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The role of political parties in building democracy in India and Pakistan. A party-oriented approach towards democratisation processes

Abstract

Political parties in India and Pakistan consider democracy a desirable regime for their countries. In order to introduce their own vision of a democratic state, they violate rules of free and fair elections, undermining the very procedures that constitute democracy. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League made different kinds of impacts on the democratisation processes in India and Pakistan respectively. In just a few years, the Indian National Congress, contrary to its counterpart in Pakistan, introduced a constitution and organised elections.

Keywords: *democracy in Asia, party system in India, party system in Pakistan, nuclear weapon states, criminalisation of politics*

Introduction

This article seeks to answer the following question: To what extent do political parties contribute to democracy-building in India and Pakistan? I postulate that political parties in both countries, despite the fact that they present themselves as advocates of democracy, do not put much effort in helping democracy to develop. To some extent, the performance of the Indian National Congress (INC) until the mid-60s, particularly leading up to 1964 when Jawaharlal Nehru died makes the exception. The notion of the negative impact of political parties on democracy in both countries, leaves the reader to speculate on how Indian democracy has managed to survive with political parties that do not seem to care for its development.

This study explains the role of political parties in building democracies in India and Pakistan since the countries gained independence in August 1947. Despite the fact that Bangladesh used to remain a part of Pakistan, I excluded the country from the analysis. However, its main political party the Awami League (AL) appears in a particular context, in order to explain why the Muslim League (ML) continued to postpone introducing a constitution and organising elections in the post-independence period. The analysis contributes to the debate on how democracy works in the non-western world. It focuses on the internal affairs of these two nuclear weapon states, both of great strategic significance in Asia and globally.

In order to explore the subject, at first I will present the brief evolution of party system in India since it justifies why I analyse exact parties' performance in particular periods. Likewise, the study will provide the general insight on party system in Pakistan. The presentation of the two countries' party systems will emphasis disparities of the two political arenas and its main actors. Secondly, I will introduce three statements on democracy and its state in India and Pakistan. Afterwards I will present the attitude of Indian and Pakistani political parties towards democracy and then their performance limited to those actions that influenced democracy building in the countries. In this context I will start with the INC and the Muslim League (ML) which constitute the main political powers of the Indian Subcontinent in pre- and post-independence periods. Afterwards, I will include other political parties, starting from the mid-60s in India, and beginning of 70s in Pakistan. The way that the study is ordered correlates with the evolution of Indian party system and uneven development of democracy in the two countries.

Party system in India and Pakistan

India

Indian party system has been evolving from one dominant party system through semi-two-party one to diverse multiparty system since the country gained independence. The transformation resulted in significant changes of Indian political scene including a shift in the balance of power between political parties. Basing mostly on Yadav's (1999) and own research[1], I present the following:

- I party system (1952-1967). The one dominant party system. Kothari (1964, pp. 1161-1173) calls it "Congress system" since it was the Congress party who continuously lead it. "The elections in this period were not seriously competitive (…). The choice was between the omnipresent Congress and its regionally fragmented opposition; often the opposition came from within the Congress" (ibidem, pp. 2393-2394).
- II party system (1967-1989). The end of Congress era. "A typical electoral verdict in this period took the form of a nation-wide or sometimes state-wide wave for or against the Congress. The local specificities of a constituency simply did not matter" (ibidem, p. 2394).
- III party system (1989-2004). Semi-two-party system. The apparent characteristic of the period that stared in 1989 "is the change in the choice set available to the voter" (ibidem, p. 2395). The Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) rose greatly into power and started undermining the position of the INC.
- IV party system (from 2004). The Coalition era marked by significant rise of regional parties both in numbers and power. Ziegfeld (2012, p. 69) notices the process in the previous period: "Between 1991 and 1999, regional parties increased their vote share from 25 percent to 46". However, regional parties commence challenging the position of the INC and the BJP even more, starting from the beginning of the 21st century.

Demonstrated election results provide explanation for such a depiction of the evolution of Indian party system.

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[1] Yadav does not identify semi-two-party system as I do. We do not share the same perspective as he published his article in 1999 while my study covers the evolution of party system from 1947 till 2016.

Tab. 1. General elections and party system in India 1947-2014

Year	Total seats	1st Party	Seats	2nd Party	Seats	Party system
1951-52	489	INC	364	CPI	16	I party system – Congress System
1957	494	INC	371	CPI	27	
1962	494	INC	361	CPI	29	
1967	520	INC	283	SWA	44	
1971	518	INC	352	CPM	25	II party system – The End of Congress Era
1977	542	BLD	295	INC	154	
1980	542	INC(I)	351	JNP(S)	41	
1984	514	INC	404	TDP	30	
1989	529	INC	197	JD	143	
1991	521	INC	232	BJP	120	III party system – Semi-Two-Party System
1996	543	BJP	161	INC	140	
1998	543	BJP	182	INC	141	
1999	543	BJP	182	INC	114	
2004	543	INC	145	BJP	138	
2009	543	INC	206	BJP	116	IV party system – Coalitions and Regional Parties Era
2014	543	BJP	282	INC	44	

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party, BLD – Bharatiya Lok Dal, CPI – Communist Party of India, CPM – Communist Party of India (Marxist), INC – Indian National Congress, INC (I) – Indian National Congress (Indira), JNP (S) – Janata Party (Secular), SWA – Swatantra Party, TDP – Telugu Desam Party.

Source: Election Commission of India.

The party system in India, despite lack of institutional change faced evolution from one dominant party system through diverse multiparty one. The following party systems were marked by the decline of the INC.

Pakistan

Pakistani Party system failed to take root and did not face a significant transformation. As a result, this study is not comparable to the analysis of the Indian party system. Political parties themselves are weak actors on political arena in Pakistan. Jafri (2000, p. xxi) questions their ability to call themselves political parties since they do not meet the following criteria: "[A] party is supposed to have a base (primary members), a constitution approved by the primary members, and some elected top leadership. Another essential element is a party programme, a platform, a policy statement and document. By election time, a party is supposed to have a manifesto".

Those ephemeral political parties left a void for the military to fill. Despite winning the elections, none of the party bears such power as military in Pakistan. Stratfor analysts when investigating the balance of power between Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of the country, and military argue that "the collective will of the army as an institution will overpower that of the prime minister. Furthermore, the Pakistani public, disillusioned with the politicians it views as inept, looks to the military as the country's protector, thereby reinforcing its power and justifying its forays into politics" (*Pakistan: An Army with a Country*, 2016).

The table below presenting the years of general elections and their results, particularly winning parties, approves that none of the party that ruled the country before the period of 2008-2013 managed to stay in power for the full term. It also includes the information on military regimes as military leaders were ruling the country for about 33 years.

When analysing election results in Pakistan, I did not identify any particular pattern of change. Due to coups d'etat that brought military into power, political parties stayed marginalised in the country.

The above general overviews of party systems in India and Pakistan to some extent expose conditions under which parties perform in the two countries. It also approves that countries' political systems differ significantly. Indian one enabled political parties to flourish while Pakistani one marginalised them.

Tab. 2. General elections and military regimes in Pakistan 1947-2016

Year	Winning party	Military regime
1970	AL	Ayub Khan's regime (1958-1969) Yahya Khan's regime (1969-1971)
1977	PPP	Zia ul-Haq's regime (1977-1988)
1985	(Elections without parties by gen. Zia ul-Haq)	Zia ul-Haq's regime (1977-1988)
1988	PPP	
1990	PML (N)	
1993	PPP	
1997	PML (N)	Pervez Musharraf's regime (1999-2008)
2002	PML (Q)	Pervez Musharraf's regime (1999-2008)
2008	PPP	Pervez Musharraf's regime (1999-2008)
2013	PML (N)	

AL – Awami League, PML (N) – Pakistani Muslim League Nawaz, PML (Q) – Pakistani Muslim League Quaid e Azam Group, PPP – Pakistani Peoples Party.

Source: Election Commission in Pakistan.

Studying democracy in India and Pakistan – methods and statements

In my evaluation of democracy and its current state I will use, the Freedom House (FH) international ranking system and Polity IV research results. When focusing on the attitude towards democracy of Indian and Pakistani political parties, I will examine parties' programmes and official websites. Also WikiLeaks will appear as a valuable source on political parties' corruption practices that enervate the rules of free and fair elections.

1. For the purpose of this study, I have defined democracy in accordance with Schumpeter's (1943, p. 271) minimal definition, which limits its meaning to free competition for a free vote. As Rose (2009, p. 12), who follows the approach, explains "The first condition of democracy today is that all adult citizens have the right to vote. Second, elections are competitive, free and fair. (…) Third, voters decide who holds principal offices in the government". Accepting the above definition implies that the study will verify:
   a. to what extent parties respect rules of free and fair elections while competing for votes; and
   b. if parties have a tendency to postpone elections while being in power.
2. My second statement focuses on the state of democracy in the two countries. Political scientists (Jaffrelot 2001; Oldenburg 2010; Tudor, 2013), who compare the two regime types, argue that India is a democracy while Pakistan is not. FH (2016) qualifies Pakistan as partly free. Political scientists as Huntington (1991) recognise free states as democratic ones, partly free as partly democratic ones and so on. Polity IV (2013), qualifies Pakistan as a democracy. Due to the lack of agreement when classifying the regime, I will consider Pakistan as partly authoritarian. According to the definition of democracy that I accept, Pakistan should not be recognised as a democratic state, since elected representatives, in fact, do not rule the country.
3. My third statement refers to the nature of Indian democracy. Guha (2007, p. xxi) when investigating the phenomena of democracy in India argues that "India will always be the exception to the rule". Countries with such high rates of illiteracy and poverty as India rarely become democracies. Neither social conditions nor cultural ones work in favour of democracy in India. The caste system, which on the one hand, according to Westerners, represents a strict hierarchy, and on the other, stands for a mere division of labour as the BJP argues, seems to contradict the idea of equality that correlates with democracy.

Democracy in political parties' programmes

India

"There are more political parties in India than there are models of automobiles" (Joseph 2012). I include only a few of them here: the INC and the BJP, the dominant parties in

the country; the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which represents the most deprived sections of society; and communist parties that lead one of the few biggest coalitions in India.

The INC (2014, pp. 14-15) presents itself as a party that supports inclusive democracy. According to its Manifesto, "the Indian National Congress has made seminal contributions to India's unity, integrity, secular polity and democratic federalism" (p. 2). The party points out its opponent the BJP deleterious to democracy calling its politics "undemocratic and exclusionary" (p. 5). The BJP (2014, p. 9) argues that it energises democracy. It wants to transform the political system form representative towards participatory one, the latter suits the diversity of Indian society. A positive attitude towards democracy from the BSP – a party of "the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Religious Minorities such as Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Buddhists" (BSP Official Website, n.d.)[2] is less debatable. The party owes its existence to democracy, as it is the only political system that guarantees representation to the most numerous ones as opposed to the most powerful ones. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) underlines its contribution to building democracy by referring to the achievements of the first communist state governments. "The first Communist ministry in Kerala formed in 1957 and later the succession of CPI (M) and Left-led governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura showed the way by striving to implement pro-people policies. These governments (…) ensured democratic rights for the working people and strengthened the democratic forces in the country struggling for alternative policies" (CPI (M), 2014, point 1.9)[3]. Unlike the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the CPI (M), Marxist-Leninist and Maoist factions of the CPI boycott the elections.

Pakistan

Despite the fact that there are fewer political parties in Pakistan than in India, too many of them operate in the country resulting in policies that are difficult to distinguish one from another. Jafri (2002, p. xxviii) ironically asks, "What is the policy difference between Pakistan Muslim League (Tweedledum) and Pakistan Muslim League (Tweedlee). Or between PPP (BB) and PPP (SB) and PPP Forward Block, if there is one?".

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[2] All bracketed sources are not dated unless otherwise indicated.
[3] The CPI (M) split from the CPI in 1964, which means that the quotation refers to the common past of the two parties.

The PPP declares its support for democracy: "Islam is our Faith, Democracy is our Politics, Socialism is our Economy, All Power to the People" (PPP Official Website). Its main political opponents, numerous ML factions, also underline their approval for democracy. Pakistani Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML (N)) persuades: "Our vision is a strong, democratic, developed, prosperous and just Pakistan in which every citizen enjoys equal opportunities to develop and grow without any discrimination and a harmonious society based on universal principles of social justice as enshrined in golden teachings of Islam" (PML (N) Official Website).

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM 2008, p. 1), a party of Muhajirs[4], considers feudalism deleterious to democracy and promises to enervate feudal dependency.

The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), which is the most popular among religious parties, declares respect for the rules of democracy: "Jamaat will try to effect reforms through democratic and constitutional ways i.e., through elections, preaching and propagation of ideology" (JI Official Website).

As I demonstrated above, most leading Indian and Pakistani political parties publicly express support for democracy. However, there are some contradictions, which lead to the conclusion that their understanding of democracy depend on their own purposes. These contradictions include the following:

- In India the CPI and the CPI (M) stand for elections despite the fact that according to orthodox communist ideology revolution serves to change the ones in power rather than elections as is the norm in democratic regimes;
- In India some parties deny India recognition as a democracy as long as the country is not ruled by them:
  - The CPI (2012, point 7.5) argues that: "But elections under the capitalist regime, (…) are intrinsically loaded against the toiling masses, firstly because, the press and other means of propaganda are controlled by Big Money and, secondly because 'money power' and 'muscle power' are being unreservedly used";
  - The INC does not recognise the BJP administration democratic and vice versa.

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[4] Muhajir is an Arabic world used in Pakistan to name Muslims who moved from India to Pakistan after the partition of British India.

Performance of political parties

The ML and the INC until the mid-1960s

Tudor (2013, pp. 61-65) recognises the attitude of the ML as antidemocratic. The ML leadership defined democracy as a system that worked in favour of a majority, which combined Hindu in British India and Bengali from East Pakistan in the newly created state. Unlike the INC, the ML leadership denied to recognise the most popular regional languages as official ones (Talbot 2009, p. 26). Due to the lack of agreement between the ML and the AL on the most crucial issues for a state as well as the fear of the ML of being marginalised, the ML introduced the constitution of Pakistan nine years after the country gained independence and organised the first general elections fourteen years after that. The INC, in contrast, successfully introduced these pillars of a democratic state. The Constitution of the Republic of India came into force in 1951 and the first general and state elections took place at the end of the same year.

The elections enabled the INC to extend its power, in particular to create a party system with one dominant party in the centre and many on the peripheries. Despite the fact that the INC stayed focused on protecting its own position in the system, it managed to organise general elections every 5 years. While these elections were most probably rigged, they were regular and democracy in India gradually improved. In Pakistan the ML continued to postpone organising them. It seemed to be a better solution to give power to the army then to lose it via free and fair elections to its political opponent from East Pakistan.

Starting from the mid-1960s

India

Indira Gandhi, performed less successfully then her father in keeping elections going. She bore responsibility for introducing the only state of emergency in the history of independent India. Voters punished her for the decision: the INC subsequently lost the general elections in 1977 to Janata. Consequently, the party system with the INC in the centre transformed itself into a system of two dominant competing parties, the INC and the BJP. The new system suited more democracy than the previous one. However,

the BJP's Hindu nationalist ideology and its violent methods remained far from democratic. The Hindu party with its circuitous paramilitary organisation the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) bears responsibility for bloody anti-Muslim pogroms.

Pakistan

In the elections of 1977 Pakistanis chose the PPP over the ML. The party ruled the country in a manner that stayed far from democratic standards. "The 1977 general elections were also direct, but these generated much controversy as the PPP government resorted to a host of irregularities, giving the opposition a basis to question the creditability of the electoral process" (Rizvi 2008, p. 6). The party served private interests of its leader Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto, who preferred to fight his political opponents using his own militia called the Federal Security Force (FSF) rather than non-violent methods (Jones 2005, p. 273). The poor state of political parties' morale caused the Chief of Army Staff, General Zia ul-Haq, after deposing Bhutto in a coup, to hold elections on a non-party basis. "Zia ul-Haq had hoped that the absence of party labels would favour pious individuals backed by the military as well as candidates affiliated with religious parties" (Haqqani 2005, p. 155).

In Pakistan, sooner than in India, the dominant party of the post-independence period, lost its position. In general, it approves political pluralism and fair competition, which correlate with democracy. However, in the case of Pakistan, it only underscored the weakness of political parties. None of them managed to achieve a status similar to that of the INC. It did not matter which party won elections in Pakistan, since their decisions and performance depended on the military.

Undermining democracy

There are seven national parties (those registered in more than four states), and more than 50 state parties operating in India (Election Commission of India 2016). Their large number correlates with diversity of Indian society divided by castes, religions and classes. This pluralism of the political scene confirms that Indian democracy, despite social disparities stays inclusive. It also makes battle for votes competitive and brutal.

Such Indian style political diversity would not occur in Pakistan. The country declared itself Islamic republic and non-Muslim citizens have no possibility of equal representation. For instance, a non-Muslim citizen cannot hold the position of prime minister (*The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* 1973, art 91(2)).

Corruption

Political parties constitute an institution recognised as the most corrupt one, among twelve tested by TI[5], in India and Pakistan. I have added evaluation of two institutions, particularly military and religious bodies, as a comparison.

Tab. 3. Global Corruption Barometer (political parties, military, religious body) in 2013 – India and Pakistan

Percentage of respondents in a country who felt that particular institution was corrupt/extremely corrupt

Country	Political parties	Military	Religious bodies
India	86%	20%	44%
Pakistan	76%	34%	27%

Source: Transparency International 2013.

Before the development of various types of communication from road infrastructure to the internet, election commissions in India and Pakistan remained unable to observe elections especially in the hard-to-reach parts of the countries. In 1980, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India experienced a "free enterprise militia' operating, such that 'dult franchise had been replaced by vicarious franchises', where the candidate with the most guns at his command could perform the function of 'mass voting' on behalf of the electorate" (Guha 2008, pp. 547-548). Corruption diminished as communication improved. According to WikiLeaks, Public Affairs Officer of the U.S. Consulate wrote the following in a confidential diplomatic message: "Wherever we went, journalists, politicians, and voters spoke of the bribes as a commonly accepted fact of the election process. (…) Poor voters expect cash" (*206688: cash for votes in South Indi*, 2011). He describes the transfer of goods from two regional parties, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), in Tamil Nadu to voters: "agents of the parties come to the neighbourhood with cash carried in rice sacks. They

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[5] The twelve institutions tested by TI were political parties, parliament/legislature, the military, NGOs, media, religious bodies, businesses, the education system, judiciary, medical and health services, police, public officials and civil servants.

have copies of the voter lists and they distribute the money based on who is on the list" (ibidem).

Manipulating electoral laws

Rigging elections in Pakistan is less challenging than in democratic India, where rules of free and fair elections are followed. In Pakistan, "[m]alpractice during elections begins with the voters' list (…).. Individual candidates use their influence to omit the names of voters of the opposition from the lists or make bogus entries" (Rais 2008, pp. 124-125). The Pakistani establishment introduced sudden changes in electoral laws just to stay in power in 2002. That year "the age limiting for voting was pushed down from 21 to 18 and the time frame given for updating the electoral rolls was not more than a month, which, given the large rural population, was insufficient to enrol new voters" (p. 125). Another common practice that brought the same result implied sudden delimitation of constituencies.

Bloody political campaigns

Criminalisation of politics in India and Pakistan includes serious criminal cases. Indian electoral campaigns in particular have become notorious for their bloody course. Variety of political parties use violence: in some states it is the RSS that fuels hostility against Muslims that causes bloody pogroms leaving hundreds dead; in others, these are the CPI (M) members who kill the RSS supporters. Such brutal campaigns inspire Indian cinema. *Raajneeti* (2010), which showed the fight for leadership inside the Rashtrawadi party, and *Gulaal* (2009), which exposed the harsh competition for votes, give the impression that elections in India are won by the party who physically survives the campaign.

Political parties contributes in buying votes, fuelling communal violence and political killings in both countries. On the one hand, when analysing statistic as those of TI, it is hard to understand that India remains a democratic state. On the other hand, when taking into consideration the circumstances under which elections are organised including the size of population and frequent cases of communal violence, these disturbances seem to be relatively small.

Discussion

The answer to the question on the impact of political parties on the democracy building process in India and Pakistan implies that most of them support democracy and associate it with its own vision of the state. In order to force their own solutions, parties enervate rules of free and fair elections. This study confirms that while the INC managed to transform itself from a national movement to a political party capable of building a democratic state, the ML presented incapability of doing so. It has also proved that the continuity of organising elections every five years enabled Indian democracy to survive.

Many studies pay attention to the impact of political parties on democracy-building in the early years of independence. Desai (2005) argues that introducing universal adult franchise in India enabled democracy to flourish. Jaffrelot (2002) stresses the importance of the anti-majority syndrome in Pakistan that in the early 1950s led to the elevation of Urdu to the status of national language and under-representation of Bengalis in national institutions (pp. 256-257). Ahsan (2005) emphasises social structure formed under British rule, with the dominant position of the military and landlords, the main reason for democratic failure in Pakistan. However, he considers ephemeral political parties as one of the obstacles towards democracy. "Lacking an indigenous bourgeoisie, dominated by a feudal elite totally dependent upon the colonial bureaucracy, deprived of well-structured, programme-oriented and duly encadred political parties, (…) Pakistan saw a gradual chocking of a democratic spirit from its early days" (2005, p. 141). Jaffrelot (2002, p. 252) identifies weak political parties as one of five reasons of democratic failure in Pakistan, arguing that, "India and Pakistan have never been equally endowed with respect to political parties". He compares the INC – enabled to introduce the Congress system – with the ML, which "was from its origin a defence movement for a minority fearful of the majority rule" (p. 261). Also Oldenburg (2011, p. 224) identifies the strength of the INC and the weakness of the ML as the reason why India and Pakistan wound up with such different regimes.

Further studies in this field could investigate how Indian democracy manages to survive with corrupt parties that violate rules of free and fair elections. For the purpose of this study, I excluded external factors, however foreign influence on regime type, especially in the case of Pakistan remains significant. Adding this perspective would not change the result of the research, but could help to explain some parties' decisions. An

alternative approach could underline the role of strong personalities in politics, which are abundant in the political scenes of India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

Most political parties in India and Pakistan officially support democracy defined according to their own understanding. Trying to introduce their own version of democracy, parties violate rules of free and fair elections. In both countries the battle for votes might include corruption activities and political killings. In the case of Pakistan, contrary to India, those who win elections, in fact do not rule the country, since the army has to approve all strategic decisions. It differentiates both regimes and is the reason why this study could not qualify Pakistan as a democracy. In such environment Pakistani parties, failed to transform themselves into strong political actors. The INC stays the party that placed a foundation for a democratic system in India. It introduced a constitution and organised the first general elections soon after the country gained independence. These foundations remain so strong that even current parties' negative actions have not undermined them. In Pakistan, none of the parties including the PPP and the ML factions build such foundations for a stable state.

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