Politics of Defection in Struggling Democracies

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Abstract

Politics of defection has remained one of the major constituents of struggling democracies like Pakistan, rendering it impossible to indoctrinate democratic values in political fabric of society. This article attempts to study the phenomenon of defection in order to understand the effects that it can have on political parties. Being an exploratory study, grounded theory was employed using fifteen extensive interviews in addition to data from ten newspapers to study the process. The findings highlighted that the politics of defection triggers a process of identity-change in political parties that are striving to challenge the status quo. This practice of identity-switch results in fragmentation within the political parties thereby obstructing the process of democratization. The analysis yielded that effective decision making in political parties by reducing the gap between their stated intentions and pursued goals can be a viable tool for democratization to be successful.

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Introduction

Political parties in Pakistan have always remained fragile, autocratic and undemocratic in their orientations. One of the constituents of undemocratic orientations of political parties is the politics of patronage, where few individuals and significant groups are blessed by the politicians rather than promoting the idea of mass benefit.[1] Patronage

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[1] Z. Hasnain, 'The Politics of Service Delivery in Pakistan: Political Parties and the Incentives for Patronage, 1988-1999', *The Pakistan Development Review,* 47:2 (2008), pp.129-51. DOI: 10.2307/41260826

referred to as 'machine politics' by Scott[2] is used by political parties to strengthen their electoral base. The politics of patronage in Pakistan is a British legacy of using bureaucracy to embed and capture local elites.[3] Wilder[4] and Zaidi[5] argue that the most important factor that led to politics of patronage has been the localization of politics. The non-party elections held during military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq strengthened the already existing constituency based politics with politicians directing only those favors that would help them win next elections. Politics of patronage is also manifested in the actions of significant number of individual politicians who switch from one political party to another. In the same political culture of patronage and defection, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) surfaced as the country's third largest (the other two being Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) with an agenda of bringing drastic changes in the political culture that would entrench Pakistan into a democratic tradition. PTI was considered as an alternative political force by many political gurus in the political scenario of Pakistan after its successful procession on 30 October 2011 at Minar-e-Pakistan, Lahore.

This paper would highlight the post-October 2011 dynamics of PTI in an attempt to study the political culture of Pakistan. The case of PTI as a reformatory movement mobilized to counter this culture and consequently, the effect of this culture on the party would be studied. The study expects to help add to the literature on political culture and political parties thereby contributing to strengthening of political system in struggling democracies like Pakistan.

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[2]   J.C. Scott, 'Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change', *The American Political Science Review,* 63:4 (1969), pp.1142-158. DOI: 10.2307/1955076

[3]   T.R. Metcalfe, 'The British and the Moneylender in Nineteenth-Century India', *The Journal of Modern History,* 34:4 (1962), pp.390-97. DOI: 10.2307/1880056; Dungen, P.H.M. Van Den, *The Punjab tradition: Influence and authority in nineteenth-century India* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972); I. Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1988); M.K. Pasha, *Colonial Political Economy: Recruitment and Underdevelopment in the Punjab* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[4]   A. Wilder, *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab* (Karachi: Oxford University Press. 1999).

[5]   S.A. Zaidi, 'State, Military and Social Transition: Improbable Future of Democracy in Pakistan', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 40:49 (2005), pp.5173-181. DOI: 10.2307/4417489

Methodology
Scholars grounded theory methods have been emphasized for carrying out thorough qualitative research, as these methods provide a set of strategies and systematic approaches for looking at unexplored domains.[6] This study rests upon fifteen interviews which were conducted with primary and secondary leadership of PTI out of which twelve respondents were identified using theoretical sampling. Following the tradition of grounded theory, the study started with initial data collection in which three respondents were extensively interviewed. These interviews were analyzed collectively to look for emerging codes in the data which formulated insights for further interviews. The interviews were then analyzed to look for emerging categories. In addition to interviews, secondary data in the form of news reports and opinion articles published between 1 June 2012 and 15 April 2013 of ten newspapers was used. The number of analyzed news reports were 400 whereas the newspapers articles that were analyzed were 100. The authenticity of newspaper reports was established by looking for similar news in other newspapers. In addition, these reports were corresponded with the interviews to counter media bias, if any. It was expected that the corroboration of interviews with newspaper data as a methodological triangulation[7] would increase the credibility of study. Categories were developed using both primary and secondary data. Data analysis was carried out employing thematic analysis techniques.

Findings
Constructed identity: PTI emerged as a political party striving for change by throwing away status quo politics in Pakistan. The crafted identity of PTI by its leadership was that it is not a traditional party and is the only untried political option left by creating an understanding that the traditional politicians and tested parties were incapable to bring change desired by the masses. One of the senior politicians of PTI stated: 'We are not a traditional party having Electables…. The masses know that we are untested until now and we have always stood to what we said in the past'.

The party also claimed doing politics for values by presenting a reliable and untested leadership with an unswerving stance. The party

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[6] D.L. Crooks, 'The Importance of Symbolic Interaction in Grounded Theory Research on Women's Health', *Health Care for Women International*, 22:1-2 (2001), pp.11-27. DOI: 10.1080/073993301300003054

[7] N.K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

was projected as revolutionary and innovative in orientation, struggling for a revived Pakistan by bringing basic changes in governability such as the party activated youth as catalyst for change against family fiefdoms and *biradari's* (clans) in politics.

The emergence of PTI as a new actor in the political landscape of Pakistan after many years of uphill struggle drew many people to the folds of PTI. However, this was considered by many old leaders of PTI as a challenge which if not properly handled would cost PTI dearly.

Initial success and defection: The successful procession of Faisalabad in June 2011, followed by a massive October 2011 procession at Minar-e-Pakistan, Lahore, made PTI a key player in Pakistan's politics. A press release by PTI central media cell on 19 December 2011 stated that since the October 2011 procession, 30 sitting and ex-parliamentarians have joined PTI by resigning from the parliament and their respective parties. The press release further quoted Chairman, PTI, Imran Khan as saying that all these people totally agree with the vision of PTI. After another successful procession of 25 December 2013, at Karachi, many more politicians from various other parties joined PTI. Another press release by PTI on 21 April 2012 stated that the new membership achieved until now have swelled to 6.5 million.

Defection and identity conflict: The initial success of PTI led not only to the joining of common people but many established politicians from various political parties also got attracted towards PTI. Few of them were initially welcomed by the existing members and leadership within PTI but they were soon held responsible for the declining graph of PTI by many party workers. Many of the vibrant youth members were highly dissatisfied with this inclusion and titled these politicians as opportunists, traditional politicians, rejected candidates as opposed to the so-called title 'Electables' and power grabbers.

The deviation of PTI from its stated goal of ending traditional politics was criticized by many respondents and in addition this divergence was highlighted by many newspapers. A newspaper report stated that the PTI constitution was amended after October 2011 procession to create an environment for facilitating defection.[8] The constitution clause regarding corruption was amended giving immunity

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8   U. Cheema, 'PTI changes constitution to open gates for those accused of corruption'. *The News,* 4 June 2012. Retrieved from: http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-112376-PTI-changes-constitution-to-open-gates-for-those-accused-of-corruption

to old office bearers who were being accused of corruption in party funds in addition to the politicians who wanted to join PTI after its success. This was in sharp contrast to what was being claimed by core leadership of PTI. The core leadership of PTI was disseminating the perception that the PTI tsunami will sweep away the corrupt politicians. Many leaders, who got sidelined from the party due to internal disagreements on issues of internal accountability within party, were severely critical of the both internal and external politicians.

Defection and power distribution: The inclusion of politicians from various other parties was severely criticized by the PTI old members and it was stated by many that due to this inclusion, PTI suffered heavy media blows. Many newspaper analysts and electronic media anchors criticized the decision of PTI leadership calling it a deviation from their stated goals. One of the founding members of PTI was of the view that, 'PTI went on shopping spree of mostly discarded and dumped leadership. It was like a garbage collection truck going from street to street collecting political waste in the hope of recycling it to generate power'.

It was found out that majority of the key posts in the party were given to the politicians who recently joined PTI. This created a furor in the old workers who considered these slots as their hard earned rights. Many respondents stated that giving away of key slots to time tested opportunists is leading to a shift in party culture, ideology and the values that it propagated. Moreover, both the new and old workers got insecure in the presence of each other. The new workers complained that they were not being included in decision making forums whereas the old workers held that they would be sidelined if all these key posts continued to be distributed to the new inclusions. The old workers demanded that leadership and decision making should remain within the ideologically committed people. They accused party chairman of doing injustices to die-hard workers. They believed that the success of PTI was due to the hardships faced by the ideologically committed people. Many believed that the party was declining amongst the masses, as it was not coming up to the expectations of a new leadership that would create the avenues for a new Pakistan. They alleged that this dream was shattered terribly as people against whom the masses were mobilized were included in the party and the key leadership positions were bestowed upon them. It was widely held by many respondents that the new entrants introduced the culture of corruption in the party; they were offered different favors in return for their support. The inclusion of electables led many old workers to quit the party. This was excessively publicized by the media.

The clarifications given by core PTI leadership about that the new entrants that may were coming in the party on the conditions set by the leadership were denied by many respondents as well as in media discourse. One of the respondent noted down that giving away of party posts to newly joined politicians was necessary as many new entrants in PTI did not come into the realm unconditionally. As opposed to statements given by the party leadership, they were promised tickets and party positions.

Few respondents argued that PTI chairman's decision of awarding key posts to new comers was right as it was based on 'right man for the right job' principle. Many old workers who remained on these key posts were unable to deliver. It was believed that decisions of old members was one of the reasons for PTI not coming into power. However, when new comers joined the party with their established political experiences, as stated by a respondent, 'the Party Chairman took not even a second to make replacements'. This annoyed the old members who developed a feeling of insecurity against the new comers.

Defection and rise of factions: The workers who were either sidelined by the party or they themselves got sidelined, due to internal differences with the leadership, believed that the party was not able to retain sincere politicians. Taking traditional politicians into the fold of PTI was seen by these workers as distrusting the power of youth. They feared of a resourceful group, in the form of defected politicians, overcoming PTI and the real ideologues going behind the scene. They criticized the attitude of PTI leadership for not taking any action against the new workers who were humiliating old workers. They held that the sole reason behind the leadership supporting the new workers was that they were resourceful and had tons of cash to offer.

This was the time when divisions within PTI got organized into different factions, mainly ideological group and unity group, striving for their share of power in the party. It was also observed that these factions differed on the basis of financial resources and socio-political background, for example ideological group consisted of politicians who were less experienced, not much resourceful and had previously remained in those parties that had not enjoyed much power whereas unity group consisted of politicians who were experienced, resourceful and had previously remained in those parties that had enjoyed power.

The joining of many new politicians also disturbed the existing balance of power in the party. Many new slots were created to accommodate both old and new workers. This created confusion in the rank and file of PTI, the old workers were not willing to work under the

leadership of any new inclusion and vice versa. Moreover, both sides created obstructions for each other by striving for their close aides to get important positions. The tasks related to the particular posts were also halted as the authority of one person intervened with that of other due to the formation of new slots. This resulted in increased tensions between old and new workers which led to formation of different factions in the party.

In summary, PTI emerged as a strong political force in late October 2011 with an agenda of changing the political culture of Pakistan. The successful exploitation of political vacuum by PTI was due to its rigorous strategy of targetting the structural weakenesses present in political culture and presenting a solution in the form of strong democratic political party to address these issues, which led to connectivity between a vast audience and PTI's vision of a new Pakistan. Consequent happenings, however, suggested that PTI too became a victim of the political culture against which it was struggling. The defection within PTI on the basis of patronage deviated the party from its ideology and the resulting conflict between old and new workers over issue of key slots let to the fragmentation of the party. This led to formation of different groups along with defection of few leaders from PTI. The party was perceived to be revolutionary in orientation but the strategies it adopted were transactional[9] that focused on operating within the present culture rather than trying to change it. This was in sharp contrast to the ideological standing of PTI giving birth to organizational dilemmas.

Discussion
The dynamics of Pakistan's politics has always been shaped by the interests of power elites in different mainstream political parties, which has played a major part in derailing democracy and democratic traditions. Apart from elite prevalence and dictatorial elements, another factor that leads to weak political parties was defection. PTI as a mainstream political party was applauded after its decision to mark a new route in democratic history of Pakistan by ending the politics of electables, personalities and sycophancy. The change oriented agenda of PTI to challenge status quo and political culture in Pakistan got deeply influenced by the culture of patronage and defection. PTI getting into

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[9]   B.S. Pawar & K.K. Eastman, 'The Nature and Implications of Contextual Influences on Transformational Leadership: A Conceptual Examination', *Academy of Management Review*, 22:1 (1997), pp.80-109. DOI: 10.5465/AMR.1997.9707180260

quest for executive power directed it to employ strategies that stressed on 'representation as presence' rather than 'representation of ideas'.[10]

Almost all of the politicians who switch from one political party to another do so as they are offered some benefits in the form of portfolios or are promised tickets not only for themselves but also for their blue eyed people. The condition of receiving benefits and favors by electables, in lieu of joining a political party, facilitates the culture of patronage which is believed to be a detrimental factor for establishing strong political parties that could embed democratic culture in a political structure. Different studies have focused on the strain that arises when electoral interests of a candidate of a particular political party differ from the collective electoral interests that the political party is pursuing.[11] The inclusion procedure of politicians depict the internal functioning of a party, its political standing in the country, types of candidates who are selected and their behavior once they attain public office.[12] The decision of political parties of taking in electables strengthens the conception of personal influence of individual politicians that is considered as an antagonist to the strength of a party. The more a party considers the existence of personal influence of individual candidates, the more likely it will be to rely on electables.[13]

It can be argued that changing political culture requires a strong political party where the reputation of party matters more as compared to individual candidates. Increase in reputation of political parties will

[10]   R.Y. Hazan, & G. Rahat, 'Representation, electoral reform, and democracy: theoretical and empirical lessons from the 1996 elections in Israel', *Comparative Political Studies,* 33:10 (2000), pp.1310-336. DOI: 10.1177/0010414000033010003

[11]   J. Carey & M.S. Shugart, 'Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas', *Electoral Studies,* 14:4 (1995), pp.417-39. DOI: 10.1016/0261-3794(94)00035-2

[12]   A. Ranney, 'Candidate Selection', in D. Butler, H.R. Penniman & A. Ranney (eds.), *Democracy at the Polls: A Comparative Study of Competitive National Elections* (Washington, D.C: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981), pp.75-106; S. Mainwaring & M.S. Shugart, 'Juan Linz, 'Presidentialism, and Democracy: A Critical Appraisal', *Comparative Politics*, 29:4 (1997), pp.449-71. DOI: 10.2307/422014; E.C. Chang, 'Electoral Incentives for Political Corruption under Open‑List Proportional Representation', *Journal of Politics*, 67:3 (2005), pp.716-30. DOI:10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00336.x

[13]   R.E. Matland & D.T. Studlar, 'Determinants of Legislative Turnover: A Cross-National Analysis', *British Journal of Political Science*, 34:1 (2004), pp.87-108. DOI: 10.1017/S000712340300036X

direct an efficient policy making as the voters will vote for the party on the basis of policies rather than patronage.[14] On the other hand, politics of defection on the basis of patronage rather than ideology leads a candidate to work for benefits that will strengthen him by increasing his reputation rather than that of the party. The leading predicament arising out of such a system is corruption as Chang[15] hypothesized that politics that depends on an individual's personal votes rather than repute of the party encourages the politicians to resort to corruption.

The politics of defection also disturbs the existing balance of power in the party. Majority of the new entrants are given key posts within the party who replace the old leadership on these seats. This creates a storm of protests from the old leadership of party which results in different factions that struggle to gain power and show their worth in the party. Problems such as disunity and disintegration arise in those parties that include members for increasing electoral support who have previously remained part of other parties.[16] Factions like political parties are driven by the idea of controlling administrative structures in order to achieve their goals.[17] Factional competition could result in many positives like better candidates and policy measures.[18] However, intense and unchecked competition can weaken and disorganize the political parties.[19]

The politics of patronage has a deep impact on change oriented political parties. Many electables and notables blemish the repute of party when they fail in winning a party portfolio, getting a ticket for general elections, or are not given promised benefits. Different studies

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[14] M.S. Shugart & J.M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[15] E.C. Chang, *op.cit.*

[16] J. Obler, 'Intraparty Democracy and the Selection of Parliamentary Candidates: The Belgian Case', *British Journal of Political Science,* 4:2 (1974), pp.163-85. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123400009455

[17] W.N. Chambers, 'Party Development and Party Action: The American Origins', *History and Theory*, 3:1 (1963), pp.91-120. DOI: 10.2307/2504305

[18] Torun Dewan and Squintani Francesco, 'The Role of Party Factions: An Information Aggregation Approach', Working Paper, University of Warwick, 2012. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/academic/squintani/research/factions.pdf

[19] F. Boucek, 'Rethinking Factionalism Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism', *Party Politics*, 15:4 (2009), pp.455-85. DOI: 10.1177/1354068809334553

suggest that the politicians have a desire to get re-elected to their current post or to some higher post in the party or government.[20] Ichino and Nathan[21] stress that the losing candidates tend to disagree with the results calling it rigged and manipulated with the support of members. The losing candidate might also defect from the party along with his/her supporters if the investment by losing candidate in the election was high.[22] The losing candidate might support the winning candidate on some bargains in the form of some other post either in the party or government or might run as an independent candidate or defect to some other party.[23] Political parties striving for change eventually fail due to such tactics as both the message and the credibility of the messenger are vital for the meanings to immerse in the public consciousness.

Conclusion

Does this mean that change oriented political parties are destined to get affected by political culture? Can political parties escape the effects of culture in which they are operating? The answer is both a yes and a no. Parliamentary system of democracy cannot be internalized in the political fabric of society until the democratic forces for the sake of personal favors stop taking undemocratic measures. Political culture does shape the environment for a political party to act in a specific way although it should be recognized that political parties are not irrational actors that can be swayed in any direction. Political parties can reduce the effects of this culture by devising effective strategies, policies and making prudent decisions.The decisions made by political party on the basis of existing circumstances can be a viable tool to help it achieve its goals efficiently. The role of leadership in decsion making is central to the route that a political party would choose. If a leadership succeeds in establishing its credibility by consistency in their stated intentions and subsequent actions, mobilization for which the organization is striving could be possible.

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[20]   R. Taagepera & M.S. Shugart, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[21]   N. Ichino, & N.L. Nathan, 'Do Primaries Improve Electoral Performance?: Clientelism and Intra‐Party Conflict in Ghana', *American Journal of Political Science*, 57:2 (2012), pp.428-41. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00624.x

[22]   D.G. Sullivan, 'Party Unity: Appearance and Reality', *Political Science Quarterly*, 92:4 (1977-78), pp.635-45. DOI: 10.2307/2148848

[23]   N. Ichino and N. Nathan, *op.cit.*

The above discussion shows how the political culture of Pakistan is shaped by the politics of defection and patronage, leading to a system where reputation of candidates matters more than the party. The presence of such political system is against the spirit of democratization that requires strong political parties to compete on the basis of policies rather than their traditional vote bank. One way to weaken this political culture is legislative reforms. The 17th Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan declared to cancel the candidature of any parliamentarian who defects to some other party. The same principle should be applied on the candidates winning election as independent contenders in order to discourage the culture of floor crossing. Parliamentary system of democracy cannot be internalized in the political fabric of a society until the democratic forces stop such undemocratic endeavors for sake of their political gains.

Another step required for constraining the culture of defection and patronage is to weaken the patron-client relationship at different levels of political system. One of the major findings of the present study suggests that the culture of individual politics is strengthened when the benefits are directly offered by the elected candidates to the voters in their constituencies. Political parties should devise a mechanism to ensure that the provision of incentives is not exploited by the candidates for their personal political gains. Additionally, being the major stakeholders, the political parties and their supporters should ensure that any action by their party does not violate party constitution. The present study found that the political parties amend their party constitution to facilitate the joining of defected politicians. A judicative body may be established in the party to avoid the amendments and violation of party constitution by the party members for political gains. Furthermore, the strengthening of political parties requires bridging the gap between stated and pursued goals of party. For resolving such contradictions, leadership with strong credentials is required from the existing available options rather than relying on traditional electables who join party in lieu of favors offered to them. Effective leadership can resolve this dilemma by employing context-specific rationale for making a decision and justifying it to relevent stakeholders.