



## Tactical Maneuvers: How Political Parties Advance Their Interests - A Global Perspective with Focus on Pakistan

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**Abstract:** The diverse tactical maneuvers employed by political parties to advance their interests, offering a global perspective with a specific focus on Pakistan. The study analyzes how parties navigate complex political landscapes through strategies such as patronage networks, identity politics, and media management. By comparing tactics used in various democratic systems worldwide and then delving into the unique context of Pakistan, the research highlights both universal trends and country-specific adaptations. The article explores the implications of these tactics for democratic processes, governance effectiveness, and long-term political stability. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data analysis and qualitative case studies, the research reveals how political parties balance short-term electoral gains with long-term institutional development. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of party behavior in emerging democracies and offer insights into the challenges of democratic consolidation in diverse societies. The study concludes by discussing potential pathways for fostering more inclusive and accountable political systems, both in Pakistan and in comparable political environments globally.

**Key words:** Political parties, Tactical maneuvers, Democratic processes, Patronage networks, Media management, Electoral strategy, democratic consolidation

### 1. Introduction

Political parties are fundamental institutions in democratic systems, serving as the primary vehicles for channeling public opinion, aggregating diverse interests, and translating them into coherent policy agendas. These organizations play a crucial role in structuring political competition, facilitating governance, and providing a link between citizens and their governments (Aldrich, 2011). In established democracies and emerging ones alike, political parties function as the primary means through which citizens participate in the political process, offering voters choices between competing policy platforms and candidates for public office. The importance of political parties in democratic systems cannot be overstated. They serve multiple functions that are essential for the smooth operation of representative democracy. First and foremost, parties act as intermediaries between the public and the government, articulating and aggregating the diverse interests and preferences of different segments of society (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). This aggregation function helps to simplify the complex landscape of public opinion into more manageable and coherent policy positions, making it easier for voters to make informed choices at the ballot box.

Political parties play a crucial role in recruiting and selecting candidates for public office, providing a mechanism for identifying and promoting political talent (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). This function is particularly important in parliamentary systems, where parties typically have significant control over candidate selection and placement on

electoral lists. By vetting and promoting candidates, parties help ensure that those seeking public office have the necessary skills, experience, and ideological alignment to represent the party's platform effectively. Political parties serve as important vehicles for political socialization and education. Through their activities, campaigns, and outreach efforts, parties help to inform and engage citizens in the political process, fostering a more informed and participatory electorate (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). This educational role is particularly crucial in emerging democracies, where political awareness and civic engagement may be less developed. However, the role of political parties extends beyond these idealized functions. In practice, parties are complex organizations with their own interests, power dynamics, and survival imperatives. As such, they employ a wide range of tactics and strategies to advance their agendas, maintain their power, and secure electoral success. These tactics can range from legitimate and transparent methods of political competition to more controversial and potentially problematic practices that may challenge democratic norms and institutions.

This brings us to the central thesis of this discussion: Political parties, including those in Pakistan, employ various tactics to further their agendas and maintain power, often navigating a complex landscape of institutional constraints, historical legacies, and sociopolitical realities. The case of Pakistan provides a particularly illuminating example of how political parties operate in a challenging democratic context, characterized by periods of military rule, weak institutions, and complex ethnic and regional dynamics. Pakistan's political landscape is dominated by several major parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), among others. These parties operate within a political system that has experienced frequent interruptions to democratic rule, with periods of military governance interspersed with civilian administrations (Talbot, 2015). This historical context has shaped the strategies and tactics employed by Pakistani political parties, as they navigate a complex terrain of civil-military relations, regional power dynamics, and the challenges of democratic consolidation. One of the key tactics employed by Pakistani political parties is the strategic use of media and communication channels to shape public opinion and mobilize support. In recent years, social media has become an increasingly important battleground for political messaging and voter outreach. For instance, the PTI, led by former cricket star Imran Khan, has been particularly adept at leveraging social media platforms to connect with younger, urban voters and disseminate its anti-corruption message (Jahangir, 2020). This digital-first approach has allowed the PTI to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and communicate directly with its support base, illustrating how parties adapt their tactics to changing technological landscapes.

Another significant tactic employed by Pakistani political parties is the formation of strategic alliances and coalitions. The fluid nature of Pakistani politics often necessitates pragmatic partnerships between parties that may have divergent ideologies but shared immediate goals. A recent example of this is the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a multiparty alliance formed in 2020 to challenge the PTI-led government (Hussain, 2021). Such coalitions demonstrate the willingness of Pakistani parties to set aside differences in pursuit of power, highlighting the complex and often unpredictable nature of political maneuvering in the country. Pakistani political parties frequently employ patronage networks and clientelistic relationships to maintain support and secure votes. The persistence of the biradari system, a form of kinship-based social organization, plays a significant role in shaping voting behavior and political loyalties in many parts of Pakistan, particularly in rural areas (Lieven, 2011). Political parties often tap into these traditional social structures to mobilize voters and distribute resources, illustrating how pre-existing social networks can be leveraged for political gain.

The tactics employed by Pakistani political parties also extend to more institutional domains, such as efforts to influence electoral processes and manipulate the machinery of government. Controversies surrounding the delimitation of electoral constituencies prior to the 2018 general elections highlight how parties seek to shape the electoral landscape to their advantage (Waseem, 2020). Similarly, allegations of politically motivated corruption investigations and selective application of accountability measures underscore the complex interplay between party politics and state institutions in Pakistan. It is important to note that while these tactics are employed to varying degrees by political parties across the democratic world, the specific manifestations and implications of these strategies in Pakistan are shaped by the country's unique historical, cultural, and institutional context. The legacy of military rule, the influence of powerful non-elected institutions, and the challenges of managing a diverse and often fractious polity all contribute to the particular character of party politics in Pakistan. As we delve deeper into the various tactics employed by political parties in Pakistan and beyond, it becomes clear that these organizations play a complex and multifaceted role in democratic systems. While they serve essential functions in aggregating interests, facilitating governance, and providing avenues for political participation, parties also engage in behaviors that can challenge democratic norms and institutions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the nature

of contemporary democratic politics and the challenges facing countries like Pakistan as they navigate the path of democratic consolidation.

In the following sections, we will explore in greater detail the specific tactics employed by Pakistani political parties, examining how these strategies manifest in areas such as media manipulation, coalition building, electoral maneuvering, policy positioning, and internal party dynamics. By analyzing these tactics, we can gain valuable insights into the workings of party politics in Pakistan and the broader implications for democratic governance in complex and evolving political systems.

## **2. Media Manipulation**

In the contemporary political landscape, media manipulation has become an increasingly sophisticated and crucial tactic employed by political parties to shape public opinion, control narratives, and ultimately influence electoral outcomes. This is particularly evident in Pakistan, where a rapidly evolving media environment, characterized by the rise of digital platforms alongside traditional media, has created new opportunities and challenges for political communication. Political parties in Pakistan have adapted their strategies to this changing media ecosystem, leveraging various techniques to frame issues in their favor and target specific segments of the electorate with tailored messages.

### **2.1 Framing Issues to Suit Party Narratives**

The concept of framing, as articulated by Entman (2007), refers to the process of selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication texts. In the context of political communication, framing involves highlighting particular elements of an issue while downplaying others, thereby influencing how the public perceives and interprets political events and policies. Pakistani political parties have become increasingly adept at employing framing techniques to shape public discourse and advance their agendas. One of the most prominent examples of effective issue framing in Pakistani politics can be observed in the tactics employed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Founded by former cricket star Imran Khan, the PTI has masterfully framed its political narrative around the central theme of anti-corruption, positioning itself as a crusading force against the entrenched political establishment (Yusuf, 2020). This framing has been particularly effective in appealing to younger, urban voters who are disillusioned with traditional politics and seek trans-formative change.

The PTI's framing strategy extends beyond mere rhetoric, encompassing a comprehensive approach to media engagement and message dissemination. A case study by Jahangir (2020) highlights how the party has leveraged social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to reinforce its anti-corruption narrative and create a sense of direct connection between party leadership and supporters. By consistently framing political issues through the lens of corruption and accountability, the PTI has managed to set the agenda for public discourse, often forcing other parties to respond within the parameters of this framing. For instance, during the 2018 general election campaign, the PTI effectively framed the Panama Papers scandal, which implicated then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family in offshore financial dealings, as emblematic of the systemic corruption plaguing Pakistani politics (Iqbal, 2019). By relentlessly focusing on this issue across various media platforms, the PTI was able to shape public perception and create a narrative of moral contrast between itself and its political opponents.

However, the effectiveness of the PTI's framing tactics has also raised concerns about the potential for oversimplification of complex political issues. Critics argue that by reducing multifaceted governance challenges to a simple binary of corruption versus integrity, the party may be contributing to a polarization of public discourse and a diminishment of nuanced policy debates (Ahmed, 2021).

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), one of the PTI's main political rivals, has attempted to counter this framing by emphasizing its track record of economic development and infrastructure projects. The party has sought to frame political discourse around themes of economic progress and stability, particularly highlighting its achievements in areas such as energy production and transportation infrastructure during its previous tenure in government (Malik & Malik, 2017). This framing strategy aims to shift public attention away from corruption allegations and towards tangible developmental outcomes. Similarly, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has consistently framed its political messaging around themes of democracy, federalism, and social welfare, drawing on its historical legacy as a party of the masses. By emphasizing its role in introducing social protection programs like the Benazir Income Support Programme, the PPP attempts to frame political debates in terms of socioeconomic rights and poverty alleviation (Gazdar, 2011). These diverse framing strategies employed by Pakistani political parties demonstrate the centrality of narrative construction in contemporary political communication. By selectively

emphasizing certain aspects of issues and events, parties seek to shape public perceptions and set the terms of political debate. The effectiveness of these framing tactics is often amplified through strategic use of both traditional and new media platforms, creating a complex information environment in which voters must navigate competing narratives and interpretations of political reality.

## **2.2 Use of Social Media for Targeted Messaging**

The advent of social media has revolutionized political communication, offering parties unprecedented opportunities for direct engagement with voters and highly targeted messaging. In Pakistan, as in many other countries, political parties have increasingly turned to social media platforms as key tools for campaign outreach, supporter mobilization, and message dissemination. The use of social media for targeted political messaging has become a critical tactic in the arsenal of Pakistani political parties, allowing them to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and tailor their communication strategies to specific demographic segments. The work of Kreiss and McGregor (2018) on the role of technology firms in shaping political communication provides a useful framework for understanding how social media platforms have become central to political campaigning. In the Pakistani context, political parties have rapidly adapted to the affordances of these digital platforms, developing sophisticated strategies for content creation, distribution, and engagement.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) offers an instructive case study in the evolution of digital media strategies among Pakistani political parties. Traditionally perceived as a party with stronger appeal among older, more conservative voters, the PML-N has made concerted efforts to modernize its digital outreach and connect with younger demographics. A study by Malik and Malik (2017) examines the party's digital media strategy, highlighting how the PML-N has leveraged platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to disseminate targeted messages and mobilize supporters. One key aspect of the PML-N's digital strategy has been the use of data analytics to segment its audience and tailor content to specific voter groups. By analyzing user data from social media platforms, the party has been able to identify key demographic segments and develop messaging strategies that resonate with different constituencies. For instance, the PML-N has created targeted content highlighting its infrastructure development projects to appeal to urban middle-class voters, while emphasizing agricultural support programs in messaging directed at rural audiences (Khan, 2019).

The party has also utilized social media influencers and digital content creators to expand its reach and appeal to younger voters. By collaborating with popular YouTubers and Instagram personalities, the PML-N has sought to present a more youthful and dynamic image, countering perceptions of the party as representing the old guard of Pakistani politics (Rashid, 2021). However, the use of social media for targeted political messaging in Pakistan has also raised significant concerns about privacy, data protection, and the potential for manipulation of public opinion. The Cambridge Analytica scandal, which revealed the extent to which personal data could be harvested and exploited for political purposes, has heightened awareness of these issues globally (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). In Pakistan, where digital literacy rates vary widely and regulatory frameworks for data protection are still evolving, the ethical implications of highly targeted political messaging on social media platforms remain a subject of ongoing debate.

The rise of social media as a primary channel for political communication has contributed to the fragmentation of the public sphere and the creation of echo chambers. As parties become increasingly adept at targeting specific voter segments with tailored messages, there is a risk of reinforcing existing political divides and limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. This phenomenon has been observed in the polarization of online political discourse in Pakistan, with supporters of different parties often inhabiting distinct digital spaces with limited interaction across ideological lines (Jahangir, 2022). The use of social media for political messaging in Pakistan has also been complicated by issues of access and digital divide. While urban areas have seen rapid growth in internet penetration and smartphone usage, many rural and economically marginalized communities remain underserved. This digital divide poses challenges for political parties seeking to reach a broad national audience through social media platforms, necessitating hybrid approaches that combine digital outreach with more traditional forms of campaigning (Zakar et al., 2018).

Despite these challenges, the trend towards increasingly sophisticated use of social media for targeted political messaging in Pakistan shows no signs of abating. As parties continue to refine their digital strategies and leverage new technologies, the landscape of political communication in the country is likely to undergo further transformations. The effectiveness of these tactics in shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes will undoubtedly be a key area of focus for both political practitioners and researchers in the years to come.

### **3. Coalition Building**

Coalition building is a crucial tactic employed by political parties to expand their support base, increase their influence, and achieve their political objectives. In Pakistan's complex and often fragmented political landscape, the ability to form effective coalitions can be a decisive factor in determining electoral success and governmental stability. This section examines two key aspects of coalition building in Pakistani politics: the formation of alliances with interest groups and cross-party cooperation on specific issues.

#### **3.1 Forming Alliances with Interest Groups**

The relationship between political parties and interest groups is a fundamental aspect of democratic politics, as highlighted by Heaney (2010) in his analysis of the linkages between these two types of organizations. In Pakistan, this relationship takes on particular significance due to the country's diverse social fabric and the presence of numerous influential interest groups representing various sectoral, regional, and ideological interests. Political parties in Pakistan have historically sought to form alliances with interest groups to broaden their support base, gain access to resources, and enhance their legitimacy. These alliances can take various forms, ranging from formal partnerships to more informal arrangements based on mutual support and shared objectives. The effectiveness of these alliances often depends on the party's ability to balance the interests of different groups while maintaining its core ideological stance and broader electoral appeal.

One of the most notable examples of a long-standing alliance between a political party and interest groups in Pakistan is the relationship between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and labor unions. As documented by Candland (2007), the PPP has historically positioned itself as a champion of workers' rights and has maintained close ties with various labor organizations since its founding in 1967. This alliance has been a crucial component of the PPP's identity as a left-leaning, populist party and has played a significant role in shaping its policy agenda and electoral strategy. The PPP's alliance with labor unions has manifested in various ways over the decades. During its periods in government, the party has often pursued labor-friendly policies, such as minimum wage increases, expansion of workers' rights, and resistance to privatization of state-owned enterprises (Candland, 2007). In return, labor unions have provided the PPP with organizational support, mobilizing workers for rallies and protests, and delivering votes during elections.

However, the relationship between the PPP and labor unions has not been without tensions. Economic pressures and the imperatives of structural adjustment programs have sometimes led PPP governments to adopt policies that conflict with union interests, straining the alliance. For instance, the privatization drives undertaken during PPP administrations in the 1990s and 2000s were met with resistance from public sector unions, highlighting the challenges of maintaining coalitions with diverse interest groups while in government (Malik, 2019). The PPP's experience illustrates both the benefits and challenges of forming alliances with interest groups. While such alliances can provide parties with a reliable support base and enhance their credibility on specific issues, they also require careful management to balance the demands of different constituencies and adapt to changing political and economic circumstances. Other major parties in Pakistan have also sought to build coalitions with various interest groups. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), for instance, has cultivated strong ties with business and industry associations, reflecting its pro-business orientation and focus on economic development. This alliance has been evident in the party's policy priorities, such as infrastructure development and energy sector reforms, which align closely with the interests of the business community (Zaidi, 2015).

Similarly, religious parties like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) have formed alliances with networks of madrasas and religious organizations, leveraging these relationships to mobilize support and influence policy debates on issues related to Islamic law and education (Akhtar, 2018). These alliances have played a significant role in shaping the political discourse around religion and its role in public life in Pakistan. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has taken a somewhat different approach to coalition building with interest groups. While maintaining relationships with traditional interest groups, the party has also sought to cultivate alliances with newer, more diffuse networks of supporters, particularly among urban professionals and youth groups. This strategy has been facilitated by the party's effective use of social media and its emphasis on issues such as anti-corruption and governance reform, which resonate with these constituencies (Mulla, 2017).

The diverse approaches to alliance-building with interest groups employed by Pakistani political parties reflect the complex and evolving nature of civil society in the country. As new social movements and advocacy groups emerge around issues such as climate change, women's rights, and digital privacy, parties are likely to continue adapting

their coalition-building strategies to engage with these new forms of civic organization.

### **3.2 Cross-Party Cooperation on Specific Issues**

While competition between political parties is a hallmark of democratic systems, cooperation across party lines can also be an important tactic for achieving specific political objectives. As Laver and Schofield (1998) argue in their analysis of multiparty governments, parties often find it necessary to collaborate on certain issues, even while maintaining their distinct identities and competing in other areas. In Pakistan, cross-party cooperation has taken various forms, ranging from formal coalitions in government to issue-specific alliances in opposition. These collaborative efforts are often driven by shared interests in challenging incumbent governments, pushing for constitutional reforms, or responding to national crises. The fluid nature of Pakistani politics, characterized by frequent realignments and shifting alliances, has created both opportunities and challenges for cross-party cooperation.

A recent and significant example of cross-party cooperation in Pakistan is the formation of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a multi-party alliance established in September 2020. As analyzed by Hussain (2021), the PDM brought together a diverse array of opposition parties, including the PML-N, PPP, and JUI-F, among others, with the shared goal of challenging the PTI-led government of Prime Minister Imran Khan. The PDM's formation represented a notable instance of parties with divergent ideologies and historical rivalries coming together around a common cause. The alliance's primary objectives included calling for fresh elections, opposing perceived military interference in politics, and advocating for stronger civilian control over governance (Hussain, 2021). This cooperation was manifested through joint rallies, coordinated parliamentary strategies, and unified messaging across various media platforms. The PDM's experience highlights both the potential and the limitations of cross-party cooperation in Pakistan. While the alliance succeeded in mounting significant pressure on the government and shaping public discourse on issues of democratic governance, it also faced internal tensions and disagreements over strategy and leadership. The eventual withdrawal of the PPP from the alliance in early 2021 underscored the challenges of maintaining unity among parties with diverse interests and constituencies (Jamal, 2021). Despite these challenges, the PDM demonstrates the ongoing relevance of cross-party cooperation as a political tactic in Pakistan. By pooling their resources and coordinating their efforts, opposition parties were able to amplify their voices and present a more formidable challenge to the government than they could have individually.

Other examples of cross-party cooperation in Pakistan's recent history include the collaboration between various parties to support the restoration of the judiciary in 2007-2009, known as the Lawyers' Movement. This movement saw unlikely allies, including the PML-N and PPP, working together to pressure the military government of General Pervez Musharraf to reinstate judges who had been dismissed (Zaidi, 2019). The success of this movement in achieving its objectives demonstrated the potential power of cross-party cooperation when focused on specific, widely supported goals. Cross-party cooperation has also been evident in parliamentary politics, particularly in efforts to amend the constitution. The passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010 is a notable example, where parties across the political spectrum came together to support significant changes to the country's federal structure and the balance of power between institutions (Adeney, 2012). However, it is important to note that cross-party cooperation in Pakistan often coexists with intense political competition and rivalry. Parties may collaborate on certain issues while remaining fierce opponents in electoral contests and other policy areas. This dynamic reflects the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of coalition politics in a multi-party system.

The effectiveness of cross-party cooperation as a political tactic in Pakistan is influenced by various factors, including the nature of the issue at hand, the perceived threat to shared interests, and the internal cohesion of the cooperating parties. As the political landscape continues to evolve, with new parties emerging and power dynamics shifting, the patterns and forms of cross-party cooperation are likely to adapt accordingly. Coalition building, both through alliances with interest groups and cross-party cooperation, remains a crucial tactic in the arsenal of Pakistani political parties. These strategies allow parties to expand their influence, pursue shared objectives, and navigate the complex terrain of the country's political system. However, the challenges of maintaining cohesion within diverse coalitions and balancing competing interests underscore the delicate nature of alliance politics in Pakistan's dynamic democratic landscape.

### **4. Electoral Strategies**

In the competitive arena of Pakistani politics, parties employ a variety of electoral strategies to gain an edge over their rivals and maximize their chances of success at the ballot box. These strategies range from institutional

manipulations such as gerrymandering to grassroots mobilization efforts that leverage traditional social structures. This section examines two key aspects of electoral strategies in Pakistan: the practice of gerrymandering and redistricting, and the use of voter mobilization techniques, with a particular focus on the role of the biradari system.

#### **4.1 Gerrymandering and Redistricting**

Gerrymandering, the practice of manipulating electoral district boundaries for political advantage, is a tactic employed in many democracies around the world. As McGann et al. (2016) argue in their comprehensive study of gerrymandering in the United States, this practice can have significant impacts on electoral outcomes and representation. While the term "gerrymandering" is less commonly used in the Pakistani context, the related process of redistricting, or delimitation as it is known in Pakistan, has been a contentious issue in the country's electoral politics.

In Pakistan, the responsibility for delimitation of electoral constituencies lies with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The process is supposed to be conducted in a non-partisan manner, based on population data from the most recent census. However, the reality is often more complex, with political parties attempting to influence the delimitation process to their advantage.

The controversies surrounding the delimitation process for Pakistan's 2018 general elections provide a telling case study of how this aspect of electoral strategy plays out in the country. As analyzed by Waseem (2020), the lead-up to the 2018 elections saw significant disputes over the redrawing of constituency boundaries, with various political parties alleging bias and manipulation in the process.

One of the key issues in the 2018 delimitation controversy was the use of provisional census data from 2017, which had not been officially finalized at the time. Opposition parties, particularly the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), argued that the use of this data was unconstitutional and could lead to unfair representation (Waseem, 2020). They contended that the new delimitation's favored certain parties, particularly in urban areas where population growth had been significant.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which was in opposition at the time but went on to win the 2018 elections, generally supported the new delimitation's. This support led to accusations from other parties that the PTI was benefiting from the redrawn boundaries, particularly in Punjab, the country's most populous province and a key electoral battleground (Rizvi, 2018).

The delimitation controversy also highlighted regional disparities and sensitivities in Pakistan's federal structure. In Balochistan, the least populous province, concerns were raised about the potential loss of National Assembly seats due to its slower population growth relative to other provinces. This situation underscored the delicate balance between population-based representation and the need to ensure adequate representation for smaller provinces in the federal legislature (Adeney, 2019).

The impact of delimitation on electoral outcomes in Pakistan is complex and multifaceted. While it is difficult to definitively prove intentional gerrymandering, the controversies surrounding the process highlight its political significance. Parties that perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by new delimitation often challenge the changes through legal means or public protests, adding another layer of complexity to the electoral process.

The delimitation process in Pakistan intersects with broader issues of governance and institutional capacity. The delayed conduct of the national census (the 2017 census was the first since 1998) and disputes over its results have complicated efforts to ensure fair and accurate representation. This situation has allowed political parties to contest the legitimacy of the delimitation process, using it as a tool for political mobilization and to challenge the credibility of electoral outcomes (Javid, 2019).

The controversies surrounding delimitation in Pakistan also reflect deeper tensions in the country's democratic transition. Allegations of gerrymandering and unfair boundary drawing often intersect with broader concerns about the neutrality of state institutions and the influence of non-elected actors in the political process. As such, debates over delimitation become proxy battles for larger contestations over the nature of democracy and representation in Pakistan.

#### **4.2 Voter Mobilization Techniques**

Effective voter mobilization is crucial for electoral success in any democracy, and Pakistan is no exception. Political parties in the country employ a range of techniques to mobilize voters, combining modern campaign methods with strategies rooted in traditional social structures. The work of Green and Gerber (2015) on get-out-the-vote tactics provides a useful framework for understanding these efforts, although the specific manifestations in Pakistan are

shaped by the country's unique social and political context.

One of the most distinctive features of voter mobilization in Pakistan is the role of the biradari system, a network of kinship-based social organizations that play a significant role in shaping political behavior, particularly in rural areas. As Lieven (2011) argues in his seminal work on Pakistani politics, the biradari system remains a crucial factor in electoral mobilization and voting patterns across much of the country.

The biradari system functions as a form of social capital, providing individuals with networks of support and obligation based on extended family and clan ties. In the context of elections, biradari leaders often play a key role in mobilizing votes for particular candidates or parties. This system can lead to bloc voting, where entire kinship groups vote as a unit based on the decisions of their leaders (Mohmand, 2019).

Political parties in Pakistan have long recognized the importance of the biradari system and have developed strategies to leverage it for electoral gain. This often involves cultivating relationships with influential biradari leaders, promising patronage or policy benefits in exchange for the support of their kinship networks. For instance, parties may offer prominent positions to biradari leaders or prioritize development projects in areas where supportive biradaris are concentrated (Martin, 2016).

The reliance on biradari-based mobilization has significant implications for Pakistani politics. On one hand, it provides parties with efficient mechanisms for reaching and mobilizing large groups of voters, particularly in rural areas where other forms of political organization may be weak. On the other hand, it can reinforce existing social hierarchies and patronage networks, potentially undermining efforts to develop issue-based or programmatic politics (Chaudhry & Vyborny, 2013).

However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that voter mobilization in Pakistan is solely based on traditional kinship structures. Particularly in urban areas and among younger, more educated voters, parties have had to develop more diverse and sophisticated mobilization strategies. These include:

1. **Social Media Campaigns:** As discussed in previous sections, parties have increasingly turned to social media platforms to reach and engage voters, particularly younger demographics. These efforts often involve targeted advertising, viral content creation, and online volunteer mobilization (Javed & Mahmood, 2016).
2. **Door-to-Door Canvassing:** Despite the challenges posed by security concerns in some areas, many Pakistani parties continue to emphasize direct voter contact through door-to-door campaigns. These efforts often combine traditional canvassing techniques with modern data analytics to target high-priority voters (Cheema et al., 2019).
3. **Public Rallies and Jalsa:** Large public gatherings remain an important tool for voter mobilization in Pakistan. These events serve multiple purposes, including demonstrating party strength, energizing the base, and generating media coverage (Mulla, 2017).
4. **Patronage and Service Provision:** Many parties engage in various forms of patronage and service provision as a means of mobilizing voter support. This can range from providing assistance with bureaucratic processes to offering more substantial benefits such as jobs or development projects (Auyero, 2012).
5. **Women's Mobilization:** Recognizing the importance of women voters, who have historically been underrepresented in Pakistani elections, parties have developed specific strategies to mobilize female voters. These efforts often involve women's wings of political parties and targeted outreach programs (Zia, 2020).
6. **Youth Engagement:** With a large youth population, Pakistani parties have increasingly focused on developing strategies to appeal to first-time voters and young adults. This often involves emphasizing issues such as education, employment, and technological advancement (Rehman & Ahmed, 2019).

The effectiveness of these various mobilization techniques can vary significantly depending on the specific context, including factors such as urbanization, education levels, and local political cultures. Parties often employ a mix of traditional and modern mobilization strategies, adapting their approaches to the particular characteristics of different constituencies. It's worth noting that voter mobilization efforts in Pakistan take place against a backdrop of broader challenges to electoral participation, including security concerns, logistical difficulties in remote areas, and varying levels of trust in the electoral process. Parties must navigate these challenges while also contending with legal and

regulatory frameworks governing campaign activities. Electoral strategies in Pakistan, encompassing both institutional manipulations like redistricting and grassroots mobilization efforts, reflect the complex interplay between traditional social structures and modern political realities. As the country's democracy continues to evolve, it is likely that these strategies will also adapt, potentially shifting towards more issue-based and programmatic approaches to voter engagement. However, the persistence of deeply rooted social and political structures suggests that traditional mobilization techniques, particularly those based on kinship and patronage networks, will continue to play a significant role in Pakistani elections for the foreseeable future.

## 5. Policy Positioning

Political parties employ various strategies to advance their interests and gain electoral support. Two key approaches in policy positioning are adopting popular policies to attract voters and the strategic use of wedge issues. This section examines these tactics within the global context, with a particular focus on their application in Pakistani politics. The adoption of popular policies as a means to attract voters has been a long-standing strategy in democratic systems. Downs (1957) proposed the median voter theorem, suggesting that parties tend to converge towards the ideological center to appeal to the largest possible voter base. This approach assumes that voters are primarily motivated by self-interest and that parties will adjust their policy positions to maximize electoral support. In the Pakistani context, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's focus on an anti-corruption platform exemplifies this strategy. Yusuf (2020) argues that the PTI's emphasis on combating corruption resonated strongly with a populace frustrated by perceived widespread graft in government institutions. By positioning itself as the vanguard of transparency and accountability, the PTI tapped into a popular sentiment, effectively translating it into electoral success in the 2018 general elections.

However, the adoption of popular policies is not without its challenges. Parties must balance the appeal to the median voter with maintaining the support of their core constituencies. Moreover, in multi-party systems like Pakistan's, the ideological space is often crowded, making distinct positioning more difficult. Parties may risk losing their unique identity if they converge too closely to the center or mimic the popular policies of their rivals.

The strategic use of wedge issues represents another crucial tactic in policy positioning. Hillygus and Shields (2008) define wedge issues as those that cut across traditional party lines, potentially attracting voters from opposing parties while energizing a party's base. These issues often involve moral or cultural dimensions that evoke strong emotional responses from voters. In Pakistani politics, religious issues have frequently served as potent wedge issues. Akhtar (2018) examines how various political parties have strategically employed religious rhetoric and policy positions to differentiate themselves and appeal to specific voter segments. For instance, debates surrounding blasphemy laws, the role of Islamic principles in governance, and the status of religious minorities have been leveraged by parties to create distinctions and mobilize support.

The use of religious wedge issues in Pakistan demonstrates both the potential and the pitfalls of this strategy. While it can effectively energize certain voter bases and create clear party distinctions, it also risks exacerbating societal divisions and potentially undermining democratic stability. Parties must carefully navigate the delicate balance between leveraging these issues for electoral gain and maintaining broader national cohesion. Moreover, the effectiveness of wedge issues can vary depending on the specific political and cultural context. In Pakistan's case, the salience of religious issues is partly rooted in the country's historical identity as an Islamic republic. However, parties must also contend with regional, ethnic, and economic cleavages that may intersect with or supersede religious considerations in voter decision-making. The interplay between adopting popular policies and leveraging wedge issues creates a complex landscape for policy positioning. Parties must carefully calibrate their approaches, considering both short-term electoral gains and long-term political stability. In Pakistan, this often involves balancing appeals to religious sentiments with addressing pressing economic and governance challenges. The effectiveness of these strategies can be influenced by external factors such as media coverage, international relations, and unforeseen events. For example, security crises or economic shocks may suddenly alter the salience of certain policy positions, requiring parties to rapidly adjust their messaging and priorities.

Policy positioning through the adoption of popular policies and the strategic use of wedge issues represents a critical aspect of political party behavior globally, with distinct manifestations in the Pakistani context. While these tactics can be effective in garnering electoral support, they also carry risks and challenges. Political parties must navigate a complex terrain, balancing ideological consistency, popular appeal, and the potential consequences of their policy positions on broader societal dynamics. As Pakistan's democracy continues to evolve, the sophistication and impact of these policy positioning strategies are likely to play a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape.

## 6. Internal Party Dynamics

The internal workings of political parties play a crucial role in shaping their strategies, policies, and overall effectiveness in the political arena. This section examines two key aspects of internal party dynamics: candidate selection and primaries, and party discipline and leadership structures. While these elements are significant in political systems worldwide, they take on unique characteristics in the context of Pakistani politics, particularly in light of the country's historical and cultural backdrop.

Candidate selection is a critical process that determines the face of a political party and its potential for electoral success. Cohen et al. (2008) argue that the method by which parties choose their candidates significantly influences both the type of individuals who run for office and the nature of representation in government. In many established democracies, primary elections have become a common mechanism for candidate selection, allowing party members or registered voters to participate in choosing nominees. This process can enhance intra-party democracy and potentially broaden the pool of candidates.

However, the reality of candidate selection in Pakistan often diverges from this model, with dynastic politics playing a prominent role. Chaudhry and Mazhar (2019) provide a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence and impact of dynastic politics in Pakistani parties. Their research reveals that a significant proportion of political leadership positions are held by individuals with familial ties to established political figures. This phenomenon is not unique to any single party but is observed across the political spectrum.

The persistence of dynastic politics in Pakistan can be attributed to several factors. Historical legacies, including the influence of feudal and tribal structures in certain regions, contribute to the concentration of political power within families. Additionally, name recognition and established networks provide dynastic candidates with significant advantages in both intra-party competition and general elections. Chaudhry and Mazhar (2019) argue that this dynastic trend has implications for policy outcomes, potentially prioritizing the interests of established political families over broader societal needs.

Despite these challenges, there have been efforts to introduce more democratic candidate selection processes in Pakistani politics. Some parties have experimented with limited forms of primaries or consultative processes to choose candidates. However, these initiatives often face resistance from entrenched interests within party structures, highlighting the tension between traditional power dynamics and the push for greater intra-party democracy.

The second crucial aspect of internal party dynamics is party discipline and leadership structures. Kam (2009) emphasizes the importance of party discipline in maintaining cohesion and effectiveness, particularly in parliamentary systems. Strong party discipline ensures that elected representatives vote in line with party positions, enhancing the party's ability to implement its agenda. However, excessive discipline can stifle internal debate and potentially alienate party members who disagree with leadership decisions.

In the Pakistani context, Adeney (2017) observes a tendency towards centralized decision-making in major political parties. This centralization is often justified as necessary for maintaining party unity and presenting a coherent front to the electorate. However, it can also lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a small group of party elites, potentially marginalizing grassroots members and diverse viewpoints within the party.

The centralized nature of decision-making in Pakistani parties is evident in various aspects of party operations. Leadership selection often follows a top-down approach, with party heads wielding significant influence over appointments to key positions. Policy formulation similarly tends to be concentrated among a core group of party leaders, with limited mechanisms for broader consultation or input from rank-and-file members.

This centralized structure has both advantages and drawbacks for Pakistani parties. On one hand, it allows for quick decision-making and can project an image of party unity to the public. This can be particularly valuable in a political landscape characterized by frequent upheavals and intense inter-party competition. On the other hand, centralization can lead to a disconnect between party leadership and the grassroots, potentially hampering the party's ability to respond effectively to local concerns and evolving voter preferences.

The interplay between candidate selection processes and party discipline creates a complex dynamic within Pakistani political parties. Dynastic candidates, often benefiting from established power bases within their parties, may be less bound by traditional party discipline. This can create tensions between personal or familial interests and broader party objectives. Conversely, non-dynastic candidates may feel greater pressure to conform to party discipline to secure their positions and advance within the party hierarchy.

The impact of these internal dynamics extends beyond the parties themselves, influencing the broader political landscape of Pakistan. The prevalence of dynastic politics and centralized decision-making can affect the quality of

governance, the responsiveness of elected officials to constituent needs, and the overall health of democratic institutions. It may also contribute to voter disillusionment, particularly among younger and more educated segments of the population who may seek more meritocratic and inclusive political structures.

Efforts to reform internal party dynamics in Pakistan face significant challenges. Entrenched interests, cultural norms, and the competitive nature of Pakistani politics all contribute to the resistance against more open and democratic internal processes. However, there are signs of gradual change, driven in part by increasing public scrutiny, the rise of social media, and a growing awareness among party leaders of the need for renewal and adaptation.

The internal dynamics of political parties in Pakistan, characterized by the prevalence of dynastic politics in candidate selection and centralized decision-making structures, play a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape. While these features provide certain advantages in terms of stability and coherence, they also present challenges to the development of more inclusive and responsive political institutions. As Pakistan continues to navigate its democratic journey, the evolution of these internal party dynamics will be a key factor in determining the effectiveness and legitimacy of its political system.

## **7. Fund-raising and Financial Influence**

In the complex landscape of Pakistani politics, financial resources play a crucial role in shaping party strategies, electoral outcomes, and governance priorities. This section examines the intricacies of political financing in Pakistan and explores the symbiotic relationship between business interests and political power.

### **7.1 Political Financing in Pakistan**

The financing of political activities in Pakistan operates within a framework that is both formally regulated and informally influenced by various socio-economic factors. According to Kaura (2022), the legal structure for political financing in Pakistan is primarily governed by the Political Parties Order 2002 and the Representation of the People Act 1976. These laws set out requirements for financial reporting, limits on contributions, and prohibitions on foreign funding. However, the implementation and enforcement of these regulations often fall short of their intended goals. One of the key challenges in Pakistani political financing is the prevalence of undocumented funds. Kaura (2022) notes that a significant portion of political donations comes from undisclosed sources, making it difficult to track the flow of money and its potential influence on policy decisions. This opacity in funding sources raises concerns about the potential for corruption and the undue influence of wealthy donors on the political process.

The role of personal wealth in Pakistani politics cannot be overstated. Many prominent political figures come from affluent backgrounds or have amassed considerable wealth during their careers. This personal financial clout often translates into political power, as candidates can self-fund campaigns and build patron-client relationships with voters (Kaura, 2022). The intertwining of personal and party finances further complicates efforts to ensure transparency and accountability in political funding. Another significant aspect of political financing in Pakistan is the use of state resources by incumbent parties. Kaura (2022) highlights how ruling parties often leverage government funds and assets for political purposes, blurring the lines between state and party resources. This practice, while not unique to Pakistan, creates an uneven playing field and can perpetuate cycles of political dominance by established parties.

The influence of external actors on Pakistani political financing is also a matter of concern. Kaura (2022) points out that despite legal prohibitions, there have been allegations of foreign funding reaching political parties through various channels. This external financial influence can potentially shape party policies and alignments, raising questions about national sovereignty and the integrity of domestic political processes.

### **7.2 Lobbying Efforts and Business-Politics Nexus**

The relationship between business interests and political power in Pakistan is characterized by a complex web of mutual dependencies and influences. Siddiq (2017) provides a comprehensive analysis of this business-politics nexus, highlighting how economic and political interests often converge to shape the country's governance landscape. One of the primary manifestations of this nexus is the phenomenon of businessmen-turned-politicians. Siddiq (2017) observes that many successful entrepreneurs in Pakistan have transitioned into political roles, leveraging their economic clout to gain electoral success. This trend has led to a significant representation of business interests within legislative bodies and executive positions, potentially influencing policy-making in favor

of certain industries or economic groups. The lobbying efforts of business groups in Pakistan take various forms, ranging from formal industry associations to informal networks of influence. Siddiqa (2017) notes that these lobbying activities often extend beyond mere advocacy for business-friendly policies. They can involve direct financial support to political campaigns, the provision of logistical resources during elections, and even the shaping of party manifestos to align with specific economic interests.

The textile industry, for instance, has been particularly influential in Pakistani politics due to its significant contribution to the country's export earnings. Siddiqa (2017) highlights how textile magnates have successfully lobbied for favorable policies, including subsidies, tax breaks, and trade protections. This example illustrates how sectoral interests can shape national economic policies through political channels. However, the business-politics nexus in Pakistan is not a one-way street. While business interests seek to influence political decisions, political actors also leverage their positions to advance their economic interests. Siddiqa (2017) describes instances where politicians have used their influence to secure government contracts, obtain preferential access to resources, or create regulatory environments that benefit their business associates. This intertwining of business and political interests has significant implications for governance and economic development in Pakistan. On one hand, it can lead to policies that promote economic growth and industrialization. On the other hand, it risks creating a system of crony capitalism where political connections, rather than market efficiency or innovation, determine economic success.

The business-politics nexus also has implications for democratic accountability. Siddiqa (2017) argues that when powerful economic interests have disproportionate influence over political processes, it can undermine the principle of equal representation and marginalize the voices of less affluent citizens. This dynamic can contribute to public disillusionment with the political system and erode trust in democratic institutions. The landscape of political financing and business influence in Pakistani politics is characterized by a complex interplay of formal regulations, informal practices, and entrenched power structures. While legal frameworks exist to govern political financing, the prevalence of undocumented funds and the use of personal wealth in politics present significant challenges to transparency and accountability. The close nexus between business interests and political power, while potentially driving economic growth, also raises concerns about equity, representation, and the overall health of Pakistan's democratic system. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to strengthen regulatory enforcement, enhance transparency in political financing, and foster a political culture that prioritizes the public interest over narrow economic agendas.

## **8. Conclusion**

Pakistani political parties employ a diverse array of tactics to navigate the country's complex political landscape, each with far-reaching implications for democratic processes and governance. These strategies range from the cultivation of extensive patronage networks and the exploitation of identity politics to the centralization of power around charismatic leaders and the formation of strategic coalitions. Parties frequently engage in populist rhetoric, leverage media channels to shape public narratives, and demonstrate their strength through street mobilizations. While these approaches reflect adaptations to Pakistan's unique political environment, they also present significant challenges to the country's democratic development. The personalization of politics around strong individual leaders, while often effective in mobilizing support, can impede institutional development within parties and government bodies. The emphasis on short-term gains through patronage and populist appeals may come at the expense of long-term policy planning and implementation. Moreover, the prevalence of identity-based politics risks exacerbating social divisions and complicating efforts to build national consensus on critical issues. These dynamics, coupled with the challenges of maintaining accountability within patronage networks, can undermine the effectiveness of governance structures and hinder progress on key development objectives.

The frequent shifts in coalitions and changes in government resulting from these political tactics often lead to policy inconsistencies, further hampering long-term development efforts. However, the continued engagement of diverse parties in the political process, despite these challenges, demonstrates a degree of democratic resilience within Pakistan. The evolving media landscape, while presenting opportunities for parties to manage public narratives, also underscores the critical need for a robust and independent press to support informed democratic participation. Furthermore, the interplay between civilian political tactics and the historical role of the military in Pakistani politics continues to shape the delicate balance of power between institutions. While the tactics employed by Pakistani political parties have allowed them to navigate a complex and often turbulent political environment, they also present significant obstacles to democratic consolidation and effective governance. Addressing these challenges

will require sustained efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, foster inclusive political dialogue, and promote accountability at all levels of government. As Pakistan continues to evolve politically, finding ways to balance the practical necessities of political competition with the broader goals of democratic development and effective governance remains a critical challenge for the nation's future.

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