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Elite Capture in Pakistan from 2018 to 2022: A Study of Political and Institutional Dynamics

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Abstract

Elite capture, the recurring process of intervention by the government and state that provides undue or unearned benefits or rents to the elite, has been an unwavering challenge to the democratic and developmental aspirations of Pakistan. This research study examines the dynamics of elite capture from 2018 to 2022. This study is qualitative in nature, based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data has been collected through interviews conducted with experts in the relevant field, which has then been analyzed through the technique of thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveal that elite capture was reinforced in the said era through institutional interference, electoral manipulation, and economic policies favoring the elite class. The study further suggests a need for structural reforms to mitigate elite dominance in the country.

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Introduction

The elite are those people who possess more power and wealth than the average citizen. They are superior to the rest of society in terms of capability, power, and authority. The term elite capture can be defined as the recurring process of intervention from the government and state that provide undue or unearned benefits or rents to the elite (Javed, 2024). Pakistan is home to the most unique types of elites, which control the maximum resources, have the most power, and embody the absolutist political agency. They manipulate the system the most. Dictatorial as well as civilian elites are the leading problem of the country. They are interdependent and serve each other. They need each other for the blame game.

In Pakistan, the elite are influential as they control economic resources of considerable economic value. This capture of economic resources allows them to capture the process of policy formulation. They influence the process of policy making to enhance their power, wealth, and influence. They act as a gang to capture a range of political institutions to consolidate their power and influence. They may capture the bureaucracy by placing their people in key administrative positions to exert influence over the government agencies. For capturing the legislature, they influence elections, fund political campaigns, and exert control over political representatives. They can also capture the executive, including to office of the Prime Minister and the President, by influencing appointments, policies, and the process of decision making (Muhammad, 2025).

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Literature Review

(Baig, 2022), states that inequality is not solely a concern for Pakistan; rather, it is a phenomenon that pervades both affluent and developing nations. A country experiencing relative economic progress may still exhibit significant disparities between wealth and poverty, often correspondingly influenced by variables such as race, ethnicity, and religion. Despite the idealistic assertions regarding a fair competitive environment fostered by market forces, governments continue to significantly influence the implementation of policies that serve to align economic benefits with elite groups.

According to (Ali S. M., 2022), elite capture, recognized as a pervasive global issue, constitutes a form of corruption in which public resources are appropriated for the advantage of a limited number of individuals or groups, frequently identified as the elite class, to the detriment of the broader populace. This phenomenon is, in part, attributable to the capitalist system. The dynamics between capital and labor within the capitalist economic framework present a compelling and complex interplay, where capital thrives and expands primarily through substantial inputs of labor as a factor of production.

(Ali S. M., 2022) has highlighted a report prepared from data available with the FBR and the Election Commission, further elaborates on the distinction between "*AwamKhas*" and "*AwamNaas*", and explains preferences of the ruling elite. According to this report, the income of the common Pakistanis has decreased, and the wealth of the members of the assembly has increased by 85%. In the last five years, the assets of the members of the Assembly have increased from 49 billion to 91 billion rupees. There was an increase of 250 percent in the assets of Imran Khan, 278 percent in the assets of Sheikh Rashid, 287 percent in the assets of Rana Sanaullah, 241 percent in the assets of Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and 200% in the assets of Chaudhry Pervez Elahi and his wife. Moreover, Munis Elahi's assets increased by 100%, Asif Ali Zardari's assets increased by 55%, and Hamza Shehbaz's assets increased by 22%. On the other hand, if we look at the condition of the common people, according to the Economic Survey of Pakistan, the per capita income of Pakistanis has decreased to 197 dollars in the last three years. For now, the comparison of certain areas cannot be presented here; otherwise, according to Asma Jahangir, the day the stories of their wealth come out, you will forget the politicians. Long story short, when and how will the people become the priority of the elite class? This is a question whose answer is far from vision (Khan I. Y., 2023).

Research Gap

Various research studies are available regarding the history of elite capture in Pakistan, including pre and post-partition history of elite capture, the role of elite in making Pakistan, circulation of elites, types of elites in Pakistan, and the implications of elite politics for democracy, etc. But no literature is available to show the dynamics of elite capture from 2018-2022. This study explores the evidence of elite capture in the political atmosphere of the country from 2018 to 2022.

Research Methodology

This research study is a qualitative study, addressing a single question, i.e. what are the political dynamics that scaffold elite capture in Pakistan (2018-2022)? The single objective of the study is to explore the political dynamics that scaffold elite capture in Pakistan (2018-2022). The study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data has been collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with experts in the relevant field. The data has then been analyzed through the technique of thematic analysis. The study has adopted the interpretivist paradigm, in terms of relativist ontological and subjectivist epistemological positions.

The 15th National Assembly of Pakistan

A FAFEN report on the data taken from 330 members of the 15th National Assembly of Pakistan, 172 members belonged to the agriculture or business class of the country, while the other 24 were feudal lords. 32 legislatures had declared themselves as full-time politicians and civil activists. Moreover, the assembly had 14 housewives and 13 practicing doctors. 35 members of this house had criminal cases pending against them in different courts. About one third (112) members of this house declared their assets worth between 11 million PKR and 50 million PKR, while 58 members had assets worth one to ten million PKR. 12 members had assets worth ranging between 501 million PKR to one billion PKR, while 5 members had their assets worth less than a million PKR. This house had 8 billionaires, with Noor Alam Khan being the wealthiest of all legislators. His net wealth, declared on the Form B of nomination papers for the elections of 2018, was more than 3.2 billion (FAFEN, 2018).

According to the statement of assets released by ECP in 2020, the number of billionaires in the National Assembly of Pakistan increased to 12. The 15th National Assembly was dominated by feudal lords and capitalists, with the majority of members having huge pieces of land, precious properties, industrial units, and huge investments in stocks. Those who have precious assets and were rolling in money included the top politicians from all the mainstream political parties (Ali & Khan , 2020).

The ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan, had shown his assets worth 38.69 million in his nomination papers for the elections of 2018, while his assets grew to 315 million, according to the documents he submitted alongside his nomination papers for the elections of 2024 (Khan I. A., 2024).

According to Azaz Syed, the 15th National Assembly of Pakistan consisted of a mix of members from different backgrounds, including the elite, middle, and working classes. However, this assembly may be considered an elitist assembly because it represented the interests of the elite class to the exclusion of other segments of society (Syed A. , 2024).

Khan's Cabinet

The cabinet of Imran Khan was composed of 33 federal ministers, seven ministers of state, and ten advisors to the Prime Minister. A huge club of special assistants, composed of 35 assistants, was also appointed by the then PM to assist him in different affairs. This huge cabinet was composed of elite from different categories including corporate elite like Razak Dawood, Faisal Wawda,

Hamad Azhar, KhusroBakhtiar, Omar Ayub, Azam Swati and Monis Elahi etc., feudal lords like Ghulam Sarwar Khan, retired bureaucrats like Shafqat Mehmood, retired military officers like Ijaz Shah and religious elite like Noor-ul-haq Qadri. The ministers holding important portfolios like Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Pervez Khatak, Fakhar Imam, Sahebzada Mehboob Sultan, and Malik Amin Aslam had studied in Aitchison College. The other members of the cabinet had also studied in elite educational institutions like Cadet College Hassanabdal and Karachi Grammar School. Some of them also have Bachelor's, Master and Doctoral degrees from foreign universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and the University of California.

The Rise of Imran Khan

Despite the full support of the then DG-ISI General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, Imran Khan was unable to make a good showing in the elections of 2013 as his party was still organizationally weak. Later, General Zaheer aimed to oust Nawaz Sharif by force (Sethi, 2024). Nawaz also confronted General Raheel Sharif, the then army chief, but he did nothing against him.

In 2017, General Faiz Hameed, the then DG Counterterrorism and then DG ISI, under the new army chief Qamar JavedBajwa, shunted a conspiracy to the judiciary under the then Chief Justice Saqib Nisar and senior puisne judge Asif Khosa to oust the then PM Nawaz Sharif. Then in the 2018 elections, RTS was broken down to swing a few dozen seats from Nawaz to Khan. Jahangir Tareen was tasked to herd a few dozen independent MNAs into PTI's camp, small Baluch parties were bought off, and Imran was installed in Islamabad with a fragile majority.

With the ascent of Khan to the office of Prime Minister, the establishment found a perfect civilian setup, which solidified the status quo in the name of change. Imran's government provided a smooth ground for the establishment to expand its influence. The PTI government was dependent upon the military establishment due to its lack of majority in the center as well as in Punjab. Several important trends that supported the "same page" hypothesis include the decision of the PTI government to defend Gen. Musharraf by taking the plea that he was never given a fair chance to defend himself, and he was represented in the court by the then federal law minister, Faroogh Naseem. Apart from this, the PTI government also gave an extension in the tenure of Gen. Bajwa. Khan's cabinet was also an example of the increasing militarization of civil decision-making. The PTI cabinet at the center presented a reincarnation of Musharraf's cabinet. This cabinet was also composed of a large number of unelected technocrats (Faiz, 2022).

The fall of Imran Khan

After becoming PM, Imran Khan gradually gained the courage to resist the army's control. Khan's relations with the military establishment started worsening when he unceremoniously removed Gen. Munir as DG ISI in June 2019. In 2021, when Khan denied the change of Lt Gen. Faiz Hameed from the post of DG ISI by Gen. Bajwa, the then COAS, it further widened the cracks in civil-military cordiality. The chasm between Khan and the military widened when Khan considered not giving an additional extension to Gen. Bajwa as COAS. It was considered that Khan wanted to control the army like the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and make himself all-powerful. The tension increased when Khan adopted a foreign policy against the views

of the COAS and his top commanders. His Islamist and anti-US rhetoric and his economic inability increasingly unpleased the army. The top brass of the military was further enraged when Khan claimed that the military wanted to blackmail his government. Finally, the military concluded that the PM Imran Khan was unbearable and supported his ouster from office in April 2022 (Wolf S. O., 2023).

According to Dr. Usman Khan, the Imran regime also became the victim of elite capture. He remained in office until he enjoyed the support of the military elite, but when he challenged the military establishment, he was ousted (Khan D. U., 2023).

COAS Gen. Bajwa Extension

General Qamar JavedBajwa joined the Pakistan Army in 1978 and got commissioned on 24th October, 1980. He succeeded General Raheel Sharif on 29th November 2016 as Army Chief. He was to retire on November 29, 2019, but he was given an extension by the then PM Imran Khan for a term of three years on 19th of August 2019, but on November 28 the apex court suspended the order of the government as there was no law to extend the tenure of army chief. However, the Supreme Court gave an extension of six months to General Bajwa after being assured by the government that parliament would pass a law regarding the reappointment/extension of the army act within six months. Finally, he was given an extension on January 28, 2020, after the parliament passed a law to settle the issue pertaining to the extension of the tenure of the army chief (Shah S. , 2022).

The government claimed that the extension was given on the grounds of regional security challenges. However, some critics consider this decision as favoritism towards the military establishment and an attempt to maintain hold over the key institutions by a select elite.

Rigging Cases in the Election 2018

In the elections of 2018, Qasim Suri, the candidate of PTI, was declared the winning candidate from NA 265 (Quetta II) by the Election Commission of Pakistan. The runner-up candidate of the Baluchistan National Party, Nawab Lashkari Raisani, accused him of rigging in the elections and challenged his victory with a petition seeking an investigation. The elections in this constituency were declared null and void by the election tribunal (Nihad & Shah, 2019). Following this decision, Qasim Suri challenged the decision in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The then chief justice of the Supreme Court rejected the decision of the election tribunal, restored Qasim Suri as a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and stayed the decision of re-election (Bhatti, 2019). Hence, Qasim Suri enjoyed the perks and position of Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan in a disputed way.

One of my respondents, Saleem Safi, a renowned journalist of Jang-Geo group, declared this case the worst example of elite capture in Pakistan (Safi, 2024).

Similarly, in the general elections of 2018, the constituency of NA-131 witnessed a fierce contest between PTI supremo Imran Khan and PML-N's stalwart Khwaja Saad Rafique. Khan secured

victory with a narrow margin of 84313, defeating Saad Rafique, who got 83633 votes. Saad Rafique requested for recount of the rejected votes, which was accepted by the returning officer, Akhtar Bhangoo. The votes of PML-N increased, but not enough to defeat Imran Khan (Tribune, 2019). Saad Rafique again requested for recount of all votes in NA-131, but the returning officer rejected the request, although the request was not unlawful as the margin of victory was less than 5% of the total votes cast. Saad Rafique appealed in the Lahore High Court, which ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan to withhold the result until a recount. The Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan, Saqib Nisar, suspended the order of the Lahore High Court for recount in NA-131 (Sethi, 2024).

Contracts given to NLC

According to the report submitted to the Islamabad High Court by the counsel for a private firm that challenged the award of contracts to NLC and FWO without inviting tenders and a competitive process, WAPDA had given the contract of the Greater Karachi Bulk Water supply scheme worth Rs. 126 billion to a joint venture of FWO, NLC, KS&EW, and RailCorp (Asad, 2023).

According to the petition filed in Islamabad High Court, the CDA awarded a contract of Rs. 10.2bn to NLC for the construction of 10th Avenue, a contract of Rs. 2.4bn was given to FWO for expansion of Islamabad Express Way, the contract of Sihala Flyover of Rs. 770mn was also given to FWO, Rs. 1.5bn was given to both FWO and NLC for the 7th Avenue Interchange project, and the project of Islamabad Metro Bus worth Rs. 20bn was also given to FWO and NLC. Moreover, Rs. 10.9bn was given to FWO for the project of GT Road expansion, Rs. 6.5bn for Bhara Kahu bypass to NLC, Rs. 15.3bn for a low-cost housing project at Farash Town to FWO, and Rs. 1.9bn for the expansion of Park Road to NLC. Contacts for the construction of C-14, C-15, and the development of the I-15 sector of CDA were also given to FWO and NLC. The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) also gave Rs. 22.8bn for Rawalpindi Ring Road and Rs. 4.99bn for Kutchery Chowk remodeling projects to NLC and FWO. The report disclosed that the NHA gave the Swan Bridge project to FWO (Asad, 2023).

According to this report, the contract for the collection of tolls on motorways was also awarded to FWO for 10 years without any process of competition. Other major projects awarded to FWO during the government of PTI were,

1. Construction of Diamer-Bhasha Dam
2. Construction of Mohmand Dam
3. Construction of Gwadar-Ratodero Motorway
4. Construction of Mansehra-Muzaffarabad-Mirpur Expressway
5. Construction of Chakdara-Chitral Road
6. Construction of Khyber Pass Economic Corridor
7. Construction of Lyari Expressway Extension in Karachi
8. Construction of Circular Railway in Karachi
9. Rehabilitation of the Indus Highway in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
10. Construction of Skardu-Leh Road in Gilgit-Baltistan

In May 2020, the government of Pakistan signed a contract of Rs. 442 billion with a joint venture of China Power and FWO for the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha dam. The Chinese state-run firm held shares of 70% while the remaining 30% belonged to FWO in the consortium (Kiani, 2020).

Another major contract for the construction of Mohmand dam, worth Rs 300 billion, was awarded to China Gezhouba, Descon, and Voith Hydro. Descon is the company owned by Razzaq Daud, the then advisor to the Prime Minister on commerce and industry. The construction of the dam began in May 2019 (DAWN, 2019).

The contract for the FIFA World Cup in Qatar was also given to the Pakistani army. Islamabad sent more than 4500 infantry troops to provide security at the FIFA World Cup 2022. Keeping the Pakistani army relations with Qatar, the government of Qatar demanded the deployment of troops. The contingent that departed from Nur Khan Airbase was comprised of army officers, junior commissioned officers, and other Pakistan army personnel (Shehzad, 2022).

Senate Election of 2018

In order to fill in the vacancies for 52 retiring senators, elections were held in March 2018. The political wrangling that took place with a nod from the establishment showed that these elections were a dry run to keep PML-N out of power. The Election Commission of Pakistan declared the senate nominees of PML-N as independent candidates because they were nominated by Nawaz Sharif, whose all official decisions being the president of the party were nullified by the Supreme Court. The PML-N, despite having a majority of seats in the senate, failed to elect its member for the chairman and deputy chairmanship (VIF, 2018).

Sugar Crises 2019

The sugar scandal in Pakistan in 2019 involved allegations of price manipulation, hoarding, and unfair practices within the sugar industry. It was revealed that several prominent politicians and businessmen were allegedly involved in these activities, leading to widespread public outcry and investigations by government agencies. The scandal shed light on the lack of transparency and accountability within the country's sugar industry and prompted calls for reforms to prevent such incidents in the future.

Pakistan is the 6th largest sugar cane producer and 9th largest sugar producer in the world, while it ranks number 9 in consuming sugar. In the past few years, the production of sugar has been more than the local requirements, so it has been exported. But the production decreased in 2018-19, and the export continued, due to which the country faced a shortage of sugar, and hence the price of sugar increased. During this era, sugar mills got an export-related subsidy, and a few mill owners got maximum benefit from the crisis. The Sugar Advisory Board failed to ban the sugar export. The export subsidy was only given by the government of Punjab (Zia U. , 2020).

The government of Imran Khan set up an inquiry commission to investigate the crisis. The commission was tasked with probing into the reasons behind the price hike, hoarding, and other

irregularities within the sugar industry. The commission was headed by the then DG FIA, Wajid Zia, comprising a senior officer of the Intelligence Bureau and the DG Anti-Corruption Punjab (Rana, 2020).

The sugar crisis report was made public on April 4, 2020, exposing the bigwigs of PTI, Jahangir Tareen, the leader of the allied parties, and Minister of Food Security, KhusroBakhtiar, and PML-Q's Monisillahi as being involved in the scam.

According to the report, the two main groups that obtained maximum benefits during the crisis were JWD of Tareen, which has six mills, and received 12.28% of the total export subsidy, equal to an amount of Rs 3.058bn during 2015-18. The other partner in this group was Makhdoom Syed Ahmad Mehmood. The RYK group was the other group, composed of four mills owned by Makhdoom Umar Shehriyar, Monis Elahi of PML-Q, and Chudry Munir of PML-N. This group availed a total of 15.83% export subsidy, equal to Rs. 3.944bn during 2015-18 (Raza, 2020).

According to this report, the exporters got benefits in two ways, first in gaining subsidies and second by making a profit from increasing sugar prices in the local market from Rs. 55 per kg in December 2018 to Rs. 77.44 in June 2019.

In Pakistan, for decades, the sugar producers have created an artificial shortage by controlling supplies in the market, which has caused an increase in prices. Thus, benefit is gained by sugar mill owners, the hoarders, and the wholesalers. This time also, the sugar mill owners got a subsidy of Rs. 10 per kg by making a false statement that the price of sugar in Pakistan was lower than those in the world. In this way, the government of Punjab paid them a subsidy of Rs. 20 billion, and an equal subsidy was also provided by the government of Sindh to the sugar mill owners. Such tricks have been played by the cartels for decades, robbing the government as well as the public (Raees, 2020).

Wheat Crisis

Wheat is the most important agricultural crop in Pakistan. It has been planted on about 22 million acres and is grown by 80% of farmers. Punjab stands first in wheat production by allocating 16 million acres for this, followed by Sindh, KP, and Baluchistan, with almost equal production. Wheat contributes 72% to the food basket of Pakistan (Anjum, 2021).

When PTI took over power in August 2018, the price of wheat flour was Rs. 50 per kg. Since the inception of the government of PTI, there has been an increase of Rs. 20 per kg in the price of flour, which reached Rs. 70 per Kg. The price of the flour was increased by the FMA because they claimed that they did not receive any subsidy on raw materials, gas, and electricity (Wasim, 2020).

The subsidy schemes of the government have sent the wrong message to the producers. The undue intervention of the market has given way to hoarders and a black market. Despite the ban imposed on the export of wheat in July 2019, the government allowed the export of 48000 tons, which caused a price hike in the country (Javed & Salman, 2020).

For decades, the artificial shortage has been produced by the traders by controlling supplies in the market to cause sharpness in the prices. In November, at the time of sowing the crop, the government fixes the purchase prices to incentivize the farmers to produce more. There is a food department in each province that procures wheat during the harvesting season in April-May. In the past, the governments have bought a lesser quantity for building reserves than was available. Under pressure, farmers pay bribes to officials or sell wheat at a lower price to traders who buy for hoarding. According to the report of the FIA, the high officials, responsible for opening the procurement center, deliberately delayed it to bring the farmers under pressure, as they cannot store or risk leaving the crop ready in the fields (Raees, 2020).

Temporary Economic Refinance Facility of the State Bank of Pakistan

The State Bank of Pakistan initiated this program in March 2020, for a duration of one year, in response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary objective of this scheme was to encourage businesses to maintain their investment initiatives rather than suspending them in light of challenging economic conditions. Participants in this initiative were granted loans at an interest rate ranging from 3% to 5%. The "Technology Exchange and Resilience Fund" (TERF) was designed to support investments in equipment, machinery, and plants to promote new industrialization. The financing decisions made by banks hinged on the feasibility and practicality of proposed projects, as well as the ability of companies to generate sufficient revenue and service the loans (Siddiqui S. , 2021).

Funding through the TERF was accessible to all sectors except the power sector. The scheme was intended to facilitate the acquisition of both domestically produced and imported machinery and equipment for the establishment of new projects, with a maximum funding cap of 5 billion PKR per initiative (Siddiqui, 2021).

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) refused to reveal the names of those persons in a general meeting of the Public Accounts Committee of the Pakistani Parliament, who had taken interest-free loans of three billion dollars during the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf regime. These loans worth billions of dollars were given during the global pandemic of coronavirus. The Public Accounts Committee meeting on Wednesday, July 5, 2023, was told that since the State Bank had given these loans through commercial banks, the names of such borrowers could not be disclosed due to privacy laws.

Ahmed Chinoy, director of the Pakistan Stock Exchange, seems to agree that no effective policy was put in place before these loans were granted. He told DW, "Three billion dollars were given as loans, but no committee was formed to monitor them, and no consideration was given to which sector or industry in the country has the most need." It is believed that at the time these loans were granted, it was claimed that after the three billion dollar loans, the country's exports would increase by nine billion dollars. But many critics believe that they did not see any signs of economic development even after giving such huge amounts.

Dr. Qais Aslam told DW, "It means there is no progress." It has become the duty of every government to reward the textile industry in Pakistan. All the governments from General Zia to date have blessed the textile industry. But it is never asked how many jobs it has created, how much it has increased exports, and how much it has collected in taxes for the government. According to him, the amount of three billion dollars is a big thing for a small economy like Pakistan. "If our rulers were wise, they would have invested the same three billion dollars in energy projects, due to which we would have gotten rid of the revolving debt, and the state of our economy would have improved."

Dr. IkramulHaq, an expert in economic affairs, says that if the government had given a loan of three billion dollars to the common people at a reasonable interest rate, billions of rupees would have accumulated in the national treasury. According to him, those who took this loan and did not use it properly have damaged the national treasury. He said, "State Bank does not want to hide the names of such people. Under Article 19A of the Constitution, such information cannot be withheld. If the hard-earned money of the people has been rewarded to a few, then there should be proper accountability for this process".

Spy Cameras in Polling Booth in Senate

During the elections of Chairman of the Senate in March 2021, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar said in a message on the micro-blogging website Twitter, "I and Dr. Mossadeq Malik traced the cameras installed just above the polling booth." In his tweet, he also shared a picture of the alleged hidden cameras. (BBC, 2021).

On the other hand, Dr. Mossadeq Malik of the Muslim League (N) also said in his message that what a joke, secret/hidden cameras were installed in the polling booth of the Senate. He also shared 2 pictures in his tweet. After the swearing-in ceremony of the senators, Senator Raza Rabbani of the People's Party objected to the alleged installation of secret cameras, after which the protest of the opposition members turned the House into a fish market. However, the presiding officer refused to discuss any matter off the agenda, but instructed the removal of the existing polling booth and the installation of a new polling booth (Khan I. A., 2021).

In this regard, while talking to the media representatives outside the Parliament House, Senator Mossadeq Malik said that on the instructions of the party, he and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar came to check the polling booth, where 2 secret cameras were installed on the top of the booth in which one was facing the voters, while the focus of the other was on the ballot paper. He said that the security of the Senate is the responsibility of the administration. In this case, someone went inside and installed cameras in the polling booth. He also said that there was a lamp with a hole in it, and no one knew how many microphones were installed in it. He claimed that there was also a device attached to the bottom of the booth, which appeared to be a camera with a microphone, as it was sealed, so it was difficult to tell whether it was a microphone or a camera.

Speaking about this, Senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar said that the important thing was that before the elections, the responsibility of the security of the House was the responsibility of the Chairman, the Secretary Senate, and their Head of Security. How did the violation occur? He said

that if these three persons were involved in the breach of security, at whose behest the Secretary Senate allowed the doors of the House to be opened, in the evening or at night, when no one was present. The leader of the People's Party said that this responsibility belonged to the then Chairman Senate, who was also a candidate in it, so it meant that it was a plan to steal the elections, which was caught, and then the responsible parties had to be determined. He alleged establishment for installing these cameras (BBC, 2021).

In my opinion, installing secret cameras over the polling booth in the Senate could be seen as an example of elite capture because elite capture is the manipulation by powerful groups or individuals to control or influence the process of decision-making for their benefit. In this case, spy cameras were installed to change the process of elections in favor of a particular candidate or party through illegitimate means at the expense of the principles of fairness, transparency, and democracy.

Million Pound Case and Al-Qadir Trust

In 2019, the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) investigated Malik Riaz, and as a result of the investigation, Malik Riaz deposited 190 million pounds to the NCA under a settlement. The NCA said that the amount of 190 million pounds received as a result of this settlement was owned by the state of Pakistan; consequently, that was transferred to Pakistan. However, under a cabinet decision on arrival in Pakistan, the money reached the account of the Supreme Court instead of the national exchequer, as Malik Riaz had to pay Rs. 460 billion to the Supreme Court of Pakistan in installments, through a settlement in the Bahria Town Karachi case (Ali N. S., 2021).

In October 2022, the NAB launched an investigation into the matter. According to NAB documents, on December 3, 2019, in the cabinet meeting chaired by Imran Khan, it was decided to indirectly transfer the Rs. 50 billion to Malik Riaz, which was received by the Pakistani government from the UK. The money was seized by the British National Crime Agency (NCA) on allegations of money laundering from property tycoon Malik Riaz. Thus, according to the NAB, the seized money, owned by Pakistan, was spent to fulfill Malik Riaz's interests in light of the cabinet decision, chaired by the former Prime Minister Imran Khan. The matter was declared highly sensitive and was kept confidential.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan, on December 26, 2019, registered a trust for the Al–Qadir University project within a few weeks of the cabinet's decision regarding the real estate developer, which later became a donor for the university. According to the NAB, just three weeks before the registration of the trust, Imran Khan's cabinet decided to return the money to Malik Riaz, indirectly, which was received from the National Crime Agency of the UK. According to NAB, Malik Riaz, the owner of Bahria Town, had donated 458 kanals, 4 marlas, and 58 square feet of land in Jhelum district to the then Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife for Al–Qadir Trust University (Syed, 2024).

In this regard, in his statement on Twitter, Malik Riaz had said that some ordinary critics were changing the NCA report and did not present it in its original shape. He said, "I sold my legal and

declared property in the UK to pay 190 M pounds to the Supreme Court of Pakistan against Behria Town Karachi".

According to the NAB, former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Shahzad Akbar, was a key person involved in the case. He and the former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, had been misleading their cabinet by hiding the facts and documents regarding the settlement agreement (Hussnain, 2023).

This case of 190 million pounds is a vivid example of elite capture in Pakistan, in which the special assistant to the PM on accountability, Shehzad Akbar, was allowed to present a non-agenda item. It was a sealed envelope containing a non-disclosure agreement. Shireen Mazari, the then Minister of Human Rights, objected that what approval were they giving when they did not even know about its contents. The cabinet was told that if the envelope was opened, there were implications for national security, and the government of the United Kingdom also had its reservations. In this country, on the pretext of a secret agreement, the matter was swept under the carpet, despite the claims to hold the corrupt people to account and bring back the ill-gotten gains stashed abroad by Pakistanis. Khan's government was curiously tight-lipped about the asset's forfeiture deal. This case shows the mutually beneficial relationship that existed among the Pakistani rarefied elites (Ali N. S., 2021).

Elite Capture of the Key Positions

Before coming to power, Imran Khan constantly proclaimed that he believed in the policy of the right man on the right job. But he did quite the opposite when he came to power. It had been seen in the appointments of his cabinet, where this philosophy was badly ignored (Sethi, 2024).

Apart from this, the number of military officials who were leading civilian institutions also increased since Khan came into power in 2018. In addition to the federal government of Pakistan, retired and serving military officers have also worked during this era in many important positions in the four provincial governments. Brigadier Ijaz Shah, a retired army officer, was the federal Interior Minister in Khan's cabinet. He has been the chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Punjab and also the former Director General Intelligence Bureau. Similarly, the former spokesperson of the Pakistan Army and former Corps Commander Quetta, Lt. Gen. (Rtd) Asim Saleem Bajwa, was appointed as the Chairman of CPEC Authority and Special Assistant for Information and Broadcasting. The Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority was Shahrukh Nusrat, a retired squadron leader of the Pakistan Air Force, with whom many retired officers of the Air Force were working. The Chairman of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) was Major General (Rtd) Aamir Azim. The post of Chairman of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was held by a serving Air Marshal of Pakistan Air Force, Arshad Mahmood Malik. Lt Gen (Rtd) Muzammil Hussain was the Chairman of WAPDA. The post of Director General of Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) had been held by a serving Major General of the Pakistan Army for a long time, and Major General Arif Malik was appointed DG ANF in October 2018. In 2018, Major General Amer Nadeem was also appointed as the chairman of SUPARCO, the national space agency. The post of Chief of the Airport Security Force (ASF) was held by a serving two-star army officer, Major General ZafarulHaq. Punjab Public Service Commission was headed by

Lieutenant General (Rtd) Maqsood Ahmed. Along with him, two retired officers, Major General Ashraf Tabasim and Captain Khalid Pervez, were also members of this commission. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was headed by a three-star serving general, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Afzal.

Even diplomatic positions had been taken over by the generals, who have largely been held by civilians since independence. The Pakistani ambassadors to KSA, Jordan, Brunei, Syria, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Libya, and Nigeria were retired military officials in the Imran Era.

Dr. Tauseef Ahmad, a renowned political analyst from Karachi, said that Imran Khan was the civilian face of the military, adding that these appointments of military officials to civil posts created frustration and resentment among the civil bureaucracy. The military has always had an upper hand in the politics of the country. Although before the Imran regime, its role was limited to foreign policy and defense affairs, in the era of PM Imran Khan, for the first time military has encroached on civilian areas with such ferocity.

State Bank of Pakistan Amendment Bill, 2021

Through the SBP amendment bill, 2021, as many as 54 amendments, including 10 new sections, were introduced to the SBP Act 1956, which was approved by Khan's cabinet on 3rd March, 2021. This amendment bill included the domestic price stability as the primary objective of the State Bank of Pakistan. In order to achieve this objective, it was held that the SBP would be guided by the mid-term inflation target set by the government. The tertiary objective of the SBP was to support the development agenda of the government. The central bank would continue the government's policies for economic growth, but the primary objectives of price and financial stability would be given priority (Gurmani, 2022).

This amendment bill gives complete autonomy to the central bank and restricts the government from borrowing from the central bank. Now the government can borrow from commercial banks at a high interest rate. This act hampers the central bank as well as the government from taking action for the welfare of the populace of the country. The SBP Amendment Act, 2021, increased the role of the State Bank in the free determination of monetary and exchange rate policies. This bill also reset the state bank's core rationale and prevented the intervention of the elected government in the affairs of the state bank. Apart from this, the top officials of the state bank got unprecedented autonomy as no agency, including NAB, FIA, or any other provincial or central government, had. The governor of SBP cannot be dismissed anymore by the president of Pakistan in case of any crime. Only the judiciary can take action in this regard. This act also extended the duration of the appointment of the governor of SBP from 3 to 5 years (Tanvir, 2021).

The passage of the bill was one of the conditions set by the IMF to release $1 billion to the country. Senior politician and the ex-governor of Sindh, Muhammad Zubair, claimed that Raza Baqar, the then governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, was an employee of the IMF, and after the development of the economic conditions of the country, he would return to his original organization. According to Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan, a veteran economist, and Miftah Ismail, the

former finance minister of Pakistan, the governor of SBP has been made the financial viceroy of the country through this act.

This bill is a compromise on the economic sovereignty of the country, as it gives complete autonomy to the SPB to make economic decisions independently. It restricted the government to borrowing only at a market rate from commercial banks, which benefited private banks owned by the business elite. This bill brought the national security and assets under severe strain and scrutiny. The bill was given too much importance, which is evident from the fact that Senator Zarqa arrived at the house for voting on the bill with an oxygen cylinder. The bill was also supported by PPP (Rana, 2022).

According to the former Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the government has surrendered the reins of the economy of country to the IMF, which would result in havoc. He added that the government would not be able to make any policy for the betterment of the masses without the will of the SBP. According to Abbasi, the SBP was given absolute autonomy as it was not answerable to the government or parliament, and the government and parliament would not be able to remove the governor, deputy governor, and board members. He warned that the SBP would also use its powers to exchange economic information with the IMF and other countries (Mehmood, 2022).

According the Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, it was a black day for the parliament, which sold the state bank, which was inaugurated by the father of the nation, to the IMF. This bill was not prepared by the parliament, but it was drafted by the IMF and sent to the Pakistani parliament for approval. It is a compromise over the legislative authority of the country. This bill had made the governor of the state bank the viceroy of the country and the IMF the East India Company (Khan M. A., 2022).

The SBP amendment has significant implications within the framework of the theory of extractive institutions. The amendment gave autonomy and independence to the SBP. The amendment has shifted decision-making authority in monetary policy from democratic oversight. This can open ways for elite groups to influence the policies of SBP for their benefit. This too much autonomy given to SBP would reduce transparency and enable the elite to manipulate the economic conditions without oversight. This amendment aims to maintain the stability of currency without considering its implications for the low-income section of society.

PECA Amendment Ordinance 2022

In February 2022, approval was taken from the Federal Cabinet to amend the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, through an ordinance. In which the punishment of up to five years of imprisonment was proposed for those who criticized the military, judiciary, and other government institutions. Defamation of people on social media has been declared a punishable offence. These amendments were introduced in the laws governing social media in Pakistan, which were promulgated by the President, Dr. ArifAlvi, through the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PECA) Amendment Ordinance. Under this ordinance, the definition of ‘person’ has been changed. According to the new amendments, “person” includes any company, association,

institution, or authority, while the ordinance increased the imprisonment from three to five years for attacking the identity of any person. The former Law Minister Farogh Naseem, a member of Prime Minister Imran Khan's federal cabinet, made it clear, while at a press conference, that under the PECA Ordinance, there would be no bail for those who spread fake news and no one would get immunity. He stated that the law was very important to eradicate fake news, as fake news spreaders would be punished for five years instead of three years. He further said that this offense would not be bailable, and the offender would be arrested without a warrant. The Law Minister had further said that the PECA law would be for everyone, and a common citizen can also complain against false news related to well-known personalities (Sadiqui, 2022).

The ordinance was criticized by various stakeholders, including the public, due to the potential for abuse of the law against those who criticize the policies of the government and individuals, and was termed an attack on the freedom of expression. In a joint statement, different media bodies, including the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors, All Pakistan Newspaper Society, and others, criticized the ordinance and declared it a blatant move to stifle the independence of the media, freedom of speech, and dissenting voices. They further added that the government wanted to push through its draconian agenda through various presidential ordinances (Kamran, 2022).

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), along with some other plaintiffs, filed a petition in the court against this ordinance, and the Secretary to the President, the Federation, the Secretary of Law, and the Secretary of Information were made parties in the petition.

According to the petition, the government had already prepared the draft, waiting for the session to end, to avoid legislation. The meeting of the National Assembly was scheduled on February 18, but it was postponed at the last minute. The plea contended that the journalists were illegally arrested under the same law, which had been amended to make it more stringent. The addition of Section 44A to the PECA Act by the Ordinance was declared against the independence of the Judiciary. No country could survive with an authoritarian regime where people are imprisoned for exercising their fundamental right of expression. It was requested that the amendment of the PECA law should be declared against the Constitution of Pakistan and fundamental rights.

The Islamabad High Court issued a four-page judgment in the case, stating that all proceedings under the PECA Ordinance are null and void, and the persons affected by the Ordinance may approach the relevant forum. The court's judgment said that the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance was a mockery of the Constitution and fundamental rights given in Articles 9, 14, 19, and 19-A of the Constitution (Naseer, 2022).

The proponents of this ordinance argue that the amendment was necessary to address the emerging challenges in combating electronic crimes, including online harassment, cyberbullying, and spreading misinformation. They declared that updating laws was essential to protect individuals and secure cyberspace. On the other hand, critics criticized the ordinance and declared it a restriction on the freedom of speech and private rights.

Conclusion

Elite capture is a terrifying challenge to institutional, economic, and political development in Pakistan. Despite the reformist agenda of Imran Khan, this era shows a complete dominance of the elite over the political landscape of the country. They have controlled the political process, political structures, and the process of policy formulation. Many interventions have been seen in this era from the military establishment in the affairs of other institutions like the judiciary, the parliament, the election commission, and political parties. Parallel to the military elite, other elite classes like political, judicial, feudal, and corporate elites have also served their interests in the same era, which can be seen in the legislation of the parliament, judicial decisions, and presidential ordinances etc.

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