

Original Article

Controlled Democracy and its Implications in Pakistan: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

Controlled or disciplined democracy has been a defining feature of Pakistan's political history, demonstrating a continual conflict between democratic values and non-democratic intervention. This article explores the history of Pakistan's controlled democracy, from 1947 until the military takeover in 1999. The study looks at how institutions or parts of society that aren't democratic—especially those in the military and civil bureaucracy—changed the course of politics by making things difficult for civilian governments and changing democratic processes to keep control. There is also inefficiency in politicians practicing pseudo democracy or feudal democracy. The article focuses on main governments of Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies System (B.D. System), Zia-ul-Haq's policies during the Afghan War, and Pervez Musharraf's local or large route-level democracy through local government reforms and desired election processes. It discusses how the judiciary and media, as well as legislation and political engineering, play their role under authoritarian power under the appearance of democratic authority. Furthermore, the article looks at the sociopolitical consequences of these actions, such as a lack of political culture in political parties and an increase in poverty and backwardness in the country. This research provides a realistic understanding of Pakistan's transition to civil supremacy and the hurdles to it, as well as an awareness of the challenges that postcolonial regimes have in balancing authoritarian tendencies with democratic ideals.

Keywords: Democracy, Reforms, Sociopolitical, Political System

INTRODUCTION

Concept of Controlled Democracy

As a valid system of government, democracy holds built-in self-accountability mechanisms. In open, impartial, and transparent elections, the people select and replace their leaders. On the other hand, Controlled democracy, also known as Disciplined, managed, democracy or guided democracy, is a hybrid political system that combines the principles of democracy with various dimensions of impositions and control. In such systems, elections and other democratic institutions may take place, but they are frequently handled or planned by those in power to maintain their dominance. They may restrict or curtail civil and political liberties,

including freedom of expression and assembly. Meserve and Pemstein (2020) investigate how democratic nations can engage in digital governance. Censorship serves as a mechanism for controlling the flow of information, demonstrating its effectiveness in democracies. Although Meserve and Pemstein (2020) focus on internet censorship, the concept of control contains additional extents of political activity in controlled democracies. Prominent characteristics of controlled democracy often include:

The governing authority may limit the processes of opposition parties, discouraging their ability to successfully contest the organization. This may involve aggravation, coercion, or even detention of political antagonists. The government may regulate the media, limiting



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information and influencing public opinion to endure its authority. This may entail curtailing press liberties, regulating information access, and advancing pro-government narratives.

The ruling authority may rig out the electoral process to guarantee its execution. In any case, the elections will still take place as planned. This may contain manipulation, voter suppression, or obvious deception. The reduction or concession of independent institutions, such as the judiciary and the legislature, may lead to a perception of their diminished ability to ensure governmental accountability. Although certain fundamental rights may be superficially safeguarded, civil freedoms, including freedom of speech, assembly, and association, may be shortened or repressed. The term “Controlled democracy” is frequently employed critically to characterize regimes that own democratic principles yet fail to adhere to the criteria of a sincerely free and fair democratic system. The range of control can change significantly among various conditions, ranging from refined management to understandable origin. The concept of “controlled democracy” has been a key aspect of Pakistan’s political background, where security is more important than the education, health, and welfare of people. This can also be called disciplined, pseudo, or feudal democracy in Pakistan.

Historical Background of Controlled Democracy

In such a situation, we have to understand that the concept of controlled democracy in Pakistan reflects a political architecture where the democratic mechanisms are contorted to maintain power as well as stability, often at the expense of real representation and civil liberties. Through colonial legacies, establishment interventions, and socio-political dynamics, this idea has evolved in different historical moments. Understanding this environment is crucial for comprehension. Pakistan continues to struggle with democracy.

Pre-Independence Period

Pakistan’s displays of managed democracy are a legacy of the pre-independence era, when various segments of British India’s population were becoming more politically aware. The British colonial administration relied on indirect government, incorporating local rulers but suppressing broader democratic movements. The Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League became leading political groups

advocating for self-rule. Global warming is an important worldwide problem with wide-reaching effects. Increasing temperatures, melting ice sheets, and severe weather patterns are just a few of its obvious impacts. Swift action is required to lower greenhouse gas releases, change to renewable energy sources, and safeguard delicate environments. Together, through cooperation, we can build a sustainable future for those who will come after us.

Britain’s preoccupation with rule through divide and rule policy was also evidence and added strife to a population already riven by sectarian divides between Hindus and Muslims. The international situation was similar. Pakistan was born, like India, with no experience of its own in administering democratic institutions, and so inherited in 1947 a weak political structure that was not just confronted with inter-regional and inter-ethnic differences. The newly independent state struggled with the construction of a unified national identity, a challenge that would continue to shape its leadership.

British Colonial Governance

Under British rule, political involvement was limited to a small elite connected with colonial interests. The Government of India Act 1935 granted limited self-governance yet excluded some of the population from real political power. Fostering oppression, compromise and torturing their subjects, the British created a legacy of authoritarian rule that would influence Pakistan’s political culture after it gained independence. The political climate was one of rising national movements demanding greater autonomy. The British response was often one of brutal repression, a tradition that continued with the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1919), where British soldiers gunned down hundreds of unarmed Indian villages protesting violent legislation. This event revitalized nationalist feeling and increased distrust of colonial rulers.

It was fact that there had been no experience with democratic institutions; Pakistan became independent in 1947 with an infant political system and a people still incapable of self-governance. This historical backdrop planted the seeds of all the issues that would govern the following regimes, ethnic rivalries, geographical imbalances that inhibited the flowering of growing ideas of democracy.

Post-Independence Period

After independence, Pakistan witnessed communal violence, mass migrations, economic

instability, and a lack of established government structure after independence in 1947. The original leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah aimed at the establishment of a democratic structure based on the tenets of equality and justice but, with his untimely death in 1948, a power vacuum emerged. Following that, Pakistan observed communal and sectarian violence, mass migrations, instability of the economy, and breakdown of government evidenced by no routine functioning of a government structure after independence in 1947. The unique leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah aimed at a democratic structure founded on the tenets of equality and justice but after his untimely death in 1948, an absolute space developed. This was not ending chaos and turmoil continued and Pakistan was not able to be self-sufficient. Civil strife, massive migrations, economic uncertainty, and a vacuum of governance followed thereafter in the wake of independence in 1947. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding leader, aspired to build for Pakistan a democratic structure based on the principle of equality and justice but he died in untimely fashion in 1948, leaving behind a power vacuum.

Ayub Khan Administration

In Pakistan, the establishment coup of October 1958 was debatably a defining moment when General Muhammad Ayub Khan took over. His regime introduced "Basic Democracies," a system designed to offer limited local self-governance without giving much power traditional political parties. Basic Democracies allowed the election of local councils, but they were elected indirectly and it was a way for Ayub Khan to maintain an appearance of democracy while effectively excluding major political players like PPP (Pakistan People's Party) and PML (Pakistan Muslim League). The Ayub Khan government emphasized economic progress through industrialization and was described as becoming the second part of Pakistan's "Decade" (complementing the non-elected regime with before - 1959 to February, five June). In this period The Green Revolution helped increase agrarian output via contemporary scientific techniques.

These policies, which helped the economy to expand in 1960s beyond simple reproducing an average annual growth of GDP higher than 6 % a year's promise, only increased social inequality and socio-political discontent among neglected people. Meanwhile, rural communities often saw no share of industrial growth and clashed with urban elites over the spoils. Multiple groups

of students and trade organizations, amongst others, were raising their opposition to Ayub Khan's regime. Upcoming demonstrations to resist the rising costs of tuition payments led to massive protests, until Ayub Khan finally resigned in 1969. His departure has been a poignant reminder of the limitations on this managed democracy; authoritarianism had made Ayub Khan very unpopular with his electorate, even as it gave him free reign to expand the economy.

The Era of Zia-ul-Haq

The coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq in July 1977 ushered in an era of authoritarian the establishment of rule, martial law, and capital punishment as part of policy with the Islamization of Pakistan. Zia sought to justify his rule by presenting himself as a protector of Islamic values threatened allegedly by secularism and Marxist thought. He governed with an iron fist, empowered by strict censorship laws that curtailed the freedom of media and saw journalists who were known critics intimidated or jailed for speaking out against dictatorship. For example, the most respected journalist, Ahmad Rashid, faced threats for his reporting on Zia's policies. Zia's establishment dictatorship made significant constitutional alterations that raised the powers of the president, lessened those of parliament, and vested meaningful authority in a National Security Council. His power was further strengthened by the Eighth Amendment (1985) gave Zia the right to dissolve National Assembly at will, which he did liberally to remain aloof as kingmaker. Soon after, Islamic law changed the legal and political landscape of Pakistan. Zia quickly passed a set of "Islamization" laws in early 1977. These included the Hudood Ordinances, which made it possible to prosecute rape under Islamic law, and they violated the human rights of many Pakistani women and non-Muslim minorities. For example, women who claim to have been raped could face prosecution for adultery if they did not produce four male witnesses—a clause that all but silenced many victims. Religion and politics needed to grow apart as an outcome of the dictatorship. Zia made a deal with hardline Islamists by incorporating the support of religious radicalism; militant groups became prominent in this period with the help of the government as one part of the policy for the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union.

Civilian Governments

The end of Zia's regime in August 1988 was

however a return to civilian power, however, this did not lead to stable power. Benazir Bhutto was the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan, but she also faced big difficulties dealing with the country's witness to the number of worsening rates of inflation, the issue of corruption, and the establishment was still strong. A government got rid of her government in 1990 with claims of corruption, and there were also increasing inflation and unemployment rates—her administration was not spared from the challenges, including energy shortages and economic mismanagement. The government of Nawaz Sharif, taking the place of the one in 1990, had to face parallel difficulties; he did his best to drive through financial reforms, but he was opposed by politicians and civil society organizations.

For example, Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990): A foreign leader's concern for the welfare of her people was a key point in her time spent in power but the matter of "Aid projects targeting have failed to reach full realization because of family corruption charges" overshadowed the political governance of her government. Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993). To strengthen the regime and reduce judicial autonomy, the government was committed to undemocratic measures, which in turn led to the struggle for power against them. Some dishonest political leaders in Pakistan are not only voting for their favorite groups but also managing fake voter lists to cling to office. The period when this was happening was the period when, parentally, the establishment democracy was sobbing, with many civilian governments under the establishment's control and involvement in agency elections. The deficiency of checks and balances only facilitated the increase of corruption like in civilian administration where the public generally regained their faith in democracy.

Constitutional Amendments

Throughout the years, we have witnessed the modifications in the constitution that indicated the overall the establishment power in the civilian administration: Eighth Amendment (1985) Strengthened the presidential authority significantly; it allowed the president to disband the National Assembly—a clause that Zia-Ul-Haq was frequently using. Thirteenth Amendment (1997) annulled the Article 58(2) (b) of the Constitution Act, which gave more powers for the assembly dissolution and neglected to introduce safeguards on the executive power. The

seventeenth Amendment (2003) strengthened the establishment authority by validating measures undertaken under Musharraf's administration while further eroding parliamentary sovereignty. These strategies weakened the democratic institutions and implemented a format where the establishment-backed parliament members were often more loyal to their own citizens. For example, political alliances were frequently engaged in discussions with the establishment leaders, among other things, such as the setting of policies or public issues brought upon them. Tough party organizations were completely absent in the electoral contests now and then, and the races were turning into a personal competition for the candidates rather than to the issue concerned or their programs.

Influence of External Factors Pertaining to the Cold War

The Cold War era geopolitical situation had a major effect on Pakistan's politics during this period. Pakistan's alliance with Western powers against communism, especially during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) that brought about significant external assistance to the establishment regimes, was considered important for the region's security. Using Operation Cyclone, the United States government offered substantial the establishment aid to Afghan Mujahedeen in the 1980s, a conflict with the Soviets. This raised Zia's domestic position, and it led to the establishment gaining more influence in politics. China's strategic support for Pakistan has also left an impact on its local politics. The establishment-backed leaders have leveraged these connections for budgetary growth and legitimacy in the global field. This external help was the US, which, among others, allowed personalities like Zia-Ul-Haq to retain authority by concealing their evil actions via national security concerns. Moreover, U.S. support at that time, on the other hand, only served to strengthen the establishment of hegemony in politics by providing resources that supported authoritarian rule rather than promoting democratic transition. International actors often prioritized order over democracy, and thus, regimes were legitimized even in the case they operated in an authoritarian style of behavior suited to Western goals.

Controlled or Disciplined Democracy in Pakistan (1988-1999)

The period between 1988 and 1999 in Pakistan's political history is often described as

an era of controlled” or “disciplined democracy.” While the country is changing from military rule to civilian supremacy following the death of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1988, the democratic background that arose was anything but free from intervention. During this time, the civilian governments of Pakistan operated under the looming shadow of unelected power centers. Including the establishment and intelligence agencies. Here we can see a democracy that appeared functional on the surface but was, in reality, tightly constrained. In 1988, Benazir Bhutto became Pakistan’s first female prime minister after her Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) won the general elections. Her rise symbolized hope for a new democratic era. However, this hope was short-lived. Her government faced constant challenges—from allegations of corruption to orchestrated political instability. The establishment, which had reluctantly handed over power, continued to exert significant influence behind the scenes in a democracy—but only within limits. Shortly after Bhutto’s dismissal in 1990, Nawaz Sharif emerged as her primary political rival. As a leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Sharif represented a different vision for Pakistan. One rooted in pro-business policies and closer ties to conservative forces. Yet his tenure was also marred by allegations of corruption and mismanagement. The pattern repeated itself and can be called controlled disciplined in practice—a carefully managed balancing act planned to check civilian rule and decision-making leaders from associating excessively with authority. Throughout the era, the economic sector produced a variety of results. Bhutto and Sharif’s privatization policies pursued to liberalize Pakistan’s economy. At the same time, these efforts were frequently damaged by allegations of political instability and favouritism. Public discontent grew as past administrations failed to solve serious issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure.

The End of the Era: Musharraf’s Takeover

Through 13th and 14th amendments .Nawaz Sharif had blocked the way for Martial law but tensions between the establishment and Nawaz Sharif’s administration had reached a breaking point by 1999 after resignations of Chief Justice, Previous army chief and President and Nawaz Sharif appeared as power Prime Minister. This violent time in Pakistani history ended on October 12 with General Pervez Musharraf’s

coup and democratic government could not be made possible. This was proof that democracy and civilian supremacy is dream still in Pakistan. Musharraf’s coup placed an immediate end to a very weak democratic experiment, ushering Pakistan back into an era of Controlled Democracy.

Additional Considerations of Controlled Democracy

In Pakistan, elections processes have been controlled at various levels. During the 2013 elections, there were allegations of election fraud, including charges of systematic manipulation to give some parties an advantage over others. Intelligence agencies have the potential to limit opposition candidates’ views or disrupt the political process. The aggressive approach of the agencies in elections has thus cast a shadow on the integrity of the electoral process; there are allegations that the agency interfered in the process to ensure the victory of the pro-establishment candidates. Media has been a state tool, especially during Zia’s rule; media freedom was restricted in a way that any report that could be against the government politically or legally was censored. Journalists, for example, Salem Shehzad faced severe consequences for covering sensitive stories including which terrorism were or considered the two activities of journalism the in establishment, suppressed which societies, shows the Despite risks cases involved of with oppression, promote practice there democracy of are and investigative civil freedom society such organizations as that they are to opposition striving protest parties’ to against ‘Azaadi the government’s March’ policies. Where people gained Activists came recognition like out for Malala advocating Yousafzai education has for girls, while did risking not her back life down from to the Taliban, oppression. Which shows The Lawyers ‘Movement (2007), was to establish independence of the judiciary from the executive interference, which showed that people want justice in the absence of democracy.

Cultural Divisions

Cultural and Ethnic division that are present right from independence, has led to the emergence of regional groups like the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) which focused on urban ethnic discontent such as that amongst Mohajirs are immigrants from India. Under pressure, democratic institutions have witnessed sectarian violence between Sunni and

Shia groups, making it difficult for authorities to maintain calm as tensions rise. State actors frequently use ethnic violence to strengthen their grip over specific territories or groups. When policies favor one ethnic group over another, marginalized members of the society become disappointed and feel separated.

Post-9/11 relations between the United States and Pakistan had a dramatic impact on internal politics, counterterrorism measures overwhelmed calls for democratic accountability, forcing regimes to prioritize security above human freedoms. Stringent limits on economic aid frequently influenced governmental decisions that prioritized foreign interests above domestic ones, impeding the country's internal democratic development.

Controlled Democracy of Pervez Musharraf (2001-2008)

After military takeover in 1999 (It is my topic my dissertation) Musharraf introduced some traditional methods to Pakistan's political structure. Some got both domestic and international praise, while others were seriously criticized. Musharraf formed the National Security Council (NSC) to monitor parliament. It was put emphasis on that the establishment held authority over all basic subjects. The establishment used powerful measures to attain results that were visible in elections of 2002. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate why Musharraf took such actions that were regarded undemocratic. In what ways did political parties challenged his government, and how did foreign factors worked? The study indicates that the Pakistani people rejected Musharraf and his allies in the 2008 general elections, establishing a civil democratic political framework in the country.

The Legal Framework Order (LFO), passed in 2002, was a significant step toward consolidating power. This constitutional amendment allowed Musharraf to select crucial officials without legislation in assembly, thereby legitimizing his status as president while dressed in military uniform. To provide the appearance of democracy while repressing true political rivalry, the LFO required that elections take place in controlled environments. Musharraf planned to create a political system that favored pro-government parties while marginalizing opposition groups. The Pakistan Muslim League Quaid e Azam (PML-Q), founded as a pro-Musharraf organization, was a key component of this plan.

Musharraf skillfully aligned himself with certain political groupings to provide the illusion of democratic pluralism while consolidating actual control inside the establishment.

Political Authoritarianism and Control Mechanisms

Along with the said support, Musharraf's administration took efforts to demote political opposition and promote civil rights assertions. Political parties might face extensive difficulties in their working and safeguarding political atmosphere. The military backed regime kept working for hybrid type of government through election manipulation, media suppression, and by controlling media. The media underwent significant shifts later this decade due introduction of electronic media and its authority Pakistan Electronic Regulatory Authority. Musharraf initially tolerated many viewpoints by letting private television networks to operate. However, when opposition and outgoing criticism of his leadership increased, these liberties were restricted. Journalists who exposed government corruption or human rights crimes faced intimidation. Like most anti-heroes, however, Musharraf was emerging as an unwilling anti- democracy. The years of work and contribution of these men would, in time, lead them to consider diversifying their interests into the civilian crease.

Role of Political Parties and Media

According to social contract theory, governments must be held accountable for their acts. If the government ignores the needs of its citizens, it may be removed in elections. Historically, governments have used undemocratic strategies and even conspiracies to maintain their power over opposition parties which important part of check and balance for true democracy. Unfortunately in Pakistan, a substandard interaction has been practiced between the government and the opposition weakened Pakistan's political framework, proving that both political parties has proved pseudo democracy, prompting military intervention. Political parties that support government accountability will help elected politicians avoid corruption. However there is feudal democracy manifest from floor crossing, regional and opportunist politics and financial and moral corruption, leading to be soft corner for non-democratic interference.

On the other media has been facilitator for non-democratic forces in Pakistan, visible in

in print and electronic media in 1958-1999. Now both internet and print media are critical for ensuring government accountability. The media investigates the government's actions and trespasses, and using free speech, they spread these wrongdoings to the public through the Internet, television, newspapers, or radio. Opposition parties exist to counter government policies that are contrary to popular opinion. Every country's political progress requires an opposition party. Even so, the opposition should play both an evaluating and helpful role. In Pakistan, the opposition has recently expressed anger. Instead of working with the administration to promote positive policies, the opposition just condemns it. Currently, there is an alternate form of protest against the government: the internet and print media, which rigorously investigate both the government and the opposition's actions.

In summary, controlled or disciplined democracy is a critical and distinct concept in Pakistan's political landscape, defined by the complex interplay of historical legacies from the colonial to neocolonial eras, various military regimes, and current challenges that have influenced its development. The goal of this ongoing war is to create effective civic domination in Pakistan. Context of Political Environment in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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