

Political Parties and Political Socialization: A Comparative Analysis of Political Parties in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This study primarily focuses on the role of political parties in Pakistan. It investigates how political parties socialize their workers? How and what role they are playing in the political development of the state? How people become members of specific political parties and get involved in political and civic activities in Pakistan is an important debate of the day. This study focuses on all these aspects of political parties in Pakistan.

Methodology: This work is qualitative in nature based on the data collected through interviews, focused groups discussion and social media (Facebook and Twitter) posts of the different cadre leadership of Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, Pakistan People's Party and Awami National Party in Peshawar, Karak and Buner. The selection of these parties is justified on the ground that these are the major parties with competing ideologies and programs. A purposive sampling technique was adopted for selection of the respondents. Three focused groups discussions were held in the selected districts in order to get the in-depth comparative perspective of the parties.

Findings: It was found that the workers are socialized through different means hence developing different political perspectives regarding different issues at hand. Though political parties in Pakistan have not yet been actively engaged in the political development of the state as they are expected to be, yet their role is vital in the broader political processes in Pakistan.

Conclusion: Political parties in Pakistan due to many reasons are not properly engaging the citizens. Political divide, intolerance and lack of political education are some of the hindrances in the way of political development. It is the stage of transition and consolidation of different political actors and players involved in the political processes in Pakistan. Political parties in Pakistan are to aggregate the choices of the people in a true sense so as to reap the fruits of democracy and representative government.

Keywords: Political Parties, Political Socialization, Political Recruitment, Political Development, Political Mobilization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties are considered to be the lifeboats and lifeblood in the modern democratic governance system (Khalil et al., 2023; Aldrich, 1995). Political parties in any polity play a vital role in the capacity of advocates and institutions of social change, enhancement and development of economic status of the masses and struggling for a just, democratic and political government (Broughton and Donovan, 1998). Their functions include but not limited to the representation of the interests of the people in the law making body of the polity, political socialization of the masses, political participation, political education and communication, recruitment of party workers and leaders, policy formulation and implementation and last but not the least working for the national integration and national cohesion (Duverger, 1963). However, these roles of the political parties vary from state to state and context to context. Normally, political parties assign different tasks and goals for themselves according to the political situation and political system of their polities (Khan et al., 2020; Shoukat, 2023; Evans and Whitefield, 1993).

Political socialization involves more than the formulation of political opinion of the people and the workers. It includes almost all the dimensions of a polity whether it is the political system or economic system. It encompasses public order, political legitimacy, social and political justice, economic stability and competent and accountable political leadership (Eckstein. (1966).

Political parties are required to socialize their workers in all these facets by means of adequate political information, publicizing and promoting the party program and ideology and the plans and way forward to address the issues faced by the polity (Ferejohn and Kuklinski, 1990). It can be argued that a party's political socialization role is attached to certain other functions that it carries in different contexts. How political parties in Pakistan perform these roles? How they socialize and "indoctrinate" their workers? And how far they add to the public order, political legitimacy, social and political justice, economic stability and competent and accountable political leadership?

1.1 Study Objectives

The main objective of the study is to explore the role of Political parties in Pakistan vis-à-vis political development and national integration.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative in nature based on the data collected through interviews and focused groups discussions with the different cadre parties' leadership in District Karak, District Buner and District Peshawar. Four "major" political parties i.e. Pakistan Tehrek-i-Insaf, Pakistan People's Party, Awami National Party and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) were selected for this study. The selection of these parties is justified on the ground that these are the major parties with competing ideologies and programs. The areas were selected for convenience purposes and that these represents three different regions i.e. South, Central and North of the province. A purposive sampling technique was adopted for selection of the respondents. Five respondents for each of the political parties were selected in different village councils. Three focused groups discussions were also held in the selected districts in order to get the in-depth comparative perspective of the parties. The identity of the respondents was kept secret. The study was conducted in August-October 2021.

3. DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Political Parties and Political Mobilization

How and why political mobilization is important for gaining public support? How your party mobilizes the public? These were the questions for the respondents in personal interviews and the FGDs. All the respondents agreed that it is the responsibility of political parties to shape public opinion. They get support of their members and other masses by actively mobilizing them and engaging them in different programs. A respondent from PTI was of the opinion that "we are more successful in mobilizing the masses when we are not in government". During the government the expectations of the masses are high

and the outcomes often are not according to the expectations of the masses. In response to a comment from PML (N) respondent “we can call PTI an opposition party”; the PTI representative replied “will there is nothing bad in that. Constructive opposition is the beauty of any democratic system”. PPP representative was of the opinion that “opposition is easy then government”. “You have every opportunity and freedom to criticize the government”. Iversen (1994) also holds similar opinion that political parties (in opposition) inform the public about different programs, planning and perspectives of the government and its intentions and the possible consequences. ANP representative however, had a slight different perspective. He added “in government mobilization of the masses somehow becomes easy as the government can reach to a greater number of people with ease. Furthermore, the government with different propaganda tools and media can manipulate any situation in its favor”.

In response to a question “how can political parties effectively mobilize the masses? A PTI representative from Peshawar responded; “the flow of political information is a vital part in the citizens’ mobilization and their political participation within a polity”. David Laitin (1989) on the other hand argues that the flow of political information is carried out and controlled by political parties. Through both formal and informal ways political parties inform their workers, persuade them and mobilize them for (a) specific cause(s). It is the political parties that decide which information needs to be propagated in the masses with what perspective. In the developed democracies, political parties rely on formal institutional arrangements for mobilization. By appealing and sending party related messages to the workers, political parties mobilize the electorate to turn out and vote for the party’s nominees for representation in the legislature of the polity (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). This practice and procedure of the parties is very common in the politically stable and democratically advanced western countries because the electoral competition is considered as basic political rights of the parties (Khan et al., 2023; Abdullah, 2023; Laver and Hunt, 1992).

Majority of the respondents in response to a question “why mass mobilization is important in Pakistan” opined that “through the process of mobilization the parties inform their electorate on party’s position on certain issue(s) and event(s) of national or party’s interest. However, those issues are specifically highlighted which are related to the electoral campaign and electorate”. These parties in different times and situations raise different issues for mobilization, which they consider suitable and significant for the party electoral gains. For example PTI since 2011 is very effectively projecting and propagating their anti-corruption campaign. The party has been effectively using social media and public gatherings in this regard. PMLN focuses more on infrastructural development. While, PPP and ANP seem to be more engaged in social reforms and social programs for the lower middle and lower classes of the society. According to Lasswell (1936), ideology, election manifesto and plan of actions are formulated to attract, engage and retain the political workers in the party.

A PMLN respondent from Buner argued that reaching out the masses and asking them for support in elections is indeed an important aspect of political parties. It is because in a multi party system, selection and identification of candidates is a hard task for the voters. The party affiliation and its program and plan of actions make it easier for the voters to select a candidate very near to his/her political orientations and approach. In Lijphart’s (1999) opinion, citizens use and understand political parties as “means of drawing inferences about the candidates’ characteristics and policy stands.” A PPP’s respondent from Peshawar said that it is the party that is a link and a bridge between the voters and representatives. He further added that all the political parties in Pakistan are not successful in mobilizing masses in all parts of the country. For example PTI is more successful and famous in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PPP in interior Sindh and PMLN in Punjab. It is because mobilization is significantly affected by social and environmental factors within the polity. Lijphart’s (1990b) argues that social and environmental factors play an important role in the political mobilization of the people. As all the areas are not having same environmental factors therefore, in specific areas specific political parties are more successful than others in mobilizing people. Due to the different socio-environmental factors of different regions in Pakistan, the popularity of different political parties is different.

3.2 Political Parties and Political Recruitment

We arranged a focused group discussion on the recruitment roles of political parties in Buner. The leading question for the discussion was why do we need to have political parties? A PPP representative in response to the question started the debate with a comment that “in democratic societies, political parties perform different (recruitment) functions. Democratic systems can best perform with political parties”. PTI representative agreed with the opinion of the PPP’s representative. He further added that, “the foremost responsibility (function) of a political party is the nomination and selection of candidates for elections. The parties recruit different candidates for contesting elections (at different levels). The party leadership and associates then campaign for the nominated candidates”. He further asserted “It would have been chaotic if (for example) PTI would not nominate a particular candidate in a constituency for election. PTI is one such party where there are many party’s associates desiring for contesting elections from the party’s platform. In such a situation the contesting candidates would declare themselves as party’s nominee; thus leaving the voters in a confusing situation. It would also bring lot of differences in the party folds. It is therefore, the basic duty and responsibility of a political party to field/recruit or nominate candidates for elections”. ANP member asserted that, political parties also recruit, select or nominate candidate for administrative offices and positions within the party or in general political administration in the polity”. He further added that political parties recruit and socialize new members in the party’ folds. Each party has a specific program and procedure for the recruitment of new members in the party. The procedure is systematically controlled by the party constitution and the hierarchical structure of the party and leadership”. The newly recruited members are then integrated into the “existing” political system. This way political parties try to convince their associates about the legitimacy and the legality of the existing political order and political system (Masood and Adnan, 2021; Shafiq et al, 2020; Rose and Urwin, 1969).

PMLN affiliate while endorsing the arguments of the ANP member added that “the classical function of the political parties is the nomination and selection of candidates for the administration of each level in the party and government. It is the party constitution that determines the eligibility and required qualification and expertise of a candidate for an electoral office”. Giovanni (1976) is also of the opinion that analyzing and focusing on the nomination process of the candidates can best analyze the recruitment function of any party (pp.36-39). Nomination in majority of the parties is done either by the public/electors or delegates. In hierarchical parties and developed countries the high-ranking organs and leaderships have no decisive role and influence in the nomination process of the candidates for different ranks within the party (Aldrich, 1995, 295). All the participants agreed that it must be the domain of the local leadership, groups and workers. The case in Pakistan is however, different in all the parties. Those parties are considered democratically stable whose’ candidates are not being selected or dictated from the top leadership or imposed from outside of the party’ folds. This is a feature, which is lacking in the political parties in Pakistan. The parties’ grassroots organizations must have a decisive role and say in the candidates’ nomination (Ali and Ismail, 2023; Kausar and Riaz, 2022; Schattschneider, 1960, P-141). ANP associate asserted that “although, ideally it is not possible, as the decisions and nomination of candidates are done, usually by a small influential group of local leadership. In case the decision and nomination of the candidate is done by the high ups through some direct and in-direct interference, it usually generates resentments, disagreements and differences within the party’s folds and local leaderships”. He further added, “As parties are the creation of people and society, therefore, the decision and nomination of any candidate must be done by the people themselves. This practice of the parties will obviously increase the people’ confidence on the party leadership. Moreover, they will own the candidate and will carry the campaign with great interest”. PTI member on the other hand stated that, “PTI is somehow engaging the local leadership in the nomination process of candidates for election. The increased political mobilization and participation have made it difficult for the higher leadership to bring someone as candidate for election outside of the party’s folds. He added “there is no place for *Fasli Bateray* (seasonal quail) in PTI”. In his opinion this attitude and approach of the PTI affiliates have ensured the internal democracy, fairness, simplicity, transparency and responsibility within the parties.

The recruitment process of any political party has far reaching consequences for the members and the polity. It is the recruitment and the workers role in the selection of the party leadership, which is to answer the fundamental question of the day i.e. “is there internal party democracy in the party? This very function of the party is also making it easy for the researchers to investigate “what effects does the process have on peoples’ perceptions of the party and its leaders? Analyzing these parties, the candidates’ selection is different. In PTI’s candidate selection, (somehow) the opinion of workers is taken into consideration. That is why the party issues tickets to party workers. On the other hand in other political parties the district leadership of the party is having significant role in candidates’ selection. This policy of these parties sometimes produces disagreements within the party workers.

3.3 Political Parties and Political Education

Another very important function of the political parties is the political education of the citizens. Political education of the people is important and significant because it seeks to ensure an effective political participation. Political education is a pre-requisite and necessary component of successful democracy and the political parties are the medium and instruments for that (Siddiqui, 2022 Baqir et al., 2023; Strom, 1990).

However, there is an extensive debate about what really political education is? What is included and what is excluded in political education? Political education includes democratic norms and values such as supremacy of the rule of law, equality, justice, responsibility, political liberty and its essential elements such as individual liberty, personal responsibility and community solidarity etc. (Aldrich, 1995).

We ask the participants that “how can the impact of political education of the citizens be evaluated in a polity”? ANP members in a louder tone said “its impacts can be demonstrated in a polity when the citizens start living and behaving democratically not only in their political lives but in personal and family lives as well”. We asked, “You mean its general perception is the adoption of the democratic values by the people? He responded, “Yes, in the political sphere, political education will entrench a culture of responsible political behavior and accountability”.

In response to our question the PPP member added, “In my opinion, one of the main goals of political education is the attainment, development and promotion of consensus on important and critical issues within the party, society and state. Consensus on issues, values and principles is important for community members because these (values and principles) are responsible for the smooth functioning of the system of the community and society (political order)”. Budge *et al* (2001) on the other hand opined that political order would ensure and maintain social justice, which is to determine/promote by none other than the members of the polity. So it can be argued that promotion of consensual values within a polity is more related to political parties rather than other agents of socialization. In this way, through the political education process a political party keeps close to the people and society. The society in turn requires the political parties as democratic and accountable political institutions. Political communication between the parties and masses is one such instrument by which parties keep in-touch with the society. It helps in the formation of political will and ultimately the political decisions within the masses and the parties. Political education and political communication in a broader perspective become similar as both aimed at making and promoting (democratic) political culture (Lipset, 1960).

For effective political education, communication is required to be open. Different tools, methods and procedures are used for communication between parties’ leadership and workers. Some prominent tools are mass media (print, electronic and social), different rallies, gathering and party meetings, direct contact among the workers and leaders and advertisements (Ibid, p.249).

3.4 Political Parties and Representation

Political parties in democratic countries are considered to be the bridges between the masses and the governments. They are to represent and speak for their supporters and the masses in all the spheres within

the society. They are to carry and promote the interest of the people in their activists in the legislature, media, electoral campaign and in other governmental and social forums (Katz and Mair, 1992).

Why political parties are needed and required? In response to this question PMLN member argued that, “In the modern representative democracy, people are indirectly involved in the administration and the decisions making of the polity. However, as it is not possible for all the people to directly and personally take part in the state administration therefore, political parties serves as the agents of the people. People chose, join and support those parties and candidates who can best represent them. Who can speak about them. Who can take them in confidence before deciding about any issue related to their interest (like that of PMLN).

Rose (1984) believes that political representation ensures political stability. The parties and the representatives try to fulfill the promises made by them during the electoral campaign so that they may not get failed next time while seeking people’s confidence and vote (Rose, 1984). This way it also promotes accountability of the selected representatives.

However, this all is linked to free and fair elections and candidates selection process. Free and fair elections will decide whether a public representative is legitimate in representing people? Also that to what extent the representative is allowed to exercise his delegated powers? Is he allowed to work in a free and fair environment for the uplift of his people? Is he bearing any pressure and influence from the party leadership or other government official in the line of his responsibilities? Is the representative working for his personal interest or he is concerned for the public interests as advocated and voiced in the party’s constitution and election manifesto? If the representative were a legitimate one, he therefore, would feel himself accountable to the people (Ibid). The discussion clearly indicated all these aspects of political representation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s major political parties.

3.5 Political Parties and Political Development

We put the question of how political parties are associated with political development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan? The respondents were of the opinion that political parties are involved in the political development of a society and polity. ANP representative stated that in his understanding of the term, it is very broad in its nature. “It includes different aspects of individual’s socio-political life. It includes but not limited to “knowledge about politics”. It shows the level and extent of political interest of the citizens”. PTI member further added that, “to him political development is the physical and psychological involvement in the activities with political outcomes. The extent, level, process and procedure of political socialization of the people also fall in the definition of political development”. PPP member asserted that for him “political development is political communication, belief in the political system and process of the state, acceptance and tolerance for other political parties within the state”. “Support and struggle for the common goals of the nation can also be included in this category.” PMLN associate while responding to the question added that, “for him the most important aspect of political development is the sense of political efficiency. It includes but not limited to self and party leadership accountability for creating a clean political environment”.

Rodee (1976) is of the opinion that the extent and level of political growth and development of a country can be analyzed on the basis of three broad characteristics. First, to a significant level separation of power, strong and affective system of checks and balance, decentralization of power and authority and the weakening of traditional sources of authority and system. Second, the growth and development of responsive, extractive, regulative and distributive characteristics of the political system. Third, increased and significant level of participation of the citizens in the political processes in the polity, identification of their importance for the functioning of democracy and interest and inclination towards political socialization.

If we analyze Rodee (1976) definition of political development in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, we may see that the political parties working here are far more behind in achieving the true essence of

political development. However, they are very active for the political and national integration of the masses. Political parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are working to enhance the capacity of the political parties within Pakistan to orchestrate the different sectors growth, integrate and mixed them with the political system of the polity. These parties try to create and maintain a balance between the demands and support of the citizens and the system. Political parties are the effective tools for the articulation and aggregation of the people's interest in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan.

4. CONCLUSION

This study focused on the importance of political parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in general and in Pakistan in particular. Political parties as many scholars believe are playing significant roles in the democratization process of a state by serving as intermediaries between the state and common citizens. If the parties' play their role effectively, the citizens' belief in the political processes and political system will further strengthen. Political parties can effectively engage the citizens and utilize their energies in the political and economic development of the state. Political parties in Pakistan due to many reasons are not properly engaging the citizens. Political divide, intolerance and lack of political education are some of the hindrances in the way of political development. Political development is the process towards democratization. It is the stage of transition and consolidation of different political actors and players involved in the political processes in the polity. Its ends are the creation of institutions of governance according to the will and choices of the common people. Political parties in Pakistan are to aggregate the choices of the people in a true sense so as to reap the fruits of democracy and representative government.

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