

# PAKISTAN

*Ross Masood Husain*

## I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The territories now constituting Pakistan were, prior to independence in 1947, a part of British India. They were governed by the colonial power (imperial Britain), initially under the direct rule of Queen Victoria and later under the statutes passed from time to time by the British Parliament (Indian Councils Acts 1861, 1892, Government of India Acts 1909, 1919 and 1935). Hence, parliamentary and electoral-style politics (sometimes referred to as the Westminster model of democracy) were progressively introduced by the imperial British administration in the South Asian subcontinent mainly through the statutes of the British Parliament. On independence, the operation of the last comprehensive constitutional and political reforms act introduced by the British Government in India, i.e. the Government of India Act 1935, was continued under the provisions of the Indian Independence Act 1947 (also enacted by the British Parliament). Subsequently, with certain amendments, it was adopted as the interim constitution of Pakistan and therefore became the foundation of constitutional development in the country.

*Political system*

Pakistan thus inherited a political system that was parliamentary (and federal) in character, and went on to establish a federal government answerable to a bicameral national parliament at the centre, and provincial governments answerable to elected provincial assemblies in the provinces. Indeed, the Objectives Resolution, which was adopted by the very first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan as early as 7 March 1949 to serve as a preamble to the constitution of the country, stated explicitly in paragraph 2 that "[T]he state of Pakistan shall exercise its power and authority through the chosen representatives of its people" (cf. Khan 2001: 91). Throughout the constitutional history of Pakistan, the Objectives Resolution has lent its colour and substance to preambles of various constitutions that have since been adopted, evidencing thereby a well-marked adherence to the parliamentary and democratic principles embodied in it.

Of the two types of electoral systems, that is, majoritarian and proportional, Pakistan follows the former. Constituencies are single member with a joint electorate system. National and provincial constituencies are first delimited (with the size of the area and population as the main determining factors), publicly notified, and electoral rolls drawn up. Every five years, the inhabitants of the demarcated areas vote for the candidates of their choice on an adult franchise and one-man-one-vote basis, with the candidate polling a relative (not absolute) majority of votes declared the winner. The system has its faults in as much as it favours the local influential (feudal lord, tribal chief, religious leaders, industrial magnate, other, usually with a parochial as opposed to a national outlook), who is able to manage an easy win over rivals with the help of his personal block of votes in his captive constituency. Increasing voices are now being heard for Pakistan to switch over to a proportional electoral system.

Elections to the Pakistan Senate follow a special procedure in accordance with article 59 of the Pakistani constitution from 1973 (Government of Pakistan 2002: 31–32). The Senate is a continuous house and all provinces are equally represented there. The present total membership is 100.

Its term is six years; half of its members retire every three years. There are five categories of members of the Pakistani Senate and each has a different rule for retirement. The respective categories and their retirement rules are:

- Fourteen general members are indirectly elected by each of the provincial assemblies, seven retiring after the first three years and the other seven after the expiry of the next three years.
- Eight are directly elected members from federally administered tribal areas (FATA); four retire after the first three years and four after the next three years.
- For the federal capital, there are two general members plus one woman and one technocrat. One general member retires after the first three years and another after the next three years; the technocrat retires after the first three years and woman after the next three years.
- There are four female members indirectly elected by each of the provincial assemblies. Of these two retire after the first three years and two retire after the next three years.
- There are also four technocrat members, indirectly elected by each of the provincial assemblies; two retire after the first three years and two retire after the next three years.

The most recent three-yearly elections for 50 members of the Senate were held in March 2009. During these elections the political parties avoided fielding candidates against each other and considerable political accommodation resulted in a smooth electoral process and undisputed results. However, many candidates were elected unopposed.

The president is elected for a term of five years on polling a relative majority of the combined votes of the members of parliament and the four provincial assemblies. According to the constitution, the president is the head of the state, represents the unity of the republic, must be a Muslim of not less than 45 years of age and possess all qualifications prescribed for a person to be eligible for membership of the Pakistan National Assembly. The Election Commission of Pakistan, a statutory body, is assigned the tasks of delimiting the constituencies, preparing the electoral rolls, scrutinising candidates and the conduct of elections to the office of the president, senate, national assembly, provincial assemblies and the local governments. It is usually headed by a serving/retired senior judge (Government of Pakistan 2002: 121) with a reputation for honesty, integrity and impartiality. Under the new national judicial policy finalized under the supervision of the sitting chief justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar M. Chaudhary, and implemented from 1 June 2009, senior serving judicial officials do not take any responsibility for the electoral process.

*Constitution* The organization and structure of the federal and provincial governments in Pakistan are governed by the provisions of the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) from 1981 read in conjunction with the current constitution, dated 1973. The latter was preceded by the interim constitution (1972); the constitutions of 1962 and 1956; and finally by the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) 1947 – almost all of which in their own way were federal and parliamentary in character. The existence of political parties being implicit in the term “parliamentary”, there is no reference as such to political parties in the constitution<sup>1</sup>, much less the assignment of special functions to them.

The constitution guarantees fundamental rights, including rights such as equality of status and opportunity; equality before the law; freedom of thought and expression, belief, faith, worship and association; and social, economic and political justice, subject to the law and public morality (articles 8 to 28 of the constitution). Adequate provision is made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities and disadvantaged groups.

The constitution also confers guarantees of fair trial and the due process of law for the protection of the life, liberty and property of citizens. Despite the fact that these basic civic rights are enshrined in the constitution, Pakistan’s human rights record has remained poor. Serious abuses such as extrajudicial killings, politically motivated disappearances, arbitrary arrest/detention/exile, denial of a fair public trial, and degrading torture in custody are matters of almost everyday occurrence. In addition, there has been arbitrary interference in the freedoms of speech and press, of peaceful assembly and association, and of religion. “Honour” killings of women, bonded labour,

human trafficking, and child labour practices are rampant. The country reports on human rights practices issued by the US State Department, Amnesty International reports and reports of Pakistan's own Human Rights Commission<sup>2</sup> (2008) have catalogued these abuses in vivid detail.

Pakistan was founded as a parliamentary democracy, but the history of democracy has been a troubled one, marked by ongoing tripartite power struggles between presidents, prime ministers and army chiefs. Military regimes have ruled Pakistan directly for over 34 years of its 62 years of existence. Pakistan has no sustained history of effective constitutionalism or parliamentary democracy. The country has had five constitutions, the most recent being ratified in 1973 (and significantly modified several times since). From the earliest days of independence, the country's armed forces, usually acting in tandem with the president, have engaged in three outright seizures of power from elected civilian-led governments: by General M. Ayub Khan in 1958; General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977; and General Pervez Musharraf in 1999.

*State  
of democracy*

After 1970, four successive governments were voted into power, but not once was a government voted out of power – all five were removed by the army through implicit or explicit presidential orders. Of Pakistan's three most prominent prime ministers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was executed; his daughter Benazir Bhutto was exiled, and later assassinated; and Nawaz Sharif suffered seven years in exile under threat of life in prison before his 2007 return. In a 2004 public opinion survey (conducted by the International Federation for Election Systems), nearly two-thirds of Pakistanis were unable to define the term "democracy". A 2008 index of state weaknesses (compiled by the Brookings Institution) labelled Pakistan the world's 33<sup>rd</sup> weakest country (between Zambia and Cambodia), based on low scores for political institutional effectiveness and legitimacy, and for the (in)ability of the government to provide citizens with the physical protection of life, liberty and property.

In the past five years, there have been no significant changes or improvement. The reason is that democratic norms and institutions have failed to compete with more traditional forces that are highly resistant to change. These include deeply entrenched feudal land control in the countryside; a large and privileged military establishment; a vast black-market economy; a bureaucracy that functions as a machine for graft and patronage; a personalized system of party politics; a pernicious nexus between official power and private gain; and, more recently, a burgeoning tide of Islamic militancy that has gained wide popularity among the disaffected poor.

Pakistan has made periodic attempts to operate as a parliamentary democracy. Each time, however, its civilian institutions have proven vulnerable to political pressure, its elected leaders autocratic or greedy, its political parties personality-driven, its ethnically diverse provinces resistant to central unifying authority, and its winner-takes-all culture of politics intolerant of dissent or compromise. Each time, the army has eventually stepped in on the grounds that civilian leaders were too corrupt and self-serving to be trusted with governing, that the country risked collapsing into chaos, and that only military discipline and honour could salvage the situation. It is far from certain whether the current elected civilian regime, despite its good intentions and the changing role of the army as a dominant political player, will have any greater success.

Pakistan is a federal state. In a federal set-up, where both the federation and the federating units (provinces) derive their authority from the same constitution, both are independent of each other's control in the spheres assigned to them by the constitution. There is a clear-cut division of powers – executive, legislative, judicial, administrative and financial – between the federation and the component units (provinces) through a device called the "Legislative Lists".

*Separation  
of powers*

Pakistan started off with three of these lists: federal, provincial and concurrent as in the Government of India Act from 1935 and in the constitution of Pakistan from 1956. In 1962 this structure was rearranged, i.e. one Federal List was formed. Today, under the 1973 constitution, there are two legislative lists: federal and concurrent, with the residual powers being assigned to the provinces.

The Federal Legislative List (Part I and II) comprises a total of 67 subjects, including such matters of national importance as defence, foreign affairs, customs and tariffs, posts, telegraphs, communications and the like. The Concurrent List consists of 47 subjects on which both the federation and the province can legislate. The Provincial Assembly has the exclusive power to make laws with respect to any matter not on the Federal or Concurrent List, which generally comprise matters of "local" or provincial interest, such as education, health, sanitation, local administration and the like (see Khan, *op.cit.*, pp. 886–887). A Council of Common Interests has been provided which, *inter alia*, helps smooth out conflicts of interests between the constituent units. It is, however, expressly stipulated that, in the case of conflict between a federal and a provincial law, the federal law will prevail. The balance of power is thus effectively tilted in favour of the federal government.

Similarly, a separation of powers is prescribed for the three institutional pillars of parliamentary democracy: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. All three fulfil major roles assigned to them under the constitution. The constitution is accepted as supreme. It is the constitution that empowers the parliament to legislate national laws that represent the interests and concerns of the people. It is the constitution that empowers the executive to exercise authority in all matters in respect of which parliament has the right to make laws. It is the constitution which provides for a Supreme Court of Pakistan at the national level and high courts of judicature in each province to dispense justice according to the law of the land. The traditional concept that, in a parliamentary democracy, the legislature legislates, the judiciary interprets the law, and the executive implements it is acknowledged in theory but has been wantonly violated in practice.

Since the inception of Pakistan, there have been numerous cases of the arbitrary dismissal of popular governments, the unlawful dissolution of elected legislatures, the unjustified appropriation of powers legitimately exercisable by parliament through "bulldozed" constitutional amendments, the manipulation of judgments of the superior judiciary, the physical storming of the highest court and dismissal of top judges, military takeovers and subversion of the constitution and, at times, suspension of the constitution itself – all at the behest of a high-handed executive. Both Pakistan's civil and military rulers have freely indulged in these gross malpractices (some of them treasonable), thereby not only rendering dysfunctional the checks and balances inherent in the system but also producing a crop of "pygmy" or "bonsai" politicians – stunted from birth and unable to function independently. The failure to inculcate lasting values and the practices of democracy (a culture of democracy and official accountability simply does not exist) has had horrendous consequences: public institutions have failed to mature, civic life has remained largely confined to a tiny elite, and the internal tensions, especially between Islamic and secular values, continue to defy resolution, often spilling over into mindless and uncontrolled violence.

*National assembly* Pakistan has a bicameral legislature comprising a National Assembly and a Senate. Both houses together are referred to as the nation's parliament. Of the two houses, the National Assembly is the heart of the country's parliamentary democracy. It comprises a total of 342 elected/nominated members (including seats reserved for women, technocrats and others). The members elect a speaker and a deputy speaker, who preside over the assembly's deliberations; a leader of the house who commands the support of a majority of members and who, by virtue of that support, becomes the prime minister or head of government; and a leader of the opposition. The National Assembly is assigned the constitutional role of enacting legislation, which becomes the law of the land after approval by the Senate and assent by the president.

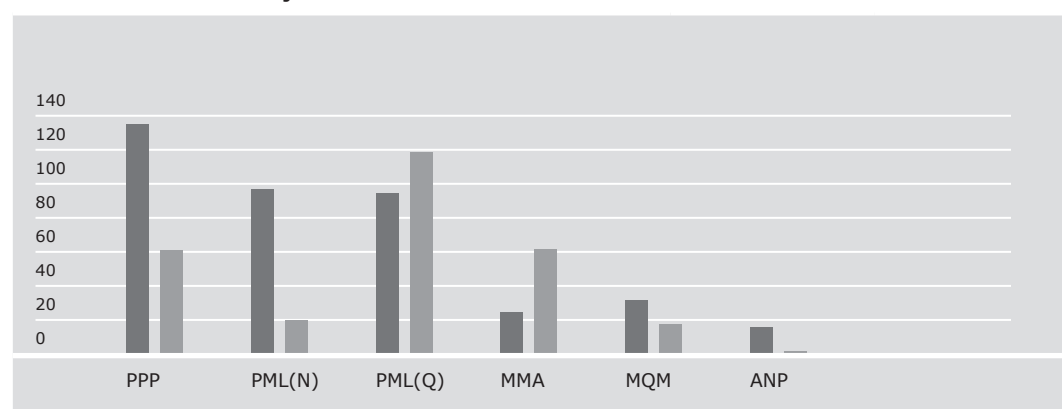
The parliament represents people's interests and concerns and, as such, it plays a crucial role in policymaking and/or ensuring legitimacy and raising public support for policies finally adopted. The parliament uses a variety of means to obtain information for controlling policy, supervising the administration, or bringing to light and eliminating abuse and injustice. Some of the common means used are parliamentary debates, questions, interpellations, adjournment motions, points of order, and inquiry and oversight committees. In addition to exercising control through budgetary appropriations, the parliament has a well-developed committee structure (embracing a variety of

subjects including defence, foreign affairs, finance, trade/industry, interior affairs, education, and others) to exert real influence on the executive. Questions, either written or oral, form an important part of the parliament's inquisitorial function, and are one of the most widely used parliamentary procedures for overseeing government action. Since there is a marked tendency for the executive in Pakistan to become imperious, insensitive and high-handed, such parliamentary practices go a long way in keeping the executive in check.

**Table 1 | DISTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS (LOWER HOUSE)<sup>(1)</sup>**

Party	2008	2002
Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)	134 (PP, PPM/GS)	60 (O)
Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) PML (N)	96 (GJ, O) <sup>(2)</sup>	19 (O)
Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid) PML (Q)	94 (O)	118 (PP)
Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)	24 (O)	61 (O)
Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)	31 (GJ)	17 (P/supp.)
Awami National Party (ANP)	15 (GJ)	–

#### Electoral Results for Major Political Parties 2008 and 2002



■ Elections 2008 | ■ Elections 2002

<sup>(1)</sup> In the 2002 elections, the PML(Q) emerged as the party of the president (a serving military general), with the PPP and the PML(N) as the main parties in the opposition. In the 2008 elections, the PPP emerged as the largest political party in the parliament and is today the senior partner of a coalition government, with both the prime minister and the president from the same party.

<sup>(2)</sup> Democratically speaking, this is an anomalous situation but reflects the factual position. The PML(N) members sit on the opposition benches having given a solemn assurance to the ruling PPP that they would not destabilise the federal government; if they did the PML(N) government in the Punjab province would suffer the same fate. Such unholy deals are quite common.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | P/supp. = parties that support the president

PPM/GS = party of the prime minister and senior partner of a coalition government

GJ = party is junior partner in the government | O = party is in opposition.

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan, <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/> (last accessed on 03/09/2009).

## II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

*Legal regulation* At present a total of 110 political parties have been registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan. The registrations of these parties have been initiated by individuals from across the country. In order to participate in elections, a political party must register itself with the Election Commission of Pakistan (fulfilling certain requirements such as the provision of a printed copy of its manifesto, a statement of accounts, a certificate of intra-party elections, etc). On registration, it is allotted an election symbol which is printed on the ballot papers issued to voters. There are no requirements regarding party structure or organization, minimum membership or electoral thresholds except that the candidate polling less than a certain number of votes forfeits his security deposit. The Political Parties Act (PPA), however, debars four categories of people from becoming members or office bearers of a political party: anyone who has been

1. sentenced by an ordinary court of law to transportation or imprisonment for not less than two years, until five years after the expiry of their sentence;
2. removed from office as a minister or governor for misconduct under the constitution until the end of their period of disqualification;
3. dismissed from the service of Pakistan, until five years have elapsed from the date of their dismissal; or
4. disqualified from holding office under the Elective Bodies Disqualification (Removal and Remission) Ordinance.

Political parties become a special target in the interludes of military rule. During 1962–1969, the military dictator of the day (Gen. M. Ayub Khan) took steps to control matters concerning the formation of political parties, their programmes and their organization, instead of leaving them alone. A number of ordinances were promulgated by martial law to regulate and restrict the development and functioning of political parties. One such law was the Political Parties Act (PPA) 1962, which defined a political party as “a body of individuals or association of persons setting up an organizational structure or collecting funds or owning property with the object of propagating political opinions or indulging in any other political activity”. The PPA also prohibits the formation of parties which are “foreign-aided” or are found to be “propagating any opinion, or acting in a manner, prejudicial to Islamic ideology or the integrity or security of Pakistan”. The PPA continues to be on Pakistan’s statute books although, through a 1963 amendment, there has been a redefinition of a political party in broader terms. A new political parties order was promulgated by the administration of President Parvez Musharraf in 2002. The Political Parties Rules 2002 were later codified and applied by the Election Commission of Pakistan on 23 July 2002<sup>3</sup>.

*Party financing* For their multifarious roles and nation-wide activities as well as for party functioning and organization, all political parties require funds on a regular and sustained basis. The funding requirements of the mainstream political parties that operate on a countrywide basis are naturally far greater than the regional ones due to the limited scope, activities and size of the latter. In the absence of state funding of political parties (which is in vogue in several democratic countries around the world), political parties in Pakistan have to fall back on traditional private sources of income for the raising of party finances. These include membership fees, donations by wealthy individuals, and donations by corporations and business houses. A highly lucrative method of funnelling substantial funds into party coffers is the practice of non-refundable deposits that must accompany all applications by candidates for party tickets to contest elections. The more popular a party is, the greater the number of applicants for party tickets.

Foreign financial aid to preferred political parties is an actionable crime under the Political Parties Act 1962, which can lead to the dissolution of the party and the disqualification of its members. Despite wild allegations about such assistance, such financing is done far too surreptitiously for detection or conviction. Political parties in Pakistan do not maintain any hard and fast rules for the disbursement of party funds (despite having a treasurer to maintain and audit accounts). Usually

such disbursements are left solely to the discretion of the party leadership. Nor are political parties obliged to give an account of their finances except at election time when the parties need to indicate the state of their finances before being registered for election purposes with the Election Commission of Pakistan.

Pakistan has a plethora of political parties with an ideological spectrum that ranges from a fading left to an active right. Judging by three yardsticks – winning seats in two consecutive parliamentary periods; forcing other parties to react because they concern themselves with similar issues; and campaigning for the same groups of voters – the relevant parties in Pakistan are:

*Relevant parties*

- Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)
- Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML.N)
- Pakistan Muslim League – Quaid-e-Azam (PML.Q)
- Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)
- Awami National Party (ANP)
- Puktoon Khawa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP)
- Muwahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a coalition of Islamist parties.

A total of 110 parties registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan for the 2008 election, and the numbers are rising. Other political parties of note are the Pakistan Peoples Party – Sherpao, an offshoot of the PPP; the Balochistan National Movement; the Sind National Front; and several regional and religious parties. Votes polled by the relevant parties in the 2008 election to the National Assembly are:

**Table 2 | TOTAL AND PERCENTAGE OF VOTES WON  
BY MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES/COALITIONS**

Party/Coalition	Votes Won	Percentage
PPPP	10,606,486	31%
PML(N)	6,781,445	20%
PML(Q)	7,989,817	23%
MQM	2,507,813	7%
ANP	700,479	2%
MMA	772,798	2%

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan, <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/> (last accessed on 03/09/09).

The outcome of the 2008 election shows that moderate, pro-democracy parties are the heart of Pakistan's political system, and that religion-based parties and politics have no hold over the voters. Together the pro-democracy parties have secured 85 per cent of the total votes cast. The membership of the new National Assembly is generally more secular than its predecessors.

The political nature of political parties range from national in the sense of broad Pakistani nationalism, for example, the PPP, PML(N), PML(Q) etc., to regional nationalisms such as the ANP, Balochistan National Party (BNP), Sind National Front (SNF) (based on Pukhtoon, Baloch and Sindhi identities), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), Tehrek Nifaz Fiqa Jafaria (TNFJ) (politico-religious parties), the MQM (based on linguistic identity), Pukhtoon

*Party families*



Khawa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) (based on Pukhtoon identity). Then there are many political parties which are basically one-man parties, such as the Pakistan Muslim League (Awami) PML(A) personified by Sheikh Rashid Ahmed and the Tehrik-e-Insaf (TI) personified by Imran Khan.

Pakistan thus has a multiparty party system in place. However, a novel feature of Pakistan's multiparty system is the formation of many factions from major national and regional political parties. There are many examples of this. The Pakistan Muslim League today has the largest number of breakaway factions, such as the PML(A), Pakistan Muslim League (Junejo) – PML(J), PML(N), Pakistan Muslim League (Qayyum) – PML(Q), Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) – PML(Q), Pakistan Muslim League (Functional) – PML(F), Pakistan Muslim League (Zia) – PML(Z), etc. – each splinter group named after the breakaway leader. Similarly, the Pakistan Peoples Party founded by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto has today split into the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), Pakistan Peoples Party (Shaheed Bhutto) – PPP(SB), Pakistan Peoples Party (Sher Pao) – PPP(SP), Pakistan Peoples Party (Jatoi) – PPP(J), etc. At the regional level the BNP has split into a few factions such as the Balochistan National Party (Awami) – BNP(A), the Balochistan National Party (Mengal) – BNP(M) etc. This trend in the break-up of national and regional political parties has weakened democracy in general and parliamentary democracy in particular as well as undermining the country's national integration. There is thus a need for legislation not only to discourage but also to bring an end to the factionalizing of political parties.

All political parties in Pakistan profess to work for the uplift of the masses and for the common good. This the common thread that runs through all their manifestos. Hence, it is almost impossible to divide them on the basis of their ideological composition (in terms of parties of the landless, parties of landowners, parties of labour and peasants, etc.). The exceptions are the politico-religious parties such as the MMA which stand for a theocratic Islamic state. Since political parties in Pakistan are in the main personality-driven, it would be more appropriate to tabulate them not by ideological composition but by the people or dynasties controlling them.

**Table 3 | PERSONALITIES/FAMILIES DOMINATING POLITICAL PARTIES**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Personalities/ Families dominating</b>	<b>Province</b>
PPPP	Bhutto (Larkana)	Sind
PML(N)	Sharif (Lahore)	Punjab
PML(Q)	Chaudhary (Gujrat)	Punjab
ANP	Ghaffar Khan (Swabi)	NWFP
MQM	Altaf Hussain	Sind
BNP(M)	Sardar Ataullah Mengal	Balochistan
PKMAP	Achakzai	Balochistan

*Origins of parties* The phenomena of the emergence of political parties can justifiably be traced back to the evolution of representative democracy and especially the parliamentary form of representative democracy generally in the West and more specifically in Britain. However, it must be pointed out that political parties exist in almost all modern states and the history of their evolution in each case is substantially different. For example the emergence of British political parties can be traced back to the



times when the absolute authority of the monarch was increasingly being questioned. Consequently, two groups were formed. One supported the monarch with absolutist powers and was known as the "Tories" and the other struggled for the limiting of the powers of the sovereign and was known as the "Whigs". By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Tories were called Conservatives and Whigs were called Liberals. Still later Conservatives formed the Conservative Party and Liberals the Liberal Party. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century trade unions and other workers' movements in Britain formed the Labour Party. By 1920 the liberals were fading into the background and the Labour Party became one of the two major parties of Britain, since then sharing the political scene in Britain with the Conservative Party. All this reflects the fact that Britain has experienced an issue-oriented development of its party system, which is also the case in the United States – although with a different issue and history.

The state of Pakistan came into existence not by conquest but through rebellion. It was inspired by a political party, the All India Muslim League (AIML), the party of the Muslims of undivided British India. It was born as the triumphant culmination of a gigantic mass movement led by the Muslim League for a separate homeland for the Muslims of British India. There is thus an umbilical connection between the state and the party in Pakistan: indeed, the very first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan was elected on a party basis, and the very first rulers of the new fledgling state were the office-bearers of the founding party.

The Pakistan Muslim League was a continuation of the AIML formed in British India specifically to promote the cause of the Muslims and generally that of all minorities in India. Since the party had roots in the masses, it was used by successive military governments in Pakistan to secure broad political support among the masses in Pakistan. In the process the party also broke into the factions identified above. Later, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a minister in the military government of General Ayub Khan, resigned because of differences with General Ayub and formed his own political party<sup>4</sup>, the Pakistan Peoples Party with Islamic-socialism as its ideology. The political orientation of both these major political parties is liberal. Parties such as Jaamat-i-Islami have also existed all along and are ideological and conservative in nature, but most of these ideological parties profess their own interpretation of Islam and hence have a limited following.

Among political institutions, political parties occupy a pivotal position because of the crucial role they play in the democratic dispensation of state functions. In fact, the political structure of contemporary democratic dispositions hinges on the political parties, which are considered paramount for the organization of modern democratic institutions as well as for the expression and manifestation of political consciousness. If political parties are strong, well organized, properly staffed, adequately financed and vibrant entities run on democratic lines, they can tailor their programmes and policies in keeping with the wishes and aspirations of the electorate, prepare members for democratic candidate selection, train and groom party cadres for leadership roles, and also provide them with guidance about the ways and means of facing and responding to the challenges of the times.

*General  
significance  
of parties*

To achieve this objective, all political parties endeavour to establish party secretariats, and to staff them with the requisite personnel, including experts and specialists on various facets of national life. They have also set up party bureau in all the four provinces to foster relations with the general public, raise their awareness level on issues facing the nation, and familiarize people with their party manifestos and programmes. The main purpose of every political party, in particular the major national ones, is to attract public attention, win the support of the maximum possible number of citizens, participate in elections, form government, and provide good governance with a view to ushering in an era of peace, progress and prosperity. Human nature being what it is, it is inevitable that in this process there will be (and there are) ambitious individuals who use the party as a vehicle to pursue their ends. To sum up, while political parties are accepted as an indispensable mechanism in the working of the democratic process, in Pakistan they often come to be used as vehicles for the catapulting into power of the inept, the unscrupulous and the corrupt. The insatiable greed for power and booty reigns supreme. Political parties in Pakistan do not meet many of the

criteria of basic party theory. What prevails is chiefly electoral participation and the attempt to win public office by rich political opportunists. In other words: political parties are an indispensable part of Pakistan's political system of parliamentary democracy but they do not always function in a congenial environment.

*Voter-party relations* The traditional feudal-patronage political system has dominated electoral politics in Pakistan. This is hardly surprising considering that Pakistan is one of the world's most impoverished countries, with a per capita income that has never exceeded \$500 a year, an illiteracy rate estimated at 42 per cent for men and 71 per cent for women, 36 per cent of the people living in poverty and countless millions of ordinary citizens having no access to a decent education, a living wage, or basic public services. The wide gap between the rich and the poor has been maintained by feudal patterns of land ownership and centralized state corruption, which has throttled the choice of the voter and rendered him a helpless tool in the hands of the rich and the powerful. Once, and only once, in the contemporary history of Pakistan, there rose a charismatic leader (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto), who founded a left-of-centre party (PPP), campaigned in the elections on the slogan of providing "roti, kapra, makan" (food, clothing, shelter), and won a landslide victory hands-down.

Today, Pakistan's electoral politics is once again mired in the same web of patronage and ethnic relationships, with little or no programmatic competition between the political parties. Indeed, except for the Islamist parties, whose programmes are based on religious agendas, there is hardly any significant difference between the manifestos and programmes on offer by the competing parties. The voter-party relationship is quite stable, and has remained unchanged over the past five years. One of the intriguing features of this relationship has been that arbitrary actions by military dictators against political leaders and political parties have only served to strengthen rather than weaken the relationship. Parties have prospered in adversity and have generally shown a remarkable capacity for resilience and survival through the military interludes.

*Party membership/  
Party organization* Parties in Pakistan rarely maintain membership statistics. The parties that maintain statistics (such as the politico-religious parties – Jamaat-e-Islami, for example) keep them a closely guarded secret. Since most parties in Pakistan are personality driven, it becomes an exercise in futility to attempt to estimate membership trends or their appeal to particular social strata. The best that can be said is that parties are organized by likeminded people and have definite programmes known as manifestos.

The structural organization aims to ensure the smooth implementation of its programmes. For this purpose the parties are organized from national to grassroots levels. In Pakistan, the major political parties are organized from the national to the provincial and down to the local/grassroots level with youth, women and labour wings. This is true for parties such as the PPP, PML(N), PML(Q), ANP, etc. However in some cases even these political parties lack a grassroots-level organization across the country and are limited to certain specific areas or regions of the country. They fall miserably short in such areas as committed activists, use of new communication technologies, due participation of committed workers in the decision-making processes of the party and strategies for recruiting supporters. Internal decision-making power remains centralized in the parties' top hierarchy.

### **III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT**

The success of all political systems, in particular the parliamentary form, largely depends upon strong, organized and vibrant parties. It may be misleading to describe democracy as "government by the people". Instead democracy needs to be seen as government by political parties which must compete for popular approval. It is a matter of deep concern that most of the political parties in Pakistan are weak on internal democracy. A majority of them are power bases of the elite, with the landed, industrial and tribal aristocracy dominating their leadership. In addition, the parties can be characterized by a general lack of communication between party leaders, workers and members. The

relative weakness of party branches in the provinces and at lower levels often results in candidates for electoral seats being chosen by the central leadership according to their wealth and influence.

Except for the mainstream political parties (PPP, PML.N, PML.Q, MMA, MQM, ANP, and others), a majority of the political parties do not even have adequately staffed secretariats at party headquarters. Nor do they have the requisite infrastructure to cultivate and maintain contacts with the populace on a sustained basis, or to carry out the roles and functions of a multifarious nature in party development, the pursuance of party programmes and policies, the fostering of citizen participation, grooming for good governance, and preparing their "vote bank" for the inevitable election.

Rooting democracy in a soil hardened and dried by decades of dictatorship is going to be no instant or easy task. In the difficult circumstances that Pakistan finds itself today, it is heartening to note that all major parties understand that the survival of democracy itself depends on the public seeing some real benefits from democratic government. Pakistan's politicians and voters all share a stake in reforms that could help make democracy more effective. There is an urgent need to foster a flexible system of strong, cohesive political parties at the national level and extend the same to provincial and local levels. An inadequacy of funds in party coffers could possibly be the biggest obstacle to the institutionalization of party democracy. A system of public (state) funding of political parties may well be the answer.

- 1| *In Pakistan the establishment and functioning of political parties was previously governed by the Political Parties Act 1962 and is currently governed by the Political Parties Rules 2002.*
- 2| *The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) publishes annual reports on the state of human rights in Pakistan in addition to its several other human rights related activities in the country. For details of the 2008 report, see <http://www.hrcp-web.org> (last accessed on 25/05/09).*
- 3| *For details of Political Parties Rules 2002 see: <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/content/PoliticalRules02.html> (last accessed on 03/09/09).*
- 4| *For details of how General Ayub created the "King's Party" see Hamid Khan, *op.cit.*, pp. 289–292.*

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