

Democratization and the relevance of history: the case of Pakistan

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Abstract

Many political scientists have argued, on the basis of extensive quantitative data, that democratic governments result in greater spending in health and education and in a redistribution of resources in favour of vulnerable groups. Democratic governments are also often associated with a decrease in levels of interstate conflict and in internal violence. And yet, there are cases – such as Pakistan— in which this has not occurred. Why have these ‘democracy dividends’ not been realized in Pakistan? This paper addresses some of the reasons why democratic governance in Pakistan has not translated into social welfare and peace, and highlights that the impact of democracy is time and context-specific. Therefore, greater attention must be devoted to the historical and societal peculiarities of each country.

Keywords: Pakistan, democratization; welfare; ethnic and religious strife

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1. Introduction

In this paper we will test the dominant theories on the effects of democratization by looking at Pakistan, which since its birth in 1947 has seen the alternation of unelected civilian governments which allowed for some measure of political openness (1947-1958), elected civilian governments characterized by multiparty politics and fairly free elections (1970-’77, 1988-’99, 2008 to present), military governments arising from *coup d’etats* (1958-’69, 69-71, 1977-’88, 1999-2008). However, we have to keep in mind that there are no sharp divisions between one period and the other: some military leaders allowed for limited periods some level of participatory democracy, including elections (such as those for the national and provincial assemblies held on a non-party basis in 1985 under Zia ul-Haq, and the general elections held in 2005 under Musharraf), while during some

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democratic phases unelected institutions such as the military influenced decision-making. The most glaring example was that of the 1990s, when Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif had to give way to the army in a number of issues; when they attempted to exert greater control over the army, they were forced to step down. Benazir Bhutto's government was dismissed twice by the President under military pressure, and Nawaz Sharif was removed from his post by a coup in the aftermath of the Kargill war. Elections held in the 1990s were characterized according to some analysts by bogus votes, intimidation and enticement of voters, and tampering of the results at the polling stations. That the passage between democratic and undemocratic phases is much more nuanced than it may appear at first sight is shown also by the case of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto: Bhutto, the founder and head of the PPP, became president and then prime minister following the 1970 national elections, the first to be held in the country. He allowed multipartitism and in 1977 he called for general elections. And yet, we cannot consider him an elected leader: first of all, it had been the *Awami League* -AL based in the Eastern wing, not the PPP, that had won the elections in 1970. The AL's leader Mujibur Rahman should have formed the new government. The reluctance of the military and civilian elites of the western wing, including Bhutto, to recognize the result of the vote precipitated the civil war, which resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. Bhutto, whose party had arrived second at the general elections, became prime minister in the aftermath of the secession. Second, the 1977 elections called by Bhutto were, according to the opposition and many analysts, heavily rigged. In sum, the Pakistani case reminds us that there are no clear-cut divisions between types of governments.

In the following pages we will look at the period 1988-1999, one that is usually described in western literature as democratic, and assess whether it produced or not any welfare dividends. We will then look at the correlation between regime type and conflict throughout Pakistani history, with particular attention to internal strife². First, however, we will summarize some of the main findings of the existing literature on the consequences of democratization.

² The following analysis draws from E. Giunchi, *Democratic Transition and Social Spending: the case of Pakistan in the 1990s*, in *Democratization*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 2011, pp. 1270-1290; E. Giunchi, *Ethnic Strife and Democratization in Pakistan: Some observations on concepts, measurements and the importance of history*, in *Quaderni Asiatici*, Vol. XXXI, No. 106, 2014, pp. 21-56.

2. *The literature on the effects of democratization*

In the past decades great attention has been devoted to studying through a quantitative cross-country approach the effects of democracy. Most scholars believe, on the basis of extensive data collected across a wide number of countries, that higher degrees of democracy result in more prosperous, egalitarian and peaceful societies. It is widely held, for example, that as levels of democracy increase, economic growth ensues³, though some argue that this relationship is more ambiguous⁴. The bulk of existing studies also argue that transitions to democracy entail greater commitment on the part of the State to social welfare and to the redistribution of resources. Elected governments, in particular, are thought to spend more on health and education and to be more pro-poor than unelected ones⁵. The results are better performances in welfare indicators⁶ and positive distributional effects⁷. Contrary to this view, which is corroborated by extensive quantitative data, other political scientists find no simple correlation between democracy and social welfare: by resorting to a quantitative approach they observe that democracies

³ J. Tavares, R. Wacziarg, *How Democracy Affects Growth*, in *European Economic Review*, Vol. 45, No. 8, 2001, pp. 1341-1378.

⁴ R.J. Barro, *Democracy and Growth*, in *Journal of Economic Growth*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1996, pp. 1-27.

⁵ M. Ross, *Is Democracy Good for the Poor?* in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 860-887; D. Stasavage, *Democracy and Education Spending in Africa*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2005, pp. 343-58; R. jr. Kaufman, A. Segura-Ubiergo, *Globalization, Domestic Politics, and Social Spending in Latin America: A Time-Series Cross-Section Analysis, 1973-1997*, in *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 2001, pp. 553-87; D.S. Brown, W. Hunter, *Democracy and Social Spending in Latin America, 1980-1992*, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 93, No. 4, 1999, pp. 779-90; J.M. Nelson, *Elections, Democracy and Social Services*, in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2007, pp. 79-97; G. Avelino, D. S. Brown, W. Hunter, *The Effects of Capital Mobility, Trade Openness, and Democracy on Social Spending in Latin America, 1980-1999*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2005, pp. 625-641; D.R. Hecock, *Electoral Competition, Globalization, and Subnational Education Spending in Mexico, 1999-2004*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2006, pp. 950-961.

⁶ B. Moon, W.J. Dixon, *Politics, the State and Basic Human Needs: A Cross-National Study*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1985, pp. 661-694; T.D. Zweifel, P. Navia, *Democracy, Dictatorship, and Infant Mortality*, in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2000, pp. 99-114; P. Navia, T.D. Zweifel, *Democracy, Dictatorship, and Infant Mortality Revisited*, in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, 2003; D.S. Brown, *Reading, Writing, and Regime Type: Democracy's Impact on Primary School Enrolment*, in *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1999, pp. 681-707; D.A. Lake, M.A. Baum, *The Invisible Hand of Democracy: Political Control and the Provision of Public Services*, in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 6, 2001, pp. 587-621; M. Baum, D. Lake, *The Political Economy of Growth: Democracy and Human Capital*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2003, pp. 333-347.

⁷ D. Stasavage, *Democracy and Education*, cit.; D.S. Brown, W. Hunter, *Democracy and Social Spending*, cit.; D.S. Brown, *Reading*, cit..

do not necessarily spend more on the social sector than authoritarian governments⁸, and that greater government expenditures do not in any case necessarily translate into better indicators⁹, nor do they always benefit the most vulnerable sectors of society¹⁰.

Similar discrepancies are to be found among political scientists studying the effects of democratisation on international and internal strife. The bulk of existing studies argues that as levels of democracy increase, conflicts between states become more rare¹¹ and military expenditures, as a consequence, decrease as a share of both GNP and total government spending¹². Again, some studies indicate that the relationship between democracy and military spending is quite complex¹³. The idea that democratic systems are more likely to promote domestic peace than authoritarian systems is also widely-held¹⁴. Some isolated voices, however, find evidence that democracies are as likely as

⁸ C.B. Mulligan, R. Gil, X. Sala-i-Martin, *Do Democracies Have Different Public Policies than Non Democracies?*, in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2004, pp. 51-74.

⁹ J.M. Nelson, *Elections, Democracy*, cit.; M. Ross, *Is Democracy Good*, cit.; D. Filmer, L. Pritchett, *The Impact of Public Spending on Health: Does Money Matter?*, in *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 1999, pp. 1309-1323; R. Barlow and B. Vissandjee, *Determinants of National Life Expectancy*, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 9-29; J.W. McGuire, *Basic Health Care Provision and Under-Five Mortality: A Cross-National Study of Developing Countries*, in *World Development*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2006, pp. 405-425.

¹⁰ F. Castro-Leal et al., *Public Spending on Health Care in Africa: Do the Poor Benefit?*, in *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, Vol. 78, 2000, pp. 66-74.

¹¹ P. James, E. Solberg, M. Wolfson, *An Identified Systemic Model of the Democracy-Peace Nexus*, in *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 10, 1999, pp. 1-38; P. James, E. Solberg, M. Wolfson, *Democracy and Peace: Reply to Oneal and Russett*, *Defence and Peace Economics*, Vol. 11, 2000, pp. 215-229; J.R. Oneal, B.M. Russett, *The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence and Conflict, 1950-1985*, in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1997, pp. 267-294; J. Yidirim, S. Sezgin, *Democracy and military expenditure: A cross-country evidence*, in *Transition Studies Review*, 2005, Vol. 122, No. 1, pp. 93-100.

¹² J.H. Lebovic, *Spending Priorities and Democratic Rule in Latin America*, in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, n. 4, 2001, pp. 427-452; J. Yidirim, S. Sezgin, *Democracy and military expenditure*, cit..

¹³ I.A. Elbadawi, P. Keefer, *Democracy, democratic consolidation and military spending*, working paper 848, ERF, 2014, pp. 1-32.

¹⁴ I.A. Elbadawi, N. Sambanis, *How Much War Will We See? Explaining the prevalence of civil war*, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2002, pp. 307-334; B. Lacina, *Explaining the Severity of Civil Wars*, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2006, pp. 276-289; R. Nordås, *Are Religious Conflicts Bloodier? Assessing the impact of religion on civil conflict casualties*, Conference paper, ISA 48th Annual Convention, Chicago IL, February 28-March 3, 2007; N. Sambanis, *Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A theoretical and empirical inquiry*, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2001, pp. 259-283; T.R. Gurr, *Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical conflict and the changing world system*, in *International Security*, Vol. 38, 1994, pp. 347-378; D.L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, Berkeley - Los Angeles, 1985; M. Bratton, *Do free elections foster capable government? The democracy-governance connection in Africa*, in *Afrobarometer*, Working Paper No. 104, 2008, pp. 331-354; M. Sørli, N.P. Gleditsch, H. Strand, *Why is There So Much Conflict in the Middle East?*, in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2005, pp. 141-165; N. Glazer, *Democracy and Deep Divides*, in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2010, pp. 5-19.

authoritarian regimes to be affected by conflict¹⁵, if not more¹⁶. There is a near consensus, however, that hybrid – also called semi-democratic or intermediate – regimes are more likely to experience internal conflict¹⁷, as do countries going through a transition to democracy¹⁸. The reasons is that intermediate regimes (and the same can be said about transitional regimes) have inherent contradictions stemming from a combination of repression, leading to grievances, and openness, facilitating protest.

Democratic openings can also create expectations that cannot be met and, particularly in the early stages of democratization, ethno-nationalist leaders tend to emphasize ethnic antagonisms in order to mobilize a support base¹⁹. While the greater freedom of the press that normally accompanies democratization is exploited by them to disseminate their ideas, their exclusivist appeals are not properly scrutinized as freedom of expression is not fully developed²⁰. However, transitions to democracy do not always entail violence, and stable western democracies have a record of subverting, directly or indirectly, elected governments abroad, though fuelling violence abroad is not captured by available data on the correlation between democracy and violence. Democratic governments, including western ones, may also co-exist with powerful unelected institutions and interest groups and with clientelistic networks.

¹⁵ G.D. Fearon, D.D. Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War*, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶ S.M. Saideman et al., *Democratization, Political Institutions, and Ethnic Conflict: A pooled, cross-sectional time series analysis from 1985-1998*, in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, p. 118; E.N. Muller, E. Weede, *Cross-National Variations in Political Violence: A rational action approach*, in *Journal of conflict resolution*, Vol. 34, 1990, pp. 624-51.

¹⁷ T. Ellingsen, *Toward a Revival of Religion and Religious Clashes?*, in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2005, pp. 305-332; T. Ellingsen, *Colorful community or ethnic witches' brew? Multiethnicity and domestic conflict during and after the cold war*, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2000, pp. 228-249; H. Hegre et al., *Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, political change and civil war, 1916-1992*, in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, 2001, pp. 33-48; G.D. Fearon, D.D. Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War*, cit., M. Sørli et al., *Why is There So Much Conflict*, cit..

¹⁸ T.R. Gurr, *Why Minorities Rebel: A global analysis of communal mobilization and conflict since 1945*, in *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1993, pp. 161-201; J. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and nationalist conflict*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2000; J. Snyder, K. Ballentine, *Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas*, in *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1996, pp. 5-40; Y. Sadowski, *Ethnic Conflict*, in *Foreign Policy*, No. 111, 1998, pp. 12-23; M.H. Chowdhury, *Democratization in South Asia. Lessons from American institutions*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003; E.D. Mansfield, J. Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why emerging democracies go to war*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2005.

¹⁹ H. Hegre et al., *Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?*, cit..

²⁰ J. Snyder, K. Ballentine, *Nationalism and the marketplace*, cit.; J. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, cit.; D.L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups*, cit..

It has also been observed that democratization within fragmented societies may politicize and institutionalize internal divisions, thus fuelling violence. For one thing, existing divisions offer politicians powerful incentives to play the ethnic and religious card to mobilize their own constituency. This does not mean that divisive policies are there to stay, however: according to some, they can be overcome by adopting institutional changes, such as reforms of the electoral system²¹.

The discrepancies that we have mentioned in the studies on the effects of democratisation are likely to stem from two factors. First of all, the difficulty in defining democracy. The dichotomy between democratic and undemocratic governments is far from agreed upon, nor is it clear what constitutes a passage between a ‘level of democracy’ and another. Both thick and thin definitions of democracy are wanting on many accounts, one of them being that they do not capture the extensive web of internal and external factors, of a contingent as well as long-term nature, that interact like living organisms, producing complex effects that are difficult to analyze, let alone translate into numbers. This leads to the second reason why studies on the effects of democracy do not reach an agreement: as we will argue in greater detail at the end of the paper, the impact of the political system cannot but be time and space sensitive. It follows that to try and understand cause and effect as well as variations between one case and the other, scholars should not lose sight of local specificities and should be able to see them in their historical unfolding.

3. *The 1988-1999 ‘democratic phase’ and welfare*

The 1988 elections following Zia ul-Haq’s death raised great expectations in the West: they were the first free and contested parliamentary elections after over a decade of military rule and as such they were seen by many as heralding a new phase. The belief that the ‘democratic wave’²² had reached Pakistan was heightened by the victory of the PPP. The party was headed by the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto, whose

²¹ See B. Reilly (Ed.), *Democracy in Divided Societies. Electoral engineering for conflict management*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001; see also M.J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994; A. Rabushka, K.A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A theory of democratic instability*, Charles Merrill, Columbus, 1972.

²² See S.P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*, Vol. IV, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1993.

image as a progressive leader had been propped up by her electoral campaign, which focused on social emancipation and human rights. She and Nawaz Sharif, the head of the PML, alternated in power as prime ministers between 1988 and Musharraf's *coup d'état* in 1999. As elected leaders they were expected to invest more in the social sector than their predecessor. However, World Bank and UNDP statistics indicate that this was not the case: in the 1990s public expenditure allocated to health and education actually decreased as a percentage of GNP when compared to the previous decade of military rule²³. Overall, as a share of the GNP and of total government spending, allocations to these sectors remained below the regional average, with Pakistan fairs worse than poorer countries that ranked lower in terms of political freedom and civil liberties like the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan²⁴. As to redistributive policies that are often associated with democratic governments, in the 1990s there was an increase in spending on primary education, but that increase was in line with what was happening in most of the region under the pressure of international aid agencies.

Statistics also do not take into account 'ghost schools', a pervasive phenomenon in Pakistan that is the product of a host of factors including lack of infrastructure and roads, low salaries of teaching staff, lack of security. The public health sector likewise remained marred by absenteeism, lack of meritocracy, limited accountability. The underfunding of the public sector and the problems hindering its proper functioning led to a growing number of private schools; this has been seen in positive terms by US agencies, as a way to circumvent the request for more State²⁵; however, despite charging low fees, private schools cannot cater for the worse off sectors of society²⁶. and due to the low salaries of their teaching staff they are marred by greater corruption than government schools. NGOs and *madrassa* have increasingly provided support to the poorest sections of society, though the quality of education provided by them seems to be wanting on many counts: *madrassa* in particular tend to focus on religious subjects and to adopt a mnemonic approach thus fostering an a-critical thinking and hindering the access of students to the job market.

²³ See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2008*, in <http://data.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/indicators/en> (last accessed 13.04.2011).

²⁴ S. Gupta, M. Verhoeven, E.R. Tiongson, *Does Higher Government Spending Buy Better Results in Education and Health Care?*, Working Paper 99/21, IMF, Washington D.C., 1999, pp. 10-13.

²⁵ N. Naviwala, *Pakistan's Education Crisis: The real story*, Washington D.C., Wilson Center, 2016.

²⁶ M. Akhram, J.K. Faheem, *Health Care Services and Government Spending in Pakistan*, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad, 2007.

On a positive note, at the end of the 1990s health indicators showed marked improvements compared to the beginning of the decade, though this output was part of a global trend, led by the UN, that took place also elsewhere irrespective of regime type. Improvements in Pakistan were actually less dramatic than elsewhere in the region; as a consequence, at the end of the 1990s Pakistani infant and child mortality rates were higher than in the rest of the region, including countries that had similar or lower pro capita income and that fared worse in terms of political and civil liberties²⁷. Pakistan compared unfavourably with the rest of the region also in terms of educational achievements²⁸.

In sum, there were some positive achievements, though their correlation with the political system is doubtful. In any case improvements were very limited, a product of the limited commitment of both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif to welfare. How to explain the limited investment in the social sector by their elected governments? Contingent problems certainly played a part: millions of Afghan refugees had flowed into the country as a consequence of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and of the subsequent civil war. These refugees, besides causing ethnic and religious tensions in northern Beluchistan, were a burden to the State's resource, especially as foreign aid to Pakistan after 1990 started to decrease. The government was forced to borrow from commercial banks at higher interest rates, causing foreign debt and debt servicing to raise as a percentage of the annual budget²⁹. Pakistan's reliance on the IMF, which had deepened since the 1988 Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), did not have any positive consequences on economic variables. It will be under general Musharraf's regime in 1999-2008 that major economic variables will show an improvement, partly a product of the economic boom at the global level³⁰. IMF conditional lending, besides failing to contribute to economic growth, prompted Pakistani governments in the 1990s to cut public expenditures, thus squeezing social spending³¹. The strings attached to the structural adjustment package of 1988-91 also led to increases in taxes and to the reduction of the support price for essential crops.

²⁷ UNDP, Human Development Report 2001, hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2001/chapters/ (last accessed 03.05.2018).

²⁸ World Bank, Pakistan Poverty Assessment, *passim*.

²⁹ O.B. Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the storm*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 231.

³⁰ J. Nasir, *IMF Programs in Pakistan (1988-2008): An Analysis*, in *CQ Criterion Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2012, <http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/imf-programs-in-pakistan-1988-2008-%E2%80%93-analysis/> (last accessed 23.01.2019)

³¹ N. Gera, *Impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes on Overall Social Welfare in Pakistan*, in *South Asia Economic Journal*, Vol. 8, 2007, pp. 39-64.

IMF standby loan of 1993 and subsequent packages until 1999 were consistent with earlier packages as far as conditionality is concerned. Cuts in subsidies and wage restraint were accompanied by the freezing of employment in the public sector³², at a time when power prices were increasing. By 1998, a decade after the launch of SAP, domestic savings and investments had increased, but at a great cost: GDP growth had decreased and unemployment had increased, together with poverty incidence, depth and severity.³³

The following table shows the cuts to subsidies and to resources devoted to health and education as a share of GDP since 1989-90³⁴.

Public Spending cuts on subsidies, education, and health

Year	Subsidies (%FDP)	Health (%GNP)	Education (%GNP)
1987-88	1.50	1.0	2.4
1988-89	1.66	1.0	2.4
1989-90	1.47	1.0	2.2
1990-91	1.10	0.9	2.1
1991-92	0.94	0.7	2.2
1992-93	0.73	0.7	2.2
1993-94	0.58	0.7	2.2
1994-95	0.35	0.6	2.4
1995-96	0.64	0.8	2.4
1996-97	0.54	0.8	2.6
1997-98	0.48	0.7	2.3

Source: J. Nasir, cit., on the basis of various Economic Surveys of Pakistan

The 1990 Gulf War also had negative effects on Pakistani economy, as it reduced particularly between 1991 and 1993 the remittances flowing into Pakistan, which had

³² T. Anwar, *Structural Adjustment and Poverty-The case of Pakistan*, in *The Pakistan Development Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1996, pp. 911-926.

³³ A.R Kemal, *Structural adjustment, macroeconomic policies, and Poverty trends in Pakistan*, Asia and Pacific Forum on Poverty, ADB, 2001.

³⁴ J. Nasir, *IMF Programs in Pakistan (1988-2008)*, cit..

previously counted for a considerable share of national income³⁵. Foreign remittances to Pakistan according to official data declined from US\$ 1467 million in 1991 to US\$ 1086 million in 2000/0³⁶.

To make things worse, in 1990, sanctions were imposed on Pakistan under Pressler Amendment. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the effects of the weakening of Iran after the first Gulf war removed the major concerns of US foreign policy in the region and decreased Pakistan's importance to US eyes. The issue of Nuclear Non-Proliferation thus became of priority concern for US foreign policy makers, who were increasingly concerned that Pakistan-Indian relations might degenerate in a nuclear war³⁷. Thus, the \$564 million of economic and military assistance approved for the fiscal year 1991 was frozen, though certain items such as humanitarian aid and bank loans and credits for purchase of food and agricultural commodities were exempted. Particularly after 1996 US-Pakistan relations did undergo some improvement, but the funds flowing to Islamabad never assumed the proportions they had had in the previous decade, when Pakistan had been a key ally in the proxy war in Afghanistan.

There were also more structural, long-term factors at play: firstly, the political role of the military. The armed forces, which had been since Partition a powerful player and had undergone since the 1950s, when the country became a bastion of US policy in the region, a process of modernization, had been further empowered under Zia in the context of the 'free world's support to the *mujaheddin*. Islamabad had become key in the CIA's distribution of weapons to the Afghan seven Peshawar-based parties, and the distribution was managed by the Pakistani armed forces and secret services. In the 1990s the army, while not directly in power, controlled behind the scenes certain sectors of decision-making and prevented the elected leaders from significantly reducing the military budget; as a consequence, defense spending between 1988 and 2000 as a percentage of the GDP

³⁵ M.S. Butt, J.S. Bandara, *Trade Liberalization and Regional Disparity in Pakistan*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2009, p. 52; U. Cock, Y. Sun, *Remittances in Pakistan. Why have they gone up, and why aren't they coming down?*, IMF working paper, 2011, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2011/wp11200.pdf> (last accessed 03.05. 2018).

³⁶ M. Irfan, *Remittances and Poverty Linkages in Pakistan: Evidence and Some Suggestions for Further Analysis*, PIDE working paper, 2011, p. 3

³⁷ T. Mahmood, *Pressler Amendment and Pakistan's Security Concerns*, in *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 47, No. 4, October 1994; M.F. Anwar, *US Sanctions Against Pakistan: Rationale and Impact (1990-2001)*, in *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2013.

did slightly decrease, but it remained above the region's average³⁸. One should not assume however that the civilian elites, in the 1990s as well as at other times in the country's history, were strongly in favour of diverting resources from the military to the social sector: the Indian 'threat', Afghan supposed meddling with Pakistani internal affairs and the permanent state of instability north of the Durand Line were widely thought by Pakistani elites, whether civilian or not, as necessitating great investments in the armed forces.

Other factors explaining the limited commitment of Pakistani elected governments in the 1990s to social spending are low literacy levels and the prevalence of family/*biraderi*, ethnic affiliations and clientelistic networks, which had the effect of hindering the awareness of socio-economic inequalities and structural problems among the population. Besides limiting the pressure that was exerted over politicians to adopt welfare policies, these factors limited the horizon of elected politicians: the latter had no incentive to address systemic issues that would require long-term measures and to cater to the interests of those living outside of their immediate constituency. To this we should add that feudal elites who were contrary to greater spending on welfare and distributional policies were entrenched in the National Assembly, in the government and in the main parties. Under Benazir Bhutto, who belonged to a family of Sindhi landowners, rural elites were overrepresented in the National assembly to the detriment of middle classes and lower income groups³⁹. The PPP itself represented to a great extent the interests of the Sindhi landed elite. As to the Punjabi business elites who supported Nawaz Sharif, they were linked by family ties to the higher military echelons and to Punjabi landlords; another major constituency of Sharif was conservative religious groups, who had no interest in redistributive politics that may erode their material interests and psychological hold over poor communities. Saudi support of the PML-N further watered down any redistributive temptation that may have been felt within by the party. Besides their elitist bias, both parties were dominated by personalities and established dynasties, and continued to discriminate against certain ethnic and religious groups.

³⁸ WB, *World Bank Indicators 2009*, data.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/indicators/en (last accessed 03.05.2018).

³⁹ S. Shafqat, *Democracy and Political Transformation in Pakistan*, in S. Mumtaz, J.L Racine, I. Ali (Eds.), *Pakistan: The contours of state and society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 225.

4. *Democracy and peace*

We have already mentioned that quantitative research on the effects of democracy present some inconsistency in the definition of what constitutes democracy, and in criteria and periods used for datasets. The analysis of the correlation between democracy and ethnic strife is hampered by additional conceptual problems, mostly related to the employment of loose definitions which tend to confuse religion with ethnicity. While I have dealt with these issues elsewhere⁴⁰, I wish to stress here that even if we take at face value existing datasets, no correlation seems to exist in Pakistani history between democracy and peace. Again, the Pakistani case contradicts the findings of many political scientists working on democratization. The datasets commonly used by them, such as those by PITF (Political instability task force, funded by the CIA)⁴¹, by UCDP/PRIO (Upsala conflict data programme/Peace research Institute Oslo)⁴², and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) all show that domestic strife in Pakistan did not decrease during democratic phases. If anything, strife became more intense in terms of number of casualties. As we have already mentioned, the traumatic 1971 civil war that torn the country apart, resulting in the secession of the eastern wing, occurred after the first national elections had taken place. The reason is quite obvious: the elections raised the expectation among Bengalis, who despite being the majority were marginalized and discriminated against, that they would obtain the majority of seats in the National Assembly and form a government. However, the reluctance by the military and civilian leaders of the western wing to allow the AL to form a government and the badly disguised racism of the Punjabi-dominated military precipitated the crisis. While the brutal repression of Bengali protestors took place under the military government of Yahya Khan, civilian politicians of the western wing did not oppose it. India's military intervention in the civil war may have contributed to the civilian leaders' support of the military. In the aftermath of the secession of the eastern wing, strife broke out also in Beluchistan, again as a consequence of ethnic discrimination. External support (this time

⁴⁰ E. Giunchi, *Ethnic Strife and Democratization*, cit..

⁴¹ See J. Goldstone et al., *A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability*, in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2000, pp. 190-208.

⁴² The dataset is described in N.P. Gleditsch et al., *Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset*, in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 2002, pp. 615-637.

from Afghanistan) helped the insurgents but fuelled the Pakistani elites' sense of vulnerability, prompting them to repress brutally, with Iranian support, the insurrection. Beluchi rebellion would resurface under the military regime of general Musharraf, in power since 1999, a consequence of persisting discrimination against the province and of the increasing influx of Punjabi workers and military personnel in the area of Gwadar which was being renovated with Chinese support. Also protests and violence by Sindhis, Mohajir and Pashtuns have taken place in Pakistani history irrespective of regime type. Sindhis and Mohajirs mobilized mostly, but not only, under the military regime of Zia as a consequence of ongoing discrimination fuelled by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's demise, of migration dynamics which increased the weight of Pashtuns in Karachi and ensuing competition for scarce resources. Anti-state attacks by neo-traditionalist groups in the Pashtun belt and attacks against religious minorities became a severe problem in the 1990s and continued under elected and unelected leaders, a consequence of the militarization of Pashtun areas in the 1980s and the increasing convergence between pro-Wahhabi groups, jihadists and criminal networks linked to narcotrafficking.

As to inter-state violence, the first India-Pakistan war (1947-1949) took place under a civilian unelected government; the following ones (1965 and 1971) under military governments, though in 1971 it was democratic India which decided to intervene militarily in the Pakistani civil war; the 1999 Kargil war took place under Nawaz Sharif, and since then skirmishes along the LoC have often occurred irrespective of regime type.

In sum, international conflict was more pronounced when Pakistan had a military government, but took place also during 'democratic' phases. As to internal strife, no correlation can be observed between violence and a particular regime type. If anything, the worst levels of internal violence erupted in the 1970s, after Pakistan's first national elections, while religious violence became widespread in the 1990s. This may support the thesis that governments undergoing transitions to democracy, like hybrid governments, are particularly prone to domestic violence. What is certain in any case is that variables other than the political system explain domestic strife: among them, ethnic grievances, interferences by foreign countries, and islamization policies that fuel an exclusivist and intolerant vision of Islam.

5. Conclusions

After a decade of Musharraf’s military rule, democracy returned to Pakistan. National elections were held in 2008, resulting in a PPP-PML-N coalition government, and in 2013, with the PML-N winning the majority of votes. In 2018 Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaf - PTI swept the polls and its leader Imran Khan became head of State. In each of these occasions, the elected civilian government was able to complete a full term in office and peacefully transfer power to another elected government. This has been considered by many observers as a step forward towards a fully democratic State, which as such, so the argument goes, will produce welfare and peace dividends. Things, however, as we have seen, are much more complicated. There is no guarantee that Pakistan will not be touched by a ‘counter-wave’, nor that greater democracy will have a positive impact on welfare and internal stability and security. We have seen that no clear-cut correlation between democracy and welfare, and between democracy and peace, existed in the previous decades of Pakistani history. It can be held that democratic transitions have lasted too little to take roots and produce durable and significant effects: as it has been noted by some political scientists, the stock of democracy is an important factor to be taken into consideration⁴³. This points to the shallowness of procedural definitions of democracy: what makes the difference, as many others have also pointed out, is substantial democracy. However, we are left wondering what is the ideal duration of the ‘stock’ for it to produce positive results, and what a ‘mature’ democracy would consist of. In any case, it may not only the limited duration of democracy that gives Pakistan’s political system a hybrid character: although undoubtedly many young democracies have adopted the *form* of electoral democracy while remaining illiberal, it could be argued that most regimes are, in Diamond’s words, ‘ambiguous’⁴⁴.

While there is no doubt that in the last decade procedural democracy has become more entrenched in Pakistan, it must be pointed out that also the latest elections were marred by some fraud and rigging, with the military accused of tilting the electoral playing field in the PTI’s favour. Although there is no evidence that this actually happened, there is no

⁴³ G. Carbone, V. Memoli, *Does Democratization Foster State Consolidation? Democratic rule, political order, and administrative capacity*, in *Governance*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2015; S.M. Saideman et al., *Democratization, Political Institutions, and Ethnic Conflict: A pooled, cross-sectional time series analysis from 1985-1998*, in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, p. 115.

⁴⁴ L.J. Diamond, *Thinking about Hybrid Regimes*, in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2002, pp. 21-35.

doubt that the actual government, like the previous ones, defers to the military on certain issues. As to ethnic institutional asymmetry, which has been a constant source of tensions and strife in Pakistani history, voting still takes place on the basis of ethnic affiliations: the PTI is the largest party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the PPP in Sindh, the newly-formed Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) in Balochistan, and the PML-N in Punjab. The ruling PTI, like the PPP and the PML-N, is dominated by personalities and displays an elitist bias. And, like previous governments, it has been unable to significantly decrease internal violence: attacks associated with Taliban, separatists and sectarian militants continue to cause a high number of casualties. Nor have Pakistan's relationships with its neighbours improved. While it is partly to the credit of Imran Khan that the recent crisis with Pakistan over Kashmir has not degenerated into a full-fledged war, Indo-Pakistan relations remain sour and both the Kashmir and Durand Line disputes remain unresolved. As to the future of Pakistani democracy, links with Saudi Arabia and China may contribute to consolidate the undemocratic features of the Pakistan political system. Western support itself has often benefitted military governments: The US and their allies supported Zia's military regime during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; they did so again after 9/11, when Pakistan, then under the military government of Musharraf, became a key element in the 'war against terror'. Given the geostrategic centrality of AfPak, and the web of interests by state and non state actors centered around it, we cannot rule out that an external power may support a military regime if that may further its interests.

The above observations make it quite obvious, I believe, that studying the effects of a particular regime type should entail (also) a contextual and historical perspective. The Pakistani case study indicates that democracy by itself, particularly in its procedural definition, is not *per se* the solution. Presumably, for a democracy to result in redistributive policies certain preconditions must exist; among them, the existence of an informed and politically aware society, the weakening of clientelistic affiliations, the capacity of elected governments to free themselves from military oversight as well as from outside pressure to cut welfare. As for the correlation between democracy and internal strife, the regional and international context must be taken into consideration, as well as the existence of grievances by groups who are marginalized and discriminated against, the de facto norms regulating access to political power and to scarce resources and the image of ethnic and religious minorities in state rhetoric and textbooks. Many of

these factors cannot be easily assessed, let alone measured. And yet, I believe that devoting attention to time and space, and trying to capture the multiplicity of non measurable explanatory variables that influence decision-making, no matter how untidy and messy it may be, would greatly contribute to our understanding of reality. As Diamond observed, classificatory schemes «impose an uneasy order on an untidy empirical world»⁴⁵. What I am arguing is not that we should shelve classifications, nor that we should do away with statistics and cross-comparisons; rather, we should attempt to make more room for that ‘untidy empirical world’: as Hirshman observed almost half a century ago, what is needed is «a little more ‘reference for life’ [...] and a little less wishful thinking»⁴⁶.

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⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁴⁶ A.O. Hirschman, *The Search for Paradigms as a Hindrance to Understanding*, in *World politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1970, pp. 329-343.

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