

## **Alliance Politics in Pakistan: A Case Study of Pakistan Democratic Movement (2020-2023)**

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### **Abstract**

*This article critically examined alliance politics practiced by Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) during 2020 and 2023. The core question of the study is to analyze the causes and impacts of the alliance. Alliance politics remained a regular feature of politics in Pakistan since its inception. Pakistan is a multi-racial state with a multi-party system, which makes alliance formation an essential condition of democracy in the state. This phenomenon makes alliance politics a subject of potential discussion for political science students. The scholar has opted for a qualitative scheme of study during the research. The study is based on secondary sources of data. The data was carefully collected and analyzed, and a conclusion was drawn. Pakistan Democratic Movement was formed by ten opposition political parties in September 2020 to counter-balance the immediate political adversary or incumbent government of PTI. This was an opposition alliance, successfully campaigned against the incumbent government of PTI and also succeeded in toppling the government through constitutional process of Motion of No-Confidence. The alliance transformed into coalition government for remaining period of the National Assembly. PDM played an active role in the political landscape of Pakistan, but failed to take democracy to the next stage of evolution. It was all about short-term interests rather than the goal of strengthening democracy. After coming into power, leaders of the alliance abandoned their lofty promises and commitments to the nation and focused solely on ministerial positions.*

**Keywords:** PDM, alliance politics, coalition governments, political parties, multi-party system, elections

### **Introduction**

The historical transformations which led to the development of modern-day democracy are very complex. Democracy has had to pass through the long and bumpy road-from mob rule to the feudal system then to the absolutist state and ultimately evolving into modern days widely accepted democratic system. Presently all leaders and rulers including military dictators, socialist authoritarians and even monarchs either

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describes themselves as democrats or pretend to consider themselves as democrats. This shift, where politicians and political thinkers have collectively embraced the cause of democracy, stands out as a dramatic and vital phenomenon in the realm of political history (Rizvi, 2013).

The formation of Pakistan was the result of democratic struggle and electoral process. The elections of 1945-46 played critical role in the creation of the country. Hence, it was known that democracy will reign supreme. Political parties are inevitable for a democratic system and same was the case with Pakistan. Establishing a bi-party or tri-party system in a multi-ethnic state such as Pakistan proved a formidable challenge. In a multi-ethnic state such as Pakistan there is a multiplicity of political parties representing diverse areas, ethnicities and nationalities in power corridor. This phenomenon of multi-party system necessitates the existence of alliance formation and coalition governments, and Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) was the latest political alliance, which is the focus of the study in hand.

Parliamentary system is all about number of seats in legislative assemblies and all political parties are struggling to secure more and more seats in these assemblies. In case of inability to have enough seats in legislative assemblies, political parties opt for the help of other parties to form government or challenge the setting government (Hussain, 2008). Every political party ideally wants to capture governmental offices independently, which will enable the party to enjoy the benefits of holding offices and frame policies independently. Political parties acknowledge the limitations of securing required numbers while contesting elections independently. Consequently, they are inclined to make concessions to potential alliance partners in terms of policy alignments (Ahmad, 2012). Dictatorial policies of ruling elites compelled opposition parties to either make a deals with the civil-military bureaucracy or to join hands with fellow parties and form alliance (Hussain, 2008). This happened in 1954 in East Pakistan when the opposition political parties formed United Front to oppose the government and contest provincial elections jointly. Again this happened, when Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto banned National Awami Party (NAP) in 1975 on the charges of anti-Pakistan activities. This victimization compelled the opposition benches to establish United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1973 and Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) in 1977 to challenge the rule of PPP (Qasim & Ali, 2019).

During military and civilian regimes, the opposition parties came together and formed alliances. The politics of alliances thus remain common, both in military and civilian tenures. Alliances have been formed to contest elections jointly, to form government, to get a setting government dismissed or to compel the government to fulfill certain

demands (Iqbal, 2022). These alliances are opposition, electoral and governmental coalitions. Opposition alliances were formed mostly during military rules and outside the parliament. During civilian rules parliamentary opposition alliances were established. Opposition alliances formed outside parliament during the reign of first military ruler, were National Democratic Front (NDF), Combined Opposition Parties (COP), Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and Democratic Action Committee (DAC). COP was both an opposition and electoral alliance of the opposition parties, challenging president Ayub in presidential elections of 1965. NDF, PDM and DAC were formed to restore democracy and remove Ayub Khan from power. Electoral alliances were established either within the parliament or outside the parliament. After elections these alliances worked in two capacities. They either challenged the setting government or formed a coalition government. United Front (UF), United Democratic Front (UDF), Islami Jamhuri Ittihad (IJI), Combined Opposition (CO) and People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) are such alliances (Hussain, 2008).

MMA was an opposition alliance formed in 2002 to oppose the policies of Musharraf government in the US war against Afghanistan. This group adopted the shape of electoral alliance in 2002 parliamentary elections and after unprecedented victory in the election formed coalition government in NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). ARD was an opposition alliance of political parties formed in 2000 to challenge the military government and ensure democratization process in Pakistan. The alliance failed to contest the general elections of 2002 jointly, but the parties of the alliance have significant presence in the parliament and contributed in challenging the government of Musharraf. APDM was another alliance of opposition political parties formed in 2007 to stop the re-election of Musharraf as president and contributed in the beginning of the end of military government. Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) was formed in 2020 by parliamentary opposition parties to challenge the government of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and after ousting the government through No-Confidence Motion in April 2022 adopted the shape of coalition government for about sixteen months till August 2023. The dynamics of political alliances in Pakistan during dictatorial and civilian tenures are the failure of small and major political parties to contest and face the ruling party single handedly. Therefore, political parties resorted to alliances as a temporary arrangement at the cost of compromising party ideology and manifesto. These arrangements can be declared as marriages of convenience for short term goals and mostly remained unnatural. Unfortunately, powerful leaders rather than manifesto and genuine policies led to the formation and disintegration of alliances

and coalitions. People extended their full support to these arrangements for democratization and stability but the leaders compromised their principles once short term objectives were achieved (Zahra & Iqbal, 2021). The study in hand covers and analyzes the alliance politics of PDM during the timeframe spanning from 2020 to 2023. As this alliance brought together different political parties under one platform, successfully arranged anti-government campaign, ousted the government through vote of no-confidence and formed coalition government. Therefore, the alliance needs detailed attention and inquiry.

### **Literature Review**

Kapa (2008) in the research article has argued that alliances and coalitions of political parties are the integral part of pluralist democracy. It has been argued that political alliances are mostly caused by the office-seeking motives of the political elites. This theory is also applicable in Pakistan, as the alliances are formed to fare well in election, to have access to government offices and avail the benefits associated with being in power.

McMillan (2014) in his article argued that electoral alliances and coalition governments have adopted a permanent feature in Indian democratic politics. This element forced acceptance that power sharing, compromises, concessions and unity in diversity are essential elements for a successful government. Alliance politics was a key element of the success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in transferring votes into parliamentary seats in Lok Sabha (lower chamber of Indian parliament) in the general elections of 1998-99. Coalition governments elected in 1999, 2004 and 2009 have not only completed constitutional five-year term but also ensured high and sustained economic growth. Alliances have tied national level political parties such as BJP and Congress with regional, small and state level political parties in terms of power sharing and developing consensus on national matters leading to national cohesion in India. Alliance politics has often brought together ideologically disparate political parties such as in Punjab Sikh based Sheromani Akale Dal alliance with Hindu dominated BJP leading to enhanced pluralistic electoral politics. A review of coalition governments in Africa suggests that motivating factors of coalition formation are to access governmental power than policy factors. Ideological considerations and to wrest powers from the ruling party have also contributed in alliance formation in Mauritius, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa. Coalitions formed in these countries since early 1990s were characterized by opportunism (Oyugi, 2006).

Sahgal (2008) in PhD thesis titled, “divided we stand, but united we oppose, opposition alliances in Egypt and Pakistan” has argued that irrespective of ideological, ethnic and other differences and regime policies, opposition parties in Pakistan succeeded in developing alliances. They worked together in the shape of joint protests, statements, strikes, sit-in and walk-out from parliament but the same did not happen in Egypt. Opposition groups formed alliances in Egypt but couldn’t succeed. Alliances can be of two types, Mobilization and Elite alliances. Two or more political parties form mobilization alliance to challenge the incumbent government by pooling their constituents and resorting to protests, strikes, sit-in and civil disobedience. Elite alliances are formed by the leaders of political parties to act jointly for the solution of problems without resorting to street politics. They may raise their voice in the parliament, walk-out and joint statements. Alliances may focus on a specific issue, such as Awami National Party (ANP) and Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) collectively opposed the construction of Kalabagh dam in Pakistan. Alliances may also be value-based focusing on a broader set of issues, such as media freedom. The anti-Kalabagh dam campaign in 1998-99 illustrate that divided constituencies can make both elite and mobilization alliances. With the passage of time other groups joined the alliance and culminated in 1999 coup.

Khan (2019) in his PhD thesis examines the political state of democracy in Pakistan and coalition governments from 1988 to 1999. The exercise is trying to discover the factors responsible for making coalition governments in the mentioned era, which makes it relevant to the current study. The main findings of the study are that interference from non-democratic forces curtailed the capacity of coalition governments to work smoothly and complete their agenda and political programs. Article 58 (2) (b), judiciary, allegations of corruption and bad governance have been frequently used by non-democratic forces to control coalition governments or to send them home. State intelligence agencies are actively involved in making and unmaking of coalition governments. The study suggests the neutrality of these agencies for viable democracy to take roots. The thesis also finds that democracy must be about building a democratic culture based on the principles of modernity and rationalist worldview instead of making it only an electoral exercise. Qasim & Ali (2019) in their article, History of Coalitions in Pakistan (1947 To 1973) and the Factors Shaping it have analyzed different alliances and coalitions. Authors are of the view that these alliances gave tough time to military rulers and contributed in strengthening democratic process in Pakistan. Coalitions in the mentioned era of political development were based on political survival and power bargaining.

Zahra & Iqbal (2021) in their research article, have argued that since the very inception of Pakistan, politics has witnessed alliances between actors, sometimes having opposite outlooks and manifestos. Unfortunately, personalities rather than party manifesto and ideologies have dominated the formation of alliances and coalitions. United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in March 1973 by eight political parties to challenge the autocratic style of Bhutto government and put pressure for amending the draft constitution. Unity of opposition parties was a vital political development in the history of Pakistan. Bhutto agreed to the many reasonable and logical demands of the UDF while drafting the constitution of 1973. The researchers have applied the theory of “Office seeking” as Bhutto reached with the opposition on accord to seek vote of confidence in the National Assembly, settlement with India and drafting a permanent constitution. On the other hand, JUI-NAP wanted provincial governments and slots of governors in NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Baluchistan. Wali Khan had to give up the ideology of secularism and socialism and allied with JUI to form coalition ministries.

In January 1977 Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) was formed by nine political parties to contest the coming election from one platform. PNA rejected the results of 1977 general elections, boycotted subsequent provincial elections and started agitation that culminated in an unfortunate development of military coup on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1977. The dynamics of the alliances during dictatorial and democratic regimes were the failure of the opposition parties to challenge the ruling party single handedly. These alliances were considered as unnatural and marriage of convenience for short term and specific goals. The analysis of alliances during Bhutto regime confirms the theory that alliances are formed for access to office and power. Most of the political leaders were involved in power politics rather than national interest and welfare of the people. Political alliances may play negative role by tempting undemocratic forces to usurp power and wrap whatever democratic system is there. On the other hand, these alliances may also strengthen democratization and civilian supremacy. Unfortunately, in Pakistan the alliances have played disruptive role, revolved around personal or party interest instead of public and national interests and enticed undemocratic forces to usurp power. Productive aspect of the alliance was that it enabled the passage of 1973 constitution, some sort of political stability and JUI-NAP government in the two provinces of Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

Mushtaq (2015) in his research work highlighted that it was difficult for Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) to challenge dictatorship single handedly; therefore, political alliance came into existence to ensure joint

efforts. The focus of the study is Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), an alliance of nine political parties to challenge the authoritarian rule of military dictator. MRD successfully boycotted the 1984 referendum and 1985 party-less general elections.

Akhtar (2021) in the article, focused on the need for alliance formation by minor political parties in 1988-99. The paper concluded that all major and minor political parties failed to gain electoral objectives without alliances. In order to sustain and ensure presence in the political arena of Pakistan, minor political parties opt for alliances. Islami Jamhuri Ittehad (IJI) was formed in November 1988, consisted of nine political parties to contain PPP in general elections of 1988 and 1990. PPP chalked out an effective political alliance, named Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA) to counter IJI in 1990 elections. In 1993 Jamat-i- Islami formed Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF), but did not fare well in the said election.

In his PhD. dissertation, 'Politics of Alliances: A Case Study of Islami Jamhuri Ittehad' Rahat Zubair Malik has discussed that IJI was an alliance of divergent political parties to contain PPP in the general elections of 1988. It was originally electoral alliance for 1988 elections, transformed into parliamentary opposition. The alliance goes back to the electoral alliance for 1990 elections and transformed into parliamentary governmental coalition. The alliance has been the most controversial in the political history of Pakistan as it has been argued that it was formed under the auspices of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to contain PPP from coming into power. In alliance formations there are two steps, one is formation and the second is organization and management. In Pakistan alliances are formed successfully, but the second part neither existed nor pursued. This results in the termination of the alliance very soon (Malik, 2014).

Ahmad (2012) in his PhD thesis has very comprehensively analyzed the governance under Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). This was the first practical example of governance under the rule of religious political parties. The Study empirically analyze coalition from different angles such as formation of the alliance, institutional progress in the era, Islamization of economy, religious parties' views regarding woman participation in public life and the relation of religious parties and their dealing with militancy in the province. The study brings the debate of religion and politics from theoretical discourse to the practical life. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan favored the formation of the alliance and the unprecedented electoral success in 2002 general elections. A successful alliance requires a shared ideological base, policy alignment and coordinated political strategy to achieve success in

election, which were enjoyed by the first ever alliance of religious political parties.

Khan (2014) in his article has analyzed that how religious alliance of MMA was formed and what were the responsible factors for the electoral victory of the alliance. US invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent decision of General Musharraf to take the side against Taliban government in Afghanistan provided golden opportunity to religious parties and they utilized it properly. Anti-US slogans played vital role in election campaign of MMA for October 2002 general elections. The absence of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir from political scene along with the differences in nationalist ANP also contributed in the success of the alliance. The alliance got unprecedented votes, formed government in erstwhile NWFP (KP), coalition government in Baluchistan and became major opposition group in the center.

Politics in Pakistan has been influenced by religion and religious parties from the very beginning. Though religious parties failed to get substantial electoral victories, but succeeded in influencing policy making in Pakistan. It was in 2002 parliamentary elections that Islamic parties got unprecedented seats in National Assembly, NWFP and Baluchistan. It was the result of an electoral alliance of religious parties named MMA. The alliance was supported by Musharraf to contain the political strength of PPP and PML-N, the mainstream parties. The alliance succeeded to form government in NWFP, a coalition government in Baluchistan and got the slot of opposition leader in the National Assembly. The alliance failed to mobilize masses in the name of Islam and remained unsuccessful in the elections of 2008. In that election Islamic parties were replaced by secular Awami National Party (Kanwal, 2019).

Nasir (2021) in his work, argued that the PPP-led coalition was a success story and gave new hope to political stakeholder to work together for sustainable democracy in Pakistan. This ruling coalition successfully worked for constitutionally mandated five years-2008 to 2013. PML-N left the ruling coalition in the very beginning, over the issue of restoration of sacked judges of superior courts. Despite this break up, PPP was allowed to head the central government, while PML-N ruled Punjab for five years. Haque (2021) in the paper, "Can civil resistance lead to the deepening of democracy in Pakistan? The case of the PDM" tries to explore the stated objectives of Pakistan Democratic Movement formed in 2020, its narrative, capacity and strategy to achieve real transfer of power to civilian government. The alliance has raised the slogan of changing the system of military rule and ensuring the sanctity of vote. However, the alliance failed to provide a detailed alternative policy framework to develop a fresh social

contract devoid of military rule. Thus, the alliance is just focusing on protest movements.

Most of the governments formed in Pakistan since creation remained coalition governments. Single party failed to form government affecting the performance of the government. Multi-party governments remained weak in terms of taking tough decisions and the allied partners are every time demanding benefits from major parties. Since 1988, Muttahida Qumi Movement (MQM) has pursued alliance and coalition politics to stay in power. MQM is an ethnic party and formed alliances and coalition governments with PPP, IJI, PML-N, and PML-Q since 1988 but failed to transform itself into a national level party and to address people's problems. MQM's alliance politics and coalition formation failed due to the alleged involvement of the party in militant activities, ethnicity based politics and pursuing regional and party interests ignoring national interests(Iqbal, 2022).

PDM was formed in 2020 by opposition political parties to challenge PTI-led central government. The alliance succeeded to dethrone the government through vote of no-confidence in April 2022. This was followed by PDM-led coalition government, but failed to deliver and to present a viable alternative. One is now inclined to believe that ousting PTI government was never about principles. Those who criticized Imran Khan for being a puppet premier proved more enthusiastic to take his place. This proved that the two forces were in race that who are more loyal and obedient than other. They were struggling for government positions("Democracy lost," 2023).

In the post general elections 2024 scenario, PMLN and PPP agreed to form coalition government in center. The announcement was made in a press conference but nothing was said about their common minimum program and plan, sending the impression that the alliance is all about power struggle but bereft of public purpose. This is happening at a time when the country confronts unprecedented challenges- the most serious economic crisis, crippling power shortage, terrorist activities, declining capacity of state institutions, deterioration in public service delivery and regional security challenges. The joint presser of both parties seemed to signal that the priority was to divide top public offices between them. This raised the question of whether they had an aim other than access to power and government posts(Lodhi, 2024).

Apart from the above-mentioned studies there is no specialized work on political alliances in Pakistan and especially from 2020 to 2023 and the current study is of paramount importance to cover the gap.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Research Design*

A qualitative scheme of analysis has been applied for this study. It involves collecting data or utilizing the available data for new purpose of analyzing alliance politics of PDM in Pakistan. **Sources of Data:** Secondary sources have been consulted to collect the relevant data. The study relies mainly on academic publications on the subject study, documents, statements, appropriate books, journal articles, periodicals, newspapers, party manifestos, and legislative assemblies' debates.

### *Data Collection Tools and Methods*

Data collection tools, i.e., secondary sources, have been utilized for collecting data on the themes. Books, research articles, online sources, newspapers, media items, and views of experts have been analyzed for the study. These sources and information are the actual tools for the research work.

### *Data Analysis Technique*

More than one technique of qualitative data analysis was applied, including the narrative and content data analysis. Narrative data analysis is used to identify, analyze, and evaluate related information and to generalize them accordingly. Content analysis has been used as a data analysis technique. This method involves the description, analysis, and interpretation of data for its contextual meaning and bias with a view to summarization or showing data meaningfully for making inferences and conclusions. In other words, content analysis is the revision of data by the researcher to reach findings and conclusions. The researcher has used content analysis as an interpretation tool for analyzing the secondary data for the current research work.

## **Pakistan Democratic Movement (2020)**

Pakistan Democratic Movement (henceforth PDM) was a heterogeneous alliance of ten opposition political parties formed on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020 in Islamabad, to challenge the government of PTI and its allies.

### *Background of the Alliance*

Since the election of Imran Khan as Prime Minister in August 2018, various attempts were made to bring the divided opposition group under one platform. In October 2019, PPP, PML-N and JUI-F announced anti-government plan including rallies, demonstrations and sit-in, but later on JUI-F was left alone in sit-in. The two major parties- Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz didn't want to take such steps which endanger the political process restored after the removal of Musharraf in 2008. But the political victimization of opposition by government in the name of accountability has pushed the two leading parties to the wall. Thus, the parties agreed on the establishment of a common platform. This time there was a shift in the stance of opposition political parties. They targeted the military establishment, which was believed to be the real power behind the government of PTI. In the words of Nawaz Sharif, it is the "state above the state" that needs to be taken on (Hussain, 2020).

#### *Formation of the Alliance*

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, hosted "All Parties Conference" at the Islamabad Marriott Hotel to form a grand political alliance. Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman, chief of JUI-F was elected as president, while Shahid Khaqan Abbasi of the PML-N was elected as Secretary-General of the newly formed PDM. According to Mahmood Khan Achakzai, chief of PkMAP, the aim of the movement was not just to overthrow the incumbent government of PTI but to create the country anew (Achakzai, 2020).

#### *Component Parties of the Alliance*

Component parties of the alliance were the following.

1. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)
2. Pakistan People's Party (PPP)
3. Jamiat-Ulama-i-Islam- Fazal (JUI-F)
4. Awami National Party (ANP)
5. Baluchistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M)
6. Jamiat Ahli Hadith (JAH)
7. National Party-Bezenjo (NP-B)
8. Pakhtunkhwa Mille Awami Party (PkMAP)
9. Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)
10. Qaumi Watan Party (QWP)

*Agenda of the Alliance*

Addressing a press conference following a meeting between various leaders on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in Islamabad, leader of the PDM, Maulana Fazaul Rahman unveiled 12 points “Charter of Pakistan” and vowed to continue the campaign against the government of PTI. These points of the covenant were:

1. Enforcement of and supremacy of the Constitution of Pakistan
2. Autonomy of the parliament
3. Elimination of the role of establishment and intelligence agencies from politics
4. Establishment of an independent judiciary
5. Reforms for free, independent and fair elections
6. Protection of basic human and democratic rights of the people
7. Protection of the rights of the provinces and the 18th constitutional amendment
8. Effective local government system
9. Security of freedom of expression and media
10. Elimination of extremism and terrorism and the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP)
11. Emergency economic plan for an end to inflation, unemployment, and for poverty alleviation
12. Protection and implementation of the Islamic provisions of the Constitution(The News, 2020).

While assessing the charter of PDM, it can be argued that it is a protest movement with the objectives of toppling the government of Imran Khan. The alliance has no detailed policy agenda to make the country anew that is devoid of martial rule. The charter says very little about security state except elimination of establishment and intelligence agencies’ role in politics. It refers to constitutional points such as security for freedom of expression and protection of fundamental human rights, it has no concrete program to counter martial rule even compared to Charter of Democracy(“Text of the Charter of Democracy,” 2006), signed between PPP and PML-N in 2006 in London. That charter has points for civilian supremacy, such as civilian oversight of security agencies, defense budget to be debated by parliament, land allotment scrutiny, peace with India and Afghanistan without compromising outstanding issues and nuclear command system under defense cabinet committee. Though only a part of the CoD was implemented. Thus, beyond rhetoric, an alternative strategic vision agreed by all is required to be propagated and implemented to achieve civilian supremacy.

The point of effective local government system in the charter of PDM is a good step for good governance and breeding new leadership, but requires utmost sincerity and implementation in letter and spirit. Regarding economy, the charter includes the provision of “emergency economic plan to end inflation, unemployment and poverty alleviation”. But the government of PDM was looking to International Financial Institutions (IFIs) for bailout packages and having no homegrown people friendly economic plan which reflects ground realities.

Although the alliance has raised the banner of changing the martial rule system through large scale protests around the country, but the focus was on the façade rather than underlying basis of power, which is the security state. The charter of the alliance lacked an alternative vision for the country having larger civil society support.

### **Assessing PDM’s Narrative, Strategy & Capacity to Achieve a Systemic Transfer of Power**

For a systemic transfer of power, a civil resistance movement needs the following requirements.

One, it must have large and diverse participation. Except MQM, this alliance enjoyed the representation of almost all nationalities till the resignation of PPP and ANP. Public gatherings under the umbrella of the alliance in all parts of the country have large scale participation. However, this participation was limited to political parties and failed to include larger civil society. Farmers, labors, professional associations, student unions, academia and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have least interest and participation in the said mobilization. This was partly due to very weak civil society in the country, because in 1980s student unions have been banned and labor unions are facing various restrictions and are mostly disorganized. Resistance movement not only requires participation of all segments but also a larger span of consensus. As in 1970s and 2010, the civilians make democratic gains in the form of 1973 constitution and 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. But the martial rule gradually make a comeback when the political consensus faded (Haque, 2021). Thus the latest alliance of PDM required a longer period of consensus.

Two, a movement needs to enjoy support in a section of security forces in particular and other elites including civil bureaucracy in general. PDM was a conglomerate of major political parties, especially from the largest province of Punjab. Punjab has the major share in security forces and civil bureaucracy. Familial and social linkages among the elites are mostly available to the movement especially in a section of security forces.

Three, the movement was using a variety of methods including protests as resistance strategy. The alliance mainly focused on large scale

gatherings to spread its message and mobilize the public. In the initial stages the hardliners, such as JUI-F stressed for resignation from all elected fora including Senate, National Assembly and provincial assemblies. But that idea was postponed mainly by moderate forces led by PPP arguing that this will enable the setting government of PTI to pass legislation which will further decrease options for PDM to resist within these institutions. The alliance targeted the civilian government and considering it as a façade of martial rule. Targeting the façade is with assumption that this will compel the army to negotiate under the framework of the constitution and accept the demands of PDM (The News, 2020). This makes the movement labeled as playing power politics rather than a genuine struggle against martial rule.

Four, with the repression from the system, the movement neither becomes violent nor wither away. PDM fulfill this requirement, as in past major parties comprising the alliance have faced different types of repressions (Haque, 2021). The PDM, just like PNA against Z. A. Bhutto targeted civilian administration of PTI government. The alliance alleged the government of election rigging, damaging economy and authoritarian measures. Studies show that one main difference between PDM and PNA was that the former confronts a civilian government which has the backing of the powerful military establishment. On the other side some factions in military establishment encouraged PNA to take a hardline on Bhutto. PDM has managed a series of successful rallies in different cities since October 2020. Demonstrations were attended and addressed by senior opposition leaders, including chief of PDM and JUI-F Maulana Fazal ur Rahman, PML-N vice president Maryyam Nawaz Sharief and PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (Khan, 2020).

Leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who was convicted of corruption in 2018 and then went to London after receiving medical bail, has delivered fiery virtual speeches at two different rallies. On October 17, 2020 addressing PDM rally at Gujranwala, Punjab, Mr. Sharif directly criticized Army Chief, Qamar Javid Bajwa, which he has appointed as army chief in November 2016, superseding two senior generals. “You are responsible for the exit of my smooth-running government,” “You got judges to write the judgments you wanted,” said Nawaz Sharif while targeting General Bajwa. He also criticized General Faiz Hameed, the serving chief of army intelligence agency ISI. According to Sharif these officials were allegedly responsible for economic and political mess of Pakistan. He alleged military establishment for meddling in political affairs, and engineering Sharif’s ouster in 2017 as well as the 2018 electoral victory of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. The ruling PTI took no time in

declaring three-time former premier as anti-state. These speeches of Nawaz Sharief have put PDM and even the PML-N in a tough spot. Other challenges for the movement were, sustaining the movement, state crackdown and cohesion with in the alliance(Kugelman, 2020).

PDM held a rally in Karachi on October 19, 2020 and next morning Nawaz Sharif's son-in-law captain Safdar was arrested by paramilitary forces known as rangers from his hotel for shouting political slogans at the mausoleum of Pakistan's founding father, Quaid-e-Azam. It was revealed afterward that Inspector General of Police Sindh was kidnapped from his office to the office of intelligence service and forced to sign the arrest orders of Mr. Safdar which he initially refused. This was followed by "protest leave" of office cadre of police which was withdrawn on the intervention of army chief with a promise of internal inquiry of kidnapping. However no visible action has been taken against the perpetrators(Khan, 2020).

#### *Rift in the Alliance*

After few months of formation, the alliance developed a rift over the issue of en masse resignations from assemblies and proposed long march on Islamabad planned for March 26, 2021. The Pakistan People's Party expressed reservations over en masse resignations from assemblies. After PPP, PMLN has also expressed reservations over the issue of resignations. Maulana Fazal ur Rahman insisted that before proposed march on Islamabad opposition should tender resignations. PMLN differs on the ground that such a move would prove futile, if all opposition parties including PPP do not resigns collectively(Wasim, 2021).

Senate elections were conducted on March 3, 2021 and the significant development and setback for the ruling PTI was the defeat of acting finance minister, Mr. Hafeez Sheikh. Prime Minister Imran Khan wanted to elect Hafeez Sheikh as senator on general seat from Islamabad. Despite numerical majority of the ruling party in the National Assembly, which was electoral college for the seat, the seat was snatched by Yousaf Raza Gilani of PPP. Mr. Gilani was a joint candidate of PDM. This victory provided opposition alliance with a new impetus for its struggle against PTI government. After this surprised electoral defeat, Prime Minister decided to take vote of confidence from the lower house to send the impression that government still command the majority of the house. 178 lawmakers against required 172, reposed confidence on Imran Khan as PM on March 6, 2021. However, this sent a message that Khan government could lack durable majority if defectors withdrew their support. On March 12, PTI nominee for the slot of chairman senate Sadiq

Sinjrani was re-elected thus defeating opposition candidate Yousaf Raza Gilani (Cookman, 2021).

The alliance broke up in early 2021 and the two major parties- PPP and ANP left the group. Differences developed over the proposed collective resignations and when PPP nominated Yousaf Raza Gilani as opposition leader in the senate in violation of PDM decision that the office would go to the PML-N (Wasim, 2022). In April 2021, PDM issued show cause notices to PPP and ANP. Later on both the parties resigned from the alliance and gave up all the offices. According to Journalist Ansar Abbasi PPP quit the alliance after a secret deal with the government. Imran Khan was worried about the political strength of the alliance and allowed the key spymaster of the military establishment to give certain concessions to Asif Ali Zardari- the co-chairman of PPP to split the PDM. These concessions include shifting of court cases against Zardari to Karachi and supporting Yousaf Raza Gilani in the Senate to become opposition leader in the house. PPP leader Qamar Zaman Kaira denied this and said that the party quit the alliance in a protest after a show cause notice by the PDM leadership (Abbasi, 2022).

Forcing snap election became the optimal strategy for PML-N, as the party viewed that it will emerge the single largest party. Since the PML-N had no government in any province, it could afford to take the risk of resignation from assemblies. On the other hand, snap elections were not suitable for PPP. The party considered that the maximum pay offs are not likely to be better than what the party has in hand, in shape of Sindh government and forty seats in the National Assembly. Hence resigning from the assemblies is going to minimize the pay offs for the party than maximizing it. That's why PPP resisted using this nuclear option and instead focused on in-house change in the system (Zaidi, 2021). PPP chairman Bilawal was adamant that the PDM should focus on removing Imran Khan through vote of no-confidence (Siddique, 2021). On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the alliance has announced a 'Long March' on Islamabad on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 against inflation and in a bid to de-seat the government of Imran Khan. This was announced by Maulana Fazal ur Rahman after a meeting of the allied parties of the opposition in a press conference. It was termed as Mehngai March (march against price hike) by the president of PDM. However, the alliance faced internal differences. With no consensus among the major parties of the alliance on the key issue of en masse resignations from assemblies, the PDM conveyed the message that it has very little options in its political armory (DAWN, 2021).

*No-Confidence Motion*

Opposition launched no-trust motion against PTI-led government on March 3, 2022. The motion was signed by the lawmakers of PML-N, PPP, JUI-F, ANP, BNP-M and some other parties. On March 8, the motion was submitted to the National Assembly. The session of NA started on 25<sup>th</sup> March and motion was presented on 28<sup>th</sup> of March. On 27<sup>th</sup> March in a public meeting PM disclosed that the motion against his government was a foreign funded conspiracy. On April 3, 2022, Deputy Speaker Qasim Sori ruled that the no-confidence motion is unconstitutional. The motion was rejected on the basis of foreign sponsored and adjourned the session of the assembly. Following speaker's ruling, PM Imran Khan advised President Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly. On the same day of April 3, President signed the summary to dissolve the NA. Supreme Court of Pakistan took suo moto on Deputy Speaker's ruling. After five days hearing on April 7, Supreme Court with one voice declared the government's ploy to subvert the April 3 vote of no-confidence and subsequent dissolution of NA was unconstitutional.

Imran Khan's stubborn insistence not to succeed opposition parties to oust him through a constitutional procedure had rendered the entire democratic process in Pakistan a farce. This was his choice not compulsion, having other options. He could have gracefully bowed before a constitutional process of no-confidence vote and prepared the party for the next election. Instead the country was pushed to a ceaseless constitutional crises, political instability, economic meltdown and severed foreign relations ("The reckoning," 2022). The Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered on April 7, to conduct the session of the Assembly on April 9<sup>th</sup> for the purpose of no-confidence resolution as order of the day issued for April 3 2022 (*Constitution Petition No.1 of 2022*, 2022).

Despite numerous political setbacks, at midnight on April 9, 2022, the alliance of PDM managed to oust Imran Khan as Prime Minister through a constitutional procedure of vote of no-confidence (Raza, 2022). This was the first case of its nature that a PM was ousted through a vote of no-confidence under 1973 constitution. Before this no-trust motion has been tabled against prime minister Benazir Bhutto in November 1989 by Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi of the combined opposition but she survived the motion. No-confidence motion was also launched against prime minister Shoukat Aziz in August 2006 by Qazi Hussain Ahmad of Jamaat-i-Islami, representing opposition's parties MMA and ARD. But again opposition failed to succeed in ousting prime minister from his office (Iqbal, 2023).

*PDM Coalition Government (2022-2023)*

After ousting Imran Khan through no-trust vote, a coalition government of PDM along with PPP and ANP was installed. Shehbaz Sharif of PML-N was elected as chief executive by getting 174 votes against the required 172 in the National Assembly. New PM took oath of his office on April 11, 2022. Shehbaz Sharif served as former Chief Minister of Punjab and is the younger brother of former three times Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

It is never easy for a coalition to rule, but it is even harder for a group of varied interests to deliver. The allied parties have an eye on the coming elections, therefore unable to carry out fundamental structural reforms in different sectors (Hussain, 2022). Before the no-confidence vote in April 2022, PML-N and JUI-F wanted early poll. But after the successful no trust vote, PML-N was divided over early elections. However, PPP insisted on letting the assemblies' complete constitutional term of five years. This suits the PPP as the party has government in Sindh, MNAs were getting developmental budgets and the political capital of PML-N was suffering for taking hard decisions to fix the economy. PML-N was the largest party and having highest exposure to the masses in taking tough decisions (Hussain, 2022).

*End of 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly and PDM Government*

15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly completed its constitutional five-year term in August 2023. After 2002, 2008 and 2013, this was the fourth National Assembly to complete constitutional five-year term. Two governments served during the life time of this assembly. The first was under the premiership of Imran Khan of PTI from 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2018 till April 9, 2022. The second was that of PDM led by Shehbaz Sharif of PML-N from April 11, 2022 to August 9, 2023. This assembly has a unique experience of successful vote of no-confidence in the parliamentary history of Pakistan against a Prime Minister (Yasin, 2023).

*PDM in Government*

In March 2022, PTI-led government was touching the bottom in popularity due to rising inflation and the inability to govern. Opposition parties came together around single point agenda of getting rid of Imran Khan government. After a successful vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan, PDM came into power. Shehbaz Sharif of PML-N became Prime Minister on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. With this the opposition alliance transformed into coalition government. It had seemed like a golden opportunity at the time- a chance to bury the 'hybrid regime' and reposition the parties that had been ignored since the general elections of

2018 as the real and deserving inheritors of Pakistan's political destiny. Unfortunately, those who took the reign of powers never did their homework. Economic situation worsened due to wasting months dilly-dallying over the best response ("Democracy lost," 2023).

In the last days of PTI government, commitment made with International Monetary Fund (IMF) were violated. This move of government derailed IMF program bringing Pakistan at the brink of default. Internal differences with in the partners in government led to further deterioration of economic situation of the country. Though government succeeded in getting IMF deal, but at a very high price. The government also faced political turmoil, as the ousted Imran Khan and his PTI had a lucky charm in the form of well-coordinated foreign conspiracy narrative. Protest movements and two long marches of the party paralyzed the government machinery. Surge in terrorist activities was another challenge for the government, straining relations with Afghanistan. Judiciary was also not very sympathetic with the coalition government of PDM ("PDM legacy," 2023).

One is now inclined to believe that ousting PTI government was never about principles. Those who criticized Imran Khan for being a puppet premier proved more enthusiastic to take his place. This proved that the two forces were in race that who are more loyal and obedient than other. They were struggling for government positions ("Democracy lost," 2023).

#### *Factors Responsible for the Formation of PDM*

The following factors were responsible for the formation of PDM.

1. To control power and by achieving that the allies will have access to the benefits associated with power holding. It means that policy factors have rare influence on alliance formation.
2. Multi-partyism is a factor contributing in alliance formation as no party commands overwhelming majority to challenge the setting government.
3. Removing the incumbent authoritarian government compels opposition political parties to join hands and challenge the setting government.
4. Confluence of interests among different political parties led to the alliance formation. Political parties needed each other support to face the government.
5. When major political parties adopted authoritative tactics in dealing with minor parties, the later resorted to alliance formation to challenge the major party. Denied breathing political space brought the opposition parties on one platform.

6. The leaders of party in power could not demonstrated maturity in their dealing with opposition political parties. Resultantly, the opposition parties opted to form alliances and started confrontational politics.

### Conclusion

Alliance formation has remained a key feature of Pakistan's political landscape. Various alliances amongst diverse ethnic, religious, and mainstream parties emerged in almost all critical moments in the history of Pakistan. Cultural and ethnic diversity and a pluralistic approach led to the multi-party system in the country. This feature of alliance politics is directly connected with the multi-party system prevalent in the country, along with an oppressive and authoritarian style of government. Major and minor political parties need help from fellow political parties to face the authoritarian regime, fare well in elections and have access to government offices. This compels political parties to enter into alliances with other parties.

In the post 2018 general elections scenario, various attempts were made to form a joint front against party in power. These attempts culminated in the form of PDM, formed in 2020 by ten opposition political parties to counterbalance the PTI led government. The alliance played vital role in the political landscape of Pakistan. For the first time in the history, a prime minister was ousted through vote of no-confidence. The alliance transformed into coalition government led by Shahbaz Sharif of PMLN. This coalition government lasted for 16 months from April 11, 2022 to August 9, 2023.

The study of the alliance revealed that it was formed as transitory movements to achieve limited objectives and to face a dominant political adversary. That is why alliance failed to achieve long-term political stability. Ideological differences, limited objectives, and political instability remained a permanent dilemma for almost all political alliances in the country along with PDM. Intra-alliance rivalries badly hurt the performance of coalition government. Component parties tried to advance party interests rather than alliance interests. The public at large supported the democratic process and political alliances for the sake of democracy. However, politicians defied popular trust and showed immaturity by changing loyalties in crucial times. The driving force behind the alliance and cementing factors of politicians was to overthrow the incumbent government of PTI, rather than democracy, alternate system of good governance, and viable socio-economic programs. The PDM formed in 2020, united diverse political parties under one umbrella to overthrow PTI's government. The alliance succeeded in this objective but failed to

replace it with a clean and transparent system with tangible reforms. The no-confidence motion against Imran Khan's government by PDM led to nothing else than destabilizing the political process and institutions in the country. After coming into power, the alliance abandoned the lofty promises and commitments to the nation and focused solely on ministerial positions.

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