REVIEW OF CRIME, PEACE AND SOCIETY
ISSN (O): 3079-6105, ISSN (P): 3079-6091
Vol. 3, No. 9, 2026, 45-67

Dynastic Politics in the 16th National Assembly of Pakistan (2023-2026): A Comparative Analysis of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan.

Ikram Ud Din[1], Dr. Muhammad Zubair Khan[2]

Abstract

With the arrival of two most powerful dynastic political parties in government after the Feb 8, 2024 elections in Pakistan, the question of dynastic politics has emerged again. In spite of the growing body of research on dynastic politics in Pakistan, there is an extensive knowledge gap with regards to the comparative analysis of dynastic politics in the four provinces of Pakistan. This study intends to find out the nature of dynastic politics in the 16th National Assembly of Pakistan and comparatively analyzes the dominant patterns in the Clientelistic relationships across Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study is qualitative in nature and uses comparative strategy of research. For primary data, the researcher has conducted semi structured-interviews from 5 different categories. For secondary data, the researcher has focused on books, articles, research papers, and online sources such as the sites of the National Assembly and the Election Commission of Pakistan. The thematic analysis technique has been used for analyzing primary data and content analysis technique for secondary data. The study found that more than half (56%) of the members of the 16th National Assembly of Pakistan are dynastic. As so far as the four provinces are concerned, Balochistan has the highest share (68%) of dynastic politics. Punjab comes second (65%) and Sindh comes third (53%). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has the lowest share in dynastic politics. As so far as the dominant clientelistic relationships are concerned, the single dominant pattern that can be seen in Balochistan is "Sardar" which is the most closed clientelistic system. This study is important because it contributes in enhancing literature regarding the theoretical debates on democracy, political institutions, dynastic politics and the changing patterns in which dynastic politics functions.

Article History
Received 12 October 2026
Accepted 04 November 2026
Published 10 November 2026
Corresponding Author*
OPEN ACCESS

Keywords
Dynastic Politics , Clientelism, Patron-client Relationship, Wadera, Sardari System, Gadi Nashin, Feudal, National Assembly, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, kinship has been one of the most significant principles of political power distribution. However, with the rise in representative democracy, elections have replaced hereditary succession as the main source of political power (Camp, 1982. Vilas, 1992). In spite of this, kinship plays a vital role in distribution of political power even in today's modern age of democracy (Geys& Smith, 2017). Smith (2012) mentions in his PhD dissertation that political dynasties based on kinship ties are part and parcel of many developed and developing states. Mushtaq et al (2013) highlight that tribe, biradari or clan plays a dominant role in electoral competitions and in defining general politics. They highlight that kinship and Biradari play a huge role in countries where democratic values have not yet matured. In such countries, public opinion is influenced by kinship ties and other informal institutions. Political

[1] Ph.D. Scholar, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology. D.I. Khan. ikramudin777@gmail.com
[2] Department of political science Gomal University of D.I. Khan. Zubairbaluch@gmail.com

dynasties are the major part of political elites in such countries. Pakistan is one of such countries where political dynasties play a huge role in the political affairs of the state.

In spite of the various democratic reforms introduced in Pakistan, the influence of dynastic politicians has remained a constant phenomenon, which perpetuates a culture of patronage, personalized politics, and nepotism (Hussain, 2012). Its far-reaching consequences include; undemocratic representation, power concentration in few hands, lack of inclusive institutions, economic and social inequalities. Besides this, dynastic politics challenges the traditional wisdom that democracy corrects itself with the passage of time by making it difficult for non-dynasts to capture political power which ultimately results in non-competition. This dominance of dynastic politics is not only limited to the national level politics but ingrained in the four provinces as well (Cheema et al 2017; Rehman 2019). A comparative analysis of dynastic politics in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would provide a better understanding of the topic and will unlock the different shapes of dynastic politics in these four provinces. This study intends to compare the nature of dynastic politics and the dominant pattern in dynastic families in the four provinces of Pakistan through the prism of the Patron-client Theory.

This study aims to investigate the nature of dynastic politics in the National Assembly of Pakistan and then compare the working of dynastic politics in the four provinces; the Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In spite of the growing body of research on dynastic politics in Pakistan, there is an extensive knowledge gap with regards to the comparative analysis of dynastic politics in these four provinces of Pakistan (Latif, 2017). This study is important because it addresses this research gap by providing a detailed analysis of the patterns of dynastic politics in the four provinces of Pakistan. The objectives of the study include: to understand the nature of dynastic politics in the National Assembly of Pakistan, to find out the share of dynastic politics of the four provinces of Pakistan in the National Assembly, to find out which province has the highest share of dynastic politics in the National Assembly of Pakistan, and to discover the pattern through which dynastic politics functions in the four provinces of Pakistan.

Asako et al (2015) defines dynastic politicians as politicians who have multiple members in politics or in political offices from the same family. Geys and Smith describe dynastic politicians as those politicians who are interconnected “by blood or marriage to other individuals formerly holding political office”. The definitions given by Smith (2012), Dal Bo et al. (2009), and Chandra (2016) also conform to the above two definitions. The only difference in their definitions lies in the specification of blood relatives. They include the following members of the family who can become the part of a political dynasty: “politicians’ children, grandchildren, siblings, spouses, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, and so on” (Smith (2012), Dal Bo et al. (2009), and Chandra (2016), as cited in Cheema et al. (2017). In this reaserch, political dynasty or political family refers to a political family whose various members are busy in politics or part of the national or provincial assemblies. The members of such a political dynasty are tied through marriage or blood. In such families, the number of people involved in electoral politics may be one or more than one.

The findings of the study will have significant implications for political parties, civil society organizations and policy makers. After understanding the topic, stakeholders can make and develop strategies in order to make institutions inclusive and representative. In addition to this, this study contributes in enhancing literature regarding the theoretical debates on democracy, political institutions, dynastic politics and the changing patterns in which dynastic politics functions.

2. Literature Review

Wilder (1999) discusses two of the most important causes behind dynastic politics in Pakistan. According to him, the first and the most important cause behind dynastic politics in Pakistan is the dependence of the common people on agriculture. Most of the people in Pakistan depend on land lords due to their huge acres of agricultural land. This dependence establishes a "patron -clint-relationship" among them. The second reason is the dependence of the common people on industrialists and businessmen. This dependence too results in a "patron-clint-relationship". It is this "patron-clint-relationship" that allow politicians to influence the electorate which ultimately paves a way for dynastic politics.

Dal Bo et al. (2009, p.115) draw attention to the fact that "power begets power" which means that whenever a member of the legislature gets second or third tenure, he or she tries to enter his or her family members too in politics which ultimately results in dynasty formation. They further write that, "holding political power for longer increases the probability that one's heirs attain political power in the future regardless of family characteristics" (p.115). Whatever may be the kind of people and in whichever profession they are, they have the tendency and inclination to become dynastic. The more power they receive, the more they want to make the privileges hereditary.

Cheema, Javid and Naseer (2013) analyze the causes behind the weak political parties in Pakistan and put in writing that dynastic politics is the most important cause behind it. Politics in Pakistan has traditionally been revolved around electables by whom we generally mean these dynastic politicians. Rather than focusing on building proper structure of the party, party leaders try to choose the easy way of selecting these electables in order to grab more and more seats in the national and provincial assemblies of Pakistan. It is due to this easy way of grabbing political power that has strengthened dynastic politicians over their political parties.

Punjab has been the most studied province with regards to dynastic politics due to its electoral weight and the transition from one pattern to the other (Wilder, 1999). The thesis of modernization (Huntington, 1968) given by Huntington had predicted that industrialization and urbanization would lessen the share of dynastic politics in the Northern Punjab but literature show that this did not happen and dynasticism not only persisted but adapted and prospered. The same is the case with the Southern Punjab where dynasticism is present in other shapes. Whatever the shape of dynasticism, Punjab is still under the umbrella of dynastic politics which is not declining but thriving.

The same is the case with other provinces as well. With regards to electoral weight, Sindh is considered the second most important province where dynastic politics is practiced extensively in the shape of Waderas and Landlords (Waseem, 2021). Dynastic politics in

Balochistan functions through the Sardari system which is entrenched in almost every part of Balochistan (Siddiqi, 2015). This is the most closed system where there is almost no chance for new-comers to even stand for the seat of the National or provincial seats. Dynastic politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the most different one because it is present not in one shape but in different shapes (Wilder, 1999).

After going through a vast array of literature, there is a lack of sufficient knowledge about the comparison of dynastic politics among the four provinces of Pakistan (Latif, 2017). A comparative analysis of dynastic politics in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would provide a better understanding of the topic and will unlock the different shapes of dynastic politics in these four provinces.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this study, the researcher has used the Patron-client Theory of clientelism for the comparative analysis of the nature of dynastic politics in the four provinces of Pakistan. Scott (1972) writes that the Patron-client is a kind of tie between unequal parties with regards to wealth, power, and status in which the strong party provides safety and the weaker one obedience for fulfilling their own interests. The researcher has opted for this framework because it perfectly explains the mechanism involved in dynastic politics in Pakistan.

The following are the types of clientelism which will be helpful in explaining the different shapes or patterns of dynastic politics in Pakistan:

A. Wadera Clientelism

Wadera is a Sindhi word which is used for a landlord who possesses huge acres of land. In this kind of relationship, Wadera has agricultural land and controls the workers or peasants through sharing of land or taking care of other problems such as water, protection, police or kachehri issues. In return, the Wadera requires from them vote, full obedience and loyalty. This kind of relationship comes under closed category of clientelism.

B. Sardar Clientelism

Sardar is a Balochi word which is generally used for the head or chief of a tribe. In this kind of relationship, the Sardar controls the whole tribe through his authority and no one can go against him and his authority. In return, the Sardar takes care of the tribesmen in every difficult time. This kind of relationship comes under the most closed category of clientelism because a person can become a Sardar only by birth.

C. Feudal Clientelism

The terms Wadera and Feudal (Jagirdar) are sometimes used interchangeably because both these terms mean possession of huge land. But, Feudal is a vast term and a title given by the colonial authorities to someone who possesses huge land and other capital through which the Feudal controls the common people. This also comes under the closed category of clientelism.

D. Biradari Clientelism

The term Biradari is used in a broader sense than the other categories of clientelism. It is a kind of relationship which is based on kinship or clan (Biradari). In this kind of relationship, vote becomes a property of the tribe or the clan and voters from that clan are required to vote

to the candidate supported by the clan. This relationship comes under the semi-open category of clientelism because it is closed to the outsiders but open to the insiders.

4. Research Methodology

This study has used qualitative research design as explained by McNabb (2015) because the study requires explanation and interpretation. The researcher has used the comparative strategy of explaining and comparing any topic or study. The sources of data include primary and secondary data. Primary data includes 10 interviews, two from each category such as , politicians, lawyers, academicians, journalists, and the civil society. For secondary data, the researcher focused mainly on books, newspapers, research articles and other online sources such as the official site of the National Assembly and the Election Commission of Pakistan. The thematic analysis technique has been used for analyzing primary data, while for secondary data; content analysis technique has been used.

5. Data Analysis

In order to know about the share of dynastic politics in the 16th National Assembly of Pakistan, the researcher visited the official sites of the National Assembly and the Election Commission of Pakistan.

Table.1

S.no	Overall Members of the 16th National Assembly	Number
1.	Total	336
2.	Dynastic	190
3.	Non-dynastic	146
4.	Percentage of dynastic politicians	56.5%

The above table shows that the majority of Members of the 16TH National Assembly of Pakistan are dynastic. This data shows that there is a need to find out the share of dynastic politics of the four provinces as well.

Punjab

After going through the available documents on the sites of the National Assembly and the Election Commission of Pakistan, the following data came to the surface:

Table.2

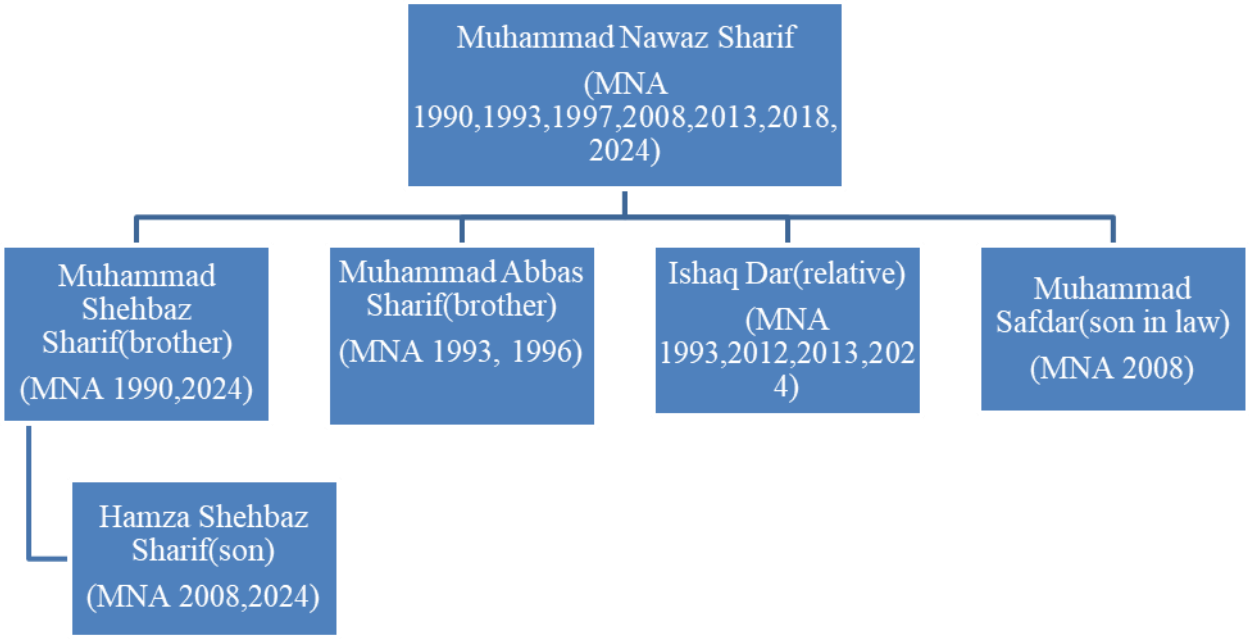
S.no	MNA`s from Punjab in the 16th National Assembly	Number
1.	Total	172
2.	Dynastic	112
3.	Non-dynastic	60
4.	Percentage of Dynastic Politicians	65%

The above data shows that a significant number of politicians in the National Assembly of Pakistan from the province of Punjab are dynastic. Keeping in mind the electoral weight of

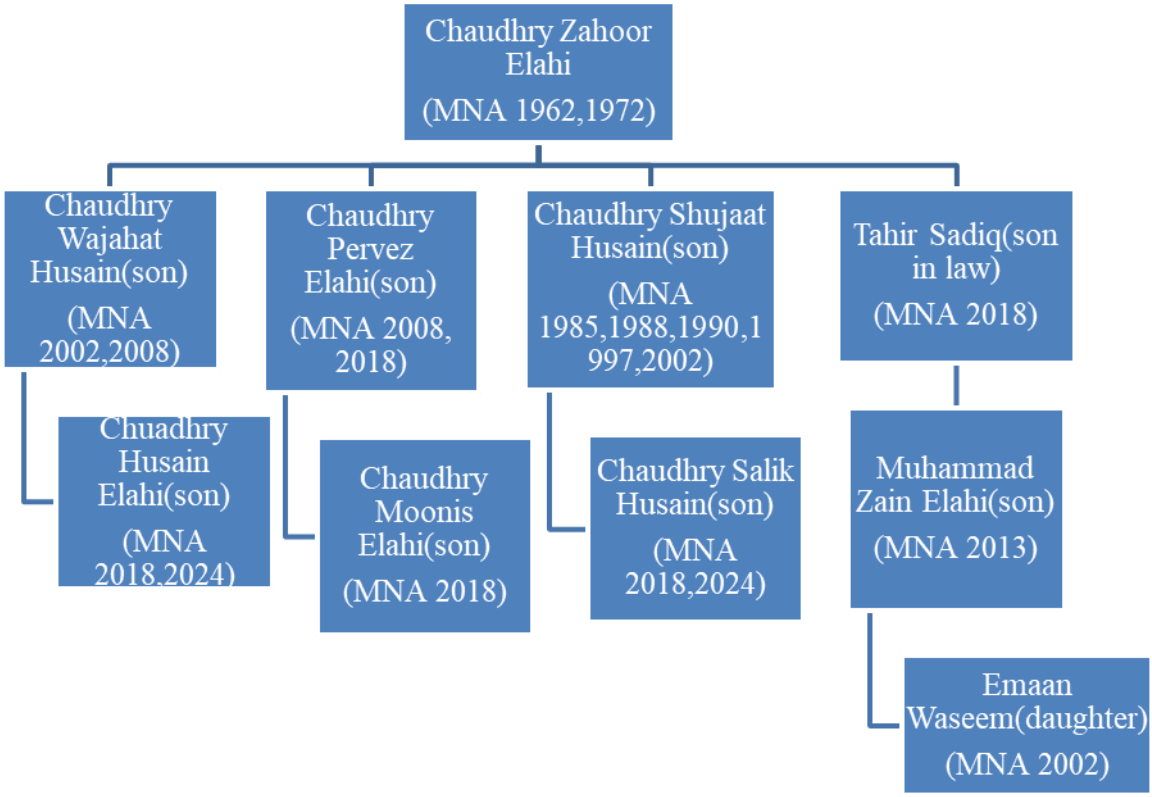
the Punjab province, this number (65%) is huge and alarming for the democratic development in the province.

The following are the top 10 dynastic families from Punjab in the National Assembly of Pakistan and their family type:

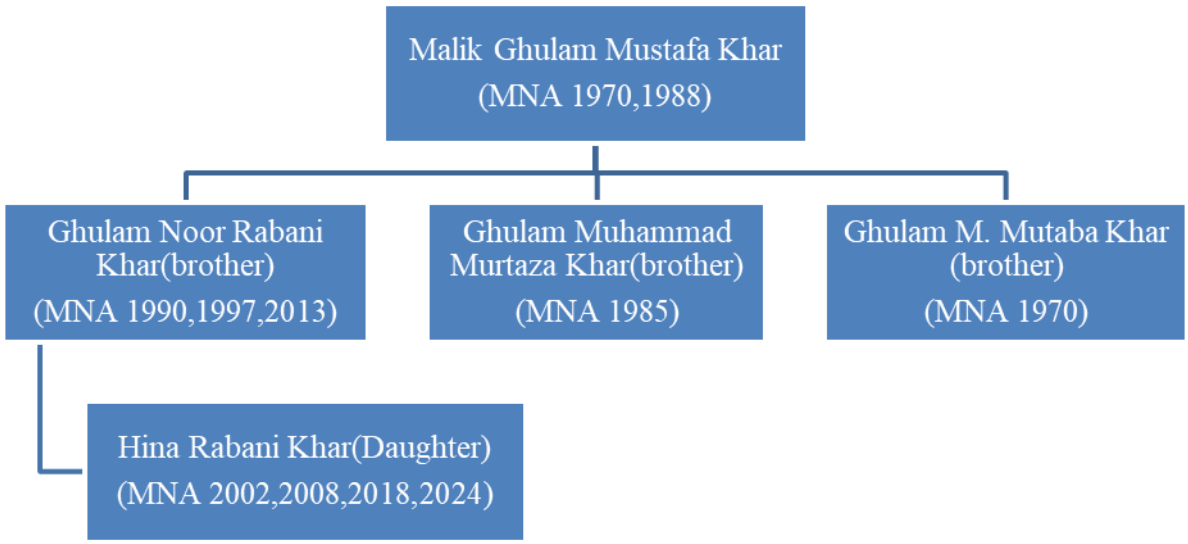
- The Sharif Family: Industrialist



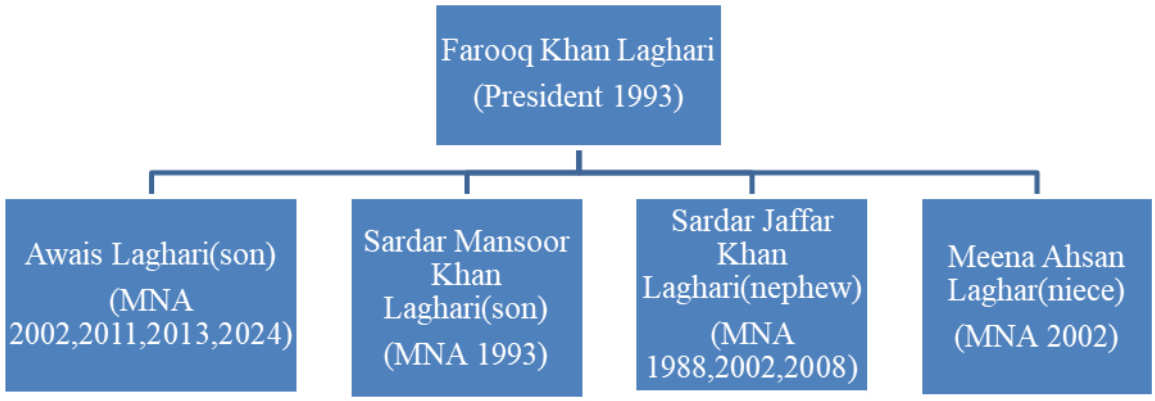
- Chaudhry Zahoor Elahi Family: Industrialist



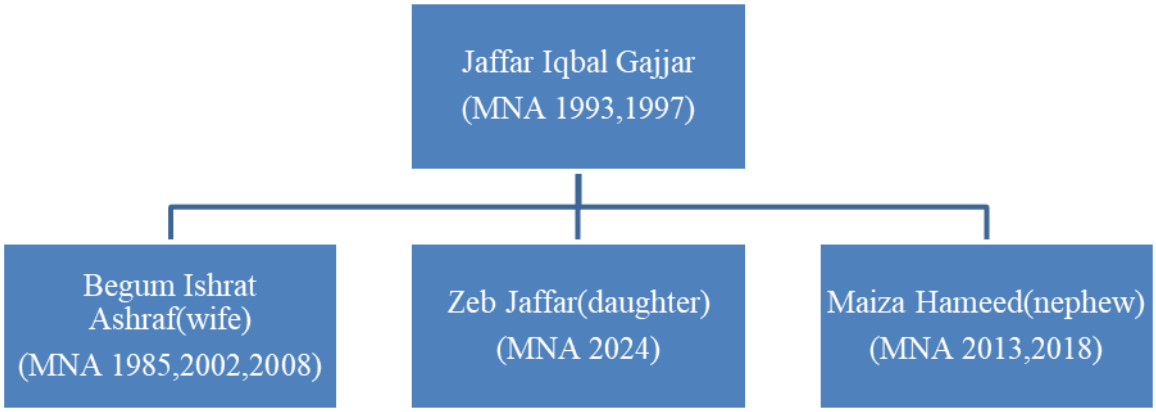
- The Malik Ghulam Mustafa Khar Family: Feudal



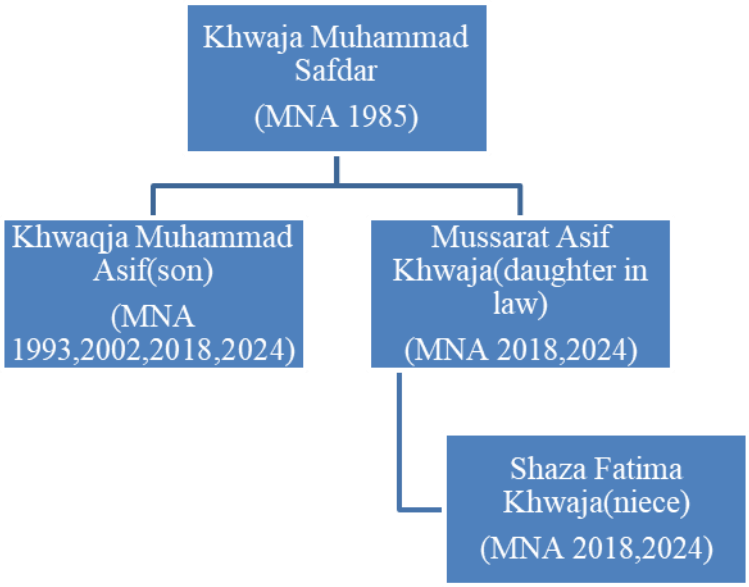
- The Farook Khan Laghari Family: Feudal



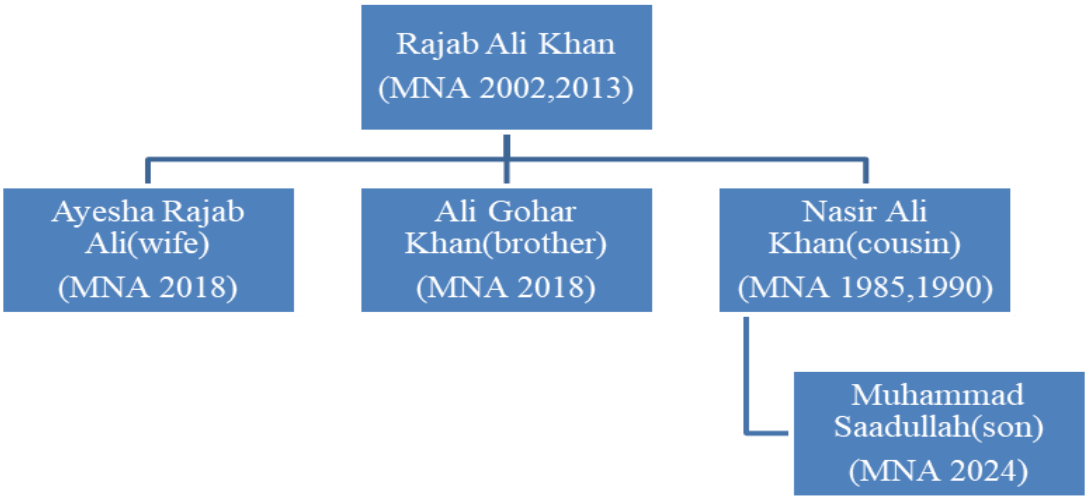
- The Chaudhry Jafar Iqbal Gajjar Family: Biradari



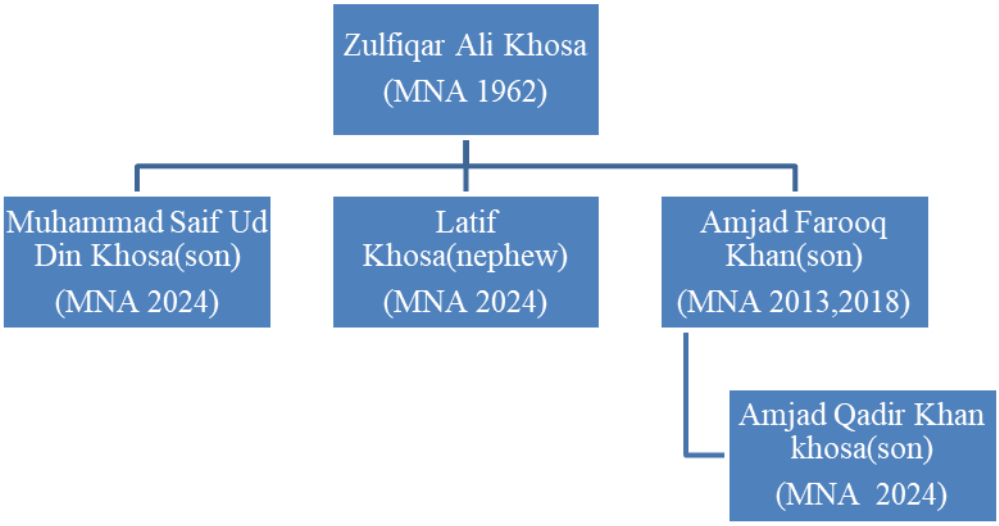
- The Khwaja Muhammad Safdar Family: Professional



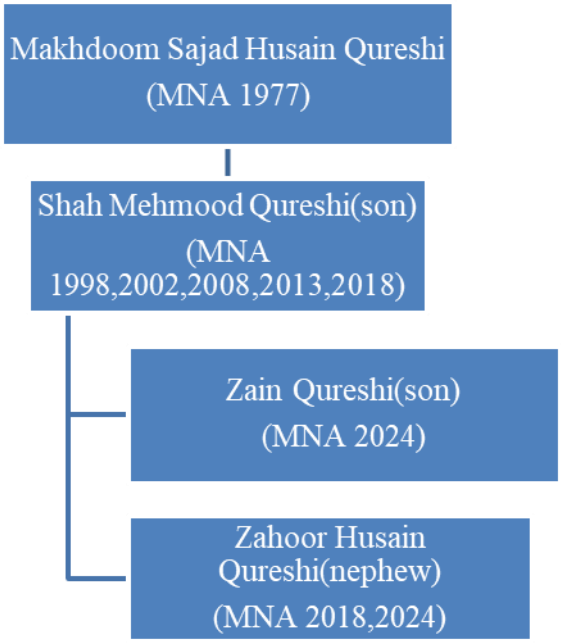
- The Rajab Ali Khan Baloch Family: Biradari



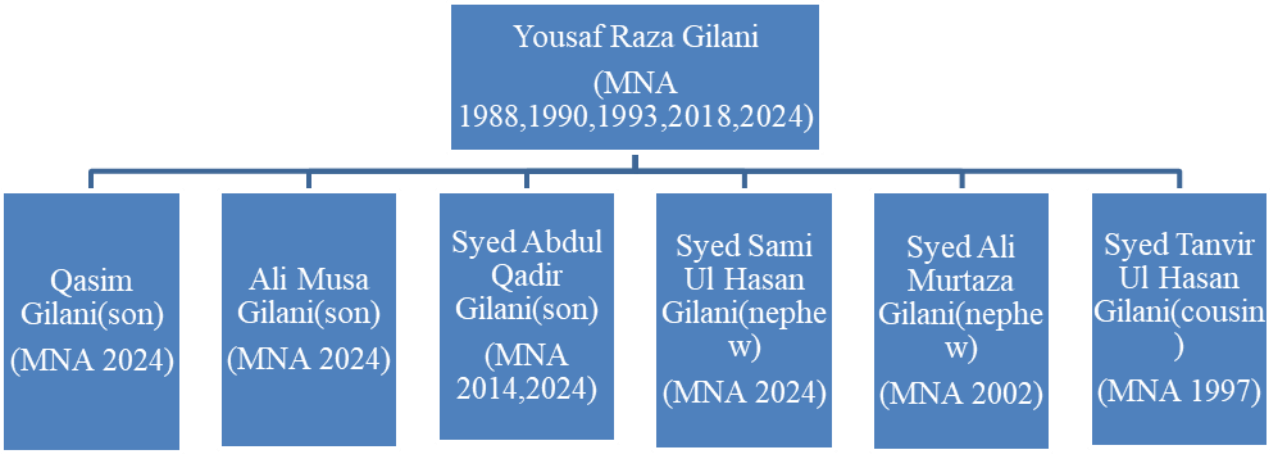
- The Zulfiqar Ali Khosa Family: Sardar



- The Makhdoom Sajad Husain Qureshi Family: Gadi Nashin (Spiritual)



- The Yousaf Raza Gilani Family: Gadi Nashin (Spiritual)



The family backgrounds of the above top 10 dynastic families from Punjab in the National Assembly of Pakistan show the following dominant themes which include: Industrialists, Biradary, Gadi Nashin, and Feudal. The dominant themes in North and Centre Punjab are industrialists and Biradri. On the other hand, the dominant themes in the South Punjab are Feudal and Gadi Nashin. A Lahore based journalist was of the view that these differences are due to the change in landscape and the overall difference in economic development.

Sindh

The following is the share of dynastic politics of Sindh in the National Assembly of Pakistan:

Table.3

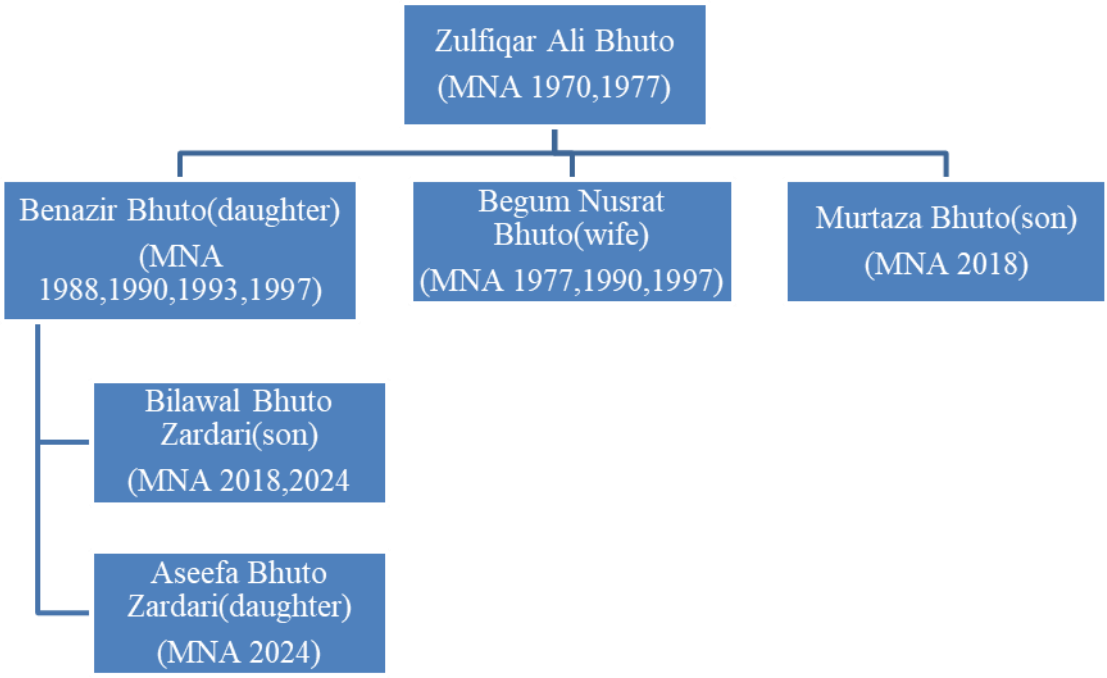
S.no	MNA`s from Sindh in the 16th National Assembly	Number
1.	Total	75
2.	Dynastic	40

3.	Non-dynastic	35
4.	Percentage of Dynastic Politicians	53%

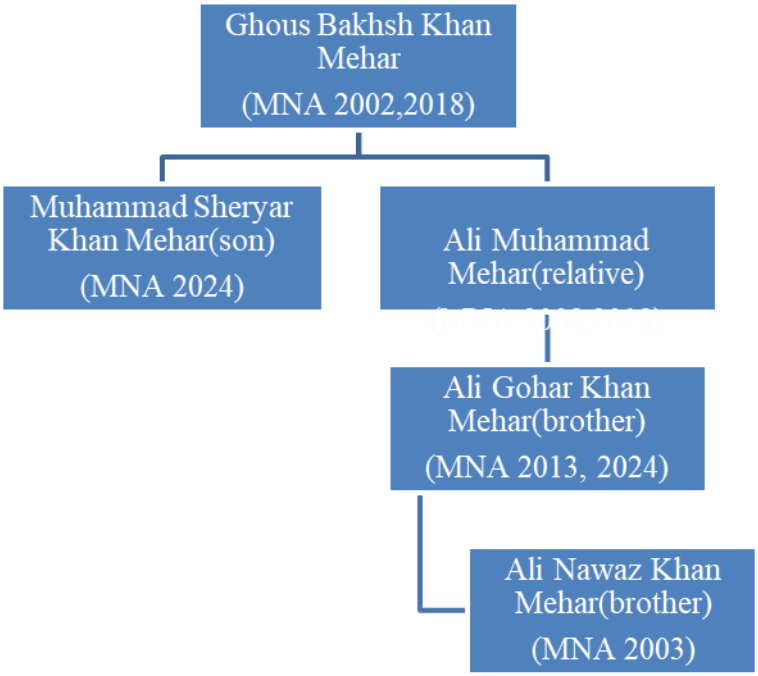
The above data shows that more than half of the politicians in the National Assembly of Pakistan from the province of Sindh are dynastic.

The following are the top 10 dynastic families from Sindh in the National Assembly of Pakistan and their family type:

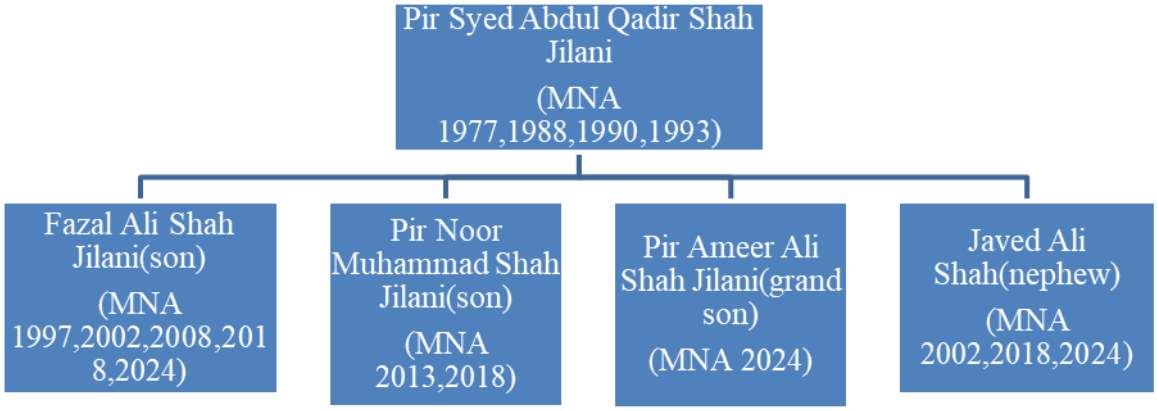
- The Bhuto Family: Wadera



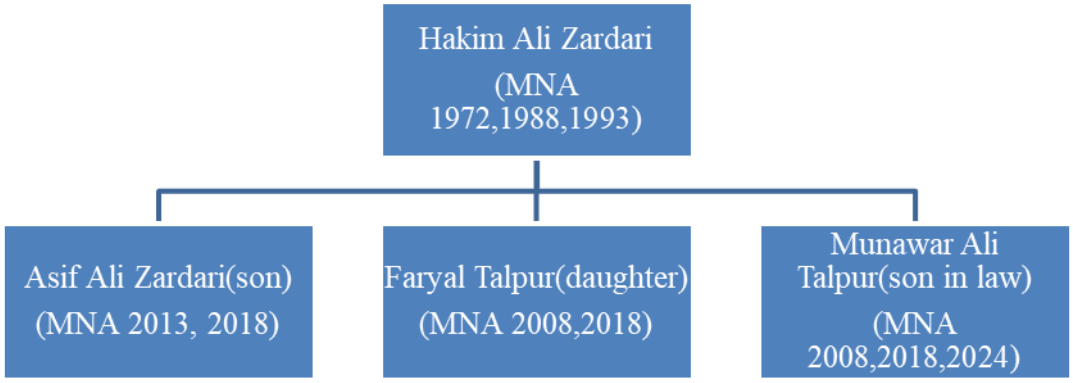
- The Mahar Family: Sardar



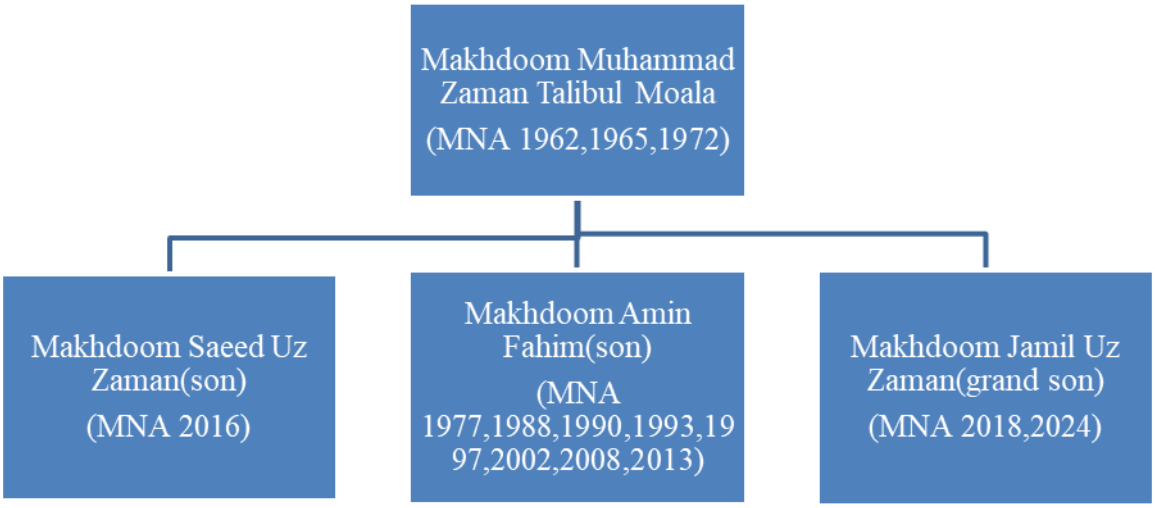
- The Jilani Family: Wadera + Gadi Nashin



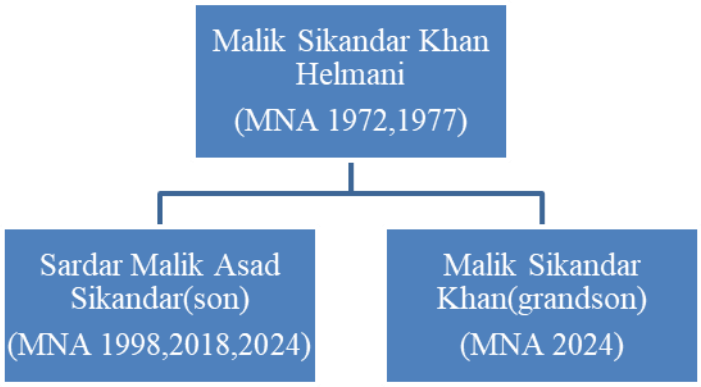
- The Zardari Family: Wadera



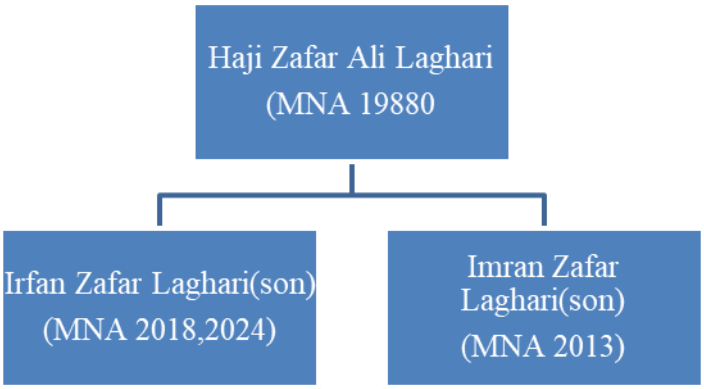
- The Makhdoom Family: Gadi Nashin



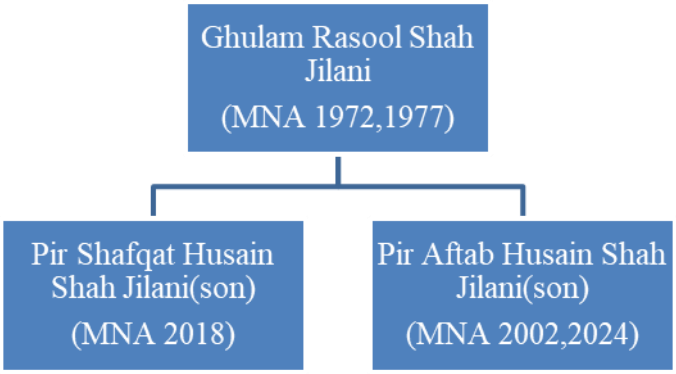
- Malik Sikandar Khan Helmani Family: Sardar



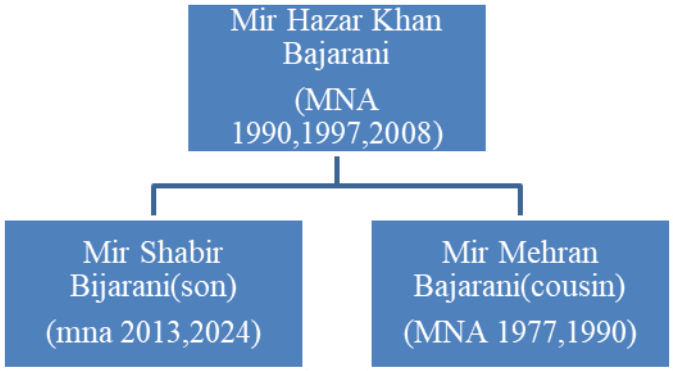
- Haji Zafar Ali Laghari Family: Sardar



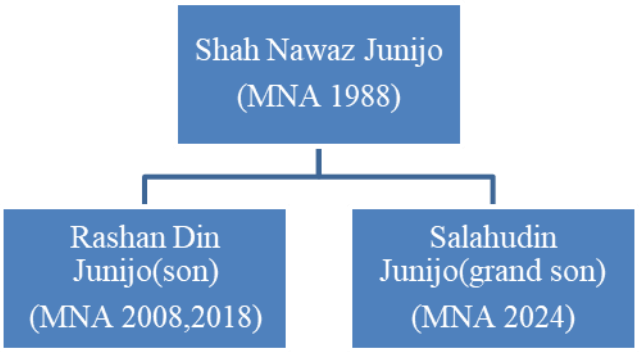
- The Pir Ghulam Rasool Shah Jilani Family: Gadi Nashin



- The Bajarani Family: Wadera



- The Shah Nawaz Junijo Family: Wadera



The family backgrounds of the above top 10 dynastic families from Sindh in the National Assembly of Pakistan show the following dominant themes: Wadera, Gadi Nashin, and Sardar. However, the most dominant theme in these categories is Wadera.

Balochistan

The following is the share of dynastic politics of Balochistan in the National Assembly of Pakistan:

Table.4

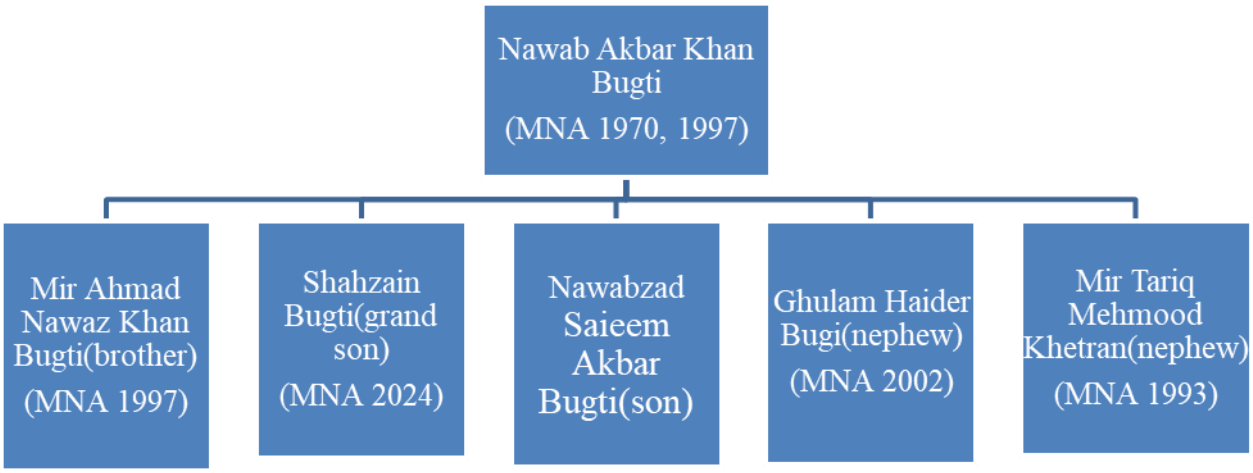
S.no	MNA`s from Balochistan in the 16th National Assembly	Number
1.	Total	19
2.	Dynastic	13
3.	Non-Dynastic	6

4.	Percentage of Dynastic Politicians	68%

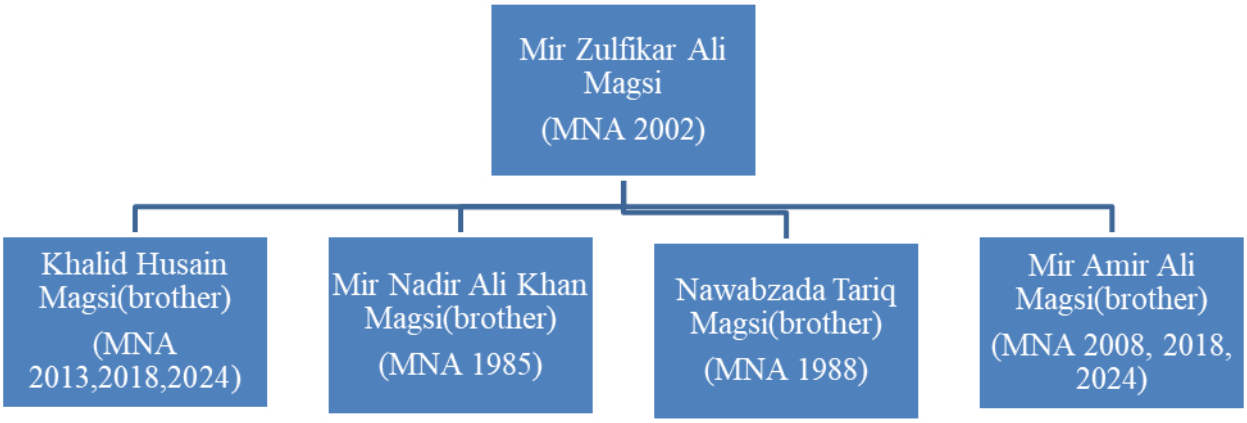
The above table shows that a significant number of politicians from the province of Balochistan are dynastic. This is the highest percentage among the other provinces. As per one academician, the more an area is backward, the more will be the share of dynastic politics.

The following are the top 7 dynastic families from Balochistan in the National Assembly of Pakistan and their family type:

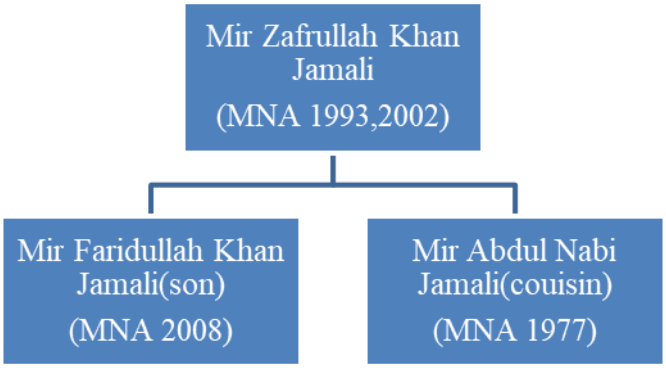
- The Bugti Family: Sardar



- The Magsi Family: Sardar



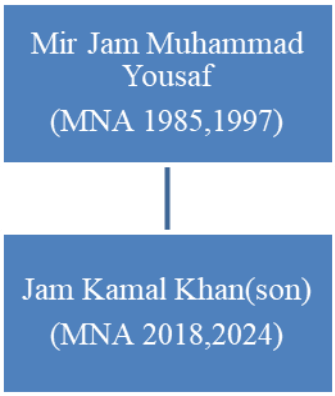
- The Jamali Family: Sardar



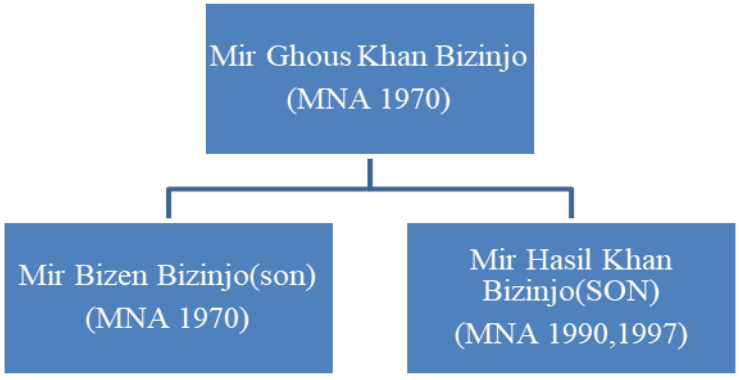
- The Mengal Family: Sardar



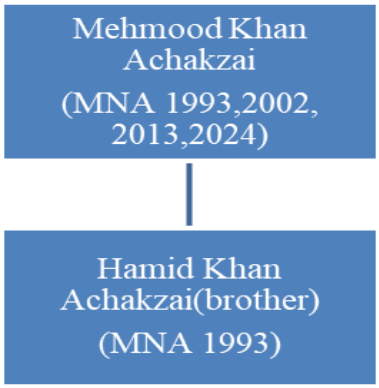
- The Mir Jam M. Yousaf Family: Sardar



- The Bizinjo Family: Sardar



- The Achakzai Family: Sardar



The family backgrounds of the above top 7 dynastic families from Balochistan in the National Assembly of Pakistan show that the dominant theme is Sardar. The heads of all the above families are the sardars of their respective tribes as well. One politician was of the view that dynastic politics is dominant in Balochistan due to this Sardari system.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The following is the share of dynastic politics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the National Assembly of Pakistan:

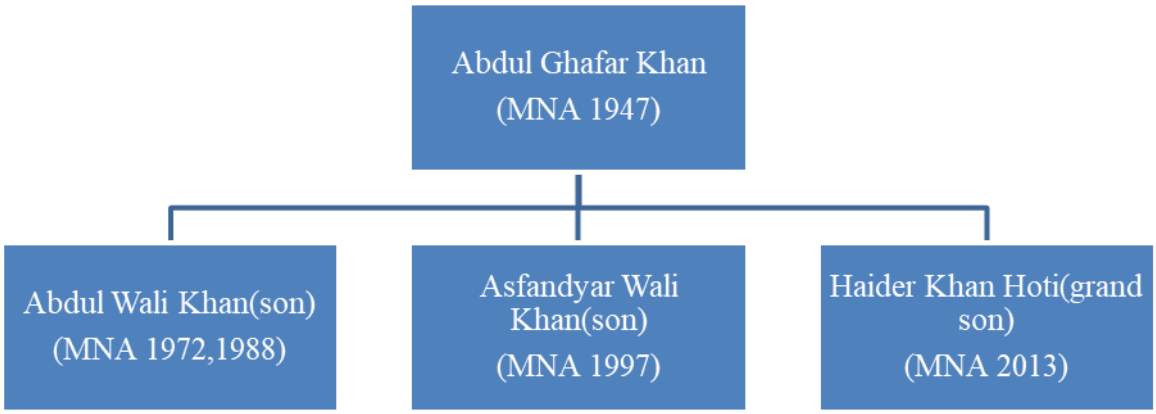
Table.5

S.no	MNA`s from KPK in the 16th National Assembly	Number
1.	Total	55
2.	Dynastic	25
3.	Non-dynastic	30
4.	Percentage of Dynastic Politicians	45%

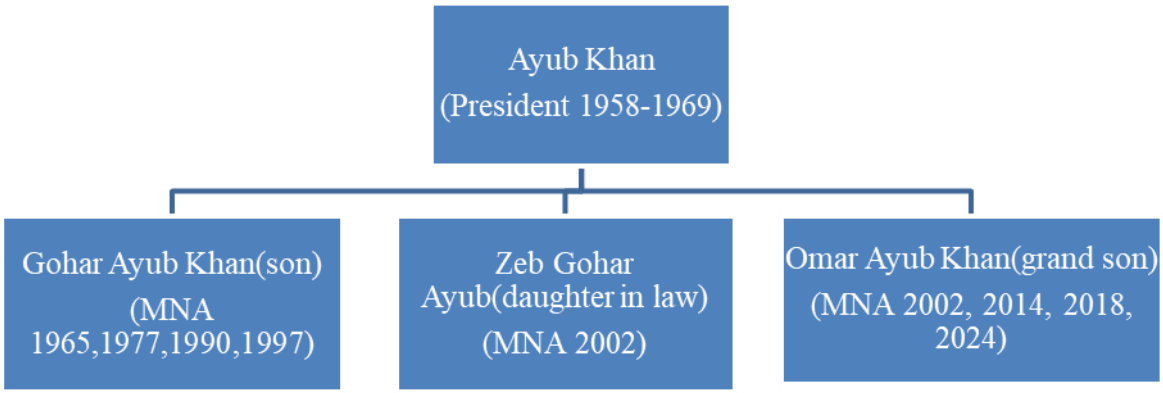
The above table shows that out of 55, 25 of the members from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the National Assembly of Pakistan are dynastic. This means that 45% of the Members from KPK are dynastic. This is the lowest percentage if we compare it with the other provinces of KPK. One politician mentioned that dynastic politics in KP is lower due to the influence of PTI in the province.

The following are the top 10 dynastic families from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the National Assembly of Pakistan and their family type:

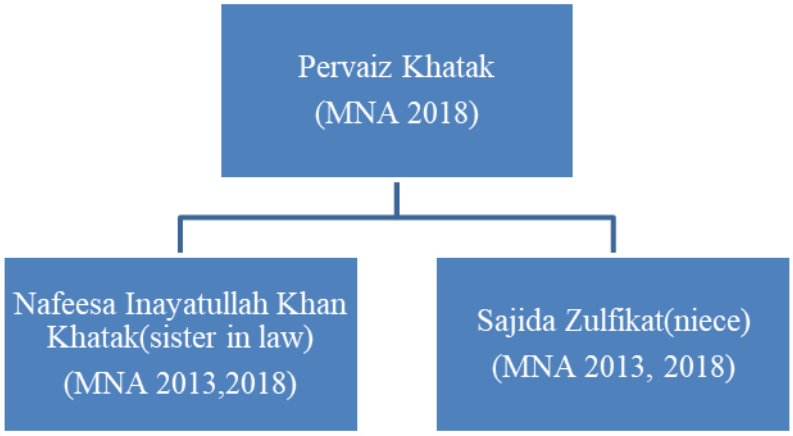
- The Abdul Ghafar Khan Family: Ideological or Nationalist



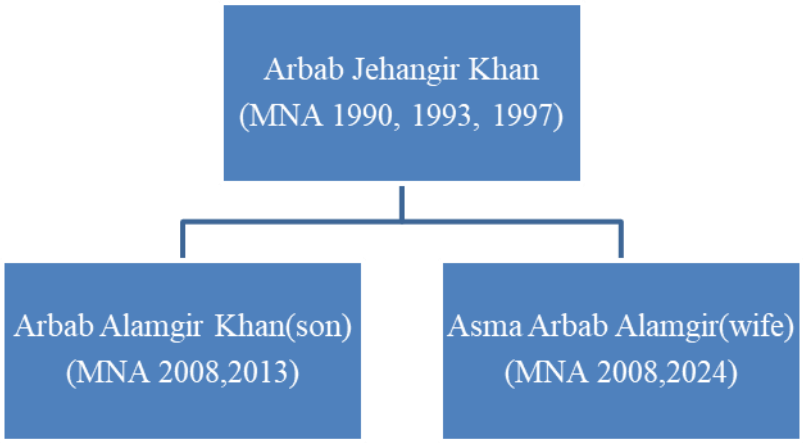
- The Ayub Khan Family: Military-bureaucratic



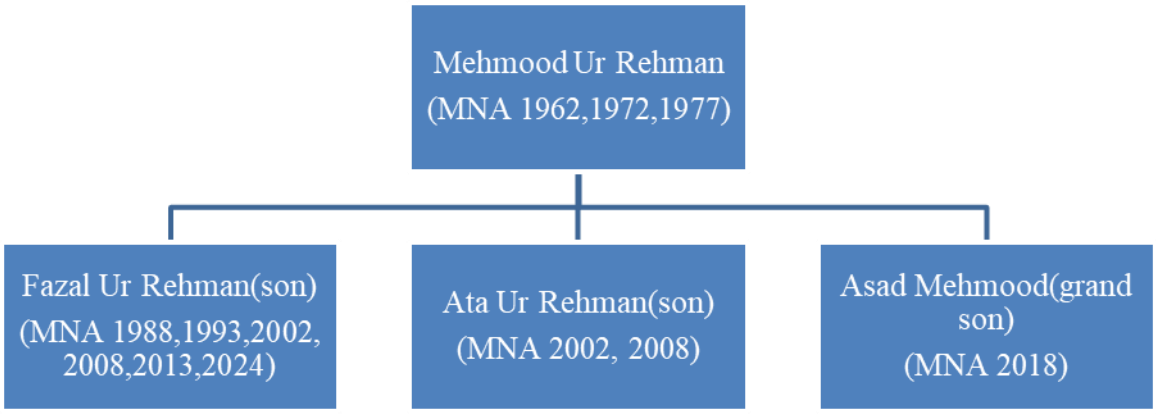
- The Pervaiz Khatak Family: Biradari



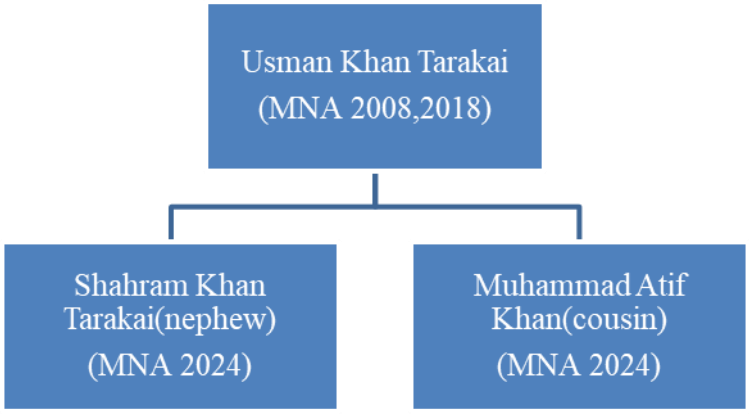
- The Arbab Jehangir Khan Family: Urban Elite



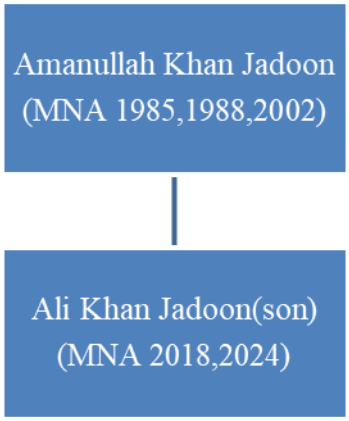
- The Mehmood Ur Rehman Family: Religious



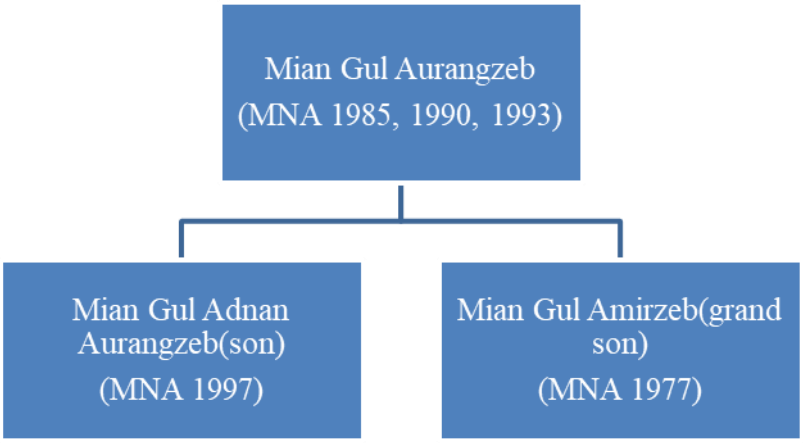
- The Tarakai Family: Industrialist



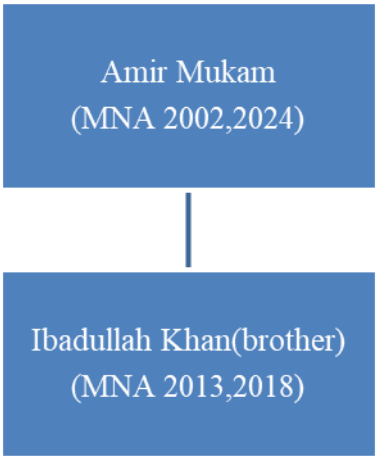
- The Jadoon Family: Biradari



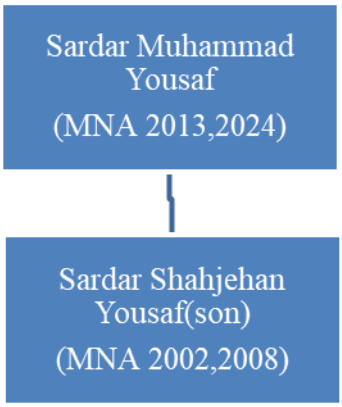
- The Aurangzaib Family: Royal



- The Amir Mukam Family: Industrialist



- The Sardar Muhammad Yousaf Family: Biradari



The family backgrounds of the above top 10 dynastic families from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the National Assembly of Pakistan show that there is no dominant theme in these clientelistic families and which shows that dynastic politics functions in the most pluralistic way in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. An advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan highlighted that dynastic politics functions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa not in one but different shapes.

6. Findings and Discussion

- Sardari Clientelism in Balochistan

Data shows that the most dynastic province in Pakistan is Balochistan. Around 68% of the MNA`s from Balochistan in the 16th National Assembly of Pakistan are from dynastic political families. Apart from this dominance, the single dominant pattern that can be seen is "Sardar" which is the most closed clientelistic system because becoming a Sardar is hereditary and obedience to him is mandatory for survival. This is because of the fact that a client has no say in changing the patron. If someone is born Magsi, he needs to give vote to the Magsi Sardar. This is the perfect clientelistic relationship explained by Scot (1972).

- Gadi Nashin or Spiritual Clientelism in Sindh and South Punjab

Data shows that Gadi Nashin is amongst the most dominant clientelistic relationships in Sindh and South Punjab. In terms of dynastic politics, Punjab comes second while Sindh comes third. As per the book by Mohmand (2019), Spirital Patronage is more durable because once a murid always remains a murid. It is the most reliable and durable clientelistic system because spiritual capital can not be bought easily. Murid not only give vote due to his or her devotion but also persuades other voters to do the same without any financial interests.

- Wadera or Feudal Clientelism in Sindh and Punjab

These two terms are most of the times used interchangeably but the term Wadera is mostly used in Sindh and Feudal in Punjab for someone who possesses large acres of land and other capital. These two types of clientelistic relationships are most dominant in Sindh and Punjab. These kinds of relationships are mostly common in the backward areas of Sindh and Punjab where the clients depend on the patron for getting their work done in most of the cases (Martin, 2016).

- New-clientelism: In Central Punjab and North KP

Industrialist or economic clientelism is sometimes called new-clientelism because it is the most recent trend that has emerged due to rising industrialization. Martin (2014) and Wilder (1999) highlight that clientelism is evolving and adapts according to the change in economics of the world. They write that modernization has not changed the relationship but only the patron. This can be perfectly seen in Central Punjab and Northern KP where the place of traditional clientelism is being captured by new-clientelists. This type of clientelism is semi-open because the client has no such dominance over the patron and he or she chooses their patron as per there interests. Mohmand (2019) argues that the traditional clientelism was broken by PTI in KP and the modern clientelism is more efficient than the older one.

- Pluralistic Clientelism in KP

As so far as dynastic politics is concerned, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the least dynastic (45%) province in Pakistan. There is no dominant theme in these clientelistic families which shows that dynastic politics functions in the most pluralistic way in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The shapes in which dynastic politics functions can be categorized in the semi-open clientelistic relationship. These clientelistic relationships are based on the themes such as , Industrialist, Military-bureaucratic, and Religious. It is due to this breaking of the traditional clientelism that dynastic politics is the least dominant in KP as compared to the other provinces of Pakistan.

7. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to comparatively study the nature of dynastic politics of the four provinces of Pakistan in the National Assembly. The study found that more than half (56%) of the members of the 16th National Assembly of Pakistan are dynastic. As so far as the four provinces are concerned, Balochistan has the highest share (68%) of dynastic politics. Punjab comes second (65%) and Sindh comes third (53%). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has the lowest share in dynastic politics. As so far as the dominant clientelistic relationships are concerned, the single dominant pattern that can be seen in Balochistan is “Sardar” which is the most closed clientelistic system. The dominant clientelistic relationships in Punjab include: Industrialists, Biradary, Gadi Nashin, and Feudal. The dominant themes in North and Centre Punjab are industrialists and Biradri. On the other hand, the dominant themes in the South Punjab are Feudal and Gadi Nashin.

The dominant clientelistic relationships in Sindh include: Wadera, Gadi Nashin, and Sardar. However, the most dominant theme in these categories is Wadera which comes under closed clientelistic relationship. The dominant clientelistic relationships in Sindh include: Industrialist, Military-bureaucratic, Nationalists, and Religious. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the least dynastic (45%) province in Pakistan. There is no dominant theme in these clientelistic families which shows that dynastic politics functions in the most pluralistic way in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which comes under the semi-open clientelistic relationship. After comparatively analyzing the nature of dynastic politics in the four provinces of Pakistan, this study recommends that future research should be about the impact of dynastic politics on political institutions in Pakistan.

References

Alesina, A. ,& Giuliano, P. (2014). Family Ties. Journal of Economic Literature, 52(2), 289-333. https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.52.2.289.

Asako, Y. Lida, T. Matsubayashi, T. ,& Ueda, M. (2015). Dynastic Politicians: Theory and Evidence from Japan, Japanese journal of political science, vol 16(1). pp 5-32.

Camp, R.A. (1982). Family Relationships in Mexican Politics: A Preliminary View. Journal of Politics, 44(3), pp. 848-862.

Cheema, A., Javid, H., & Naseer, M.F., (2013). Dynastic Politics in Punjab: Facts, Myths and their Implications. Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, Working Paper No 01-13.

Dal Bo, E. Dal Bo, P. and Snyder, J. (2009). Political Dynasties. Review of Economic Studies, 76, pages 115–142.

Geys, B., and Smith, D.M. (2O17). Political dynasties in democracies: Causes, consequences and remaining puzzles. Economic Journal, 127(605).

Huntington, S. P. (1968). Political Order in Changing Societies. Yale.

Hussain, Z. (2012). Dynastic politics. Dawn.

Martin, N. (2014). The Dark Side of Political Society? Patronage and Informality at the Margins of Politics in Rural Pakistan. Journal of Contemporary Asia, 44(3), 411-434.

Martin, N. (2016). Politics, Patronage, and Debt: Democracy and the Limits od Electroral Clientelism in Pakistan. Cambridge University Press.

McNabb, D. (2015). Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. Routledge.

Mohmand, S. K. (2019). Crafty Oligarchs, Savy Voters: Democracy under inequality in Rural Pakistan. Cambridge University Press.

Mushtaq, A.Q. Ibrahim, M. ,& Kaleem, M. Dynastic Politics in Pakistan. Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2(2), 219-229.

Rehman, F.U. (2019). Has Dynastic Politics damaged democracy in Pakistan? The Express Tribune.

Scot, J. C. (1972). Partron-client Politics and Political Change in South East Asia. American Political Science Review, 66(1), 91-113.

Siddiqi, F. H. (2015). The Political Economy of the Ethno-nationalis uprising in Pakistan Balochistan, 1999-2013. Palgrave Macmillan.

Vilas, C.M. (1992). 'Family affairs: Class, lineage and politics in contemporary Nicaragua. Journal of Latin American Studies, vol. 24(2), pp. 309-44.

Wilder, A. R. (1999). The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behaviour in the Punjab. Oxford University Press.

Waseem, M. (2021). Political Conflict in Pakistan. Hurst & Company.