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Democratization Under Military Rule: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Democratization refers to the political process leading to the establishment of democratic political order. Existing literature on democratization mostly discusses the transition from authoritarian structures to democracy in Eastern Europe and Latin America. This paper reviews the mainstream democratization theories in the context of Pakistan. It has been argued that three experiences of democratic transitions and authoritarian reversals have made Pakistan a classical case for developing new theoretical insights and a potent knowledge addition in the existing literature on democratization. This paper revolves around the two fundamental questions; firstly, under what conditions democratization becomes a possibility in an authoritarian state? Secondly, what are the possible modes of democratization?

Key Words: Democratization, Authoritarianism, Transformation, Trans-placement, Replacement, Modernization

Introduction

Democratization is a widely addressed area of study. It can be analyzed at two levels; at the regime level and at a societal level. At the regime level, it means the transformation of the regime to democracy. It refers to the transfer of power from a monarch, a personal dictator or a military dictator to a body of elected representatives. At the societal level it means growing the trust of the majority of the population in democratic institutions, the evolution of participatory political culture and tolerant society, the realization of one's right of governing oneself, and strengthening of the belief that opinion of the mass population can influence the public policy. Democratization at the societal level can be termed as a movement towards greater legitimacy of democratic institutions. The dream of a consolidated democratic political order can only be materialized when the above mentioned two movements are reconciled. This paper reviews the mainstream democratization theories and applies them in the context of political development in Pakistan.

Most of the studies in democratization literature revolve around the following questions:

- Firstly, under what conditions democratization is possible in those states which are experiencing authoritarian rule?
- Secondly, what are the possible modes of democratization in these states?

The main body of the paper is divided into three sections. The first section analyzes the theories dealing with the conditions leading to democratic transitions. The second section debates the possible modes of

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democratization. The third and last section develops a theoretical debate on Pakistan's experience of democratization and authoritarian reversals.

Macro Vs Micro Oriented Studies

In order to respond to the first question, Adam Przeworski identified two types of studies in democratization literature: macro-oriented studies and micro oriented studies (Przeworski, 1986, pp. 47-48). Macro oriented studies primarily focus upon objective conditions like level of economic development, literacy rate, the emergence of a reasonable middle class etc. These studies are deterministic in nature. They claim that when these pre-conditions are achieved in a society, it ultimately finds its way to democracy. Although the argument carries some weight, it is evident that in many cases, objective conditions do not inevitably lead to regime transformation (Przeworski, 1986). Katharine Adeney and Andrew Wyatt referred to Sri Lanka as a leading case that has been able to consolidate its democracy since independence, irrespective of long-running civil war and poor economic performance (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004). Similarly, these studies fail to explain the correlation between economic growth and democratic consolidation in the Pak-India case, if taken in comparative terms, as Pakistan has had a higher growth rate than India for most of the time since the partition of India (Adeney & Wyatt, 2004).

Micro oriented studies focus upon the political actors and their strategies that may lead to a successful transition from authoritarianism to democracy. These studies identify four kinds of factors that may contribute to regime transformation (Przeworski, 1986, p. 50).

1. A realization within the authoritarian regime that it is no more possible to sustain the status quo may lead to its collapse.
2. The regime, due to one reason or other, may lose its legitimacy. As no regime can last without legitimacy, therefore it may disintegrate.
3. The emergence of a conflict, due to one reason or other, within the ruling block, particularly within the Military, and its failure to resolve it internally may lead to regime transformation.
4. Foreign pressures, particularly through the threats of economic sanctions, may compel the authoritarian regime to go for democratization.

Democratization through the mechanism of (1) and (4) is strongly linked with (2) and (3). There is a minimum possibility of developing a realization in an authoritarian regime; to go for regime transformation unless there are serious challenges posed to it through loss of legitimacy or internal conflicts within the regime. More particularly, as Alfred Stepan notes that, the states in which military government is the central base of power, military as an institution when feels that the long term corporate interests of the Military may be threatened by popular forces, only then, for its own preservation, it opt for the termination of the authoritarian regime (Stepen, 1986, pp. 72-72). Similarly, external powers do not come into play in a normal situation, as relations among states are dominantly ridden by realism. It is only when (2) or (3) happens and compels the international actors to think that their interests are at stake, in the state suffering from loss of legitimacy or internal conflicts within the holders of power, they pressurize the regime to transform in order to safeguard their long term interests in the said state. Thus, the two, legitimacy crisis and internal conflicts, are the most important factors in micro oriented studies, influencing regime transformation in a state.

The linkage between loss of legitimacy and regime transformation is also not direct and universal. A regime may survive, even after losing legitimacy, with the help of increased oppression. There are a few cases in which authoritarian regimes with sufficient legitimacy transformed into a democracy. What is the most crucial point then which plays a very important role in regime transformation? Adam Przeworski noted that it is nothing else but the presence of a preferable alternative (Przeworski, 1986, pp. 51-53). Thus, loss of legitimacy, in itself, is not the sole cause of regime transformation, as Przeworski argued,

rather the absence or presence of preferable alternatives play the most crucial part in creating the possibility of democratization (Przeworski, 1986, p. 54).

Lastly, the emergence of conflict within the authoritarian regime and its subsequent collapse also needs some explanation. There may be a number of reasons that may cause a conflict within an authoritarian regime. Adam Przeworski termed them as 'objective signals' towards liberalization (Przeworski, 1986, p. 55). These signals may include the sudden death of the leading head of the authoritarian regime resulting in competition among various contenders for succession. If the mechanism of succession is not institutionalized, then there are dominant chances of the emergence of a serious conflict resulting in the collapse of the regime. Other signals may include a "manifest loss of legitimacy, evidenced by mass protest and noncompliance; another signal may consist of a forthcoming economic crisis, still, another may be strong foreign pressures to transform" (Przeworski, 1986). All these signals lead to a successful transformation, only when some members of the ruling block go outside for help. If the ruling bloc is cohesive and tightly controlled, then there are least chances of a regime transformation (Przeworski, 1986, p. 56).

Modes of Democratization

In order to respond to the second question, which refers to the possible modes of democratization, four modes of regime change can be identified in democratization literature; top-down transition, bottom-up transition, transition through transaction and transition through intervention. Samuel P. Huntington termed the first three as transformation, replacement and trans-placement, respectively (Huntington, 1991, pp. 34-175). A brief review of these modes is discussed as under:

In some societies, democratization is initiated by the authoritarian regime itself. Those who are at the top, initiate democratization through reforms. They transfer power, slowly and gradually, to the political and representative forces. The participation base is enlarged gradually. Political parties are allowed to operate in the system. Such constitutional arrangements are made, which start from the partial transfer of power and, at last, power is completely transferred to the political forces, and the political system is democratized. A notable example of such a democratization process is that of democratization started during colonial rule in India, which was completed in 1947 when power was completely transferred to the local political elite in India and Pakistan. Since independence on 15 August 1947, India succeeded to some extent in the process of democratization of its political system through constitutional means.

When an authoritarian regime shows no flexibility for change, political forces organize themselves against it. These forces try to get popular support. Slogans of 'no taxation without representation and utilitarian views of democracy help them in this respect. With the increasing mass support of political actors, demands for regime change intensify. Massive protests, general strikes and non-compliance become routine of the day. As a reaction, the authoritarian regime becomes more repressive. The ultimate outcome is a violent struggle between the authoritarian regime and mass representative forces that may culminate in the throwing away of the authoritarian regime and the establishment of a democratic order. Notable examples of such democratization are East Germany, Romania and Argentina. Alfred Stepan termed such transitions as "society-led regime termination" (Stepen, 1986, pp. 78-80). He argues that the outcome of society-led transitions is always uncertain. It may result in a newly constituted authoritarian regime or a caretaker military setup promising election in future. Therefore, the role of political parties is very crucial in society-led regime terminations. Political parties have to build constant pressure on the caretaker regime for holding elections. It is only in the presence of such pressures that the soft-liners within the authoritarian regime can convince the hardliners to democratize (Stepen, 1986).

Some transitions are the outcome of negotiation between democratizing forces and the authoritarian regime. When a strong opposition to the authoritarian regime emerges, and it challenges the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime, then there occurs a split within the authoritarian regime. The authoritarian regime

is divided into two camps; reformers and hardliners. Reformers are those who are in favor of democratic reforms, while hardliners want to maintain the status quo. Similarly, there are two broader groups in the opposition camp; moderates and the radicals. Moderates are in favor of a peaceful transition of power by allowing room for the authoritarian forces to quit the scene, while radicals want to throw away the old regime. In such a situation, reformers from the authoritarian regime and moderates from the opposition camps come forward and negotiate the terms and conditions of transition of power (Przeworski, 1992, pp. 66-79). The possibility of regime transformation depends upon the following factors; (1) Moderates and Reformers successfully chart out an agreement for the establishment of institutions under which they would have a significant political role in the democratic order, (2) Reformers are successful in convincing Hardliners to democratize, and (3) Moderates are able to control Radicals (Przeworski, 1992, p. 68). When this threshold is achieved, a safe passage is granted to the proponents of an authoritarian regime, with some guarantees, and political order is democratized. Poland, Nicaragua and Bolivia are the leading examples of democratization through negotiation between the authoritarian regime and the opposition parties.

And finally, there is a transition through intervention. Such transitions are mostly the outcome of a war. When a democratic power, after defeating an authoritarian regime in war, plays a vital role in the establishment of democratic rule in the occupied territory, then such transformation is said as externally monitored installation of democracy or democratization through intervention (Stepen, 1986, p. 71). Notable examples of such democratization are Japan and West Germany.

Democratization in Pakistan

Pakistan has a unique history of democratization and authoritarian reversals. Military intervention in politics is a constant feature of its political history. The Military has started influencing its policymaking since the inception of the state, as Ayesha Jalal argued that perceived threat from India strengthened the Military in Pakistan, which consequently helped it to emerge as a strong political actor (Jalal, 1995, pp. 3-22). The Military directly intervened by imposing martial law in 1958. It lasted for twelve years, and a regime transformation took place in the fog of a serious crisis that led to the dismemberment of its East Wing in 1971. After a short episode of six years of democratic rule, the country faced the second coup in 1977. This time again, the Military Regime lasted for another eleven years, and it was terminated when the military dictator died in a plane crash. Pakistan experienced another short period of democratic rule, but during less than ten years, four times mid-term elections were held, and none of the political governments completed its term. On 12th October 1999, Pakistan experienced the third coup of its history which lasted till 18th February 2008. On 18th February 2008, general elections were held and transition to civilian rule took place.

The understanding of causes of this cyclical development is very important because ignoring it would leave the analysis of democratization under military incomplete. As focus of this paper is to analyze the democratization process after a successful military coup, therefore, detailed discussion on the causes of military intervention runs beyond the scope of it. Keeping in view this problem a brief discussion about the rationale of military intervention will be followed by detailed discussion on the process of political liberalization in Pakistan.

A general perception about military intervention in politics refers to these acts as individual acts of the military command, whosoever is in the top position of its hierarchy, either led by the lust of power, as perceived by the opponents of the coup, or dissatisfaction by the performance of politicians, as claimed by the authoritarian regime itself. This was the reason that military dictators had always overshadowed the role of the military institution, and as a result, the criticism and dissatisfaction had always been directed against the individual personalities of military dictators rather than the Military as an institution. The adherence to this perception led to terms as "Good Generals" and "Bad Generals". This perception is not only limited to the common masses, but dominant part of mass media and even political leadership seems to be stuck with

such a world view. Thus, this perception leads to such hypothesis as if at the place of Ayub, Zia and Musharraf, there were some “Good Generals” Pakistan’s political history would have a different story, one without having any reference of military intervention in politics.

On the other hand a good number of scholars, experts of Pakistan’s politics and civil military relations, like Rizvi (Rizvi, 1986), Shafqat (Shafqat, 1989), Waseem (Waseem, 1994), Siddiq (Siddiq, 2007) etc., stand against this common perception of understanding the primary cause of military intervention in Pakistan. The proponents of this alternative view focus on the role of the Military as an institution, striving for its institutional interest rather than behaving like a perfect hierarchal organization completely dependent on the behavior of its top command.

In order to understand Military’s institutional role in politics, one cannot ignore the core-periphery model of the power structure of Pakistan as enunciated by Hussain. Hussain argues that after the independence of Pakistan, three elite groups inherited the core of Pakistan’s political power structure. These include Traditional Elite, Colonial Elite and Emergent Elite. The traditional elite referred to the religious and feudal elite. Colonial elite means Military and bureaucratic elite, which were structured by the British colonial power in order to run the business of the empire. While the emergent elite were the newly emerging classes in the later period of empire or after the independence of Pakistan. These include the elite professional classes like lawyers and intellectual elites and business-merchant class or industrial elite. All these elite groups strived to protect their respective elite interests and dominate the political structure during the post-independence phase of Pakistan’s political history (Hussain, 1979).

Shafqat, running with the same argument and classification of the elite, tested Flanagan’s model of crisis and change in Pakistan. He argues that all these elite groups strive to build internal and external alliances in order to dominate the system. Among these elite groups, the Military had dominated Pakistan’s political system throughout its political history, with the exception of a brief period after losing the war in East Pakistan (Shafqat, 1989, pp. 23-72). Its success in building an alliance with the religious right, conservative feudal elite and business merchant class at the domestic level and with the United States of America in the Asian sub-system at the international level helped it to extend its role and consolidate its position in the power structure of Pakistan. Expansion of the Military’s role ultimately led to the reduction of the influence of other classes in the political system. Siddiq argues that the dominant position of Military in the power structure encouraged it to go for business adventures in order to further consolidate its position (Siddiq, 2007, p. 173). Thus, its encroachment in the business and agriculture sectors made it one of the powerful interest groups and a significant stakeholder in the political system. The institutional economic interests had strengthened its internal unity as well as compelled it to play a vital role in the political development of the system. Thus, institutional interests led the Military to interrupt the political process time and again. It intervened directly in situations when political governments started asserting their roles to democratize and consolidate. It played indirectly to safeguard its institutional interests whenever it realized that its further direct control of the system might hurt its long-term institutional interests. This cyclical pattern of transition from and to democracy had on one hand, added to the role and position of Military in the power structure while led the political institutions to decay and remain weak on the other, thus creating chances for another military coup after a short episode of democratic rule.

A very significant study, conducted by Daron Acemoglu, Davide Ticchi and Andrea Vindigni, in military dictatorship identifies that nascent democracies always have the threat of yet another military coup after transition if it inherits a strong military. After a successful transition, with a strong inherited military, the nascent democracies may go for two options either to reform the Military or to give it concessions which it had already been enjoying in the previous regime. In both cases, the likelihood of yet another military coup increases. If the nascent democracy commits itself to reform, threatening the institutional interests of the Military, it serves as an important motivation for the Military to reverse the process. If the nascent democracy, realizing its vulnerability to the threat of yet another coup, ensures the previous concessions

to the Military, it may badly affect the economic performance of the government in ensuring utilization of resources for the public good, leading to its unpopularity in the masses and encourages the Military to go for a coup that will be least resisted by the people. Thus, the cycle of transition to and from democracy carries on (Acemoglu, Ticchi, & Vindigni, 2010). These theoretical considerations may help in understanding Pakistan's cycle of democratic transitions and subsequent authoritarian reversals.

Pakistan, after independence, inherited a big military, almost forty percent of total colonial Military in the United India. The perceived threat of Indian aggression compelled the early managers of Pakistan to keep the size of the military intact, as well as to heavily spend on defence. The Military's alignment with the United States of America in the context of the Cold War, due to Pakistan's geo-strategic importance, helped the Military to expand its role in the foreign policy of the country. The decay of political institutions and low political culture encouraged the Military to directly intervene in politics in order to further its institutional interests. Thus, the first military dictatorship (1958-1971) served the economic interests of the Military. After the partial collapse of the state in 1971, for a brief period under Bhutto military accepted a subordinate role, but Bhutto's attempt to reform it, though not radically, to minimize its role in politics threatened the institutional economic interests of the Military, which led to the establishment of military dictatorship for the second time, in 1977. The second military rule greatly served the Military's economic interests, which not only strengthened the internal unity of the institution but expanded its role further in the power structure of Pakistan. The second transition to democracy occurred in 1988, after the death of General Zia, when the Military realized, due to external and internal pressures, that its long-term direct control of the political scene may threaten its institutional interests. The nascent democracy, weak and vulnerable, was unable to go for abrupt military reform; therefore, it opted for the second option of guaranteeing concessions to the Military as well as accepting its indirect role in politics. Democratic institutions were not allowed to consolidate from 1988 to 1999, a period in which four democratic governments were terminated in the post-transition phase.

It was after the election of 1997 when the Muslim League (N) won a two-thirds majority, the Military felt threatened, after the forced resignation of General Jahangir Karamat, the then COAS, who suggested a permanent role of the Military in politics through the establishment of NSC, and termination of 8th amendment, which was successfully used to terminate the previous three governments before completing their terms, thus hampering consolidation of democracy. The Military's institutional interests again led it to go for yet another military coup in October 1999, and the cycle entered into its third rotation.

Conclusion

A review of mainstream theories on democratization in the context of political development in Pakistan leads to the following conclusions:

1. Despite long periods of authoritarian rule in Pakistan, there has always remained a preferable democratic alternative.
2. The legitimacy of any regime in Pakistan depends more on its performance in resolving economic problems rather than facilitating fundamental liberties. Therefore, the Military Regime started with a higher level of legitimacy, but with the passage of time, it suffered a downward trend on the legitimacy graph due to its failure in resolving forthcoming economic problems.
3. Military dictators never rejected, for one reason or other, the idea of democracy outrightly; rather, they always claimed that their intervention is for a temporary phase.
4. Democratization in Pakistan never remained an overnight phenomenon; rather, it started right after the establishment of military dictatorship, starting from the little vacuum given to political forces to play, maturing the political struggle for democracy and culminating in complete democratization of the regime.

5. Pakistan's geo-strategic location and its economic dependence on international actors gave external actors a very vital role in its internal political development.
6. Whenever a transition occurred, it occurred in the quagmire of crises that posed serious challenges to the succeeding regime.

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