

General Pervez Musharraf: The Political Strategies to Consolidate Power (1999-2008)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the patterns of civil-military relations in Pakistan, with a particular focus on General Musharraf's military dictatorship from 1999 to 2008. It explores that General Pervez Musharraf implemented a series of maneuvers that involved political engineering, judicial manipulation, and military control. All of these political strategies helped him to grab and strengthen his authority under the guise of democratic evolution. Among the most prominent of his political strategies was his devolution plan, which reduced the influence of political institutions and directly empowered district administrations. Despite these, the general elections in 2002 were held under a controlled environment marred by allegations of rigging. Under Musharraf's leadership, Political Parties Order 2002 was passed, which imposed strict limitations on political parties—the judicial manipulation and control over the media-fueled mass protests and calls for judicial independence. Despite the crackdown, civil society and opposition groups persisted in their protests. They launched lawyers' movements and called for the restoration of civilian governance. Through these actions, Musharraf was able to prolong his undemocratic governance.

Key Words: *Coup, Political Strategies, Civil-Military Relations, Democracy, Dictatorship*

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan experienced a chaotic phase in its political history from 1999 to 2008 that was renowned for a fragile balance between democracy and authoritarianism. General Pervez Musharraf, who came to power through martial law in October 1999, presided over this radical period. To briefly trace the history of military takeovers in Pakistan, it began in 1958 when Pakistan's first field marshal law administrator, Ayub Khan, imposed martial law. After his military takeover, he suspended the 1956 constitution and introduced the 1962 constitution, which increased presidential power. Furthermore, he implemented a basic democratic system, which diminishes political party influence and derails parliamentary democracy (Dawn Media Group, 2017). Similarly, in 1969, General Yahya Khan imposed martial law in the country. After the takeover, he followed General Ayub Khan's approach. He abrogated the 1962 constitution and issued the Legal Framework Order. LFO was a constitutional decree. It provides the legal basis for the country's general elections for the National Assembly. These elections were not satisfactory and ultimately divided Pakistan into two separate nations (Jalal, 2014). In addition, in 1977, the third military dictator, Zia, enforced martial law in the country. After coming into power, he put the 1973 constitution on hold and restricted political activities. Eventually, his regime is associated with political repression, heightened sectarian divisions, and the use of religious rhetoric to justify military dominance. Overall, this study reveals that all of the military governments aggravated political instability and delayed Pakistan's democratic progress (Ziring, 1988).

Like his predecessors, General Musharraf was actively engaged in political engineering and constitutional handling. He implemented a devolution plan of 2001, organized general elections in 2002, imposed media censorship, and suppressed political parties (Shah, 2023). Similarly, in October 1999, Prime Minister Nawaz and Army Chief Musharraf had a serious disagreement over the Kargil issue. The conflict arose because the military launched the Kargil operation without seeking civilian approval. As a result, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif decided to force Musharraf into retirement and appoint General Ziauddin Butt as the new army chief. On October 10, 1999, while Musharraf was on a two-day visit to Sri Lanka, Nawaz Sharif signed the notice for Musharraf's forced retirement (Chaudhry, 2009). After this announcement, Musharraf returns to Pakistan and imposes martial law. On October 13, 1999, he took control as Pakistan's Chief Executive and declared emergency rule and suspended the Constitution by dissolving the legislative bodies (Musharraf, 2006). However, at that time Musharraf aims to achieve legitimacy both nationally and internationally (Aziz, 2008). That's why he portrays his military regime as a counter-coup to stop Nawaz Sharif's unconstitutional attempt to dismiss him (Husain, 2018).

By rationalizing his military takeover, Musharraf explained that "Dear brothers and sisters, your armed forces have never and would never let you down. We shall preserve the integrity and sovereignty of our country to the last drops of our blood." In these words he assured the nation of the military's loyalty and commitment, as his predecessors Ayub, Yahya, and Zia had done. He also emphasized that the armed forces had always stood by the people. (Dawn, 1999). Furthermore, he articulated his aim of reshaping Pakistan as a moderate Muslim state (Cohen, 2004), where Islamic moderation remained a central theme throughout his period (Talbot, 2012). His main goal behind these tactics was to gain public approval and validation of his rule along with achieving personal pursuits (Mahmood, 2016).

This study focuses on how General Pervez Musharraf employs strategies such as the manipulation of civil-military relations, restructuring of the judiciary, control over the media, and constitutional engineering to consolidate political autonomy to legitimize military dominance in governance and suppress opposition in Pakistan. How he used electoral mechanisms to sustain his hold over Pakistan's governance. Furthermore, this article attempts to answer these questions by reading government documents and archival records, including the legal framework order of 2002 from the Punjab assembly, the devolution plan of 2001 from the Punjab archive, and an autobiography. The newspaper, journals, reports, and published books are other important source materials. Building on these sources, this research argues that Musharraf's political strategies had not only facilitated his undemocratic governance but also laid the groundwork for civil-military imbalance in Pakistan. The introduction of legal, political, and constitutional maneuvers not only facilitated his governance but also showed that General Musharraf wanted to prolong his rule under the name of national interest.

The details of Musharraf's political strategies are outlined as follows.

Devolution Plan 2001

All military regimes in Pakistan used local governments as a tool to consolidate power. Through these tactics they enhance military dominance and diminish the influence of national and provincial politicians. (Mahmood, 2016). Following this strategy, General Pervez Musharraf announced the Devolution Plan in August 2000. This plan was designed not just as an administrative reform but as a means to strengthen and centralize his control while presenting it as a move toward decentralization (Sanaullah, Sarwat, & Rehman, 2021). In this plan, Musharraf implemented a three-level local governance system at the union, Tehsil, and district tiers.

Similarly, the Union Council was composed of 21 members, with 12 Muslim candidates elected on general seats. Thirty-three percent of the total seats were allocated for women, 5% for farmers and laborers, and 5% for minority groups. At the union level, Nazim and Naib Nazim ran for election on combined tickets. The public directly elected both union councilors and the Nazim. The elected union councilors formed an electoral college responsible for electing the district nazim, who served as the district's chief executive (National Reconstruction Bureau, 2001).

Under Musharraf's regime, a devolution plan was introduced to devolve power to the local government. Control over nearly 12 provincial departments, including civil defense, agriculture, social welfare, education, transport, taxation, land revenue, and culture, was handed to local authorities. The offices of commissioners and deputy commissioners were replaced with the District Coordination Officer, who was accountable to the elected district Nazim. The police department was placed under the authority of the district Nazim. This authority rendered the position so influential that some lawmakers of the national and provincial bodies opted to contest it. Additionally, this shift redistributed financial resources and emphasized fiscal decentralization (Husain, 2018). Musharraf's Devolution of Power Plan aimed to reduce the influence of political institutions controlled by his opponents by bypassing provincial governments and directly empowering district administrations. This approach helped him strengthen his control over Pakistan's political and administrative systems. He promoted the plan as a means to gain international legitimacy by decentralizing power and supporting marginalized communities. However, in the end, it strengthened the central government and destabilized the provincial government (International Crisis Group, 2004).

General Elections 2002

In early 2002, General Pervez Musharraf's proclaimed nationwide elections were scheduled for 10 October 2002, while Senate elections were postponed until 12 November 2002. These elections brought about key constitutional reforms, including Parliament, the Senate, and provincial lawmaking bodies. New provisions were introduced, such as sixty legislative seats designated for women and a shift from a separate electorate for minorities to a joint electorate. Along with that, the age of enfranchisement was lowered from twenty-one years to eighteen. These electoral reforms were not merely administrative changes but part of a broader strategy by Musharraf to solidify his hold on power. The 2002 general elections became essential for Musharraf to reinforce his control. The changes implemented through the electoral process allowed Musharraf to extend his rule by sidelining the opposition and ensuring the army's authority.

By carefully managing the 2002 elections, he strengthened his grip on power and enabled military-led governance in Pakistan for years to come (Nadeem & Laghari, 2003). Following the October 10, 2002, elections, the November 16 swearing-in of the newly elected National Assembly members marked a crucial step in General Pervez Musharraf's strategy to consolidate his rule. This process represented Pakistan's third changeover from military control to civilian administration rule. Nevertheless, it was evident that the transition would not be complete until the Constitution was fully restored, the Senate was operational, and the president. This marked a contrast with the last military-to-civilian transition in 1985, where the coexistence of civilian and military powers lasted only three years, abruptly ending in 1988. Unlike the previous transition, the MNAs elected in 2002 were confronted with complex issues, particularly the military president's powers, which included the authority to dismiss the National Assembly. Musharraf's self-confirmation as president, bypassing constitutional requirements for parliamentary elections, was another controversial issue.

These measures made the 2002 elections a vehicle for Musharraf to tighten his grip on power (Shape of Democracy Rests upon MNAs, 2002). The impact of these elections on Pakistan's democratic institutions shows Musharraf's strategies undermined the electoral process and fostered a more authoritarian political climate (Waseem, 2006). In short, the 2002 general elections were strategically arranged by Musharraf to strengthen his grip over Pakistan's political culture. Moreover, by projecting a mask of civilian rule, he ensures the central influence of armed forces. All of this allowed him to extend his rule and further consolidate power within the military establishment (Dawn, 2002).

Political Parties Order 2002

During Musharraf's dictatorial period, Pakistan witnessed a shift to an unstable democratic system. Throughout this time, Musharraf thought of different methods to strengthen his control. The major motive behind the Political Parties Order of 2002 was to limit political activities that weaken democratic institutions and control opposition. The Political Parties Order of 2002 introduced several measures:

The provision was viewed as blocking certain exiled figures from mainstream political parties.

Political parties were restricted from forming any coalition against ruling parties.

It empowered the government to oversee the finances of political parties.

The order also authorizes the government to ban political parties accused of spreading violence based on religion, ethnicity, or sect.

However, the Political Parties Order of 2002 deeply impacted the political system. Prominent figures such as BB and Nawaz were compelled to leave the country just to stop them from challenging Musharraf. They were also banned from leading their parties, ensuring they stayed out of power. However, opposition against Musharraf grew over time. On September 1, 2000, leaders like Altaf Hussain, Ataulah Mengal, and Mehmood Khan Achakzai demanded that the military return power to elected leaders. Moreover, Musharraf promised to restore democracy, but he mostly focused on crushing opposition, controlling elections, and changing laws to favor his regime. He justified these actions by saying civilian governments in the past had performed poorly. However, the strategies he used to control political parties and stay in power continue to influence Pakistan's politics today (Naheed, 2023).

Legal Framework Order 2002

On August 21, 2002, Musharraf presented the LFO of 2002, which was subsequently endorsed by the Apex Court with legal sanction. His primary objective behind this move was to secure a constitutional directive. Here are some important clauses that were included:

Musharraf turned down the position of chief executive and converted it to head of state. According to him, now the presidents have the legal authority to rule the country for five years.

The President has the right to terminate national and provincial legislatures to designate governors and commanders of security forces.

In addition, he has the power to specify the day for the electoral process of speaker, deputy speaker, head, and deputy head of the House of Representatives and Senate, respectively. Furthermore, the number of

seats in the parliament also increased. They were raised from 270 to 342. Apart from this, 60 seats were allotted to women and non-Muslims. All the bills of the federal and provincial houses would pass with the authorization of the president. The National Security Council was formed to discuss matters regarding sovereignty, integrity, democracy, governance, interprovincial harmony, and security of the state. The president will serve as the head of the NSC, which will include the PM, the head of the Senate, the Speaker of the NA, the Opposition Head, the CM of Provinces, and the head of Pakistan security forces as members (Pakistani.org, 2002). Meanwhile, the Legal Framework Order 2000 has been declared unaltered, ensuring that no court can challenge its validity "on any ground whatsoever." It is now treated as an essential part of the Constitution, leaving the newly elected National Assembly with no option but to accept it, whether they agree or not. All of this converts the current Parliament into an effectively powerless body that can undo or repeal any amendments. The head of government, along with the entire legislative body, is dependent on the president's discretion, whose authority is now decisive for their survival. Many argue that the LFO 2000 disregards legal and representative principles. By overturning the 13th Legislative Amendment, which was collectively endorsed via Parliament, Musharraf reacquired the power to dissolve the Cabinet and the entire National Assembly. Through the implementation of LFO, Pakistan shifted from a legislative framework to a de facto head-of-state system. Article 58(2)(b) was altered with 152A and the formation of NSC. While these changes are meant to establish checks and balances, they also raise concerns. Besides this, the president can easily secure majority support within the National Security Council, allowing them to dismiss the PM while weakening the legislative system of governance (Legal Framework Order, 2002).

Media Censorship

In Pakistan various regimes have employed legal and constitutional measures to suppress public debate and criticism through the media. Since its inception, civilian governments in Pakistan have been less frequent compared to military regimes. The media frequently face threats, violence, and economic pressures. While all governments, including military regimes, proclaim support for media freedom, they often act contrary to these claims when faced with criticism. During General Musharraf's nine-year military-civilian rule, the media operated with a mixed point of freedom and restriction.

Throughout General Pervaiz Musharraf's tenure, the media sector, particularly the electronic media, witnessed remarkable growth. He founded PEMRA and authorized permits for the non-public sector to initiate television and radio stations. Furthermore, other forms of media, including mobile phones with advanced features, cable television, and high-speed internet, became accessible to both the elite and the general population in urban and rural areas. In an unprecedented move, print media was also encouraged to thrive, with Musharraf replacing the Press and Publication Ordinance that had previously regulated its operations. This policy led to a rapid expansion of media across various forms.

However, Musharraf's support for the media remained strong only as long as it served the interests of his regime. The situation shifted when General Musharraf's grip on power weakened as a result of his unfavorable and autocratic decisions. The turning point came when the media extensively covered daily events surrounding the suspension of Justice Iftikhar. This coverage played a pivotal role in shifting public opinion and severely damaging Musharraf's image. This irritated Musharraf, and instead of revising his unlawful policies, he intensified his efforts to suppress the media and bring it under his control to strengthen his rule. The government anticipated that the media would report the events according to its preferences.

The media largely reported the incident contrary to the government's wishes. Furthermore, Justice Iftikhar's restoration led to a substantial decline in the Musharraf administration's popularity. The public grew increasingly disillusioned with the general's actions. He became increasingly detached from the people, isolating himself to such an extent that he failed to recognize the real situation outside the presidency. Instead of acknowledging his mistakes and attempting to address the situation, he took measures that portrayed him as a ruthless authoritarian. One of the most significant and controversial actions was the imposition of the Emergency Order in 2007. Those who opposed taking the oath under the PCO lost their jobs without any entitlements. Consequently, 12 Supreme Court judges and 24 High Court judges from Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab lost their positions. The entire nation, including politicians, citizens, lawyers, the media, and civil society, rejected the bans on gatherings, speeches, and demonstrations. Thousands of people, especially lawyers, were arrested, beaten, and detained without trial. Meanwhile, the government also pressured local cable operators to use violence against journalists who were protesting to end the emergency and restore the constitution. The government pressured Dubai to stop uplink services for channels like Geo and ARY. Journalists faced restrictions and obstacles in doing their work, which worsened the situation. During this tough juncture, the state of affairs further worsened when the government introduced ordinances including a ban on live television coverage of violent events and conflicts, as well as a ban on TV operators. The Geo TV office in Islamabad was raided by the police.

This event was broadcast live and witnessed by viewers around the world. The police abused the staff, beat them with batons, and damaged office property. All of these actions had one clear message: the media was expected to stop reporting the government's wrongdoings and instead support its actions. Until March 9, 2007, General Musharraf was not considered an unwelcome figure and still commanded some respect within the country. However, as he continued to disregard his errors, his decline came to be anticipated. He made a series of unpopular decisions, one after another, leading to his decreasing popularity. The media pointed out his mistakes and urged him to correct them. Instead of addressing these issues, Musharraf sought to suppress the media, which had been critical for the consolidation of his rule (Iqbal, 2012).

Manipulation of Judiciary

The judicial system in Pakistan has experienced persistent difficulties. Over the years, Pakistani judicial courts have often been pressured into supporting military coups and procedures (Newberg, 1995). Military governments have used the judiciary to justify their rule by making legal and constitutional changes to strengthen their control, often benefiting right-wing political parties. After assuming power, Musharraf attempted to secure legitimacy via governmental authority. He adopts extremist measures to establish power regulation within essential entities and the bureaucracy while also creating a formal institutional framework to ensure the military's active role in decision-making (Rizvi, 2003). This shift was apparent when General Pervez Musharraf suspended Justice Iftikhar.

After being appointed by Musharraf, Justice Iftikhar proposed some revisions in court. He focused on improving its efficiency and minimizing the delays in cases. Between 2005 and 2007, he amplified efforts toward public interest and legal proceedings. Besides this, he took suo motu actions that aimed to tackle abuse of power, misuse of authority, and biased and corrupt decisions by officials. This covered in-depth investigations into politically charged cases. The conflict between Musharraf and Iftikhar started when the administration chose to transfer ownership of the Pakistan Steel Mills Enterprise to different companies in Russia. As a result, the privatization became the subject of multiple legal challenges. This was the first occasion where the judiciary nullified the foremost action of the Musharraf government. In a separate

instance, the Supreme Court urged the authorities to reveal details regarding individuals who had allegedly been detained by security forces. Justice Javed Iqbal remarked, "If they (security agencies) are not answerable to any ministry, they are certainly and surely answerable to this court." According to a Human Rights Commission of Pakistan report, a minimum of 400 individuals have been displaced since Pakistan joined the US-led counterterrorism efforts in 2001. However, the state representatives consistently refuted any connection to the abductions. Meanwhile, the greater portion of the victims are said to be from Baluchistan and Sindh (Ghias, 2010). In addition, the situation became unstable when Musharraf aimed to win another term as president. Aitzaz Ahsan stated that "being an army chief, General Musharraf cannot contest presidential elections; he cannot file the nomination papers" (Gall & Masood, 2007). All of these show that Musharraf's move was aimed at blocking an unfavorable Supreme Court decision against his presidential candidacy (Shah, 2007). However, Musharraf dismissed the chief justice of Pakistan on the accusation of corruption to clear the path for his re-election. Hence, all these steps were defended under Article 209 of the Constitution (Article 209 of the Constitution, 2007).

Lawyers' Movement 2007

As a consequence, Musharraf's judicial interference lawyer's movement took place from 2007 to 2009 (Jafri, 2018). The movement is officially known as "Adliya Bachao Tehreek," which means to restore judiciary independence and reinstate the removed judges. Around 80,000 lawyers, despite their political differences, united to restore the authority of Chaudhry Iftikhar as Chief Justice and ensure judicial independence in Pakistan. A Pakistani Supreme Court lawyer described this movement as "the first time in Pakistan's history that lawyers set aside their political disagreements and came together as one professional body to uphold the rule of law." The key objective of this movement was to advocate judicial authority (Phelps, 2009). However, the movement took place in two distinct phases. At first, the Supreme Court maintained its independence and bolstered its credibility. Secondly, a broad network of legal professionals, political factions, and civil organizations organized countrywide protests to challenge executive overreach. For instance, lawyers in Lahore began holding weekly gatherings at the Lahore High Court alongside professional trade associations, labor unions, and political party representatives. Additionally, Supreme Court lawyers like Munir Malik, Tariq Mehmood, Aitzaz Ahsan, and Ali Ahmed Kurd played a key role in the movement, bringing legal professionals together. They take part in the movement to secure public legitimacy. At this stage, their primary focus shifted to the removal of Musharraf and the revival of a democratic government. Lawyers called for the dismissal of PCO-appointed judges and the reinstatement of those who had been removed. However, their protests coincided with Musharraf's re-election as president. They exert pressure on the Election Commission to review nomination papers for the election. After months of demonstrations against the dismissal of the Chief Justice in March 2007, the lawyers once again took to the streets in protest (Faqir, 2014).

NRO: A Political Turning Point

Musharraf promulgated the National Reconciliation Ordinance on October 5, 2007. NRO served as a broad legal exemption, protecting politicians, political workers, and bureaucrats from prosecution for offenses including corruption, embezzlement, financial misconduct, and abuse of power. The ordinance encompassed offenses committed between 1986 and 1999, during the interval between two military takeovers. Moreover, NRO was designed to promote national reconciliation, build mutual trust among public officeholders, eliminate political victimization, and enhance the transparency of the electoral process (Jalal, 2014). However, behind the scenes, the NRO functioned as a strategic tool aimed at securing an extension of Musharraf's rule. Many observers argue that the ordinance was primarily enacted to facilitate Benazir going back to Pakistan and being free from prosecution for politically motivated

corruption cases. Musharraf justified the NRO by asserting that it was necessary to create a unifying atmosphere in the political landscape by dismissing politically driven cases. In addition, several powerful politicians and government officials escaped legal scrutiny due to the protections offered by the NRO. The list consists of huge names like Zardari, Jahangir Badr, former minister Yusuf Talpur, and diplomat Hussain Haqqani, who also benefited. Bureaucrats like Salman Farooqi and Usman Farooqi, along with politicians like Sindh Governor Ishrat ul Ibad, were among those covered. A list of approximately 5,800 people, facing charges of financial misconduct and criminal activities, were granted relief. A report by Dawn shows that MQM was the biggest beneficiary, with 3,775 cases, mostly criminal, against its members. Nevertheless, there was an ambiguity among law ministry and NAB officials about legal proceedings in opposition to the key leadership of PML-N. They were unsure whether the Hudaibya Paper Mills case and other charges had been resolved under the NRO or were still awaiting a court decision (Dawn, 2009).

In essence, the NRO played a crucial role in Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan from exile and later helped Asif Ali Zardari to secure the presidency. Here it is worth mentioning that the PILDAT Legislative Brief identifies four core areas that were targeted by this ordinance. One of its clauses modifies Section 494 of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1898. With this alteration, if a case is deemed false or politically driven, the Board can direct the government to withdraw it. Secondly, it has been revised to ensure greater electoral transparency. Under this amendment, an electoral official is required to furnish competing candidates and their electoral coordinators with a copy of the official count result. Thirdly, a key change in the National Accountability Ordinance 1999 ensures that lawmakers cannot be arrested in NAB matters without the advice of the designated morals panel. These councils were formed for both parliament and the four provincial assemblies to maintain proportional representation. Fourthly, it was revised to ensure that all cases, domestically or internationally, were withdrawn and terminated immediately. This section of the ordinance has been particularly controversial and has faced widespread criticism (Ashraf, 2012). A crucial point of discussion is the aftermath of the NRO decision. The justification is that this ordinance led to a fusion of judicial and executive powers, which reshaped Pakistan's political framework and paved the way for an accountability drive. Rather than allowing relevant state institutions to handle accountability, the judiciary involved itself in overseeing politicians, who are primarily responsible to the parliament (Ali, 2020). Moreover, in October 2007, Justice Iftikhar put this ordinance on hold and declared it as a conflict between the executive and judiciary. However, he was soon removed from office. Another newly appointed Justice, Hameed Dogar, was selected in February 2008 (Dunya News, 2009). Subsequently, the higher court ruled this ordinance unconstitutional in December 2009 (Business Recorder, 2018).

Musharraf's Tensions with Opposition

To maintain power, various regimes followed three main tactics to control politics. The first was to use state power to suppress opposition. This included arrests, harassment, and bans on political events. As a result, the foundation for a strong and constructive political opposition never developed (Rizvi, 2000). Throughout Musharraf's rule, the PPP, PML-N, and other opposition parties remained at the forefront; they strongly opposed Musharraf's military and pushed for civilian supremacy just due to a violation of democratic values. There were mainstream political leaders like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, who were forced into self-exile. They were unable to gather their supporters or take part in political activities. Furthermore, opposition parties use international platforms and the media to highlight the decline of democratic values under Musharraf's rule. They arranged protests and rallies across the country; besides this, they also activated their members to lead campaigns against Musharraf. They promised to replace the military rule with an elected government (Naheed, 2023). He attempted to reach an agreement with Benazir Bhutto, with the aim of a conditional understanding, but their initial negotiations failed badly. In

response, Musharraf changed his approach and worked to form a coalition between MQM and PML (Q) to establish a national government. Amin Fahim and Yousaf Raza Gillani were invited to join, but they refused. Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto resumed discussions for a revised agreement. This time, Western powers and influential figures actively supported the deal.

Eventually, Benazir agreed and signed the "Benazir-Musharraf National Reconciliation Ordinance Deal" with Musharraf. Under this agreement, Musharraf would remain in power, while Benazir would be allowed to return to Pakistan, and all corruption cases against her and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, would be dismissed (Gohar, Sajid, & Sumayya, 2023). Here it is noteworthy to mention that when Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan, she faced serious challenges from Musharraf's government. By coming back, she put her life at great risk. At the same time, Musharraf worried that her presence could turn more public support against him. To discourage her, he warned that intelligence reports suggested suicide attackers from FATA were planning to kill her. He advised her to delay her return until after the 2008 elections. Meanwhile, on October 18, 2007, after spending eight years in self-imposed exile, Benazir Bhutto finally arrived in Karachi. Soon after Benazir's arrival, there was a shocking bomb blast that targeted her procession. In this blast, 139 people were killed and 290 were injured. After this attack, Benazir explained to journalists, "You can name Musharraf as my assassin if I am killed." She directly pointed out Brigadier Ejaz Shah, who was a close associate of Musharraf and a key figure in this conspiracy (Jalal, 2014). However, luckily, Benazir survived a deadly bomb blast and returned from self-imposed exile. However, another assassination attempt in December 2007 took her life. In response, General Musharraf suspended the constitution, declared a state of emergency, and removed the judiciary, including the Chief Justice of Pakistan, on November 3, 2007. Moreover, despite all of these brutal measures, Musharraf faces an unreceptive response from both local and global communities. Ultimately it turns into a major crackdown on opposition groups and civil society. To challenge Musharraf's government, various political groups, civil society activists, and common masses staged protests and marches. People across Pakistan mobilized for large-scale protests, marches, and demonstrations. Students and young leaders stood at the forefront of resistance against government oppression. Colleges and universities served as centers of political activism. Students rallied for the restoration of democracy and the rule of law. In line with Musharraf's brutal approach, he used repression and arrested political activists. To spotlight the political turmoil in Pakistan, civil society groups and activists engaged with the international community. They sought support from foreign nations and global organizations to support democracy and safeguard human rights in Pakistan.

To address political turmoil, talks were held between major political factions, particularly the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. These talks resulted in the formation of the All-Parties Democratic Movement. The core mission of this talk was to restore the judiciary and oppose military rule. Under growing political instability, Musharraf announced his resignation as Chief of Army Staff in 2007. In another attempt to justify his authority, Musharraf held presidential elections in September 2007 and won. However, the opposition showed little engagement in the presidential election. In February 2008, general elections took place for the National Assembly and provincial assemblies.

These elections were a game changer for the PPP. After securing victory, PPP negotiated with opposition parties to set up a coalition government. The PPP officially announced Yousaf Raza Gillani as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. In response to increasing resistance, ultimately Musharraf stepped down as Pakistan's president in August 2008 (Naheed, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study has explored the civil-military relations in Pakistan during General Musharraf's period. Initially, when Musharraf took control in 1999, he called his coup a rescue mission to save Pakistan's integrity and sovereignty from poor civilian leadership. According to him, his actions were meant to defend national order, and he denied pursuing personal power. Later on, his patriotic message soon shifted into a strategy for gaining political control. He employed various political and legal strategies to stay in power longer. In 2001 he introduced a devolution plan and transferred powers directly from central government to local government. It ultimately weakens the provincial government and strengthens district administration. Besides this, in 2002 he launched the 2002 general elections, which were marred by allegations of rigging and created a supported party, PMLQ, for him. Under Musharraf's leadership, the Political Parties Order 2002 was passed, which imposed strict limitations on political parties. In 2002 he introduced a legal framework order that allowed him to change the Constitution and keep both the positions of president and army chief. Similarly, judicial manipulation and control over the media fueled mass protests and calls for judicial independence. Despite the crackdown, civil society and opposition groups persisted in their protest and demanded the revival of civilian governance.

This study has also argued that Musharraf's political strategies had not only facilitated his undemocratic governance but also laid the groundwork for civil-military imbalance in Pakistan. The introduction of legal, political, and constitutional policies not only facilitated his governance but also showed that General Musharraf wanted to prolong his rule under the name of national interest. In a nutshell, Musharraf's martial law marked one of the darkest periods in Pakistan's history. It severely suppressed democratic institutions, freedom of expression, human rights, and political parties. Although he remained in power for nearly a decade, civil society eventually rose against his rule. Despite the delayed response, the movement was a step in the right direction, which ultimately led to Musharraf's resignation and the end of military dictatorship in the country.

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