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**Politics and governance**

There has been quite a bit of literature lately that has emerged on voting trends and the political economy of pre-elections dynamics. A relevant question also is: how do political parties govern once they are in power?

The PTI came into power by hook or crook but has been increasingly finding it difficult to govern as we have seen since the fall of 2018. Therefore, it is important to scrutinize governance by political parties when they are in power. Sameen Mohsin Ali’s chapter ‘Governance Amid Crisis’ does that for the PML-Q, PPP, and PML-N governments in Mufti, Shafqat, and Siddiqui’s new edited book ‘Pakistan’s Political Parties: Surviving between Dictatorship and Democracy’ (2020).

The research particularly focuses on bureaucratic appointments. Party leaders politicize bureaucratic appointments to set up patron-client relations with the bureaucracy. Whether the political parties’ objectives are personal gains or electoral patronage or programmatic efficiency, they need to operate via the bureaucracy. Mohsin Ali says, “Understanding patterns of bureaucratic appointments helps us understand patterns of governance: why certain policies get implemented quickly when others do not, why some projects are swiftly completed while others languish, and why certain communities benefit over others”.

The three parties studied for research – the PML-Q, PPP, and PML-N – adopted three different variants of the “politician-bureaucratic interaction”: the PML-Q went for delegation to the bureaucracy; the PPP appointed bureaucrats that could help with accruing personal gains; and the PML-N honed its bureaucratic appointments to pursue the strategy of service delivery of public goods to a large segment of population. This is in the backdrop of all three political parties being highly centralized and institutionally weak, and trying to survive in a difficult political space – hovering between dictatorship and democracy.

The PML-Q ruled in the shadows of the Musharraf government, so its strategy to delegate governance to selected bureaucrats suited well with the party leaders’ diminished interest in the independent policy formulation and implementation. It desired no interference in Musharraf’s ways of running the country and the involvement of his natural constituency in governance matters. So, the party opted for delegation of powers to selected bureaucrats.

The PPP came to power in 2008 at the twilight of the Musharraf era and its bureaucratic appointments were geared towards accruing personal gains from public office and protecting the party leadership and its cronies from the accountability drive. So, the PPP pursued acquisitive politics and worked on a rent-seeking model of governance.

The PML-N that came back to power in Punjab in 2008 and at the federal level in 2013 adopted a service delivery agenda. It made bureaucratic appointments to enhance bureaucratic performance through “micromanagement” by offering “non-targeted” (meaning non-patronage based) delivery to services to a large number of its voters. It wanted to prove to its voters that it could deliver governance. However, Mohsin Ali states while studying teachers’ appointments in the education department that the PML-N also distinguished between “good sifarish” and “bad sifarish”. The party heavyweights that had access to the higher offices in the party could still indulge in patronage while others were told to follow the rules. Yet, teachers’ appointments in Punjab under the PML-N were streamlined as per laying out the rules to quite an extent.

Despite the limitations placed on political parties in the swinging pendulum between dictatorship and democracy; there is real political competition amongst the political parties of Pakistan and winning power to run the government is considered of “substantial value”. Elections are hotly contested and those political parties that cannot win provide effective opposition. Yet, real competition between the political parties has not curtailed the politicization of bureaucracy. Pakistan’s political parties deal with “short-term horizons” rather than “long-term horizons” and are more likely to politicize the institutions of state. Bureaucrats also indulge in seeking patronage of the political parties for their careers’ enhancement under the democratic rule.

The politicization of the state is carried out through appointing officers for key bureaucratic offices (such as secretaries of government departments, provincial chief secretaries, heads of key administrative districts, directors of autonomous bodies amongst others) with loyalists through patronage and these officers ensure meeting the party objectives while running the civilian administration. Rules regarding bureaucratic appointments are often manipulated. This is also a way for both politicians and bureaucrats to seek stability in an otherwise “unstable political environment”. So, a change in government means reshuffling one set of loyalist bureaucrats with another.

Since political parties run in a highly centralized manner, they exclude most legislators from effective decision-making. The majority of legislators have less interest in legislation or providing an oversight of the functions of government since they lack expertise in policymaking. This leads to bureaucrats and party leadership to sideline them. As a result, the party leadership and loyalist bureaucrats establish a relationship of trust and reciprocity. Bureaucrats also maintain network ties amongst other Pakistan Administrative Service cadres and mentor junior officers to achieve parties’ objectives.

The PTI is new to the power centres in Pakistan. Its agenda is similar to the PML-N’s – service delivery for the citizens. Yet, it faces the same contradictions as of other parties. It is stuck between its anti-corruption rhetoric and its party members’ demands of state patronage through bureaucracy. In September 2018, PTI politicians in some places tried to influence street-level bureaucrat appointments, and bureaucrats complained about this episode to their district commissioners and also to the Election Commission. Bureaucrats have also been hesitant in performing in the PTI government due to enhanced scrutiny by NAB and the courts.

There is also much infighting and near paralysis-like confusion in the Punjab government due to PTI politicians and allies vying for power that has further hamstrung the bureaucrats. The PTI has become a “pragmatic party” rather than being the ‘idealist’ it projected itself as while it was in opposition.

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