

Question no:02

Parliamentary and Presidential form of government

Introduction:

Pakistan's political system has oscillated between parliamentary and presidential system, reflecting its quest for political stability, and effective governance. Parliamentary form of government is characterised by the supremacy of parliament, limited power to president, devolution of power to provinces and democratic accountability through vote of no confidence. In contrary to this, the presidential form of government is characterised by concentration of power to president, separation of powers, and offers political stability. However, owing to lack of democratic culture, military intervention and weak political institutions are the reasons of oscillation between presidential and parliamentary form of government in Pakistan.

The tragedy of Pakistan is not that democracy failed, but that it was never allowed to function.

1. Historical background:-

1956 Constitution

- Adopted parliamentary form of govt; Prime minister as chief Executive

1958 Coup

- Gen. Ayub abrogated constitution,
- introduced presidential form in 1962.

1973 Constitution

- Restored parliamentary democracy again
- Strengthened federation

1977-1999

- Military regimes under Zia and Musharraf introduced presidential form of govt

Post-2008 era

- Return to pure parliamentary form of govt, via 18th amendment.

2. Comparison between parliamentary and presidential forms of government in Pakistan

(i) Nature of Executive authority

Parliamentary System: The executive authority lies with cabinet and the

Prime minister, accountable to the parliament. The executive survival depends on majority support in the legislature.

In presidential system, President acts as both head of state and government and is independent of the legislature.

ii) Accountability and Responsibility of Executive

In parliamentary system, the Prime minister is politically answerable to the National Assembly and can be ousted by a vote of no confidence.

In presidential system, the president can only be removed through impeachment, which is a difficult process.

Under Ayub Khan and Musharraf, this lack of accountability led to authoritarianism.

iii) Separation of power

In parliamentary system, there is a fusion of powers. Executive members are part of the legislature. This allows cooperation but risks

executive dominance.

In presidential system, there is a rigid separation of power. Under 1962 constitution, the legislature had minimal control over the president's actions.

iv) Stability and continuity of the government

In Parliamentary form, coalition politics and intra-party divisions cause frequent changes in leadership. Between 1988-1999, four elected governments were dismissed.

In presidential form, although it provides continuity of leadership but results in concentration of power. Ayub Khan ruled for a decade (1958-1969) but with political suppression.

Strong men make weak institutions.
(Stephen P. Cohen)

v) Power of judiciary and parliament

In parliamentary form, Parliament is the supreme law making body, hence keeping executive actions within bounds.

In presidential form, the judiciary often legitimized presidential rule under the Doctrine of Necessity.

vii) Political culture and party system

Parliamentary form of government encourages a multiparty culture and consensus politics.

while presidential system promotes personality-based rule. leaders like Ayub, and Musharraf established controlled political parties.

Democracy cannot function if institutions are subservient to individuals.

(Benazir Bhutto)

vii) Federal-provincial relations

In parliamentary form, there is a cooperation between centre and provinces through intergovernmental mechanisms. The Council of Common Interest (CCI) is its hallmark.

However, in presidential system, there is a centralized authority eroding provincial trust. Under 1962 model, East Pakistan was marginalized.

Centralization breeds alienation.
(Hamid Khan)

viii) Political legitimacy

In parliamentary form, the ruler derives authority directly from elected representatives, ensuring popular legitimacy.

In presidential form, Presidents in Pakistan often emerged from military takeovers, not elections.

ix) Public participation

In parliamentary form, it encourages mass political participation through parties and debates. As political pluralism revived after 2008 in Pakistan.

In presidential form, it limits political activity and relies on 'controlled democracy'.

3. Lessons drawn from the oscillation between the two systems

i) Civilian Supremacy

military dominance for upto 3-decades distorted constitutional continuity. So, military withdrawal from politics is key to democratic consolidation.

ii) Strengthening political parties

Lack of party discipline and ideology.

based politics results in weakened political institutions. So internal democracy within parties ensure system endurance.

iii) Checks and balances

Both executive and legislature must share power to prevent authoritarianism.

iv) Balance of power

Parliamentary democracy better protects provincial rights and national integration.

Conclusion:

Pakistan's experience proves that while the presidential system ensured administrative control, it ended democratic participation and federal harmony. The parliamentary system though imperfect, aligns with Pakistan's social diversity. True stability lies in strengthening democratic institutions.

The strength of democracy lies not in the system it adopts; but in the spirit with which it is upheld.

(Benazir Bhutto)

Question no: 01

Evolution of Pakistan's democratic System since 1971

Introduction:

Democracy is a process; not a product.

(John Dewey)

The evolution of Pakistan's democracy since 1971 has been marked by alternating cycles of civilian rule, constitutional development and military intervention. Each phase reflected both progress and regression in institutional growth and political maturity. Despite various milestones like the 1973 constitution, 18th amendment and civilian transition since 2008, Pakistan's democracy remains fragile due to weak institutions and persistent civil-military imbalance, as stated by Ayesha Jalal;

The history of Pakistan's democracy is a tale of interruptions and incomplete transitions.

(The Struggle for Pakistan, 2011)

1. Post - 1971 political reorientation :-

From disintegration to reconstruction

After the separation of Pakistan, country faced a legitimacy crisis. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto emerged as a civilian leader and introduced;

- ✓ land reforms,
- ✓ nationalization of industries
- ✓ worker participation schemes to create a socialist democracy.

2. The 1973 constitution: Foundation of parliamentary democracy

The 1973 constitution established parliamentary system, supremacy, strong federation and fundamental rights.

However subsequent amendments during military regime distorted its spirit.

The 1973 constitution was the first genuine social contract of Pakistan.

(Hamid Khan)

3. Zia-ul-Haq's era (1977-1988):

Islamization and political reversal

General Zia introduced Islamization policies, non-party elections, and the 8th amendment giving the president

power to dissolve ~~power~~ assemblies.
these moves weakened parliamentary sovereignty.

4. Democratic restoration and political instability (1988-1999):

Post Zia era saw alternating governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

Frequent dismissal under article 58(2)(b), corruption and institutional rivalry undermined democratic consolidation.

democracy in this decade was
"form without substance"

(PILDAT)

5. Military dominance under Musharraf: Controlled democracy

Gen. Musharraf's coup (1999) was justified as saving democracy from corruption.

His regime promoted local governance devolution plan (2001) and media liberalization, yet centralized power belonged to president.

6. Democratic Transitions and the 18th amendment

After 2008, 18th amendment enacted, that improved centre power relations between federation and provinces. It led to successful democratic transitions afterwards.