

# JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE (JICC)

Volume 07, Issue 02 (July-Dec , 2024)

ISSN (Print):2707-689X

ISSN (Online) 2707-6903

Issue: <https://www.ahbabtrust.org/ojs/index.php/jicc/issue/view/17>

URL: <https://www.ahbabtrust.org/ojs/index.php/jicc/article/view/217>

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14028332>

**Title** The Process of Democratization And  
Role of Opposition Parties In Pakistan  
(2018-2022)

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**Received on:** 15 June, 2024

**Accepted on:** 15 July, 2024

**Published on :** 25 December 2024

**Citation:** Khial Ghani, Dr. Noor Ul Amin  
“The Process Of Democratization And  
Role Of Opposition Parties In Pakistan  
(2018-2022)JICC :7 no,2 (2024):16-45



**Publisher:** Al-Ahbab Turst Islamabad

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## The Process Of Democratization And Role Of Opposition Parties In Pakistan(2022-2018)

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### Abstract

*The main focus of this research is to examine the various events that occurred during these four years i.e. from 2018-2022, and what kind of role has been played by the political opposition parties as independent variables. Whether their acts impacted the weak democracy in the right direction or not? The credence of people in the state can only be materialised by the practice and exercise of free, fair, and transparent elections. Democracy through elections ensures people a responsible elected government with defined political, social, economic, and constitutional limitations. Moreover, elections manifest human behaviour and proceed to understanding and identifying the essential factors and considerations that frame people's political temperament, voting priorities, and preferences. More importantly, the exercise of elections results in overwhelming nationwide awareness and mobilisation of people in the form of competing political parties. Pakistan experienced another general election in July 2018. Unfortunately, it did not have a positive impact on the health of democracy. Almost the majority of the political parties declared the elections as rigged and engineered. The opposition parties came on the road to demonstrate their demands. The running of government machinery for the inexperienced Khan was difficult although the establishment was on his side. But the coronavirus crisis, high inflation, the Kashmir Issue, and unity of opposition parties in the shape of PDM changed the political scenario very soon, which, finally culminated in the removal of the PTI government in April 2022. The 2022 proved to be the year of political and constitutional crisis in Pakistan .*

**Key Words:** PDM, General Elections 2018, Azadi March, Senate Elections 2021, Electoral Reforms, PDM Long March, Role of opposition Parties,

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## **Introduction**

On July 25th, 2018, the general elections were held for the members of the national and provincial assemblies in Pakistan. The elections were mainly contested by 11-political parties. The PTI secured majority seats in the National Assembly (NA). The PTI formed a coalition government in center with the PML-Q, MQM, BNP, Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), Awami Muslim League (AML), Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) and independent members. In Punjab, the PTI formed a coalition government with PML-Q, while in KP, the party formed its own government having absolute majority. In the 2018 general elections, the PML-N won 63 seats for the national assembly, and secured the second position. The PPP won 42 seats of the national assembly which was declared the third biggest political party in the country. Moreover, in Sindh, the PPP swept the provincial election and formed its government in the province (Corsi, 2018) .

In response to alleged rigging in the general elections of 2018, the opposition parties organized a multi-party conference (MPC), where they denounced the elections results and demanded fair and transparent re-election in the country. The conference was attended by the opposition parties' leadership, which was headed by the PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif and the JUI chief, Maulana Fazlur Rehman. On the conclusion of the conference, Maulana Fazul ur Rehman told the media that the elections do not reflect the actual mandate of the people. He added that through rigging and tampering, actual mandate of people has been stolen by the PTI by joining hands with the military establishment. Fazul ur Rehman further argued that the political parties' representatives, who attended the conference, will not take oath in the national and provincial assemblies. He further added that the opposition parties will announce protests and demonstrations after proper consultation against the alleged rigging in the elections. He said that they would not let the undemocratic forces to hold democracy hostage.

Fazul Rehman said that the parliament had allocated Rs.20 billion to Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for holding free and fair elections in the country, but the commission failed to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities and duties. The commission officials were made hostage by the military personnel and failed to provide the elections results to the political parties in the given time period. Conducting poor elections in the country, the ECP just wasted the tax payer's money. He warned that the opposition would block the entry of those into the parliament who have stolen the elections. The PML-N alleged that the PTI with the prior support of the military establishment, had stolen the PML-N mandate. The PML-N president Shahbaz sharif argued that it had been the worst election in Pakistan's history. PPP commenting on the elections, announced that the party had decided not to attend the multi-party conference (Hussain, Multi-party conference rejects results of July 25 polls 'with consensus', demands re-election, 2018 ). It argued that pertaining to irregularities and rigging in the elections, the party would adopt its own strategy in this regard.

Maryam Aurangzeb, the spokesperson of PML-N, told the media that decision, whether

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to boycott the parliament or not, would be decided after a proper consultation within the party and also with the leadership of opposition parties, who attended the multi-party conference. Moreover, in response to alleged irregularities and rigging in the elections, the “opposition parties initiated a protest in front of the ECP office in Islamabad. The decision to launch protest was made by the 11-opposition political parties known as ‘Pakistan Alliance for Free and Fair Elections, on the floor of the multi-party conference, organized immediately after the elections in Islamabad. The alliance was joined by the following opposition parties: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Awami National Party (ANP), Qaumi Watan Party (QWP), Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), National Party (NP) and Muttahida Majlis-I-Amal (MMA) (Hussain, 2018 ).

Barrister Ali Zafar, the Caretaker Information Minister, announced the first session of the National Assembly scheduled, between August 12-14. The opposition parties, however, continued their protest and also announced launching demonstration and protests before the offices of the provincial election commissions. On the other side, Pakistan Tehreek Insaf, decided to address the opposition’s reservations over the alleged rigging in the elections. In this regard, the party delegation, comprising of Asad Qaiser, Shafqat Mehmood, Omar Ayub and Fawad Chaudhry, led by the former Chief Minister of KP, Pervez Khattak approached the senior leadership of the opposition’s parties in order to make a friendly environment in the parliament. PTI delegation told the opposition parties that they should share their reservations and complaints regarding the rigging in the elections on the floor of the parliament so as to address the matter through collective consensus (Wasim, 2018).

The PPP called a meeting of the party parliamentarians at Zardari House to devise a strategy for the National Assembly’s first meeting that was scheduled on Monday, 2018. The sources claimed that PPP chairman, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, told his party members to ensure their presence in the first session of the house as he wanted to play a role of an active opposition in the parliament. Moreover, he told the participants that PPP believes in democratic principles and his party would continue the commitments made by “Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto to save democracy in Pakistan.” Former President of Pakistan Asif Zardari, told the participants of the meeting that PPP would exploit every opportunity to strengthen democracy in the country (Wasim, 2018). PPP although rejected the election results due to huge irregularities and rigging, but the party will play its role as opposition in National Assembly. Bilawal Bhutto told the Election Commission to immediately resign for massive rigging and huge irregularities in the elections.

The National Assembly, finally, reached the collective consensus to establish an inquiry committee into the alleged irregularities and rigging in the July 25, 2018 general elections. The move was appreciated by all the political parties. The move ensured that the PTI led government is willing to consider a proper investigation into claims of electoral rigging raised by the opposition parties. (Dawn, 2018). The four major

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political parties of the opposition- PML-N, PPP, MMA and ANP committed in a meeting arranged at the federal capital Islamabad, that they would come with collective and joint parliamentary strategy to deal with Pakistan Tehreek Insaf in the parliament. The opposition parties repeated the claim of rigging in the election. However, Emir Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq said that the new government of PTI should be given a chance to play their due role. The JI Emir, while addressing a press conference in Lahore, opposed Fazal ur Rehman's suggestion of not taking oath in the national assembly and may even push for fresh polls in the country (Hussain, Javed, 2018).

In order to investigate the rigging allegations in the election, the special parliamentary committee formed a sub-committee to proceed and conclude the matter. The government dispatched a brief terms of reference (ToRs) to the opposition parties regarding the alleged rigging and discrepancies in the elections. Moreover, the sub-committee met under the chairmanship of its convener, Shafqat Mahmood, member of PTI, Naveed Qamar member of PPP, Rana Sanaullah member of PML-N and Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif. The sub-committee, according to the government-devised ToRs, will initiate an inquiry to clarify and determine that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) held and organized the general elections of 2018 with full transparency and no corrupt and dishonest exercise be involved in the election process .

The opposition was told that until December 13, they should properly respond to the government's proposal regarding the rigging allegations. In the last meeting of the sub-committee, the joint opposition submitted a 10-point ToRs identifying the crucial irregularities in the elections. The ToRs were approved by all the opposition parties. Responding to opposition allegations of rigging in the election, the federal minister of PTI said that the election had been transparent and there had been no irregularity and rigging in the process of polls. He added that FAFEN and the European Union observing mission had declared the election fair and transparent, but the opposition parties in Pakistan were trying to make the elections controversial on one and another pretext.

PPP member of NA Navid Qamar, said that the government's lack of interest into the matter of rigging was evident from the very first day. The government wanted to the delay inquiry into the rigging in the election. He added, the ToRs prepared by the government, were very short, which did not provide details about the matter. He further argued that the government wanted an escape from the matter but the opposition would resist their escape. PML-N's member, Rana Sanaullah, argued that the basic question was that the elections were rigged and stolen to facilitate a single party. He said that the opposition parties' collective suggestion of boycotting the parliament was not abided by the PPP. He asked that both the government and the opposition's ToRs should be sent to a central committee which should take the final decision into the rigging matter in the elections (Dawn, 2018).

ECP denied the opposition allegations of rigging in the elections and advised them to share solid evidences and complaints with the commission. The commission argued that there were some technical complications behind the delay in the elections results.

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Moreover, the Chief Election Commissioner argued that he knew the public annoyance caused by the short delay in the election results. He explained that for the first time, the Election Commission of Pakistan, was using Results Transmission System (RTS). He also discussed political parties' grievances about polling agents and presiding officers. Responding to opposition claim that they were not given Form 45 by the presiding officers, the Chief Election asked the political parties to come with genuine evidence and complaints so that the commission may take strict action and address the complaints quickly. He declared the elections fair and transparent (Tribune, 2018).

Azadi March of Jamiat Ulma Islam (F) against the PTI (led) Coalition Government

To protest against the election irregularities and the alleged manipulation in the 2018 general elections, the JUI-F announced the Azadi March. The JUI-F leader Moulana Fazlu Rehman declared that his party demonstrations would continue until the fulfillment of their demands which included the resignation of the PM and announcement of new elections. Moulana claimed that the PTI government was a product of stolen elections, and that those liable for it should be held accountable.

Thus, on 27th October, 2019, Azadi March began in Karachi. The march was attended by thousands of people, including seminary students. Additional convoys from the PPP, PMLN, and ANP also participated in the march (I, 2019). They all demanded that the country's current Prime Minister should step down and new elections be announced. Speaking to the marchers, Maulana Fazlur Rehman said, "My party will not turn back. The war has been declared. We are advancing with complete assurance. Since the current administration has endangered Pakistan's survival, we must defend its constitution, democracy, and other fundamental rights (Masood, 2024). We'll maintain our composure, and the government won't halt the protests". The JUI-F head continued, "Our protest will stay within the bounds of law and the constitution". Speaking to the government, he added, "We are peaceful people, and unlike you (PTI) we will not attack the parliament or Pakistan Television (PTV) by hanging our pants on the buildings' walls". He claimed that the "selected government of the PTI must go home", a common goal shared by all parties. The true representative of the people, he continued, "will deliver and lead the nation down the path of progress." He concurred that free and fair elections were the only solution to all the issues (Sirajuddin, 2019) . Though PPP and PML(N) were targeting the fraud in the 2018 general elections and wrong policies of the government inside the parliament, however, they did not genuinely start their move against the government outside the parliament. It was the stupidity of PM Khan who used very rough and harsh language against all opposition parties' leaderships especially PPP and PML N, so, due to such a harsh approach of dealing with the oppositions the leaderships of the nine political parties came on the stage of Moulana's Azadi March sit-in in Islamabad .

The resignation of the PM, dissolution of assemblies, arrangements for free, fair, and transparent elections, abstaining military personnel from voting areas, were some of the major demands of the Marchers. Instead of talking in reconciliatory manner, the

Information Minister of Punjab labelled the father of Fazlu Rehman, Mehmood Khan Achakzai and Asfandyar Khan as traitors .

Prime Minister, Imran Khan also called the demands of the oppositions as unjustified, undemocratic, and against the law. He said that the backing of the people led to his election. He asserted that he would carry out the requests and benefit the populace. To negotiate with the opposition-led Rahbar Committee to finish the Azadi March, the government, then established a seven-member group under the leadership of Defense Minister Pervez Khattak. The government committee accepted the demands regarding rigging and electoral reforms, but the resignation of the PM was not endorsed.

On November 13th, 2019, the Azadi March "Plan-A" was canceled, and as per decisions of the party leadership "Plan-B," was initiated through which, important routes were blocked. On November 19, Nawaz Sharif flew from Pakistan to the UK for medical treatment. After a few days "Plan-B" for the blockade of important highways was also canceled. In "Plan-C", JUI leadership started their demonstration against the PTI in the capital cities of KP, Punjab and Baluchistan on every Friday. (Afzal A. , 2019). The main difference between PTI sit in 2014, and Moulana sit in was that the Moulana Azadi March was more peaceful compared to the PTI dharna. The dharna of JUI lasted for two odd weeks. The PPP and PML-N did not want to topple the government from outside the parliament through agitation, so Moulana was unable to challenge the government lonely. Needless to say that the PTI led government disgraced as well as teased the JUI(F) leadership for the last one year through administrative measures as well as through social media trolling (Safi, 2021) .

No-Confidence Vote against Sadiq Sanjrani

On August 1, 2019, a no-confidence motion was moved by the opposition parties against the Senate Chairman, Sadiq Sanjrani, but he survived from the move. Ironically, just few hours before announcing the final official result of the no-confidence motion against the senate chairman, the opposition initiated a joint resolution in the senate to proceed a move of no-confidence vote against the Senate Chairman, which was passed easily and comfortably by the opposition, as 64 senators favored the no-confidence motion. The opposition needed 53 senators' votes out of its 64 senators to remove the Senate chairman. But surprisingly, despite the support of 64 senators, the opposition failed to get the support of 53 senators, the required number for the motion to succeed, after the announcement of the final results of the voting based on secret ballot. The final result announced that 50 votes came in favor of the motion, 45 votes came against the motion and 5 votes were rejected. "Fallen short of a simple majority in the upper house, the motion was dismissed. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Imran Khan (SAPM) on Information, Firdous Ashiq Awan expressed Sadiq Sanjrani's victory as the victory of Pakistan" (Gurmani, 2019) .

After the failure of the no-confidence motion, Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani pointed and said to the National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser that he is thankful

to friends and colleagues of the house who considered and trusted him a better chairman of the upper house of Pakistan. He added that honestly, he doesn't have any information about the 14 opposition senators, who favored him by casting their votes on his side in the senate poll. He added that this matter should end here because the results are not anyone's victory or defeat. Following the vote of no-confidence against the Senate Chairman, Deputy Chairman of Senate, Saleem Mandviwala, also survived the no-confidence motion, moved against him by the government. For succeeding the motion against the Deputy Chairman of the Senate, the government required 53 votes, but only 32 votes were cast in favor of the no-confidence. The motion failed, because the opposition walked out of the house to block the way of their members casting their vote in favor of the motion .

For the first time in the history of Pakistan, the upper house of the parliament had observed tabling no-confidence motions against its chairman and deputy chairman. The motion of vote of no-confidence against Sadiq Sanjrani, was submitted by the opposition, which was retaliated by the government and submitted the same motion against the Senate Deputy Chairman Saleem Mandviwala. The opposition had a total of 67 members, but the number decreased to 64 senators, after the PML-N's Chaudhry Tanvir's absence, who had reportedly fallen ill. Moreover, two senators belonged to the Jamaat-i-Islami, but the party decided to abstain from the proceedings. On the other side, the government and its allies had the support of 36 members, all of whom, were present in the proceedings of no confidence vote against the chairman and deputy chairman of senate (Saeed, 2023) .

The Revocation of Special Status of Kashmir

In 2019, India's ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) revoked the Indian occupied Kashmir's special status by annulling Article 370 of the constitution. The act gave right to people other than Kashmiris to purchase and acquire property, permanent accommodation and settlement in the Indian occupied Kashmir. Article 370 had confined the jurisdiction of the Indian parliament to interfere the state legislations and laws, but allowed it only to administer and run matters of defense, foreign affairs and communications of the occupied territory. Kashmiris, Pakistan, international human right organizations and some of the Indian opposition parties termed the revocation of the special status as an attempt to thin the demographic feature and structure of the Muslim-majority populated Kashmir with Hindu settlers and immigrants .

The Prime Minister of Pakistan strongly reacted to the Indian unconstitutional exercise in the occupied Kashmir. He appealed the entire nation to come and attend the 'Kashmir Hour', to show the people of Indian-occupied Kashmir that the entire Pakistani nation stands with them. Moreover, the government decided to observe August 05 as a 'Black Day' to demonstrate solidarity with the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir. Imran Khan said that the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had committed a "strategic blunder" by revoking the special status of the Indian-occupied Kashmir. He commented that the only legitimate solution to the issue of Kashmir was to let the people freely decide their

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fate (Dawn, 2019).

On August 6, 2019, President Arif Alvi summoned the joint session of the parliament after the Indian government revoked Article 370, which had given special status to Jammu and Kashmir dividing the state into two union territories, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Prime Minister Imran Khan began the session by requesting that the parliamentarians to listen carefully to him. He added that his government tried its best to settle disputes and establish good relations with its neighbors. In the first place, the PTI government had reached out to all the neighboring states, because they knew that without good relations with them, Pakistan could not achieve stability and alleviate poverty.

The Prime Minister said that when he first reached out to India, the Indian government claimed that militant outfits were operating from Pakistan, which caused security threats for their country. Regarding the Indian claim of militants operating from Pakistan, the PM argued that he had clarified before the Indian PM, Narendra Modi, that after the brutal and inhuman tragedy of the Army Public School in Pakistan by the terrorist organizations, all the political parties, including the other important stakeholders, committed that Pakistan would never let its territory to be used by the militants and terrorists against any country. He added that he soon realized that India was not interested at all in Pakistan. Moreover, the premier told the parliament that the Indian government considered their intention for peace to be Pakistan's weakness, and after that, their government stopped extending offers to hold talks regarding peaceful bilateral relations. He further explained, "Pulwama happened and thanks God that our air force retaliated in the way it did. We shot down the Indian pilot, but released and returned him to them to send the message that Pakistan did not want war and conflict". Shahbaz Sharif, the opposition leader in the national assembly, told the parliament that Pakistan should give a decisive response to India's unconstitutional move by revoking the special status of Indian-occupied Kashmir. He added that Pakistan always desires to maintain friendly and working relationships with its neighbours. Kashmir is a central agenda of their national policy, and everyone knew that they had fought three wars with Indians in the region. Pakistan seeks friendly relations with all states, but they must be based on mutual interest and self-respect. Moreover, he said that they had two options: either to hide or take decisive action against the matter. He suggested that they must take responsive and decisive action against the Indian unconstitutional move in Kashmir. The opposition leader remarked that none of Pakistan's friendly countries, not even China, had taken Pakistan's side over the issue. He declared that it was the failure of the government on foreign front (Govt resolves to take up 'annexation' of Kashmir on international forums, fight BJP's 'racist ideology', 2019).

PPP Chairman, Bilal Bhutto Zardari, told the parliament that India's heavy and massive security deployment in occupied Kashmir would only add fuel to the fire in the region. "The Indian government's efforts to force pilgrims and tourists to leave the region, the complete closure of educational institutions, and the arrest of politicians, who are

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critical of the Indian government's policies reflected the true face of the Indian fascist regime led by Narendra Modi." On August 7, 2019, the Joint Parliamentary Session passed a resolution that condemned the Indian unilateral move by repealing the special status of the Indian-occupied Kashmir. The resolution urged the United Nations and the Security Council to stop India from committing brutalities in the occupied Kashmir. It also highlighted Pakistan's future course of action regarding the Indian autocratic designs in the disputed territory. The resolution explained that the Indian fascist regime led by the BJP, had intended to oppress the Muslim majority by the Hindu minority in Indian-occupied Kashmir, which would result in horrific repercussions in the region.

The Foreign Minister appreciated the role of the opposition parties in the country, being on the same page against the BJP-inspired unconstitutional revocation of the special status of Indian-occupied Kashmir. Moreover, he said that the support and cooperation of the entire nation was required to deal with that critical situation. Here, we have seen some positive gestures shown by the opposition for the resolution of this extremely important national interest issue. Consensual politics is actually the cure of ill-health democracy. So, such positive approach should be adopted by the government as well as the opposition parties (Mir, 2023) .

The Formation of Pakistan Democratic Front (PDM)

Although, the opposition parties especially the PPP, PML-N, JUI (F) and JI were opposing the PTI led coalition government and declared it the product of rigged and manipulated elections from the very first day, but Fazlu Rehman was very serious in this case. He gathered the opposition parties from time to time against the electoral fraud. He himself arranged a long Azadi March in 2019, to put pressure on the government to announce date for fresh elections. However, he was not succeeded in his mission to dislodge the government due to lack of interest of the PPP and PML-N, who opposed the move of the JUI head as undemocratic and unconstitutional. On the other hand, the opposition was under the mark of bullet of the government as it was making cases regularly against them through NAB. It was the repression policy of the government and the leadership of Moulana Fazlu Rehman, who gathered more than ten opposition parties on a common platform (PDM) in September, 2020. Moulana Fazlu Rehman was elected as un-opposed president of the alliance. The PDM had a wide manifesto but its basic objectives revolved around the ouster of the PTI government, announcement of fresh general elections, and the withdrawal of establishment from the ground of political contest. The PDM organized various public rallies in different cities against inflation and failed policies of the government and the Army intervention in the civilian affairs. It is pertinent to mention here that Nawaz Sharif was also involved in these rallies in Punjab through video link. He mentioned the names of General Bajwa and General Faiz for their alleged involvement of rigging in 2018 general elections to favor Imran Khan's PTI. The PDM though started their campaign against the government very aggressively, but they were not able to turn the table on the government. PPP and PML-N were not ready to oust PM and his government through force outside the parliament. Both the parties also

did not agree with the resignation policy of the President of PDM from assemblies due to their larger stake in Sind and Punjab provinces. They had their eyes on the up-coming senate (2021) elections. Both larger opposition parties wanted the ouster of the government within the ambit of the constitution (Almeida, *Pakistani Politics Roiled by Familiar Triangle: Military, Government, Opposition*, 2020) .

#### Senate Elections 2021

In the Senate election, 2021, the joint opposition-fielded PPP parliamentarian and the former PM of Pakistan, Yousuf Raza Gilani against the government candidate, Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, for the general seat from the federal capital Islamabad. In the election, Yousaf Raza Gillani secured 169 votes, while Abdul Hafeez Shaikh got 164 votes. Seven votes were rejected, while two votes of the ruling party PTI parliamentarians were declared invalid, because they didn't mark their ballots correctly. Hours before the senate elections proceedings, a controversial video aired in which, Ali Haider Gillani son of Yousaf Raza Gillani, was seen telling the lawmakers how to cancel their votes in the election. The ruling party, PTI, cried on the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to immediately take action against those, who were involved in the illicit bargaining and horse trading. The Party added that the ECP should declare Gilani ineligible, after the airing of the controversial video by his son regarding the senate election. The ruling party, PTI, alleged that votes were bought and the elections were fixed. Moreover, the PTI filed a reference with the ECP, asking for Yousaf Raza Gilani's immediate disqualification and removal who was allegedly involved in corrupt and mala fide exercises (Satti, 2021) .

Ali Haider Gillani, while talking to media, confessed that he was in the leaked video about the senate elections, but he rejected the allegations that he was making and planning any kind of deal to buy votes for his father in the senate election. He further explained that the MNAs in the aired video were his friends from the ruling party, PTI. After his remarks on the alleged video regarding the senate election, some audio clips were reportedly leaked, in which various people could be allegedly heard discussing about a deal worth millions of rupees with lawmakers in order to buy their votes. According to the media circles, two of the voices in the leaked audio clips were said to be of Ali Haider Gillani and Sindh Information Minister, Nasir Hussain Shah. Ali Haider Gillani denied his voice in the audio clips, while talking to Shahzeb Khanzada in the Geo News.

The PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, tweeted that democracy was the best revenge, after winning the Senate election by Yousaf Raza Gillani, a joint candidate of the opposition against the government candidate, Hafeez Seikh. He added that that was a win for all the democratic forces in Pakistan. Bilal Bhutto Zardari expressed that new democratic trends were taking place in the country and they were fully committed in this regard. He thanked, especially the PDM and repeated that Yousaf Raza Gilani's victory against the government was not confined to one political entity, but it was a win for all those, who loved and desired to prevail democracy in country. He added that the

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puppet PTI regime had lost credibility in the parliament, and that day, the people of Pakistan and democracy had won. He expressed, that PM Imran Khan should resign from the premiership, as that was now the combined demand of both the government and the opposition (Dawn, 2021) .

PML-N supremo, Nawaz Sharif, said that it was a glorious victory on the part of a joint opposition. PML-N vice president, Maryam Nawaz, through a social media site on twitter congratulated Yousaf Raza Gilani for his glorious victory in the senate polls. She also hailed and congratulated PDM for the victory. She appreciated her party members in the national assembly and senate for accepting Nawaz Sharif's ideological stance while refusing to bow down and sell out their conscience. Moreover, PML-N senior leader Ahsan Iqbal after the opposition victory in the senate polls, advised the Prime Minister Imran to immediately resign from the premiership, tonight. He added that the PM Imran Khan and his cabinet members can't even cast their votes properly in the polls how can they run a country (Dawn, 2021). The ruling party, PTI, however, criticized the Senate election results and demanded the concerned authorities to properly investigate the controversies behind the election .

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in a press conference clarified that after Gillani victory in the senate election, PM Imran Khan will definitely seek a vote of confidence from the parliament. He added that after the senate upset, the party will make it clear to the nation that who stood with whom. He expressed that PDM had been only extending and protecting their self-interest in the country, but they were fully committed to bury their politics of self-interest. He said that his party had invited the opposition parties to develop consensus on the open ballots system in the senate election, but the opposition declined his invitation every time. He added that PTI had informed the ECP about its constitutional duty of conducting free and transparent elections in the country, but it failed once again fulfilling its duties and responsibilities to ensure transparency in the polls. He added that those, who proclaimed themselves as the defenders of democracy, had killed the very basic principles of democracy in the senate polls (Tribune, 2021).

**PM Imran Khan Secured a Trust Vote from National Assembly**

The special session of the national assembly was called, as the Prime Minister Imran Khan had decided to seek a vote of confidence from the house, after the opposition candidate Yousaf Raza Gillani's victory, against the government member Hafeez Seikh, on the general seat from Islamabad in the Senate Polls. The proper proceeding for the vote of confidence was initiated by the Speaker of the NA. PM Imran Khan secured 178 votes in the national assembly, six more votes than the required numbers. The Speaker of the National Assembly, Asad Qaiser, announced the result that Imran Khan had been elected as the PM after receiving 178-votes from the national assembly in the vote of confidence (Hashim, 2021).

After securing the vote of confidence from the house, Prime Minister Imran Khan thanked the members of the house, who stood with the government in that critical time.

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He added that their government was aware of the fact that how a huge amount of capital was invested by the opposition parties for changing PTI members' conscience in the Senate elections. He said that despite massive rigging, the ECP claimed that it had carried out fair and transparent polls in the Senate. Imran Khan added that he had suggested the ECP to receive proper briefing from the country's prime intelligence agencies, to find out what went on behind the scenes in elections. Moreover, he blamed Asif Ali Zardari and Nawaz Sharif for blackmailing the PTI- led government for securing an NRO to save their capital, which they had made through corruption (Dawn, 2021).

A day before tabling the vote of confidence, the 11-party alliance (PDM) announced that they will not attend the PM vote of confidence proceedings in the national assembly. In this regard, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) Chief, Maulana Fazlur Rehman said that it made no sense that a head of the government, who had already been rejected by the house in the Senate elections, was again seeking a vote of confidence from the national assembly. He added that it was a futile exercise, and the PTI led government will not be considered the representative government of the country (Khan H. , Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan, 2023).

Following Imran Khan's securing a trust vote from the national assembly, a large number of PTI workers gathered outside the Parliament lodges, chanting slogans in support of PM Imran Khan and against the opposition. The PML-N senior leadership, including the former PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Ahsan Iqbal, Musaddiq Malik and Marriyum Aurangzeb also arrived outside the parliament lodges for holding a press conference against the prime minister's move for a trust vote. PML-N member of NA, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, argued that constitutionally the Prime Minister had no power to go for a vote of confidence by himself. He added that the constitution of Pakistan has given this power to the president, and only if the president thinks that the prime minister had lost confidence of the house, he can advise him to take the confidence vote from the national assembly. The PML-N senior leadership blamed the PTI workers and supporters for harassing and manhandling the opposition parliamentarians, but the PTI denied their allegations (Mariam Mufti e. e., 2020).

#### Electoral Reforms(2022-2018)

The PTI government tried to incorporate massive electoral reforms to the Elections Act, 2017 in order to eliminate the standing ambiguities and ensure transparency in the forthcoming election. But, some of these proposals invited severest criticism both from the opposition parties as well as ECP. A total of forty nine amendments in the above mentioned election act were proposed.

Despite the fervent protest by the opposition parties, the PTI led federal government finally succeeded in bringing amendments to the Elections Act, 2017, in the joint session of the parliament. The bill pertained to electoral reforms, introducing and allowing the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and granting voting rights to overseas Pakistanis. The government's move provoked the opposition parties, which tore down copies of the agenda and walked out of the session in protest. The opposition parties

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raised their objection that according to the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the National Assembly laid down in 2007, the federal government needed a majority of the total membership of both the houses of the parliament for a bill to be passed in a joint session of the parliament, which amounts to 222 members of the total number of the members in both the houses. However, the government claimed that according to Article 72 of the Constitution, it required a simple majority of the members present during a joint sitting to get a bill passed (Tribune, 2021). The Speaker of the national assembly Asad Qaiser ruled that the Constitution held precedence over the Rules. The opposition parties criticized the uni-lateral approach of the government while passing the law. Similarly for the PAFEN it was against the democratic norms to pass the laws without any debate and discussion in the parliament. Both mainstream political parties of the opposition strongly resisted the use of EVM in the forthcoming election.

The leader of the opposition in the national assembly, Shahbaz Sharif, called the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) as evil and vicious machines. He alleged that the government was not sincere in developing consensus with the opposition regarding the electoral reforms. While addressing the joint session of parliament, the opposition leader argued that the PTI-led government was working on the agenda to hijack the important bills pertaining to the national interest. He called the prescribed bills as illicit and illegal, which were in contradiction to the parliamentary norms. He objected that the government intended to pass the bills in haste without consulting the opposition. The opposition leader argued that there were always allegations of rigging and tempering during the elections, but today they were observed that for the first time in the history of Pakistan, there were allegations of planned rigging before the elections. He added that the PTI selected regime intended to introduce EVMs because it could no longer ask the people for votes due to its bad governance in the country (News, 2021).

The opposition leader asked the Speaker to defer the joint session for comprehensive consultation so that the matter of electoral reforms could be settled in a proper way. Shahbaz Sharif pointed to the national assembly speaker, Asad Qaiser, that if he allowed the bills to bulldoze the parliament established tradition, the nation would never forgive him. He urged the Speaker that being the custodian of the house, he should recognize his duties and responsibilities. He also criticized the unconstitutional manner adopted for the bill's presentation in the parliament. Moreover, the opposition leader argued that conducting free and transparent election in the country is the prime responsibility of the ECP, but it is known to everyone that the ECP had raised serious reservations over the introduction of EVMs in the elections, but surprisingly, the government had intended to pass the bills despite the ECP reservations (Husain, 2021).

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while addressing the parliament said that today is a historic day, where the parliament had passed the laws, which closed the rigging mantra and made the electoral process transparent once for all. Reacting to the opposition leader remarks that the government intended to pass the black laws, he said that government intended to clean away the blackness of the past associated with the

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electoral system. He added that the PTI believed in democracy and our government will never let anyone to bulldoze the established parliamentary procedures. Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that the opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif called EVMs 'evil and vicious machines and the government respected his opinion, but EVMs are not evil and vicious machines, but they are introduced to bury the evil and vicious designs operating in the country since decades. He said that the government intended to ensure a credible and transparent electoral process in the country which is acceptable to everyone. Shah Mehmood Qureshi reiterated the government's serious commitments regarding the issues confronted by the overseas Pakistanis. He added that the overseas Pakistanis are the nation's asset and our government wished to make them involve in the state affairs and decision-making (Desk W. , 2021).

PPP chairman Bilal Bhutto Zardari, in his address to the parliament said that the bills pertaining to the electoral reforms introduced by the government were one-sided business which had no precedent in Pakistan's history. He added that the previous government of PML-N headed by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, had a two-third majority in the national assembly, if that government had unilaterally decided and used the majority to force reforms, then the opposition parties, including the PTI and the PPP would not have been able to block his way regarding the legislation. But, they did not deviate from the established traditions of the parliament, and approached to the opposition parties to develop consensus on national issues in the parliament. He further said that if the PTI led government had followed the footsteps of its predecessor, the PML-N government, then today the situation would have different and the opposition would have warmly participated in the legislation process. He argued if both the government and opposition collectively carried out electoral reforms, then, the next election would not be controversial and it would be Prime Minister Imran Khan's success (Nadir Gurmani, 2021).

However, Bilal Bhutto Zardari said that the opposition would surely decline the results of the next general election in the country if the government continued in the unconstitutional and undemocratic manner, it had been proceeding in. He continued to say that both the PML-N and the PPP favored providing voting rights to the overseas Pakistanis despite the PTI led government one-sided legislation in the parliament. He added that overseas Pakistanis should be provide representation on the pattern they have in the Azad Kashmir legislative assembly. Bilal Bhutto Zardari added that how the opposition can accept your proposal where Pakistanis sitting in Paris, California and Britain decide for the people of Karachi and the tribal regions? He suggested that the overseas Pakistanis should their own independent electoral college. JUI-F parliamentarian Maulana Asad Mahmood blamed the government for intentionally creating chaos in the parliament by introducing such laws. He warned the government that if it tried to bypass the parliament and bulldozed the legislation, the nation would not accept it. He added that the law remained controversial even before its initiation in the parliament. He added that despite that, if the government intended to pass the law,

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it would lead to massive demonstrations and protests in the country. He said that for any misadventure in country, the government led by the PTI would be made responsible for that (Nadir Gurmani, 2021). According to the leaders of opposition parties, how will the political parties and ECP reach and make arrangements for conducting election for those overseas Pakistani living in different countries around the world. The amendment Act having a clause regarding the delimitations of constituencies will be made on the basis of voter list which was totally rejected by the opposition parties and ECP as well. They demanded that delimitations should be made on the basis of population instead of registered voters as it is against the spirit of the article 51 of the constitution. Like the political opposition parties, the ECP also raised questions on EVMs regarding its function in different kind of weather, energy short fall in the country, and how its transparency and secrecy and efficiency would be ensured without pilot study or testing. There was chance of hacking the data of machine which was another vital question raised by the ECP. The political opposition parties and the ECP have reservations over the shift of registration of voters from ECP to National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), which will question the autonomy of the ECP (Rahman, 2021).

The PDM government after coming in to power in April, 2022, brought a new amendment bill with the title Elections (Amendment) Act 2022. It brought two main changes through this Act, one by removing the use of its EVMs in the future elections and second is stopping the overseas Pakistanis to participate in the future elections through I-voting. About the EVM the government official said that its usage without a pilot project is a great risk. First of all awareness in the public is necessary in this regard. About the participation of overseas through I-voting the government did not give solid answer. The Amendment Act (2022) was passed easily from the parliament, as PTI as a major opposition party was protesting against the PDM government as well as the establishment for its ouster from the government. Consensus and consultation on electoral reforms are too much necessary for the smooth functioning of democracy. But, in Pakistan, the consensual politics is always missing both inside and outside the parliament which cause political disturbances (Tribune T. E., 2022).

**PDM Long March or Mahangai March**

On February 27, 2022, the PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari launched his long march from Karachi towards the country's capital Islamabad. The march was named the Awami Long March, which aimed at ending the PTI-led government in the center. Before the march left for Islamabad, the PPP chairman Bilal Bhutto addressed the participants belonging to his party that the march would move to the federal capital and continue until the resignation of the selected and incompetent Pakistan Tehreek Insaf government in the country. He raised the slogan "go selected go". The PPP scheduled its long march by reaching the D-Chowk of Islamabad on the evening of March 8, 2022, primarily aimed at ousting the PTI led government which the party considered selected (Iqbal, 2022).



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On March 26, 2022, the major opposition party, PML-N following the PDM directives also initiated its long march that commenced from Lahore to Islamabad. The March was led by Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Hamza Shahbaz. The party announced that its long March was against the massive inflation and the rising prices of the essential commodities in the country. They blamed the PTI led government for the economic and political instability in the country and demanded immediate resignation of the PM. The party workers and supporters in Lahore chanted slogans of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

On March 26, 2022, JUI-F launched his anti-inflation march against the government led by PTI. Addressing the participants of the March in Islamabad on March 27, 2022, the party chief Maulana Fazul Rehman said that the PTI had lost all the reasons to rule the country. He added that PM Imran Khan was isolated having no support from the powerful circles of the state. He said that the PM had only one option in hand to resign from the premiership peacefully otherwise, he would be forced to resign. The PDM concluded its Mahangai March in Islamabad, while decided to file a vote of no-confidence against the Prime Minister Imran Khan in the national assembly. The suggestion was given by the PPP which was collectively accepted by all opposition parties in the PDM (Ali, 2021 ).

*Vote of No-Confidence against the Prime Minister Imran Khan*

The joint opposition alliance known as Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), on March 3, 2022, announced a no confidence motion against the Prime Minister, Imran Khan. The motion of vote of no-confidence had been signed by more than 80 members of the national assembly, belonging to the opposition parties. The opposition leader in the national assembly, Shahbaz Sharif, said that PM Imran Khan had lost the confidence of the house. He added that due to the government inability, the country had been facing severe political and economic instability. He said that Pakistan was heading towards isolation on external front due to its mistaken and failed foreign policy. The deadlock among the opposition parties over the no-trust move, was finally addressed after the joint opposition favored the PPP stance to immediately hold general elections in the country after removing PTI government. PPP emphasized that the Pakistan Tehreek Insaf PTI government should have been given the opportunity to complete its five 5-year tenure, which was declined by the other opposition parties in the PDM (Lodhi, Seven days that shook Pakistan, 2022).

On March 5, 2022, the PML-N senior parliamentarian Ahsan Iqbal said that the PTI coalition partners could not decline the offer they were giving at that time. Finally, on 8th March 2022, the joint opposition filed a vote of no-confidence motion against the PM Imran Khan in the National Assembly and asked for calling the session of the assembly as earlier as possible. The opposition claimed that they had more than 172 members in the house for successfully passing the vote of no-confidence motion against the PM. The session of the National Assembly was scheduled to begin on 25th of March 2022 while the no-confidence motion was moved in the national assembly on 28th of March 2022. Shahbaz Sharif, the opposition leader in the house requested permission of

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the Speaker of the house to initiate the vote of no confidence motion against the Prime Minister in the house. Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri initiated proper proceedings to the motion in the house and asked the members who supported the motion to stand up. 161 members stood up in favor of the vote of no-confidence against the PM and thus the motion was adopted under Article 95(1) resolution was led to the house. The Deputy Speaker announced that further discussion on the motion will be made on 31st March 2022.

The Joint opposition, working under the flag of PDM, tried to convince the dissenting MNAs and the coalition partners of the ruling Party to successfully proceed the vote of no-confidence against the prime minister in the house. On 17th of March, the ruling PTI claimed that about two dozen of the party dissenting members had been seen in the Sindh House who had made a deal with the opposition alliance for casting their vote against their own party's prime minister in the motion of no confidence. In retaliation to the opposition meeting with PTI dissenting members, the government launched efforts to gain the sympathy of the opposition members against the motion. In this regard, the party claimed that they had contacts with opposition MNAs who assured their full support against the opposition in the vote of no- confidence against the PM.

But surprisingly, the government's coalition ally, Shahzain Bugti hea of Jamhoori Watan Party, separated from the PTI government on 27th March, 2022. Following, Shahzain Bugti, on the next day, BAP four members out of total five, left the PTI led ruling alliance and switched to joint opposition PDM. Finally, the government last coalition partner MQM-P announced its withdrawal from the government. In a short period of time, a huge change was seen in Pakistan's politics. The political situation dramatically changed when the Prime Minister Imran Khan, on March 27th addressed the house that a no-confidence motion against him was linked with foreign funded conspiracy against his government in the country. He added that attempts had been made through foreign money to change the government in Pakistan (Chaudhry, 2023).

More importantly, PM Imran Khan claimed that he had received a letter in which, the foreign conspirator threatened to remove PTI government, everything will be forgiven; otherwise, the country would face a terrible and dangerous situation. Finally, he disclosed that the letter had been issued by USA to authorities in Pakistan, but USA denied the allegation. On March 31st, 2022, the National Assembly session initiated, but it was adjourned by Deputy Speaker without having any discussion on the no-confidence motion. Again, on April 3, 2022, the session of the national assembly started to proceed the motion of no-confidence against the Prime Minister Imran Khan. Addressing the house, the Law Minister, Fawad Chaudhary argued that though a motion was submitted under Article 95 of the constitution, the Chair must invoke Article 5(1) of the Constitution, which stated that loyalty to the state is the basic duty of every citizen, in light of the fact that the motion was filed under an international conspiracy. Deputy Speaker of the house stated that the joint opposition had filed the vote of no-confidence motion on 8th of March 2022 against the PM of the country. He argued that

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no confidence motion must be according to the basic principles and rules of the constitution of the country. He added that foreign powers had no right to remove the elected government of Pakistan. He clarified that the points raised by Fawad Chaudhry, the Minister of Law and Justice, stood valid, and the no confidence motion annulled the constitution and rules of law. Deputy Speaker of the national assembly Qasim Suri had given the ruling which declared the vote of no-confidence motion as contradictory to the constitution of the country. After the ruling, the Deputy Speaker once again adjourned the House (Lodhi, Seven days that shook Pakistan, 2022).

After the Deputy Speaker's ruling which declared the opposition vote of no-confidence against the Prime Minister, contrary to the constitution, Prime Minister Imran Khan immediately advised the President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly. Following the PM advice, the President dissolved the NA on March 3, 2022. He told both the government and the opposition to consult names for Caretaker Prime Minister. Moreover, he advised the Election Commission of Pakistan to schedule the date for the general elections in the country. The ruling party PTI proposed and forwarded the name of former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Gulzar Ahmad for the slot of Caretaker PM but as expectedly, the opposition did not yet provide any name for the said post.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan took a suo moto action against the ruling of the Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri as the opposition declared his move unconstitutional. After five day's hearing, on April 7, 2022, the Apex Court annulled the Deputy Speaker's ruling as contrary to the constitution. The court reversed the dissolution of the Assembly by the President which also stood in violation with the constitution. Moreover, the Court directed the federal government to immediately restore the national assembly and allow the cabinet to do their duties. The Court also ordered the government to conduct the session of the national assembly on 9th day of April, 2022 as per order of the day that had been issued for April 3, 2022.

After the apex court directives, the national assembly re-scheduled its business on April 9, 2022, which lasted till midnight on 10 April 2022. The Deputy Speaker announced voting on the no confidence motion. The no confidence motion was voted by 174 members of the NA which required to be passed by 172 members. Reacting to the success of opposition vote of no-confidence, the PTI claimed that the joint opposition PDM was fulfilling the United States mission to remove Imran Khan's government in the country. He called on his party workers and supporters to launch protests and demonstrations in the country against the alleged US role behind his government's removal. On 11th April, 2022, Shahbaz Sharif received 174 votes in the national assembly, and took an oath as Prime Minister of Pakistan. PTI's claims of regime change in Pakistan changed the entire dynamics of politics in the country. The party supporters and workers once again took to the streets after the party announcement of resignation from the national assembly. The party launched demonstrations and protests in different cities against the government, which, it called the imported government (Hussain Mirza,

2023).

### Political and Constitutional Crisis in Pakistan

The year of 2022 had come with massive political and constitutional debacles and crisis that mainly resulted in the removal of PTI government in the center. Moreover, the worst economic instability further aggravated the crisis in the country. The removal of PTI -led government through a vote of no confidence on April 10, 2022, unleashed a series of constitutional and political crisis in the country that led to a worst economic uncertainty in the country (Lodhi, 2023). Notably, the crisis this time encompassed all the state institutions, mainly the Parliament, the Supreme Court, Election Commission of Pakistan, the Army and the Presidency too. Instead of accepting the opposition constitutional move of vote of no confidence and playing a role of the opposition in the parliament, the former Prime Minister Imran Khan quit the parliament and followed the street politics linking with protests and demonstrations. Moreover, he aired an alleged narrative of a foreign conspiracy that was mainly directed to remove his government in the country for various reasons. In this regard, he blamed the military establishment, which cooperated and supported the United States planned conspiracy against him. On floors of various demonstrations and protests, he openly talked about the foreign conspiracy against his government (Afzal, 2023).

The joint opposition PDM came into power with the intension to ensure smooth transition of powers and constitutional responsibilities but it absolutely failed in this regard. The political and constitutional spheres in the country became more uncertain and volatile leading to serious constitutional deadlocks. Political victimization and confrontational politics was unleashed in the country that mainly benefited the undemocratic forces in the country. After immediate removal of the PTI led government, Imran Khan chose street powers, announcing and launching massive protests to pressurize the government for conducting general elections in the country. On the other side, the joint opposition PDM, remained obstinate to complete its constitutional tenure that ended in August 2023. In the game of power politics between the federal government of PDM and the PTI, the country's most populated province, Punjab, became an arena of nonstop power struggles. Pakistan Tehreek Insaf PTI and its coalition partner PML-Q led by Parvez Elahi, was able to form government in the province after PML-N Hamza Sharif's brief tenure. But, the province became a sandwich and remained paralyzed due to political confrontations prevailing between Lahore and Islamabad.

PTI and its ally intended to dissolve the provincial assembly, while PDM alliance opposed the dissolution by political maneuvers. The ceaseless political confrontation between the government and the opposition finally led to a full fledged constitutional debacle. Both the government and the opposition ignoring any possibility of bilateral dialogue to save the country from the political and constitutional turmoil, had led the situation to no point ending. Both the political rivals either approached the courts or relied on the military mainly to take their side and ratify their political aims, which

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massively marginalized the role of the parliament and other democratic entities in the country. The country's apex court was over burdened by the political parties bringing political issues to the court delaying its primary concern to deal with legal and constitutional matters in the country. Since the political turmoil that probably started in 2022, the military establishment repeatedly announced that the institution was absolutely neutral and had no role in the political affairs of the country, but despite that, it was blamed for fueling the political crisis in the country.

The worsening polarization and political turmoil deeply deteriorated the country's economy. To avoid the expected economic downfall of the country, PDM government led by Shahbaz Sharif, immediately approached the IMF to resume the program done by previous PTI led government with it. The government requested the IMF to immediately release the funds for Pakistan to address the vulnerable economic crisis in the country. Moreover, in December 2022, former Prime Minister, Imran Khan's announcement of dissolving the Punjab and KP assemblies further deteriorated the already fragile political situation in the country. In the province of Punjab, the constitutional crisis deepened after the Supreme Court in its judgment, annulled the decision of the deputy speaker of the provincial assembly and found that the decision was without legal authority. The Supreme Court declared the election of Hamza Shahbaz null and void, paving the way for PML-Q leader Pervaiz Elah to become the provincial Chief Minister.

The opposition suggested PTI if they wanted elections in the country, the party must dissolve the provincial assemblies of Punjab and KP. Punjab chief minister Pervaiz Elahi showed no intention of dissolving the provincial assembly, but PTI chairman Imran Khan, had made the final decision in this regard. Imran Khan intended to weaken the federal government and bring it to his terms to announce general elections in the country. After the success of the no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister Imran Khan, PTI parliamentarians collectively announced their resignations from the national assembly. The party intended to make the Parliament dysfunctional as it would have no legitimacy without the opposition. Some MNAs of PTI dissented the party decision regarding the resignation from the national assembly and they decided to play a role of opposition in the assembly (Lodhi, Pakistan Search for Stability (edited), 2024).

The tension between the political entities dragged the judiciary into the political sphere, which was primarily not an area of the judicial concern. Since Prime Minister Imran Khan's removal from power, he repeatedly asked the courts to show their honesty and impartiality while addressing the matters pertaining to corruption and embezzlement. Moreover, in various speeches, Imran Khan directly addressed the courts to pressurize them for favorable verdicts. More importantly, when the Apex Court gave a verdict that favored PTI coalition partner Pervaiz Elahi in Punjab, former Prime Minister Imran Khan highly appreciated and welcomed the court rulings (Lodhi, Dawn, 2023).

Like PTI the PML-N leadership tried to pressurize the Supreme Court for not taking their side against the PTI. When the Supreme Court gave rulings against Hamza Shahbaz,

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the opposition led by PML-N, held a joint press conference in which the three judges' bench of the apex court of the country was declared partial and associated with PTI. The party and its allies expressed that they had no-confidence in the bench and called the verdict as selective justice. So, in this way, both the PTI and the PDM for the sake of their political interest and point scoring tried to blackmail the judiciary, which seriously affected the impartial reputation of the courts in the country. One of the other important state institutions, Election Commission of Pakistan was repeatedly targeted by all the political parties in the country, either by a party in the government or the opposition. After the removal of his government, Imran repeatedly demanded of Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan to immediately resign from his position as he was not fulfilling his constitutional duty of conducting general elections in the prescribed time period advised by the constitution.

After losing government in the center, on April 10th, 2022, the former PM, Imran Khan announced the dissolution of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provincial assemblies. Imran Khan intended to force the PDM led government for conducting the general elections in the country. Earlier, he had resigned from the national assembly on the pretext that his party did not want any association with the current corrupt political system that was based on the foreign conspiracy. Eventually, in January, 2023, he dissolved the provincial assembly of Punjab and KP assembly on January 18th, 2023. In this regard, Article 105 of the Constitution of Pakistan says that elections to the provincial assembly must be held within 90 days after its dissolution. So, after the constitutional clarification, elections should have been conducted in both Punjab and KP by not later than 14 and 18 April, respectively (Afzal M, 2023).

Moreover, to proceed the matter of elections in the respective provinces, on February 20, 2023, President of Pakistan Arif Alvi, singly announced April 9th, 2023, as the date of elections for both the provincial assemblies. The president justified his decision of announcing the date of elections for the Punjab and KP assemblies in order to uphold the constitution after the governors of both provinces had failed to announce and fix the date of elections to the provincial assemblies. After the controversy emerged on the elections date among the President, governors and Election Commission of Pakistan, Chief Justice of Supreme Court, Justice Umar Ata Bandial took a *Suo motu* notice of the issue. On March 1, 2023, the apex court gave the rulings that elections should be held within 90-days as prescribed by the constitution of the country. The court also directed the ECP to properly consult the president and governors of both the provinces to reach any possible collective date for elections that was not in clash with the prescribed rules of the constitution. But, the court in its rulings, allowed the Election Commission of Pakistan ECP to deviate from the fixed constitutional deadline of 90-days by the barest minimum (Hunter, 2023).

Surprisingly, on March 22nd, 2023, the Election Commission of Pakistan ECP announced that elections to the provincial assemblies of Punjab and KP had to be postponed until 8 October, 2023. It claimed that the finance and interior ministries had

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shared their observations with the commission regarding the vulnerable security and economic situation prevailing in the country. The commission added that the concerned ministries had excused from providing fund and security for conducting elections, which made it difficult for the ECP to hold elections in the province of Punjab and KP. Against the ECP decision of postponing election in Punjab and KP, Pakistan Tehreek Insaf approached the Apex Court to immediately annul the ECP decision of delaying elections in the concerned provinces. In this regard, on April 4th, 2023, a three-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial gave the rulings which declared the ECP's postponement of the Punjab elections as unconstitutional. The court added that elections for the provincial assembly of Punjab would be held on May 14th, 2023. Moreover, the court added in its ruling that the ECP had no legal authority to extend the dates for elections already prescribed by the constitution (Dawn, 2023).

The Apex Court also directed the federal government to immediately release the required election funds for both Punjab and KP by not later than April 10th, 2023. The court directed the federal government and the Punjab caretaker set up to devise a security strategy and plans for the elections. Regarding fund allocation for the elections, the court directed the central bank of Pakistan to subsequently release fund for the elections to the Punjab assembly. However, the bank excused that it did not have the authority to release the funds for the elections as it required the federal government's prior permission. In order to stop elections in the provinces of Punjab and KP, on 17th April, 2023, the National Assembly passed a resolution, which stopped the central bank of Pakistan from releasing fund for the elections in Punjab.

Despite the Supreme Court verdict to hold elections for the Punjab Assembly within 90-days, on April 22, 2023, in this regard, the Interior Minister, Rana Sanaullah argued that elections to the Punjab assembly would not be held even on May 14, 2023, explaining the reasons that the ECP, military and judiciary were not ready to perform their assigned responsibilities and duties. His remarks proved right as the Punjab elections were pending till then. Provincial elections in Punjab and KP were not conducted within the timeline of 90-days prescribed by the constitution which was a clear violation of the constitution of the Pakistan (Siddiqi, 2023). After delaying the provincial assemblies' elections, another constitutional dilemma came to surface. It started when the Chief Justice of Pakistan took a Suo moto notice on February 22, 2023, of the provincial elections delayed by the ECP, a power granted to the Supreme Court through Article 184(3) of the constitution of Pakistan. The Supreme Court constituted a nine-member bench to hear the case. Four Judges excused to be a part of the bench and thus the bench was finally reduced to five judges. On March 1, 2023, the five-member bench of the Supreme Court gave its verdict with a ratio of 3-2, which directed provincial elections had to be held within the 90-days as prescribed by the constitution.

On the day of the Supreme Court judgement conclusion against the elections delay in Punjab and KP, two members of the bench, Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Jamal Khan Mando Khail issued their own dissenting note emphasizing for revisiting and adjusting

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the one-man show and the centralization of power by the Chief Justice of Pakistan. They argued that the centralization of power by the Office of Chief Justice is contrary to the democratic norms such as the decentralization of power. Their dissenting notes further stated that concentration of power with a single office holder may lead to abuse of power. Pertaining to the Supreme Court decision on the elections, both the judges mainly identified two major issues associated with the *Suo motu* proceedings. They argued, that firstly the *Suo motu* action should not constitute judicial overreach like in this case, the issue was already pending adjudication before a provincial high court or had already been decided by a high court. The second point they raised regarding the SC decision is that the Apex Court should confine its original jurisdiction to extraordinary and exceptional cases where there was a threat to people's fundamental rights. They suggested that the court original jurisdiction should not be frequently and incautiously exercised, lest it should damage the court impartial image in the public. So, the division persisted in the members of Supreme Court and cabinet members of the federal government relied on the view of two dissenting members who argued that they had dismissed the petitions regarding elections with majority of 4:3. So, the order of Supreme Court was not complied. (Lodhi, *Pakistan Search for Stability* (edited), 2024).  
*Political Victimization of the opposition parties*

During the tenure of PTI led coalition government from 2018 to April, 2022 the opposition parties especially PML-N and PPP were under severe oppression in the name of political accountability. There is a long list of politically victimized politicians in this era. First, the Former PM Nawaz Sharif and his daughter, Maryam Nawaz were jailed in the Avenfield case. Mia Shahbaz and his son Hamza Shahbaz Sharif were arrested in a case of corruption and money laundering cases. Khwaja Saad Rafique central leader of PML-N and his brother Salman Rafique were imprisoned in Paragon City case of corruption. The most dangerous and falsified case was filed against Rana Sanaullah of drug trafficking by carrying 15 kg heroin in his car to Lahore by Anti Narcotic Force. Another main leader of PML-N Ahsan Iqbal was convicted in Narowal Sports City reference and was arrested by the NAB. Similarly the senior leader of PPP, Syed Khurshid Shah, was also charged in corruption case by NAB. PPP Co-Chairman and former President Asif Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur were also charged by FIA and NAB. Besides these, Hanif Abbasi, Ahad Cheema, Javed Latif, Fawad Hassan Fawad, Arbab Alamgir and the former PM, Shahid Haqan Abbasi, were also convicted by the NAB in the so called corruption charges. Both the major opposition parties regularly organized protests, rejected the process of imprisonment as political victimization. They criticized the fake cases made by the government which were totally against the spirit and principles of authentic accountability and above all, the media trials of its political opponents were negative endeavors harming the smooth process of democratization. Meanwhile, the masses dis-content with the government increased due to ever-increasing price rises. In retaliation, the PDM government which lasted for about sixteen months also adopted the same oppressive policy against the PTI leadership. Cases were



made especially against Imran Khan like Tosha Khana Case, Alqadir Trust Case, the Ciper conspiracy Case and Treason case, are worth to mention in which he was arrested. Many leaders like Azam Swati, Shahbaz Gill, Fawad Choudry, Sheryar Afridi, Ali Muhammad Khan, Yasmin Rashid and Shah Mehmood Qureshi were also arrested (Mir, 2023).

#### Role of the Opposition Parties in the Continuation of Democracy

Pakistan's democratic phase once again began in February 18, 2008, when the general elections were conducted in the country after a long military rule of General Perwaiz Musharraf. In 2007, Musharraf's dictatorship weakened after the lawyer's movement, which was supported by the major opposition parties against him. Moreover, foreign mediators, mainly the United States, Saudi Kingdom and United Arabs Emirate made efforts to develop consensus between the military and the major political parties, PML-N and PPP. Finally, a Charter of restoration of democracy was signed between the military and the opposition parties. It allowed the exiled PPP leader, Benazir Bhutto and PML-N head Nawaz Sharif to return to Pakistan to participate in the general elections of 2008. On December 27, 2007, leader of the PPP Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated in an election rally in Liaqat Bagh Rawalpindi. The agreement regarding the restoration of democracy continued despite Benazir Bhutto's assassination.

The general elections were held in February, 2008, which put the country once again on the track of democracy. In 2008, the PPP coalition government in their starting days was hugely pressurized by the opposition parties, lawyers' movement and civil societies to immediately restore Iftikhar Chaudhry to his position of the Chief Justice of Pakistan, who had been ousted by Musharraf. After Iftihar Muhammad Chaudhry's restoration to his position of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, he started taking side of the opposition against the PPP- led federal government, which disturbed the smooth transition and continuation of democracy in the country. PML-N Nawaz Sharif's opposition triggered the Memo gate controversy in 2011, accusing the PPP government of sending a memo to the Obama administration, leading to Haqqani's resignation and weakening of the government. The PPP-led government faced challenges after the memo gate, including the dismissal of the Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani in contempt of court proceedings. Despite these challenges, the PPP completed its constitutional term and the 2013 general elections saw the first-ever peaceful and democratic power transition in the country. However, the PML-N, which remained victorious in the general elections in the federal and Punjab, soon confronted undemocratic challenges.

The PML-N government faced the new emerging political party, PTI. PTI charged PML-N with massive rigging and tampering in the 2013 general elections in the country. In order to destabilize the PML-N-led government, PTI held a massive demonstration and a protest, later, converting into a sit-in in the capital, Islamabad. The March was focused on to pressurizing the PML-N government to investigate the rigging in the elections or resign, otherwise. Regarding PTI's long sit-in in Islamabad, Shuja Nawaz, in his book

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“The Battle for Pakistan” argued that the then DG ISI, Zahirul Islam, in September 2014, had planned a coup against the Nawaz Sharif- led government, but the alleged coup proved futile and failed after the then Chief of the Army staff, General Raheel Sharif’s disapproval of it. In 2017, Panama Papers revelations led to the removal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from the premiership and national assembly. However, his PML-N remained in power until the 2018 elections (Adil, 2021).

In the general elections of 2018, PTI emerged victorious, which formed its government in the federal capital with a narrow majority of 104 seats in the national assembly. His hybrid regime remained confined to a few areas. PTI government although claimed that the civilian and military leadership was united and working with collective will and consensus, reflecting with the then-Prime Minister, Imran Khan blind approval for the extension of General Bajwa’s tenure as chief of army staff. Differences emerged in 2021, when the then prime minister, Imran Khan had delayed the changing of ISI high command on some baseless pretexts. This proved a turning point for the opposition parties, which came in close contacts with the military to oust Imran from the power corridor. PM, Imran Khan had crossed the red line, which eventually led to his removal from the premiership. The Opposition parties in Pakistan’s hybrid democracy had always been looking for military association, which the military establishment always kept in the power corridor. More importantly, Imran Khan’s removal from the premiership, was planned by the military establishment, but it was done by the joint opposition PDM through a vote of no-confidence.

The military’s establishment patronized association with the political parties had caused political chaos and undermined the continuity of democracy in Pakistan. Previously, it was the two major political parties, the PPP and PML-N, which were playing the game of association and disassociation with the military establishment. All such practices we see mostly took place during the nineties weak democratic era. But these two parties learned from their past experiences. The PTI laid under the umbrella of patronage and the Supreme Court also became part of the game. PTI emerged again after Imran Khan’s removal as PM with an attractive populist narrative called imported government, which threatened the traditional political parties, PPP, PML-N, including the establishment. PTI’s massive political rallies and huge electoral win in the bi-elections shifted the traditional political dynamics in the country. PTI’s belief that it can dominate the political entities and non-political forces is conceived as existential threat by the PPP, PML-N and military, which forced them to maintain association with each other (Mufti, 2014). The anti-military narratives of former PM Nawaz Sharif was now being followed by Imran Khan accusing military intervention in the state affairs. The PML-N realized the intensity and repercussions of the anti-military narrative that had brought major changes to its policies. PTI was going ahead with its anti-military policy, which recently closed its options to rule the country (Rahim, 2023).

We also witnessed some good gestures shown by the opposition as well as the government parties for the health of democracy and safeguard of its future. Like on April

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20, 2010, the PPP-led government initiated the landmark 18th constitutional amendment in the parliament, which was collectively passed by all the political parties. It restored and completed the scheme of decentralization of powers and resources among the federation and its federating units as devised by the 1956 and 1973 Constitutions of Pakistan (Jon Lunn, 2012). The legislation was appreciated by the democratic forces as it made its way to the civilian rule after long dictatorial military regimes, which kept power centralized at the federal level to serve the interests of the ruling elite and the military establishment. The centralization of powers at the federal government since 1956 constitution, has been reversed by the 18th Amendment (Shah, 2012).

The Eighteenth constitutional amendment, to a greater extent, addressed the long-standing reservations of the least populated provinces regarding the fair distribution of power among the federal government and provinces. More importantly, it ensured provincial autonomy, and strengthened the federation. In 2019, during the Covid-19, there were speculations that the PTI led federal government intended to repeal the 18th Amendment. The federal government alleged that the provinces, especially Sindh, was not cooperating with the federal government regarding the pandemic. Sindh declined federal government's allegations, claiming that the federal government policies were making the situation worse than making it better. PPP-led Sindh government claimed that health was a provincial subject. The tension intensified between the federal and the provincial governments when the Sindh government devised to impose severe lockdowns in the province, while on the other hand, the PTI-led federal government suggested to impose a smart lockdown, no full blockage of the social and economic affairs and movement of the people. The disagreement between the federal government and the Sindh government further intensified. Moreover, the then Prime Minister Imran, Khan stated that the 18th constitutional amendment had actually turned the Chief Ministers into dictators and intended to reconsider some provisions of the amendment (Mirza M. N., 2020).

In June, 2020, PPP organized a multi-party conference against the federal government intentions of repealing the 18th Amendment. Probably, all the opposition political parties in the conference committed that they would not allow the federal government to repeal the amendment. More importantly, in November, 2018, the two major political parties PPP and the PML-N, jointly committed to protect and defend the Eighteenth Amendment both inside and outside the parliament. In 2018, the ANP, in its election manifesto, made it clear that the party was fully committed to defending and promoting the provincial autonomy.

Similarly, in 2014, the National Assembly passed a resolution in which both the government and the opposition parties had rejected PTI and PAT's unconstitutional demands and jointly committed to protect and promote the supremacy of the parliament and the constitution of the country. The resolution was moved by the member of the National Assembly Muhammad Khan Achakzai. The resolution unanimously turned

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down the PTI's chairman Imran Khan and Pakistan Awami Tehreek PAT's chief Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri's demand of the then Prime Minister resignation and the dissolution of the National Assembly. The Faizabad sit-in that took place in November, 2017, continued for 20 days, paralyzing the routine human affairs in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The dharna was organized by Tehreek Labaik Pakistan, TLP, which blocked interchange between the two metropolitan cities. The protestors were inciting hatred, resorting to violence and urging insurrection against the PML-N led government at federal level. It was feared that the violence might be extended to different cities of the country. The government and the opposition peacefully dealt with the situation and thus stopped the planned entry of undemocratic forces in the political affairs of the state. The Azadi March of JUI(F) which started under the leadership of Fazlu Rehman against the rigging and engineering in the general elections, 2018, pressurized the sitting government but PPP and PML-N as major political opposition inside and outside the parliament did not compromise on this fragile democracy as they decided to play their role inside the parliament within the ambit of the constitution. The removal of the PTI led government through a vote of no confidence destabilized the political environment of the country because of PTI rallies, demonstrations and protests on a large scale against the PDM government, but the government succeeded in completing the remaining term of government. But, procedural democracy again became defective when elections in the provinces of Punjab and KP and then at federal level did not occur well on time (Mir, 2023).

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan's democracy is at the verge of inflection point. The meddling of the military in the election process and interference in the works of the civilian government, have muzzled the smooth process of democratization. Similarly, the curb on the freedom of press since 2018 elections and other authoritarian signals continued to show Pakistan a mere democratic state. Elections though bring political stability and security to democratic set-up but the manipulated elections and the favor of establishment here for one party brought hazardous environment. The 2018 general elections results were not accepted by the opposition parties. They clearly demanded another fresh but free and fair elections from the very first year of PTI-led government. So, the legitimacy of the government was challenged as well as unaccepted. The procedural civilian set up though continued, but had been under the umbrella of military establishment on one page concept. From foreign policy services to the parliamentary affairs, everything was under the control of the military junta, that's why many political scientists called the Imran Khan PTI led regime as hybrid regime. The leadership of the opposition parties was under severe political victimization throughout the three and a half years term of government of Imran Khan. The diversion path of the military from PTI- led government proved fatal when PDM, the alliance of the opposition parties, brought a vote of no confidence against Khan, and thus ousted him from the government on 10th April, 2010. Instead of sitting in the parliament, the PTI representatives sent their

resignations from the membership of NA. They started rallies, demonstrations, sit-ins and agitational campaign against the sitting government by calling it imported one. The constitutional and the political crises became severe throughout the year of 2022. Like political victimization of Imran Khan, the government of PDM was also full of such unlawful acts.

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