

Role Of Pakistan Peoples Party In Politics Of Pakistan 2008-2018: A Decade Of Pragmatism

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Abstract

The country oldest and major political party, PPP has completed its five decades in the politics of Pakistan. In the state's politics up to 2018, the PPP alternated between being the opposition party, a coalition partner, and the ruling party. This demonstrates its total political influence on the nation's political landscape. During the four decades PPP has sacrificed the two charismatic leaders. The fifth decade of PPP started with new leaderships with a new zeal and with a new approach. This article highlights the role of PPP in politics of Pakistan during 2008-2018. The political history of PPP is discussed with the lens of pragmatism and the theory of Pragmatism is applied on the whole decade. Therefore the role of PPP in politics of Pakistan during the period from 2008 to 2018 is described as the decade of Pragmatism.

Keywords: Pakistan Peoples Party, Politics, Democracy, Pragmatism, Governing Party, Parliamentary opposition

Historical Background: Ups and Downs

A five-month-long popular uprising that resulted in the overthrow of military dictator Ayub Khan's regime in March 1969 gave rise to the PPP, which was founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Since the party's founding in 1967, it has been a powerful player in Pakistani politics. Since then, it has influenced Pakistani politics in one way or another. It has frequently been a well-liked party with a wide base of support among the populace and charismatic leaders like Z.A. and Benazir Bhutto. Both held the position of prime minister of the nation during the years 1973 to 1977, 1988 to 1990, and 1993 to 1996, respectively, before their deaths. When Zia-ul-Haq, a military general,

overthrew Bhutto's government in 1977 and executed him in 1979, the PPP was forced to the margins of Pakistani politics (Faiz, 2021). In 1988, the PPP fought valiantly to restore democracy and reclaim political power. From 1977 to 1988, General Zia's military regime was in place. Zia was compelled to reestablish democracy, albeit in a regulated manner, as a result of multiple political pressures on his rule, particularly the PPP's Movement for Restoration of Democracy. In this sense, the General Elections of 1985 were held without the participation of any parties, and the bulk of the victorious candidates joined the Muslim League. Zia proposed Mohammad Khan Junejo as Pakistan's next prime minister, but he ousted the Junejo administration on May 29, 1988, since he could not even permit a helpless individual to oppose dictatorship and seek to restore democracy (Burki, 1988). On August 16, 1988, Zia announced the date of fresh general elections, but he passed away shortly after in an aircraft crash. Benazir had already returned from her self-imposed exile at this point. She ran in the 1988 general elections, which were held in the wake of Zia's demise, and established the PPP in the centre (Ahmad, 2015). The struggle between the PPP and the PML (N) began in 1988 and contributed to the ouster of the Benazir and Nawaz governments in the 1990s, which caused democracy to stall. In actuality, the 1988 elections fostered animosity between the PPP and the Islami Jamhoory Ittihad (IJI), of which the PML (N) was a member, and both parties shared responsibility for upholding a strategy of hostility for a protracted period of time (Faqir, Islam & Rizvi, 2015). If the PPP attempted to put barriers in Nawaz Sharif's way of forming his government in the Punjab, the IJI requested assistance from the president and the establishment through covert channels in order to topple the PPP government in the centre. Later developments allowed Nawaz Sharif to defeat the PPP-led coalition, which included the MQM and ANP, and win the 1990 elections. Ineffectiveness, corruption, and political immaturity characterized Benazir's first stint as prime minister, which allowed Nawaz Sharif to dominate the PPP's government once more (Bashir, 2015). Additionally, Nawaz Sharif had adequate backing from the establishment and had the favour of the President. In fact, Benazir created a hornet's nest when she started the policy of confrontation against the IJI, particularly Nawaz Sharif. Both the PPP and the PML (N) utilised dishonest and cunning strategies to outmaneuver one another while simultaneously enjoying roles as the opposition and the government party in the 1990s. But because of their vested interests, this war was characterized by the weakening of democracy, which ultimately made way for the military government in 1999 (Gohar, 2015). Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif were able to return to Pakistan and rejoin mainstream politics thanks to the Charter of Democracy (CoD) that the PPP and PML (N) finally agreed to in 2006. In 2007 PPP completed its fourth decades in politics of Pakistan but unfortunately the fifth decade started with the loss of another charismatic leader, Benazir Bhutto (Gohar & Bibi, 2022). The 2007 assassination of Benazir opened the door for Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto to jointly serve as PPP co-chairmen. Since then, they have been essential to the party's agenda. After 2008 general elections PPP entered in politics of Pakistan with a new zeal as governing party while adopted pragmatic approach towards the political matters and completed the tenure from 2008 to 2013 and as major opposition party in Parliament from 2013 to 2018 (Chawla & Ullah, 2018). Therefore this study named the period during 2008-2018 as the decade

of Pragmatism and applied the theory of Pragmatism. The following detail discussed the pragmatic politics of PPP during this decade. But before going this discussion it is necessary to understand the theory of Pragmatism.

Theoretical Framework: Pragmatism

Politicians have diverse perspectives on how to understand, apply, and implement the pragmatic approach. The following are some of the key political pragmatism landscapes. Firstly, pragmatism refers to the adoption of a “practical attitude to problems and affairs” and defines politics as the policies and actions that politicians adopt in order to gain power in order to impact the public life of a society or a country (Henry, 2008). Since “practical” refers to something that is doable or likely to succeed, it is evident from Pakistan's political history that politicians have demonstrated “a kind of openness to whatever works to attain the desired goal”. This is referred to as pragmatism in politics. Second, realists accept the world as it is and do not pretend otherwise. This is a characteristic of pragmatic politicians. Because of this, these politicians not only demonstrate flexibility, but also the freedom to change their political course whenever and wherever it is essential to accomplish their goals (Ross, 2009). Because it frequently necessitates modification and compromise in one's proclaimed political stance, this realism can be humiliating and hurtful (Hartford, 2011). So why does the astute politician select such a difficult route?

It's because he believes that “the art of compromise is what politics is all about. Finding strategies for moving forward that opposing forces can accept is the goal. Deal-making is required to achieve the best possible compromise for everyone's interests” (Edwards, 2013). Thirdly, pragmatic politics is largely motivated by the concern for “positive effects” and is unconcerned with preconceived political divisions of “conservatism,” “liberalism,” “left,” or “right” (Ross, 2009). The pragmatic politician decides what is “good,” and once that is decided, he is not hesitant to take any position to achieve that aim. An illustration from the life of American statesman and pragmatist Abraham Lincoln might be used to further illustrate this notion (Saxton, 2013). Lincoln abolished slavery, but he was also dedicated to preserving the American Union. Horace Greeley, a newspaper editor, asked him about his stance on these matters in August 1862, and he responded, “If I could save the Union without freeing a slave, I would do it; if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that” (Hayes, 2008). The assumption that persons have a fixed nature or can hold absolute notions is rejected by pragmatics. Dogmatism and idealism are opposed by pragmatism. The pragmatist depends on facts, whereas the idealist trusts a theory. The pragmatic examines the particulars of the issue, prefers to test his theories, and changes course if necessary, whereas the dogmatist defends an overall narrative and looks for what fits over his preconceptions (Hartford, 2011). For an idealist, principles are everything, however for a pragmatist; principles are abandoned in favour of adapting to the situation in order to gain political power (Paris, 2012). The primary aim of pragmatists is to obtain the intended objectives; in doing so, they adapt to the changing environment and do not refrain from anything in order to do so, in contrast to idealists who fervently adhere to immutable ideas (Chawla & Ullah, 2018).

Role as a Governing Party during 2008-2013: An illustration of Pragmatism

Pragmatists approach factual matters with common sense. In order to foster a welcoming environment for the formation of a coalition government at the centre and in the provinces, the PPP leadership made sense to settle rather than engage in conflict immediately after winning the majority in the National Assembly (Nasir & Faqir, 2021). Asif Ali Zardari of the PPP encouraged them to join a coalition government during visits to Nawaz Sharif, the leader of the PML (N), in Lahore and the MQM headquarters in Karachi. With the main opposition party, PML (N), an agreement known as the Murree Declaration or Bhorban Accord was signed for government formation in 2008. Although the PPP had a majority in Sindh and didn't require a coalition, MQM was also a part of the provincial government there. Similarly, PPP generously encouraged the formation of coalitions in those provinces where it did not hold a majority of seats (Gohar & Bibi, 2022). In Pakistan's political history, the PPP thus established a new standard and birthed a sophisticated political movement. Similarly, PPP later demonstrated the same political maturity in the issue of Punjab and did not overthrow the PML (N) Provincial government there during its final term, despite the PPP having severe reservations about the power-sharing arrangements there (Arshad, Muneer, Saleem & Mahmood, 2020).

In August 2008, PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari made the decision to run for president of Pakistan with the backing of the coalition. Because of this, prior to the presidential election, the PPP government was able to win their support for President Musharraf's resignation by threatening impeachment, despite disagreements between coalition members and the opposition PML (N) over the issue of judges' restoration. It was a novel tactic in Pakistani political history for a military president to be forced to step down or risk being impeached (Khan, 2017). It was made feasible by the PPP leadership's foresight and pragmatism, which helped establish a positive trend in Pakistani politics. Pragmatists are willing to compromise and consider politics to be an art. When the PPP Government failed to function efficiently and satisfactorily with PML (N), PML (N) departed the PPP in 2010. As a result, the PPP allowed PML (Q), once an arch opponent of the PPP, to join as a coalition partner at the centre. The opposition MQM from the coalition at the centre and in Sindh was persuaded by the party as well. 2011 saw the MQM's decision to re-join the ruling coalition in Sindh and the centre (Nasir & Faqir, 2021). It was the PPP leadership's capacity for forging coalitions and practical attitude to the political environment. Being political realists, pragmatics adapt their behaviour to the circumstances. All judges Pervaz Musharraf had removed from office will be reinstated, despite the PPP co-chairman's prior agreement in the Murree deal. For the reinstatement of the deposed judges, however, later made use of delay strategies and presented various viewpoints. Even Asif Ali Zardari described the agreement as just a political document and claimed that it is neither a verse from the Quran or a hadith (Khan, 2017). The PPP leadership, however, took a practical approach and reinstated the removed judges in the wake of the lawyer's movement's successful long marches and the deteriorating general situation that threatened another military takeover. Despite opposition, the PPP accepted Prime Minister Gillani's resignation and the appointment of Raja Parvez Ashraf as the new Prime Minister in the interest of an independent judiciary. The PPP also agreed to send the letter to Swiss authorities in

the interest of Pakistan's political transition toward the positive and constitutional supremacy (Mahmood & Yasmeen, 2019).

Throughout its five-year tenure, the PPP government maintained the primacy of Parliament and pursued a pragmatic strategy to advance its legislative agenda. The PPP government worked more effectively and made an effort to build a relationship of mutual respect with the opposition parties, sharing committees with them in particular. With the support of the main opposition party PML (N), 116 government measures and 18 private members' bills were passed by the PPP with apparent political maturity. Ninety-four of these went on to become laws. The historic eighteenth, nineteenth, and twenty constitutional amendments that reinstate democracy in Pakistan in its genuine form and spirit were ratified simultaneously. PPP leaderships struck deals outside of Parliament for some of these amendments' terms in order to pass these constitutional modifications, especially the 18th amendment (Syed, 2013). The most important and significant accomplishment of the PPP government was the constitutional Eighteenth Amendment, which made Pakistan a parliamentary state and concentrated the President's discretionary power in the Prime Minister and the Parliament. Following the ratification of the 18th amendment, President Zardari delegated complete power to Prime Minister Gilani while taking a practical stance. As a result, the Amendment restores the 1973 Constitution to its original form. It strengthened Pakistan's federalism and guaranteed parliamentary supremacy. The PPP's historic achievement in the form of the 18th Amendment changed Pakistani politics forever and significantly influenced the country's political evolution (Rizwan, Arshad & Waqar, 2014).

A pragmatic approach can also be seen in the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave the judiciary more authority over the judicial selection process in order to prevent any future conflicts. The Twentieth Amendment is also a significant accomplishment of the PPP Government, which eliminated a blame game following elections and took a practical approach to transparency in the choosing of the caretaker prime minister and chief minister (Adil & Afridi, 2020).

The PPP Government has granted Gilgit-Balistan constitutional empowerment as promised by COD in 2006. The government also enlarged the Political Parties Order (PPO) 2002 to cover FATA and amended the outdated Frontier Crime Regulation (FCR). The population was given the right to vote as a result, and all significant and mainstream political parties contested for office in FATA for the first time. The administration also paid attention to underprivileged and overlooked areas. Balochistan underwent changes in this context, and the number of jobs available to young people increased significantly. Additionally, Balochistan and KP profited from the National Financial Commission (NFC) Award's first-ever weighting of poverty and vulnerable areas. These reforms would not have been achievable without taking a pragmatic approach (Nasir & Faqir, 2021).

Through legislative actions, the government tried to institutionalize things, including the military institution. The military in the back did not oppose the government's reform plan. Consequently, it demonstrated the military leadership's professionalism. Numerous events offered the military the chance to seize and exercise political control, but they limited themselves to their official

responsibilities. Civil-military ties have for the first time in Pakistani history entered a new phase of amicable relations, (Kaleem, 2015) which was made possible by the PPP's pragmatic attitude and a positive development in Pakistani politics.

The country's overall human rights situation deteriorated from 2008 to 2013 during that time. Human rights abuses were frequent. However, the PPP Government, while adopting a pragmatic approach to the deteriorating situation, largely took legislative steps on an as-needed basis and made every attempt to make things better. During this time, there was a sharp increase in terrorism, militancy, and terror attacks. To combat the threat of terrorism, the PPP Government had used both military and non-military tactics. The pragmatist is continually aware of the current circumstances and acts accordingly. To combat the terrorist organizations, the PPP government launched an operation in the Swat Valley and other operations in the FATA region after consulting with opposition parties. The PPP Government's anti-terrorism laws were also brave and audacious moves that took a slightly different approach from Pakistan's traditional legal system (Nawaz, 2016).

During the latter months of its term, the PPP Government had to deal with Tahirul Qadri's anti-government demonstrations. However, the PAT and PTI, who intended to dissolve this coalition and ignite political unrest as usual, referred to the cooperative major opposition party PML(N), which was so closely allied with the government, as the "B" team of the PPP government. Additionally, they gave the military the okay to overthrow it by proclamation a state of emergency or staging a military takeover. Thus, following mutual discussions signed the "Islamabad Long March Declaration" with Tahirul Qadri (Daily Times, 2013, January 18), demonstrating the PPP's pragmatism and aiding Pakistan's political progress. Similar pragmatism was evident in the installation of a caretaker administration after consulting the opposition. The opposition was given the opportunity to provide input for the formation of the interim administration for the first time. So, with the help of two Prime Ministers, the PPP Government successfully completed its five-year legal term. An important development for the nation's political development was the peaceful and transparent way the entire process was carried out. Political development was boosted by the March 2013 exclusively democratic transfer of power from Prime Minister Raja Parvez Ashraf to Interim Prime Minister Mir Hazar Khan Khoso (Shafiq, Khan, & Shah, 2020) and pragmatism is clearly visible in the process. The PPP government showed considerable political maturity by organizing the 2013 general elections without delay.

Role as Opposition Party during 2013-2018: A Paradigm of Pragmatism

The PPP did not fare well in the 2013 national elections since it was unable to keep its parliamentary majority. Despite the politicians' criticism of the elections owing to the suspicions of rigging, it is clear that the PPP government did not tamper with the polls, which can be described as free, fair, and transparent. However, during the 2013 general elections, PPP showed exemplary political maturity by accepting the outcome without conditions and peacefully handing over power to PML (N) without delay. It was encouraging for Pakistani politics (Khan, 2017) and all it was not possible without the adoption of pragmatic approach. Once the pragmatic politician had

decided what was good, he was not afraid to assume any circumstance in order to reach his goal. Therefore, President and Co-Chairman Zardari decided to boycott the 2013 presidential election out of respect for the Supreme Court's ruling, and he was not concerned about losing the party's presidential nomination for the following five years (Dawn, 2013, July 26). However, they warmly welcomed Mamnoon Hussain as the new president of Pakistan and transferred power to a second democratically elected leader. Thus, Asif Ali Zardari of the PPP became the first president of the nation to finish his constitutional term, and for the first time, a civilian president was chosen in the presence of the sitting president. This marked the end of a democratic and historic transfer of power. The PPP established a provincial government in Sindh with the help of the MQM coalition, becoming the main opposition party in the legislature. As a result, PPP established a positive trend in national politics and gave up trying to ignore their mandate (Khan, 2017).

When the PML (N) government faced a significant danger from the PTI and PAT to overthrow it and storm Islamabad, the PPP, which was at the time a friendly opposition, backed the PML (N) and preserved its government. In this sense, the PPP's pragmatic approach to the crisis once again prevents democracy from imploding and having an unmatched impact on Pakistan's political evolution (Gohar, Sarwat & Farman, 2022). The PPP also embraced a pragmatic approach to politics during the 2015 Senate elections, promoting a climate of mutual cooperation with other political parties and working together to prevent political horse dealing, which helped pave the way for constructive political change (Gohar, etal, 2022). In the PML (N) government's policies and methods to combat militancy, extremism, and terrorism, the PPP followed a similar strategy. The PPP also played a constructive role as friendly opposition in these initiatives, which was encouraging for political progress (Gohar, etal, 2022).

The PPP has contributed positively to Pakistani politics during the key constitutional reforms from 2013 to 2018. The twenty-first and twenty-third constitutional amendments, which established and expanded military courts, respectively, both used a pragmatic approach. Despite misgivings, PPP demonstrated that it could work with the government to advance national interests. The PPP also firmly backed the Thirty-First Amendment, particularly in the case of merging tribal agencies into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for the benefit of the tribesmen (Gohar, Sumayya & Sarwat, 2022).

The major purpose of pragmatists is to get the intended results, and in order to do this, they adapt to changing circumstances and do not give up on anything in pursuit of their objective. Therefore, in the Panama Gate case, the PPP leadership severely condemned Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and Zardari reminded him of his heinous role in PPP Prime Minister Gillani's dismissal from the same Supreme Court over a trivial issue. For its own benefit, the PPP had attempted to get the most out of this crucial position. The PPP leadership modified the party's designation from "friendly opposition" to "potent opposition". The party obtained political compensation as a result of the Panamaleaks scandal and other developments leading up to the 2018 general elections. Because of its pragmatic approach to political issues, the PPP was able to maintain its position of authority or potential opposition and therefore played a significant role in Pakistani politics. Due to the changing circumstances, PPP even teamed up with its rivals PAT and PTI, which the

Pakistani establishment is believed to have supported. However, following Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's disqualification in the Panama case, PPP did not cede ground to PTI (Gohar, Khan & Noareen, 2022). Being the largest opposition party in the legislature, the PPP nominated a candidate and actively participated in the election for interim prime minister. In the 2018 Senate Elections, it had to play a significant political role in the replacement of the Chief Minister of Balochistan and employ a practical strategy to win and maintain a solid majority in the upper house of the Parliament (Gohar, etal, 2022).

The PPP's reconciliation policy and pragmatic politics were responsible for making history, creating a culture of term limits and a smooth transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another, and contributing positively to the establishment of the caretaker government by nominating members of its own party for the position of caretaker prime minister.

Conclusion

In term of overall political history some analysts and academicians have referred to the years 2008 to 2018 as the "Decade of Democracy," as well as the "Era of Reconciliation" and the "Era of the Charter of Democracy". However, this study in term of PPP's political history referred to it as the "Decade of Pragmatism" because the PPP significantly increased its pragmatism during this time, whether it was in power or opposing it in the Parliament. In conclusion, the review and analysis of the PPP Government from 2008 to 2013 reveal that it had numerous difficulties, crises, and obstacles. However, the PPP persisted in fighting for the pragmatic approach throughout its five-year term. Positive change was the result of the PPP's pragmatic approach to political issues. The ramifications of this transition were also felt under the subsequent Nawaz government, when PPP served as the main opposition force in the legislature during 2013-2018. Finally, the PML (N) Government was mostly treated with maturity by the PPP. The PPP Government's initiatives for democratic growth served as a demonstration of the concept of a constructive change. And that change was also reflected in PML (N) government. The PPP used a pragmatic approach to political issues, remained in power or as prospective opposition during this decade and as a result has been instrumental in shaping decisions made at the federal and provincial levels.

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