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## A Critical Analysis of Democratic Culture in the Political Parties; Awami National Party, Pakistan People's Party, and Pakistan Muslim League (N)

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**Abstract:** The undemocratic behavior of the political parties in Pakistan is one of the major causes of political instability and political corruption. The control of a few people or families over parties creates feelings of dissatisfaction and powerlessness among the masses. The situation leads to the development of centralized, family-based, and, autocratic culture in political parties. The political experts and legends pointed out the selection of leadership, selection of candidates for public offices as well as for party offices, and the organizational structure of decision-making bodies of political parties as the basic institutions for party democratization. In the light of the literature review and constitutional framework for political parties of Pakistan, the party leadership, selection of candidates, and decision-making bodies are being examined of sample parties (ANP, PPP, and PM -N).

## Introduction

In Pakistan, except for a few, the main political parties are run by families that have power over them, and thus have a major bearing on their democratic process. Party positions are filled by democratically elected leadership, although succession usually passes between different members of one family. As such, this practice prevents the rising of other party members with qualitative merits to leadership roles in direct violation of the parties' public axioms that they uphold democratic values (Khan, 2021). This paper examines how these parties go against dominant democratic principles to maintain family-centered leadership. The analysis, relying on public surveys and the internal rules of these parties, points out the gap between the declared and actual democratic principles of these parties (Khan, 2021).

## Literature Review

It has been pointed out that the democratic culture within Pakistani political parties, namely the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Awami National Party (ANP) has a dynastic nature and has no internal democracy at all. According to many scholars, including Siddiqui et al., Pakistan's political framework poses challenges for true democratic representation, as parties tend to work more like family-run entities than democratic institutions (Siddiqui, Mufti, & Shafqat, 2020).

Political party leadership is said to be usually more inclined towards loyalty than merit and therefore inclined to autocratic tendencies making accountability and transparency within the party internal a remote possibility, Khalid Bhatti notes. Such practices are symptomatic of Pakistan's hybrid political system in which family loyalty

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replaces democratic decision-making in the party (Bhatti, 2007).

This dynastic progression, echoing broader South Asian trends (Jones, 2020), is demonstrated in the PPP's leadership succession from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. In the same way, the leadership of the ANP has remained within the Ghaffar Khan family, thereby consolidating the non-democratic practices (Kureshi, 2022).

Finally, the challenge of internal democratization has not yet been met. There are efforts akin to improving internal transparency that the latter parties (i.e., parties deviating from democratic norms) might use to try to be in line with democratic norms to subsequently enhance governance outcomes (Liaqat, Cheema, & Mohmand, 2021).

## Research Methodology

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This research utilizes a qualitative content analysis approach to critically assess the democratic culture within Pakistan's main political parties: Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N) and Awami National Party (ANP). Since the study is concerned with organizational structures, leadership patterns, and succession practices, party constitutions, historical documents, and scholarly works, are used as a foundation to analyze these internal dynamics given that they deal with the study area. The analysis of the secondary data from books, academic articles, and reports helps to understand how dynastic leadership and centralized power structures create hereditary party democracy and decision-making (Khan, 2021).

An analysis is enhanced by public survey data on perceptions of democratic integrity in these parties, which also shows how leadership, party operations, and candidate selection affect public confidence in internal democracy. The study examines these public perceptions with party documents to show gaps between democratic ideals and day-to-day practices in these political entities (Zaidi, 2018).

## Theoretical Framework

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This study is theoretically based on Political Party Theory which judges the function of parties in a

democratic polity, which consists of representation, integration, and recruitment into leadership posts. Throughout this project, the framework of the roles of political parties in making the governments accountable and the functions of the opposition by Vicky Randall and Lars Svåsand called 'potential functions' (Randall & Svåsand, 2002) serves as a purpose to determine the Pakistani targeted parties' democratic setting. Norms.

## Research Questions

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- How does the leadership structure in ANP, PPP, and PML-N represent the principles of a democratic culture when it comes to leadership succession and member participation?
- To what degree do the decision-making processes inside these parties enhance their democratic representation and accountability, or does it just emphasize autocratic tendencies?

## Analytical Discussion

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According to PPO 2002, the executive positions and all levels of committees must be formed entirely through the process of transparent elections while nominations must be put to an end. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the political parties have very weak organizational structures and revolve around personalities or families instead of ideology and party manifesto. Political parties are dominated by personalities or dominant families and there is no democracy in the political parties. Inner party election has become only a selection in all major parties of Pakistan. There is a concept of "Ta Hayat Chairman or Chairperson." The domination of specific families has not left any room for the emergence of true leadership.

## Leadership in Dynastic Political Parties; PML-N, PPP, and ANP

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The PML-N was founded in 1988 by Mian Nawaz Sharif. Nawaz Sharif ran it informally from the start, despite his nominal president Fida Muhammad Khan (Purdey 2016). The Sharif family's flaws stem from internal party elections that are opaque to outsiders. During Nawaz Sharif's imprisonment in 1999, his wife Kalsoom

Nawaz, who had no political background, became the party's president (Pakistan Muslim League (N), 2013). This reflects PML(N)'s non-democratic practices. After the Sharif family was exiled, Javed Hashmi became president from 2001 to 2005, remaining under Nawaz. Party workers' refusal to support Hashmi's leadership contributed to the

2002 election loss (Jafri A., 2002). Shahbaz Sharif became party president in 2005; Nawaz took over in 2011. After Nawaz and Shahbaz's deaths, their children, Hamza and Maryam, are preparing to take over the party leadership. This dynastic party control paradigm undermines party dissent like undemocratic methods.

**Table 1**

*The table shows the names and tenure of the president's office of PML (N).*

No	Name of Party Chief	Designation	Period
1	Fida Mohammad Khan	President PML (N)	1988 – 1993
2	Nawaz Sharif	President PML (N)	1993 – 1999
3	Kalsoom Nawaz	President PML (N)	1999 – 2001
4	Javed Hashmi	President PML (N)	2001 – 2005
5	Shahbaz Sharif	President PML (N)	2005 – 2011
6	Nawaz Sharif	President PML (N)	2011 -

*(Pakistan Muslim League (N), 2013)*

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto founded PPP in 1967 and became chairman of the party. After his death, his widow Nusrat Bhutto became Chairperson she vacated the office for her daughter Benazir Bhutto in 1984. She remained in the office till her death in December 2007. After the death of Benazir Bhutto her son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was nominated as new Chairman of the party according to the will of Benazir Bhutto. At the time of nomination, Bilawal was studying abroad, and he was not registered as a voter in Pakistan. This

young and unregistered voter was nominated as Chairman of the largest democratic and political party in Pakistan. During his stay in London for study, his father Asif Ali Zardari was appointed as co-chairman of the party. This nomination turned the largest democratic party into a family party. Though democracy and the struggle for the restoration of democracy is the objective of the PPP internally democratic values are not present in the party.

**Table 2**

*The table shows the names and tenure of the chairperson's office of PPP*

S.N	Name of Party Chief	Designation	Period
1	Zulfikar Ali Bhutto	Chairperson PPP	1967 – 1979
2	Nusrat Bhutto	Chairperson PPP	1979 – 1984
3	Benazir Bhutto	Chairperson PPP	1984 – 2007
4	Bilawal Bhutto Zardari	Chairperson PPP	2007–onward

The case of the Awami National Party is not different from the PPP and PML (N). ANP is the offshoot of Khudai Khidmatgar founded by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. ANP has always been led by the Ghaffar Khan family since its formation in 1986. At the time of its formation, Abdul Wali Khan the eldest son of Ghaffar Khan became its president. In the 1990 elections, he was defeated in his home constituency by Maulana Hassan Jan and then he resigned from the party leadership. Ajmal Khattak was appointed as President of the

party in a meeting while Wali Khan was given the status of supreme leader of the Party (Jafri A., 2002, p. 67). After Musharraf's takeover, Azam Hoti, the former minister of Nawaz Sharif, was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on charges of corruption. As Azam Hoti was the brother of Wali Khan's wife, Khattak was asked by the Wali Khan family to use the party for his release. But Khattak refused to deal with Musharraf. So, Khattak was expelled from the Party in 1999 (Jafri A., 2002, p. 66). After the

expulsion of Khattak, Asfandiyar Wali became President of the party.

The following tables show the names and duration of office of the ANP leadership which

clearly indicates that the parties are dominated by their founding families and there is no chance for other party members to become leaders of their parties through a democratic process.

**Table 3**

*The table shows the names and tenure of the president office of ANP.*

No	Name of Party Chief	Designation	Period
1	Abdul Wali Khan	President ANP	1986 – 1990
2	Ajmal Khattak	President ANP	1991 – 1999
3	Asfandiyar Wali	President ANP	1999 – 2002
4	Ehsan Wyne	President ANP	2002 – 2003
5	Asfandiyar Wali	President ANP	2003 - onward

*(Awami National Party, 2013)*

### **Decision Making Bodies of ANP, PML (N) and PPP**

The Constitution of Pakistan provided that every political party should have its own party constitution. The constitution should indicate organizational structure, policy-making bodies, and criteria of membership, qualification, and tenure for the party leader. According to the party constitutions of ANP, PML (N), and PPP, the decision-making bodies within their party structure are as below.

The ANP Party Constitution has a Central Executive Committee with 15 elected members from Punjab, Sind, KP, Baluchistan, and Saraiki belt. Central and provincial Party presidents and general secretaries will be ex-officio CEC members (ANP, 2008). A central president can nominate 10 CEC members at will. The Party Constitution allows the President to remove CEC members earlier. The central executive committee is the ANP's supreme body. The CEC can create and implement Party manifesto-based policies. Central Executive Committee appoints sub-committees, prepares the annual budget, supervises national units, and nominates candidates for party and public office elections. From top to bottom, the CEC organizes party elections. This body is crucial to ANP politics and decision-making.

According to the Party Constitution of PML (N), (CWC) is the supreme body. It consists of not less than 15 members and not more than 40. All the members are nominated by the Party President.

The Party President has the power to expand, reconstitute, or replace any member of CWC. It is the duty of the CWC to appoint committees for the supervision of subcommittees and provincial organizations. Furthermore, CWC controls and regulates the activities of the entire PML (N) and appoints Party election commissions to conduct elections for the party offices from top to bottom. All the party powers rest with CWC. This body is responsible for devising and implementing policies in the light of the party manifesto. The candidate's selection for party and public offices is the responsibility of this committee.

According to the party law, the CEC is the major organ of the PPP. This body has real executive powers. It works to control and regulate the functions of the entire party. It is the duty of this committee to devise and implement policies in the light of the party manifesto. The selection of candidates for various public and party offices, the arrangement of inner-party elections, and the formulation of the party election commission are the functions of CEC in PPP. The members of CEC are the nominees of the Party Chairperson. The Chairperson can appoint or remove a member of this committee from his/her own discretion. The members of CWC hold offices at the pleasure of the party chief.

The Central Executive Committee of ANP, the Central Working Committee of PML(N), and the Central Executive Committee of PPP are designed to easily control its members by the founding families.

## Selection of Candidates in PML(N), PPP, and ANP for Elections

The selection of candidates for contesting elections at different levels in a political party should be through a democratic process. According to the Italian scholar Giovanni Satori, "Any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through the election, candidates for public office" (Hofmeister, 2011, p. 11). The Political Parties Act of 1962 clearly mentioned in Section III Article 17 that Parties should elect the candidates for contesting election to the Parliament by secret ballot through a democratic process (Gazette I, 1994). The PPO 2002 also indicates that every worker or member should be given an equal opportunity to contest elections at all levels (Ministry, 2002). In Pakistan, all political parties adopt different procedures for the selection of candidates to contest elections for public offices.

Most of the political parties are adopting less democratic procedures in this connection. The party ticket is given to those who are in the good book of the supreme leader. If the supreme leader is not interested in a constituency, then the wealth factor plays a vital role in the distribution of party tickets instead of merit. The electoral system of the country, demands wealthier people to participate in the elections. In most cases, the party leadership is authorized to award tickets to a person.

In PPP the (CWC) is authorized to issue tickets to the candidates to contest elections for public office. The CWC cannot oppose the will of the supreme leader because their own nomination

and removal as a member of the CWC depend on the interest of the Chairperson (Ahmed, 2015). The (CEC) is the supreme body of ANP and this body is responsible for nominating candidates for public offices. The members of (CEC) are elected but the party president has the power to remove them from the membership at his own discretion. So, the CEC has no courage to oppose his party leadership. In case of leaders' interference in issuing a ticket to a person to contest elections for any public office merit goes to a secondary position.

Similarly, the PML (N) Central Working Committee is authorized to finalize the list of candidates for public offices at different levels. CWC is a nominated body that remains under the influence of the party president (Khan & Singh, 2016). The selection of candidates for public offices as well as for party offices is conducted in a centralized method controlled by the party president (Hussain, 2017). The public perception in this regard is very clear. For decentralization in political parties, 90% of people asked for decentralization in ANP, PPP, and PML (N). While 7% agreed on the continuation of the present practices (Zaidi, 2018).

## Public Perceptions of Democratic Integrity within Major Political Parties: A Survey

During the survey, conducted by the researcher, the following findings are extracted regarding the democratic process of party leader selection. Nearly all the respondents agree that the sample parties are not democratic in nature.

**Table 4**

*Following figures and percentages collected during the public survey.*

Research Questions	ANP	PPP	PML (N)	Average
Percentage of people who believe that political parties in Pakistan are family-oriented	97	98	98	97.7
Percentage of people agreed that the leadership of the parties does not come through a democratic process	78	82	81	80.3

According to public perception, the leadership of political parties in Pakistan did not come through a democratic process and declared their nomination totally undemocratic. 78% of respondents declared the leadership selection of

ANP undemocratic. In the case of PPP, 82% of people declared it as an undemocratic selection of leadership and 81% of respondents were of the opinion that the procedure of leadership selection in PML (N) is undemocratic.

To another question, the respondents made it clear that the political parties in Pakistan are totally specific families-oriented parties. About ANP 97% of people agreed that it is a family-oriented party while 98% declared PPP and PML (N) as family-oriented parties.

In regard to decision-making, the public's perception is very clear. Most of the people agreed that there is no role for workers and party members in the decision-making process. The decision-making process is very centralized. The central leadership imposes decisions upon their party members and workers may be against their will. For ANP 80% and 79% for PPP and PML (N) were of the opinion that there is no role for party members and workers in decision-making. While 19-20% said that the workers are consulted in local political decisions. In the query conducted regarding the decentralization of the decision-making process in the political parties 90% of the respondents agreed there must be decentralization in the process of decision-making and candidate selection for public offices. While only 3% were of the opinion that the present procedure is suitable for the country and there is no need for decentralization.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

After highlighting a large democratic deficit in major Pakistani political parties ANP, PPP, and PML-N, this analysis demonstrated that there is a

leadership tendency to travel from generation to generation within the families, leaving these parties far from following democratic principles. The dynastic trend stifles leaders within the party's rank and renders party members and the public feel powerless. These practices contravene Pakistan's 1973 Constitution's spirit as well as the standards of international democratic norms. Here are the recommendations to enhance democratic practices within major Pakistani political parties:

- **Enforce Party Constitutions:** Remind the members to strengthen the enforcement of existing party constitutions which require democratic processes to conform to national democratic standards. Increase
- **Member Participation in Decision-Making:** The need to improve mechanisms to allow broader participation of party members in decision-making processes so as to conform to a more democratic practice.
- **Implement Transparent Election Mechanisms:** Clear, transparent processes to elect the leadership position must be developed for parties so there is no bias and it's fair.
- **Introduce Term Limits:** Establish a term limit for key positions in the party so that there are term limits for key positions so that a single leader or family doesn't dominate the party.



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