REVIEW OF CRIME, PEACE AND SOCIETY
ISSN (O): 3079-6105, ISSN (P): 3079-6091
Vol. 3, No. 8, 2026, 265-286

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES TO GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL RECONCILIATION

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Abstract

The political development in Pakistan during PML-N's government from 2013 to 2018 has been examined in this study, focusing on how to rebuild the complex course of democracy after years of military rule and political instability. The main objective of this paper is to examine the democratic transition in Pakistan and to investigate the challenges related to political stability, governance issues, civil military relations and political reconciliation. During PML-N government five constitutional amendments were incorporated. The aim of this study is to analyze the change that took place in the political scenario of Pakistan between 2013 to 2018. Both primary as well as secondary data have been analyzed through thematic analysis. It adopts a Case Study Research Design coupled with relativist ontological and subjectivist epistemological positions The key findings suggest that although, between 2013 to 2018 Pakistan made improvement in electoral continuity, yet political confrontation, weak governance, limited political consensus and weak institutions continued to hinder democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

Article History
Received 22 September 2026
Accepted 14 October 2026
Published 20 October 2026
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OPEN ACCESS
Keywords
National Assembly, Constitutional Amendments, Transition, Pakistan, Parliament.

Introduction

A democratic state is where not only the rights of the people are guaranteed but also safeguarded (Robinson, 2006). In Pakistan, a challenging journey has been witnessed by democracy, marked by frequent disturbances, weak institutions, and power fights among the key stakeholders. Pakistan has swapped among the key actors affecting the political landscape. governments since its formation, causing an unpredictable drive of Democratic Consolidation. Pakistan was established on the basis of democracy but fragile institutions and feeble parliamentary traditions polluted its political scenario. Pakistan is a country where civil liberties of the people are limited. However, democratic desires still persevered, with political mobilization, civil society engagement, and electoral processes which play a critical role to resist authoritarianism and to advocate a representative government system (Iqbal et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, the development of democratic governance has been shaped by a number of critical moments, including the restoration of civilian rule in 2008. (Ali, 2024). To elect the

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members of National and Provincial Assemblies, the general elections were held in May 2013 in Pakistan. These elections were considered crucial in the political history of Pakistan, because it was for the first time that an elected government peacefully transferred power to a new elected government. PML-N won the elections, Mamnoon Hussain became the President, while Mian Nawaz Sharif became the Prime Minister of Pakistan. (Iqbal et al., 2022)

The PML-N has served in both government and opposition at different times. It conducted judicial enquiries and lead political agreements. Owing to an increased public demand for accountability and transparency, it introduces electoral reforms, and judicial activism within the changing scenario. This constitutes wider tensions and a wholesome struggle for institutional development, civilian hegemony and the rule of law. Pakistan Muslim League-N has placed itself as a center-right party, that advocated for the promotion of Islamic conservatism fused with pro-business policies, economic liberalization, and infrastructural development (Ali, 2024). In 2013, after the completion of five years' term in office, the elected government handed over power to another popularly elected government. (Malik, 2014)

Pakistan Muslim League-N from 2013 to 2018 followed a consensus-seeking approach in various fronts of legislations. It passed the 21st Amendment (2015) with the grudging support of PPP and PTI, setting up short-term military courts to deal with terrorism cases. However, a consensus was reached on national security grounds as there were potential terrorist threats.

The PTI went to the National Assembly for the first time in 2013 as the third largest party. However, during the dharna period (August 2014 to early 2015) and afterwards, the PTI lawmakers boycotted parliamentary sessions. However, despite this success, tensions and new political polarizations continued to emerge, especially between PTI and the establishment, becoming increasingly evident in party manifestoes and media discourse. (Jamil et al., 2025)

From 2013 to 2018, the 14th National Assembly improved legislation in almost all governmental departments. It encompasses 21st to 25th Amendments which increasing the role of opposition and its leaders in committee system particularly in Public Account Committee (PAC), and their participation in the preparation of annual budget, women participation in parliamentary matters and executive procedures, electoral reforms and restructuring of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and a spontaneous grant of provincial autonomy (Kanwal, 2017). The 14th National Assembly like its predecessor completed its five-year term, which was seen for the second time in the history of Pakistan. A smooth and nonviolent transition of power from one to the other civilian elected governments took place. These landmark and historical developments can be considered as trendsetter. Despite the challenges, this era could be characterized by political, democratic, social and financial development. The Elections Act of 2017, has been passed by the 14th National Assembly which aimed at reforming the system of criminal justice by reducing litigation costs, guaranteeing security to witnesses and speedy clearance of law suits. It also took serious actions regarding right to information, climate change, and it carried reforms in the institutions. (Kanwal, 2017). Thus the period of the 14th National Assembly can be considered distinctive in the history of Pakistan's legislature in term of democratic development. (Bashir et all,2024) Until 2018, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) defeated Pakistan Muslim League-N in the general elections of 2018. This defeat was attributed to allegations of political

weakness, corruption, and economic negligence. The PML-N despite its defeat in elections, remain a key political force in Pakistan (Mumtaz, Zahoor, & Yasin, n.d.)

Literature Review

From 2010 to 2018 a critical moment in Pakistan's democratic journey can be seen. This period marked by the transition from long military dominance to civilian governance. Historically the post 2008 democratic transition was significant, but it failed to develop into a stable and consolidated democratic order. Focusing on the early phase of this transition, Ali et al, (2025) argue that democratic consolidation from 2008 to 2015 was controlled by structural weaknesses, security challenges, political instability, weak governance structure, widespread corruption, and terrorism. The effectiveness of state institutions has been effected by all these factors which prevent democratic norms from being deeply rooted.

Political parties, identity politics and the nature of political competition has been argued by most of the scholars in their writings. Akhtar (2009) discussed identity politics, while Khan (2002) highlighted party populism as an aspect of political mobilization. Chaudhry et al., (2009) emphasis on the centralized organizational structure of Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. He also discussed weak political polarization and weak state institutions. Similarly, Diamond (1997) argues on the positive role of political parties and the competition among them to capture state powers. These perceptions show that political leadership and parties are essential to democratic development. Khan (2020) further discusses the efforts of opposition parties to remove the ruling party, while Khan and Khan (2020) demonstrate on the role of judiciary. Political polarization is another significant theme. Kronstadt (2005) connected political polarization with obstinate tension among the executive, judiciary, and military institutions. Shak (2014) in relation to military interference and political polarization, argue on the fragility of democracy in Pakistan. Ishaque (2022) deliberates over political polarization which weakened national integration of democracy and consolidation, while Uroosa (2022) highlight the effect of both political parties and ordinary citizens on polarization. Rehman (2023) investigates the consequences for democratic consolidation and governance. He suggests that moderate polarization effect civic engagement in a different way. Talboot (2023) explore political polarization as a factor that led to political instability. Hanif (2024) also consider polarization as a political challenge. A significant number of scholars highlighted civil-military tension and its consequences for civilian authority. Masood (2007) demonstrate that within Pakistan's political system the military occupied central powers. On the other hand, the work of Mushtaq et al., (2011), Ahmad and Stephan (2010), Behuria (2009), shah (2004) and shahid (2025) discuss political instability and civil-military relations. Khalid (2012) associated military-judicial tension to political instability. Croisssant (2010) traces that direct military control reduces the elected government's authority. Ali (2020), Jalal (2018), and Lateef (2016) similarly argues that military influence has constraints on the civilian government. Shah (2019) observe these changes during the government of PML-N between 2013 to 2018, while Maali (2020) deliberate over military involvement in political matters. Gul (2024) further give emphasis on the interference of military. Kurlantzick, (2011) and Besong, (2005) both scholars reveal Pakistan's democratic struggle within a larger historical pattern of elite control and manipulation. The relationship between

the character of Pakistan's political system and institutional weakness discussed by contemporary scholars. Khan (2018) deliberate over weak institutions, while Ashfaq (2023) highlighted political instability and military intervention with reference to weak institutions. Mahar (2023) describes Pakistan as a hybrid regime where state institutions remained under the control of military influence. Siddiqi (2020) likewise inspect Pakistan under the concept of a hybrid regime. In a related vein, Qazi (2013) highlighted that power structure in Pakistan is associated with political instability. Waseem (2020) further emphasis on the need to change such power structures. Hussain (2022) debate over fragile institutions, unstable political alliances from 2018 to 2023. While in contrast, Greogry (2013) arguments identify the 2008 and 2013 elections as inspiring developments for internal stability. Therefore, this literature points out an important distinction between institutional consolidation and electoral progress. Furthermore, Linz and Stephan (1996) theorizes consolidated democracy through the principle that democracy becomes "the only game in town". Diamond (1996) highlighted democratic legitimacy, while Linz and Stephan give emphasis on attitudinal agreements as an element of democratic consolidation. Fair (2011) and Talbot (2023) give emphasis on civil liberty in everyday political life. Sqapi (2017) considered democracy as a continued process. These viewpoints suggest that democratic consolidation in Pakistan comprises more than the protection of civil liberties, the acceptance of democratic rules and institutional independence. Khan (2021) in the light of this context, considered the 18th constitutional amendment as an advancement to parliamentary supremacy. Furthermore, Sial (2020) inspects socioeconomic conditions necessary for democratic consolidation, while Lipset (1959) and Diamond (1999) deliberate over the relationship between democratic development and the distribution of wealth. Olukoshi (2001) stresses on government to take transparency measures i.e to curb bureaucratic obstacles, decentralize powers, impartial judiciary, participatory decision-making, respect for human rights and follow the rule of law. Gul (2024) stresses on education as the only mean to increase public awareness. Hanif (2024) relates economic instability to participatory democracy. Kamran (2008) observes the challenges and opportunities in Pakistan's political landscape, while Mirza (2023) confers the instability of government in the underdeveloped countries. The literature also highlighted communication, reforms, and the relationship between state institutions and political institutions. Talbot (2023) relates civilian supremacy with democratic consolidation and polarization with political instability.

Research Gap

Studies on Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Pakistan frequently focus on important issues like flawed electoral system, civil-military imbalance, and weak institutions while research on political reconciliation highlights long term equilibrium and elite promises or agreements. These elements are closely related, yet they are frequently examined separately or in relation to specific political period. However, limited analysis has been found about the PML-N's Government (2013-2018) which can assimilate both political reconciliation and governance challenges to address their impact on democratic consolidation. This study highlights this gap through the examination of institutional restraints and the lack of effective political reconciliation that formed the course of democratic transition during this time.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and involve exploratory and comparative method. The study answers three questions i.e (i) what institutional or political obstacles have weakened the democratic transition from 2013 to 2018? (ii)why did democratic consolidation failed during the PML-N's Government? and (iii) what are the main challenges faced by the government to change its manifesto into policy outcomes? The primary objective of this study is to examine the institutional and political challenges that shaped democratic governance and to highlight the role of political reconciliation in supporting democratic consolidation. The study is qualitative in nature uses both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with policy makers, key politicians, journalists and academicians, while secondary data from related books, journals, research papers and interpretivist philosophical position. The data has been analyzed through thematic analysis. Ontologically, the study adopts a relativist position, supposing that experiences and political truths may assume differently by different political actors according to their political perspective and institutional roles. Epistemologically, the study adopts a subjectivist position. It recognizes that the knowledge of democratic transition and consolidation developed through the interactions, experiences, and interpretations of the participants and researcher. To identify differences, interview data are examined thematically and compared with documentary evidence.

Theoretical framework.

This study draws on the theories of Jaun J Linz, O'Donnell and Samuel P, Huntington to understand Pakistan's democratic journey during the period of PML-N from 2013 to 2018. Linz's theory helps to understand the reason behind democratic failure and the issues that affect democratic stability. O'Donnell's work describes the challenges a country faces after moving from authoritarian rule to a democratic one. While Huntington's theory helps o explain the process of democratic transition. All these theories are relevant to the current study because Pakistan has experienced repeated military interventions, political instability and weak institutions. By applying the theoretical framework, this study examine how these factors influenced the prospects for democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

Background of the Study

A country can be called "Democratic" as soon as it comes out of authoritarian rule. (Eldem, n.d).However, for some time, it will endure with less precisely define characteristics associated with democratic consolidation. Democratic consolidation is not only to establish new democratic rules and institutions, but to remove the old system and ending the 'authoritarian enclaves' inherited from the previous regime. (Cottey, Edmunds, & Forster, 2002). Civil-military relations inhabit an important place among the signs of democratic consolidation. In line with the "civil-military relations" criterion, "democracy cannot be fully consolidated until the military is completely subordinated to civilian control and fully committed to the democratic constitution". (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1991). Therefore, in an elected system, a proper balance of power between the military and civilians exists only when the military is under the control of civilian authority. (Croissant, Kuhn, Chambers, & Wolf, 2011)

Following the exile of Nawaz Sharif after the military coup in 1999, the PML-N confronted with Political exclusion. However, the party once again came to power with majority of seats in the general elections of 1999. Yet Pakistan Muslim League-N's robust performance in Punjab, imitated its durable public support. Under challenging conditions, including military influence and judicial manipulation the party decided to take part in elections which highlights its confidence in democratic endurance. The role played by PML-N in the Charter of Democracy (2006), set the foundation of post-2008 democratic improvements, presenting an intermittent example of inter-party compromise for democratic progress (Khan, 2022). 2013 elections were debatably the high point of PML-N's democratic journey. PML-N formed the federal government by winning a clear cut majority of seats, and taking power in Punjab and Baluchistan. In Pakistan's history these 2013 elections particularly marked the first peaceful transition of power. Under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif, the party afformed economic progress, infrastructural reforms, and the stability of state institutions. Regardless of tension in civil-military relations and constraints on media freedom, the PML-N's democratic mandate was strong, and its electoral legitimacy helped to strengthen Pakistan's weak democracy (Shafqat, 2020)

(Linz and Stepan, 1996), explained democratic consolidation as socially, a democracy in an area is consolidated, when no important political, national, institutional, social, or financial actor spend huge amount on trying to attain their objectives. Attitudinally, democracy is consolidated, even during the severe financial crises and more disappointment with the officials when a strong public opinion, make sure that the democratic procedures and institutions are the proper way to manage the collective life. Constitutionally, democracy is consolidated, when national and international powers likely pay attention to solve conflicting issues. (Linz & Stepan, 1996)

Linz and Stephan's Model of Democratic Consolidation (Nisa et al., 2019)

1-Behaviorally Consolidated Democracy	Democratic regime in a region is ,consolidated behaviorally when no momentous national, economic, social, institutional or political actors spend substantial resources attempting to accomplish their objectives by making a pullout from the country
2-Attitudinally Consolidated Democracy	Democratic regime consolidated attitudinally when a resilient bulk of public opinion even in the core of major economic difficulties and deep displeasure with officers, holds faith that the democratic actions and the institutions are the maximum suitable way to manage the communal life and when care for anti-system replacements is relatively insignificant or mostly inaccessible from the pro-democratic powers
3-Constitutionally Consolidated Democracy	Democratic government is ,consolidated constitutionally, when non-governmental and governmental actors equally focus to, and inured to, the purpose of conflict inside the limits of

	explicit laws, institutions and procedures authorized by a new democratic course

W. Merkel sets a "*multilevel consolidation model*" involving "*constitutional consolidation*", "representative consolidation" (parties and interest groups), "*behavioral consolidation*", and "the *consolidation of civic culture*", following Linz and Stepan"s differentiation. So, as a dynamics of the consolidation three foremost alliances arises to the front: "*institutional, behavioral, and attitudinal*". In other words, democracy becomes the "*only game in town*".

Democracy returned to Pakistan after Musharraf's military rule. In 2008, National elections were held, resulting in a coalition government between the PPP-PML-N, and in 2013, with the PML-N winning the majority of seats. Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaf - PTI in 2018, won the elections and Imran Khan became the Head of government. In each of these instances, the elected civilian government completed its full term and peacefully transferred power to another elected government. This has been perceived as a progressive step toward a fully democratic State. Things, however, are much more difficult. There is no assurance that Pakistan will not be affected by a 'counter-wave', nor that better democracy will have a positive influence on internal security and stability. In the previous years of Pakistan's history, we have seen that no clear-cut connection between welfare and democracy, and between peace and democracy, existed. It can be argued that democratic transitions have been too brief to take root and generate strong, meaningful effects. As some political scientists have noted, the stock of democracy is an important factor to consider. what makes the difference, as many others have also pointed out, is substantial democracy. However, we still wonder how long the 'stock' should last to produce positive results, and what exactly makes a democracy '*mature*'. In any case, it may not only the inadequate duration of democracy that gives Pakistan's political system a hybrid character, although undoubtedly many young democracies have adopted the form of electoral democracy while remaining illiberal. It could be contended that most governments are, in Diamond's words, '*ambiguous*'. While there is no doubt that procedural democracy in the last decade has become more rooted in Pakistan. (Giunchi, 2007)

By securing a clear cut majority in Punjab the PML-N formed the central government in the 2013 general election. The Panama Papers exposed in April 2013. These papers include details of private properties of rich peoples and off shore companies around the world. Among others, the leaked papers named persons from Pakistan, including the children of the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Properties and off shore companies belonging to Nawaz Sharif, which they have been blamed of possessing since the early 1990s, included a number of apartments in Avenfield House in London. The Sharif family denied ownership of the Avenfield apartments for nearly two years, however, shortly before the Panama Papers were leaked in April 2016, Hussain youngest son of Nawaz Sharif accepted the ownership of these properties on different news channels.

Imran Khan, opposition party leader of the PTI, started a campaign for a judicial enquiry to investigate about the possession of London properties by Nawaz Sharif's family, whether they are acquired by lawful means or not. Nawaz Sharif 's resignation was also demanded by the PTI. The PML-N constantly claimed that the London properties of its leadership were legally

purchased and rightfully owned. On 16TH May 2016, in his address to the national assembly Nawaz Sharif confidently presented the financial trail describing the purchase of the properties. However, Imran Khan continued with his demand for a judicial inquiry and filed a petition. Before the 2018 elections NAB announced ten and seven years' imprisonment respectively to Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz. (Salman & Raza, 2023.)

Regarding the suspected fraud in the previous year's elections in 2014, Imran Khan led anti-government protests. The party members and workers closed the central route of the capital city and, for a few precarious weeks, thrust the stability of Nawaz Sharif 's government into doubt. Under crisis and unrest situation, the Pakistani army mediated between these democratically elected representatives of the people. This tussle come to an end with an acceptable but weakened Prime Minister. The military as an organization was able to yet again position itself as a key source of stability in the country. It has since then consolidated its position through the institutionalization of its role in administration by forming newly Apex Committees at federal and provincial levels that comprises the civil and military leaders. Leaders of the ruling as well opposition parties were also required to set up Military Courts through a constitutional amendment that allowed the military to have complete control on security matters. For almost seven decades as a sovereign nation, Pakistan has ruled under military rule, oscillating between a fragile democracy and overt military rule with distressing regularity. Highlighting that Pakistan's political instability was largely shaped by the rise of the military in the decade after independence. (Tudor,2016)

Elections of 2013 and the composition of the 14th National Assembly

In the general elections of 2013, 127 seats won by the PML-N, with 61% over a margin of 15%, PPP 56%, PTI 31%, MQM 95%, and independent candidates 4%. The National Assembly comprised of total 342 seats. The 14th National Assembly started its work after the general elections. On May31, 2018 this Assembly admirably completed its five-year term (PILDAT, 2018). After winning 163 seats in the general election the PML-N became the single largest party. On June 01, 2013 the members of the 14th National assembly took an oath (PILDT, 2013). Mr. Nawaz Sharif became the Prime Minister of Pakistan for his third term as an outcome of general election results (Hashmi, 2022). Syed Khursheed Ahmed Shah became the Leader of Opposition Party. Mr. Ayaz Sadiq and Mr. Nisar Ali Khan became speaker and the deputy Speaker of 14th National Assembly respectively. In the history of Pakistan this constitutional transition of power, without any obstructions, from one elected government (democratically) to another had never been seen before (Akram & Azhar, 2022). Moving forward, the 14th National Assembly of Pakistan took innovative steps in almost all key areas in its five-years term and focused on effective legislation. (Basir et all,2024)

Main events (2013-2018)

Amendment	Year	Key Objective
21st	2015	Military courts for terrorism
22nd	2016	ECP reforms
23rd	2017	Renewal of military courts

24th	2017	Census-based delimitation
25th	2018	FATA-KP merger

Election Victory (2013)

- 2013 general elections were won by the PML-N with a majority.
- Nawaz Sharif became Prime Minister of Pakistan for the third time**.**
- Promised energy crisis resolution, infrastructure development and economic revival in the country.

Energy Crisis and Load Shedding

- Major electricity shortages resolved by 2018.
- Several power projects Initiated and completed (coal, LNG, nuclear, solar).
- Notable projects like the Port Qasim Power Plant, Neelum-Jhelum Hydro Project, and Sahiwal Coal Plant**.**

Economic Development & CPEC

- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor launched in 2015(CPEC)**.**
- Energy and Infrastructure plans brought investment and development under CPEC.
- GDP growth peaked around 5.8% in 2017-18**.**
- Motorways, highways, and public transport projects were given major attention (e.g., Metro Bus, Orange Line).

Infrastructure & Transport

- Substantial rail and road expansion.
- Orange Line Train and Lahore Metro Bus launched.
- Extension of motorway network (M-4, M-5, etc.)

Bills passed by the 14th National Assembly

Parliamentary years	**Bills passed by government**	**Bills passed by private members**	**Total**
1st year	11	0	11
2nd year	16	0	16
3rd year	59	0	59
4th year	50	09	59
5th year	46	14	60
Total	182	23	205

Performance of the 14th National Assembly of Pakistan 2013-2018

The 21st Constitutional Amendment

The Twenty-First Amendment Act, 2015, in the constitution set up military courts to prosecute Islamist terrorists and punish their serious crimes. This act seems an unprecedented step of parliament of Pakistan to deal with the Islamist terrorists in Pakistan. The Act not only amended Article 175 of the constitution but also made changes in the first schedule (such as XXX The Pakistan Army Act 1 952, VI of The Pakistan Air Force Act 1953, XXXV of the Pakistan Navy Ordinance 1961, and X of the Protection of Pakistan Act 2014) (Zahid, 2015).

The 22nd Constitutional Amendment

The Twenty-second Constitutional Amendment Act, 2016, aim to modify the criteria for the appointment, qualifications and other requirements of the Chief Election Commissioner and the four members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to determine its composition.

The 23rd Constitutional Amendment 2017

The 23rd Amendment for another two years till January 6, 2019 prolonged the working of military courts (against terrorists). For a period of 2 years, the 21st Amendment of 2015 created the military courts, which were expired on January 6, 2017. Therefore, for additional two years till 6 January 2019 the 23rd Amendment was integrated to re-establish the military courts. (Constitution (Twenty-third Amendment) Act, 2017).

The 24th Constitutional Amendment

The redistribution of National Assembly seats among the Provinces on the basis of the population census of 2017, was the main objective of this amendment (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973).

The 25th Constitutional Amendment

The Parliament of Pakistan and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Assembly approved the 25th Constitutional Amendment in May 2018, that is known as the 25th Amendment Act 2018. Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) shall be part of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) according to this Amendment, (Khan & Mahmood,2018). The president of Pakistan approved this amendment

on May 31, 2018. It was considered a milestone constitutional legislation that helped the Government plan carefully for the people of the Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA and PATA).

Judicial Confrontation & Panama Papers:

- In 2016**,** Nawaz Sharif's name appeared in the Panama Papers leak**.**
- Supreme Court ordered investigation via the Joint Investigation Team (JIT)**.**
- In July 2017**,** under Article 62(1)(f) Nawaz Sharif was disqualified by the Supreme Court for "dishonesty and untruthfulness".
- Shahid Khaqan Abbasi became Prime Minister in August 2017.

Civil-Military Relations:

- Relations with the military, especially over internal governance and foreign policy remained strained.
- Controversy over Dawn Leaks (2016) deepened the gap.

Nawaz Sharif's Disqualification & Legal Cases:

- Disqualified for life from holding public office.
- Faced NAB cases (Avenfield, Al-Azizia, Flagship).
- Convicted in Avenfield case in July 2018 and sentenced to prison.

Governance Challenges:

- Improved security situation in Karachi and tribal areas with military operations (Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad).
- Faced criticism over press freedom and accountability of opposition**.**
- Struggled with foreign relations**,** especially with the US and India.

Political Narrative of "Vote Ko Izzat Do":

- Nawaz Sharif and PML-N launched a public campaign demanding respect for the electoral mandate.
- Accused the establishment of interfering in democratic processes.

The PML-N emerged as a strong advocator of rebalancing civil military imbalance in the 2008 elections. It maintains strategic policy domains like foreign affairs and defense should fall within the purview of civilian leadership. Nawaz Sharif's government from 2013-2018, took initiatives to improve its relations with India and CPEC with China. But military interference undermined these efforts through the culmination of 2016 "Dawn Leaks" episode, which exposed civil-military conflict and added to banning of Nawaz Sharif from politics. Parliamentary sovereignty has also enhanced by PML-N's oversight of endorsing civilian

leadership in matters of security. Institutional weaknesses and limited execution of policies and programs are the initiatives that reflect the party's democratic vision. (Jamal Ud Din et al., 2025)

The PML-N During Its 2013-2018 Period at the Federal Level

The PML-N at the federal level from 2013to 2018 period made efforts to address governance problems through initiatives such as Vision 2025, institutional reform, energy generation, and focusing on economic stability. Vision 2025 was an ambitious plan, but due to judicial challenges, political instability, and civil-military imbalance implementation remained uneven. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) was supported by the PML-N on the issue of accountability of main actors but condemned it for being worked under the influence of the establishment to target leaders of the opposition party. In its efforts to depoliticize these institutions, the PML-N failed to achieve adequate progress. This practice reflecting a broader pattern in Pakistan's political development in which accountability serves political purposes rather than being neutral (Malik et al., 2023).

Role in National Security Policy and Counterterrorism

From 2013 to 2018, the PML-N had a determine role in shaping Pakistan's national security policy and counterterrorism. The government of PML-N, having support of the military and political leadership started the National Action Plan in reaction to rising militant violence, most notably in December 2014, the Army Public School incident in Peshawar. This 20-point plan aims to eliminate terrorism, regulate madrassas, curb hate speeches, and strengthen the system of justice in the country. Under the leadership of PML-N, the preparation and execution of NAP signifies a move toward a more coordinated and state-driven counterterrorism strategy. PML-N also sought to advance the role of civilian institutions in the governance of counterterrorism efforts. Coordination with provincial law enforcement agencies and the consolidation of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) reflected a commitment to civilianize security mechanisms. Moreover, legislation on security issues including the sanction of military courts through 21st Amendment and to protect Pakistan Act were also supported by the PML-N government. Emphasis were also given on legal oversight, time limitations and a systematic judicial procedure. The PML-N's policy of counterterrorism was based on to strengthen state capacity to preserve civilian supremacy and democratic norms (Gohar et al., 2022).

Federalism and Provincial Autonomy

The PML-N has played a key role in Pakistan's democratic development to support federalism and to promote provincial autonomy. Despite being in opposition, it supports the 18th Constitutional Amendment. It decentralized main powers to the provinces by eliminating the Concurrent Legislative List, allowing provincial legislation on health, education and local governance. (The News, 2013). To ensure equitable financial distribution and to reinforce financial autonomy of the provinces, the party supported the 7th NFC Award. To decide

matters of federal-provincial autonomy on education, energy, and water, the Council of Common Interests (CCI), was institutionalized and regulated to work (PIPS, 2015). The PML-N also showed openness to demoted areas, supporting coalition governance in Baluchistan and introducing developmental plans under CPEC to expand inclusion and infrastructure. The party guaranteed respect and smooth financial cooperation to PTI's mandate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These determinations showed that PML-N support a cooperative governance system rooted in democratic principles under a comprehensive federal structure (Jamal Ud Din et al., 2025). The National Action Plan (NAP), was announced in response to the 2014 APS attack, revised the Anti-Terrorism Act, and reinforced the 21st Amendment to create military courts. Significant arrangements were taken to fight against terrorism (Dawn,2025). Likewise, the party prioritized parliamentary oversight by authorizing the Public Accounts Committee. It took active part in legislative debates, both in opposition and in government. Further it plays significant role in passing key constitutional amendments, including the 18th and 20th. The party support parliamentary tools for reform, whether in governance, economy, or security. (Express, 2023).

Tthe PML-N government from 2013 to 2018, throughout its reign commenced several legal reforms. These reforms concentrated on transparency, accountability, and good governance measures. The Election Act, 2017, included amongst them was a widespread consolidation of earlier electoral laws. This legislation was a privilege to rationalize legal framework for elections. It aims at improving transparency in improving voter registration and in campaign financing process. Nawaz Sharif temporarily allowed through a controversial amendment to this law to head the party after disqualification. However, an important institutional impact signifies in the broader legislative efforts.

Challenges

Despite the fact that PML-N has played an important role to strengthen democratic institutions. The democratic credentials of the PML-N have faced challenges. Political rivals and adversaries have upraised their worries about the internal structure of party, its governance style, and its management of key national issues. These critiques underscore the contradictions and limitations in the party's larger democratic framework. One of the most obstinate challenge to PML-N is its dynastic political culture and alleged authoritarian tendencies. The party has often been accused for the centralization of power inside the Sharif family. Among close relatives of Nawaz Sharif, Key leadership roles always circulating. This has raised doubts about merit-based leadership development and intra-party democracy. Critics resist that such centralization of power weakens the democratic development within the party and restricted opportunities for mass contribution. Decisions are made generally by the senior leaders. This practice reduced party member's autonomy (Sheikh, 2009). Another criticism comprises allegations of corruption and electoral rigging. The PML-N has faced repeated accusation from rival parties of influencing electoral results. Although independent analysts recognized progresses in the 2013 elections. PTI and other opposition parties purported large-scale rigging, resulting in prolonged protests and political instability in the country. High-profile cases of corruption have severely damaged the party's image such as the Panama

Papers disclosures resulted in Nawaz Sharif's disqualification by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2017. These scandals fueled narratives that PML-N has used state power for personal and financial gain. This practice weakened democratic legitimacy. Another point of tension throughout PML-N's political journey was the civil-military imbalance. Despite its advocacy for civilian supremacy its confrontational approach with the military establishment has often led to political crises rather than institutional balance. Nawaz Sharif's exile under 1999 coup and the frequent breakdowns in civil-military relations during the 2013-2018 tenure reflected the complexities involved in handling this delicate equilibrium. Some analysts discuss that the occasional hardline stance of PML-N provoked avoidable conflict, while others contend that the party compromised too rapidly under pressure, failing to proclaim genuine democratic authority. These frequent hostilities have destabilized the governance continuity of governance and democratic stability in the country (Zahid et al., 2023).

PML-N was criticized for its governance style that occasionally prioritized development over fostering inclusive democratic practices. For example, under Shabazz Sharif the "Punjab Model", praised for infrastructure progress and efficiency, was also criticized for centralized decision making and negligence of participatory governance. Civil society actors have pointed out cases where obstinate voices, political opponents and the independence of media were discouraged, raising apprehensions about the party's obligation to democratic discourse and pluralism. While the PML-N has indisputably contributed to democratic consolidation in Pakistan, it has also been constrained by unresolved tensions with key state institutions, internal conflicts, and allegations of authoritarianism. A comprehensive assessment of its role in Pakistan's democratic evolution should consider both its achievements and its limitations, as these dual realities collectively shape the trajectory of Pakistan's democratic consolidation (Khan, 2022).

A review of National Internal Security Policy (2013-18)

Pakistan's federal government declared the internal security policy of 2013-18, on 24th February 2014. A political government announced its vision of internal security for the first time. The ministry of interior was assigned with the task to formulate the new policy and submitted its first draft, which was presented to the federal cabinet in December 2013. The cabinet proposed changes to address neglected issues. For further consideration a revised draft was presented to the cabinet.

Key Features of the Policy

This policy has three major elements: negotiation with all stakeholders, separating terrorists from their support bases, and improving deterrence through capacity-building to enable the security apparatus to neutralize threats to internal security. This approach is founded on two threat scenarios. First, national, political, economic and social potential weakened by internal threats. Second, expanding internal conflict and weakening national power are creating conditions for external aggression. To implement this approach, the policy framework is based on two components soft and hard. The former entails research and understanding, and winning

of hearts and minds. The hard component consists of a composite deterrence plan (CDP). The policy draft evaluates the soft approach at length but the CDP in a brief manner. (Sial &Satti,2014)

Transition

Transition can be explained as a process through which a country moves from one form to another. It often involves a shift from an authoritarian government to a more democratic one.

Consolidation

Consolidation refers to the process of strengthening democratic institutions and practices within a state. It means how a democratic government can emerge and become stable with the passage of time. Democratic consolidation proposes that the strengthening of democratic institutions is a gradual and multifaceted process. It includes freedom of speech, the rule of law, sovereignty of parliament, media freedom, free and fair elections, and independence of judiciary.

Reconciliation Concepts and Empirical Approaches

Reconciliation is a term with a rich but problematic history of meanings in political language. Generally, reconciliation refers to the activities of repairing an imbalance relationship and build cooperation and friendship after a war or conflict. Nonetheless, according to Rettberg (Ugarriza, 2016), it has applied to describe a tremendous number of peacebuilding aspirations and practices. They found at least 5 common forms of use of the concept in their extensive survey of the literature, which are: (i) the use of reconciliation as a rhetorical symbol (called into discourse without supplying any solid definition), (ii) solution used interchangeably with peace or harmony, (iii) multi-vocal umbrella-term (recognizing the existence of diverse meanings), (iv) an ultimate goal or the end-state of peace activities, and (v) a process that lacks any definite purpose.

Instead of picking one specific definition of reconciliation, these authors suggest dividing the term into dimensions and be able to reflect on the multidimensionality of the concept by dividing it into dimensions: perspective (religious, psychological, political, etc.), depth, actors, mechanisms, etc. This means that empirical study on reconciliation in this context entails studying the variability in behavior and norms change across the elites. In Pakistan it is well to speak of reconciliation at the level of elite political society (among the leaders of the parties in parliament), but this will not necessarily drop down to civil society or the trust that is between people. Reconciliation may progress at one level (e.g., party's collaboration in the parliament) and not at another (e.g. mistrust existing among common men, or unresolved historical dislikes in conflict torn areas). (Rettberg and Ugarriza, 2016),

Completion of term and Electoral Transition

End of Tenure & 2018 Elections:

- In May 2018, Completed its 5-year term in office **(**second consecutive democratic transfer of power**).**
- Faced strong competition from Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf of Imran Khan's Party**.**
- PTI formed government under Imran Khan as PML-N Lost 2018 elections.

To summarize

The general elections of 2013 provide for a changed political culture and reasons for optimism which may be stated as follows:

- The support of the army for politicians and electoral processes so that a peaceful change of government takes place as determine by the people rather than by the president under the now defunct Article 58 (2) (b) of the constitution or the army through a military coup.

- An assertive judiciary and Election Commission which has gone to new lengths to ensure that candidates possess minimum required qualifications to contest elections.

- An assertive print and electronic media which has made frequent calls for the continuation and consolidation of democracy through its support for elections.

- The mobilization of new political parties and forces, including Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf, which attests to the broadening of Pakistan's political party base and the injection of a new political force to challenge traditional political parties, the PPP and PML (N).

- Moderate Baloch nationalists who boycotted the polls in 2008 have now decided to take part in the elections, most importantly Sardar Akhtar Mengal and his Baluchistan National Party (Mengal) group. This bodes well for the democratic processes in Baluchistan as it brings disgruntled Baloch nationalists into the political mainstream. The present elections, in this sense, provide a major incentive to move things forward in Baluchistan in contrast to developments under General Musharraf where Baluchistan was coerced into subservience through a policy of military dominance and the direct use of force, Pakistan has faced significant negative impacts on social cohesion and stability. (Siddiqi, 2013)

Conclusion

The period from 2008 to 2015 was crucial for Pakistan's democratic course, marked by both substantial progress and obstinate challenges. The 14th National Assembly completed its five-year term which can be perceived as trend setter. It was for the second time in the history of Pakistan that power was peacefully transferred from one civilian elected government to the

other. In order to make democracy strong, the opposition parties also played their positive role that's why the Parliament completed its five years' term in office. Five constitutional Amendments such as 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, and 25th that established military courts and gave extension to them for two years introduced by them. It aims to provide speedy trial against terrorists, ensuring the redistribution of National Assembly seats among provinces according to the latest census results, carrying electoral reforms, and making arrangements for the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Despite the historic transition of power through notable constitutional reforms and democratic elections enhancing provincial autonomy, Pakistan's democratic consolidation faced considerable challenges. Political instability fueled by entrenched patronage, weak party structures, and corruption weakened public trust in democratic institutions. Simultaneously, the persistent influence of non-state militant actors, alongside deep-rooted civil-military tensions, constrained the effective functioning of civilian governance. Additionally, challenges within the judiciary and civil society often contributed to political instability. A number of criticism has also been faced by the PML-N for its weaknesses in internal accountability, and unpredictable advocacy for civil society involvement and freedom of the press. However, the party's association with international democratic standards, its engagement with counterterrorism policy, and democratic transitions highlights its intricate but significant role in the democratic progress of Pakistan. PML-N despite the complex challenges make significant contributions to highlight its importance as a vital force in Pakistan's democratic consolidation.

Findings

Education and economy of the country during PML-N's government made progress, however it faced hardships and difficulties to handle foreign affairs. This paper concludes that despite its success in some of the areas, many of its promises that it has made at the time of general election remained unsatisfied which creates feelings of suspicion and distrust among the people of Pakistan.

Recommendations

- By ensuring inclusive decision-making he PML-N should prioritize internal democratic reforms, merit based political advancement and transparent leadership elections. The party's integrity will be enhanced through strengthening intra-party democracy, reducing the concentration of power in dynastic structures and fostering political pluralism.
- Through inclusive, gradual, and consensus-driven measures the FATA reforms, must continue that respect local aspirations and avoid disturbing the region's fragile social fabric.
- For accountability and civilian input in national security policymaking, the PML-N must establish effective mechanisms. It must promote a balanced civil military relationship.
- By introducing public-interest bills, regularly attending parliamentary sessions, and engaging constructively in debates the PML-N should focus on

meaningful legislative activity. Improved parliamentary performance will not only reflect the promises but also build public trust in state institutions.

- It should develop a monitoring mechanism to adapt strategies to emerging threats and evaluate performance. It should also connect political responses with operational strategies.
- A more consistent stance on civil society engagement and media independence must also be develop by the PML-N. Ensuring legal protections for journalists, refraining from coercive practices, and fostering collaboration with civic society actors are essential for promoting a vibrant democratic culture.
- Democratic legitimacy can be strengthened by aligning governance with the welfare of the public welfare. The PML-N should strengthen social safety nets, implement inclusive economic policies, and address regional disparities to ensure that democratic dividends reach all segments of society, particularly marginalized communities.
- Making politics less polarized so that it could be governed cooperatively at the federal level Enhancement of transparency and accountability in order to avoid governance crisis. Strengthening the legitimacy of major political parties by encouraging intra-party democracy.
- Improving electoral reforms to make the electoral process credible and minimize contestation.
- First, the political leadership must change their own attitude and then develop a serious plan to reform the internal structure of political parties, thereby strengthening the democratic base that serves as the true source of civilian leadership's strength.
- To create equilibrium between civil-military relationships establishment of civilian organizations are necessary.
- For the purpose of enhancing the base of their legitimate power, the civilian leadership needs to focus on improving the overall quality of governance.

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