendous amount of money spent on electoral politics as an



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investment. (Rasheed, 2020)

The politics of identity is stable in Pakistan's political culture. Although Pakistan emerged with a new identity, colonial politics' effects on its political culture have remained significant since then. Ian Talbot mentions five notable effects. The first effect is the conflicting relationship between regional identity and Muslim nationalism, which did not go unnoticed during the Pakistan movement, especially in Bengal and Sindh. The second effect is that the relationship between Islam and Muslim nationalism is very complex and confusing (Rasheed, 2020).

The third notable effect was a culture of political intolerance and prejudice, which Younis Samad described in his research paper "Reflections on Partition: Pakistan's Perspective" as more severe than the political culture of intolerance. He said that the trend of dominance prevailed in the pre-independence and post-independence periods (Rasheed, 2020). Some of the views of respondents about undemocratic culture in Pakistan are,

Democracy is not merely a form of government, but it is a political culture associated with various factors. In Pakistan, the factors that strengthen democracy do not suit our overall environment. Additionally, since partition, the establishment has frequently been intervening in politics directly or under the civilian umbrella's garb, resulting in the weakening of democracy in particular and Pakistan's political system in general (Khan S., 2020).

No Politics of Ideology

In Pakistani electoral politics, the manifesto and ideologies of political parties matter little. Political parties have their vote bank in big cities, but in small cities, towns, and villages, people do not vote for political parties. Still, they vote for personalities, which include feudal lords, rich individuals, and influential families. These personalities change their loyalties overnight. Their only aim is to protect their interests (Bhatti, 2017).

In Pakistan, there is an oligarchy in political parties because these political parties are identified by their founders instead of their ideologies (Khan A. A., 2018).

"Electable(s) have less respect for democracy, ideology, or political affiliations. They play in the hands of dictators" (Khan S., 2020).

"Electable(s) do not have any permanent ideological commitment or political affiliation. They are wise enough to see the winds of change and take sides accordingly, either before or after elections" (Ullah T., 2020).

"The performance of electable(s) is so far very bad. They have no permanent ideology and political affiliations. Their only aim is to protect their own interests and domination in their respective areas" (Khan S., 2020).

"In Pakistan, people vote for personalities and not for the slogans and ideologies of political parties, and this is the reason why electable(s) win frequent elections in Pakistan" (Khan M. N., 2020).

"Electable(s) have no ideological alienation. They change their ideologies with changing parties. They may become liberal, Marxist, nationalist, or theocratic, depending upon the party they join" (Haleem, 2020).

Politics of Patronage

In this type of politics, politicians greatly favor their voting block or their close associates. In rural areas, people vote in unions and do not vote individually. In villages, the heads of different clans and tribes decide the fate of the vote of their tribes. Local patronage plays a key role in these decisions. Small farmers, landless peasants, and poor people cannot decide individually on whom to vote for. They have to follow the orders of tribal chiefs, local feudal lords, and rich and influential families (Bhatti, 2017).

Elected members of the parliament in Pakistan do not work for the benefit of the general masses, but they feed a particular group of people. The higher the levels of party fragmentation, factionalism, and polarization, the greater will be the incentives for patronage and poorer will be the service delivery quality. Party fragmentation increases the



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information demands on voters since there are many more candidates and, therefore, many more messages that voters have to evaluate during the election. When political parties are highly factionalized, they do not provide their members with stable career prospects, and politicians have a relatively greater incentive to focus on targeted goods so as to build a personal reputation that they can carry across party lines. Finally, in highly polarized party systems, the provision of public goods provides fewer political benefits as different ethnic groups have different preferences over and cannot agree on the public interests to be provided (Hasnain, 2008). The views of respondents about politics of patronage are,

According to Dr. Murad Ali, the politics of electable(s) is the politics of patronage. Electable(s) are experienced politicians who use government resources to help people. They help people in every walk of life and become a strong candidate for winning the next election (Ali D. M., 2020).

According to Zul Wiqar Mashwani, electable(s) use their wealth and also government resources to facilitate their voters. They buy votes from poor people. They provide shelter and security to poor people. They provide jobs to their supporters. These electable(s) have special groups within the masses and feed them, who try to secure their vote bank (Wiqar, 2020).

According to Sher Hassan, the politics of electable(s) is the politics of patronage. Electable(s) have resources. They solve problems of their voters, and voters expect a lot from them (Hassan, 2020).

Usman Khan said that in Pakistan, the establishment is one of the big patrons, while different parties have acted as clients. Like in the 1960s, it was the Convention Muslim League, the Muslim League in the 1980s, the Muslim League (Q) in 2002, and the new one is Tehrik-e- Labaik. These client parties consisted of electable(s) when they remained in power (Khan U., 2020).

According to Safiullah, due to a lack of ideology in politics, non-democratic political parties, expensive elections, and politics of constituency, electable(s) win elections. If we look at the history of elections, all governments were made with the support of electable(s). Kinship bonds, biradari system, and the politics of patronage pave the way for it (Safiullah, 2020).

Dynastic Politics

In Pakistan, the politics of affinity is strongly fastened in the politics of clientelism; it is closely associated with identity, caste, and ethnicity. Tribe, clan, biradari, and caste play an important role in the electoral contests. This politics keeps the hold of political families on resources and passes these resources as a legacy to a new generation of family members. Although dynastic politics is associated with the politics of feudalism, these two are not the same. Feudal politics has over time weakened in Pakistan. Many feudal families have been washed out electorally. But dynastic politics is always alive (Mushtaq, Ibrahim, & Kaleem, 2013). Electoral politics is a family business in Pakistan. A few families are ruling the legislature and have turned it into an oligarchy. It is a big hurdle in the way of electoral politics and institutional growth. Due to this, many veteran politicians have never become the chairman of their parties. The heirs of these political dynasties reach parliament due to their heritage and surnames. Politics is not a thoughtful process to help the communities, but it is a family enterprise (Shah, 2020).

Benazir Bhutto inherited the Pakistan People Party after her father's death, and in 2007 it transferred onto her son and husband through a clear instrument of succession. In Punjab, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz is headed by Mr. Shahbaz Sharif on behalf of his brother Mr. Nawaz Sharif. It is a non-feudal political dynasty. A parallel dynasty of Punjab is an offshoot of the Muslim League called the Muslim League (Q), headed by the Chaudries of Gujrat. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pushtoon nationalist secular politician Asfandyar Wali Khan's claim over the party is also dynastic, leads the Awami National Party. Asfandyar Wali is the son of Abdul Wali Khan and grandson of Abdul Ghafar Khan. The religious parties such as National Jamiat Ulama-e-Pakistan and Jamiat Ulama-



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e-Pakistan are no exceptions either (Mushtaq, Ibrahim, & Kaleem, 2013).

The military rulers in Pakistan have also created political legacies. General Ayub's son, Mr. Gauhar Ayub, entered politics while his father was in power. Mr. Gauhar Ayub's family is now active in politics. The sons of Mr. Zia ul Haq and General Akhtar Abdur Rehman are also in politics (Mushtaq, Ibrahim, & Kaleem, 2013).

The predominance of family politics also has much to do with money, time, and connections that can only come from being part of the family. An unfinanced unknown man cannot contest an election in Pakistan. Voters vote for candidates, not their parties. Votes rarely reflect individual choice. In South Asia, politicians depend upon kinship networks to secure biradari (Pakistan) or fiction (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) or caste-based (India) support at the grassroots level that has a track record of providing patronage and development to their constituency (Mushtaq, Ibrahim, & Kaleem, 2013).

Hereditary politics or leadership is not limited to large families. This style of politics is also very prevalent in the lower classes of society. The monopoly of a family is not limited to the national or provincial assemblies, but also the rate of candidates in local governments clearly reflects hereditary politics. Sitting in the media, hereditary or family politics is called bad, but practically everyone is naked in this bath (Imam, 2018).

Dr. Ali Cheema, a researcher at the Lahore Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, and his colleagues (Hassan Javed and Muhammad Farooq Naseer) compared Pakistan's hereditary politics to those of a few other countries. According to him, the share of hereditary politics in the US Congress was about 6% in 1996, 28% in the Lok Sabha of India till 2010, while the share of hereditary politicians in Pakistan's National and Punjab Provincial Assemblies was 53%. (This rate of hereditary politics is unacceptable to any democratic society) (Imam, 2018).

Surprisingly, in General Zia's non-partisan elections, new candidates came forward, but only a few of them established their new family political monopolies. The children of generals have tried to build their monopolies by contesting elections. That is, the military rulers did not weaken the hereditary leadership. Therefore, it is clear that the advent of new leadership does not necessarily weaken the system of hereditary politics or family politics. The same study also showed that hereditary politics is not limited to the feudal class, but also the industrialists and businessmen who came into politics brought their heirs into politics and thus ignited the tradition of hereditary politics. General Musharraf had made it a condition for candidates to be graduates during his tenure, but when he engaged in manipulative politics, the graduates of political families returned to the assemblies (Imam, 2018).

The big political families of Punjab, including Mr. Nawaz Sharif, Chaudhrys of Gujarat, Twain, Qureshi, Gilani, Makhdoom of South Punjab, and the children of the generals in power, not only maintain their monopoly in the National Assembly but also directly in the Provincial Assemblies. There is no dynastic politics in any of the extremist and banned religious parties except the Tehreek-e-Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi. Dynastic politics also prevails in JUI-F as Maulana Fazlur Rehman of the JUI-F became the leader because of his father, Mufti Mahmood, also the daughter Qazi Hussain Ahmed of the Jamaat-e-Islami has remained the member of the National Assembly (Imam, 2018).

The same is true of hereditary or family politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the largest political family is that of Mr. Pervez Khattak. Traditionally, the largest political family has been that of Khan Abdul Wali Khan. The Hoti family, Saifullah's family, Yusuf Khattak's family, Ayub Khan's family, and Maulana Mufti Mahmood's family have also benefited from this hereditary politics. Qazi Hussain Ahmed's family can also be said to be the beginning of hereditary politics in Jamaat-e-Islami. In Sindh, because politics is mostly in the hands of feudal lords, hereditary politics is much stronger socially. But in Sindh's urban areas, MQM has shaken up hereditary or family politics by being a new party in its sphere of influence. Now that the party is under the sway of the establishment, it is feared that there will be changes in it that will bring back hereditary or family politics. In Sindh, the name of the Bhutto family is usually used in reference to hereditary politics. There,



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however, most political leaders are hereditary leaders. However, it does not say anything about the Bhutto family that Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not get hereditary politics. In terms of heritage, Mr. Mumtaz Bhutto had to do politics, and if Bhutto's government was not overthrown, Ms. Benazir Bhutto's chances of becoming a leader were slim. Similarly, Benazir Bhutto's own violent death created a state of hegemony that led to her son taking over the leadership. Violence and martial law, etc., strengthened the hereditary politics in the PPP. Ms. Benazir Bhutto was educated by her father, but he wanted to bring her into international politics and not into Pakistan's national politics. But martial law and then Bhutto's execution changed the situation. The axis of politics in Balochistan is tribal or family loyalties; political parties exist in name only. Achakzai, Bizenjo, Raisani, Murree, Mengal, Bugti, Zehri, to name a few; all these families have a monopoly on the political system in their respective tribal or ethnic regions. The irony here is that apart from Dr. Abdul Malik, the former Chief Minister, the Nationalist Baloch Liberation Army under the leadership of Dr. Allah Nazar is one where the hereditary leadership is not visible. Except for Dr. Allah Nazar's Baloch Liberation Army, political leadership in Balochistan is hereditary due to the tribal system. Another irony is that extremist organizations, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat-e-Wal-Jamaat, and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) still do not have hereditary politics. But the hereditary leadership in the Tehreek-e-Nifaz Shariat-e-Mohammadi is clearly visible as Fazalulullah, the son-in-law of Sufi Muhammad, took over the leadership (Imam, 2018).

Some of the respondents indicated as follows:

The politics of electability is a threat to the real democratic norms in Pakistan. These electable(s) get selected by all means, and thus, they are less interested in serving the poor masses. Moreover, the electable goes through dynastic politics, which can result in incompatible leaders. It also has a negative impact on major political parties interested in focusing on buying the electable(s) instead of working on the grassroots level of the party organization or being re-elected based on performance. The emergence of democratic leaders could be discouraged by the electability (Khan M. N., 2020).

Dynastic politics is deeply rooted in Pakistan. Actually, it has become a hallmark of our political culture. Party politics and independent politics both depend upon dynasties. Not only in the largest parties like PPP and PML (N), but also in regional and local parties like ANP, PK MAP, JUI, PPP Sherpao, etc., dynastic politics prevails (Safiullah, 2020).

Findings

Based on data collected and analysed by the scholar, the following facts were discovered about electable(s):

Electable(s) are influential and experienced politicians who have a strong family background and money.

Electable(s) play an important role in making and unmaking the government.

In Pakistan, the real norms of democracy are lacking. The undemocratic behaviour of political elites is the major problem in the way of true democracy.

The political culture of Pakistan is swinging between democratic aspiration and authoritarian realities and seems to stand on the peg of hypocrisy.

The politics of electable(s) has hampered the growth of democracy. Due to this, people are in search of an alternative system.

Electable(s) are status quo-oriented politicians.

Electable(s) cause stagnation in democracy.

The politics of electable(s) is not based on any ideology. It is based on the self-interest of electable(s).

The politics of electable(s) is the politics of patronage.

Electable(s) act as a tool for political parties to win elections.



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Recommendations

The following are some suggestions and recommendations to eradicate and discourage the politics of electable(s) in the national politics of Pakistan.

People should be made aware of the negative impacts of the curse of the politics of electable(s). This can be done by an effective education system and free and impartial media.

Ideological politics should be encouraged at the national as well as regional level. For this purpose, study circles should be arranged by political parties and relevant literature should be provided to the political workers.

For discouraging the politics of electable(s), amendments should be incorporated in the Political Parties Act.

Political parties as well as voters should prefer educated and able candidates instead of wealthy candidates.

Leadership should be developed at grass root level. For this purpose, student politics, trade unions and other unions should be encouraged.

Electability can also be discouraged by introducing a proportional representative system in Pakistan, which means people will not vote for a candidate, but they will vote for a party. A party will produce a list of candidates which it wishes to send to parliament. This party is given seats in the parliament on the basis of the percentage of votes it has gotten.

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