**Populism in Pakistan**

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Populism refers to a range of political stances that emphasize the idea of “the people” and often juxtapose this group against “the elite”. It is frequently associated with anti-establishment and anti-political sentiment. In simple terms, populism is a name for a kind of political movement. Populists usually try to make a difference between common people and “elites”. In politics, the word populist refers to someone who puts ordinary people’s rights above those of the wealthy and powerful. It is a synonym of democrat, which is simply a person who believes in democratic principles of rule by the people, freedom, and equality. The American populist movement worked to enact a variety of democratic political reforms.

Throughout the 1880s, local political action groups called Farmers’ Alliances or the Populist movement was a revolt by farmers in the South and Midwest against the Democratic and Republican Parties for ignoring their interests and difficulties. For over a decade, farmers were suffering from crop failures, falling prices, poor marketing, and a lack of credit facilities. The US People’s Party, also known as the Populist Party adopted a platform calling for free coinage of silver, abolition of national banks, a sub-treasury scheme or some similar system, a graduated income tax, plenty of paper money, government ownership of all forms of transportation and communication, the election of Senators by direct vote of the people and non-ownership. However, the Populist Party is generally regarded as a failure by historians as it did not address the realities of an industrial economy and could not endure.

[UN decides to set up investigation into Iran protests](https://www.nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2022/u-n-decides-to-set-up-investigation-into-iran-protests)

After independence, Pakistan People’s Party raised by late former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto despite being from a feudal background and elitist political class can be credited with being the first populist leader whose successes and failures have remained a subjective issue. Nevertheless, his goals and objectives were closer to what the American Populists’ movement was all about, his domestication of the political concept and movement included a fine mix of Islam, communism, and socialism. Political scientists and other analysts regard the left as including anarchists, communists, socialists, democratic socialists, social democrats, left-libertarians, progressives, and social liberals.

Movements for racial equality and trade unionism have also been associated with the left; some if not all such ambitious goals were there in Bhutto’s reforms. Thus the inherent contradictions in the conceptual framework of his party as well as compulsive reliance on the same feudal class opposed to the very idea of populism did not allow the reforms to manifest as were envisaged. A few of the commoners introduced in politics by his party sooner than later became an exclusive class themselves. Besides, the elite class, establishment in an all-inclusive sense, and rising industrial class, all joined hands to guard their respective interests. After the death of Bhutto and his daughter Benazir who tried to fill her father’s shoes, the party got hijacked by those who had the least to do with the party’s ideology, goals, and dreams and rather proved to be more of an antithesis. Nonetheless, both Bhutto and Benazir as populist leaders were internally and externally unacceptable to the powers that be, which became the raison d’être for their elimination.

[Veteran actor Ismail Tara passes away](https://www.nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2022/veteran-actor-ismail-tara-passes-away)

The rise of former Prime Minister Imran khan as yet another populist leader in Pakistani politics after a struggle of over two and half decades has some similarities and some differences with Bhutto’s populism in ideology as well as in execution. In my view Imran Khan while facing similar difficulties as we confronted Bhutto about the electable and old feudal elite, had to additionally include industrialist and business tycoons in his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice), whose slates were never clean and eventually became the main reason for his party’s internal weakness. However, besides populism, Mr. Imran Khan wittingly or unwittingly is also presenting a mix of liberalism with populism.

In general terms, Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on the rights of the individual, liberty, consent of the governed, political equality, and equality before the law. Liberals espouse various views depending on their understanding of these principles. However, a high sense of self-respect, eloquence, personal charisma, clear-headed approach touching overconfidence, ability to see eye to eye with the former and new colonial powers with the discomforting ability to disagree with their dynamic demands, especially with regards to Pakistan’s nuclear and missile capability and refusal to act as a door mat are the similarities I see common in late Mr. Bhutto and Mr. Imran Khan who has already twice survived assassination attempt besides removal from the seat of the Prime Minister. Despite being recently wounded with at least three to four bullets in his legs by a few assassins, Imran Khan seems determined to continue with his ongoing long march with the sole demand for immediate announcement of dates for general elections in the shortest possible time. That is unacceptable being visible political suicide by the incumbent Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDM, a 12-parties political pickle), who know well that in foreseeable future, Imran Khan’s PTI will sweep the general elections.

[Clarity needed for effective narrative building against extremism: Kaira](https://www.nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2022/clarity-needed-for-effective-narrative-building-against-extremism-kaira)

Pakistan is already on the brink of economic collapse and that cannot be addressed without bringing around political stability to the country. The political polarisation and societal morality are at their worst in the country. The institution of the Armed Forces has been cleverly made to look partisan by the PDM leadership; besides involving superior judiciary in most of the political bouts that should have ideally been left to be fought on the floors of both houses of the parliament. The vast electronic, print, and social media has been effectively hijacked for garbage-in garbage-out mode, which has driven the public crazy and makes Joseph Goebbels turn in his grave. The sane or opposing voices are being silenced through unprecedented kidnapping, harassing, torturing, and even murdering. The assassination attempt on Mr. Imran Khan and the murder of the most popular journalist and TV anchor Arshad Sharif (Shaheed) has infused a new life in the ongoing long march as well as among brave journalists determined to bring the truth to the limelight.

[NA Speaker underlines role of Women’s participation in legislation](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Nov-2022/na-speaker-underlines-role-of-women-s-participation-in-legislation)

\Mr. Imran Khan will have to be extremely careful in his public appearances as his internal and external enemies seem relentless in their pursuit to get rid of the currently most popular political leader in Pakistan as they did in the past not only in Pakistan but also in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Palestine, and Lebanon. Pakistan’s superior Judiciary and new military leadership along with all internal bureaucratic stakeholders will do well to see the writing on the wall and work for meeting the rational demand for announcing dates and holding immediate general elections rather than making it unduly complicated and getting embroiled in the political mire. If the present situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria is not enough to get us out of deep slumber; that is the most unforgettable and bitterest lesson from the 1971 breakup of Pakistan. Pakistan Zindabad!