



Was the Charter of Democracy Meant for Democratic Stability, or for the Continuation of Political Dynasties of Two Parties Only?

Waqar-Un-Nisa¹, Dr. Muhammad Rizwan²

Abstract

The article explores the political moves of two-mainstream political parties e.g., PPP and PML-N during 2022 in the purview of 'Charter of Democracy'. Both parties mutually agreed to curtail the usurpers' interference in the future political spectrum. The accord was signed against the interference of non-political forces in Pakistan since last Seven decades. The article mainly focuses on two questions. At first, PTI was an emergent political force so why did the PML-N and the PPP dismantle the elected government of PTI during April 2022? As per the spirit of the CoD, both were committed to stabilize democracy against the non-political force. Therefore, they showed complete intolerance towards PTI, which is a third emergent force on the political horizon of Pakistan. This situation created a second question, are PPP and PML-N not willing to share political power with any of the third political force? The author explains, how did they formed an alliance during PTI reign to dismantle it. The paper also works on the assumption that both political parties signed the said accord of mutual trust to retain political power within themselves. It is appeared that the said accord was aimed to strengthen their political powers instead of restoration of democratic culture in Pakistan. In this context, a scholarly review of the CoD is needed to ascertain its true implications. It is concluded that PPP and PML-N are unwilling to share the regime with any of the third emerging political forces. Furthermore, both parties' political decisions during 2018-2022 went against the vision of their own accord which was aimed to assure the oscillated democracy on stable path.

Keywords: Transformation, Charter of Democracy, Reconciliation, Undemocratic Forces

1. Introduction

The constitution of 1973 clearly indicated the process for establishment of a democratic state. However, no elected government served out its five-year constitutional term because they were removed from office before it was likely to complete its tenure. (Talbot, 2012). Pakistan inherited a weak vulnerable political system but strong Bureaucracy and the Military. It is understood that the strong and well-disciplined institutions often emerged dominant in underdeveloped newborn states. (Shah, 2014). As it is seen in third world countries that Military establishment had been transgressing and interfering in democratic matters, so as a third world country Pakistan had no exception. (Binder, 1963). This arbitrary practice also had an impact on the regimes of Muhammad Khan Junejo and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Likewise, Benazir government was overthrown in 1990 and 1996, the Nawaz Sharif administration was overthrown twice in 1993 and 1999. (Waseem, 2012). It is an established fact that in the entire political history, all political developments happened circumstantially.

It is understood that due to the immature democratic attitude, mainstream political parties underwent hazardous experience of political instability during the 1990s. (BBC, 2006). Both parties were not adhering to the democratic norms and adopted intolerance towards each other's regime. More often they got involved in political engineering and maneuvering politics with the 'deep state' actors. Their apprehension about the democratic norms was narrow, confined and party centered. PML-N and PPP had formed as opposite camp against the Military establishment after the adaptation of policy of Reconciliation. It is an established fact that PPP and PML-N learnt horrible lessons after the bloodless coup of Pervez Musharraf in October, 1999. Both parties brushed aside their previous longstanding antagonism. Both formed a fleeting alliance following elections in February 2008, therefore, agreement was never reached over critical issues simmering under the surface.

Peculiar indicators manifested the beginning of political development during the Musharraf Regime (1999–2008). (Musharraf, 2008). The PPP and PML-N signed the Charter of Democracy to promote democratic principles and cooperation to ensure stability of the forthcoming elected governments. The military establishment turned its focus towards the PTI. It was a relevantly a new emerging force, however, was not able to become an election winning party. There are various factors, to begin with PTI contained ideological candidates before 2011 and the track towards the powers avenues needs winnable electable in all major constituencies of Punjab and Sind. Therefore, the Military establishment supported PTI in becoming a winnable party and consequently the PTI too, became a next pawn in the hands of Military establishment after 2011. In this context the PTI also launched a 2014 long sit-in in Islamabad to dismantle the PML-N elected regime. Arguably, the PTI was being utilized at the hands of the Military, as it used to happen during 1990s politics with the PPP and the PML-N. Since these two parties closed the doors of military interference by signing the CoD. Hence, the CoD was quite successful in winding up the deep-rooted conflict between

¹ Ph.D. Scholar Pakistan Studies Abbottabad UST, Pakistan, nisa.edu@must.edu.pk

² Chairman Department of Pakistan Studies Abbottabad UST, Pakistan, drmuhammadrizwan_hu@yahoo.com

the PPP and the PML-N. More arguably, both learnt terrible lessons from the Military dictatorship. Therefore, the PTI's leadership was able to form its government after the 2018 elections. During the post and pre-election period, its leadership interpreted the CoD according to their level of political wisdom. PTI's Chairman, Imran Khan didn't grasp the basic essence and the well-established goal of the CoD. As it was aimed to refrain the extraconstitutional means by the non-elected powers of the state through some important constitutional amendments. Hence, the PTI couldn't cultivate a reconciliatory politics with the PPP and the PML-N. Consequently, the political interference of the Military establishment could not completely vanish.

As far as both election results are concerned, neither the PPP and nor the PML-N raised reservations about the rigging. After the 2008 general elections PML-N accepted and in return the PPP accepted the elected government of the PML-N after 2013. For the first time, the opposition was given the opportunity to provide input before the caretaker government was established in 2013. Both members of the government and the opposition were represented on the Parliamentary Committee, and the Election Commission of Pakistan. However, the third emerging force, the PTI held a different narrative about the reconciliatory politics of PPP and the PML-N. The PTI leadership held the narrative that each time the PPP and PML-N's government dissolved or maligned due to corruption and mismanagement charges. Both were never impeached by the apex court of Pakistan. Furthermore, the NRO permitted them for further mismanagement and corruption. On these grounds, PTI never came under the umbrella of reconciliation. The establishment on the other hand wanted a third political force to maintain their political hegemony. Hence the establishment opted the PTI as a pawn for its future political intervention. Therefore, after 2011, the establishment tried its best to make use of PTI for its possible intervention.

2. Research Methodology

Since the research contains Seventeen years old historical events and political developments coupled with the dissolution of PTI's elected government in April 2022. Both primary and secondary data has been utilized to present a rational understanding and implications of the Charter of Democracy. The paper assesses the implementation of CoD, limitations, and possible outcomes for the sustenance of democracy. Therefore, newspaper columns, articles interviews of imminent analyst have been thoroughly reviewed to develop a deep-rooted party dynamic of the mainstream political parties of Pakistan.

3. Literature Review

There are numerous books and published research papers about the implications of the CoD. However, no one has ever raised concerns about the limited political wisdom of the two mainstream political parties. After 2018 general votes, when PTI (as third political force) came into power, the implementation of the CoD became a test case for the PPP and the PML-N. By subsiding the spirit of the CoD, they formed PDM (an alliance of Thirteen Regional and mainstream parties) to dissolve the PTI elected government. Contradictory to their CoD agreement, the PPP and the PML-N sought support of the Military establishment to derail the PTI government. The author of the paper has extensively reviewed the existing literature about the Military role after the signing of CoD. The author found two schools of thought in this context. First is the state of Pro-Military and CoD like agreement would be beneficial to sustain the democracy in any possible way. Dr. Hassan Askari, Khalid Bin Saeed and Dr. Muhammad Waseem have extensively shed light about the weak inherited political structure in comparison with the strong, disciplined, and well-organized military and bureaucracy. It is understood that a strong institution happened to be dominant in all spheres of the third world newly born states. The second school of thought is clearer and can be categorically considered as anti-military. These included Dr Ayesha Jalal and Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi and their followers. According to the later scholar, the military intervened primarily to gain its vested business interests. While the former intellectual emphasized the need for strong civilian institutions for smooth democratic transition. A very significant role and implications of the CoD in fragile democratic setup has also been extensively discussed in various national and international journals. But their focus revolved around the conundrum of the CoD. However, the present research covers the recent dismissal of PTI's government in April 2022 and the prospects of democracy. The paper also concludes the future implications of the CoD for other political parties other than the PPP and the PML-N.

4. Scholarly Examination of the Charter of Democracy signed between PPP and PML-N

Ahead of general elections 2007, the PPP and the PML-N signed 'Charter of Democracy' to get their participation in befitting manners and to strengthen struggle for an end to the Military rule of Musharraf. (Jalal, 2014). Since 2008, under the spirit of bipartisanism the PPP's and PML-N's elected governments achieved a peaceful transfer of power with each other. Unlike in the past, the opposition PML-N collaborated with the government to maintain and advance a functioning democracy. (Gul, 2018). Democratic journey of Pakistan shows that all leaders, including General Ayub, Z.A. Bhutto, and General Musharraf, faced fierce opposition. Long marches, riots, and other forms of abuse were all

part of politics in the past. But from 2008 to 2018, the PPP and the PML-N played a mature political role and cultivated a political bonhomie. It is acceptable that the post-CoD period turned out to be the most solid and reliable shift of democracy. It was keenly observed that the exchange of powers between the PPP and the PML-N following the 2008 General Elections posed a significant challenge for the Military establishment. It was almost impossible for them to retain their political role in any possible way. Therefore, it was high time to hunt a third political force or to build up a new party under military patronage. Therefore, they sought support to make PTI a winnable party. The PTI, being impartial and dispassionate, was more eager for such support to challenge the reconciliatory politics of its rival parties. Therefore, after Seventeen years of CoD, the political landscape had been significantly changed from a two-party system to multi-party after the rise of the PTI. Therefore, in 2018 general election the PTI alone grabbed 32% vote bank in comparison to the 37% combined vote bank of PPP and the PML-N. Contrary to the PPP & PML-N political narrative, the PTI openly gave its disavowal to the CoD. Therefore, it poses a new hurdle in continuation of PTI's elected government after 2018 and the implementation of the CoD with its true letter and spirit. On the other hand, the PTI's Chairman couldn't contemplate the need of the reconciliatory politics to foresee the situation after coming into power. It is argued that the CoD remained successful in preserving the PPP and PML-N turns in power. (Hayat, 2023)

5. The Democratic Norms, as Defined by PPP & PML-N in CoD

Demands for the constitutional reforms gained momentum especially after signing of the CoD in 2006. In this context, passage of 18th, 19th, 20th, and the 7th National Finance Commission Award manifested the stronghold of Parliament over the key issue of restoration of the 1973 constitution. (Shafiq, Khan & Shah, 2020). Political development clearly manifested that the 1990s infighting of the PPP and the PML-N had been converted into cooperation and understanding. (Talbot, 2015). However, Pakistan's democratic institutions remained precarious after the restoration and amendments of the 1973 constitution. Although the nation underwent a change from military to civilian control, democratic institutions like the legislature, courts, and election system continued to suffer difficulties. The efficient operation and consolidation of these democratic institutions was hampered by corruption, poor governance, and constrained institutional capacity. It is noted that the military continued to play a large role and exert significant influence during this time. As a most disciplined and strong institution, the military retained influence over important defense and security issues, which left impacts on both domestic and international security policies. The balance of power between civilian and military authorities was impacted through the decision-making processes and influences behind the scenes. The military's influence also had repercussions for governance and policy formulation. In some instances, it led to policy inconsistencies, as civilian governments had to navigate around the military's preferences and interests. This, in turn, affected the effectiveness and coherence of governance and policymaking processes. (Mufti, 2020).

During the PPP rule of 2008-2013 the military retained its control over security programs. To address the worsening law and order situation, the PPP government was reluctant to rely on the military's assistance and collaboration. The situation led the military to continue playing a large role in politics. It is noted that the possibilities of fifth coup was almost vanished, but the elected government of the PPP and the PML-N couldn't maintain the civilian supremacy. The more an institution would be disciplined and organized the more it would strong. In contemporary milieu, the democratic institutions are not as disciplined, strong, and well organized. Therefore, after Seventeen years of the CoD, the democratic institutions are still lacking in implementation of coherent policies and sustenance. The task of keeping the spirit of CoD alive had become more difficult for the PPP and the PML-N after 2018 general election. The formation of PDM and the begging help of the military establishment manifested the diversion from the reconciliation. Furthermore, the PPP and the PML-N's CoD were meant to sustain the family dynasties. The signing of CoD in 2006 alluded the democratic stability. Therefore, it appears that the dismissal of the PTI Government at the hands of PDM undermined the logical acceptance of CoD in future prospect of Pakistan.

6. Reconciliatory Politics of PPP and the PML-N through the Lens of Imran Khan

Whether Pakistan's democracy survived through the CoD or not, but the regime of PPP and the PML-N had successfully completed their tenures during 2008-2018. (Yamin, 2015). Keeping in view the conundrums of the CoD, Chairman PTI, Imran Khan had deliberately boycotted the 2008 general election. Firstly, he was mindful of the fact that the PTI's turn might be possible after a frequent transition of rule between the PPP and the PML-N, and the transition might take 10 years. Imran Khan pre-assumed that both PPP and PML-N would not dismantle each other's regime. In addition, his party was not in a such a position to win for Central government. Furthermore, the subsequent political event also proved the assumptions of Imran Khan about the limited utilization of CoD. He blamed the CoD as a shadow deal between the two parties to secure executive position for their off springs and nothing else. Therefore, Imran Khan neither accept nor did came under the umbrella of the reconciliatory politics through CoD. The political

analysts argued that such rigid attitude compelled the other mainstream parties to dissolve his elected government through constitutional means. (Mufti, 2020)

7. Formation of PDM and the PPP and the PML-N knocked again the Usurpers Door

Amid economic crises, Pakistan Democratic Movement has emerged as an unified anti-PTI movement. (Kugelman, 2022). It was an alliance of Eleven opposition parties. Having large rallies in big cities was not a big task for the PDM, therefore, removal of Premier Imran Khan was a challenging order. The CoD was signed to eliminate the Military establishment's interference into political affairs. During the PPP and the PML-N regimes between 2008-2013, they completed the Five years tenure strictly on the lines of the CoD. They obliged the terms signed in CoD. Although both parties are entangled in some major issues e.g., reinstatement of Judges supported by the PML-N and opposed by the PPP, and the Governor rule imposed by the PPP government to undermine the Provincial government of the PML-N. Both parties continued with their party ideology, therefore, didn't let the non-elected powers intervene. During their regimes they were mindful of the fact that the military establishment was frequently destabilizing democracy since the creation of the state. Although during 1988-1997, it was Presidential powers very often used to dissolve the elected governments, but these powers were bestowed by the Military regimes through constitutional engineering. (Afzal, 2017) Therefore, after PTI's Chairman, Imran Khan sword in, they restarted old maneuvering politics. Although this time not for each other but for a third political power e.g. the PTI. Imran Khan also utilized unconstitutional means to avoid a vote of no confidence motion from the PDM. He also relied on a foreign conspiracy of regime change. However, the apex Court fixed the date for vote of no confidence motion in the National Assembly, and on 9th April 2022, the PDM through constitutional means dismissed PTI's elected government. Political analysts argued, albeit through constitutional means too, that without support of the military establishment, the PDM was unable to dissolve the PTI's government. Therefore, the CoD stalwarts (the PPP and the PML-N) needed support of the Military establishment after Seventeen years to derail a third political power. (Tabinda, 2020).

8. Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates that the political transition was guaranteed to be peaceful, and that various positive democratic principles were implemented after the signing of CoD. During this period, Pakistan has become an important democratic nation because of the continuation of the democratic norms. Finally, the democratic development steps demonstrated the initiative for positive change. The impact of this transformation was observed during the next five years of the Nawaz Sharif regime, during which the judiciary became independent, political parties demonstrated maturity, the military played a professional role, and the Prime Minister faced trial for the Panama leaks, among other things. The PTI was dissatisfied with the results of the 2013 election and accused the PML-N of pre-poll rigging and engineered results. It is acceptable that CoD paved the way and favored the long-term viability of the democratic system. Therefore, on various grounds, PPP and PML-N did not support PTI (2018-2022) regime. There was a perpetual conflict between the PPP-PML-N and the PTI pertaining to the CoD. For the former parties it meant to sustain the democracy and for the later it is a shadow deal between the PPP and the PML-N to grab power and run their family dynasties in the name of spirit of democracy

The paper concludes that the CoD brought positivity, continuity in fractured democratic system of Pakistan. But the political wisdom of PPP and PML-N is questionable and objectionable on two grounds, Firstly, their spirit of restoration of democracy through the CoD was limited to their own rule. Secondly, they pledged to keep military interference out of the door of the Parliament and democratic affairs. Therefore, they again bowed before the army for PTI's elected government dissolution. Furthermore, the selection of the New Army Chief during the PTI regime stood an undeniable challenge. Both the PPP and the PML-N strived hard to dissolve PTI government before the retirement of the then COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa in November 2023. They presupposed that if Imran Khan would announce the new COAS in his regime, the setup would favor his upcoming 2023 electoral success by all possible means. It truly reflects that even signing of CoD, the mainstream political parties still possess fears about the appointment, role and hegemony of the Army. The political wisdom of the political parties is still limited, and they are unable to break the political intervention of the military.

References

- Afzal, Madeeha (2017), Democracy in Pakistan: Election tell us why politicians behave so badly, *Brookings*,
 Ali, Javed, (2023), Military Dominance in Post-Colonial States, A Case Study of Pakistan, *Journal of Political Studies*,
 30(1), 29-37.
 Binder, L. (1963). Religion and Politics in Pakistan. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Pres.
 Gul, Imtiaz, *Politics and Government in Pakistan: A Historical and Contemporary Overview*, Routledge ,2018.
Harvard University Press.

- Hayat, Haider Umar, (2023). The Charter of Democracy, *The Nation*.
- Ian Talbot, (2012). *Pakistan: A New History*, Oxford University Press, p.45
- Jalal, Ayesha, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, Belknap Publishers, 2014.
- Khan, Tabinda, (2020). From a Movement to Catch All Parties, Pakistan Political Parties, Surviving between Dictatorship and Democracy, *Georgetown University Press*, p.82
- Kugelman, Micheal (2020). Pakistan's Anti-Government Movement May Hit the Brick Wall of the Security State, *South Asia Brief*, p-2.
- Mufti, Maryam, et, al, (2020). Pakistan's Political Parties, Surviving Between Dictatorship and Democracy, *Georgetown University Press*, p.23
- Musharraf, Pervaiz, (2006). The Line of Fire, *Simon, and Schuster*, 54.
- Mushtaq, Iqra and Baig, Fawad, (2018). The Role of Political Parties in Political Development of Pakistan. *Pakistan Vision*, 19(1), 176-190.
- Shah, (2014). The Army and the Democracy, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA:
- Yamin Sara, (2015). Pakistan: National Security Dilemmas and Transition to Democracy. *Journal of Asian Security, and International Affairs*, 21(2), 13-24.