Transformation of political elite as regime changes in Pakistan

Ayesha Shoukat & Edmund Terence Gomez

To cite this article: Ayesha Shoukat & Edmund Terence Gomez (2018) Transformation of political elite as regime changes in Pakistan, Asian Journal of Political Science, 26:1, 35-52, DOI: 10.1080/02185377.2017.1356738

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2017.1356738

Published online: 08 Aug 2017.

Article views: 121

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Transformation of political elite as regime changes in Pakistan

Ayesha Shoukat\textsuperscript{a} and Edmund Terence Gomez\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Department of Commerce, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan; \textsuperscript{b}Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Burton and Higely [(2001). The study of political elite transformations', 	extit{International review of sociology/Revue internationale de sociologie}, 11(2): 181–199] argue that when elites of a society are not united this will lead to an unstable political regime. Consensual elite cohesion is only created through distinctive elite transformation. This essay attempts to elaborate their argument in Pakistan, by developing a link among a continuous regime shift from authoritarian to democratic governments and the political elites who keep transforming their structure accordingly. The technique followed for it is analysing the epochal events over time from pre-partition till date which became reason for regime transformations. The discussion focuses on the collusions and contestations of multiple power elites within given social context which are embedded under the international context. It concludes that political elites in Pakistan were always embraced by multiple other power elites who accordingly hold dual elite identity to control the command post in the political arena. Such complex elite structure makes it paradoxical to distinguish political elite of Pakistan from other power elites of Pakistan.

KEYWORDS

Transformation of Regimes; Power Elite; Collusions; Contestations; Military; Democracy

Introduction

In 2000, the International Political Science Association (IPSA) created a Research Committee on Political Elites to undertake an assessment of elite studies. When the papers were presented at a special session of the IPSA World Congress, an extremely interesting conclusion was reached that merits being quoted at length:

Scholars in elite studies are largely unable to agree about the core features of political elites and how these vary from one country to another or from one historical period to another in the same country. This is the same as saying that there is no accepted typology of political elites to facilitate a theory in which changes in types of political elites would be linked causally to other major political changes, such as changes in regimes or in institutional effectiveness. (Higley and Moore, 2001, p. 177)

Edinger and Searing (1967) argue that ‘all political systems are more or less stratified and their elites constitute that minority of participating actors, which plays a strategic role in public policy making’; hence, they are called power elites. As the incumbents of
such key positions, they have a far greater influence than the masses in structuring and
giving expression to political relationships and policy outputs at various levels of author-
itative decision-making. They wield this influence by virtue of their exceptional access to
political information and positions, giving them highly disproportionate control over
public policy-making. Keeping to a similar stance, this research intends to analyse the
role of multiple powerful groups and to understand their evolution and their role in
public policy-making, which in turn transform the political elite of Pakistan.

Higley and Burton (1989) studied elite disunity and its impact on democratic transition
in the western world from 1500. They concluded that disunity among national elites is a
generic condition and it tends to persist regardless of socio-economic development and
other changes in mass populations. They argued that stable democratic regimes depend
heavily on the ‘consensual unity’ of national elites. If elites do not remain unified, political
regimes are unstable, a condition which facilitates a breakdown of authoritarian govern-
ments and facilitates democratic transitions or, in other cases, power reconfigurations.
They went on to categorize in a very articulate way the types and origins of national
elites in some selected western countries (Higley and Burton, 1989). This study intends
to measure such transformation in political elites of Pakistan over the regime change to
find out that is the unstable democratic regimes in Pakistan and the continuous coups
from military for four times is a reason of non-consensual unity among political elites
or due to emergence of many other power elites as political elites in Pakistan?

Scholars who consider regime change to be the result of the characteristics of political
institutions and consider it to be a transition that can help consolidate democracy have
focused on the following factors: the extent of institutionalization (Huntington, 1968),
consociation arrangements (Lijphart, 1977), coherent (non-fragmented) party systems
(Mainwaring, 1993) and parliamentary rather than presidential systems (Linz, 1994;
Elgie, 2005). Huntington (1965, 2006) noted the importance of political institutionaliza-
tion and its application in authoritarian regimes, although here consociational arrange-
ments, a non-fragmented party system structure, electoral rules and the type of
executive system are largely irrelevant.

Other scholars have argued that international political and economic conditions may
affect political regimes, including colonial legacies (Collier, 1982; Weimer, 1997), econ-
omic dependence (Bollen, 1983; Gasiorek, 1988; Gonick and Rosh, 1998), relationships
with superpowers (Gasiorek, 1991; Muller-Rommel, 1985), the ‘demonstration effect’
of democracy in neighbouring countries (Huntington, 1993) and some aspects of the
international environment (Gourevitch, 1978; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; O’Donnell
et al., 1986). While empirical studies have shown that these structural factors significantly
affect political regimes (Chudhe and Neubauer, 1969; Vanhanen, 1990; Hadenius, 1994;
Arat, 1999), these theories of regime change are based on structural factors and can
only explain the factors which facilitate the regime change. They do not consider the pro-
cesses that actually bring about regime change and therefore cannot fully explain its causes
(Rustow, 1970). These processes, typically involving coups d’état that result in military rule
or mass protests, lead to democracy and consist of the strategic behaviour of political
actors embedded in concrete historical situations (Przeworski 1986). Much of the work
on regime change focuses narrowly on ‘strategic behaviour’ (O’Donnell et al., 1986; Di
Palma, 1990; Kitschelt, 1992), but a much larger body of literature examines ‘concrete his-
torical situations’ that affect such political transitions.
Political elites are those who hold strategic positions in large political organizations which enable them to influence political decision-making in the country directly, substantially and regularly. This definition is by now standard in elite studies, even though different scholars use different adjectives and adverbs to define such ‘proximate decision makers’ (Putnam, 1976). To be sure, there are still scholars who use ‘elite’ to denote much larger upper and middle strata of privileged people (Collier, 1982). Likewise, Vergara (2013) defined political elites as ‘a group of people, corporations, political parties and/or any other kind of civil society organization who manage and organize government and all the manifestations of political power’, while Higley (2008) contends that ‘elites may be defined as persons who, by virtue of their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, are able to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially.’

Political elite means the top minority that rules, struggles for power, takes decisions and influences political conditions through their programmes and actions. According to Michel (2003), in spite of the presence of a modern democratic system and elections in voluntary political organizations, a few individuals can secure control of important offices in government. They use their control over these offices to consolidate their position in government. Michel (2003) calls this ‘the iron rule of aristocracy’. Due to this, even democracies can create a comparatively stable aristocratic group or elite. And, as Pareto (1935) has noted, the present day political system has two types of elites, ruling and non-ruling.

**Political elites in Pakistan**

In this study a historical analysis of events in Pakistan, triggered in conjunction with certain structural factors, is applied with reference to the effects of regime changes on transformation of political elites in different regimes, taking an elitist state framework as a background condition. Power reconfigurations in Pakistan have led to continuous regime change between the military and civilian governments. Power shifts between democratic regimes and the military have continued to transpire well into the present period (1958–1968, 1968–1971, 1977–1988 and 1999–2007). Pakistan’s economic performance under these different regimes is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** indicates that whenever there was a military regime (blue bars), the economic conditions of the country improved; this certainly had a positive effect on the corporate sector and boosted the confidence of corporate elites. The yellow and red bars indicate that democratically elected governments have not been able to consistently retain power. The black bars show the period when during Mixed democracy, in one year, five prime ministers hold the PM office. The green bars indicate the time when the bureaucracy was controlling the political scene of the country.

Few events have been considerably more imperative in the history of contemporary South Asia than the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947 based on the two nation theory. The anticipation of partition had a powerful shadow on historical reconstructions of South Asia in the decades before 1947, while the complications of partition have been persistent in leaving their mark on sub-continental politics, even till the present time.

The ‘Two Nation Theory’ is based on the philosophy that Muslims around the world are one nation and hence cannot live under one state with Hindus of United India. But
in Pakistan there are ethnic cleavages which developed right from the beginning and exist till now, a factor that has not allowed the country to emerge as one nation. Jalal (1985) wrote that Jinnah was the ‘sole-nationalist’ in a quest to make a nation. Jalal (1985) at the same time was questioning whether Jinnah ever really wanted the creation of a separate homeland for Muslims of United India, or whether the partition was forced by the leaders of Congress who found it more convenient to give Jinnah a ‘truncated, moth-eaten’ Pakistan rather than to give him the political position he wanted in United India. In reality, in 1937 when Jinnah’s Muslim League could only win 55 seats, he coined the formula of a ‘Two Nation Theory’.

According to Jinnah:

Islam and Hindus are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact different and distinct social orders (…). The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and Literatures (…). To yoke together such nations under a single state. One as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and the final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state.

Muslim traders (later the corporate elite) adjudged the creation of a separate state as a promising land for prosperous ventures without the intrusion of Hindu competitors. Their motivation came from vested economic interests rather than religious sentiments. Similarly, the educated urban middle class (bureaucratic elite) supported the idea of an independent Muslim state which promised better employment opportunities. Muslim-educated urban middle classes were not so much concerned about their religious and cultural rights as they were about their share in the government of the country (Sayyed, 1963). Similarly, for Muslim members of the Indian Civil Service, a separate state meant their domination of the bureaucracy, then under the control of their Hindu colleagues.

Local religious, political and western educated Muslim elites, along with future bureaucrats, encountered dissension based on theology on which the newly created Pakistan
should be governed. These disputes also involved a desire by them to safeguard their interests. The International elite, on the other hand, had their own foreign policy goals in the partition of India. One obvious reason was to use the newly created Pakistan as a military base against the rising influence of Communist Russia. In view of these theories, one reality which persists is that interest groups such as the landlord elites, business elites, bureaucratic elites, modern urbanities and international elites, together had played a critical role in the creation of Pakistan as a nation state. The collusions among these elites with political elites of each regime shape the transforming structure of political regime of each regime.

In early days of Pakistan, political elites can be differentiated depending on their location, in East Pakistan (Currently Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (Current Pakistan). In West Pakistan, political leaders were primarily big land owners or princes of various degrees of mobility, while those of East Pakistan were more often lawyers, teachers or members of other middle class professions. The third group comprises those who had migrated from central India and consisted of some of the above-mentioned categories as well as a small contingent of industrial and commercial families (Binder, 1961).

On the basis of this division, it is clear that three major elite groups controlled Pakistan, after independence, and have preserved their position and existence. These were the big landlords of western India who, after the creation of Pakistan, saved their land from any further division or any kind of reforms. Others were the modern educated urbanities who took charge of all state departments as bureaucrats. The last group comprised commercial minorities who were working as traders in western India and were making little profit, but after independence when Hindu entrepreneurs migrated from western India, they got an opportunity to develop themselves as major businessmen. Papanek (1962) did a detailed survey on the nature of entrepreneurs in Pakistan in its early decades and was of the view that most of them were traders who migrated from Western India. Papanek also mentioned the growing disparities among citizens of East Pakistan, which predominantly was because entrepreneurial development in West Pakistan was occurring at a faster rate led as it was by people with business know-how.

**Political elites of first bureaucratic regime, 1947–1957**

On achieving independence, Jinnah took charge of the country as Governor-General and appointed as Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, a profound supporter and his companion throughout the Pakistan movement of 17 years. The latter held this position from 1947 to 1951 with the strong assistance of bureaucrats who were trained and appointed to good positions in the British Indian civil service. After Liaqat Khan’s assassination, the top command of the ruling Muslim League coordinated immediately to elect a new leader and landmark changes were made in top positions. Ghulam Mohammad, who had been Finance Minister since 1947, and by profession was a charted accountant, was appointed as the Governor-General. The sitting Governor-General Khwaja Nazim-uddin was demoted by the party as Prime Minister. Choudhary Muhammad Ali was appointed as Finance Minister in Ghulam’s place (Rehman, 2006). Ghulam ruled as Governor-General from 1951 to 1955.

The political decisions taken by political leaders at that time did structure the future of international elites in Pakistan. Ghulam was considered the most pro-western member of
Liaqat’s cabinet. When Liaqat decided to visit United States instead of a Soviet Union, the Soviets blamed Ghulam for this (Kux, 2001). This visit and later Ghulam’s decision to continue the Pakistan’s alliance with the United States through economic and military pacts shaped the country’s early foreign policy, thereby giving way to the Americans to dominate Pakistan (Rehman, 2006).

Under Quaid-e-Azam’s constitutional framework, executive powers lay with the Prime Minister. However, Nazim-us-din was reported as stating that when he was the Governor-General, power rested with the Prime Minister; now that he was Prime Minister, the Governor-General was wielding real power. Given this situation, identifying bureaucrats or political leaders as the primary ruling elite in that early days is not possible as it was a unique arrangement, like the ‘revolving door’ concept involving both of them as the key elites kept switching positions according to the need of the time (Brezis and Hellier, 2013). Politicians and bureaucrats not only used to collude but often went into contestations with each other. In 1953, Ghulam sacked Nazim-ud-din and imported Mohammad Ali Bogra from Washington to become Prime Minister. Ghulam again played a cunning role in 1947, by supporting the Bengali leader, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy. Later, when Nazim-ud-din won the elections and became Prime Minister, he changed his alliance with the East Pakistan Muslim League (PML) (Bangladesh) and managed to secure the ambassadorship to the United States. Later, he aligned himself with the Ghulam Mohammad-Iskander Mirza-General Ayub Khan axis and managed to become the Prime Minister (Kamal, 2012).

In spite of this, Muslims in the Indian civil service now in Pakistan had emerged as a political elite by controlling public policies. After 1955, this civilian bureaucracy evolved into a military bureaucracy. Major General Iskandar Mirza became the last Governor-General of Pakistan in 1955 and first President of the country in 1956 and served as such till 1958 when the first military coup occurred. Mirza, after his stint in the British Indian Army, joined the Indian political service. He became the Joint Defense Secretary of India in 1946. The induction of Mirza from a military position to a political administrative post can be considered as the first step in allowing the military elite to enter the political domain. Iskandar Mirza secured entry in government through Prime Minister Liaqat when he was appointed as Pakistan’s first Defense Secretary.

The other example of civil servants appointed to top government positions was the appointment of Choudhury Mohammad Ali, the Finance Minister, as the Prime Minister after the dismissal of Mohammad Ali Bogra. The 1956 Constitution of Pakistan replaced the position of Governor-General to the President. In this way, after almost nine years of independence, Pakistan’s political system was driven by parliamentary democracy.

Political elites of first military regime, 1958–1968

Elite groups which became influential in the first military regime of General Ayub were the military and bureaucrats. The third group which made its position strong in decision-making comprised industrialists but only those in West Pakistan. These industrialists normally used the tool of marriage ties with civil and military families to enhance their collusion with them. The benefits corporate elites had obtained by forming collusions with bureaucratic and military elites would become obvious in 1965 when 13 civil service
officers were dismissed and the companies associated with them were asked to pay their taxes and surrender their foreign exchange; that number had increased by 1969 to 300 persons. Later, Bhutto as a Prime Minister sacked 1400 civil service officers, proving his lack of trust in the bureaucracy (Chengappa, 1999).

Although General Ayub’s regime had outlined definite steps to reduce regional disparities between East and West Pakistan, nothing progressive had happened. In key ministries associated with economic policy-making, all officers till 1969 were from West Pakistan or had emigrated from the Muslim-minority provinces of India. The other regional disparity complaint was that even in West Pakistan, key positions were controlled by Punjabi officers. This indicated a strong sense of regionalism and regional bias. Regional representation was evident in them too. Till the 1970s and even later, 60 percent of the army were from Punjab (Punjab Province) and 35 percent were Pathan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province). This was justified on the grounds that most of the army recruitment was done in four provinces of Punjab and in two from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The separation of the Eastern wing from Pakistan was clear evidence of the failure of the political system. Numerous studies, like those by Maniruzzaman (1971), Rahim (1973), Schanberg (1971), Sherif (1971), Wilcox (1968, 1970) and Wriggins (1973), have tried to determine the key reasons for this failure. Some blamed Ayub’s strategies, while others attributed them to extensive collusions among power elites, primarily the military, bureaucratic and corporate elites of West Pakistan. This led to contestations between these power elites such as the military with regional politicians of East Pakistan and the industrialists of West Pakistan with bureaucrats because the former were not given an opportunity to become a part of government.

Though landlord elites benefitted from regionalism too, ethnicity had always been seen as an essential ingredient of Pakistan’s political power structure. Punjabi and Muhajirs occupied strategic positions in the bureaucracy and military system. Their ideas determined national policies from 1954 to 1970. One group which got involved in the Planning Commission of Pakistan was the Harvard advisory group. Due to their influence, policies had a western influence from the start. In some instances, these US-based advisors even wrote a complete draft of the five-year plans. As a result of these policies, development was concentrated in Punjab province and Karachi. Such regional influence on resource allocation strengthened the position of Punjabi elites. This eventually increased the sense of discrimination among people in East Pakistan’s provinces, leading to continuous riots and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh.

Punjabi elites were reputedly embarking on a ‘Punjabi colonization’ of Pakistan, a factor exploited by other ethnic political elites (Hussain, 1976). Ethnic-based political elites shifted loyalties from national to ethnic levels. These shifts provided opportunities for the military elite to enter the political arena, eventually taking control of the country ostensibly to maintain law and order.

**Political elite of democratic regime, 1972–1977**

The period between Bhutto’s electoral victory in West Pakistan and his accession to head of state was marked by civil war, between India and Pakistan, and the collapse of united Pakistan (Heeger, 1977). In many respects, 1970 was an eventful, exciting and tragic year
for Pakistan. It was eventful because the Yahya regime, unlike Ayub, initiated liquidating its own government in favour of a democratically elected civilian government. It was exciting because after more than a decade, normal political processes, suspended by Ayub, were restored. A year-long electioneering campaign had resulted in politicizing the masses as never before. The outcome of the elections was the emergence of two regional parties: the PPP led by Bhutto, which won in West Pakistan, and the Awami League led by Mujeeb Ur Rehman, which won a massive majority in East Pakistan. Since the military was not ready to hand over the government to the Awami League, this led to civil chaos among the people of East Pakistan. India took advantage of this situation and waged war against Pakistan. This war led to the most tragic calamity of that time, causing over 200,000 casualties.

Bhutto won the elections of 1970 with the slogan of Islamic socialism: ‘Islam is our religion, Socialism is our economy, and Democracy is our politics’. He faced the civil war with the same slogan and used it during his tenure, although the economic policy to support that slogan was never clear all through. Bhutto critiqued ‘robber barons’ during his election campaign and promoted the idea of equal distribution by nationalizing resources concentrated among industrialist groups. Industrialists protested Bhutto’s policies. Language riots in Sind were backed by the Mahajar (migrant) industrialists of Karachi who were the major beneficiaries during the 1960s industrial push.

After the Bhutto government took over basic industries and financial institutions, control went overnight into the hands of the members of the ruling political party. It was reported that the party members had also got the opportunity to get top positions in those nationalized projects (Rashid, 1978). The socio-economic reforms of 1960 had cost a huge unrest among the masses in the matters of equality (Burki, 1988). Although Bhutto was the first torch bearer of democracy in the country, by 1974 the departure of reformist leftists from the ruling party showed that Pakistan had not fallen out of the hands of landlords/military/bureaucratic elites (Gustafson, 1976; Kukreja and Singh, 2005).

But as with the previous military and bureaucratic regimes, the same practice of replacing or removing civil servants from their posts on any statement against the government policies had been practiced by the democratic regime. These removals were primarily done on the request of powerful industrialists and landlords. Bhutto’s nationalization broke some of the 22 families financially, but several of them were also broken in body and spirit, resulting in the disposal of industries that escaped nationalization or self-imposed moratorium on new projects (Rehman, 1998). Bhutto mistrusted both the large industrial families and military. He proved this by curtailing the industrial families by nationalizing major enterprises. He also consigned the military to the barracks by assuming the position of commander-in-chief of the armed forces, removing senior military officers from positions of power and selecting General Zia-ul-Haq as the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) because of his reputation for professionalism and lack of interest in politics (Burki, 1988).

In July 1977, General Zia, Bhutto’s chosen COAS, enforced Martial Law, suspended the constitution and banned political activities. On September 17, Bhutto was arrested under Martial Law orders. Zia, after assuming charge, assured the business families that it was safe to invest in Pakistan and denationalized the ginning mills. However, denationalization and privatization were not pursued vigorously until the mid-1980s.

History repeated itself when Bhutto chose and trusted Zia-ul-Haq, a situation similar to Ayub’s betrayal of Iskandar Mirza. Whether Bhutto was executed by Zia as a result of political rivalry or if it was a fair judiciary verdict remains disputable. Bhutto’s trial and execution also indicated for the first time the existence of the Judiciary as one other power hub in the country; an institute which could fundamentally change the power structure of the country. Pakistan suffered an abundance of internal and external strife during Zia’s regime. Nevertheless, his policy towards Afghanistan made Pakistan a safe haven for many Afghans who settled in different parts of Pakistan.

Zia helped create a political party based in Sindh, Mutahidda Quami Movement (MQM) (Joint Immigrants Movement) led by Altaf Hussain (currently in political asylum in Britain). The purpose of this new political party in Sindh was Zia’s attempt to establish a counter political party for the Sindhi people against Bhutto’s PPP which had a strong standing in that province. It became obvious later that the MQM was like the Military’s Frankenstein, an institution that could not be controlled and could possibly change Pakistan’s power structure (Aftab and Khan, 1996).

Between 1988 and 1999, Pakistan saw four different parliaments. Although it was the tenure of civilian rule and an electoral process was instituted, the true definition of democracy was not applied. Scholars like Talbot (2009), Kukreja and Singh (2005) and Akhtar (2010) named it a ‘Mixed Democracy or Guided Democracy’. Both civil and military rulers designed a concept and let flow in society the idea that the nation was not able to follow pure democratic values; therefore they needed to design a unique, customized structure of government for their country. However, what actually persisted was power elite politics of chosen personalities, as well as injustice and inequality (Akhtar, 2009). As Shafqat (2009) notes, the Army had clearly declared its desire to share not transfer power, therefore this decade could justifiably be named as that of a Mixed Democracy; Pakistan had had eight different governments (Bhutto, Jatoi, Nawaz Sharif, Mazari, Moeen Qureshi, Bhutto, Meraj Khalid and Nawaz Sharif) between 1988 and 1999.

During this Mixed Democracy period of 11 years, the world also experienced a wave of globalization known as the New World Order (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1995; Slaughter, 2009). Pakistan was entrapped in a debt trap, suffering from repayments of old loans of US$38 billion though managing to keep the economy growing. The country’s total public debt was around Pak. Rs. 1.2 trillion by the end of 1997 (Khan and Ahmad, 1997). The failing economic situation of Pakistan in the 1990s indicated an absence of an institutional framework of governance. As Kukreja and Singh (2005) noted:

The mismanagement of Pakistan’s economy can be attributed to the reckless behavior of those making and implementing economic policies. The intimately linked economic and political systems are the formidable obstacle to reform. Both are dominated by elites whose self-interest dictates a firm defense of ‘non representative’ ‘unaccountable’ decision making processes.

Corruption was recorded to be at its peak during this decade when this constant shuffling of government occurred. In Benazir Bhutto’s two tenures, many contracts with energy companies were awarded, some of which were for installations in totally inappropriate locations and the reason provided was that they were planned for future
electricity needs, in 2010. However, the government was contractually bound to purchase all the electricity produced. Later, in 1998, when 21 Western companies were investigated by the national anti-corruption agency for alleged bribes to the former government, 6 companies confessed they had offered bribes. Benazir Bhutto’s husband Asif Ali Zardari in 1989 was alleged to be a major source of these contracts and became infamously known in Pakistan as ‘Mr. 10 percent’. The charges of corruption levelled against Asif did much to undermine Benazir and weaken the government (Nasr, 1992). As a result, the World Bank sent a special team of investigators to look into these allegations. Pakistan was warned by the governments of the United States, Japan and Canada that these confrontations with energy companies would deter other investors. However, the IMF provided a new loan package in late 1998, conditional on the government dropping charges against the companies. Hawley et al. (2000) show the links and networks these international elites had with each other and argued that international companies, if caught in a corruption case, would have the support of international financial institutions to safeguard them from any future problems.

While the state was experiencing weak elected governments which were shuffling power between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, government officials were accumulating wealth through corruption. This wealth allowed them to enter spheres of business, either directly or under the name of a relative. As Ali and Malik (2009) note, the rent-seeking and malpractices which occurred primarily in the cotton industry had over-leveraged textile projects though the risks of investors were reduced by transferring much or all of the owners’ equity offshore. Strategies such as the over-invoicing of machinery imports had allowed new investors like Sharif of Ittefaq and Chaudhry of Gujrat as well as some sons of corrupt generals to enter politics. In addition, the military established a strong business holding under the concept of trust and foundation. Currently, the military-controlled Fauji Foundation is the biggest conglomerate in Pakistan, with eight major manufacturing units as well as a strong position in the services sector. Fauji’s participation in the financial, education, transportation and health industries are commendable (Jalal, 1995; Gardezi, 1998).

The situation in that era raises the question why political parties were not strong enough to lead the country out of the control of bureaucratic/military elites. This was due to poor political cohesion among these parties and the high degree of factionalism within parties (Hasnain, 2008). The manifestos of the two major parties, Bhutto’s PPP and Nawaz’s PML, were basically the same. The members of the National Assembly switched their loyalties between the two parties on the basis of their vested interest of being in the ruling party. A voter would not find any major difference in the political ideologies of these parties. As, Nasr (1992) concluded, the three major reasons for this shuffling of governments in that era were the lack of organizational structure in political parties and weakening of PPP with new people, the continuity of control of landlord elites on their constituencies and the absence of rules to prevent members from switching party alliances while serving as elected representatives.

Pattern of political elites from 1999

In military regimes, forceful de-politicization of the public arena, the imprisonment of political figures and banning of public rallies are evident. The military in Pakistan acted in a
similar manner and gradually took control of all key institutions of society, from universities to civilian intelligence agencies, public utility services and civil services. The military created a convoluted web of control over all activities in the country allowing it to develop its own independent economic system. The military’s wide political influence had not merely distorted the democratic process, but earlier periods of military intervention had also created new political divisions (Evans and Rose, 1997). Groups that found themselves benefiting from authoritarian rule were opposed by others, often those linked to mainstream political parties that were sidelined or repressed.

During General Parvaiz Musharraf’s rule (1999–2007), the strategy adopted was one of centralizing power and he introduced a local government plan working under military control. As General Ayub chose the title for himself of ‘Field Marshal’, Musharraf, when he assumed power on 12 October 1999, opted for the title of ‘Chief Executive’. And, like Zia, he used the term ‘emergency’ to justify his de facto martial law regime. As Musharraf had acquired power after 11 years of civilian regime, he did everything to win over and maintain the support of pro-military politicians. With the strong support of these politicians who would favoured military control, the voice of democracy could be crushed. Musharraf used the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) as to blackmail and threaten politicians; they had to surrender loyalty to the military or be ready to face the accountability process. One well-connected business group, Chaudhary Brothers, who were defaulters of many bank loans, favoured the Musharraf government to prevent an investigation by the NAB. Such efforts by the military and state agencies before and after elections allowed Musharraf to ensure his party ruled the country and he took charge as President of Pakistan (Shaikh, 1989, 2010).

During the fourth military regime under Musharraf, economic growth was registered. It was a period characterized by domestic economic reforms, political stability, continuation of policies and a massive injection of aid and support by international economic players. With the participation of Pakistan in the War on Terror, the international committee had committed massive funds and facilitated the inflow of direct foreign investment which helped restructure the domestic economy.

The elections of 2008 were overshadowed by the assassination of PPP leader Benazir Bhutto. She had returned in December 2007, after long exile, to contest the election. The PPP won with much sympathy votes and formed the government in February 2008. In September 2008, Benazir’s husband, Asif Ali Zardari, won the presidential elections, leading to the return of civilian-led democracy. However, analysts saw this as the ‘return of a corrupt civilian government’ (Stachoske, 2009). This democratic government was unable to resolve an issue which became the reason for Musharraf’s fall: resolving a conflict between security forces and militants. In fact, the violence by extremist religious groups has worsened and put the security situation in question for international investors and governments.

**Conclusion**

The power elite transformation can be concluded within two primary phases, first in 24 years after independence in 1947, which was marked by several changes in government and three wars with India, Pakistan was divided into two distinct countries. Those years consisted of one bureaucratic regime (1947–1957) and two military regimes
In the initial years, elite groups which led the rest were those with a strong institutional backing. Although other elite groups also strengthened their standing, they were not been able to emerge as the ruling elite due to their internal lack of cohesion. Intragroup contestations, in the shape of regionalism, undermined the landlord and political elites of East and West Pakistan. Similarly, religious elites were undermined by the imposition of Shariah law since they were not able to come to a mutual agreement about the role of Islam in the country. So bureaucratic and military elites controlled the state and both work together to strengthen their position in the power game.

General Yahya’s takeover of government from General Ayub was an example of a complex intra-military elite power shift. Later, Yahya transferred power to Bhutto, while refusing to do so to Mujeeb, an example of control of the military even after an ostensible power transfer to politicians. This transfer depicts a selective inter elite transformation. It leads to second phase of political elite transformations in Pakistan after East Pakistan (Bangladesh) separation. The political regime after 1971 delineate many gradations of civilian-military relations and the flux in the determination of power between the military, bureaucrats and civilian politicians which yielded systems that can be considered as hybrid or mixed rather than as clear manifestations of a military or civilian type (Bienen & Morell, 1974). These transitions from a complex inter-military rule to relatively civilian government rule are a depiction of transition from one mixed system to another mixed system. However, the military takeover of the Zia regime, from 1978 to 88, changed the structure of Pakistan’s political system. This regime encapsulated a massive international elite, bonded by a desire to deal with the Afghan problem along with issues such as colossal arms and narcotics trade. To divert attention from this major act, Zia used the religious elite to propagate Islam, a factor that worsened the situation. Since then, the state has been in constant struggle to define the line between democracy and autocracy.

However, Hasan (2002) notes in his inquiry of the Bhutto years that the strong stance which Pakistan’s Finance Ministry had used suddenly changed in mid-1974 when Bhutto started issuing sudden orders of retirement or dismissal of his party fellows who had adopted a hard stand against international financial institutions. He recruited many political administrators who were anti-leftist and retired civil servants who had served in Ayub’s military regime. Bhutto introduced land reforms but was unable to implement them completely given he had a battle here with powerful landlords. He had, however, won the battle he had with corporate elites by nationalizing their businesses.

What made Bhutto change his attempt to deal with unequal wealth distribution? Bhutto had lost his power by mid-1974 to the ‘establishment’, including the military intelligence which had sabotaged him completely. This struggle by civilian governments to sustain itself would remain a core problem. The interference of the military was justified on the grounds of security issues, to ensure economic stability and control social unrest. In reality, a complex triangulation of power elites colluding and contesting with each other to safeguard their own vested interest was being played out. Bhutto’s democratic regime was a new populist style of governance with a modes operandi of ‘deliberate use of state power’ and ‘planned state intervention’ involving a much more active role by in relation to society and its subjects; he, in fact, sought to reshape the economic and political landscape of Pakistan (Shafqat, 1998). In sharp contrast to Ayub’s elitist approach, Bhutto reached out to the masses, aroused their feelings and
attempted to reshape the way they viewed the role of the state (Shafqat, 1996). Strategically speaking, Bhutto’s biggest mistake was his attempt to keep the military only partially out of governance. In his brutal suppression of labour unrest and language riots, and even more in his campaign of political expropriation against the Baluchistan autonomy movement, which escalated into a civil war from 1973 to 1977, Bhutto found himself relying heavily on the army. This allowed the military to again enter the political corridors. As some have noted, a war-making army was back to state-making (Wilke, 2001; Siddiqui, 2011).

On the other hand, the military regime of General Zia was accompanied by an open access to international elites who influenced the country’s policies. Zia allowed for US intervention, a country keen to play an active role in Pakistan’s policies. Zia used religious elites under the name of Nizam e Mustafa (System of Prophet) to sustain his control. As he took charge, he established Shariah courts in 1979, introduced Zakat rules in 1981 and instituted a Majlis e shoora in 1982. He strengthened his presidency by making parliament amend the constitution to give him more power. His Islamization endeavour was not only backed by religious elites, but the international elite too.

In 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, it changed US policy towards Pakistan for the next decade. This created an avenue for Zia to rule Pakistan with the help of heavy inflow of US funds. This included a US$3.2 billion aid package by President Jimmy Carter, ostensibly as economic and military assistance. With this support came certain demands. Zia had to open its borders to Afghan’s Mujahedeen who were to be trained in American military camps in Pakistan to take on the Soviets. This was the landmark political-military deal which changed the canvas of Pakistan’s political and economic structure. It brought in foreign assistance along with many problems such as Afghan refugees, Islamic extremism, ethnic diversity, security dilemmas and a proliferation of economic crises which have left Pakistan with serious internal issues. These problems still prevail. Gardezi (1998) notes that

a decade of General Zia’s US supported regime did much harm to Pakistan’s civil society, ruthlessly undermining political and judicial institutions, violating civil and human rights and oppressing women in the name of Islamization of civil and criminal codes. Moreover, the regime’s involvement in Afghanistan’s civil war left the country with a legacy of gun running, sectarian violence, drug trafficking and an immense refugee burden.

When comparing the Bhutto and Zia regimes, an important fact emerges; Pakistan needs to come out of the shelter of international elites. Pakistan is at a disadvantage in deals with international elites because, first, its land and resources are used by foreign forces for their vested policy interests. Second, such domestic-international alliances serve as an avenue for military elites to sustain their rule. However, this can only be achieved if all internal power elites work in cohesion. The contestations between political and military elites have led to a discontinuity of stable policies which could have taken the country out of its economic and social crises.

Pakistan has never enjoyed much democracy. Politicians ought to have been saddled with this huge responsibility, but in Pakistan’s case elites in power were from the bureaucracy, like Ghulam Mohammad and Iskander Mirza, and the military, like Yahya, Ayub, Zia and Musharraf. Even when not directly ruling the country, military elites played decisive roles in many political and economic aspects (Cohen, 2002). During the 11-year Mixed
Democracy period four elections were held but none were free and fair. The outcome of each was predetermined by the generals in command and the inter service intelligence (Haque et al., 2006; Burki, 2008). Political elites belonging to all parties joined Benazir Bhutto, due to her excellent credentials, but her liberal impulse and probity were subverted by her husband Asif Ali Zardari who undermined her government. On the other hand, Nawaz Sharif was a progeny of the generals. He was trained and reached high office under the shelter of a dictator, General Zia. Sharif was fully aware of all the need to network, particularly with the military in order to rule. When Sharif tried to bypass the army and become the supreme power source, the military’s chief, General Musharraf, overthrew him as Prime Minister. Sharif was sentenced to life imprisonment on hijacking and terrorism charges. He was then sent into exile, in Saudi Arabia.

Though Musharraf took over the government under the plea of safeguarding the country from economic instability, a number of reasons led to this military coup: Sharif’s rigid stand towards the National Security Council (Khan, 2000); military dissatisfaction towards government’s stance on Kargil conflict (Mazari, 2003); the forced resignation of a General Karamat, seen as a deliberate act by Prime Minister Sharif to create a rift between government-controlled ISI and the military intelligence (Chengappa, 1999); and his increasing intent to take the military out of decision-making processed and governance (Burki, 2008).

Musharraf followed the same techniques of governance as the general’s in previous military governments, including bringing in new politicians from the grassroots system. This he achieved by introducing the localization of government; he named this the ‘Devolution of Democracy’ (Khan, 2004). To ensure the military’s permanent role in decision-making and governance, Musharraf passed the NSC Act in 2004. This NSC made the military a prime domestic player in the control game involving different elite groups (Talbot, 2003). Although Musharraf emphasized that the NSC was to strengthen democracy and prevent politicians from exploiting the powers vested with them, it was actually to safeguard the interests of the military (Rizvi, 2003). The fall of his regime was the result of protests by emerging new groups in the society which had flourished due to strong support by those in control of the media.

The 2008–2013 democratic government completed its tenure, the military remained influential. Moreover, influential actors including new emerging groups like the judiciary and the media kept undermining the credibility of the government and eroded key aspects of the consolidation of democracy. For the first time, a democratic transition occurred in Pakistan, but the military had certain issues on which it had zero tolerance. This included any civilian government interference in foreign policy; appointments of the COAS, military budget allocation, control on intelligence and control of the media and judiciary.

The discussion above yields two important insights about power configurations in Pakistan. First, the changed strategy of military about participating in the power structure and the rationale of their such act was the strong pressure from international elites to sustain democracy in this part of world. The intention behind such pressure was the better chances they avail in civilian regimes to implement their foreign policies in Pakistan and the related regions compared to military regimes. Second, the recapture of the state by the corporate elite by helping Sharif become the Prime Minister. This provides an intriguing point of closure to the current study. Pakistan is going through a precedent-setting phase of political restructuring where the corporate elite is becoming a major force in
politics, either by funding political parties or by capturing control of the state by participating in politics. Henceforth, the current stage of political elite transformation had indulged corporate elite in political spheres actively. So we conclude that the applicability of Burton and Higely (2001) theory in developing countries is more complex as the reason of transformation of political elite is not the non-consensual base rather the collusions and contestations among other power elites, like corporate elites, who overtime transformed themselves as a political elites too.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Notes on contributor**

*Dr Ayesha Shoukat*, Assistant Professor at Department of Commerce, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

*Dr Edmund Terence Gomez*, Professor at Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**References**


