

Institutionalization Process during Zardari Period 2008-2013

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Abstract

The Zardari period in Pakistan, spanning from 2008 to 2013, was a time of dynamic challenges and developments across multiple domains. This abstract provides a concise overview of the key aspects of this period. Politically, Pakistan witnessed a turbulent landscape marked by frequent government changes, political rivalries, and allegations of corruption. Efforts to strengthen democratic institutions coexisted with a polarized political arena. The Benazir Income Support Program aimed to empower vulnerable segments of society, but implementation hurdles persisted. Economically, Pakistan grappled with an energy crisis, fiscal deficits, and inflation. Economic reforms were introduced to stabilize the economy, albeit with austerity measures that impacted citizens. The 18th Amendment was a significant achievement in devolving power to provinces, though it posed fiscal challenges. Security-wise, Pakistan confronted extremism through military operations and efforts to counter radicalization. The Kashmir issue remained unresolved, contributing to regional tensions. Socially, the devastating 2010 floods necessitated extensive relief and recovery efforts. In conclusion, the Zardari period reflected the intricate interplay of challenges and developments across Pakistan's political, economic, social, and security spheres. The period emphasized the need for balanced, sustained efforts to navigate Pakistan through diverse dynamics toward greater stability and development.

Keywords: *Institutionalization, Political challenges, Economic reforms, Social developments, Kashmir dispute, Benazir Income Support Program*

1. Introduction

Since achieving independence from British colonial rule, Pakistan has grappled persistently with the formidable task of establishing and sustaining a robust and enduring political institutional framework. Over the course of its tumultuous history, Pakistan's political landscape has been marked by a constant ebb and flow of governmental regimes (FAFEN, 2013). The nation's intricate political narrative has been defined by protracted periods of autocratic rule, frequently interrupted

by fleeting interludes of democratic governance, typically accompanied by electoral tumult and turmoil. Pakistan's experience with the vicissitudes of government can be likened to the rhythmic oscillation of a pendulum, swinging back and forth between democratic ideals and autocratic tendencies (Chawla, 2017).

These consequential shifts in the nation's political regimes are intrinsically tied to the actions and influence of the elite echelons occupying the highest tiers of power within their respective administrations (DeVotta, 2016). This comprehensive study undertakes a meticulous examination of the complex phenomenon of political institutionalization in Pakistan during the specific period spanning from 2008 to 2013, colloquially referred to as the "Zardari era." Within this intricate temporal framework, we shall explore the nuanced dynamics and multifaceted facets of Pakistan's political evolution during a pivotal phase in its history, shedding light on the critical role played by the elites in shaping the trajectory of the nation's governance structures.

This study has also examined the democratic process, economic development, social development and major political developments in these eras. It has also explained theories of some researchers on political institutionalization, political developments, political stability and political participation (Chawla, 2017). Political development attributes to the necessary political institutionalization and unified flow of modernization.

The concept of political institutionalization is a multi-dimensional and intricate construct that has undergone extensive analysis by a diverse array of institutionalists, political theorists, and sociologists. As a result of this comprehensive examination, a plethora of challenges and varied perspectives have surfaced, contributing to the complexity of understanding this concept (Bhatti et al., 2021). A consensus has unequivocally emerged from the body of research, emphasizing that the establishment and consolidation of democracy stand out as the cornerstone and fundamental prerequisite for the process of political institutionalization.

2. Literature Review

This section of the research is dedicated to a comprehensive examination of the existing body of literature pertaining to politics, political development, the role of political parties in the establishment of democracy, and various factors that either bolster or undermine the political system of Pakistan. The central focus of this segment is to delve into critical reviews of scholarly works and writings related to the concept of political institutionalization within the political landscape of Pakistan.

Building upon the foundations laid by previous research, it is imperative to consider the insights of Lawrence Ziring (2003), who astutely observed the prevalence of factionalism within political parties and the presence of disorganized party politics within the political system of Pakistan. Ziring's analysis not only critiques the political leadership of various political parties but also highlights their collective contribution to the weakening of the political system in Pakistan. It is apparent from his perspective that these political entities are failing to effectively champion democracy and contribute to the broader political development of the nation. Furthermore, Ziring's examination underscores the notion that due to the inherent weakness of political institutions, external forces play a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape of Pakistan. Consequently, the political system in Pakistan appears to be more influenced by military and bureaucratic institutions rather than being driven solely by political parties. This multifaceted analysis sheds light on the

complex interplay of power dynamics within Pakistan's political arena, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms that shape the nation's political trajectory.

In addition, the article by Mirza and Fatima (2020) delves into a critical examination of the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment and its implications for the process of democratic consolidation within Pakistan. This amendment represents a pivotal development in the country's constitutional history, and its influence on various facets of Pakistan's political landscape is of paramount importance. The authors adopt a multifaceted approach in their study, exploring both sub-systemic and normative aspects of institutionalization. Sub-systemic institutionalization delves into the intricate workings of the political system, including the roles and functions of various state institutions, political parties, and power structures. Normative institutionalization, on the other hand, delves into the development of democratic norms, values, and practices within the society, examining how these contribute to the consolidation of democracy.

Furthermore, the book "Pakistan's Enduring Challenges," edited by Fair and Watson (2015), addresses the persistent and multifaceted challenges facing Pakistan. This comprehensive volume delves into various aspects of Pakistan's socio-political and economic landscape, offering insights and analyses from a range of scholars and experts. The book provides a valuable resource for understanding the complex and ongoing issues that Pakistan grapples with, making it a significant contribution to the study of Pakistan's contemporary challenges.

In addition, Khalid's (2020) comprehensive exploration not only highlights the challenges inherent in Pakistan's federal system but also delves into the potential opportunities that lie within this framework. Within the pages of this article, readers are invited to embark on a journey through the nuanced landscape of Pakistani politics, where the federal structure plays a pivotal role. His research offers an in-depth analysis of the multifaceted issues surrounding federalism in Pakistan, shedding light on the intricacies and complexities of this governance model. This article serves as an invaluable resource for scholars, policymakers, and anyone interested in gaining a profound understanding of the intricate web of federalism in Pakistan. By addressing both the problems and prospects associated with this system, Khalid's work provides a holistic view of the subject matter, contributing significantly to the ongoing discourse on the dynamics of federalism in the South Asian region.

3. Theoretical Framework

Institutions, as we delve deeper into their essence, reveal themselves as intricate social structures that emerge from the interplay of cultural and normative behaviors, fundamentally shaping the very fabric of societal interactions. To illustrate, take the institution of voting, a quintessential example that guides and governs our selection of representatives who are entrusted with the responsibility of legislating. These institutions are deeply interwoven into the tapestry of human interactions, representing stable and enduring patterns of behavior. Their functioning is designed to adhere to the pertinent frameworks of rule-making, political cohesiveness, the accommodation of diverse perspectives, and the amicable resolution of conflicts.

The term "institution" is capacious in its scope, encompassing a wide spectrum of social structures that span from formal organizations and intricate systems of organizations to the nuanced web of rules and regulations that govern our societies. Scholars such as Lawremnce and Winn, in their work from 2011, have eloquently articulated this expansive notion of institutions. Within this comprehensive and intricate framework, we embark on an exploration of the complex interplay

between political institutionalization and the pivotal role that institutions play in shaping, sustaining, and nurturing democratic governance.

4. Research Methodology

The present investigation, titled "Political Institutionalization in Pakistan: 2008 to 2013," adopts a predominantly descriptive and interpretive approach in its research methodology. The data utilized in this study is of a qualitative nature, aligning with the historical and theoretical context that underpins the subject matter. By employing qualitative data, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the events and dynamics within the specified timeframe.

Furthermore, this study serves as a valuable tool for illustrating and evaluating the performance of the political landscape during the Zardari Period. It endeavors to analyze the implications and repercussions of this era on the broader context of political institutionalization. Given the predominantly descriptive and interpretive nature of the period from 2008 to 2013, the researcher has aptly chosen the descriptive model as the most suitable method for this inquiry.

In order to substantiate and enrich the conceptual underpinnings of this study, the researcher has drawn upon a wealth of secondary sources. These sources encompass a wide spectrum of materials, including articles from magazines and insights from books, all sourced from the fields of Political Science and Public Administration. The integration of such secondary sources enhances the credibility and depth of this research, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

5. Findings

The Zardari Period, spanning from 2008 to 2013, is a pivotal era that can be dissected into two distinct domains: challenges and development. This segmentation allows for a more comprehensive examination of the multifaceted dynamics that unfolded during this period, offering a nuanced perspective on the various obstacles encountered and the progress achieved within the political landscape of Pakistan.

5.1. Political institutionalization issues

i. Conflicts within Coalition

The Zardari Period, spanning from 2008 to 2013 in Pakistan, was marked by profound political complexities, notably centered around coalition disputes. These disputes stemmed initially from the departure of General Musharaf from power, setting the stage for a tumultuous political landscape (DeVotta, 2016).

A significant point of contention revolved around the choice of Musharaf's successor. Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), responded to ongoing discord by withdrawing his party from the governing coalition. He also announced plans to field a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections (Chawla & Ullah, 2018). Tensions between Asif Ali Zardari, head of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Nawaz Sharif further escalated in early 2009. The Supreme Court's decision to disqualify Sharif's brother from the position of Chief Minister of Punjab and uphold a ban on Sharif from holding political office added fuel to the fire.

Another major issue was the reinstatement of judges removed by President Pervez Musharraf during a state of emergency in 2007. Sharif demanded their full restoration within 30 days of the federal government's formation. However, Zardari seemed to backtrack, delaying the matter for political reasons.

Tensions eventually led to PML-N's withdrawal from the coalition government in May 2008, though it continued to support the government in Parliament. This political crisis brought Pakistan close to disaster (Bibi et al., 2022). Ultimately, the government yielded to demands for the reinstatement of Chief Justice Chaudhry and other judges, marking a significant turning point in Pakistan's political landscape during the Zardari Period.

ii. Center-Province relationship issue

The allocation of authority between the central government and its provincial units has remained a persistent and contentious matter in Pakistan ever since its inception in August 1947. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once asserted that the issue of provincial autonomy had been a challenge since the early days of British presence in the subcontinent (Bhatti et al., 2021). He argued that even the very concept of Pakistan was rooted in the idea of autonomy. Bhutto further contended that the tragic separation between East and West Pakistan was fundamentally linked to disputes over autonomy.

During this period, the President held a substantial array of powers, further contributing to the complexity of the issue. Political speeches of leader persuades masses largely (Ramzan et al., 2023).

iii. Civil-Military relation

The military has wielded considerable influence in Pakistan since its inception, enjoying a level of autonomy surpassing that of any other state institution. This dominance of the military has persisted over the years. The backdrop of a confrontation between the executive and the judiciary provided the military with an opportunity to step in and defuse tensions, particularly among the masses and the legal community (Naz & Kanwal, 2022).

During this period, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was organizing successful Long March protests in various cities, primarily focusing on the restoration of judges. As the government faced mounting pressure and felt compelled to accede to the protestors' demands, it became evident that the military played a pivotal role in these government actions (Hassan, 2022). President Zardari, in particular, was deeply concerned about the evolving circumstances, as he harbored apprehensions about potential military intervention.

In response, the elected government led by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) took certain measures to assert its authority vis-à-vis the military (Hamida Bibi & Khan, 2022). This complex interplay between the civilian government and the military underscored the intricate power dynamics at play within Pakistan's political landscape during this period.

5.2.Social issues

5.2.1. Summer flood

During the summer of 2010, Pakistan experienced one of the most devastating floods in its recorded history. This catastrophic event was triggered by unusually heavy monsoon rains, causing the Indus River, which typically expands to a width of more than half a mile during a regular monsoon season, to swell to a staggering 15 times its normal breadth (Ahmed, 2020). By mid-August, the toll of this extraordinary flooding was grim, with over 1,500 Pakistanis losing their lives, and approximately a quarter of the population directly affected to varying degrees.

The humanitarian crisis unleashed by the floods was characterized by severe shortages of food and clean drinking water, the looming threat of waterborne diseases, incidents of looting and violence,

and the disruption of crucial transportation and communication networks. Additionally, the catastrophe had a significant impact on the country's livestock population, which was anticipated to have lasting consequences on food production and the availability of raw materials like cotton, essential to Pakistan's export-driven textile industry (Ahmad et al., 2023). The 2010 floods left an indelible mark on the nation, affecting not only lives and infrastructure but also the economic underpinnings of the country.

5.2.2. Health regarding issues

During the Zardari period in Pakistan, from 2008 to 2013, the nation confronted a myriad of health-related challenges that spanned both acute crises and chronic issues. The catastrophic floods in 2010, one of the most devastating in the country's history, triggered a humanitarian emergency. The floods resulted in a range of health concerns, from waterborne diseases due to contaminated water sources to the displacement of communities, which strained access to healthcare services (Shahnawaz et al., 2020). Emergency healthcare responses were essential to address the immediate health needs of the affected populations.

Furthermore, Pakistan continued its battle against polio during this period, with the country facing unique challenges. Security concerns in certain regions, vaccine hesitancy among some communities, and difficulties in reaching remote and underserved populations posed obstacles to polio eradication efforts. Simultaneously, maternal and child health remained a focal point, with initiatives aimed at expanding access to maternal healthcare services and promoting immunization to reduce child mortality rates. Despite these challenges, efforts were made to address communicable diseases like tuberculosis and hepatitis, emphasizing the importance of disease prevention and control measures. Resilience reduces psychological distress (Riaz et al., 2021) and perceived support enhances quality of life (Adeeb et al., 2017) of patients. Job-related stress affects the mindfulness of doctors (Javaid et al., 2023) as well. Additionally, discussions surrounding healthcare financing models underscored the need for increased investment in healthcare infrastructure to enhance service delivery and healthcare access, particularly in rural areas.

5.2.3. Extremism

The Zardari period in Pakistan, spanning from 2008 to 2013, was marked by a persistent and multifaceted struggle against extremism. The country faced a surge in terrorist attacks during this time, with extremist groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targeting various sectors of society. These attacks resulted in a substantial loss of life and created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among the population. To counter the escalating extremist threat, the Pakistani government launched security operations in regions known to be hotbeds of militancy, including Swat and South Waziristan. These operations aimed to dismantle the strongholds of extremist elements, restore government authority, and reduce the influence of militant organizations. While these efforts led to some successes in pushing back extremist groups, the threat of terrorism persisted throughout the period.

Pakistan also faced international pressure to intensify its efforts against extremism, as concerns mounted about the global implications of domestic militancy. Collaborative measures were undertaken to enhance intelligence-sharing and improve border security to prevent the cross-border movement of militants. Additionally, countering extremist ideologies was a pivotal aspect of Pakistan's strategy (Ahmad et al., 2023). Promoting a more moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam, countering extremist propaganda, and addressing the socio-economic factors contributing

to radicalization were central components of these efforts. Overall, the Zardari period was a critical juncture in Pakistan's ongoing battle against extremism, highlighting the complex nature of this challenge and the need for sustained and multifaceted approaches to mitigate the influence of extremist ideologies and organizations.

5.2.4. Kashmir Issue

The Kashmir issue remained a prominent and contentious topic during the Zardari period in Pakistan, spanning from 2008 to 2013. Pakistan continued to advocate for a resolution to the long-standing conflict over Kashmir, which has been a source of tension and conflict between Pakistan and India since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. President Asif Ali Zardari and his government consistently raised the issue on international platforms and urged the international community to play a more active role in facilitating a peaceful resolution.

Despite diplomatic efforts, the Kashmir issue remained a source of conflict between Pakistan and India during this period. Both countries accused each other of human rights violations in the region, and sporadic border skirmishes occurred (FAFEN, 2013). The Zardari government's stance on Kashmir echoed Pakistan's historical position, emphasizing the rights of the Kashmiri people and advocating for a plebiscite to determine their future status. However, achieving a breakthrough in resolving the Kashmir issue remained elusive during this period, highlighting the deeply entrenched nature of this longstanding dispute and the complex geopolitics surrounding it.

5.2.5. Corruption

Corruption was a significant and contentious issue during the Zardari period in Pakistan, spanning from 2008 to 2013. The presidency of Asif Ali Zardari was marked by allegations of corruption and mismanagement. Critics and political opponents accused the government of engaging in corrupt practices and embezzlement of public funds. These allegations ranged from financial irregularities in government contracts to money laundering scandals (Khan et al., 2021). The most notable among these was the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO), which granted amnesty to various politicians and officials, including President Zardari, from corruption charges. This move sparked outrage and protests, with many viewing it as an attempt to shield the political elite from accountability.

In response to the corruption allegations and mounting public pressure, there were calls for accountability and transparency in the government's actions. Civil society organizations, the media, and the judiciary played a significant role in exposing corruption scandals and demanding accountability. The Supreme Court of Pakistan took suo-motu actions on various cases related to corruption, adding to the pressure on the government. Ultimately, the issue of corruption remained a contentious and polarizing topic during the Zardari period, reflecting the challenges of combating corruption in Pakistan's political landscape (Naz & Kanwal, 2022).

5.2.6. Load shedding and power output

Load shedding and power output issues were significant challenges faced by Pakistan during the Zardari period from 2008 to 2013. The country struggled with a severe energy crisis, resulting in frequent and prolonged power outages. Load shedding, which refers to scheduled power cuts, became a routine part of daily life for Pakistanis, severely impacting businesses, industries, and the overall quality of life (Shahnawaz et al., 2020). These power shortages were caused by a combination of factors, including inadequate infrastructure, a growing demand for electricity, and issues related to the distribution and management of power resources.

The Zardari government faced immense pressure to address the energy crisis and improve power output. Efforts were made to initiate energy projects and attract foreign investment to bolster the country's power generation capacity. However, progress in resolving the crisis was slow, and the energy deficit continued to be a significant challenge. Load shedding persisted throughout the period, leading to public frustration and protests. The energy crisis during the Zardari era underscored the critical need for comprehensive reforms in the energy sector to enhance power generation and distribution, a challenge that extended beyond the scope of a single presidential term (Ahmad et al., 2023).

5.2.7. Political parties

The political landscape was marked by a degree of polarization and instability. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by President Asif Ali Zardari, was at the helm of the government, and it struggled to maintain political stability amidst a fractious political environment (DeVotta, 2016). The period saw frequent changes in government, with political parties engaging in intense power struggles and maneuvering to form alliances and coalitions.

One of the prominent political issues during this time was the strained relationship between the PPP-led government and the opposition parties, particularly the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by Nawaz Sharif. This political rivalry often resulted in gridlock and political turmoil. Additionally, allegations of corruption and governance issues, including concerns about transparency and accountability, were frequently raised by the opposition and civil society (Kanwal, 2017). The period witnessed significant political developments, including the lawyers' movement and protests against the government's policies. These political challenges reflected the broader dynamics of power and governance during the Zardari presidency and contributed to a complex and fluid political landscape in Pakistan.

5.2.8. Economic issues

During the Zardari period in Pakistan, the country also grappled with several significant economic challenges. One of the most pressing issues was the state of the national economy, characterized by high inflation rates, fiscal deficits, and a fragile balance of payments. Pakistan faced mounting external debt, and its ability to meet its financial obligations came under scrutiny (Mahmood et al., 2019). The global financial crisis that began in 2008 further exacerbated these economic woes, leading to reduced foreign investment and dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

The energy crisis and frequent power outages, as mentioned earlier, had a detrimental impact on the economy. Industries faced production disruptions, businesses suffered losses, and job creation was hindered. The government struggled to address the energy shortfall effectively, which, in turn, impeded economic growth. Furthermore, corruption allegations and concerns about governance issues deterred foreign investment and eroded confidence in Pakistan's business environment (Shahnawaz et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, efforts were made to attract foreign investment, improve tax collection, and implement economic reforms, but progress was often slow. The economic issues faced during the Zardari period underscored the need for comprehensive economic reform and stability to spur sustainable growth and development in Pakistan.

6. Social Developments

6.1.Flood reliefs

During the Zardari period in Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of the devastating floods of 2010, social development issues took center stage as the government and various humanitarian organizations worked to address the plight of the flood-affected population. The floods resulted in widespread displacement, loss of homes, and a dire humanitarian crisis (Khan et al., 2021). Millions of people were affected, and immediate relief efforts were required to provide food, clean water, shelter, and medical assistance to those in need.

The social developments during this period included the mobilization of local and international aid agencies, civil society organizations, and the government to provide relief to flood victims. Temporary relief camps and shelters were set up to accommodate the displaced population, and efforts were made to ensure that basic needs were met. Additionally, community-based initiatives emerged, showcasing the resilience and solidarity of affected communities (Gohar et al., 2022). Social development efforts also extended to addressing long-term recovery and rehabilitation needs, including rebuilding infrastructure, providing livelihood support, and restoring access to education and healthcare services for the affected population. Despite the immense challenges posed by the floods, the period saw significant collaborative efforts aimed at mitigating the social impact and promoting the recovery of flood-stricken areas.

6.2.Infrastructure developments

During the Zardari period, the government recognized the importance of infrastructure in promoting economic growth and improving the quality of life for its citizens. Several infrastructure projects were initiated during this time to address critical needs and support the country's development. One of the notable infrastructure projects during this period was the construction and expansion of road networks (Ahmed, 2020). The government invested in the improvement of highways and roadways to enhance connectivity within the country and facilitate the movement of goods and people. Projects like the Motorway M-9 and the Lahore Ring Road were significant developments aimed at reducing transportation bottlenecks and promoting economic activity.

However, infrastructure development faced challenges such as funding constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and issues related to governance and transparency. The Zardari government aimed to attract foreign investment for infrastructure projects and sought assistance from international financial institutions (Bashir et al., 2022). While progress was made on some fronts, addressing the full spectrum of infrastructure needs in a country as diverse and populous as Pakistan remained a complex and ongoing challenge. Nevertheless, the period witnessed efforts to modernize and expand critical infrastructure, which laid the foundation for future development in the country.

6.3.Developments in Health sector

The health sector experienced a mix of challenges and developments during the Zardari period. The government recognized the importance of improving healthcare services and undertook various initiatives to address the country's healthcare needs. Efforts were made to expand access to healthcare services, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Chawla & Ullah, 2018). The government launched programs to strengthen primary healthcare and enhance the capacity of healthcare facilities to provide essential services.

However, despite these efforts, the health sector faced significant challenges, including inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited resources, and persistent issues related to the delivery of healthcare services. The country continued to battle communicable diseases like tuberculosis and faced challenges in controlling outbreaks (Haroon & Hussain, 2019). The government also grappled with healthcare financing issues, with discussions surrounding sustainable models to fund healthcare initiatives. Additionally, the healthcare sector had to respond to emergencies, such as natural disasters and disease outbreaks, which strained healthcare resources. Overall, while there were notable efforts to improve the health sector during the Zardari period, comprehensive reforms and increased investment were required to address the diverse healthcare needs of Pakistan's population effectively.

6.4.Strategies for Extremism

During the Zardari period, the government adopted a multifaceted approach to counter extremism. One of the key strategies was military operations against extremist elements in various regions. Notable operations included the Swat Operation in 2009 and the South Waziristan Operation in 2009. These military campaigns aimed to eliminate militant strongholds, disrupt the infrastructure of extremist groups, and restore government control in areas where militants held sway (Ahmed, 2020). While these operations achieved some success in pushing back extremist groups, they also highlighted the complexity of dealing with militancy in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Additionally, the government worked on improving intelligence-sharing and cooperation with international partners to track and apprehend extremists. This involved collaboration with countries like the United States to target high-value extremist targets. Furthermore, the government focused on addressing the root causes of extremism, including socioeconomic factors and lack of education (Shahnawaz et al., 2020). Initiatives were launched to promote education and provide vocational training in areas affected by militancy, aiming to offer alternatives to young people who might be susceptible to radicalization. These strategies, while addressing the immediate security concerns, recognized the importance of long-term efforts to prevent the radicalization of vulnerable populations and build a more resilient society against extremism.

6.5.Women empowerment

During the Zardari period, efforts to empower women gained momentum, albeit with persistent challenges and obstacles. The government, led by President Asif Ali Zardari and his party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), recognized the importance of women's empowerment for the nation's socio-economic development (Hassan, 2022). Various initiatives were launched to promote gender equality and expand opportunities for women in different spheres of life.

One significant development during this period was the passage of the National Commission on the Status of Women Act in 2012. This legislation aimed to establish a permanent body responsible for promoting women's rights and gender equality in Pakistan. Additionally, the government worked on increasing women's political participation. Pakistan saw the election of its first female speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza, during this time, marking a milestone for women in politics. Furthermore, programs were introduced to enhance women's access to education and healthcare, addressing some of the systemic barriers that had traditionally limited women's opportunities (Hamida Bibi & Khan, 2022). Female students also right to get quality knowledge. Social support (Maqbool et al., 2021) and classroom engagement (Ramzan et al., 2023) improves academic achievement. Further, emotions (Javaid et al., 2023) and learning (Ikramullh et al., 2023) affects vocal abilities which helps women gain confidence and speak for

themselves. However, it's important to note that despite these efforts, significant gender disparities persisted, particularly in rural and conservative areas of Pakistan, highlighting the need for sustained and comprehensive measures to advance women's empowerment.

6.6.Kashmir's Rights to Self Determination

During the Zardari period in Pakistan (2008-2013), the issue of Kashmir's right to self-determination remained a central focus of Pakistan's foreign policy and diplomatic efforts. The government, led by President Asif Ali Zardari, consistently advocated for the right of the Kashmiri people to determine their own political future, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and international law (Khan et al., 2021). Pakistan maintained its stance that the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan should be resolved through dialogue and in a manner that respects the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

However, despite diplomatic efforts and negotiations, a lasting resolution to the Kashmir issue remained elusive during this period. The region continued to experience tension and sporadic clashes along the Line of Control (LoC) that divides the Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered parts of Kashmir. While both countries engaged in dialogue to address the issue, significant hurdles remained, including differences over the status of Kashmir and the modalities for conducting a plebiscite (Bibi et al., 2022). The Zardari government's commitment to the Kashmir cause underscored the enduring nature of the dispute and the complexities involved in reaching a peaceful settlement that respects the rights and aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

6.7.Benazir income support program

During the Zardari period, one of the flagship social safety net programs was the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP). Named after former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the program aimed to provide financial assistance to vulnerable and economically disadvantaged households across the country (Mahmood et al., 2019). BISP was designed to alleviate poverty, reduce income disparities, and empower women by providing cash transfers to eligible families.

Under President Asif Ali Zardari's leadership, the BISP expanded its reach and impact. The program used a targeted approach, identifying eligible beneficiaries through a comprehensive survey and registration process. Cash transfers were provided to registered beneficiaries on a regular basis, helping them meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life. BISP played a crucial role in addressing issues of income inequality and social exclusion, particularly in rural areas where poverty rates were higher (Gohar et al., 2022). By focusing on women as recipients of cash transfers, the program also aimed to enhance women's economic participation and decision-making within households. While BISP faced challenges related to governance and transparency, it represented a significant effort to reduce poverty and improve the well-being of vulnerable populations during the Zardari era.

6.8.Freedom of Media in PPP Government

The issue of freedom of media was a subject of both progress and controversy during the Zardari period in Pakistan (2008-2013). The government, led by President Asif Ali Zardari and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), initially made efforts to promote media freedom and openness. Steps were taken to liberalize the media landscape, including the issuance of licenses for private television channels and the removal of restrictions on media ownership (Chawla & Ullah, 2018). Social media usage increases motivation to raise voice (Ramzan et al., 2023) These measures led

to the proliferation of private media outlets and a diversification of voices in the media landscape, contributing to a more vibrant and dynamic press environment.

However, the period was also marked by instances of media censorship and curbs on freedom of expression. There were allegations of government pressure on media outlets and journalists, particularly when it came to reporting on sensitive political issues or matters that were critical of the government. Journalists and media organizations faced threats and violence in some instances, leading to concerns about the safety of media professionals (Haroon & Hussain, 2019). While Pakistan's media landscape continued to expand during this time, the challenges to media freedom underscored the delicate balance between promoting a free press and addressing national security and political considerations.

6.9.NFC Award

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7. Economic Reforms

The government undertook a series of economic reforms to address critical fiscal challenges and promote economic stability during the Zardari period. One of the notable initiatives was the implementation of a stabilization program with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This program aimed to address the country's macroeconomic imbalances, including high inflation rates and fiscal deficits (Kanwal, 2017). As part of the reforms, the government introduced measures to enhance revenue collection, rationalize energy subsidies, and reduce the budget deficit. These efforts were aimed at stabilizing the economy and attracting foreign investment.

Additionally, the government worked on improving the investment climate by simplifying business regulations and promoting private sector growth. Various infrastructure projects were initiated to address energy shortages and enhance connectivity within the country, contributing to economic development (Mahmood et al., 2019). The government also sought to strengthen Pakistan's trade ties with other nations through preferential trade agreements and initiatives to boost exports. While these economic reforms were important steps towards addressing pressing economic challenges, they were met with both praise and criticism. Some argued that the reforms were necessary to stabilize the economy, while others raised concerns about the impact of austerity

measures on the common citizens. Despite these challenges, the Zardari government's efforts to implement economic reforms aimed at fostering fiscal discipline and economic growth were notable during this period (Gohar et al., 2022).

8. Legislative Initiatives

During the Zardari period, several significant legislative initiatives were undertaken, reflecting efforts to address critical issues and bring about legal reforms. One notable development was the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010. This landmark amendment was a comprehensive package of constitutional reforms that aimed to devolve greater powers and resources to the provinces (Chawla & Ullah, 2018). It abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, effectively transferring several subjects, including education and health, from the federal to provincial jurisdiction. The 18th Amendment also limited presidential powers, enhanced provincial autonomy, and established the National Economic Council (NEC) to coordinate economic policies. This constitutional reform was seen as a significant step toward strengthening Pakistan's federal structure and promoting greater provincial autonomy.

Another important legislative initiative during this period was the passage of the Right to Information Act in 2013. This legislation aimed to promote transparency and accountability in government operations by granting citizens the right to access public information. It represented a significant step forward in Pakistan's efforts to ensure open and accountable governance. Additionally, various laws and policies were introduced to address issues such as women's rights, education, and healthcare (Khan et al., 2021). While these legislative initiatives reflected a commitment to legal reforms and progressive policies, their effective implementation often faced challenges due to issues related to enforcement and capacity-building. Nonetheless, the Zardari period witnessed several legislative achievements aimed at improving governance, devolving power, and enhancing the rights of Pakistani citizens.

9. Conclusions

The Zardari period in Pakistan, which spanned from 2008 to 2013, was marked by a complex interplay of challenges and developments across various sectors. This era saw Pakistan confronting significant political, economic, social, and security challenges, each demanding careful attention and strategic responses. In terms of political challenges, Pakistan experienced a fluctuating political landscape characterized by frequent changes in government, tensions between political parties, and allegations of corruption and governance issues. While efforts were made to strengthen democratic institutions and promote political stability, the political arena remained polarized and contentious. The government's commitment to empowering women, as reflected in the Benazir Income Support Program and other initiatives, aimed to address social disparities and promote gender equality. However, these efforts often encountered obstacles related to governance and implementation.

Economically, Pakistan grappled with the energy crisis, fiscal deficits, and inflation during this period. Economic reforms were introduced to stabilize the economy and encourage investment, but they also brought austerity measures that affected ordinary citizens. The introduction of the 18th Amendment was a notable achievement in terms of devolving power and resources to the provinces, strengthening Pakistan's federal structure. However, this also posed fiscal challenges for the federal government.

Security-wise, the era witnessed a persistent struggle against extremism, with military operations targeting militant strongholds and efforts to address the root causes of radicalization. The issue of Kashmir's right to self-determination remained unresolved, contributing to tension between India and Pakistan. Socially, Pakistan grappled with the aftermath of the devastating 2010 floods, leading to extensive relief and recovery efforts.

In conclusion, the Zardari period in Pakistan was characterized by a complex web of challenges and developments that reflected the multifaceted nature of governance and progress. While significant strides were made in some areas, challenges persisted, highlighting the need for sustained efforts to address Pakistan's diverse socio-economic and political dynamics. The period underscored the resilience of the Pakistani people and the importance of balanced, comprehensive approaches to navigate the country through various challenges toward greater stability and development.

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