

## **Internal Democracy in political parties of Pakistan: a case study of Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI)**

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***DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1715>***

### **Abstract:**

Political parties play a central role in democratic systems by linking the state with society, organizing political competition, and ensuring representation and accountability. The quality of democracy at the national level is therefore closely connected to the internal democratic functioning of political parties. This study examines the nature, extent, and challenges of intra-party democracy in Pakistan, where political parties operate within a formally democratic framework but often display undemocratic internal practices. Using a qualitative research design based on secondary data, the study analyzes academic literature, legal documents, party constitutions, Election Commission of Pakistan records, and scholarly analyses of Pakistan's political system. The research is grounded in the theoretical perspectives of the Iron Law of Oligarchy and party institutionalization theory to explain the persistence of elite dominance and weak internal accountability. The findings reveal that intra-party democracy in Pakistan remains largely procedural and symbolic, characterized by centralized leadership, dynastic control, weak member participation, and uncompetitive intra-party elections. Historical legacies of colonial governance, repeated military interventions, sociocultural structures such as patron-client relations, and ineffective legal enforcement have collectively hindered the institutionalization of democratic norms within political parties. The study concludes that weak intra-party democracy negatively affects democratic governance by undermining accountability, discouraging political participation, and weakening policy responsiveness. Strengthening internal democratic mechanisms through effective legal enforcement, leadership accountability, and greater member participation is essential for democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

### **Introduction:**

As the main conduit between the state and society, political parties are essential components of any democratic system (Gherghina, 2024). They organize political competition, recruit political leadership, unite interests, and rally citizens. (Darmoe et al., 2024). Therefore, the internal operations of a nation's political parties are strongly linked to the quality of that nation's democracy. (Mersel

Yigal, 2006). It is commonly believed that democratic consolidation requires internal democracy, which is defined as the degree to which political parties adhere to democratic values like accountability, transparency, participation, and competitive leadership selection inside their organizational structures.(Erubami, 2024). Political parties in well-established democracies are supposed to function through formalized systems that enable party members to actively engage in leadership selection, policy formation, and decision-making.(Currie-Wood, 2025). In contrast, institutionalizing internal party democracy continues to be a struggle in many developing democracies, including Pakistan. (Mubarak et al., 2024). The growth of democratic political parties has been negatively impacted by Pakistan's extended military incursions, weak political institutions, and frequent disruptions of democratic government since the country's independence in 1947 (Ismail, M. et al., 2025). Centralized leadership, personality-driven politics, and dynastic rule are the main characteristics of Pakistan's political party system.(Din and Usman (2024) Powerful families or individuals frequently hold leadership posts in major political parties, which leaves limited opportunity for grassroots involvement or leadership renewal (Poguntke et al., 2025). When held, intraparty elections are usually symbolic and devoid of real competition, openness, and inclusivity. Parties' capacity to operate as democratic organizations is hampered by this concentration of power, which also compromises internal accountability (Reiser, 2024). The state has implemented legal and constitutional procedures to control political parties in recognition of the significance of internal party democracy. (Azhar & Jamil, 2024). Political parties are required by the Political Parties Order (PPO) 2002 to organize regular intra-party elections and provide the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) with organizational and financial information.. Despite these legislative limitations, political parties frequently comply only superficially, and enforcement has remained lax (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002). As a result, Pakistan's party structure still lacks internal democracy.(Ullah 2024). Pakistan's democratic administration is affected more broadly by political parties' lack of democratic practices. Weak parliamentary performance, bad governance, political instability, and popular mistrust of democratic institutions are all caused by undemocratic party systems (Bibi, 2025). Political parties are less likely to advance democratic ideals nationally when they do not uphold democracy inside their own ranks.(Novelli at al 2024). As a result, internal party democracy affects Pakistan's overall democratic trajectory and is not just an organizational problem.(Mubarak and others, 2024).

### **Background:**

The methods and procedures that enable political party members to actively engage in decision-making, the choosing of leaders, and the nomination of candidates are referred to as internal democracy. In the end, it helps to strengthen democracy at the national level by ensuring accountability, transparency, and representation inside party organizations (Erubami, 2024). Strong intra-party democratic procedures have been demonstrated to promote policy responsiveness, encourage leadership renewal, and increase public confidence in the political system on a global scale. Despite legal frameworks and constitutional guarantees, internal democracy in Pakistan is still restricted.(Mubarak & Waseh, 2025). The freedom of association and the ability to form political parties are guaranteed by Article 17 of the Pakistani Constitution. Furthermore, political parties are required by the Elections Act of 2017 to hold intra-party elections in compliance with their constitutions. (Ezeani at al 2024). In the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) intra-party election case, however, the Supreme Court upheld the Election Commission of Pakistan's authority to enforce internal electoral regulations, resulting in the temporary suspension of the party's election symbol due to non-compliance. This illustrates how inconsistent enforcement has been. Long stretches of military rule and political unrest have historically hampered Pakistan's efforts to establish internal democracy.(Ismail et al., 2025). Political parties were either outlawed or severely restricted under the governments of Ayub Khan, Zia ul-Haq, and Pervez Musharraf, which hindered their capacity to

institutionalize democratic practices inside their own ranks. (Khan & Hussain 2025). Major parties like the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have frequently displayed centralized, dynastic leadership structures even in the post-2008 democratic era, limiting meaningful participation by common members (Ahmad, 2025). Smaller grassroots parties have little national power, and while certain parties, like as Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), profess more participatory procedures, actual enforcement differs. Significant consequences result from the absence of internal democracy. It undermines Pakistan's democratic process generally by limiting the renewal of leadership, concentrating power in a small number of hands, and decreasing citizen engagement.(Din & Usman 2024). Research shows that rather than actually empowering members, intra-party elections are frequently held as formalities to comply with legal obligations (Erubami, 2024). Therefore, strengthening internal democratic processes is essential to promoting leadership development, strengthening political accountability, and solidifying Pakistan's democratic culture.(Ullah at al, 2025).

### **Problem Statement:**

The foundation of democratic political systems are political parties, which act as crucial go-betweens for society and the government.(Ajwang, 2025). Political parties in parliamentary democracies are meant to establish policy objectives, attract political leadership, gather public interests, and guarantee accountability through representative governance.(Darmoe et al., 2024). Political parties themselves must function in accordance with democratic standards, such as internal engagement, transparency, frequent leadership turnover, and accountability to party members, according to a core tenet of democratic thought.(Adegehe & Gella, 2025). Political parties run the risk of becoming tools of elite dominance rather than vehicles of popular representation in the absence of internal democracy.(Mugamba, 2025). Political parties play a crucial role in election competition and the establishment of governments in Pakistan, which is acknowledged by the constitution as a multiparty parliamentary democracy. (Butt at al , 2024). Since independence, political engagement and representative government have been prioritized in a number of constitutions and legal frameworks. The internal organizational structures of the majority of Pakistani political parties, however, show a continuous and systematic democratic deficiency in spite of these formal democratic procedures.(Tajammul, 2024). Many parties are typified by centralized authority, individualized leadership, and inadequate internal accountability systems rather than operating as institutionalized democratic organizations. (Fink-Hafner 2024).

The predominance of powerful families, dynastic leadership styles, and narrow elites is a characteristic of Pakistani political parties. There are few prospects for merit-based leadership recruitment because leadership posts are frequently held by long-standing party elites or pass through hereditary succession. Intra-party elections are often irregular, uncompetitive, or entirely procedural in nature, despite the fact that they are meant to guarantee participation and leadership renewal. Party constitutions frequently include formal provisions for democratic processes, but in reality, these rules are either ignored or applied selectively. (Erubami, 2024). Because of this, regular party members and grassroots activists have little say in the selection of leaders, the creation of policies, or the making of strategic decisions. Pakistan's democratic governance is significantly impacted by the concentration of power inside political parties. (Din & Usman 2024). Political accountability is seriously undermined when internal decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a small number of people. Party leaders who are shielded from member supervision and internal dissension are more likely to put their own, their families', or their factions' interests ahead of those of the public.(Chitondo & Thelma, 2024). This pattern weakens public confidence in democratic processes by fostering factionalism, the personalization of politics, and the deterioration of institutional standards. Furthermore, political involvement is discouraged by the absence of true internal democracy, especially among women, young people, and underprivileged groups.(Din & Usman 2024). Political engagement becomes symbolic rather than substantive when party members believe

their involvement has little influence on decision-making. This hinders the growth of a democratic political culture in society as a whole in addition to weakening party structure at the local level. (Kumari 2025). Rather of acting as democratic educational institutions, political parties turn into closed institutions that are hostile to change and creativity. Inadequate enforcement of legal and regulatory processes exacerbates the issue of weak intra-party democracy.(Yonah & Mengistu 2024). Political parties are required by the Pakistani Constitution and electoral rules to uphold democratic institutions and conduct regular intra-party elections.(Alqama & Bhatti, 2025). However, structural, political, and capacity-related issues have limited the ability of oversight organizations like Pakistan's Election Commission to enforce compliance. (Sadat 2025). As a result, internal party practices are still mainly unregulated, which permits undemocratic organizations to continue without any real accountability.(Usen, 2024). A significant obstacle to Pakistan's democratic consolidation is the ongoing discrepancy between democratic principles and internal party actions. The quality of democracy at the national level is unavoidably jeopardized if political parties themselves lack democratic norms, accountability, and openness.(Mubarak et al., 2024). When the main players in charge of representation and policymaking use undemocratic methods, democratic governance cannot be maintained. Even though political parties play a crucial role in Pakistan's political system, there is still a dearth of methodical and critical research on the characteristics, scope, and effects of intra-party democracy.(Kausar et al., 2023).

### **Research Questions:**

**RQ1: What kind and degree of intra-party democracy exist in Pakistan's main political parties?**

#### **Explanation :**

The main political parties in Pakistan still have mostly weak, centralized, and procedural intra-party democracy. Formal party constitutions have democratic features, but elite control and individualized leadership dominate actual practices. Party members' levels of substantive democratic engagement are low due to a lack of internal participation, leadership competition, and accountability procedures.

**RQ2: How are decision-making, candidate nomination, and leadership selection procedures organized and carried out inside political parties?**

#### **Explanation:**

Party leadership and key decision-making bodies are principally in charge of the nomination and leadership selection processes. When held, intra-party elections sometimes lack independent scrutiny, competitiveness, and transparency. Internal pluralism and democratic discourse are constrained by top-down decision-making processes that involve little grassroots member consultation..

**RQ3: What institutional, sociological, and historical elements account for Pakistan's continued weak intra-party democracy?**

#### **Explanation:**

Weak institutional development, frequent military interventions, and historical political instability are all factors contributing to the perpetuation of weak intra-party democracy. Political parties don't have strong organizational structures or transparent accountability systems. Merit-based leadership and participation norms continue to be undermined socioculturally by patronage networks, dynastic leadership, and individualized political allegiance.

### **Research Objectives:**

- I. To examine the nature and extent of intra-party democracy in major political parties of Pakistan.
- II. To analyze leadership selection, decision-making, and candidate nomination processes within political parties.
- III. To identify historical, structural, and sociocultural factors contributing to weak intra-party democracy.

## **Literature Review:**

### **Intra-Party Democracy in Political Parties of Pakistan:**

The internal systems and procedures that political parties use to facilitate member engagement, accountability, competition, and leadership selection are referred to as intra-party democracy (Kaijage, 2024). It is commonly acknowledged that by guaranteeing openness, representation, and responsiveness inside political systems, robust intra-party democratic norms aid in the development of democracy. According to democratic theory, political parties must operate as democratic institutions on the inside in order to successfully represent the interests of the people at the federal level.(Hill 2024). However, academics have repeatedly pointed out serious flaws in intra-party democratic processes in the Pakistani context, which obstruct both party institutionalization and more general democratic progress. (Bibi 2025).

### **Centralization of Leadership and Dynastic Politics:**

The consolidation of power in powerful leaders or families, which leads to deeply ingrained dynastic politics, is a central issue in the literature on Pakistani political parties. Decision-making procedures of political parties like the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are concentrated around important figures, many of whom are members of the founding families.(Mumtaz at al, 2024). Internal accountability and leadership competition are both hampered by this concentration of power. In a same vein, hierarchical command structures within parties have been entrenched by political patronage networks and individualized leadership styles, providing little opportunity for internal dissension or leadership renewal.(Márquez, 2024). Because of this, political parties are no longer participatory democracies but rather elite-dominated organizations. (Collord, 2024).

### **Intra-Party Elections and Symbolic Compliance:**

Despite the fact that political parties are required by laws like the Political Parties Order 2002 to hold regular intra-party elections and have open organizational records, research indicates that compliance is frequently symbolic rather than substantive. (Wiesendahl 2024). Pakistani intra-party elections are sporadic, ill-organized, and have little grassroots participation. As a result, intra-party elections are ineffective as tools for organizational renewal or leadership accountability.

### **Weak Organizational Structures and Member Participation:**

The literature also critically examines the marginalization of regular party members and the organizational inadequacies of political parties. Party constitutions frequently don't provide any guidelines for how members can participate in decision-making. (Rasheed et al. 2025). Central executive bodies or party leaders usually have authority over important choices like candidate nominations, alliance formation, and policy direction.(Cheibub & Silva, 2025). Pakistan's internal party governance is still dominated by the elite, with little grassroots involvement and little openness. Internal accountability is weakened and political engagement is discouraged by this top-down decision-making style.(Islam 2025). As a result, political parties are unable to fulfill crucial roles in democratic regimes, such as providing venues for political socialization or training grounds for democratic leadership.

### **Legal and Institutional Challenges:**

The literature has also extensively examined the function of institutional and legal frameworks in fostering intra-party democracy. Although the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has the constitutional authority to control political parties and supervise intra-party elections, its ability to enforce the law is still restricted. Without strong institutional oversight and political will, legal provisions are insufficient to guarantee democratic internal practices.(Alqama & Bhatti, 2025). Intra-party democracy is now primarily procedural rather than substantive due to regulatory organizations' lack of autonomy and enforcement power. This institutional flaw weakens democratic accountability within political parties and solidifies elite dominance.

### **Identified Gaps in the Literature:**

There are still a number of gaps in the literature, despite the fact that it offers insightful information on the difficulties facing Pakistani intra-party democracy. First, a large portion of the literature does not systematically compare democratic behaviors among major political parties; instead, it concentrates on descriptive evaluations of party structures. Second, the effects of weak intra-party democracy on national political engagement and democratic consolidation have received less consideration. Third, there is a dearth of current empirical studies evaluating recent advancements in regulatory enforcement and party structure..

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Examining intra-party democracy in political parties requires a theoretical framework that explains the persistent concentration of power within party organizations despite formal adherence to democratic principles. The "Iron Law of Oligarchy" serves as a crucial theoretical foundation for this study. All large and complex organizations eventually embrace oligarchic leadership structures because centralized control is essential for administrative efficacy, specialization, and organizational longevity. Leadership elites are able to manage decision-making and overcome internal challenges because they have greater access to information, resources, and organizational influence over time. Even democratic political parties, frequently turn into elite-controlled entities when their leaders put organizational stability and individual power ahead of internal rivalry. In Pakistan, leadership continuity, dynastic succession, and centralized decision-making mirror the oligarchic tendencies; intra-party elections and participatory mechanisms, when they exist, frequently serve symbolically and seldom challenge entrenched leadership, reinforcing elite dominance within party structures. This theory is especially pertinent to the country's political context, where major political parties often revolve around powerful individuals or families. The degree to which political parties establish stable regulations, organizational autonomy, internal coherence, and meaningful member participation is referred to as party institutionalization. Organized parties are crucial for maintaining political stability and consolidating democracy because they offer reliable channels for choosing leaders, resolving disputes, and developing policies. Additionally, contends that parties with inadequate institutionalization are more susceptible to fragmentation, clientelism, and authoritarian control. Political parties in Pakistan are still poorly institutionalized, with weak internal democracy, brittle organizational structures, and individualized leadership. Decision-making is still concentrated within a small leadership elite, and formal party constitutions are frequently in place but are not always followed.

### **Historical Development of Political Parties in Pakistan:**

Pakistan's colonial and postcolonial political experiences are the historical causes of the nation's limited intra-party democracy. The All-India Muslim League, which led the independence movement during the late colonial era, was essentially an elite-driven political party. Prominent professionals, landlords, and political personalities dominated leadership and decision-making, while organized internal democracy and widespread involvement remained scarce. Instead than using participatory organizational structures, political mobilization mostly relied on elite bargaining, personal influence, and networks of patronage. Pakistan had a difficult time developing solid political and constitutional institutions after gaining independence in 1947. Political parties were unable to establish themselves as democratic groups due to administrative control, frequent changes in administration, and constitutional violations. Internal democratic development was hampered by the early lack of robust party structures since parties put survival and power consolidation ahead of organizational reform and member involvement. The development of party politics in Pakistan was further disturbed by repeated military interventions in 1958, 1969, 1977, and 1999.

To justify authoritarian control, military regimes frequently banned political parties, created party structures, or appropriated political elites. By encouraging factional politics and individualized leadership, these initiatives weakened party autonomy and opposed internal democracy. In order to

be relevant under authoritarian restrictions, political parties mostly relied on charismatic leaders and networks of patronage, which further undermined internal democratic norms. The memory of military intervention continues to influence party behavior even during times of civilian control. Leadership roles were frequently inherited within families or obtained through elite networks, and political competition remained personality-driven. There was little focus on grassroots involvement and organizational development, which led to low leadership turnover and poor internal accountability. As a result, rather than becoming formalized democratic institutions, Pakistani political parties became organizations controlled by the elite. Pakistan's intra-party democracy has been permanently impacted by this historical trend. Within political parties, centralized authority, dynastic leadership, and patron-client relationships have been established due to colonial legacies, constitutional instability, and frequent authoritarian disruptions. In order to grasp current trends of weak intra-party democracy and the difficulties Pakistan faces in consolidating democracy, it is crucial to comprehend this historical background.

### **Legal Framework Governing Intra-Party Democracy:**

Pakistan has put in place a formal legal structure that mandates internal democracy for political parties. Internal party elections, constitution submission, and financial disclosure are required by the Elections Act of 2017 and the Political Parties Order of 2002. Parties must report to the Pakistani Election Commission and elect office-bearers on a regular basis. But enforcement is still inadequate. Senior leaders predetermine leadership positions, and internal elections are frequently symbolic or unchallenged. On paper, party constitutions may seem democratic, but they have enough flexibility to solidify concentrated power. One of the main obstacles to Pakistani intra-party democracy is the disparity between the law and actual practice.

### **Decision-Making Processes:**

Within Parties Although most Pakistani parties possess central executive committees, parliamentary boards and working committees, actual decision-making typically rests with a small core leadership circle. Party constitutions often grant discretionary powers to party heads to dissolve organizations, appoint office-bearers or override committee decisions. This centralization of authority reduces deliberation and limits internal debate. The use of disciplinary measures to suppress dissent is also common. Party members who publicly criticize leadership risk expulsion or marginalization. This discourages internal pluralism and promotes conformity. Consequently, parties fail to function as democratic deliberative spaces.

### **Role of Military and State Institutions:**

The dominance of the military and unelected institutions in Pakistan's politics has significantly affected intra-party democracy. Recurrent military interventions have fragmented political parties, encouraged factionalism and created incentives for loyalty to state power rather than democratic organization building. Certain parties at times relied on military patronage to gain office, fostering opportunistic politics over principled organization. Frequent dissolutions of assemblies have also discouraged long-term party institutionalization. Political leaders have focused more on short-term survival than on internal reform. This environment perpetuates personalistic leadership styles and weak internal accountability.

### **Sociocultural Factors Affecting Intra-Party Democracy:**

Feudal structures, kinship networks and patron-client relationships shape political behavior in Pakistan. In many rural constituencies, local elites command social and economic power, allowing them to dominate party organizations. Loyalty to influential landlords, clan leaders or tribal chiefs often outweighs commitment to formal party structures. These sociocultural dynamics reinforce elite control within parties and hinder the development of programmatic politics. Literacy rates, poverty and weak civic culture further limit rank-and-file participation. Ordinary members frequently lack access to party forums or internal information. Women and youth face additional structural barriers, resulting in their marginalization from leadership roles. **-Impact of Weak Intra-Party Democracy**

**on Governance:**

Weak intra-party democracy has broader consequences for Pakistan's political system. Leaders who are not accountable within their parties are less likely to be accountable to the public. Parliamentarians often depend more on party leaders for career advancement than on constituents for reelection, reducing responsiveness. Corruption, nepotism and weak policy performance are indirectly connected to the absence of internal party accountability. Furthermore, weakly democratic parties discourage issue-based politics. Since leadership authority is personalized, policy debates are secondary to loyalty politics. This undermines the development of programmatic platforms and weakens democratic consolidation.

**Prospects for Reform:**

Despite structural challenges, prospects exist for strengthening intra-party democracy in Pakistan. Legal frameworks already require parties to hold internal elections and maintain transparent records. If implemented rigorously, these laws could promote accountability. Civil society organizations and media scrutiny increasingly highlight internal party practices, creating pressure for reform. Expanding political education, encouraging youth participation and empowering internal party forums may gradually democratize parties. However, meaningful change requires political will from party leaders who currently benefit from centralized control. Without leadership commitment, legal and institutional reforms may remain symbolic.

**Methodology:**

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine the nature, processes, and challenges of intra-party democracy in Pakistan's major political parties. A qualitative technique is particularly suitable for this study since intra-party democracy is a complex institutional and normative phenomenon that includes organizational structures, leadership behavior, political culture, and legal frameworks. These qualities require contextual analysis and interpretation rather than numerical measurement. Existing scholarly and institutional information may be thoroughly and critically analyzed because all of the study is based on secondary sources. Data sources include academic publications, peer-reviewed journal articles, working papers, and reports authored by research groups and political scientists. The publications of the Election Commission of Pakistan, political party constitutions, manifestos, and relevant legislative texts—such as election laws controlling political parties and constitutional provisions—are also carefully scrutinized. These sources provide both empirical information and theoretical viewpoints regarding internal party practices. The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design.

The descriptive component explains the formal structures and declared democratic systems within political parties, while the analytical component critically assesses how these mechanisms function in practice the study examines issues such as leadership selection, decision-making processes, and candidate nomination using qualitative content analysis. procedures, internal elections, and member participation. Thematic patterns that arise from the literature are compared across major political parties to identify structural similarities and common tendencies. To improve analytical rigor, the study is grounded on recognized theoretical perspectives on party institutionalization, elite dominance, and intra-party democracy. These concepts help explain why democratic practices often remain subpar despite legal and constitutional obligations. Historical study is also necessary to situate current party structures within Pakistan's broader political development, which includes the consequences of military interventions, political instability, and patron-client relationships. comprised All things considered, this methodological approach ensures academic rigor, depth, and coherence while adhering to the objectives and constraints of the study. By carefully reviewing existing literature and institutional records, the study provides a comprehensive analytical overview of intra-party democratic practices and their consequences for democratic government in Pakistan. Long stretches of authoritarian control have shattered democratic processes since independence, discouraging the development of internally Democratic Party formations. Political parties were either

repressed or coopted during military regimes, making them dependent on centralized decision-making and strong leadership to survive. Even under civilian administrations, these trends continued, creating a political culture where allegiance to leaders took precedence above institutional conventions. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto established the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in 1967. At first, it was a mass-based political movement that organized students, workers, and peasants. Through its socialist language and public mobilization, the party demonstrated aspects of internal debate and intellectual involvement in its early years. The central leadership chooses candidates for national and provincial assemblies, frequently based more on allegiance and electability than on grassroots involvement. Party employees thus have no say in how decisions are made, which erodes responsibility and the democratic ethos within the organization. The leadership style of the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) is similarly centralized and individualized. The party has mostly focused on the Sharif family since it became a powerful political force in the 1990s under Nawaz Sharif. Leadership succession has remained confined within the family, with Shahbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz occupying key positions. Internal party elections are often uncontested and held primarily to fulfill legal requirements rather than to encourage competition or participation.

Within the PML-N, decision-making power is centralized at the top, especially when it comes to candidate nomination, coalition building, and policy drafting. Rather than serving as platforms for internal discussion, local party organizations primarily serve as networks for electoral mobilization. Internal democracy is discouraged by the hierarchical party mentality that is reinforced by the regular marginalization of dissenting voices. Although this paradigm has helped the party win elections, it has hindered its internal accountability and institutional growth. With a clear pledge to institutionalize intra-party democracy and put an end to dynastic politics, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) first appeared as a reformist alternative to established political parties. With a clear pledge to institutionalize intra-party democracy and put an end to dynastic politics, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) first appeared as a reformist alternative to established political parties. Imran Khan founded it in 1996. The PTI placed a strong emphasis on openness, leadership based on merit, and grassroots involvement. The party increased political engagement, especially among urban young, by holding reasonably competitive internal elections and registering members online.

But as the PTI became more well-known in the elections, pressure mounted on its internal democratic procedures. It became usual to hear accusations of power concentration around the party chairman and manipulation of internal elections. By giving tickets to well-known candidates from opposing parties during the 2018 general elections, the party put electability ahead of ideological commitment, excluding longtime employees. This change created internal unrest and called into question the PTI's initial assertions of internal democracy. Within a clerical and religious organizational structure, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), and especially the JUI-F faction, functions. The party has consultative structures like shura councils that formally take part in policy and leadership decisions. However, senior religious leaders—particularly Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who has led the party for decades—still hold the majority of the real power. Although the succession of leadership is not inherited, it is limited to a few religious elite, which prevents party members from participating more widely. Even though Pakistan's constitution encourages political association, intra-party democracy is still not well enforced. The Election Act mandates frequent internal elections, although Article 17 of the Constitution protects the freedom to establish political parties. Nevertheless, political parties frequently merely ostentatiously comply, and the Pakistani Election Commission lacks the political clout and ability to guarantee substantive implementation. As a result, intra-party democracy is still mostly symbolic. There are significant ramifications for Pakistan's democratic administration if insufficient intra-party democracy continues to exist. Parties that lack democracy within their own ranks frequently replicate authoritarian policies at the state level, which exacerbates elite domination, poor accountability, and patronage politics. Furthermore, the lack of internal debate restricts policy innovation and responsiveness, limiting political engagement to sporadic elections instead of ongoing

democracy. All things considered, Pakistan's intra-party democracy is still lacking in all of the key political parties. The JUI follows a regulated consultative approach, the PTI has backed off from its original democratic pledges, while the PPP and PML-N are distinguished by dynastic leadership. Institutionalizing democratic standards inside political parties is necessary to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. The larger democratic system will remain structurally constrained in the absence of internally democratic parties. With a clear pledge to institutionalize intra-party democracy and put an end to dynastic politics, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) first appeared as a reformist alternative to established political parties. The PTI, which Imran Khan founded in 1996, placed a strong emphasis on openness, leadership based on merit, and grassroots involvement. The party increased political engagement, especially among urban young, by holding reasonably competitive internal elections and registering members online. But as the PTI became more well-known in the elections, pressure mounted on its internal democratic procedures. It became usual to hear accusations of power concentration around the party chairman and manipulation of internal elections. By giving tickets to well-known candidates from opposing parties for the 2018 general elections, the party disregarded longtime employees in favor of electability over ideological commitment. This change created internal unrest and called into question the PTI's initial assertions of internal democracy. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), especially the JUI-F branch, functions within a clerical and religious structure. The party has consultative structures like shura councils that formally take part in policy and leadership decisions. However, senior religious leaders—particularly Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who has led the party for decades—still hold the majority of the real power. Although the succession of leadership is not inherited, it is limited to a select religious elite, which prevents other party members from participating as widely. Even though Pakistan's constitution encourages political association, intra-party democracy is still not well enforced. The Election Act mandates frequent internal elections, although Article 17 of the Constitution protects the freedom to establish political parties. Nevertheless, political parties frequently merely ostentatiously comply, and the Pakistani Election Commission lacks the political clout and ability to guarantee substantive implementation. As a result, intra-party democracy is still mostly symbolic. There are significant ramifications for Pakistan's democratic administration if insufficient intra-party democracy continues to exist. Parties with an internal lack of democracy frequently replicate authoritarian policies at the state level, which exacerbates elite dominance, patronage politics, and poor accountability. Furthermore, the lack of internal debate restricts policy innovation and responsiveness, limiting political engagement to sporadic elections instead of ongoing democracy.

All things considered, Pakistan's intra-party democracy is still lacking in all of the key political parties. The JUI follows a regulated consultative approach, the PTI has backed off from its original democratic pledges, while the PPP and PML-N are distinguished by dynastic leadership. Institutionalizing democratic standards inside political parties is necessary to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. The larger democratic system will remain structurally constrained in the absence of internally democratic parties.

Conclusion:

This research paper demonstrates that intra-party democracy in Pakistan remains weak due to historical legacies, sociocultural structures, dynastic politics and centralized leadership patterns. Although parties operate in a competitive electoral environment, their internal organization reflects oligarchic tendencies rather than democratic participation. Internal elections are often ritualistic, candidate selection is elite-controlled and decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a few leaders. The weakness of intra-party democracy undermines democratic consolidation at the national level because undemocratic parties produce undemocratic governance outcomes. Nevertheless, internal democratization is both possible and necessary. Stronger enforcement of election laws, empowerment of party members, transparent internal elections and cultural change within parties are essential steps. Pakistan's democratic future depends not only on fair general elections but also on

whether its political parties become genuinely democratic organizations. Despite constitutional protections and legal procedures necessitating internal party elections, Pakistan's intra-party democracy is still substantially underdeveloped. When major political parties like the Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam are examined, it becomes clear that party leaders mostly control and centralize internal decision-making. Ordinary party members typically do not have a real say in the selection of leadership, the nomination of candidates, or the creation of policies.

Weak intra-party democracy is a systematic problem rather than an exception, as evidenced by the PPP and PML-N's dynamic leadership, the PTI's deteriorating democratic pledges, and the JUI's limited consultative framework. Broader democratic issues including poor accountability, patronage politics, and low political involvement are exacerbated by these inherent flaws. Therefore, in addition to holding free and fair elections, Pakistan's democracy needs to be strengthened by institutionalizing democratic standards within political parties. Pakistan's chances of achieving long-term democratic administration will be constrained in the absence of internally democratic parties.

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