

INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN: MYTH OR REALITY?

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Abstract

A truly democratic society requires genuinely functional and representative political parties for promoting societal inclusiveness and extensiveness, public mobilization and motivated organization, arousing and stimulating participatory democracy, providing foundations for sustainable democratic institutions and linking them to the government. To maximize the benefits of participatory democracy, political parties have to articulate public needs and demands, aggregate and augment diverse political interests, train and educate political leadership as well as promote, responsibility, accountability, transparency and impart acceptability to the political system. In developed democracies, political parties channelize upward mobility, resource distribution and inclusiveness; nevertheless, in developing democracies like Pakistan, political parties are personality-centric with weak intra-party organizational structure. Lacking the real democratic culture at intra-party level sparks factionalism and fragmentation within the party since the party workers are not provided by any space for their proper elevation. Moreover, over-centralization of power in party leadership creates space for its arbitrary use and discourages the culture of internal debate and deliberation. Dynastic parties never tolerate dissident opinions and such workers are shown exit-doors. Consequently, the gap between central leadership and party workers widens which adversely affects the party in its binding, integration, functioning, and deliverance. The instant study intends to explore the causes which promote over-centralization and personality-centric political culture among political parties of developing democracies like Pakistan. The paper also examines the issues which the parties face in proper instrumentation and appliance of an internally inclusive decision-making process. The study relies on secondary resources and examines the intra-party democratic culture of three national political parties. The result shows that majority of the political parties in Pakistan has nothing with internal democratic setup and intra party elections mean nothing but to consolidate the dynastic politics.

Keywords: Intra-party democracy, Inclusiveness, political parties, party organizational structure

Introduction

In the modern-day politics, political parties play a pivotal role in articulating desires and demands of the masses into people-centric policies. In this regard, they conscientiously and laboriously devise and formulate their party programs, carefully and rigorously scrutinize the political aspirants, allocate the tickets to the capable contestants, tactfully conduct an electoral campaign to secure maximum parliamentary slots and finally seize treasury or opposition benches. Weber believes that “political parties are the children of democracy, of the mass franchise, of the necessity to woo and organize the masses”. Discussing the evolution of the political parties, he observes that primarily, “parties were formed according to the class interest, family traditions or for ideological reasons to serve the interests of class or family”. The existence of the political parties with different shapes and structure is history long (Weber, 1990). According to Bryce, “parties are inevitable; no free country has been without them; and no one has shown how representative government could work without them”. The roots of the political parties can be traced out quite before the concept of the democracy. None of the state was free from their existence whatsoever the government was. They might be varied in terms of their ideologies and structures but showed their existence in all forms of government (Bryce, 1921). Schattschneider observes that “political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable without political parties”. It is generally believed that the political parties have achieved a central position in the modern democracies and doing their best to improve the quality of democracy (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Lipst, 2000; Scarrow, 2002; Schattschneider, 1942).

Political parties have emerged as key operative tools for developing an inclusive society. They sense the public pulse and inculcate democratic values in politics by engaging citizens in the political process and thus serve as a prerequisite for political institutionalization in the society (Tariq, Usman, & Sajjad, 2015). According to Sartori, “the primary function of a political party is to develop a link between citizenry and government”. To make the intra party decisions more representative and collective, the political parties have to facilitate their enrolled members for an effective and productive participation at party level (Sartori, 1976). Furthermore, political parties perform three main functions which included the mass mobilization through identifying critical domestic and international issues, developing political strategies for electioneering and, if become winner(s), the governance. Hence in democratic states, public institutions and representative as well as inclusive political parties are interlinked and intertwined and the existence of any democratic political order without an open and competitive party system is an impossible phenomenon. The party theorists believe that these entities have become a lifeline in the establishment and proper functioning of a representative and inclusive democracy. However, some scholars criticize the way through which the parties operate in the political setup. They argue that parties fail to perform their basic functions as being “vehicle of representation”, “instrument of mobilization” and the most importantly “channel of interest articulation and aggression”. However, the authoritative structure of the parties succeeded to retain the exclusive control of candidate

selection, structuring of party organization and formulating the government (Van Biezen, 2004).

Political parties can adversely affect the spirit of democracy if fail to internalize the true democratic culture within their ranks. Rizvi is of the opinion that:

they can cut in both ways: a source of strength for democracy as well as a threat to democratic values and norms depending on how they function, deal with their internal organizational matters, mobilize people on the basis of a socioeconomic program and help them making intelligent choices for electing their leaders and selecting policy options” (Rizvi, 2015). Nevertheless, these propositions can be achieved through societal transformation and liberty. Since the political parties emerge from and reflect the society, therefore, if they provide viable space and accommodate almost all sections of the society in their ranks, hence, left nothing for centrifugal forces to manipulate the societal diversity by developing and propagating their self-centric narratives which otherwise would hit the national integrity.

Democratic theorists stress upon free, fair, transparent, regular and uninterrupted elections and equal opportunities for all. They also place great importance upon the electoral-operational channels not only among the political parties but also within the parties' ranks (Donnell, 1999). Since the political parties has extended in a way to aggregate the demands and desires of the people in democratic ways, hence, it is pertinent that political parties should internally be ruled democratically through surfacing equal opportunities and prospects for all. So that all of them can enjoy political and electoral process (Toerell, 2010). Therefore, democratic principles require openness in candidate selection, inclusiveness and a shared decision-making mechanism among party leaders and its ranks. All these norms reinforce the overall democratic culture and values by nurturing democratic attitude among citizens. According to competitive democracy school of thought, a well-organized and effective operative system of competitive political parties is the primary determinant for effective and collective interest aggression and articulation and eventually channelizing those in competing for the government. However, political parties should follow inclusive and participatory mechanism in establishing a well-functioning participatory democracy in the wider and heterogeneous societies; only then the intra-party democracy would promote and strengthen the efficacy and competitiveness of political parties and eventually the inclusive and participatory democracy will be flourished in the society (Dahl, 1956; Downs, 1957; Sartori, 1987; Schattschneider, 1942). Through developing intra-party democracy, the parties can easily manage to elect more capable and proficient leaders, articulate collective and representative policies and in the longer run can grab the electoral ground to form the government. Moreover, these competitive practices would affect the democratic and political culture of the state in a productive and cohesive way. It would not only create a level playing field for selection of electoral candidates and formulating collective party policies but would also encourage the political equality and openness within the political parties. It would further provide an assurance for the popular and good governance approach and on the other hand would promote the culture of transparency and accountability. Intra-party democracy is a sole mechanism through which inclusive and deliberative practices can be invigorated

through a quality and constructive debate on domestic and international issues (Sarrow, 2005).

On the contrary, oligarchy school of thought is of the opinion that, in their organization and functioning, political parties are not democratic but have the propensity to be oligarchic. Teorell argues that “in order to serve democratic ends, political parties themselves must be ruled by oligarchic principles” (Toerell, 1999). It believes that intra-party democracy is inconvenient and ponderous which leads towards inefficient, tedious and long-widened decision-making process which is not at par with the real myth of a well organized, structured and institutionalized party system. Hence intra-party democracy weakens the parties’ structure; as its natural consequence, political parties compromise their principles and provide space for their opponents to manipulate the situation which is an undesirable proposition for the parties and their followers (Duverger, 1954; Michels, 1968). They further argue that intra-party democracy does nothing but adversely affects the party cohesion and strengths and increases the risk of internal fraction and dissention. Most of the time and energies of the political parties thus spent in conflict resolving which undermines their concentration over electoral and political success. In the developing states, political parties should be oligarchic and authoritative in nature to maintain parties’ strength and integrity (Michels, 2016).

However, all these assumptions would block the nurturing of political leadership as well as induction of new blood in the parties’ ranks which, instead of becoming democratic political parties, would become dynastic, oligarchic and personality-centric enterprises. Missing intra-party democracy would thwart parties’ decision-making process. The party leadership would nominate or select electoral candidates on personal likes and dislikes rather than merit and consolidate the powers of few in the party at the expense of party members (Gauja, 2006). The political parties, if become personality-centric then they would never deliver good governance and the democracy in real sense would never be deepened in the society (Akhtar, 2009; Bibi, Jameel, & Jalal, 2018).

It is an accepted and well-settled proposition that the political parties which fail to perform their internal functions in a democratic way cannot perform in democratic way at state level. Internally non-democratic and authoritative political parties cannot sense the public music and their non-inclusive policies adversely affect the public-political parties’ relations. Eventually, the political parties become the mouthpiece of only limited class and fail to aggregate the public sentiments into reality. Missing intra-party democracy reinvigorates party defections and cleavages; its only accelerates the political impatience and snubs the culture of accommodation. Democratic culture provides that critical issues should be debated and deliberated at party level and decisions would be made collectively. If political parties follow the principle of openness and inclusiveness, they minimize the option of factionalism and fragmentation (Patrick Kollner, 2005). Moreover, it creates a legitimate internal conflict-management system which marginalized the opportunism and indiscriminate use of

delegated powers. Hence, in the contemporary world, intra-party democracy has become an essential determinant for the well-growth and functioning of democratic institutions. Scarrow advocates that the increased party democracy and effective party functioning are strongly correlated. He believes that these propositions result in substantive electoral success and eventually societal democratic culture prevails (Scarrow, 2005). Maiyo emphasized that “political parties should follow the democratic norms and values in true letter and spirit if they come to play their role as legitimate and credible agents of democratization”. However, it depends how effectively and systematically they manage their enrolled members’ participation at party level and practically implement the designated rules and regulations in their organizational structure and hierarchical slots. An absence of such a set of rules or their ineffective enforcement leads towards significant institutional and operational challenges (Maiyo, 2010).

The Case of Political Parties in Pakistan

In Pakistan, democracy within political parties is in its embryonic stage and facing a large number of chronic issues including unconstitutional sacking of elected governments under the covert or overt military support, legal protection to these illegitimate and illicit moves through constitutional courts under the “doctrine of necessity”, personality-centric and over-centralized political parties, dynastic leadership, ineffective and inefficient intra-party structures, fast-growing impatience and intolerance within the political parties, un-accommodative and non-inclusive attitude towards the party and non-democratic response towards the democratic practices ranging from intra-party elections to candidate selection have adversely affected the culture of political parties and widened the public-political parties’ gap. Unfortunately, no serious and practical attempts have been made to bridge this ever-increasing distance.

Majority of the political parties are born after the creation of Pakistan and centered on personality cults, hence, their organizational structure and hierarchical tree have yet to be established on democratic grounds. On the other hand, “old and adult political parties” seem to be ineffective and circumscribed. Political parties are being run in Pakistan in quite selective mode. All the hierarchical slots are filled through nominations and the intra-party elections are conducted in a flimsy way only to fulfill the legal requirements. In short, authoritative and dynastic political culture as well as non democratic governments exploited the weak political parties for their own personal and vested interests. Resultantly, the parties failed to establish and develop themselves as well as to represent the public and defend their interests in a democratic way. Hence, the political parties did not play their role in democratizing the Pakistani state and society in a real sense. Salim says that: “*citizen form political parties that politically compete for power and, if trusted, only then enter into power corridors. However, in Pakistan, the said proposition is not found. Political parties developed in the parliament under the patronage of ruling elites*” (Salim, 2005).

As an outcome of the preceding discussion, following research questions are designed for the instant study:

Research Questions:

- i. Whether or not the intra-party democracy promotes inclusiveness and the culture of accommodation in Pakistan?
- ii. In developing states, like Pakistan, whether oligarchic set-up within the political parties strengthens the organizational structure or invigorates factions and fragmentation?

Research Methodology:

Dozens of political parties are registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). However, only a few parties (having national/regional/religious/ethnic posture) bag sizeable votes in elections and enjoy the parliamentary representation. To answer the designated research questions, only three major political parties were selected which captured more than thirty seats (each party) of National Assembly in the last two general elections held in 2013 and 2018. These parties included Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (Parliamentarian) (PPP-P), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI). During the study, mainly secondary sources of research were used. Available published and online books, articles and newspaper editorials were accessed and analyzed. Moreover, official links of the parties and some office-bearers were also consulted to get the firsthand knowledge.

Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)

The party constitution of PML-N stresses that the intra-party elections should be conducted sporadically of four years. It further mentions that in case of the removal of the party head, party Central Working Committee would elect an acting chief within one week and the new president of the party would have to be elected by the general council not later than 45 days (“Constitution, Pakistan Muslim League (N),” 1996). Contrary to constitution, the party observes irregular and patchy schedule of intra party elections; 2011 was the year when PML-N conducted intra party election after unexplained gap of ten years. Khan believes that party did that exercise only to satisfy the ECP wherein Nawaz Sharif was elected as the party president (Khan, 2011). As per party constitution party had to conduct election in July 2015 but it took more than fifteen months to conduct it. The said election was only the replica of the previous one. Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, succeeded to retain the slot of party president through an unopposed election and to some extent, all other party positions were occupied by his loyalists (“PMLN’s intra party elections on Oct 18,” 2016; Wasim, 2016a, 2016b). Meanwhile, a report by PILDAT in 2015 assessing intra party democracy in Pakistan concludes that the PML-N had the weakest internal democracy when compared with seven other major political parties of Pakistan. The said report further disclosed that the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the party had not met even once in the past two and a half years and the National Council had not met since July 2011. Major policy decisions of the party had been taken without any institutional consultation. The party earned this status of having the weakest internal democracy for the second consecutive year in a row. The report further observes that “*Power within the party seems to be concentrated in the party president's hands, and the party constitution does not grant any specific powers*

to the Chairman and Vice Presidents – the next senior most positions. Dissent within the party is usually ignored and most of the decision making is carried out without formal consultation of the CEC or any other body of the party (Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan 2015, 2016)”.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan in July 2017 disqualified the then Prime Minister of Pakistan and president of PMLN, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif after a long hearing of Panama case under Article 62(1)(f) (Bhatti, 2018); (Masood, 2017). As a consequence, the slot of PML-N's president also became vacant. Consequent upon the new scenario, party's Central Working Committee and the general council meeting were convened which elected Mr. Shahbaz Sharif (the younger brother of Mr. Nawaz Sharif) as party president (A. Malik & Sheikh, 2018; “PML-N elects Shahbaz Sharif its permanent president,” 2018; “Shahbaz Sharif formally elected as PML-N's president,” 2018). The transfer of party leadership from one “Sharif” to another “Sharif” established that the party failed to internalize a truly democratic culture at the gross root level. Moreover, irregular and delayed party meetings, controlled intra party elections and the dynastic continuity in leadership had been alleged as the key loopholes of the democratic essence of the party. Maraym Nawaz, the daughter of Nawaz Sharif and Mr. Hamza Shehbaz, the son of Shehbaz Sharif are also portrayed as the future successors of Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif respectively which further establishes that the PML-N has adopted Sharif “cult” in its ideology and functioning.

Pakistan People's Party (Parliamentarian) (PPP-P)

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was founded by Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967. After the execution of Mr. Bhutto, Begum Nusrat Bhutto became the party president in 1979. Her daughter Benazir Bhutto replaced her as party president in 1988. She retained that slot until her assassination in December 2007. After Benazir's assassination, her son, Bilawal Bhutto, became the party chief and Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, the spouse of Benazir Bhutto, became co-chairman of the party through the will of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto which was also endorsed by the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the party. Although, the constitution of the party demands fresh intra party election after every three years (Abbas, 2017; “Pakistan People's Party: Constitution,” n.d.) nevertheless the party did not manage to conduct any intra party election throughout this period and all the office bearers were appointed through nominations (Ullah, 2018).

Meanwhile, a set of new rules and regulations was introduced by President Musharraf in 2002 which made it mandatory for the political parties to conduct periodically intra party elections failing which the ECP was authorized to cancel the party registration. The said legal bindings forced the PPP to form a new faction entitled Pakistan People's Party-Parliamentarian (PPP-P) to contest the general elections of 2002. Makhdoom Amin Faheem and Raja Pervaiz Ashraf respectively became unopposed president and secretary general of the newly registered party whereas Miss Bhutto remained the party president of the PPP. The constitution of PPP-P stresses that “the intra-party elections would have to be held after

every two years or as determined by the “Federal Organization” but the last three elections for PPP-P were conducted in 2007, 2013 and 2017 with irregular and patchy periodical gaps. The said elections were conducted only to fulfill the legal requirements of the ECP and the spirit of democratic values was missing. Surprisingly, majority of the office bearers succeeded to retain their slots unopposed. Interestingly, Bilawal Bhutto, Nayyar Bukhari and Saleem Mandiwala were not present at the scene but re-elected (“Zardari elected PPPP president, Bilawal elected PPP chairman,” 2017). The PILDAT report of 2015 rates the PPP as the third weakest party in terms of internal democracy; it further observes that the tradition of dynastic leadership is well-established in the party which is dependent on Bhutto/Zardari family for providing leadership (*Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan 2015*, 2016).

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI)

PTI was founded by Imran Khan in 1996. To elect the office bearers for a term of four years, the party conducted its first intra party election in 2012-13 and the second in 2017. Although both these elections were criticized because of their credibility and transparency but it is a credit for PTI that it involved all its workers in the internal democratic process of the party. Mr. Hamid Khan was the Chief Election Commissioner in the first election. In the said election, Makhdoom Javed Hashmi was elected as party president and Shah Mehmood Qureshi was elected as vice-chairman of the party. Imran Khan was elected unopposed as party chairman (“PTI intra-party polls: Imran Khan elected chairman unopposed,” 2013). Massive illegalities and ill-practices were allegedly committed during the electoral process (Wasim, 2017). To address the electoral complaints, an election tribunal headed by Justice @ Wajihuddin was constituted by Imran Khan. The commission recommended the dissolution of all the elected bodies as well as to shorten the tenure of elected officials from four years to two years; it further recommended for sacking of four key leaders including Jahangeer Tareen, Pervaiz Khattak, Abdul Aleem Khan, and Nadir Leghari. Under the pressure from print and electronic media, Imran Khan partially implemented the recommendations of the commission in March 2015 but reappointed most of the sacked party office bearers in the interim set up. The party didn’t announce the schedule for next intra party elections; meanwhile, all the powers were exercised by the party chairman Imran Khan. He emphasized during a party convention in Islamabad that he was the sole authority to decide who is loyal to the party and who is not (“Imran Khan’s policy statement on his own place in the party in PTI National Council meeting and implications for intra-party democracy,” 2015). ”

Analyzing upon the parameters like active participation of women, youth and minorities in the party affairs and discouragement of the tradition of dynastic leadership, the PILDAT report of 2015 recognizes PTI as the third most democratic political party of Pakistan (*Internal Democracy of Major Political Parties of Pakistan 2015*, 2016). Moving ahead, Mr. Tasneem Noorani was appointed as new Chief Election Commissioner of the party who framed new electoral rules. The second intra party elections were held in June 2017; using electronic software, the voters had to elect one among the two panels i.e. “Insaf Panel” and “Ehtisab Panel” led by Imran Khan and Naik Muhammad Khan respectively. Only 10.4%

turnout was recorded during the said election wherein “Insaf Panel” of Imran Khan won. It is quite surprising that the party could not convince majority of its members to participate in the electoral process or the majority showed their reservations over the whole procedure (“Imran Panel wins PTI election,” 2017; M. Malik, 2017).

Conclusion

The political parties in Pakistan although conduct periodic intra-party elections but the practice lacks a truly democratic letter and spirit; instead, they use non-democratic tools to keep intact and maintain the hierarchical structure of the party. It is quite unfortunate that the said parties beating their drums for the promotion and implementation of democracy fail to implement the same in their ranks. They do not follow the democratic norms and values hence various the intra party appointments are made through nomination instead of elections. Unfortunately, political parties in Pakistan could not develop a mechanism to breed the leadership since they are being run through dynasties and the proper political training of the gross root level workers is missing; these workers are not included in consultative and decision-making process. Besides, the trust-deficit between political parties and masses is also increasing because the political parties fail to fulfill their electoral pledges after seated on treasury benches. It is a need of the hour that new leadership should be groomed by providing opportunities in contesting intra party elections and the old political stalwarts must encourage and absorb the induction of younger political blood.

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