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Ideological Partisan of Political Parties and Reforms in Education: A Study of Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf Government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2013-18)



Abstract *This paper is about the linkage between party's ideological orientation and subsequent education reforms once they come into government after winning elections by taking Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a case study. It was found that though the improvement was made in certain aspects of education like budgetary allocation, erection of monitoring mechanisms and healthy up rise movement in enrolment. However, they were found wanting on one crucial front: reforms in textbooks and curriculum. Certain changes were made at the cost of others that came under criticism from some segment of society which again led to the Islamization of curriculum. The province had long struggled to make some healthy changes in the books by the previous government, but all this was revised by the incumbent government. Data was collected through secondary sources by consulting books, research paper, reports and newspaper articles.*

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Introduction

There is no denial of the fact that education plays perhaps the most vital role in the intellectual and material development of a nation. Probably this is the reason that a substantial majority of countries think that the provision of basic and elementary education is not only a fundamental human right but also an effective way to help states overcome poverty, deprivation, and above all, underdevelopment. 'Our progress' to quote John F. Kennedy words, 'as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource'.

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It is for this reason that many developed nations, especially from western societies, have directed much of their financial energies and resources to education, as they know that it is an engine of social change, economic development and human progress. In other words, spending money on education is not less than an investment. However, for education to deliver, it is important it should be in line with the needs of the time, encompassing tools of modern technology, and have elements of innovation and creativity to prepare students for the world that presents diverse challenges but opportunities too. Hardly anyone can challenge the hypothesis that the level of national development is directly linked to the quality of education of a nation (Faiz, 2019). The more a nation is educated, the better it is equipped for economic prosperity and intellectual growth. This is true in many developing nations, including Pakistan.

If modern democracies is a cart, political parties are certainly its wheels. In order to gain public support and enhance vote bank, political parties make electoral commitments and announce policy packages. What may be so interesting for readers is that for the same public issue, different political parties within the government or outside the government opt for different policy solutions. Among other factors, one strong reason for policy differentiation is the difference in the ideological orientation of political parties. Though the literature on the ideological inclination of political parties and policy direction is rare, the relationship between the ideological position of the party in government and the policy they would formulate in a particular field is clear (JUNGBLUT, 2014). About the relationship between a party's ideological orientation and the selection of possible policy solution, there are two strands of thinking approaches. The first one suggests that it is the ideological foundation of any political party in government, either left or right, that determines the very direction and shape of reforms in education, including even the budgetary allocation (JUNGBLUT, 2014). In other words, there is a strong possibility that the driving force behind many reforms introduced in the field of education reflects the ideological stance of the ruling party.

There is another group of thinkers who suggest that instead of being driven by the ideological predisposition of any political party, any difference in education or curriculum reforms is guided by the institutional structure (JUNGBLUT, 2014). Although both lines of thinking carry weightage in their arguments and approach, what this paper suggests is that in the case of Pakistan, although institutional structure may be intervening factors, it is the ideological inclination of the ruling party that helps determine how education reforms would look like at the end.

Different political parties position themselves differently on education policies. The question is, why is it so? To find the answer to this question, one has to understand the ideological inclination of the party leadership and the surroundings of the general condition of the formation of a political party. Furthermore, in order to win elections and secure offices, parties offer and present different policy choices so as not only to satisfy their voters but are more suitable to their ideological characteristics. In other words, the more education has become a distinct area of policy issue, the more it has become politicized.

Though at the time of partition, there was one single political party, the Muslim League, in Pakistan. However, as time went on, a number of new parties appeared on the political scene in the newly independent state. With the exception of a few, the majority of the newly established parties had religious roots who tried to exploit religious symbols and sentiments of the people to make their way to the corridors of

power. In 1997, the cricketer turned politician, Imran Khan, erected a political party of his own named Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (Pakistan's Justice Party). The party hardly made any headlines in its early days, but the founder never gave up his political struggle to broaden its vote bank. Although educated in one of the world's most renowned universities, the Oxford University in England, Imran Khan's PTI has all the features of Right or Center-Right political ideals (Flamenbaum, 2012) (Afzal, 2019). His reputation as anti-west and pro-Taliban translates him neatly as right-winged who strongly believes in administering the state on religious lines. While in opposition, his campaign against the US drone strikes in Pakistan's ex-FATA region, his assertion to engage Al-Qaeda and Taliban in dialogues along with his drive to mainstream the banned Militant outfits politically, just to name a few, would make him a true Right-winged populist.

Pakistan's Crisis with Education and Tehreek e Insaaf Reform Agenda

The 18th constitutional amendment passed in April 2010 devolves education to be a provincial subject and makes education compulsory for all children between the age of five and sixteen. However, there still exists issues and crisis of far greater magnitude, not allowing education to be a cheap available-for-all commodity. This is visible from the fact that there are still millions of children out of schools. There are millions of children who don't receive primary and secondary education, and so the literacy rates are too stubborn to move up. Furthermore, militancy and terrorism have caused serious damage to the education system, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where hundreds of schools have been razed in bomb blasts. Female children are faced with additional problems in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as restrictive social traditions, Talibanization of the region, along limited facilities hinders their enrolment in schools. Perhaps one of the biggest reasons is the budgetary allocation, which stands at two percent of the Gross Domestic Product, one of the lowest in South Asia. All this has contributed to the worsening situation in the education sector, and one can gauge the vitality of the situation from the fact that Pakistan is nowhere near meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Pakistan Tehrek e Insaaf (PTI) emerged as the leading political party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with a maximum number of provincial seats in the general elections held in 2013. The party was able to form government in the province in a coalition with two other political parties. Before moving further, it is important to trace the centrality of education as an engine of socio-political change in the election manifesto of the ruling party as it is the elections manifesto that guides and drives the reform program of a government in democracies. In its election manifesto, PTI had committed, first, to increase spending on education from 2% of GDP to 5% in five years; second, a decentralized system where all hiring will be made at district level; third, more focus on girls' education by doubling the number of high schools for girls in five years; fourth, special programs to upgrade and modernize government sector colleges; fifth, allocation of more resources to adult literacy in the age range between 15 to 30 (Pakistan Tehrek e Insaaf, 2013). This description is reflective of the fact that how serious PTI was to reform and transform the existing education system to make it more conducive to the existing needs of the time.

Soon after its election, PTI declared an education emergency in the province and has embarked upon a number of reforms packages to deliver on its election commitments. Ironically, education, though too vital for socio-political change, has faced poor

budgetary allocation in Pakistan over the years. However, since the election of PTI to the corridors of power, budgetary allocation to elementary and secondary education has shown gradual upward movement. In the year 2013-14, the budget allocated to elementary and secondary education stood at PKR. 64 billion, which rose up to PKR.88 billion in the next budget. In the following budget for the year 2015-16, the total budget allocated to education increased to 99.4 billion, then increased to 118.7 billion and 136.194 for the years 2016-17 and 2017-18 respectively. Importantly, the PTI led government, when in power, in the province made a total increase of 113.84% between 2013-18 for elementary and secondary education (Saeed T. , 2018).

This much-needed increase in the budgetary allocation has had a healthy impact on the overall outlook of education and its infrastructure. The party, after taking over the government in the province, started reforms in the education sector on an emergency basis by increasing the number of community schools, raising 1251 new community schools in three years between 2013-16. Statistics show that as many as 43,220 girls who were out of schools earlier have been enrolled in these schools (Tribal News Network, 2016). Some more than 500 ghost schools have made functional while at the same time, 539 non-functional, for one reason or other, primary schools have been reopened. Furthermore, the government is determined to expand and provide more facilities to the students in the schools. In this regards, the department of education has built some 16,000 new classrooms, has raised over 15,000 boundary walls, electrification of some 10,000 schools, constructed some 19,000 toilets and provision clean drinking water to as many as 15,000 schools. Walls. There is a plan that envisages the construction of 1,748 new schools in the province (Zia, 2017). The provincial government allocated PKR. 3 billion for the construction of Cadet College for girls at district Mardan. Moreover, to equip the students with technological know-how in public schools, the government built some 1350 IT labs. For the first time in the history of KP, Girls Cadet College at Mardan was established with a budget allocation of RS. 3 Billion. Moreover, to ensure the enrolment of poor students, the government has initiated a voucher scheme that has reached 13,000 poor students in KP.

To make the delivery system further effective, the government has introduced a mechanism to observe and monitor schools and staff members. For this purpose, monitoring teams known as Independent Monetary Units have been established throughout the province who pay periodic but surprise visits to schools to ensure the attendance of teachers. These monitoring teams were helpful in tracing and locating ghost schools, teachers who remained absent from duties for a long, and ensuring that quality education is imparted at public schools (Ullah, Ullah, & Ullah, 2020). Moreover, a biometric system of attendance has been introduced in schools. The net effect of all these reforms is that there can be seen a marked improvement in the attendance of teaching staff at schools.

The reforms introduced by the PTI led government between 2013-18 in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are proudly showcased as achievements that other governments in the province dared not to introduce. In support of their claim, they argue that as many as 10,000 students switched from private to government-run public schools during this time which speaks volume of the rising standard of the public school's education system (Siddique, 2021). Although the authenticity of this claim is challenged on many grounds, what is more, controversial about their reform process is the changes they made in curricula and contents on books.

The politics of curriculum is not something new (Ullah, Ullah, & Ullah, 2020). Educators have long argued that the curriculum and contents of textbooks are designed in such a way as to advance the national-political interests of a particular state while keeping in view the socio-economic dynamics of that society. In other words, books, especially textbooks at the school level, are written under a plan for a purpose. Besides this, changes or reforms in curricula are also made in line with the party manifesto and what is expected from the ruling party by the people who vote them to power. However, Pakistan's dilemma with the education system is the uninterrupted experimentation with education policies and curriculum reforms that continues till day since independence. However, one of the dominant characteristics of these reforms is the excessive Islamization of textbooks contents by successive governments. Although efforts have been made by some governments, especially at the beginning of the 21st century, to reform education on secular lines, they have met strong public resentment and criticism. However, there is a reason for these uninterrupted school books.

Pakistan appeared on the world map on the 14th of August, 1947, when the Muslim majority provinces of the Indian subcontinent decided to make a separate state of their own. The division or separation was purely based on religious lines because the Muslims of united India maintained that they couldn't live in a Hindu majority united India and needed a state where they could live in accordance with their religious injunctions and principles. However, not only their separate identity would be threatened if they were forced to live together with Hindus, but there will be civil war and terrible bloodshed at the end between the two communities that may make India not worthy of living in. So it was expected that a nation created in the name of Islam, religion will be the dominant force to drive the country's internal as well as external policy. Furthermore, religion came to the center stage and employed as a policy tool to counter or subdue the centrifugal-divisive tendencies, sub-ethnic identities. Slowly religion made its way even to the pages of textbooks and thus became a driving force to mold and shape the state-sponsored curriculum. This was well reflected in the report of National Commission on Education, 1959, which stated that '*Our educational system must have to play an important role for protecting those theories by which Pakistan came into being. The struggle for Pakistan was actually shaping a path for the safety of the Islamic way of life. The people of Indo-Pak demanded a separate country only for living their lives freely according to the Islamic values*' (Saleem, Ahmad, & Saeed, 2014, p. 55)

Though the Islamization of textbooks in Pakistan goes back to the time of partition, it got pace and intensity soon after the military dictator, General Zia Ul Haq, took over the country and imposed martial law in 1977. As he was more eager to use religion for political motives, he started a movement for the Islamization of the state of Pakistan that also included changes in textbooks and curriculum on Islamic lines. Even science and math books included chapters with Islamist contents. Muslim invaders and commanders were glorified so as to be idealized and realized as real heroes of Islam in the subcontinent. This overhauling of the education system left marking imprints on the society that manifested itself in the shape of radicalization of the society, leaving no room for tolerance and openness.

Interestingly the inclusion of religious materials in textbooks and the Islamization of curriculum didn't stop with the death of Zia Ul Haq in the late 1980s. Even in the years that followed, the curriculum was revised from time to time to accommodate the demands of religious parties and silence pressure groups (Saleem, Ahmad, & Saeed,

2014). The government of the Awami National Party (2008-13) had started a series of initiatives to reform the education system that was subsequently reversed by the PTI led government. The ANP led government in 2008 had passed a bill that introduced local language to be a compulsory subject to be taught as well as making it mandatory that education at the primary level should be imparted in the mother tongue (Ullah, Ullah, & Ullah, 2020). Moreover, they made many changes in the contents of the textbook by removing certain chapters while adding others. However, as soon as the new government was elected in 2013, the previous government of ANP came under serious criticism for introducing secular and objectionable contents that negated the very spirit of the local people and immediately made its intention clear to fold all those initiatives back. A commonly held opinion, though to some extent uninformed, was that the changes introduced by the ANP were external in nature and not suitable in the context of the socio-economic realities of the province. People in the far-flung districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa criticized reforms in curricula introduced by the previous governments for being un-Islamic in spirit that glorified western culture and way of life.

When Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf was elected to power in the general election held in 2013, they once again started the process of Islamization of textbooks. The PTI led provincial government rolled back many changes made during the previous government led by a left-wing political party when authorities removed religious chapters on social science texts to replace them with chapters on Nelson Mandela, Karl Marx, Marco Polo, Vasco de Gama and Neil Armstrong. Though PTI itself has an appetite for the Islamization of curriculum, it seems that the move is driven primarily by the junior partner, Jamaat e Islami (JI), in the provincial government, who considers themselves to be the champions and custodians of Islamic values and norms. "There are errors in current textbooks which go against our values," Inayat Ullah Khan, a minister from JI, once told the media. They also pressed the government for the inclusion of Quranic verses on jihad in the textbooks while adding passage on the divine creation of the universe in the science books. What is more objectionable is that as many as a hundred textbooks were evaluated, and it was found that these books depicted Hindus as second class citizens and essential enemies of Islam (Dawn, 2014). The government had to accept all these demands to please the key coalition partner and retain their support.

Jumat e Islami leaders have raised objections over the publication of images in textbooks of small girls not wearing the dupatta, the inclusion of pictures of Christmas cakes, the replacement of Assalam U Alekum with good morning and the inculcation of some other 'unacceptable' materials in the school books at school level. As the government was in no position to alienate its political partner, they wasted no time accepting the demands made by the JI leaders (Ali, 2014). Resultantly, in a move to Islamize the curriculum, the PTI led government in KPK has introduced and implemented a new scheme of studies to impart Quranic education with translation to Muslim students from class I-XII in all schools throughout the province from this year's new academic session (Abbasi, 2017). Moreover, contents encompassing teachings of Islam, sayings of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), materials about the four caliphs of Islam have been brought in afresh in the textbooks during the PTI led government in the province.

Changes in the textbooks received a mixed reaction from the people, depending on their political affiliation, level of education and ideological inclination. The changes made came under heavy criticism, especially from liberals, who maintain that the newly

introduced textbooks are highly Indian centric with a greater focus on highlighting the enmity with arch-rivals India while also portraying the religious minorities as second class citizens. They accuse the government of striking a hidden deal with JI as not to lose their support in the provincial assembly. The government is certain to collapse if the latter withdraws its support. There is a general consensus that it is time to move forward and bring changes that allow students to think critically and independently. Moreover, they argue that Zia's era policies must now stop as this has inflicted greater damage to society and the state. Education must be reformed in a way that would serve its real purposes instead of making it subservient to some narrow individual or party interests.

Conclusion

There is, no doubt, a strong link between education reforms and the ideological inclination of the ruling party. If at one time there is a party with a left orientation, education reforms have taken a different direction from those initiated by a party with the right inclination. Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf that succeeded Awami National Party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2013 nullified all their reforms and started the Islamization of textbooks again. The party must be given credit for some good data figures. Statistics and data show that KP is well ahead of all four provinces, including Islamabad in Gross Intake Rate (GIR). The GIR of KP is 135 per cent compared to the 128 per cent of ICT and the 116 per cent and 111 percent of Punjab and Pakistan, respectively. The rest of the provinces and regions have recorded a lower GIR. About the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER), it is heartening to note that KP stands second after the ICT with 110 percent of GER (Arif, 2016). Though figures indicate improvements in many areas in the education sector, a lot still has to be done. The challenge is enormous. It is at the curriculum reforms that PTI will be tested. Their Islamization of textbooks and reforms in the curriculum is certainly a source of discontent in the educated segment of the society. The surrender of PTI to the Jumat e Islami, a religious right-winged party, is a point of worry for many within and without the country. Moreover, according to the Alif Ailaan group, some 25 million children aged from five to 16 in Pakistan are out of school, 14 million of them girls. The challenge is more serious in far-flung areas of the province where non-state actors and miscreants have targeted and bombed schools, particularly girl schools. Many schools remain closed or dysfunctional due to reasons known to everyone. These are the kind of challenges that will certainly test the mettle of the provincial government in the days to come.

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