

Impacts of 1977 elections in Pakistan: An assessment of the politics of agitation and reconciliation

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Abstract

In a democracy, the political leaders must reflect democratic norms of mutual respect towards divergent viewpoints that must be resolved through dialogue and accommodation. This paper focuses on the 1977 general elections and the developments associated with the aftermath that derailed the democratic process that had started five years before. The paper focuses on how the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) emerged from the variant political ideologies of different political parties that were previously not so close in their relationship. The campaign for elections by an electoral alliance of nine political parties and the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is also part of the discussion. The paper analyses why the election results proved controversial and profoundly impacted the future course of politics. The study examines whether the elections were rigged and whether PNA and PPP had fulfilled their democratic obligations to continue the democratic process. This research aims to highlight the role of the ruling and opposition parties and its effects on national politics. A study of the events after the elections allows one to learn about the undemocratic attitudes and behaviours of political leaders, which were purely based on feelings of enmity and were directed towards vested interests.

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1. Introduction

Democracy does not simply mean holding elections and establishing democratic infrastructure. People who manage democratic institutions and processes must imbibe its principles and norms to reflect them fully in the political system. One way to judge the quality of democracy is to review the disposition and conduct of key players, i.e. political parties and leaders. How far do they internalise norms and values of democracy and practice them in managing political and societal affairs? Since assuming power in 1971, Z. A. Bhutto has faced strong resistance from opposition parties and failed to develop a consensus with them. The elements of accommodation, reconciliation, and large-heartedness were substantially missing from Pakistan's politics during the Bhutto era. The federal government's interference in the affairs of provinces was a clear violation of the 1973 Constitution, along with his style of politics, which brought the rightist and leftist political forces on one page against him.

Therefore, nine opposition political parties united in a common platform for the 1977 general elections, the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA). The rigged elections of 1977 were rejected by PNA, which demanded the resignation of Bhutto and the holding of fresh elections under an independent Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). Instead, to pay any heed to their demands, the Bhutto government used coercive measures to deal with the opposition. The situation led to political turmoil, and protests erupted, resulting in violent clashes between the security and law enforcement agencies and the opposition. Unwillingness on the part of both the government and opposition to develop a consensus thereby resulted in the derailment of the democratic process in the country and martial law was imposed by General Ziaul Haq. This descriptive and qualitative analysis focuses on the strategies adopted by the Bhutto government and PNA, their election campaigns, the outcomes of the elections, whether accurate or rigged, the final impacts of the disagreements that resulted in the agitational politics where the reconciliation process resulted in the derailment of the democracy.

1.1. Pre-election strategies of Bhutto government

Coming into power in December 1971, the five-year term of PPP was to end in December 1976. However, according to Bhutto, the five-year constitutional term of the National Assembly started on August 14, 1973 (Raza, 1997). As opposed to the parliamentary setup, Bhutto believed that the system had sacrificed the rights of many to protect the privileges of the few. Therefore, as he imposed some constraints on his authority, Bhutto was unsatisfied with the 1973 Constitution. Opposition parties have also been repeatedly condemned for their alleged misuse of different provisions of the Constitution, thus contributing to the country's social and economic downfall.

In 1976, Bhutto visited different constituencies and made speeches to catch the people's attention, supporting his ideas. In fact, by directly facing the masses, PPP's leadership wanted a heavy mandate in the next general elections that may give him absolute power to change the political and constitutional setup into a presidential system (Burki, 1988). That is the only reason Bhutto had deferred general elections until becoming sure of PPP's victory. Moreover, by the end of 1976, army action in Balochistan had ensured control of the ruling party, and disturbances were calmed down to a greater extent. Banning of the National Awami Party (NAP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then NWFP) in the first quarter of 1975, the topmost leaders, including Abdul Wali Khan, were sent behind bars. Other opposition parties in parliament,

with no more than three seats in the lower House, were also weak. Applying section 144 and other coercive measures, political discussions and meetings were banned, thus barring opposition leaders from conveying their views to the public. Contrary to democratic traditions, state-owned media rarely reported the critical speeches of opposition leaders being delivered in the National Assembly (Weinbaum, 1977).

Reports from intelligence agencies, especially Inter-services Intelligence (ISI), held that the prime minister's popularity was at its peak, making it a suitable time to encash it. Therefore, in January 1977, Bhutto announced in his address to the National Assembly that general elections would be held one and a half years earlier than the mandated time. It is also alleged that the decision to hold early elections was taken to deprive the opposition of sufficient time for the election campaign. The ruling party had already prepared for elections for the past several months. Immediately after announcing the election schedule, Bhutto launched a country-wide election campaign. However, some restrictions had already been imposed on opposition parties, including section 144 in several districts on the pretext of law and order (Chishti, 1990). A significant section of the society considered the possibility that a wind of revolt would topple Bhutto to bring PNA to power, just as the 1970 elections had brought him to power. Bhutto wanted no excuse or reason either; therefore, they activated every channel and launched an offensive strategy against the opposition parties. Bhutto seemed more nervous this time, which made him aggressive. This was because of a lack of unity and discipline in his party, disappointment with Bhutto's policies and programs and the firm determination of the opposition parties to snatch the reins of power from PPP's leadership.

Bhutto had also made necessary changes in administrative and military structures to counter any expected challenges to the PPP's victory. The federal cabinet was reshuffled in February 1976, and orders were issued to reorganise the federal secretariat and provincial structures. State-owned media was responsible for projecting an image of the PPP and its leadership and exposing opposition parties' incapability. It ultimately described opposition parties as disloyal to the country and projected PPP as the right choice for the masses. 'The Pakistan Times' labelled PNA as an 'opportunistic alliance' and stated that voters are fully aware of its conspiracy against "the New Order." It was also stressed that the people "will reject anti-democratic and anti-people elements that are now making a desperate last-ditch attempt to stop the march of history" (The Pakistan Times, 1977, January 13; Zahra & Iqbal, 2021).

1.2. Formation of Pakistan National Alliance (PNA): A counter-strategy

Bhutto was confident of his support base and sure that various opposition parties would not be able to get together and form a platform against the ruling PPP. Opposition parties, however, afraid of Bhutto's dictatorial tendencies, tried to close their ranks and stand as one against the PPP in the name of PNA. The formation of PNA not only surprised but also shocked PPP leadership. Bhutto's strategy assumed that various opposition parties could not unite due to their differences. However, if we got united, there would be only minor adjustments for different seats. The vast intelligence network had not made any indication of such a possibility. Even political journalists of the government press could not predict this possibility. However, once the opposition alliance came true, Bhutto called the PNA a cat with nine tails.

The political parties that joined PNA comprised those different social and economic groups from the middle class, which had suffered at the hands of oppressive policies like social,

economic and administrative reforms of PPP leadership in one way or another. Moreover, PNA incorporated groups from both the right and the left wing. Their viewpoints on Bhutto's nationalisation policy and provincial autonomy were divergent and not uniform. Despite this, they bargained for the enforcement of Nizam-i-Mustafa, as evidenced by their electoral speeches. The PNA included all of the older United Democratic Front. This time, it was strengthened by coming into the row of Asghar Khan's Tehrik-i-Istiqal, which boosted the opposition's morale (Wolpert, 1993).

PNA anxiously challenged and gave a tough time to PPP, which was out of the question at the time of its rule and put Bhutto and his party on the defensive. The nervousness of PPP's leadership was evident from Abdul Hafeez Peerzada's decision to challenge the allotment of a single election symbol to PNA. This alliance, at least, set the precedent that the ruling party could be challenged (Malik, 1977; Suhail, 2011). Asghar Khan once referred to Bhutto's allegations, stating repeatedly that he did not know politics, but now the nation could see who the novice was. The opposition, he claimed, had deliberately put up a facade of disunity and demoralisation so that Bhutto could be "trapped" into holding general elections. His revelations seemed entirely accurate because the moment the ruling party announced the election schedule, the opposition got together and, within forty-eight hours, could hammer out a united alliance. Secretary General of PNA, Rafiq Ahmad Bajwa (from JUP), expressed that since the formation of the alliance, the last three days of experience had convinced him that the opposition was going to "make a sweep" (Viewpoint, 1977, January 21).

Many people remained confused by the different faces PNA had. Being consisted of political parties led by leaders having different programs and thinking, it did not seem easy to believe that Mufti Mahmood (the president of PNA), Pir of Pagaro (Head of the Central Parliamentary Board of PNA), Asghar Khan and not to mention other partners, would be able to pull PNA in the intended direction. However, it was their enmity towards the dictatorial powers of Bhutto that they buried all differences and stood as a united force against the PPP. Undoubtedly, the formation of PNA had one central theme: the Bhutto government was dictatorial, which must be weeded out at once. Moreover, the opposition believed that the continuation of the PPP government would be no more than the end of Pakistan's democratic dream. Although opposition parties, in their election campaign, criticised Bhutto for having dictatorial powers and used them as a major complaint against him, such powers proved to be his greatest asset for winning a majority in the elections.

1.3. Campaign for 1977 elections: Restrictions on the opposition

Chairman Bhutto launched the PPP election campaign at a public meeting at Liaquat Gardens (Rawalpindi). At the same time, PNA started its election campaign with a public meeting at Karachi's Nishtar Park. PPP also announced its manifesto for the upcoming elections. With March 7 as the polling date for election to the National Assembly, less than one and a half months away, the vote-seeking campaign throughout the country was gaining strength with every passing day. PPP was banking heavily on its achievements and reforms introduced during its previous tenure, while the opposition was trying to prove that these reforms did not benefit the common person. They maintained that in most cases, the government measures had opposite effects on the country's economy and the standard of living of the common person. The PNA leaders promised the electorate that they would bring the soaring prices back to the 1970's level.

Moreover, the PNA highlighted the loopholes in the PPP government's domestic and foreign policies, especially in limiting civil and political rights. The opposition also criticised the PPP for cramming the working people's rights with severe restrictions, rendering them abstract and inane. Foreign loans and the alleged involvement of Bhutto in the disintegration of East Pakistan were other issues that PNA discussed during the election campaign. Mr. C. R. Aslam, President of the Pakistan Socialist Party (PSP), believed that the foreign policy had moved in the opposite direction, claiming that the PPP talked of third-world unity. However, Pakistan is tied to the world of the capitalist economy and the CENTO and RCD (Viewpoint, 1977, January 28).

No doubt, the elections of 1977 were contested not for the sake of grand visions about governance and progress but marked by libels, slanders and vilification of personalities. The opposition was cognizant of the importance of Bhutto's charisma and considered him the man standing in their way to realise a democratic form of government. Therefore, the PPP, in general, and the person of Bhutto, in particular, were targeted by the opposition. Their attacks were directed exclusively against Bhutto's politics, lifestyle, and family (Ziring, 1977). There was a series of heated speeches from both sides and confrontation; each wanted to downgrade and impose its will on the other.

Bhutto's announcement that the politicians imprisoned in different jails would be freed to compete in the general elections was one of his campaign ploys. Another one was scaling down the size of extensive land holdings to make available more land to the landless tenants/farmers (Talbot, 2003; Ibrahim et al., 2015). The PPP itself was popular amongst the populace, but it was the superimposing personality and charisma of Bhutto that the PPP hoped would win the day for them. Therefore, the opposition had grown pale in its appeal compared to Bhutto. The latter had ensured that the opposition, even if released from behind bars, would not endanger his chance of securing the premiership for the second term (Ziring, 2005; Hussain, 2013). Bhutto was of the view that PNA leadership was grouped against him, either "obscurantists", "agents of capitalism", or "foreign reactionaries." Therefore, Bhutto never respected PNA leaders and considered them "light-weights" (Wolpert, 1993). However, with the lifting of restrictions on holding public meetings for election campaigns, the PNA could express its opinion about people's grievances against the PPP government and get support for its program. The PNA attracted unsurprising support from the public in its meetings. It showed its loyalty to Islam and promised to put in force the Nizam-i-Mustafa in its genuine form in the country if it came to power.

Bhutto was convinced that he was the party's sole asset and vote catcher, a view with which party officials around him eagerly concurred. Moreover, by the time of the elections, Bhutto had lost his old and committed colleagues, and PPP's original identity and vitality had died. Contrary to the 1970 elections, several feudal lords and other influential successfully obtained PPP tickets. Most of them had to face defeat by relatively unknown candidates of the PPP in the 1970 elections. PPP became a 'Modern Muslim League' as the majority of disgruntled politicians from the Muslim League had joined it. Those who could not derive any benefits from the establishment thus joined PPP. The Federal Security Force (FSF), established as a substitute for the army to deal with civil disturbances, had become unpopular and was ineffective except for pressuring and terrorising the opposition. Thus, Bhutto entered the election year with a disillusioned PPP and questionable support from the bureaucracy he relied on (Raza, 1997).

The prospects of PNA's success in the polls were also dark. This was due to the natural incoherence and differences among the alliance partners, the lack of access to mass media, restrictions imposed by the government to prevent PNA members from contacting people, and PPP's one-sided propaganda through controlled communication media. The opposition got only two months for campaigning when Section 144, prohibiting assembly of more than four persons, was lifted. Sensing the situation, some of the PNA favourites admitted that it would not be able to give the PPP a tough time (Ali, 1977; Hussain et al., 2017). However, members of the political parties of the PNA also knew in advance that elections would not be fair and free. They knew that PPP's leadership would not be satisfied with a straightforward victory. Bhutto, they knew, was determined to put an end to all challenges to his authority and position. Before the elections, M. Asghar Khan had also alleged that the ruling PPP had been manipulating election results.

2. Election results: a surprise for opposition and masses

No doubt, the charisma of Bhutto maintained the same level of insurmountability in the eyes of the observers as it had been enjoying a couple of years before in the eyes of the populace. They were dead sure about the PPP's victory by a landslide. Both PPP and PNA contested the elections in a vicious battle in which a score of people lost their lives, and many more got injured. PPP ministers facilitated their supporters' easy access to polls but created hindrances for the supporters of PNA from casting their votes (Burki, 1988; Awan, 2014). As predicted, the victory of the PPP came true when the results of the National Assembly polls were announced. The ruling PPP had obtained 155 out of 200 seats. However, all political parties in PNA bagged only 36 seats.

Table 1: The parties' position in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

Political Party	Constituencies Contested	Number of Seats Secured
PPP	191	155
PNA	168	36
PML (Qayyum)	37	1
Independent	324	8
Other Parties	21	0
Women & Minority Seats	-	16
Total	741	216

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (1977).

The ruling PPP had won the elections in three of the four provinces by securing nearly four-fifths of the National Assembly seats. In addition, the eight independent candidates from FATA were quasi-PPP in some sense, as in the past practice. They were expected to join the ruling party, thus increasing PPP's seats to 81.5% of the total in the national assembly. It was a victory, more than enough, required to amend the Pakistan Constitution and alter and overhaul the political system. Though the people expected the PPP's victory, the exceptional party score was beyond their imagination. The opposition alliance was believed to secure at least a few parliament seats to resist the would-be ruling PPP's excesses. However, surprisingly for the public and the opposition, and unsurprisingly for those observers who had stuck to the belief that the PPP would win elections by a considerable margin, it occupied an absolute majority in the parliament. The massive attendance at the public meetings of the PNA had given the hope

that it would surely catch more seats than the opposition captured in the first general elections of 1970.

Table 2: Province-wise party position in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

Province	PPP Seats	PNA Seats	Independents Seats	Total
Punjab	107	8	-	115
Sindh	32	11	-	43
KP (then NWFP)	8	17	1	26
Balochistan	7	-	-	7
Islamabad	1	-	-	1
Tribal Areas	-	-	8	8
Total	155	36	9	200

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (1977).

When election results were announced, Bhutto held a press conference declaring that the results were as he expected. However, PNA did not accept the results and charged PPP's leadership with rigging. Without delay, the opposition opened a campaign against the incumbent government, which strengthened quickly. The General Council of PNA unanimously rejected the National Assembly elections, which were "rigged" and "stolen" by the PPP. Moreover, the leadership of PNA decided to boycott the provincial assembly elections to register protests. The General Council also demanded that the elected members of the PNA resign immediately (Wolpert, 1993).

Bhutto, however, severely criticised the boycott of provincial elections and appealed to the electorates to come out to cast their votes with full vigour and enthusiasm, no less than they showed at National Assembly polls. Bhutto emphasised to the people that a vote for PPP was a vote for democracy and would frustrate the boycott of PNA. However, the people positively responded to the appeal of PNA on March 10, 1977. The masses did not go to the polling stations as more than half of those who had voted during the National Assembly election remained absent. The patrolling military witnessed that turnout was so poor that more law enforcement personnel were at some polling stations than voters. Kausar Niazi, a close colleague of Bhutto and cabinet minister, admitted the fact (Mazari, 1999). Abdul Hafeez Peerzada also expressed a similar opinion that PNA boycotted provincial elections, and its boycott was very effective. However, a boycott of PNA resulted in the PPP securing larger seats in all four provinces.

Table 3: The number of seats secured by PPP in provincial assembly elections of Pakistan.

Name of Province	Total Number of Seats	Seats Secured by PPP
Punjab	240	232
Sindh	100	89
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	80	63
Balochistan	40	35
Total	460	435

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (1977).

Accusations and allegations were natural in Pakistan's politics. However, to make the matters

worse, the government announced a hugely inflated turnout. Members of the PNA, from the very outset, blamed the PPP for fraud and voter manipulation. PNA candidates also reported that the local administration did not allow them to submit nomination papers. The unopposed election of 19 members to the National Assembly and 66 members to provincial assemblies turned the suspicion of rigging into a reality. Bhutto understood that the election results for 30-40 seats were fabricated in favour of the government (Niyazi, 1988). However, Bhutto paid no heed to the demands of PNA, declaring it just a facade created by opposition parties. He also declared it a general attitude of losers of elections in third-world countries (Bardwaj, 1996).

The sealing of 80 constituencies' results by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) convinced PNA that rigging, fraud and other malpractices were committed on a large scale (Ali, 1977). Responding to the opposition's insistence, Justice Sajjad Ahmad Jan, the CEC, ordered the recounting of votes at some disputed polling stations. When it became clear that malpractices existed, the PPP government withdrew the authority from CEC to announce revised results. The CEC came out on various occasions, stating that the elections were rigged and expressing its helplessness to end them (Amin, 2007). PNA leaders discouraged an opportunity to ascertain the truth about the level of rigging. They rejected ECP's idea of being of any help in probing the matter based on their shaky trust in ECP. PNA was not innocent either, or such malpractices were committed on both sides.

International observers and correspondents reported that rigging and other malpractices were circumscribed to a limited number of constituencies. However, they were mistaken as rigging was not confined to limited constituencies and was at a scale unprecedented in the electoral history of Pakistan (White Paper, Govt. of Pakistan, 1977). PPP had been doing homework for winning the elections, irrespective of whatever opposition might come its way. Prime Minister's Secretariat, Intelligence Agencies and the Ministry of Information were collectively engaged in recommending candidates for different seats and advising various secret moves for the PPP's win. Few ministers were reported to have attacked voters and stamped the ballot papers (Schwarz, 1977). However, according to Miraj Muhammad Khan, Bhutto, having confidence in himself and his party, never made any rigging plan. However, his party had black sheep foreseeing their future in danger. These few people were involved in rigging, which damaged not only PPP but also Bhutto.

3. Politics of agitation and reconciliation between PNA and government

Independent newspapers had predicted that the post-election period would not be a success but a trial for PPP leadership. The masses, having seen and participated in a political campaign for PNA, were flabbergasted by the landslide victory of the PPP. People's misgiving of the results was primarily due to their preconceived notion that PNA was one of the favourites before the elections. PPP was not expected to win the elections with such a large majority. Fingers were raised on transparency and fairness of the elections. Whatever the scale of rigging might have been, PNA and its supporters rallied for altogether cancelling election results and holding fresh elections under the supervision of the army and judiciary.

After the results of the provincial elections, PNA leadership called for a strike to demonstrate the nation's loss of confidence in its present leadership. Bhutto, very disturbed by the unease of the opposition, warned PNA leaders to approve the results. In any other case, they would not be allowed to bring death and destruction to the people and country. Despite Bhutto's

warning, a successful strike was observed on March 11, 1977. Having gathered large crowds prior to the elections, PNA had already expected the strike to be one of the same. The countrywide strike assured them of public support. However, rallies and processions organised by the PNA against the government compelled Bhutto to negotiate with the opposition. Therefore, the next day, Bhutto offered the opposition to have a dialogue. He also made an impassioned plea that PNA should accept defeat in elections and rejected their demand for re-election (Zahra & Iqbal, 2021).

Bhutto expected a positive response from Maulana Mufti Mahmood. However, due to an air of mistrust and lack of approval of Bhutto's idea, i.e., the election being regarded as a settled matter, Maulana Mufti Mahmood, instead of a nod, denied the invitation until their basic demands were accepted. PPP's leadership also expressed its intention that the government "would not hesitate" to invite the army, if found "necessary" to "restore order." As a reaction to this threat, General Gul Hasan and Air Marshal Rahim Khan, who had played the leading role in supporting and helping Bhutto's coming into power, wired their resignations as ambassadors to Greece and Spain, respectively. They contended that the previous regime had held free and fair elections, but Bhutto, a power-hungry man, did not, which may lead the country towards another civil war. The resignations were a bad omen, as what was following in the pipeline proved disastrous. Both officers never stopped to be game changers and masterminds for the military (Wolpert, 1993).

Later, in March 1977, a National Assembly session was called, but the opposition did not participate due to their boycott. As most opposition leaders were arrested and sent behind bars, the session was considered a unilateral decision. Later in March, the 168 members of the National Assembly voted Bhutto to power. Denying the demand of the PNA to dissolve the National Assembly, Bhutto held that there was no moral or political justification for such action. Bhutto admitted that some individuals had violated the game's rules and committed malpractices in the elections for which the premier cannot be held responsible. Bhutto also maintained that it did not mean the government had made a rigging plan. Nonetheless, Bhutto rejected allegations of planned rigging and held that by conceding to the demand for re-elections, history would remember him as a rigger of the elections (Zahra & Iqbal, 2021).

Opposition rallies attracted people from different sections of society, mainly involving students, youth, women, lawyers, professionals, the business community and the Ulema. Deliberate violations of law and order and confrontations between opposition and law enforcement agencies became routine. Political agitation spread throughout the country through strikes and protests, which soon transformed into a political movement. Now, the opposition demanded that the resignation of Bhutto precede the holding of fresh elections. However, Bhutto was prepared to correct only the minor irregularities. To deal with such a situation, the magnanimity of both sides was needed, but unfortunately, that could not happen. However, Bhutto, based on such demands, declared that a foreign hand, especially that of the US, was involved in aggravating the situation, thus accusing opposition leaders of being foreign agents (Bhutto, 1981).

The Bhutto government, however, imposed section 144 and retaliated with oppressive measures like using tear gas, baton charges, and even firing on protestors. Top opposition leaders were put behind bars, thus providing religious groups with an opportunity to lead the movement. To deal with section 144, religious opposition groups used mosques and accused

Bhutto of faithlessness in religion. Bhutto, denying the claim, ordered FSF to punish those who, according to the ruling party, negated the will of the masses and the expression of the democratic process. The Bhutto government lost patience, and the police and FSF entered the mosques and harassed demonstrators, thus beating and arresting them as well. It sparked great resentment and consolidated an impression of the government's intention to use all measures of repression. The real problem surfaced with the failure of FSF and police to restrict the agitation of protestors in April 1977. Now, PNA-led politics of agitation was transformed into confrontational politics. The results were that Bhutto, although striving to assert his grip over the military vis-à-vis opposition forces, declared martial law under the Constitution in Lahore, Karachi and Hyderabad in April 1977.

Concerns about fairness and transparency in the election process are raised almost everywhere where there is democracy. What made the 1977 elections so contentious was that malpractices of every sort were committed on too large a scale to be overlooked as routine in a democratic form of government. Bhutto was unwilling to resign and planned to hold a referendum as an evasive tactic. The PPP government passed the 7th Amendment Bill in May 1977, which sought legitimacy for the ruling party through a referendum. Opposition parties had boycotted the assembly session as things were not yet settled between PPP and PNA. Bhutto aimed that if the situation got worse, holding a referendum would bring adjustment by taking a vote of confidence directly from the nation. Regarding the referendum, Bhutto insisted that as PNA had turned down all his reconciliatory efforts, he let the people decide his fate. However, PNA leaders condemned and rejected this move, declaring it a device for supporting the PPP's illegitimate rule and ensuring one-party hegemony (Kushik, 1985).

Resorting to politics of reconciliation, Bhutto compromised with PNA and agreed to hold fresh elections in November 1977 and offered them five ministries during the interim period. Later on, the insistence of PNA for 50% of cabinet ministries and holding elections before August 14, 1977, was also accepted. However, it seems that PNA had decided in advance that the Constitution would be respected in case of their victory in the elections. In the case of the PPP's victory, elections were to be considered completely rigged, and results would be rejected altogether. One illustration of such opposition behaviour was Air Marshal Asghar Khan's press interview in Karachi, which was held a few days before the elections, declaring that he was not ready to accept the government's victory. He did not advance any proof of the government's intention of rigging on that stage, which seemingly was not an issue. Blatantly refusing PPP victory, Asghar Khan declared it a disaster for the country if PPP rule continued. He did not express the need for strikes and violence and said that it would not serve much purpose, but he would simply refuse to sit in parliament.

The press conference became a base for full-fledged agitation. Later, it stirred up the opposition supporter's emotions, and they were on the streets with the same motto as the Air Marshal. Their sole purpose was to bring Bhutto's government down. It was their sheer demand, and they were ready to pay any price. The fact that rigging, in reality, did take place in specific constituencies had served the purpose of those PNA groups very well in that they had been able to carry with them the parties which stood to lose a great deal by refusing to seek a political way out of that deadlock. It seemed that some of PNA's hard-line leaders had decided to use other means to topple Bhutto's regime. However, what these people had in mind about fresh elections by the Army could not happen, and everyone lost. The open letter of Asghar Khan to three service chiefs not to accept the unlawful directives of the prime minister gave an

impression in favour of a military takeover (Khan, 1983). Moreover, the refusal of Bhutto to appoint another prime minister of his own choice until fresh elections also eliminated hopes for a peaceful settlement of the political crisis.

4. Results of the political crisis

For most PNA factions, political developments in the aftermath of the 1977 general elections represented a last chance to eliminate Bhutto. They believed that if Bhutto could not be detached from power at this time, it was uncertain that they would ever be able to oust him. If Bhutto were allowed to have a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, he would become more assertive and even more secure. Opposition leadership speculated that if the PPP were allowed to form government, Bhutto would bring in new constitutional amendments so that he could slip back to establish a presidential system for pursuing his dreams (Taseer, 1999). If Bhutto's government machinery had not committed rigging and other malpractices, the PPP would have won the 1977 elections with little margin. Allowing this would mean respect for votes, respect for popular choice, and respect for democracy, but I am sorry to say that PPPs' autocratic leadership wasted the chance. Due to the boycott of opposition parties from provincial elections, the 1977 elections lost their credibility. It became difficult for Bhutto to maintain his standing in the media, courts, and other democratic institutions.

The ruling party and the opposition concluded that the democratic process could not open the door to power. They decided to work on a policy of creating a crisis of such dimensions that it became necessary for the military to be called out to maintain law and order. Some PNA leaders thought it would deal with the political crisis once the military came in to deal with the situation. Therefore, they assumed and hoped that a military regime would speedily evolve a new constitution, presumably like that of Yahya Khan and hold elections in a manner that would make it easy for them to realise their ambitions. PNA leaders did not hesitate to confess that, in their view, only military intervention could get them rid of Bhutto. They agreed that they could never hope to attain political power through the ballot box. Some of their partners, known for political integrity and faith in the democratic process, seemed to have resigned themselves to the view that nothing could be done in that situation, and they had to go along with their partners. Even though they did not share the confidence of the self-appointed Army lobby that such a development would lead to a quick takeover of power, followed by an altruistic handing over to the opposition (Viewpoint, 1977, April 1).

Opposition leaders aimed to oust Bhutto from power and introduce Nizam-i-Mustafa into the country. After the 1977 elections, the PPP and PNA failed to settle the allegations of rigging; thus, the military under General Ziaul Haq took over the power. However, with the end of the PPP rule, PNA also disintegrated and thus lost the chance of becoming a viable alternative government. Its first aim, the ousting of Bhutto, was fulfilled, and the vested interests persuaded its leaders to withdraw from the second one, i.e., establishing Nizam-i-Mustafa. PNA regarded opposition as a stepping stone to achieve more significant influence in the country's politics rather than acting as a torch bearer. Political development is possible when all political parties, irrespective of their differences, sit together to debate and discuss national issues, build consensus and find solutions to common problems. A lack of consensus developing the mindset of politicians allowed the military to take over the government. Politicians, including the ruling and opposition, were supposed to realise the seriousness of the situation in the post-1977 elections. They should have found a solution to their differences

within the democratic framework. Unfortunately, some extremist elements in the opposition were unwilling to seek a peaceful solution to the problem. There was a division among the opposition as a section wanted a peaceful solution to the issue, and others considered resorting to politics of agitation. Care should have been demonstrated for the sake of the continuity of the political process restored after thirteen years of military rule.

The opposition got an opportunity to boost prestige but could not muster enough support to take a formidable stand on controversial issues. Mufti Mahmood, Professor Ghafoor Ahmad, Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Abdul Wali Khan and Attullah Mengal were seasoned politicians from the opposition. By becoming united, they fulfilled the requirements for becoming an effective opposition but failed to do so. Thus, opposition could not present itself as a viable option for an alternative government. Due to internal differences and rigid attitudes adopted by some hardliners, opposition parties in the post-election period could not contribute much to the healthy growth of democracy. Though Bhutto started a democratic process, the opposition had equally supported democratisation. Similarly, it was not only Bhutto and his party but also the opposition parties that hampered the political process. During the Bhutto regime, opposition parties had an opportunity to emerge and grow as a united force, but by resorting to confrontational politics, they failed to do so. Therefore, as demanded by democracy, the opposition could not offer a viable alternative to the ruling party, thus making their loss in elections obvious. If, on the one hand, Bhutto was suffering from a personality cult and wanted to establish a one-party rule, the opposition also appeared to be least interested in establishing a genuinely democratic system.

5. Conclusion

The adoption and persistence of undemocratic attitudes and practices on the part of the incumbent government have always limited the efficiency of opposition in different ways. That was what the PPP government practised during the 1977 elections. During the election campaign, the PPP government tried to block, weaken, suppress, and divide the opposition parties. The PPP established rules for electoral contests, which favoured it the most. The ruling party sought to limit or disallow the opposition's media access. All available resources were used throughout the election campaign to manipulate and influence voters. Different tactics were used to keep the potentially dangerous opposition leaders from contesting the 1977 elections. Bhutto should have ensured fairness and smooth conduction of elections so that the country would remain free of any trouble that a band of rumour mongers had forecasted. He had to have made such an arrangement to eliminate possible clashes during elections. The PNA leadership should have reached an understanding as soon as possible, which could have kept the democratic process intact.

The political deadlock created in the aftermath of the 1977 elections could only be resolved by resorting to the political process. Peaceful means could have been found to expunge the electoral records of all constituencies, the results of which were considered doubtful on reasonable grounds. Irrespective of PNA's stance, ECP had to probe irregularities in elections and vacate all seats with suspected rigging—those found guilty of malpractices, whether officials or ministers, should have been dealt with severely. Political parties should have arrived at an early settlement for re-elections on suspected seats and that fresh elections would be held without any fear of rigging or malpractices. Both PPP's leadership and PNA's would have realised that a mutually acceptable, negotiated settlement had to be found to resolve the issues.

Opposition parties, as claimed to have been interested in true democracy, should have realised that the situation had provided an opportunity to move forward to this goal and prove their estimated strength by accepting the proposal for provincial re-elections. That would have created conditions for the elimination of political crises. If opposition parties had secured a majority in most provinces, this would have helped them strengthen the demand for fresh elections to the National Assembly. Though seasoned politicians on both sides advocated for establishing true democracy, there was a need to join hands and bring Pakistan out of the political crisis. Both the PPP and PNA did not move on the path of reconciliation, which created a situation that facilitated the military's return to the corridor of power.

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