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Political Participation and Democratic Governance in Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis of PPP and PML-N Governments, 2008–2018

1. Sajid Hussain
PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan
Email:sajidmalik874@gmail.com
2. Dr.Rafida Nawaz
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan
Email:rafida.nawaz@bzu.edu.pk

Abstract
Political participation and democratic governance are two indicators of political development in democratic countries where citizens can vote for their leaders. The period 2008-2018 is the time of change of two civilian governments and two successful general elections in Pakistan. The present study is an attempt to compare the relationship between political participation and democratic governance in Pakistan under the Pakistan people's party parliamentarians (PPPP/PPP) and the Muslim league governments for the period under review. The article will use a mixed-method research design. The quantitative data is mostly drawn from the election reports of the Election Commission of Pakistan, parliamentary records, reports on gender participation and governance indicators. The qualitative data is derived from the constitutional documents, parliamentary studies, policy reports, party-related documents and scholarly research published in PDF form. Political participation is operationalized through electoral participation, political representation, parliamentary participation and inclusion of women and marginalized groups. Democratic governance is examined in terms of parliamentary effectiveness, constitutionalism, accountability, transparency, institutional responsiveness, civilian authority and continuity of democratic government. However, the evidence shows that the two governments supported democratic continuity, but the patterns of political participation and governance were not the same. During the PPP period, coalition-based politics, political reconciliation, constitutional reform, provincial devolution and the landmark 18th amendment were the defining features. However, its democratic legitimacy was hampered by governance problems, allegations of corruption, energy shortages, insecurity and weak service delivery. During the PML-N tenure it can be observed the first civilian to civilian transfer of power, relative political continuity and a governance agenda focused on infrastructure, economic development, energy projects and CPEC.The study concludes that the period 2008-2018 was an important advance in procedural democracy and political participation, but democratic governance was uneven and institutionally fragile.
Keywords: Political Participation, PPP, PML-N, Pakistan, Political Development, Democratic Governance, Parliamentary Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, 2008-2018.

1.Introduction

Political participation is one of the basic features of democratic politics. It provides citizens with opportunities to influence the selection of political leadership, public policy, legislation, and the overall direction of the state. Democratic governance, in contrast, refers to the exercise of political power once governments are elected. This includes accountability, transparency, responsiveness, institutional effectiveness, constitutionalism, rule of law and capacity of political institutions to transform public preferences into legitimate policy outcomes. A democratic system cannot therefore be judged by the mere holding of elections. The quality of democratic

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governance depends on the extent to which citizens are able to participate in a meaningful way and whether elected institutions are accountable and responsive to them.

These issues are of special interest for Pakistan as they have been a feature of the country's political development since independence, resulting in the interruptions of civilian rule, military interventions, weak political institutions, unstable party-government relations and tensions between elected governments and unelected institutions. In this historical context, this 10-year period from 2008 to 2018 is unique. The general elections of 2008 put an end to the direct military rule of General Pervez Musharraf, and the following governments of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP/PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) served their constitutional terms. Post 2013 and 2018 elections, power has been transferred from one civilian elected government to another. The Research Initiative has pointed out that during the past decade; Pakistan witnessed remarkable continuity in its Parliament, a remarkable event in the political history of Pakistan.

The importance of this specific period is not only in terms of electoral continuity. The PPP government made several significant amendments to the constitution, of which the most significant one was the 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010. The amendment further bolstered parliamentary government, diminished the powers of the president, increased the autonomy of provinces and eliminated the Concurrent Legislative List. During the PPP era, the 7th National Finance Commission Award was held, political reforms in FATA, efforts for reconciliation between major political parties and the first peaceful transfer of power in Pakistan's history was witnessed. These changes opened new avenues for political participation and institutional development (Khan et al., 2021; Pakistan Institute of Development Economics [PIDE], 2017).

When the PML-N government took over in 2013, it entered into this developing democratic climate. Its election led to yet another transfer of power from civilians to civilians. Government was later seen to be very active in the field of infrastructure, energy, economic development, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It also operated under a more competitive political climate where Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) became a major opposition movement. The continuity of the democratic system did not prevent institutional conflict that was evident during the 2014 sit-in, the Panama Papers controversy, judicial intervention, civil-military tensions, or even disqualification of the prime minister Nawaz Sharif in 2017 (The Research Initiative, 2019; Iqbal & Begum, 2025b). Therefore, the comparative analysis of PPP and PML-N becomes crucial to understand if the democratic opening of the last 10 years (2008-2018), was only a continuation of the process, or a significant shift in political participation and governance. Previous studies have focused on the distinct elements of the two governments. In the studies on PPP, emphasis has been laid on political development, federalism, institutionalization, reconciliation and democratic consolidation, and studies on PML-N have been focusing on electoral politics, governance, accountability, civil-military relations and economic development. However, many of the studies were the specific government. The comparative study of the two governments based on a common political participation and democratic governance framework is rather underdeveloped (Bibi et al., 2022; Zikria et al., 2019; Iqbal & Begum, 2025a, 2025b).

This study addresses the gap and it does not question 'which government was more democratic?'. Rather, it examines the role and impact of PPP and PML-N governments on the opportunities for participation and the overall democratic governance. The study thus casts a light on procedural

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democracy and substantive democratic government. Procedural democracy largely involves the following: peaceful transfers of power, representation, continuity of institutions, and elections. Substantive democratic governance includes accountability, responsiveness, transparency, effectiveness of the parliament, constitutionalism and institutional checks and balances. The main findings of the study are that, although there have been significant advances in procedural democratic development between 2008 and 2018; there was only occasional improvement in the quality of democratic governance during the period. The PPP government has contributed in important ways in the areas of constitutional reform, federal devolution, strengthening parliaments, coalition-building and political reconciliation. Although the PML-N government achieved electoral continuity and worked on economic and infrastructural development, it encountered institutional issues with respect to parliamentary oversight, accountability, judicial intervention and civil-military relations. Thus, both governments played a role in political development but failed to establish a solid framework of democratic governance in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Development and PPP

The authors of paper, Zikria et al. (2019), investigate democratic political development in Pakistan between 2008 and 2013 and highlight a number of developments that set it apart from past political experiences. These were political cooperation, parliamentary activity, constitutional restoration, enhanced participation and civilian institutions working. Their study is significant as it relates participation to wider political development. The specific focus of Bibi et al. (2022) is on the politics of development and institutionalization during the PPP government. In their analysis, they connect political participation, political stability, institutionalization and governance. The study suggests that the completion of PPP's five-year constitutional term was an important institutional development. It has a government specific orientation, but there is space for a systematic comparison with PML-N.

Khan et al. (2021) emphasize on democracy and federalism during PPP’s government. Their research focuses on the 18th amendment, provincial autonomy, women empowerment and participatory governance. They claim that constitutional changes enhanced parliamentary democracy and federalism. They found this to be very relevant for the current study, as they show that political participation is tied to the institutional distribution of power. Gohar and Kanwal (2024) analyse the coalition government of PPP and highlight the importance of coalition government, political stability, constitutional reform, BISP and 7th NFC Award. Their analysis reveals that coalition politics gave rise to opportunities and constraints for democratic governance.

Ali et al. (2023) offer a more critical evaluation of the PPP period, however. They elaborate that the lack of a strong public delivery service and the other problems in the government weakened their public image and led them to lose the elections in 2013. This discovery is an important contrast: that achieving a democratic term does not imply successful democratic governance.

2.2 PML-N and Democratic Governance

The focus of the literature on the PML-N government (2013-2018) is on both economic development and institutional challenges. In Electoral politics and governance under PML-N, Iqbal and Begum (2025b) argue that the government made economic and infrastructural progress, but had shortcomings in parliamentary oversight, accountability, and civil-military relations. Studies on the PML-N governance also highlight the role of political communication

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and media. The study by Amin et al. (2020) explored the framing of governance issues by Pakistani newspapers in PML-N regime. The study by Amin et al. (2020) focused on the framing of governance issues in the context of PML-N in the Pakistani newspapers. Their quantitative content analysis shows that governance was a contested topic in public discourse, where media framing has an impact on perceptions of government performance. There were also key accountability issues during the tenure of the PML-N. The Panama Papers scandal and trials brought a new dynamic to the political landscape. This study sees accountability not as a legal question, but as a part of democratic governance because accountability mechanisms affect the legitimacy of the executive and balance the institutional system.

2.3 Political Participation and Women

Women's participation is a crucial measure of democratic governance inclusiveness. Women faced structural, cultural, economic and institutional barriers to political inclusion, which persisted as per the study of Zafar and Sami (2021). Their studies reveal that in some ways participation grew, but was still limited by patriarchal social structures. The data from the 2008, 2013 and 2018 elections indicate that there has been an improvement in female registration and participation, although there remains a gender gap. Comparative gender data showed that females made up about 44 per cent of the registered voters in 2018 and the gap between males and females in registered voters were more than 12 million. (Gul & Sherazi, 2022) As the years went by, the number of women candidates also rose, although women candidates were sometimes assigned to tough or hopeless seats (Zafar & Sami, 2021). This dimension is significant for the comparison between PPP and PML-N as both possessed women wings and fielded women candidates in reserved and general seats. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) National Action Plan, prepared with representatives from PPP, PML-N and other parties, specifically recommended increasing the voices of women in party decision-making forums and party wings (National Democratic Institute [NDI], 2017).

3. Research Gap

Three gaps that emerge from the literature: firstly, there are very many studies, which only focus on one government rather than comparing both the PPP and PML-N. Secondly, the studies have tended to study democratic development, governance, political participation, or institutional change in isolation. Thirdly, most of the studies done so far have used a qualitative descriptive method of inquiry. The present research fills these gaps by using an analytical framework that is common to governments and employs both quantitative and qualitative data. The research not only examines whether political participation grew, but also whether the growth was associated with better governance.

4.**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This research relies on the notion of political participation and democratic governance. Lucin Pye's Model has been employed under the umbrella of main attributes of political development i.e. (equality, capacity and differentiation).

Political participation is defined as a process through which people and political organizations try to affect governmental decision-making. This involves such acts as voting, election campaigns, membership in political parties, political representation, parliamentary processes, protests, civic organizing, and participation in debates.

Democratic governance entails the systems and mechanisms whereby elected powers are exercised and controlled. Such systems entail accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule

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of law, parliamentary scrutiny, constitutionalism, institutional balance of power, and civilian control.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study can thus be represented as:

(i) Political Participation

Voting Participation, Representation in Politics, Participation in Parliament, Female Participation, Opposition Participation, Civic and Political Expression, Political Institutionalization and Regular Elections.

(ii) Democratic Governance

Accountability, Transparency, Responsiveness, Rule of Law, Parliamentary Oversight, Institutional Effectiveness, Civilian Authority.

Such a model allows for the evaluation of the PPP and the PML-N without assuming that participation automatically leads to effective democratic governance.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

In this research, Historical-Comparative approach has been used with analytical and investigative modes of research. The first involves the analysis of participation in elections, voter registration, voter turnout, parliamentarian representation, women's participation and selected governance indicators. The second will analyze constitutional reform, parliamentarianism, political reconciliation, government and opposition relations and accountability.

6. Analysis and Findings

6.1 Electoral Participation

Electoral participation is the best quantitative measure of political participation.

Based on ECP statistics, about 80.8 million people were registered to vote in the general election of 2008. About 35.6 million people voted, and the total turnout was about 44 percent. The number of registered voters rose to about 86.2 million by 2013 while the number of votes cast increased to about 46.2 million. The total turnout was about 53.62 percent.

The rise in voting was not evenly spread throughout the provinces. The rise of participation rate in Punjab rose from roughly 48% in 2008 to 58.38% in 2013. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the figure rose from around 34% to 44.64%. In Sindh, the participation rate rose from 44% to 51.58%, in Baluchistan from 31% to 38.97%, and in the Federal Capital from 50% to 62.29%. The FATA region is the exception.

These examples clearly suggest that there was a significant growth in voter participation between PPP and PML-N periods. Yet this increase cannot be solely seen because of policies of these two governments. The 2013 election was characterized by various political changes including more competition, the appearance of PTI and new citizen demands.

Nevertheless, these comparisons prove that voter participation became more competitive during the decade. Loss of PPP's monopoly on power at the national level in 2013 and its loss of power in 2018 have proved that voters can change the makeup of the federal government in elections. It is a sign of democratization of the institution of elections.

The 2018 elections have maintained this trend of competitive electoral politics. Some of the technology and administrative changes that were introduced by ECP include GIS mapping of polling stations, online scrutiny facilitation, SMS to voters, and a test case of overseas voting in future by-elections. These changes by ECP were meant to strengthen electoral administration and democracy (ECP, 2019).

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Therefore, when viewed from the elections point of view, the 2008-2018 decade was a decade of significant achievements.

6.2 Political Representation and Party Competition

A PPP-led coalition government emerged from the 2008 elections. While PPP emerged as the majority party, PML-N along with other parties were significant. The coalition government needed negotiations and compromises. Coalition politics can be beneficial for democracy when the various parties accept pluralism, but coalition politics can create chaos when the members have disagreements.

By 2013, PML-N had 126 general seats and 166 seats when reserved seats are taken into account. PPP lost its ground and were reduced to 31 general seats and 42 seats in total (The Research Initiative, 2019).

This is significant because it shows how political participation has been meaningful in terms of creating change in the balance of political power.

The 2013 elections also marked PTI's rise as a major player in national politics. The formation of a robust third party has raised the bar of political contestation and has posed a challenge to the dominant political equation of PPP-PML-N. Thus, political contestation in Pakistan has become multidimensional. Similarly, the 2018 election proved yet another milestone when PML-N was unable to remain in power and PTI emerged as the largest political group.

Nonetheless, political representation continued to be influenced by dynastic politics, elite politics, regional imbalances, and asymmetrical access to political resources. Likewise, the evaluation of the institutions of Pakistan conducted by the World Bank highlights the significance of institutional quality and good governance (World Bank, 2019).

Therefore, it can be concluded that although electoral competition increased, the democratization process of political parties was still inadequate.

6.3 Parliamentary Participation and Legislative Development

Parliament has been one of the key places for political participation in 2008-2018. Both National Assemblies during this decade, the 13th National Assembly from 2008-2013 and 14th National Assembly from 2013-2018, managed to complete their constitutional terms. Thus, the parliamentary record is an important institution's achievement (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2018).

This decade has been characterized by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Decade of Democracy in Pakistan as an important one in history of Pakistan as the 13th and 14th National Assemblies have completed their constitutional terms and there were two peaceful transfers of power between two elected civilian governments (The Research Initiative, 2019).

The PPP government contributed greatly to the development of Parliament through the 18th Amendment. The amendment reformed the constitution and brought back its parliamentary nature by diminishing the power of the president and increasing that of the prime minister and parliament. It also empowered the provinces.

In this way, the PPP government made significant contributions to constitutional participation and institutional reformation. In the case of the PML-N government, parliamentary continuity was ensured, but the institutional context was somewhat different from that of the previous government. Due to the large parliamentary majority, there was no necessity for much coalition bargaining.

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Weaknesses in parliamentary oversight and fast-track legislation have been identified during the PML-N era especially with regard to the 21st Amendment that came after the Army Public School incident (Iqbal & Begum, 2025b). In this way, it becomes clear how the conflict between security issues and parliamentary debate exists.

Hence, it can be concluded that while PPP showed great success in constitutional reforms and negotiations in parliament, PML-N had the advantage of stronger parliament but lacked in the field of oversight.

6.4 Political Reconciliation and Opposition Participation

The Charter of Democracy, which was signed by PPP and PML-N leaderships in 2006, gave the political basis of collaboration against the military takeovers and restoration of democracy institutions. In the era of PPP government, this political agreement played a role in constitutional reforms (Zubair et al., 2024).

The politics of reconciliation of PPP enabled the collaboration of major political parties in the country. It was very important because the previous democratic eras in Pakistan were full of confrontations between government and opposition.

There were two crucial outcomes of the reconciliation process. First, it made the occurrence of any sudden political instability outside the parliament very unlikely. Second, it made possible the reaching of a consensus over constitutional reforms, especially regarding the 18th amendment. The period of PML-N was characterized by increased confrontation between the opposition and government. Increased political power of PTI led to severe political clashes between government and the opposition.

From the perspective of political participation, this was both a democratic expression and a governance challenge. Opposition protest can strengthen accountability by pressuring governments, but prolonged confrontation can weaken institutional procedures if parliamentary mechanisms become secondary to street politics.

The comparison indicates that PPP's political participation model was more strongly characterized by elite reconciliation and coalition building, whereas PML-N faced a political environment increasingly characterized by mass opposition mobilization and competitive polarization.

6.5 Women's Political Participation

The decade between 2008 and 2018 saw a notable increase in women’s participation as both voters and candidates. According to a study by Zafar and Sami (2021), women were seen making their way into politics at both the national and provincial level despite considerable socio-cultural and institutional hurdles.

The 2018 elections were significant in this regard. According to studies using data from ECP and parliament, 464 women participated in the 2018 general elections, which was about 5.2 percent of the total contestants. Out of these women, 289 got party tickets while the rest contested independently.

Nevertheless, more candidacies do not necessarily imply equal political influence. Women are often assigned hard-to-win constituencies. As pointed out by Zafar & Sami (2021), other barriers include family duties, financial limitations, patriarchal mindsets, political violence, and stereotypical media portrayal.

This indicates that both political parties recognized the participation of women as a democratic goal, but formal recognition alone did not solve the problem of barriers.

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6.6 Political Participation through Federalism and Devolution

The 18th Amendment brought about a change in the power equation between the federal and provincial governments. The Concurrent Legislative List was repealed, and several subjects were given to the provincial governments. The devolution process is one of the most important changes in the federal structure of Pakistan according to PIDE and PIPS (PIDE, 2017; PIPS, 2018).

The process of devolution had democratic repercussions, as it involved bringing political power closer to the citizenry. Greater significance was also attributed to the Council of Common Interests. Institutionalized federal-provincial consultations would have enhanced participatory governance in the federal state. However, its implementation proved difficult. The PIPS documents pointed out the problems that persisted in the transfer of administrative, financial, and regulatory powers to the provinces. The devolution of tourism sector, for instance, posed new challenges in institutional coordination due to the changes in the distribution of power (Khan, 2018).

Hence, the PPP government has contributed much to the institutionalization of participatory federalism, but devolution proved incomplete.

However, the PML-N government also worked within the same decentralized system. However, the government's focus during that period was much more on national infrastructure development and economic growth than on any further decentralization efforts.

6.7 Democratic Governance and Accountability

As far as the PPP government is concerned, its democratic mandate was helped by the presence of parliamentarian continuity and constitutional change, though charges of corruption and poor service delivery affected public confidence. Studies of the PPP government show that factors such as energy shortages, charges of corruption, economic problems, and governance issues were significant reasons for its electoral loss (Ali et al., 2023; Iqbal & Begum, 2025a).

This is an example of the difference between survival and effective governance of the regime. PPP managed to survive the entire constitution period, which can be termed as successful institutionally. However, one of the requirements of democracy is the assessment of performance by the citizens.

The PML-N government also encountered similar challenges but in a different manner. The focus on the development agenda such as infrastructure, CPEC, energy, and economic growth led to some concrete developments. On the other hand, issues of transparency and accountability were coming into prominence.

However, it should be acknowledged that the Panama Papers case was a particularly crucial one. The disqualification of Nawaz Sharif by the Supreme Court in July 2017 became a landmark event, as it showed that an elected political leader could be disqualified using legal means. On the other hand, it raised questions regarding the scope of the boundaries between political and legal powers (The Research Initiative, 2019).

Therefore, accountability was present in both cases; however, its institutional nature was in question.

7.**Comparative Findings: PPP versus PML-N**

Table shows the findings of comparatively performances of both governments led by PPP and PML-N

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Dimension	PPP Govt,2008-2013	PML-N Govt,2013-2018
Democratic elections	Completed constitutional tenure	Completed constitutional tenure
Political transition	First peaceful handover in 2013	Handover following 2018 elections
Political participation	Reconciliation and coalition politics	Politics becoming increasingly polarized
Parliamentary institution	Constitutional/parliamentary reforms	Parliamentary continuity
Constitutional reforms	Constitutional reforms: 18th Amendment	Constitutional reforms less transformational
Federalism	Constitutional/devolution of power	Federal
Women Continued representation and party inclusion	Continued representation;	2017 Elections Act improved candidate eligibility criteria
PTI opposition	Accommodation and reconciliation	Growing confrontation with PTI
Governance	Institution building, but poor governance	Infrastructure/economic development, but lack of accountability
Accountability	Vulnerabilities and corruption charges	Strong judicial/accountability action
Political institutionalization	Great progress	Progress, but more polarization

It can be observed from the above discussion that PPP and PML-N have contributed differently to political development in Pakistan.

PPP has contributed mainly through institutions and constitutionally. It has worked on a coalition politics basis, reconciliation, 18th amendment, increased provincial autonomy, and first complete constitutional term by civilian regime.

PML-N has contributed mainly through continuity and policy-based governance. It has worked on a stronger parliamentary system, continuity of civilian regime, developed infrastructure and energy, and stayed in power through elections until 2018.

Yet both suffered from significant deficiencies. PPP was beset by problems of governance and service delivery. On the other hand, PML-N faced difficulties regarding accountability, institutional conflict, civil military relations, and polarization.

8. Quantitative Comparison of Political Participation

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The available PDF evidence indicates several broad quantitative trends.

Table 2. Electoral Participation, 2008 and 2013

Indicator	2008	2013	Direction of Change
Registered voters	80,796,382	86,189,828	Increased
Votes polled	35,637,072	46,217,482	Increased substantially
Overall turnout	44%	53.62%	Increased
Punjab turnout	48%	58.38%	Increased
KP turnout	34%	44.64%	Increased
Sindh turnout	44%	51.58%	Increased
Baluchistan turnout	31%	38.97%	Increased
Federal Capital turnout	50%	62.29%	Increased
FATA turnout	31%	29.22%	Decreased

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (2013).

This table shows that the shift from PPP regime to PML-N regime was associated with a marked increase in voting. However, it would be unscientifically incorrect to suggest that the PML-N regime policy directly led to such an increase since the elections of 2013 took place when the PML-N regime was just beginning its rule.

A more realistic view is that participation in politics grew during the democratic decade, where the 2013 election marked a turning point.

9.Discussion

The main findings from this study show that there was substantial increase in political participation in the 2008-2018 decade, but not necessarily improvements in democratic governance. The findings based on election data indicate rising levels of political participation. Voter turnout rose from about 44 percent in 2008 to 53.62 percent in 2013. There were also signs of rising level of political competition and emergence of new political parties.

This is also an essential fact concerning the parliamentary evidence. The 13th and 14th National Assemblies completed their constitutional tenure. The two smooth power transitions that happened in 2013 and 2018 were historic occurrences. As per the parliamentary report of the FES, this era is unique since there have been two National Assemblies consecutively completing their five-year tenure and the transfer of power twice through elections (The Research Initiative, 2019).

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The successes that PPP achieved in terms of constitutional developments have not transformed into good public administration. The failures of PPP in handling energy shortages, allegations of corruption, economy, and security reduced public confidence in the government. Ali et al. (2023) directly relate the performance of governance to the defeat of PPP.

The PML-N regime showed improved performance in various sectors from the economic and infrastructural point of view, but in terms of governance, it had problems related to transparency, parliamentary scrutiny, accountability, and institutional rivalry. The case of Panama Papers was one example where the issue of executive legitimacy became evident.

Moreover, the data also confirms that political participation is multifaceted. Voting activity rose but political participation requires more than voting. Citizens need to have access to political parties; women need real chances for competition; opposition parties need to be able to organize themselves; Parliament needs to work well; and civil society and media need an open environment.

9.1Political Participation and Democratic Governance: The PPP Experiences

PPP's experience may be considered one of participatory institution building under conditions of low governance capacity.

It became a party of the government following a military-dominated era. Political legitimacy of the party was thus directly related to the establishment of civil democratic rule. The most significant accomplishment of this government has been the creation of a political and constitutional framework in which parliamentary institutions could re-establish their authority. The significance of 18th amendment is that it altered the constitutional balance among President, Prime Minister, Parliament and Provinces.

In terms of the politics of reconciliation, this has further helped create a conducive democratic environment. The readiness of PPP to collaborate with PML-N and others prevented any risk of political instability and enabled agreement on constitutional reforms. Nevertheless, the poor governance of PPP has negatively affected its political legitimacy. Democracy entails both processes of governance as well as good governance.

In this respect, the PPP case study highlights a paradoxical situation:

While a state government may be able to make meaningful contributions toward democratic institutionalization, it can still fail in the realm of democratic governance.

9.2. Political Participation and Democratic Governance: The PML-N Experiences

Unlike the previous government in 2008, the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had an institutionalized environment for the practice of democracy to rely upon. Its core responsibility was not to revive democracy after military dictatorship but to strengthen the process of democracy through effective governance. With a majority in parliament, the government could work on its various projects.

Nevertheless, it is true that the government was receiving increasing pressure from the PTI party. Political polarization grew even more during the protest movement of 2014. Political participation increased outside the parliamentary institutions but at the same time, it created institutional instability.

With regard to the political environment, the Panama Papers issue changed the scenario once again. It proved that the judiciary could check an elected executive. Nevertheless, there were still many questions that remained unanswered.

PML-N's experience thus serves to highlight another paradox:

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Legitimacy in elections and ability in policy making can exist simultaneously alongside weaknesses in accountability and democratic institutions.

9.3.The Role of Political Parties

Political parties were the central intermediaries between citizens and the state during the period.

The PPP and the PML-N political parties had national level organizations, electorate base, representation in the parliament, and wings for women. Nevertheless, there was some degree of lack of institutionalization within political parties. Political parties in Pakistan have been known to be affected by factors such as leadership concentration, dynasty politics, poor internal elections, and personality-based organization.

This research done by the National Democratic Institute concerning women and political parties is important because it highlights the need to enhance women's participation in the structures of political parties as opposed to mere inclusion of women in Parliament (NDI, 2017).

Research related to political parties and civic education asserts that while party manifestos and political institutions have the capacity to foster democratic citizenship, the link between political parties and citizens has not been sufficiently explored (Khan, 2022).

Therefore, political participation during 2008–2018 was enhanced more through elections and parliamentary representation than political party democratization.

Conclusion

Political participation and democracy in Pakistan have been an alyzed in this study via comparison of PPP and PML-N governments from 2008 to 2018. Through the application of a mixed-methodology approach using predominantly PDF documents from electoral, parliamentary, constitutional, policy, and scholarly sources, it was found that the decade under discussion constitutes one of the most crucial periods for democratic continuity in Pakistan's political history. The most notable accomplishment of the period is the establishment of electoral succession. While PPP fulfilled its constitutional term and transferred power to PML-N after the elections in 2013, PML-N, in turn, accomplished its constitutional term and transferred power after the 2018 elections.

The scope of political participation also increased during this period. Greater voter turnout in 2013 compared to 2008, more electoral contestations, the appearance of the PTI, rising numbers of female politicians, and continuing participation in parliament are clear indications that citizens were increasingly engaging in democratic politics. The PPP-led government played an especially significant role in developing the constitution and institutions in Pakistan. The passage of the 18th Amendment helped establish parliamentary democracy and increased provincial autonomy by changing the federal system. The politics of reconciliation adopted by PPP contributed to the creation of a cooperative environment among different political parties. Its major flaw was its poor governance.

With respect to its continuity in democracy, the PML-N government was more effective and carried a strong mandate in parliament. Its priorities were economic growth, infrastructure, energy, and CPEC. On the other hand, there was greater political polarization, opposition mobilization, and controversies with respect to accountability and civil-military relations during this time.

From the above comparison, it becomes clear that PPP and PML-N helped in the development of democracy in different ways. The PPP was better than the PML-N when it comes to constitutional reforms, political reconciliation, and devolution of powers to the provinces. The

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PML-N government was better at policy continuity and infrastructure development. However, none of the governments managed to institutionalize democracy.

The key result from this research is that political participation grew much faster than the level of democratic governance. Competitive and periodic elections were held but accountability, institutional independence, civilian supremacy, internal democracy within political parties and efficient public administration were not achieved.

These findings have significant consequences for the political development of Pakistan. Democracy cannot be built based on elections alone. Electoral participation should be complemented by strong political parties, efficient Parliament, independent and accountable institutions, good governance, inclusive political representation, civilian supremacy and participation of women and marginalized communities.

The decade of 2008–2018 should therefore not be seen as a decade of successful democracy or failed democracy but rather as a decade of transition and institution building in which Pakistan made progress from a condition of constant interruptions of democratic governance to that of democratic continuity.

For further democratic evolution, what Pakistan needs is the transition from procedural democracy to substantive democracy. This would entail building strong parliamentary oversight, political party democracy, transparency and accountability, effective participation of women, federal devolution, civic and media space, and demarcation between elected civilian and unelected institutions.

In this regard, the lessons learned from the experiences of both PPP and PML-N from 2008 through 2018 indicate that democratic continuity is a condition precedent of political development, but it is not a sufficient condition. The key to political development is when democracy leads to the institution of good governance.

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