



## The Continuation of Democracy in Pakistan: An Analysis of 2018 General Elections

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- **Vol. VII, No. II** (Spring 2022)
- **Pages:** 31 – 42
- **p- ISSN:** 2521-2982
- **e-ISSN:** 2707-4587

**Key Words:** Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, Elections, Political Parties, Electable, Social-Media, Electable,

**Abstract:** July 25th 2018 marked as a momentous occasion in the political history of Pakistan as for the first time in 72 years of history of Pakistan, the third consecutive general elections and second consecutive democratic transition were held from one party to another. As a result of the elections, PTI, with the support of the middle class, and urbanites youth, including male and female having greater access to electronic and digital media, with its agenda of change, working relations with the military establishment succeeded in forming its government at centre with Imran Khan as premier. Some argue that these developments established a strengthened democratic era in Pakistan; others see it as yet another pliant civilian government propped up by the non-political actors. However, during the present PTI regime, the social, political and economic profile of Pakistan has gone through significant changes which greatly affected the polity of Pakistan. The objective of this study is to explore how various developments directly or indirectly impinged the democratic process in Pakistan during the PTI government.

### Introduction

After the conduct of election on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2018, by mid-august, Pakistan moved towards the second successive democratic transition and has showcased a third consecutive peaceful transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another as the newly elected members of the Pakistan national assembly, including the chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and Imran Khan, head of the PML-N Shahbaz Sharif, Chairman Pakistan People Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and erstwhile president of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari in the inaugural session of the national assembly, have sworn in ([Raise, 2018](#)).

After taking oath as the 22<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, his 16-member cabinet was sworn in. Shah Mahmood Qureshi was given the charge of the foreign minister. In contrast, the ex-chief minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pervez Khattak, was assigned with the defence portfolio, whereas Asad Umar was tendered with finance.

The coalition partners were awarded 6 out of 16 ministries in the federal cabinet. Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) was given two ministries, whereas the Awami Muslim League of Sheikh Rasheed, Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), Balochistan Awami Party, and Grand Democratic Alliance received one each ([Shukla, 2018](#)).

Immediately the opposition parties, including Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), Pakistan People Party (PPP), Mutahida Majles-e-Amal (MMA), Awami National Party (ANP), QWP and others jointly rejected the election results, declared the elections rigged, manipulated by the military establishment and demanded the holding of fresh elections ([Dawn, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018](#)). The erstwhile ruling PML-N asserted that the removal of Nawaz Sharif from the office of prime minister on the allegation of corruption led to prepoll rigging (BBC, July 23, 2018). PPP's senior representative Farhat Ullah Babar maintained that the presence of Army personnel inside and outside the polling

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stations made the election results suspicious ([The Daily times, 25 July 2018](#)). The Pashtun nationalist ANP also rejected the election result. It asserted that the Army, the Election Commission, and the caretaker government ousted ANP and its leadership from the parliament ([Dawn, 28 July 2018](#)). However, it is fascinating that all those political parties, which had never accepted the PTI demand previously, have objected to the transparency and fairness of the 2018 elections. While Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, which objected to the results of the 2013 elections, led a protest and gave a 126 day *Dharna* (sit-in) for the anti-rigging electoral system, proclaimed these elections fair and transparent (Ahmad, 2018). However, several procedural irregularities during the pre-poll phase, the election campaign period, such as violent attacks on certain parties, the creation of corruption cases on the leadership of erstwhile ruling parties, the creation of groups and factions among political parties and the overt and covert support of deep state institutions with PTI in the electoral process severely affected the credibility of these elections ([Sheikh, 2018](#)).

### **The Contemporary Trends, Slogans and the Emergence of New Political Forces in 2018 General Elections**

Apart from the constant leverage by the military establishment in the backdrop to support one party and another, during the 2018 elections, some new trends and narratives also shaped some unexpected results.

### **The Politics of Southern Punjab**

Pakistan is a multi-ethnic federal state comprised of many ethnic identities. At one time, these ethnic groups facilitate national integration, and at other times it endangers its federal entity. Ethnic politics is always an essential subject in Pakistani politics, and the ethnicity card has always been used by politicians for their interests ([Lashari, 2018](#)). During the election of 2018, the ethnicity card was scrupulously used by the politicians in the Punjab province. Punjab is an important province of Pakistan; in the federal legislature, 148 seats out of 272 national assembly seats are allocated to Punjab. Therefore, in the formation of the federal government, the Punjab province plays a decisive role. Southern Punjab is comprised of Seraiki

speaking people, and the creation of a Seraiki province is its long-standing issue ([Lashari, 2018](#)). Time after time, this issue is raised by the political parties to get the sympathy and support of the local masses. In April 2018, just before the elections, a front with the name *Junoob Punjab Sooba Mahaz* (JSPM-South Punjab Province) was formed by the defectors of PML-N after their resignation from parliament and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party and merged into PTI for the 2018 general elections. The merger of JSPM has further strengthened the cause of PTI because the agenda of both groups were similar to defeating Pakistan Muslim League in the elections ([Butt, 2018](#)).

### **The role of Social Media in Politics**

Besides the mainstream mass media, social media and politics have a strong relationship in the present modern political milieu. Nowadays, social media is a powerful instrument in the hands of politicians and social activists. Most of the issues raised and highlighted on social media are linked with governance matters such as honour killing, hospital issues, child abuse, police beating poor people etc. When these videos go viral on social media, the competent authorities reach out to the wrongdoers and react against them ([Islam et al., 2019](#)). The recent election of 2018 saw the colossal use of information and communication technologies, especially the internet. Political parties, voters, and supporters widely used social media for their election campaigns and publicized their agenda ([Sheikh, 2018](#)). Their media cells remain active day and night to mobilize the public in their favour, and those parties which have active social media cells gain more votes and give better results in the elections. Currently, 44 million people have access to social media across Pakistan ([Islam et al., 2019](#)). While roundabout 3 million Twitter users are actively engaged on these virtual platforms ([Sheikh, 2018](#)). In the recent few years, PTI emerged as the most prominent political party on social media. They have established media cells to disseminate their manifesto, party agenda, vision, and program. Its workers are frequently using Facebook for propaganda against rival political parties and their leadership ([Ullah, 2019](#)). PTI Chairman Imran Khan's official page on Facebook, "*Naya Pakistan*" had the leading number of followers compared to other parties. This inclination accelerated because nowadays, a

physical campaign in Pakistan involves security risks as in the last few elections, many party workers and their election candidates died because of violent attacks. Secondly, by using these internet sources and digital cellular technologies, one can reach out to millions of netizens at once within a short period ([Sheikh, 2018](#), & [Ullah, 2019](#)).

### **Women and Youth Participation**

Like most developing countries, women in Pakistan are also denied their fundamental right, although Pakistan is the signatory of CEDAW. Though the vote is the right of every Pakistani citizen, male and female, equal voting rights are absent. In the past elections in Pakistan, the women were denied casting their votes, even though most of the political parties by signing an agreement, debarred women to cast their votes. However, The Elections Act 2017 guarantees women's political rights, and it delineates that in those constituencies where the turnout of women is less than 10% of the total votes, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will declare the results null and void. It also provided that every political party shall at least allocate 5% of the party tickets to women candidates on general seats. As a result of these measures, the 2018 general elections saw many women (171 women) contesting elections on general seats. In some constituencies, the turnout of women voters was higher than men ([Nazeer, 2018](#)). Even the women of conservative South Waziristan of tribal regions cast their votes for the first time ([Barker, 2018](#)). During the 2018 general elections, for the first-time highest number of women participation were recorded in the PTI rallies and gatherings. Now, most of the political parties, ranging from religious to nationalist, have encouraged women's participation in politics both as electorate and party candidates, which is a positive sign for Pakistan's future politics. Gender imbalance, women's harassment, and violence are some reasons of women have low participation in politics ([Shaukat, 2018](#)).

Youth makes up more than 60% of the total population of Pakistan. The July 2018 elections refreshed Pakistan's political system by involving a substantial proportion of the urbanite middle-class youth in electoral politics, who lost faith in the older traditional political parties, their leadership, policies and programs, and vocally supported Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's agenda of change.

During these polls, 43.82% of the total voters on electoral rolls were young voters in aged between 18 years to 35 ([Iftikhar, 2018](#)).

### **Voter's Registration and Turnout**

Despite irregularities and shortcomings, the 2018 general elections in Pakistan witnessed a high-level competition among the political parties, voters, and supporters. The 2018 polls noted a substantial increase in the voter turnout, which indicated more significant participation in the electoral process and their confidence in the democratic continuation. During the elections, 51.99% voter turnout was recorded, the third highest turnout after 1970 ([ECP Report, 2018](#)). Similarly, the 2018 elections also recorded an unprecedented increase in voter registration of Pakistan's political history. The number of voters has increased from 86.19m in 2013 to 105.96m in the 2018 general elections. Thus, between 2013 to 2018, 19.77 million new voters were added to the electoral roll, a 23% increase in the five years. This represents the largest increase in the number of voters between two elections in recent history (FAFEN, 2018).

### **The Politics of Electables**

In third-world countries where there is a lack of strong and well-organized political parties, the phenomena of electables are quite common. The political system of Pakistan has also comprised of weak political parties; hence, the phenomena of electables during the elections are a common feature of its political culture. Apart from the lack of organized political parties, money and financial positions are the most important aspects of Pakistan's political culture. During elections, the candidates spent billions of rupees on their election hence financial position matters a lot in Pakistani politics. Sometimes politics in Pakistan is considered a game of money, and the party allots tickets to those candidates who had a strong financial position and knew the art of winning seats ([Khan, 2019](#)).

In the past, in politics, the term used for electables was *lotacra*, a kind of horse-trading; however, the recent trend of electables got prominence from Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf while accommodating a large number of such groups during the July 2018 general elections. In the 2018 general elections, the report revealed

that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has given more than a hundred tickets to the so-called electables, who had switched off their loyalties from Pakistan Muslim League-N and Pakistan People's Party (Butt, 2018).

According to Muhammad Waseem, the Pakistani establishment- a non-political actor, put together these potential winners in the Imran Khan team for the July 2018 elections (Waseem, 2020). This phenomenon deprived many ideological workers contesting the elections on PTI tickets. The majority of the electables include those who plied away the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and had a strong vote bank and influence in the rural areas of Punjab and other parts of Pakistan (Butt, 2018). As Andrew Wilder has pointed out in his book *Pakistani Voters*; "The electoral democracy in Pakistan has maintained the political dominance of rural elites. The political parties who seek to win elections must obtain the support of rural elites to influence the voting behaviour of majority voters of rural areas" (Wilder, 1999). Even in Balochistan province, the entire parliamentary party of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) resigned and formed a new party, Balochistan Awami Party (Butt, 2018). As noted by Saleem Safi in his article *Naya Pakistan aur Naya Tehreek-e-Insaf*;

"During the 2018 elections, PTI put aside its ideology of bringing credible leadership. It ignored its ideological workers, and the tickets were allotted to those traditional politicians who were once sitting in the Musharraf cabinet and were the part of Zardari and Nawaz government. PTI accommodated all those traditional politicians who could win their seats. PTI is completely hijacked by these politicians" (Safi, 2018).

But this bunch of traditional status quo politicians is famous in Pakistan political circle for changing loyalties with the changing political winds (*Hawa*) or under the persuasion of the Pakistani establishment (a non-political actor) (Zafar, 2019).

### New Political Slogans

The Election manifestos of political parties always provide a blueprint of their future policies and governance. It is considered a driving force for reforming the system, but in the run-up of the 2018 elections, the mainstream political parties have developed some new narratives and catchy

slogans that pin down their governance philosophy. These slogans got nationwide fame among the masses and became the tag of the concerned party.

### Change (*Tabdeli*) & New Pakistan (*Naya Pakistan*)

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, led by former captain of Pakistan cricket team Imran Khan, introduced new slogans in Pakistan's electoral politics. In its earliest entry into the electoral politics, PTI came up with the lofty slogan of Change (*Tabdeli*), which became an ideal for the middle class, young men and women, came out in millions to support its agenda of change in the 2013 general election, as their primary concern about the economy, and worries about the soaring inflation, employment, and poverty. The pro-change slogan of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf incited anti-status quo sentiments blaming Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan People Party for all the public's miseries (Islam, et al., 2019).

For the 2018 general election, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf developed new slogans with the rhetoric of corruption-free Pakistan, *Naya Pakistan* (New Pakistan) based on *Riyasat-e-Madina* (Madina Model), and not two one Pakistan (*do nahi aik Pakistan*). With these narratives, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf stood for an egalitarian society with effective governance based on meritocracy (Islam, et al., 2019).

### Vote ko izzat do (Honour the Vote)

A person who has been elected the prime minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan thrice through votes, and each time he had failed to complete his constitutional five years term. Each time he had been removed through undemocratic and unconstitutional ways (Daily Times, 2018). However, his third-time removal was not done through any military coup or by article 58 (2b) but disqualified by a full bench of the apex court in that is also in his government just before the new elections (Abbas, 2018). After disqualification by the supreme court of Pakistan, the erstwhile prime minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, raised the slogan of *Vote ko Izzat do* (Honour the Vote) to get public support and grab the sympathy votes in the forthcoming July 2018 election. The anti-establishment and anti-judiciary political slogan of



PML-N did not gain any momentum in the wake of polls. Instead, it made things even worse for the erstwhile ruling party while it ultimately benefited Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in the election to be tried and tested at the federal level for the next five years (Malik, 2018).

### **The Emergence of new Political Forces**

Despite allegations of rigging and manipulation in the electoral exercise, the 2018 general elections have great importance and not less than a revolution from the perspective of party politics in Pakistan. The political system of Pakistan was dominated by Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and Pakistan People Party (PPP) since the 1980s; however, these elections broke the two-party system (Sheikh, 2018). As mentioned earlier, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf rose as a new political force into mainstream politics and emerged as the second national party of Pakistan after Pakistan People Party and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz. Apart from PTI, the revival MMA and TLP also affected the party politics in Pakistan (Raise, 2018).

### **Resuscitation of Muttahida Majles-e-Amal (MMA)**

Muttahida Majles-e-Amal (MMA), an electoral alliance of six religious parties formed to contest the 2002 elections, successfully used the anti-US and Islamization card and garnered votes from the Pashtun belt of two contiguous provinces bordering Afghanistan. During the 2002 general elections, MMA emerged as the third-largest party in the country and the majority party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Just before the 2008 general elections, Jamaat-e-Islami detached herself from the alliance, and later on, its boycott from the polls weakened its position. As a result, the rest of the Majles-e-Amal parties individually participated in the election (Khan, 2015). In the 2008 and 2013 general elections, the vacuum of Muttahida Majles-e-Amal parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was filled by Awami National Party (ANP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), respectively even though they had a vigorous street power but they failed to divert voters in their favour (Islam, 2019).

As the expiry of the 14<sup>th</sup> national assembly of Pakistan drew near, and the new elections started signaling, the religiopolitical parties once again entered into the drawing-room for resuscitation of

Muttahida Majles-e-Amal (MMA), thus after soul-searching negotiations, in December 2017, Muttahida Majles-e-Amal was revived to pool up their vote bank (Ullah, 2017). In the 2018 elections the MMA did not perform well compared to the 2002 general elections and secured only a few national assembly seats; even its top-ranking leadership, including Fazlur Rehman of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and Ameer Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) Siraj-ul-Haq, lost their seats. Furthermore, their popular vote declined from 11% in 2002 to 9% in the 2018 general elections. Many reasons contributed to the failure of Muttahida Majles-e-Amal (MMA) in the recent 2018 elections. First, the joining of JUI-S to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was a setback for Majles-e-Amal in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Amir, 2018). Secondly, from 2013 to 2018, both JUI-F and JI remained the coalition partner of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and PTI at central and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government, respectively, where they failed to accomplish their agendas. Thirdly, during the elections, the Majles-e-Amal parties did not develop a new narrative to motivate the masses in their favour. Fourthly, their opposition and divergence to the merger of federally administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the emergence of new religious parties like *Tehreek-e-Labbaik* and MML also affected the MMA alliance to a great extent (Rehman, 2018).

### **Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)**

During the July 2018 elections in Pakistan, the emergence of a sectarian Barelvi party Tehreek-e-labbaik Pakistan of Khadim Rizvi, was a new development in the political milieu of Pakistan (Sohail, 2018). In recent years, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan became very prominent among the religious section of Pakistani masses and garnered their followers popular support in the 2018 elections. In September 2017, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan was registered with the election commission of Pakistan to contest the forthcoming 2018 general elections. This party got a boost from the protest following the execution of Mumtaz Qadri and got additional strength from the September 2017 Islamabad *Dharna* (sit-in) against the controversial constitutional amendment brought by the PML-N led government related to the *Khatme Nabuwat* (Finality of the Prophethood) clause in the

nomination paper where the government finally surrendered before the TLP ([Islam, 2019](#)). During their maiden campaign for the 2018 election, TLP targeted the erstwhile ruling party Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz causing a significant dent in the vote bank in Punjab province, where it emerged as the third-largest party in terms of vote polled. According to a Gallup survey, 46% of its voters include those who supported PML-N in 2013 general election ([Shah & Sareen, 2018](#)).

## **Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Politics and Governance: An Analysis**

Pakistan, in a state of grave economic turmoil with numerous domestic and external challenges, under a serene democratic transition, was handed over to Imran Khan, a former cricketer who also known as “the man of crisis” in cricket world. Under the premiership of Imran Khan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf started its regime with the agenda of first 100 days based on revolutionary changes in governance and the ideal to establish *Naya Pakistan* (now Pakistan); a welfare state on the model of *Madina*, based on an egalitarian society, where economic justice, the rule of law with meritocracy and transparency will be its guiding principles and will put an end to the legacy of corrupt and misrule only serving the industrialists and elite class (Shah, 2020).

Below is a summary of Pakistan the Tehreek-e-Insaf two years government.

### **The Economy**

It is a dilemma that Pakistan has been consistently in economic turmoil. Undoubtedly, the present government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf inherited the prevalent economic crisis from the previous Pakistan Muslim Leagues-Nawaz government (Bari, 2020). However, the problem doubled with a balance of payment, forcing the Imran Khan government to knock the doors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its early months for the US \$6 billion. Earlier, he visited Pakistan's long-time allies Kingdom Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Pakistan evergreen friend China and collected \$9 billion of loans. Although Imran Khan earlier, during his election campaign, promised that he would fix the country's sinking economy without any foreign loan ([Hussain, 2019](#)).

PTI government had received this loan while fulfilling all the IMF conditions, in the form of strict austerity policy, devaluing rupee, and imposition of more taxes. Moreover, its worries were increased by its inability to achieve its economic targets for its first year ([Malik, 2019](#)).

At the end of its two years, the PTI government appeared with a retarded economic growth, slowing down the business investment by the private sector and dilapidating the living standard of a common man as it failed investment in human development, especially in education, health, and youth skill development and employment ([Bari, 2020](#)). The strict austerity policy that Pakistan had undertaken in consequence of the IMF bailout hampered the economic growth. Though the PTI government aimed at a 6.2 percent GDP for the fiscal year 2019, it was closed at 3.29 percent, compared to the 5.8 % in the previous year. According to the World Bank, this ratio will further 2020 by 2.7 percent ([Malik, 2019](#)).

Though the PTI government was forced to enact according to the IMF bailout program, that shows that many problems faced by the tattering economy are structural and cannot be sorted out in a year or two. However, so far, the PTI government has failed to devise any policy to counteract the economic situation ([Malik, 2019](#)). In a brief period of two years, the PTI government changed the finance minister for the third time, the FBR chairman for the 6<sup>th</sup> time and the chairman board of investment for the fourth time (Azad, 2020). According to Saleem Safi;

“Imran Khan's PTI came into power with the narrative of corruption-free Naya Pakistan but almost after two years of PTI government, the corruption has increased in the country. PTI peacefully came into power. Even though there was no panic, no terrorism in Pakistan. The PTI government has completely failed to tackle its economic situation. So far, it has failed to launch any mega project. Even during the PPP government (200-2013), Pakistan was passing through its critical time. On one side, it was facing the disastrous challenge of the 2010 flood and the worse terrorism of its history, and on other side it kept continued the mega project in health and education. Followed by PML-N, which initiated the historical CPEC project and kept the economic

index better, inflation was less than the PTI government (Safi, 2020).

The corona pandemic exposed the government's inability to handle the grave economic situation and expanding crisis of governance, characterized by lack of control over market dynamics, hiking inflation, shortage of daily commodities supply, diplomatic setbacks, and insecure situation of employment and services resulting in mass resentment. The middle class, who brought the PTI government with great expectations looked fed up with the poor governance and dysfunctional polity affecting the PTI popularity and its leadership. However, Imran Khan learnt how to preside over the parliament and lead the country with fait accompli characterized by a nonrepresentative undemocratic ruling dispensation (Waseem, 2020).

### **Crackdown against the opposition**

Accountability of the corrupt under the rule of law is the essence of democratic and social stability (Raise, 2018). Imran Khan during his election campaign pledged to introduce fundamental reforms in the government structure to cleansing government institutions and wiping out the corrupt practices of maladministration introduced by the previous parties (Hussain, 2019). He also promised to promote reconciliation by engaging the opposition to way out the conflict resolution and promote the democratic process. However, after establishing his authority in the country Imran Khan, instead of fulfilling his earlier campaign pledge, followed the policy of manoeuvring and witch-hunting against the opposition and his critics with the semblance of free and fair accountability (Waseem, 2020). Safi noted that during the current PTI regime, accountability is used for political engineering and political victimization against the opposition. The PTI government should initiate accountability across the board /across the table without choice; this is also the spirit of true democracy” (Safi, 2020).

For this purpose, under cover of PTI cornerstone slogan 'accountability for all the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) were activated to victimize his political opponents (Jillani, 2020). NAB, with the backing of establishment and

judiciary, arrested a large number of opposition leaders of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan People Party including, three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, the erstwhile Chief Minister Punjab Shahbaz Sharif, and former president of Pakistan and co-chairman of PPP, Asif Ali Zardari on charges of corruption and money laundering (Hussain, 2019). While many of his close associates and allies involved in large-scale corruption and who have been accused of corrupt practices are left free from accountability and their cases and inquiries have either been dropped or shelved in cold storage, which exposed his accountability and anti-corruption drive (Jillani, 2020).

In response of government victimization policy, in November 2019, the opposition parties particularly, the JUI of Maulana Fazl ur Rehman, while challenging the legitimacy of PTI-led parliament, after a four-day March, staged a *dharna* (sit-in) at Kashmir highway in Islamabad. The march demanded; the resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the dissolution of the assemblies and fresh elections (Dawn, February 10, 2020).

*Pashtun Tabafuz* March, is a Pashtun-based organization working for the rights of ethnic-Pashtuns community, especially those had been affected by the war on terror in south Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region bordering with Afghanistan. The march started from the Internal Displaced People (IDP's) of south Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and further ignited from the Islamabad *dharna* (sit-in) held for the extrajudicial killing of Najeeb Ullah Mahsud, joined by a large number of nationalist leaders, lawyers, and civil society members (Hussain, 2018). The rights-based Pashtun *Tabafuz* Movement demanding for demining of tribal areas to ensure freedom of movement, the missing persons should be brought before the court of law, enforced disappearances, and an end to the extrajudicial killing of Pashtuns residing in different parts of the country. For accomplishing its objectives, the movement stages peaceful protests at different parts of the country, which is joined by a large number of vibrant educated Pashtun youth, who found PTM as their voice (Qadir, 2018). Even though Prime Minister Imran Khan endorsed the grievances of PTM as reasonable and further clarified that any agitation on the part of PTM will not yield any benefit (The

[Dawn, 19 April 2019](#)). The military establishment initiated curbed on its central leadership and arrested its top brass with the blames, that PTM is working on anti-state agenda to destabilize Pakistan ([The Dawn, 30 April 2019](#)). On the other side, the central leadership of PTM denied this perception and provided that they have no anti-state agenda and all their demands are in accordance with the constitution and their struggle is neither anti-state nor against any state institution ([The Dawn, 02 April 2019](#)).

The movement demanded a truth and reconciliation commission to probe their demands ([The Nation, 23 April 2019](#)). Recently, two parliamentarians of the Pashtun *Tabaq* Movement, Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir, and its central leader Manzoor Pashteen are arrested by law enforcement agencies under the charges of terrorism and high misdemeanours, and they are at the fate of production order. Under the democratic rules production order is to be issued by the speaker of the national assembly of Pakistan for the parliamentarians ([The Dawn, 2019](#)).

## Media Landscape

Media is the fourth pillar of the state and is an integral part of any functional democracy. Thomas Jefferson once said that if he had to choose between a government without newspapers and newspapers without a government, he would opt for the latter. The 1973 constitution of Pakistan, article 19, guaranteed the right of freedom of speech, expression and the right to freedom of the press ([The Nation, 2018](#)). During the 2018 election campaign, the journalist community endorsed Imran Khan as the true leader of Pakistanis and the protector of free media along with the right of dissent. However, these claims have been repudiated by the actions of the current PTI government. The current political dispensation has put curbs on the press's freedom and muffled the voices of independent journalists, columnists and writers (Rastogy, 2020). Instead of promoting freedom of the press, the incumbent government of PTI has muzzled the media's voices ([Waseem, 2020](#)). The military has adopted harsh measures to tame the media during the current PTI led civilian government. The military public relations agency restricted media to not air news without their recommendation. Last year Pakistan's leading English newspaper *Dawn* was threatened by the

military-backed militant groups to tame their tone ([Siddiq, 2020](#)). While Mir Shakeel ur Rehman, the owner and chief editor of Pakistan's largest media group "*Jang and Geo*" is under the custody of law enforcement agencies since march 2020 because he is critical of PTI's Government ([The News, 2020](#)). Besides, the government suspended many media channels critical of PTI's Government ([Dawn, 2020](#)). The journalists, civil society groups, and politicians termed the suspension of media groups and the arrest of journalists as a curb on freedom of media and violation of the fundamental right enshrined by the state's supreme law ([The News, 2020](#)). Pakistan Union of federal Journalists (PFUJ) submitted that due to the authoritarian strategies and the usage of draconian laws by the federal government, the freedom of expression is a threat, and the life of media workers is unsafe. Due to the government policies, the media industry is in crisis (PFUJ, 2020). These developments further weakened the process of democracy and democratic institutions ([Siddiq, 2020](#)).

## Legislation

Legislation is considered as one of the most important KPI of a parliament. The current Imran Khan-led parliament is the 15<sup>th</sup> legislative assembly of Pakistan's 72 years' political history. During its one and half year government, the PTI-led parliament has failed to draft important legislation due to the confrontation between treasury and opposition. Most of the working sessions of parliament are consumed in blame-game with chaotic noises. Instead using the parliament as a forum for conflict resolution and democratic governance, it uses the parliament as a forum to engage with the opposition ([Mahboob, 2019](#)). So far, the PTI led parliament, in the persuasion of its ambitious reform agenda, passed only ten bills, including an annual budget and two supplementary budgets. Instead of using the parliamentary process, it has done some critical legislation through ordinances, which tells the sorry tale of the lost definition of an elected political dispensation ([Shah, 2020](#)).

Moreover, disregarding the internal non-political actors, most of the legislation and policies are drafted on international actors' recommendations, such as IMF and the world bank. This practice weakened the representative



and elected institutions of the country (Anwar, 2020). The prominent media representative, Syed Talat Hussain, expressed that during the last two years, the prime minister has given very little attention to the parliament, and most of the time, the federal government relied on ordinances instead of legislation through parliament ([Hussain, 2020](#)). The spirit of democracy demands that parliament should only draft laws because, in this procedure, the law-making process involves a great degree of check and balance. A bill is passed from several committees before reaching to parliament, while engaging the opposition in the process, it acknowledges their role as well. The promulgation of ordinances is a handy tool in the hands of a military dictator, in democratic regimes, ordinances can be promulgated in extraordinary situations, in the times of grave crisis where the parliament's session cannot be summoned ([Dawn, 2019](#)). The most significant legislation done by the current parliament was the 26<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment which merged the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) of Pakistan into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It increased the tribal seats in national assembly from 6 to 16 while enhanced its representation from 16 to 24 in the provincial legislature of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ([Mahboob, 2019](#)). However, with these two pieces of legislation, the PTI reform agenda for *Naya Pakistan* (New Pakistan) come to fruition. For the manifestation of their *Naya Pakistan* project, the incumbent government should take the opposition on board to draft structure-oriented legislative reforms as they have a wafer-thin majority in the lower house of the parliament ([Batool, 2019](#)).

In recent past, on 02 January 2020, the treasury benches, with the endorsement of all major stakeholders in the parliament, including the two major mainstream and so-called democratic political parties PML-N and PPP, voted for the constitutional amendment to support the Army Act 2020, which extended the tenure of General Qamar Javed Bajwa for three years as Chief of Army Staff (COAS) ([Zafar, 2020](#)). Many of the political analysts, journalists, voters, and supporters of the mainstream parties believe that this amendment weakened the democratic institution and strengthened the hegemony of the undemocratic forces in the country ([Siddiq, 2020](#)). They further argue that those politicians who were talking about the sanctity of the vote and called

themselves the custodian of democracy killed the democratic aspirations of 200 million Pakistanis by supporting the Army Act (Murtaza, 2020). Some of the pro-democracy politicians perceive that the amendment in the army act has challenged the civil supremacy in Pakistan, and it harms the democratic norms, which once again transforms the nascent democratic system of Pakistan into a controlled democracy or hybrid democracy in which the non-political actors have a proportionate influence on policy and decision-making ([Khan, 2020](#)). While the democratically elected authorities rule only in name ([Upadhyay, 2019](#)). The famous writer Ayesha Siddiq predicted a total contradiction of Francis Fukuyama's End of the History. She opines that in the 2020 decade, the South Asian democracies in general and Pakistan, in particular, will face immense challenges due to oppression, dictatorial policies, weak political parties and leadership and one-party domination, which will put democracy in trouble ([Siddiq, 2020](#)). The economist intelligence units survey for the year 2020 also provided the same prospect of democracy. The survey index projected a global downfall in democracy in general, and that is particular in Pakistan. The survey shows that the points of democracy were better in PPP and PML-N governments while the prospects of democracy adversely impinged during the PTI led civilian government. Which means that democracy was better during PPP and PML-N than the current PTI government ([The News, 2020](#)). Ayesha Siddiq provided that under cover of the PTI-led government, Pakistan's ailing democracy is crumbling ([Siddiq, 2020](#)). Syed Talat Hussain argued that the indices of democracy, including judiciary and media paint a bleak picture of the quality of Democracy in Pakistan during the current regime ([Hussain, 2020](#)). Indeed, under the current PTI regime, democracy is facing myriad challenges, but most of the masses favor democracy and support a civilian form of government. Democracy in Pakistan needs another round of transparent elections and peaceful change of governments to address its diverse challenges ([Hussain, 2020](#)).

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## Conclusion

Despite declaring high-level pre-poll and polling day irregularities, under the patronage of military,

and the political parties notwithstanding asserting the Imran led parliament as bogus and selected, gave a chance to PTI to form its government and proceed the project of democracy. However, instead of using the parliament as a forum to promote the policy of consensus and reconciliation by engaging the opposition to sort out a strategy for resolving their mutual conflict and to further proceed the democratic process, the PTI government under the prescription of non-political and nonelected actors initiated the strategy of 'divide and rule' by launching a political witch-hunt against the opposition through its accountability drive by using the NAB and FIA. On the legislation side, the PTI led parliament has failed to pursue its manifesto and campaign agenda of extensive reforms in the governance and most of the time the parliament has been utilized for the blame game. On the economic front, the PTI government has failed to devise any policy to counteract the economic situation and provide relief to the poor masses. The less privileged section of society, the common middle class, the business and mercantile community, the government employees, and the young educated strata including male and female who had attached

high hopes with PTI and to its rubric program of change, are in worrisome and miserable circumstances due to the rise of double-digit inflation, economic turmoil, unemployment, poverty and other uncountable miseries.

The current Imran led PTI parliament is exhibiting a nonrepresentative political dispensation, in which the non-political forces have appropriate influence in policy formulation and decision making. The PTI regime is characterized by dictatorial policies, weak representative institutions, absence of leadership, divided opposition, controlled media, one party domination and confused civil society. However, democracy is a noisy business in Pakistan, but it is a form of government that the majority of the people have chosen to go forward. It will require another round of transparent elections to address its many-fold challenges.

Social media role in the political socialization of masses, vibrant role of youth including men and women, the emergence of new political forces in the political system, are the only complementary democratic developments of 2018 general elections.

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