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Challenges to the PML-N in the Process of Democratic Consolidation in Pakistan (2013–2018):  
An Assessment

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This study assesses the major challenges faced by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in advancing democratic consolidation during its 2013–2018 tenure. Employing a qualitative analytical approach, drawing on secondary data, government reports, and scholarly literature, the paper examines how persistent civil-military tensions, judicial interventions, and politicized accountability reflected in the Panama Papers, Musharraf treason trial, and Dawn Leaks constrained civilian authority. The analysis further highlights governance obstacles arising from terrorism, political polarization, economic instability, and weak intra-party democracy, all of which undermined institutional performance and public trust. The findings demonstrate that these interconnected challenges limited the PML-N's ability to translate electoral legitimacy into substantive democratic strengthening. The study concludes that sustainable democratic consolidation in Pakistan requires not only regular elections but also strong institutions, cooperative civil-military relations, a pluralistic political culture, and socio-economic stability capable of supporting long-term democratic reforms.

**Keywords:** PML-N, Democratic Consolidation, Civil-military Relations, Political Instability, Judicial Engineering, Intra-party Democracy.

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### Challenges to the PML-N in the Process of Democratic Consolidation in Pakistan (2013–2018): An Assessment

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#### Abstract

*This study assesses the major challenges faced by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in advancing democratic consolidation during its 2013–2018 tenure. Employing a qualitative analytical approach, drawing on secondary data, government reports, and scholarly literature, the paper examines how persistent civil-military tensions, judicial interventions, and politicized accountability reflected in the Panama Papers, Musharraf treason trial, and Dawn Leaks constrained civilian authority. The analysis further highlights governance obstacles arising from terrorism, political polarization, economic instability, and weak intra-party democracy, all of which undermined institutional performance and public trust. The findings demonstrate that these interconnected challenges limited the PML-N's ability to translate electoral legitimacy into substantive democratic strengthening. The study concludes that sustainable democratic consolidation in Pakistan requires not only regular elections but also strong institutions, cooperative civil-military relations, a pluralistic political culture, and socio-economic stability capable of supporting long-term democratic reforms.*

#### Keywords:

[PML-N](#), [Democratic Consolidation](#), [Civil-military Relations](#), [Political Instability](#), [Judicial Engineering](#), [Intra-party Democracy](#).

#### Introduction

This paper examines the key challenges faced by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in its efforts to consolidate democracy during its 2013–2018 tenure. Despite the historic peaceful transfer of power from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to the PML-N, which signaled a degree of democratic maturity, the party confronted a complex array of institutional, political, and economic obstacles that

constrained its capacity to strengthen democratic governance. Central among these challenges were persistent civil-military tensions, judicial interventions, politicized accountability processes, media influence, electoral irregularities, lack of intra-party democracy and leadership crises, which prevented the PML-N from turning electoral success into long-term democratic success.

These challenges were exacerbated by economic turmoil, energy crises, increased terrorism, divisions



in politics, and external geopolitical influences that meant that good governance and institutional change were hard to attain. The combination of these factors not only influenced the performance of the PML-N government but also had a wider implication on the supremacy of the civilian, the trust of the people in the democracy, and the political participation of the citizens.

The paper seeks to illuminate the structural and political limitations that influenced the performance of the governance of the PML-N through a critical analysis of these problems and the role of the party in the consolidation of democracy. The discussion also presents how the party made efforts to build democracy were thwarted continuously by the internal and external factors. This research paper gives a faint perception of the sophisticated setting in which the PML-N was operating and a glimpse of the wider issues of institutionalizing democracy in Pakistan.

### Contentious Civil-Military Relations

The civil-military relations have historically been one of the major challenges in the development of democracy in Pakistan, where the military has usually exerted considerable influence on political, security, and foreign policy issues. These dynamics have been strained, especially in the PML-N government led by Nawaz Sharif (2013-2018). As Sharif focused on the dominance of civilian power and institutional responsibility, the military demanded to be allowed to exercise its conventional independence, especially in areas of national security, foreign policy, and management control. Such tension had a major impact on the democratic consolidation process within the given period (Ali, 2024).

The key crisis arose when the former military dictator General (R) Pervez Musharraf was charged under Article 6 of the Constitution on the basis of declaring an emergency and suspending the Constitution in 2007. This was legally warranted, but to the army, this was seen as a way of threatening their ego, and this just increased the distrust on both sides. There was a covert manipulation of the trial speed and course by the military, which revealed the boundaries of the power of the civilian (Rehman et al., 2018; PILDAT, 2019).

The foreign policy that Sharif had attempted to make with India through normalizing the relations

also exacerbated the tensions between the civil and military. His participation at the swearing-in of the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in 2014 and his focus on trade and economic activity were seen as a claim of civilian control of foreign policy. These overtures were viewed by the military, which has been more conservative towards India as a threat to their security, and increased the divide between the civilian and military interests (Zahid et al., 2023).

The counterterrorism strategy also involved disagreements. The PML-N was supportive of negotiations with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) at first, and the military demanded a decisive military response. Civic policy was eventually marginalized by the eventual introduction of Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, as more profound dissonances existed over who should make decisions regarding national security (Ali, 2024). The same differences were seen in relationships with the United States, Afghanistan, and China, where the civilian government wanted more autonomy in diplomatic relations, and the military wanted to maintain the status quo in strategic relations.

Political crises within the country, like the 2014 PTI and PAT sit-ins in Islamabad, worsened relations. The PML-N accused it of supportive military intervention in the demonstrations, which weakened people's faith in the democratic system. The fact that the military mediated the sit-ins showed its political power as an informal force (Taj et al., 2016). The conflict between civilians and the military was also extended into the media relations, which was observed after the assassination attempt of a journalist named Hamid Mir. The government's response to the freedom of the press has been civil-libertarian, whereas the military response has been a defensive stance, which shows the difference in approach to freedom of the press.

PML-N ministers venting their frustrations in public statements involving military interference in politics contributed to the tension, and this created mistrust and hostility. The military viewed these criticisms as an effort to diminish its political influence, whereas the civilian government viewed the criticisms as an effort to establish a constitutional limit. The nature of these dynamics greatly limited the government in its implementation of the policy agenda in the areas that were traditionally dominated by the military.

## **Law and Order Challenges**

Pakistan suffered from law and order issues due to terrorism, sectarian violence, separatist movements, and worsening internal security. There was a high threat of the TTP and other militant groups, which were active in the tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These organizations started to spread to cities and organized suicide bombings, targeted murders, and assaults on citizens and security forces. The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) reports that in 2014 alone, 1,781 people died in terrorist attacks in Pakistan (SATP, 2014). Sectarian groups, like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, increased their attacks on the Shia community, and the insurgency of low intensity went on in Balochistan, hampering law and order in the province. One of the highlights of this time was the Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar on 16 December 2014, where more than 150 people, primarily children, were killed in one of the worst acts in the history of Pakistan. The TTP organized the attack that revealed severe flaws in the internal security and intelligence coordination (Tribune, 2014; CRSS, 2019).

The decline in law and order situation was a major challenge to the democratic consolidation process in Pakistan. The inability of the government to adequately counter terrorism, provide people with security, and enforce the rule of law undermined the confidence that people had in civilian democratic institutions. In most instances, the military has intervened in order to cover the gap when the existing civilian government has failed, especially in operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad. This further skewed the civil-military balance towards the security establishment at the expense of elected representatives playing a role in critical areas of policy making, like in national security and counterterrorism. In addition, the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment gave rise to the military courts, which were perceived to be an emergency need, but it showed an inefficiency of the civilian judicial system and undermined the principle of separation of powers (Ahmed, 2020).

## **PTI and PAT Sit-in (Dharna)**

During allegations of widespread vote rigging in the 2013 Pakistan general election, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) initially conceded the election results, but demanded an investigation into all four electoral constituencies for election fraud as a test case on the

rest of the election. The PTI conducted numerous public rallies (jalsas) in reaction to the delay on the part of the government (Masood, 2014). In August 2014, Imran Khan stated that PTI had been trying to use legal methods to ensure that the culprits of the fraud are brought to justice in 14 months. The administration took no action even after the party had shown a 2,100-page white paper that contained evidence of vote-rigging. Whichever democracy it was, according to Khan, the Supreme Court would have declared the results of the election as illegitimate and ordered that fresh elections be conducted (NDTV, 2014). There were also allegations of fraud by Afzal Khan, who served as a former additional secretary of the Election Commission of Pakistan (GEO, 2014); however, there was no action taken by the Supreme Court. The motion to dismiss the election was refused since they could not find sufficient evidence to support the claims made by Afzal Khan, which were ultimately proven false by the court.

Throughout the protests, Imran Khan expressed his displeasure with the electoral commission's treatment of his accusations as well as the country's justice system's inaction. On April 22, 2014, the PTI announced that its anti-corruption drive had begun. Khan's declaration prompted the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) party, led by Islamic cleric Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, to organize a rally as well. On August 15, 2014, tens of thousands of protesters appeared before the capital of Pakistan, and they demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Followers of Khan and Qadri have vowed to put up camp in Islamabad until Nawaz Sharif steps down. The unrest caused security panic in Pakistan at a time when the military was fighting a campaign against Taliban terrorists in the lawless tribal areas of the country (Boone, 2014).

Members of the PML-N asserted that the demonstrations were being covertly supported by the army, which has a problematic relationship with Nawaz Sharif. The military was upset with the administration, especially since Pervez Musharraf, the former president and chief of the army, was facing treason charges. In addition, there have been disputes over how to handle the Pakistani Taliban between the army and the civilian government. The military ultimately launched an operation despite the government's insistence on holding peace

negotiations. As Nawaz Sharif spent most of 2014 tied down in disagreements with the powerful military, tens of thousands of protesters camped out in front of the prime minister's house, calling for his resignation (Hassan, 2022). During the rallies, rumours emerged that the military was planning a coup to depose Sharif. Sharif allegedly allowed the military to make foreign policy choices in order to protect his authority.

### Treason Trial of General (R) Pervez Musharraf

Among the earliest and most significant developments in civil-military relations between the year 2013 and 2018 was the ruling by the PML-N federal government to bring a treason charge against General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf because of his declaration of the emergency against the provisions of the constitution in November 2007 (Afzal, 2019). The consequence of this ruling is that he was charged on May 31, 2014. The trial of General Musharraf was a heavy blow to the civil-military relationship in Pakistan. Shortly after assuming the position of Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif announced in parliament his intention to prosecute Musharraf for "high treason," which refers to any act aimed at overthrowing or suspending the constitution.

On November 3, 2007, General (Rtd) Musharraf was put on trial following the order of his dissolution of the Supreme Court, detention of all the judges, and torture of them because the chief justice refused to abide by his unlawful instructions ("Former dictator Musharraf," 2013). According to Article 6 of the Constitution, which provides for capital punishment, he has been tried in accordance with this provision. He was accused of three offences, and they were: the suspension of the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973; the unauthorized application of Article 270-A by the regime of Musharraf through the Constitution (Amendment) Order 2007; and the unlawful usurping of the courts. The tribunal that tried the treason of Musharraf was headed by three judges, that is, Justice Faisal Arab, Justice Yawar Ali Khan, and Justice Tahira Safdar ("Three-member bench", 2013).

The Supreme Court also created a special panel, which was led by Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, to prosecute the former president on the crime of high treason. In addition, a three-member court was formed to decide the case. A special court

summoned Musharraf to give an answer to accusations of treason. Musharraf was admitted to the hospital with a heart condition, on his way to a special court meeting on the high treason case made against him (New York Times, 2014). This led to a lack of an arrest warrant due to his poor condition. The army head, General Raheel Sharif, came out to oppose the trial of former President Musharraf on the charge of high treason. According to him, the army will defend its reputation and its pride because it is unjustified that the institution has received criticism (VOA, 2014). Because of his health reasons, the former president had asked once again to get a special dispensation to visit other countries. After the Supreme Court decided to lift the name of Musharraf from the ECL, he got freedom to seek medical treatment in foreign countries.

On December 17, 2019, a specialist court in Islamabad declared Musharraf guilty of a serious crime against the state. Therefore, he was sentenced to death according to Article 6 of the Constitution (BBC, 2019). Musharraf became the first military dictator in Pakistan, which had never happened in history, and was found guilty and punished for the extreme crime of high treason. Major General Asif Ghafoor indicated that the lower-ranking members of the Pakistan Armed Forces had reluctantly and sadistically accepted the judgment of the special court in his defense of Musharraf. According to him, the Army experienced a drop in morale when it came to know that its former chief was being charged with treason. Alternatively, the court action against Musharraf generated a strain between the authority of the civilian and military. Gen Raheel Sharif also used his powers as the Chief of Army Staff in persuading the government of Nawaz Sharif to cease its endeavors in laying charges against Musharraf. This case specifically planted the seed of division between the civilian government and the army since the very first instance, which later aggravated the relationship on many other occasions.

### The Dawn Leaks

An article published in the Dawn Newspaper on October 6, 2016, titled "Exclusive: Act against militants or face international isolation, civilians tell military," sparked a major controversy in Pakistan and led to an inquiry known as the "Dawn Leaks." The article in the Dawn newspaper about a rumored scuffle between the civilian administration and the

military during a meeting generated a political outcry in the country, which swiftly escalated into a crisis, including news leaks, before becoming national press content. According to reports, Dawn writer Cyril Almeida "leaked classified meeting minutes" when government and military leaders met to discuss "national action plan." According to the report, the civilian government informed the army of intensifying international concerns so that the military could conduct more operations against extremist organizations (Gul et al., 2024).

The government was pressured by the military to get an investigation into the incident to ascertain who had leaked the contents of the meeting, but the administration denied the allegation. The report has led to the dismissal of Pervaiz Rasheed as the information minister because the administration believed that Rasheed ought to have advised the news organization against publishing the report (Al Jazeera, 2016). Dawn confirmed this in an Editor's note dated October 11, 2016, which said that the report had undergone confirmation, cross-checking, and fact-checking. The report was publicized, and the name of Cyril Almeida was added to the Exit Control List (ECL), though the interior ministry later removed him due to the criticism of the press and human rights activists (Dawn, 2016).

To effectively point the finger of culpability, find the ends and missions, and dig up all those involved in this incident to severely punish them in the national interest, the Government of Pakistan set up an inquiry committee of senior ISI, MI, and IB officers. Justice Retired Aamer Raza Khan headed the seven-member inquiry committee that was to probe into the Dawn leaks. The committee was made up of the Secretary of the Establishment, Punjab Ombudsman, the Director of the FIA Punjab, and one member of ISI, MI, and IB (Dawn, 2016). First press reports suggested that the committee had a period of thirty days before which it could issue its report.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif gave a series of directions, including the firing of his special assistant on international affairs, Tariq Fatemi, and action against Rao Tehsin, the chief information officer, according to the report. Within hours of their publication, the army officially rejected the proposals (Tribune, 2017). Unexpected was Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan's criticism of the army's use of social media to express opinions on an

internal issue that should have been addressed through normal channels (VOA, 2017). Clearly, the army was unhappy with the government's response to an investigation into a Dawn newspaper article that compared the military and civilian approaches to battling terrorist groups.

### **The Emergence of Tehreek e Labaik Pakistan**

Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) emerged as a significant political force in 2017, staging its first major demonstration in response to amendments in the country's election laws (Ahmed, 2022). The party organized a prolonged sit-in at the Faizabad Interchange in Islamabad, which lasted for three weeks and paralyzed the capital. The protest ultimately led to the resignation of Federal Law Minister Zahid Hamid. Negotiations between TLP leaders, senior PML-N officials, and a representative of the security agencies concluded with the government agreeing to all demands of the protesters (Rava, 2017). The resolution followed a failed security operation, during which six protesters were killed, and hundreds were injured.

The concessions that the government had to make received a lot of criticism, and the observers believed that giving in to an extremist group would only encourage radicalization in the nation. The deal was controversially praised as the Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and his team had made great efforts to resolve the standoff that was commended by the agreement, a provision that critics regarded as problematic. Social media videos of uniformed officers giving out 1,000 rupees to the protesting crowds that had left also contributed to the belief of military interference (Khan, 2017).

Although the TLP failed in overthrowing the PML-N government, its sit-in showed its ability to destabilize the functioning of the government and undermine the power of the Prime Minister. The PML-N leadership viewed the emergence of the TLP, along with videos spread by the media of military dealings, as signs of potential support of the establishment in diminishing the influence of the party prior to the 2018 elections. The TLP and the military refuted these allegations. However, the episode also revealed the emergence of a new actor capable of organizing mass demonstrations, putting pressure on civilian leadership, and affecting

political processes, which leads to the further destabilization of politics in the PML-N era.

### Political Instability

Political instability remained a key problem for governance and democratic consolidation in Pakistan under the PML-N government. The larger political arena was ill-balanced, polarized to extremes, with no trust in the institutions and endless conflicts between the civilian government and other usurpers of power, as the party attained power with a majority in the legislature. The active restlessness of the opposition and the increasing activist court system, in combination with the mere oblique measures of the military establishment, undermined the government, rendering it unable to govern (Fahad, [2018](#)). These processes established an atmosphere of insecurity and policy inertia that negated the primacy of parliament and overshadowed efforts to institute democratic norms and institutional credibility.

The collapse of trust between political actors was one of the biggest aspects of political instability, as it did not allow building a culture of cooperative democracy. The PML-N government was unable to forge a consensus on such vital matters as electoral reforms, civil-military balance, and judicial accountability. Rather than holding a constructive dialogue, political competition was usually done on the basis of personal attacks, media trials, and demonstrations, which fueled divisions (Imran, [2023](#)). There was also instability in governance, leading to a high turnover of administrative and constitutional offices, thus a lack of continuity in the policies. A divided power structure in which the elected government seemed to be in subordination to unelected institutions was a result of civil-military tensions, especially on foreign policy and domestic issues of security. These trends hampered the process of democratic consolidation drastically, as it is based on stable, predictable, and civilian rule.

### Economic Instability

In Pakistan, the major challenge to democratic consolidation was economic instability. Despite the efforts of the PML-N government to facilitate economic growth and influx of investment, the structural economic problems of Pakistan turned out to be so rooted and subjugated the overall democratic process. Democratic consolidation

entails a measure of socio-economic security that brings about the confidence of individuals in the democratic institutions, efficient provision of social services, and the validity of elected governments. In Pakistan, economic instability continued to impact the population to such an extent that it undermined their belief in the democratic government (Khan, [2024](#)).

Fiscal mismanagement was one of the root causes of such instability. The repeated budget deficits, which were a result of the high government spending against the generation of revenue, resulted in financial imbalances. A government that cannot competently manage its budget finds it difficult to provide critical services that include education, health, and infrastructure. These shortcomings undermine the trust that people place in the ability of the state to provide the most basic needs, leading to the feeling that democracy does not make living better. Anti-democratic forces tend to take advantage of this environment and offer alternative solutions, which are usually authoritarian (Shaikh et al., [2025](#)).

Also, the trade imbalance in structure, where imports were a lot higher than exports, placed a strain on foreign exchange reserves and also led to currency depreciation. The excessive dependence on imports exposed the economy to foreign shocks, an undesired move to plan and invest in the long run. To the PML-N government, this entailed a lack of fiscal space to initiate inclusive development agendas that would unite regional and social inequalities, which are major goals of democratic consolidation. The other most important reason was the low tax base. The habitually low tax collection was limiting the capacity of the government to raise domestic income in Pakistan, hence making it more reliant on foreign loans and aid (Tabassam et al., [2016](#)).

The energy crisis also had a so far implication on the economy and the democratic process. Even though the PML-N government did roll out power generation projects, energy shortages were also an issue of big concern in the early years of its rule. The reliance on debt, particularly in relation to the international financial institutions, also limited the government in its capacity to adopt independent and socially inclusive economic policies. Economic policies of the PML-N government, however, infrastructure-oriented and aimed at investing in

the poorest areas, were seen as favoring elites over the population, further increasing socio-economic disparity and making common people indifferent to the democratic process (Uroos et al., 2022). Lastly, corruption continued to erode economic confidence and governance credibility.

### Political Polarization

The issue of political polarization undermined the democratic consolidation process in Pakistan to a large extent. The widening gap between the key political figures, especially between the PML-N and PTI, provided a situation of opposition, lack of trust, and institutional paralysis. Instead of being a part of a democratic culture of dialogue and negotiation, political parties became more aggressive in their rhetoric and employed methods to block the way to consensus governance, which is one of the most essential pillars of a proper democracy (Arshad, 2023).

The historical background of Pakistan is one of the structural foundations of this polarization. Political controversy has been taking place since the 1950s on basic matters like the role of religion in the state, the nature of federalism, civil and military relations, and the ideological orientation of the nation. These divisions have hardened with time, creating a fragmented political culture in which parties can hardly find a point of agreement. These divisions reached the climax with the PML-N era, when the parliamentary cooperation was disintegrating, and the opposition formulated the other not as an adversary, but as an existential threat to the state (Hanif, 2024).

This confrontational political environment seriously undermined the level of politics. Personal attacks, use of abusive language, and poisonous blame games were induced by political leaders and spokespersons, particularly in media briefings and on television debates. Rather than conducting an issue-based debate, political debate was usually reduced to a personality conflict and demonization of the other side. Substantive policy discussion on governance, development, and institutional reform was thus neglected. The young people who constituted approximately 60 per cent of the population were pulled into this polarizing conversation and, as a result, were becoming more inclined to parties that were rooted in the emotional

and partisan allegiances instead of rational democratic participation (Gul et al., 2024).

### Freedom of Expression and Media Censorship

One of the main pillars of democratic consolidation is freedom of expression and independent free media. In Pakistan, the censorship and silencing of dissenting voices through the media have created a big barrier to the establishment of democratic norms. An active media not only creates awareness among the masses but also helps to keep governments on their toes, create tolerance, and raise awareness of politics, which are indispensable in a healthy democracy. In the face of restrictions on media freedoms, the freedom of debate is limited, thus undermining the institutions of democracy and participation of the citizens (Ishfaq et al., 2024; Abbas & Zubair, 2020).

Pakistan's ranking in the 2022 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index dropped from 145 in 2021 to 157, reflecting a deteriorating media environment. According to the Freedom Network's annual report, 86 cases of violence and restrictions against journalists were reported between May 2021 and April 2022. These comprised harassment, censorship, threats, abductions, and even murder. There are memorable examples of the murder of journalist Aziz Memon in Sindh (2020) and the targeted murder of Wali Khan Babar in Karachi. In Kenya, the assassination of Arshad Sharif in the year 2022, after Pakistan had charged him with sedition, became a symbolic example of intolerance of the state toward investigative journalism. The events are not a one-off event but are a larger trend of repression of dissent under political and institutional forces (Gul et al., 2024).

Media censorship is a critical issue to democratic consolidation in Pakistan as it restrains open discussion, access to truthful information, and accountability of the people in authority. By silencing or threatening journalists, people cannot make informed political choices and express their opinions freely. This undermines the democratic institutions, and it discourages the participation of people. A democracy is not able to operate without the free media, and authoritarian practices start to establish themselves. Therefore, the limitation of the right to expression harms the relationship

between the citizens and the state, making democracy weak and insecure.

### Absence of Democratic Norms and Intra-Party Democracy

Lack of democratic norms and poor intra-party democracy has remained a major challenge to democratic consolidation in Pakistan. Democratic consolidation does not only involve the conduct of elections or the operation of institutions, but also involves the observance of democratic values like tolerance, transparency, accountability, and internal democratic governance. Political parties have a negative effect on the overall democratic system, as they do not perform democratic tasks.

The majority of political parties in Pakistan, such as PML-N, PPP, and PTI, tend to be more centralized and personality-based and not democratic institutions. The process of decision-making is normally top-down, and there is minimal room for opposing voices or debating. The leadership of the party is normally a hereditary process or controlled by a small number of influential families, and this has pushed out the leadership of the grassroots. This internal democracy also discourages dialogue, policy creativity, and accountability in the party. Consequently, the identical undemocratic culture is transferred to the national politics, where consensus-building and constructive opposition are not a common occurrence (PILDAT, 2020).

This internal undemocratic culture also affects the legislature. When party leaders control all decision-making, parliamentarians often become passive, merely endorsing decisions made outside parliament. This weakens parliamentary oversight, discourages policy debate, and reduces legislative independence, factors essential for a strong democratic system. Thus, the lack of democratic

norms and intra-party democracy erodes democratic culture, curtails political engagement, and diminishes accountability, and the consolidation of democracy is challenging. To continue the process of democratizing Pakistan, the political parties need to institutionalize democracy within their organizations and encourage the culture of tolerance, openness, and decision-making (Azhar et al., 2019).

### Conclusion

The period of PML-N governance from 2013 to 2018 highlights the complex interplay of structural, institutional, and political challenges that constrained democratic consolidation in Pakistan. Civil-military tensions, exemplified by the Musharraf treason trial, the Panama Papers controversy, and the Dawn Leaks, consistently undermined civilian supremacy and policy autonomy. Simultaneously, persistent law and order crises, terrorism, and political instability limited effective governance and public confidence in democratic institutions. Economic volatility, fiscal constraints, and energy shortages further weakened the state's capacity to deliver public services, while rising political polarization and weak intra-party democracy impeded consensus-building and legislative effectiveness. Media restrictions and suppression of dissent curtailed freedom of expression, reducing accountability and public engagement. Collectively, these interrelated challenges reveal that democratic consolidation requires not only electoral victories but also resilient institutions, cooperative political culture, and socio-economic stability. The PML-N's tenure demonstrates both the possibilities and limits of civilian-led democratization in a context of enduring structural constraints.

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