

POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION OF PAKISTAN PEOPLE'S PARTY AND CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE REFORMS IN PAKISTAN (2008–2018)

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Abstract

The study discusses how the Pakistan People's Party's strategy of reconciliation influenced the reforms of the constitution and legislation during the democratic period (2008–2018). In 2008, after it won the election, the PPP sought to build coalitions, reach agreements with rivals (especially, PML-N) and deepen relationships with government institutions to maintain democracy and see its mandate through. Qualitative historic methods are used in the research by looking at parliamentary files, amendments to the constitution, media coverage and scholarly works. Important changes occurred thanks to reconciliation such as the "18th Amendment" (2010) that restored leadership in Parliament, gave powers to provinces and supported federalism, the "19th Amendment" (2011) that helped the Judiciary become more self-reliant and the "20th Amendment" (2012) which ensured neutral caretakers existed for the next election. During its opposition (2013–2018), the PPP backed important changes like the "21st Amendment" (setting up military courts to hear cases of terrorism) and the "25th Amendment" (including FATA in KPK). Human rights laws (for instance, the Transgender Rights Act 2018), changes to elections and social justice acts also came through legislative advancements. At the same time, reconciliation did not always work well: sometimes elite deals reduced accountability, relations among civilian, military and judicial sectors were strained and many gaps appeared in implementation. Mixed results in government and strong political divisions since 2018 meant PPP's approach to unity greatly helped maintain democracy and the constitution, even with underlying challenges that need fixing.

INTRODUCTION

The period of 2008 to 2018 stands out in Pakistan's politics as an important period of transition from General Pervez Musharraf's military regime and back to being an electoral democracy. The general elections of February 2008 brought the PPP in power, months after the tragic assassination of

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto (Yasin, Z., 2021). As a result of that, in Pakistan's history it would be the beginning of the era where for the first time in Pakistan's history, the elected government will complete their term and hand over power to another elected government peacefully in

2013(Noor, A., 2024). What ended up defining the political landscape of this decade was a conciliatory stance between stakeholders in politics that was historically confrontational, and frequently involved either military or presidential intervention, which we had seen in the 1990s.

It was this new paradigm which was based on the idea of reconciliation politics the PPP had been advocating for under the leadership of its President, Asif Ali Zardari. The process to settle conflict and repair cooperative relations between the warring factions in the Pakistani context, is political reconciliation. These were not about seeking revenge through dominance over the existing political rivals and institutions, rather, PPP hoped to become a movement of 'politics of reconciliation' by uniting major force in a 'common good' of democratic stability and consolidation. Based on this, this approach was inspired by the Charter of Democracy of 2006, which was an agreement between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) aimed at ending the zero-sum conflict between the parties of Benazir and Nawaz Shah and keeping the faith with the constitutionalism and civil supremacy (Chawala, M. 2017). The National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) in 2007 too facilitated exiled leaders' return and allowed them to contest the elections thereby paving the way for a broad-based democratic transition.

When the PPP government took charge in 2008, it had to reign over a polarized polity, an emboldened judiciary, an interventionist military, economic crises, and rising militancy. The PPP's response was to cultivate a conciliatory political style which pioneered a form of politics which worked by inclusion rather than confrontation. The background of 2008-2018 is presented and reconciliation politics is proposed as analytical framework. The following sections describe how the PPP used this framework in practice, both domestically and institutionally, and how it played out against the backdrop of a progressive agenda of constitutional and legislative reforms that set Pakistan's federal democracy on a calmer course.

Methodology

The qualitative historical study focuses on the PPP politics of reconciliation as well as the constitutional and legislative reforms that were affected in Pakistan during the period of 2008-2018. On the other hand, the research uses many sources to draw a complete picture about the era. The content of reforms and official policy statements is traced by means of primary sources such as official government documents and parliamentary records. The intent and consensus underlying certain reforms, for instance, constitutional amendments (i.e. 18th, 19th and 20th Amendments) or proceedings of the National Assembly, could be drawn from texts of those amendments and of National Assembly proceedings respectively. The analysis is also based on academic literature and policy analyses in addition to official records. Details about political negotiations, conflicts, public perception (i.e., press and editorial reports of the formation or breakdown of coalitions, Supreme Court ruling, passage of major bills - The 20th and 21st amendments), etc. have been drawn from media reports and editorials for the period overlapping 2008-2018.

Politics of Reconciliation

Reconciliation with Political Opposition

Immediately after winning election in 2008, the PPP took its first test of reconciliation. The PPP did not have an outright majority, and formed a coalition with its former opponent, Nawaz Sharif's PML-N, and some smaller regional parties (ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and JUI-F). The power-sharing was unprecedented in Pakistan's history; it was "the first time in Pak politicians' short history - that a winning party shared power with all major stakeholders". Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co Chairman Asif Ali Zardari had prevailed upon Nawaz Sharif to come to polls under Musharraf and kept the word of coalition government. To bring even opposition figures to serve in government, Zardari's PPP kept 'political differences aside for the greater good'(Shah, A. A., 2020).

The PML-N left the coalition in mid-2008 and the PPP did not return to winner takes all behavior. Such events underlined that PPP's reconciliation was not only about saving its own government, but stood in the line of a bigger commitment towards

democratic continuity by PPP with its traditional Persian rival, PML N.

Civil-Military and Judicial Relations

An even greater challenge was possibly to navigate the relations with the powerful military and an assertive judiciary. Reconciliation was the hallmark of the PPP’s ethos, reaching even into the establishment with varying results. The PPP was able to complete its tenure by absorbing these shocks and choosing not to escalate to military pressure, something that had not been done previously.

Another formidable front that got in the way of PPP’s reconciliation efforts was the judiciary. With Musharraf’s fall, an empowered Supreme Court under Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry became a

ferocious watchdog over the government. In amending the Constitution, Parliament led by the People’s Party parliament grew conciliatory by conceding to the judiciary’s assertiveness avoiding deadlock that could jeopardize the very democratic setup.

The effect of this delicate balancing, the democratic system was resilient enough to weather institutional turbulence that would have turned the screw on other governments. Yet they were also revealing of the narrowness of reconciliation: PPP appeared to make itself more pliant, and the episodes highlighted that it can be a very hard truly to harmonize with some power centers (above all an unchecked court) (Naz, S., 2022).

Dimensions of Reconciliation: A Comprehensive Definitional Framework

Perspective	Depth	Mechanisms	Assessment	Key Points
Political (PPP-led Government)	Recognition	Coalition Government, Power Sharing	Political stability	PPP coalition formed after 2008 elections. Power-sharing agreements between PPP and other political parties.
Judicial (PPP and Judiciary)	Validation/Acceptance	Restoration of Judges, Legal Reforms	Judicial independence and challenges	Restoration of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry through long march by Nawaz Sharif, resulting in a more powerful judiciary.
Military (PPP and Military)	Cooperation	Cessation of conflict, Cooperation over National Security	Balancing Civilian-Military relations	PPP made efforts to reconcile with the military after military interventions, though the military’s mistrust of PPP remained.
Provincial (PPP and Provincial Autonomy)	Interdependence	18th Amendment (Devolution of powers)	Strengthened Federalism	18th Amendment (2010) granted more autonomy to provinces, particularly in areas of education, health, and resources distribution.

Elite Theory and Elites

Elite theory, as examined by John Higley, focuses on the impact of elites in producing political outputs, considering the elites in any democratic as well as in authoritarian system. Power is concentrated in a few hands of political elites who monopolize politics and political processes, to the detriment of broader

public interests, and this has been founded on existing major theories by Mosca, Pareto, Michels, and Weber. He takes on the concept of democracies that truly represent the will of the people and points out that more often than not, they act as an arena for competition among the elite and not real representation (Higley, J. 2010).

Role Of Elite Bargaining in Democratic or Authoritarian Regimes

The politics of both democratic and authoritarian regimes are largely pioneered by elite bargaining. It is the process that involves the negotiation by powerful individuals or groups to bargain on policy-making and governance. The supply logic of democratic and authoritarian systems, on the other hand, exhibits stark differences in the dynamics of elite bargaining because of the differences of institutional frameworks; power structure; degree of political competition; and so on. Specifically, this response deals with the role of elite bargaining in contemporary political systems, especially in democratic and authoritarian regimes whereby it creates impact in policy-making and governance (Schmitter, P. C. 2018).

Elite Bargaining in Democratic Regimes

Elite bargaining is often institutionalized through formally mechanisms as political parties, coalitions and parliamentary procedures in democratic systems. They guarantee that the competing interests are put forward and negotiated in accordance with the rules and norms of democracy.

Elite Bargaining in Authoritarian Regimes

Elite bargaining is a process that proceeds relatively opaquer and more centralized in authoritarian regimes. It maintains power concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals or factions which bargain without it clearly taking place within the formal institutional channels (Newson, A., 2018).

Comparison of Elite Bargaining in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes

Aspect	Democratic Regimes	Authoritarian Regimes
Institutional Framework	Bargaining occurs within formal institutions like parliaments and political parties.	Bargaining is often informal and centralized, with power concentrated among a small elite.
Key Actors	Political parties, legislators, and government officials.	Military leaders, high-ranking officials, and influential businessmen.
Transparency	Bargaining processes are subject to public scrutiny and accountability.	Bargaining is opaque, with little public oversight.
Policy Outcomes	Policies often reflect broader public interests due to representation of diverse groups.	Policies tend to favor the interests of the ruling elite.
Examples	Germany, Israel, and the United States.	China, Russia, and Pakistan.

Institutionalized Peacebuilding

Formal incorporation of peace building processes in the social structure for institutionalizing sustainable peace through existing norms and practices is known as institutionalized peace building. This way is characterized with the embedding of peacebuilding efforts in political, economic and educational institutions to create a culture of peace and cooperation. Despite the advantages that institutionalization offers, it is accompanied by its own challenges, which have to be overcome for constructive peacebuilding (Bath, C., 2024).

to the politics of reconciliation that facilitated large scale reforms (Bashir, H., 2022).

LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

Legislation 2008-2013

1. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2008

The intent of this bill was to repeal and replace section 16 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, to amend the electoral processes and rules, and also rules of representation. With the aim of strengthening the integrity and transparency in the elections of Pakistan.

Constitutional and Legislative Reforms

Law and constitutionally, the PPP's tenure and its aftermath (2008–2018) was transformative one due

2. The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2009

This bill was based on previous reform and amended the electoral laws further to make the electoral system more efficient and fairer. It was intended to more precisely specify the electoral procedures and what electoral officers should be doing.

3. The Islamabad High Court Bill, 2010

The concept of this bill was to establish the Islamabad High Court as the dedicated judicial forum for the Islamabad Capital Territory. The law was intended for streamlining of legal processes and boosting of access to justice for the residents of the capital.

4. The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2011

Specifically, this amendment was aimed at enhancing the electoral process through the adoption of procedures designed to render less inaccurate the list of voters and more transparent the results of elections. The chairman argued the audit was meant to improve public confidence in the electoral system of the United States.

5. The Islamabad High Court (Amendment) Bill, 2011

This bill was regarding the amendment of the Islamabad High Court Act, 2010 which was aimed at resolving operational bottlenecks and improving the working of the court. Judges were provided for, and how the administration of justice within the court should be done, was included.

6. The Delimitation of Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, 2011

This was a needed amendment to make periodic adjustments in constituency boundaries when population increases or decreases, and creates fair representation. The intention was to bolster the democratic process by ensuring that constituencies better followed those being represented by the electorate.

7. The National Commission for Human Rights Bill, 2012

This bill proposed creation of the National Commission for Human Rights in Pakistan to promote and protect human rights in the country. It

was meant to establish an independent body to redress the violation of human rights and struggle for the rights of citizens.

8. The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2012

This bill intended to promote the thought free and obligatory training to the entire children inside the age understanding of 5 to 16 years of Pakistan. In larger scenario, the main objective of the program was to increase the literacy rate and to ensure that none of the children is away from the quality education.

9. The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2013

This amendment to the electoral laws was made these further electoral reforms so as to enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process. It was to resolve emerging issues and to make conduct of elections better generally.

10. The National Counter Terrorism Authority Bill, 2013

The objective of this bill was to establish the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) to have the responsibility of coordination and implementation of National counter terrorism and extremism strategies. Its purpose was to unite various efforts of Pakistan in fighting terrorism.

11. The Anti-Terrorism (Second Amendment) Bill, 2013

It was trying to buttress existing anti-terrorism laws with more severe punishment and deterrent against terrorist acts. The aim was to provide the missing legal tools to curb terrorism in Pakistan.

12. The Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill, 2014

The bill contained an attempt to limit the practice of corporal punishment in all educational institutions and all childcare facilities including private for-profit childcare for children. It was being employed in order to protect children against physical abuse and also to make them familiar with the best disciplinary measures.

13. The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2015

This amendment then further eliminated electoral laws to be able to accommodate emerging issues and work better in the electoral process. So, it was done to improve the efficiency and integrity of the elections in Pakistan.

Legislative Reforms in Pakistan (2013–2018)

Important years in politics of Pakistan from the year 2008 to 2018 were those that saw the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as being active in constitutional and legal reform in the country. Some PPP turned out to be challenges which prevented their success but at least they helped in developing the legal framework of the nation during this decade (Bashir, H., 2024).

1. Unification of Nine Electoral Laws into One Comprehensive Electoral Law

In May 2018, the National Assembly unified nine successive electoral laws by passing a law to include them into a comprehensive electoral framework on July 10, 2018. Its purpose was to make the electoral process in Pakistan streamlined and transparent with the fair representation in the democratic setup of Pakistan.

2. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018

This law was signed into effect December 19, 2018 and was intended to protect the rights of transgender individuals. It had enough legal recognition, protection from discrimination, and access to health care and education, which is a vast stride in terms and conditions of inclusivity and social justice.

3. The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018

This Act was enacted on 31st May 2018 to deal with the serious matter of human trafficking. It set up strict punishments for the traffickers and extended support to the victims while bringing Pakistan's legal system to comply with international standards to arrest this immoral crime.

4. The Supreme Court and High Court (Extension of Jurisdiction in Federally Administered Tribal Areas) Act, 2018

It was on April 14, 2018, that this Act extended the Supreme Court and High Courts jurisdiction to FATA so that the residents of this territory have access to the highest instances of judicial authority. This was important in the upkeeping of the rule of law and act of justice to the tribal areas.

5. The Public Interest Disclosure Act, 2017

This Act was passed on August 21, 2017, aimed at encouraging whistleblowing by protecting persons who reveal the information on corruption or misconduct of the public offices. The goal was to increase transparency and accountability of the public sector.

6. The Costs of Litigation Act, 2017

This Act (part of the 23 May 2017 Act), formally dealt with the financial barriers to accessing justice by regulating litigation costs. It aimed to reduce the cost and accessibility of courts to an ordinary individual.

7. The National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017

The intention of this Act, law since October 2nd, 2017, was to create a national commission assigned to the protection and promotion of the children's rights. This was meant to ensure that the policy and the legislation made provision for the welfare of the children in the country.

8. The Alternative Dispute Resolution Act, 2017

This Act was created April 13, 2017, with the laws providing control over the resolution of disputes out of the regular court system. It strove to make the courts of dispensing justice easy and render their office in time reasonably by advocating mediation and arbitration as effective means of settlement of conflicts.

9. The Right of Access to Information Act, 2017

This Act was made to allow for the access to information by the public in public authorities in the promotion of transparency and accountability in government and was enacted on October 16, 2017.

It was able to make the government responsible to the people and more active involvement of the people in democratic processes.

10. Hindu Marriage Act, 2017

This was an enabling Act which was passed on the 17th March 2017 for the registration and solemnization of Hindu marriages in Pakistan. The intention of it was to protect the Hindu couple and to make their marriage legitimate.

11. The Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Act, 2017

Approved by the Governor June 7, 2017, this Act creates a process for protecting witnesses who testify in a criminal case. Basically, this is meant to push people out to give their testimony without fear of being reprimanded which cases strengthen the criminal justice system.

12. The Pakistan Climate Change Act, 2017

This Act was passed in the form of 'An Act XII of 2017' to make the legal framework for addressing the issue of climate change in Pakistan on March 28, 2017. It was supposed to lessen the impact of climate change by practicing sustainable development and by protecting the environment.

13. The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or on Pretext of Honor), 2016

Wittingly constructed to fill up legal loopholes which enable honor-based crime perpetrators to easily escape justice, this amendment was enacted on the 19th of October 2016. It stated that honor crime will not be accepted, and no crime is committed in the name of honor.

14. The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act, 2016

This was, however, also passed on 19th of October, 2016, which gave rigid penalties for rape and sexual assault. It was meant to provide more protection to victims and to make it easier to prosecute offenders.

15. The Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government Act, 2015

This happened on 6th August, 2015 when the system of local governance in Islamabad Capital

Territory was established through an Act. Decentralization of administrative functions somewhat, with more powers to the local communities in governance is what it intended to achieve.

16. The Security Act, 2015

This Act, passed on May 18 2015, brought in regulations of security agencies; counter terrorism; and measures directed towards improving national security. It was a way to meet new security threats and ensure the safety of the citizens.

17. The Pakistan Army Act, 2015

On 6 January 2015, this Act was amended to modernize the military legal infrastructure with current necessities. Of these, a few concerned military personnel's behavior and the operations of the military.

18. The Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2014

Keys passed the amendment to strengthen anti-terrorism law on June 6, 2014, by increasing the penalty and widening the scope of terrorism related offences. In other words, it was an attempt to improve counterterrorism efforts.

19. The Service Tribunals (Amendment) Act, 2014

This Act was also enacted on 6 June 2014 to amend the Service Tribunals Act so as to rationalize the adjudication of service-connected issues. Its objective was to supply faster resolutions and better service tribunal efficiency.

20. The Protection of Pakistan Act, 2014

This Act, which was signed into effect on July 2, 2014, has improved national security by giving the law enforcement powers to destroy terrorism and other grave offences. The court provided for preventive detention and surveillance.

21. The Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Act, 2014

This act (passed on 6th June 2014) legalized the status of legal profession as a profession regulated and controlled, in terms of conduct of a legal practitioner and a barrister under this act. The intentions were to make sure that the legal

environment remained of high integrity and

professionalism.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

List of Amendments and Their Impact

Amendment

18th Amendment

19th Amendment

20th Amendment

21st Amendment

22nd Amendment

23rd Amendment

24th Amendment

25th Amendment

Impact

Restored parliamentary system, increased provincial autonomy, and ensured a federal approach in governance.

Strengthened judicial independence by reforming the judicial appointment process.

Ensured neutral caretaker government for conducting transparent and fair elections.

Created military courts for handling terrorism-related cases during national crises.

Strengthened the Election Commission, ensuring impartiality and transparency in elections.

Extended the powers of military courts for an additional term, addressing terrorism-related cases.

Enhanced the functioning and penalties for electoral misconduct, improving electoral integrity.

Integrated FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, granting political rights and representation to tribal areas.

PPP as Ruling Party, Commitment to Reconciliation and Constitutional Reforms (2008-2013)

Following its return to power in the 2008 general elections, the PPP government in clear and bold terms committed to restore the constitution in its original form. Considering the necessity to incorporate all political parties during the process, in 2009, President Zardari formed the Special Parliamentary Commission on Constitutional Reforms (SPCCR). The main aim of this commission was to modify the parliamentary federal structure of the state to instigate the practice of democracy and to decrease the over density of the power which had been prevailing in Pakistan for so long in the political system.

SPCCR was the first step that PPP took in pursuing reconciliation as a political tool. All members of the commission included twenty-seven who were chosen so that it reflected all political parties in the federal parliament. In this way, the PPP made sure that the reforms had a wide political consensus from behind which would reinforce the country democratic founding.

During its deliberations, the commission proposed constitutional amendments that its members submitted. Over the course of its history the commission held 77 meetings and discussed 385 hours. One was that it was enacted that all its proceedings shall be held in camera thereby its debates and negotiations were private and there was no outside influence that may disturb the reconciliation process. The model of the decision making proved the PPP's dedication to guaranteeing that each political force, irrespective of its size or capacity, had its say on the reforms (Ali, M., 2022).

18th Constitutional Amendment and Restoring the Parliamentary System

The 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 was one of the landmark achievements of the PPP's politics of reconciliation. However, the amendment had been designed to reverse some of the constitutional changes made during the military regime of General Musharraf, more particularly those that had undermined the parliamentary system of government. The amendment aimed at curbing the powers of the president which were boosted very

high during the era of Musharraf by restoring the parliamentary form of government.

It was a very important moment, when the 18th Amendment was passed by the PPP to balance the power structures within the state. The amendment stripped the president of the power to dissolve parliament, got rid of the controversial Article 58-2b, and returned legislative power to the parliament. Apart from it, it also gave more autonomy to provinces by shifting 17 ministries and 47 subjects from the government of the nation to the government of provinces. This proved that the PPP was ready to decentralize and reconcile with provincial stakeholders.

It also heightened Senate's importance and made the federal cabinet accountable to both houses of the parliament. Other examples of this preoccupation are the establishment of Islamabad High Court and reforms in the period of appointment of Chief Election Commissioner. The government also made an attempt to fill up this cleavage between the political elites and the regional parties and through this, also strengthened democratic institutions for national reconciliation (Rizwan, M., 2014).

19th Constitutional Amendment and Judicial Reforms for Accountability

As part of its reforms in institutions the PPP ushered in the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 2011. This was amendment of judicial appointment which the executive and the judiciary had been locked in over almost a long time. The new system involved formation of a Judicial Commission to oversee the process of judicial appointments with a view that the same should be transparent and devoid of the taint of political influence in the appointment of its members.

This is how the PPP tried to create trust among the state's other branches through such reforming of the judiciary.

The importance of the judicial reforms was that they made the judiciary independent with the power to check executive. The politics of reconciliation of PPP was based on the principle that all state institutions must be strengthened without their apportioning given limit (Ali, R. N. 2021).

20th Constitutional Amendment and Electoral Reforms for Transparency

The other important part of the PPP's politics of reconciliation was its election reform agenda. In 2012, the government introduced the 20th constitutional amendment which discusses the formation of caretaker government to conduct the process of the elections. The amendment sought to protect the election process by making it independent, unbiased and not a subject of influence of politics, and as such; it was very important for the health of Pakistan's democracy as it was for free and fair elections and hence recognized so by the PPP.

The amendment also indicated that a neutral caretaker government was to be appointed to oversee affairs of the country up to the day of elections. The setup of this caretaker setup served the intention of restoring public confidence in the electoral process by reforms of the Election Commission and stopping the elections involved with the influence of the political elite. The goal of the PPP was for such reforms to be entrenched so that their inability to be manipulated by any political force and that all political parties, regardless of how strong or weak, would have an equal opportunity of the electoral process (Arshad, S. A., 2025).

PPP's Opposition Politics, Commitment to Reconciliation and Constitutional Reforms (2008-2013)

In the period from 2013 to 2018 the PPP went into the opposition still, the period has been important for the continuance of the party's core principle of political reconciliation. When PPP retired from the power, it indeed had a significant role in designing the constitutional reforms of Pakistan, based on collaboration and unity among the parties. This commitment to reconciliation was at the core of PPP's strategy and it was waxed strong over key constitutional amendments of this time.

Without power, PPP retained its status as a major force and reminded them not to perceive the reforms as one sided but rather as together enhancing the democratic institutions. Within the architecture of consensus building, PPP, as an opposition party, had aimed to synchronize the reforms to the spectrum of politics and to benefit the nation the most.

At this time, PPP also used its politics of reconciliation through issues such as national security, integrity of the electoral process and the rule of law. The party realized that in order to have political stability it had to engage positively with all the political stakeholders including their rival and building reforms that promoted inclusiveness and justice to all. However, the constitutional amendments that were passed between 2013 and 2018 embody such a philosophy, collaboration, transparency and stability for the better part of a century.

21st Constitutional Amendment and PPP's Support for National Security and Military Courts

In 2015, the 21st Constitutional Amendment was passed, which allowed for military courts to be formed that would deal with cases of terrorism in Pakistan increasing the threat of extremism. The amendment was spearheaded by the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) government but given that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was in the opposition, their involvement was indispensable in ensuring a consensus that included diverse political voices, though that did not happen, at least not yet. As a major opposition party, PPP willingly took its role in the politics of reconciliation on board and supported the setting up of military courts to deal with the rising terrorism crisis. Military courts were controversial, but PPP agreed with the need for quick justice in the face of ever present security threats. PPP's support for this amendment is their commitment to national security, on the one hand, and their equally sacrosanct commitment to the rule of law and democratic governance, on another hand. It is noteworthy that PPP's support to the military courts was not unconditional rather, the party demanded greater transparency in the functioning of the military courts and demanded that they function within the frameworks of the law, conduct free justice to all. And in debating the political economy of Pakistan, PPP took a balanced approach emphasizing consensus building and the role of PPP to shape reform which would be fair for Pakistan as well as being beneficial for Pakistan's long-term stability (Iqbal, Z., 2017).

22nd Constitutional Amendment and PPP's Role in Strengthening Electoral Integrity

In 2017, 22nd Constitutional Amendment was forced by the government of its own party to address the working and independence of the body that PPP had long been insisting is key to its free and fair elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). PPP as the opposition insisted that the electoral reforms should have transparency and impartiality, with no party, including the executive forming part of the process.

PPP's stance coincided with its larger politics of reconciliation in calling for reforms that ensured the independence of the ECP. The rationale behind the party's support for the 22nd Amendment can be explained as follows: A transparent electoral process was deemed essential to Pakistan's democratic health and it was considered that though all political parties are not in power, they should be following the same standards. By consistently advocating electoral reforms, PPP also proved its dedication to the integrity of Pakistan's democratic institutions and its character as a reconciliatory political force.

PPP believed it had to establish a system of elections that was free from external pressure on ECP, and that would, in this way, build confidence of general public and political parties about the election process. Clearly, PPP's political reconciliation remained consistent and institutional reforms had been carried out in Pakistan with a view to build trust and ensure fairness in Pakistani electoral system (Arshad, S. A., 2025).

23rd Constitutional Amendment and PPP's Role in Extending Military Courts' Jurisdiction

In 2017, the 23rd Constitutional Amendment extended the jurisdiction of military courts for another two years to continue felicitating in the terrorism related cases. Initially, PPP had endorsed the creation of military courts in 2015, but as their scope was increased, it became sharply critical of them, as these courts have raised fears of the weakening of civilian judicial authority over time.

The nuances in PPP's position served the politics of reconciliation—support national security measures and the long-term preservation of civilian judicial systems. This is not because the party did not want to curb national security, but merely because that they

did not want to see extraordinary measures of this nature becoming the norm, and that civilian courts should remain the arbiters of justice.

PPP’s involvement in the debate around this amendment was indicative of a party dedicated to ensuring that security needs are not harmful to democratic institutions. The party’s constructive approach in discussing the matters indicated that party still believes that reconciliation and fairness have to govern all decisions about the future of Pakistan (Khan, M. M. A., 2024).

24th Constitutional Amendment and PPP’s Advocacy for Stronger Electoral Reforms

In 2017, passing of 24th Constitutional Amendment had aimed to expand the election commission of Pakistan (ECP) more so, giving it some more powers and functions. It contained several novel provisions aimed at changing the process of hearing an election petition, strengthening penalties on electoral malpractices and increasing powers of ECP to maintain the free and fair electoral process.

PPP was such a staunch advocate on electoral transparency on the floor that it supported as a principled matter the passage of the 24th Amendment, even as it was in opposition. In addition, the party realized that democracy needed to have free and fair elections in order to maintain public trust in Pakistan’s political system. PPP’s politics of reconciliation was indeed at the forefront of its efforts in pushing for these reforms, which sought an election both fair and perceived to be so by all political parties and the public.

PPP campaigned, and worked, to ensure strong penalties for electoral fraud and empower the ECP so that the system in place, would assure electoral integrity. The significance of this amendment was

the confirmation of the match championing for transparent governance and willingness to work with the ruling party to achieve common democratic goals (Arshad, S. A., 2025)..

25th Constitutional Amendment and PPP’s Pivotal Support for FATA Integration

In 2018, the 25th Constitutional Amendment was an important reform that intended to integrate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), giving FATA residents the same rights and representation in Pakistan’s political structure. For a long time, PPP had been trying to integrate the FATA, and the party played a key role in making this historic change.

Although PPP still in opposition, it was championing the cause of FATA integration that showed the commitment of the party for the sake of national unity and political reconciliation. including FATA into the mainstream structure of the political structure was not only a policy need for PPP, but was something of fairness and justice for deprived communities. All the regions of Pakistan, irrespective of their geographical or political status, be given equal opportunities, legal protection and democratic rights, so the party has argued.

PPP’s vocal backing for anything to do with the 25th Amendment was in line with its decades-long belief that Kenya needed cohesion to forge ahead as one nation. With the integration of FATA being a major step towards the inclusion of marginalized groups in the political process, PPP’s involvement in this process also brought out its role as the driving force in bringing together diverse groups of people for the formation of pluralistic government (Usman, S. M. 2022).

Principles and Themes of Politics of Reconciliation of PPP

Principle/Theme	Description	Outcome
Inclusivity in Politics	PPP sought to include opposition parties, military, judiciary, and stakeholders for a unified transition.	Helped in stabilizing democracy and reducing political conflict.
Consensus Building	PPP prioritized consensus-building over confrontation, particularly with rival parties and state institutions.	Facilitated the peaceful transition of power in 2013, resulting in a smooth government handover without military intervention.

Principle/Theme	Description	Outcome
Devolution of Power	PPP aimed to decentralize power by empowering provincial governments and reducing central control, specifically through the 18th Amendment.	Strengthened federalism, reduced federal-provincial tensions, and empowered provincial autonomy.
Judicial and Military Engagement	PPP engaged in conciliatory approaches towards the military and judiciary, despite challenges and tensions.	While relations with the military remained tense, PPP managed to avoid full-blown conflict, and judiciary reforms were undertaken to ensure institutional independence.
Restorative Justice	Aimed at healing past injustices by acknowledging the wrongs and seeking restorative measures.	Focused on reconciling historical divides, fostering forgiveness, and moving beyond revenge.
Recognition and Acknowledgment	Acknowledging the suffering of victims and the contributions of various groups towards peace.	Enabled marginalized groups (e.g., Balochistan) to feel recognized within the national framework, helping reduce ethnic and provincial alienation.
Building Trust	Establishing trust between political opponents, institutions, and the people by showing transparency and consistent cooperation.	Reduced political conflict by strengthening cooperation and mutual respect among institutions.
Shared National Identity	Promoting a unified vision for the nation, where diverse groups coexist within a shared identity, often emphasizing national values and democratic principles.	Fostered a sense of shared national purpose, particularly in the context of Pakistan's diverse communities, bolstering democratic values.
Conflict Transformation	Moving from confrontation and division to collaboration, aiming for a constructive transformation of political conflict.	Transformed Pakistan's political environment by addressing past divisions and promoting unity for democratic stability.
Equal Political Participation	Ensuring that all parties, including political opponents and marginalized groups, have an equal say in the democratic process.	Enhanced democratic processes through laws that promoted equality and participation in governance, as seen in the 18th and 20th Amendments.
Mutual Respect for Institutions	Emphasizing respect for the autonomy and integrity of democratic institutions, such as the judiciary and electoral commission, ensuring no institution dominates the others.	Established stronger, more independent institutions like the Election Commission of Pakistan, increasing public trust in electoral processes.
Moral and Ethical Leadership	Encouraging political leaders to prioritize the common good over personal or party interests, upholding ethical standards in their decisions.	The PPP leadership under Zardari and others chose reconciliation over retribution, despite political challenges, setting an example of moral leadership.
Civic Participation and Dialogue	Encouraging public engagement in the reconciliation process, ensuring citizens' voices contribute to the political process.	Helped ensure that PPP's political approach was not solely top-down, but included the voices of ordinary citizens in reforms like BISP and social protection laws.

Principle/Theme	Description	Outcome
Maintaining Political Stability	Ensuring political stability through power-sharing agreements and institutional strengthening, avoiding the return of military rule.	Maintained democratic continuity by implementing power-sharing agreements that helped prevent military interventions.
Encouraging Democratic Norms and Practices	Advocating for democratic norms, including respect for human rights, rule of law, and regular elections.	Strengthened Pakistan’s democratic institutions, ensuring free and fair elections as seen in the electoral reforms of the 20th Amendment.

Findings and Discussion

The present analysis demonstrates that the politics of reconciliation of the PPP and its legislative reforms between 2008 and 2018 have both major successes and major limitations. The most indisputable success was the stabilization and normalization of Pakistan’s democratic process.

But perhaps the most major positive finding is the relationship between the constitutional reforms and federalism and governance. The 18th Amendment and accompanying measures have rebalanced Pakistan’s federation on a basis that is fair to the burden carried by each part of the federation.

A criticism is that in reconciliation there was elite compromise at times at the expense of accountability. Critics claim that the affair behind the back is the PPP and PML N ‘Mukmuka’ (as it is popularly phrased) that was solely concerned with each other’s vested interests and corruption, in turns being in power and not confronting each other for lapses in governance. According to this a limitation, in order to placate the public trust, consensus politics should not be viewed as collusion.

Second, reconciliation with non-political institutions like judiciary and military was very fragile. Often the PPP’s concessions did not result in reciprocity commensurate with the concessions.

Legislative reforms, although an 18th Amendment landmark, have had problems of implementation issues. The unrealized reforms hint at the extent of the change that was possible even in a reconciliatory atmosphere.

Finally, governance quality under the PPP government drew public ire. As was the case with all fronts, reconciliation did not mean effective administration. Yet this record on the day-to-day delivery of services is mixed, it means that when

governance other than the structural transformation fails, these crucial reforms can be undermined in the public eye.

A reconciliation narrative on politics and legislative legacy of the PPP from 2008 to 2018 can therefore be considered rather complex but mostly positive. In accomplishing its primary objectives of terminating many years of political instability and resuscitating a parliamentary democratic ethos the strategy was successful.

Conclusion

The politics of reconciliation led by the PPP during this period (2008–2018) transformed Pakistan’s democracy and allowed for landmark changes in laws and constitution. Making consensus the main goal, the PPP helped create the first peaceful passing of power from one elected government to another (in 2013) and established main safeguards for democracy. Notable advances during this time were the 18th Amendment which put more power with the provinces; giving the judiciary stronger control over government; and changes in elections to make them more open. When in opposition, the PPP endorsed key reforms like the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (through Amendment 25) and improvements in national security laws (by passing Amendment 21), showing they wanted to safeguard the nation, not just their parties. Legislative developments in human rights, government and social justice all mirrored this idea.

Still, it was obvious that reconciliation had shortcomings: in some cases, leaders negotiated without accountability, disagreements between civilians and the military remained and weak implementation reduced the success of changes. People’s unhappiness with how government runs

made clear the distinction between the country's development and what it provided. From 2018, political polarization set in and PTI gained power, changing the political atmosphere, but the legacy of the Constitution—mainly the firmness of the 18th Amendment—kept Pakistan from becoming more centralized.

Although PPP's reconciliation approach stabilized democracy and helped make important changes, it could not solve major problems in institutions or the economy. To move forward, this model needs tweaking so accountability, inclusive participation and rule of law are reinforced, helping the Pakistani democracy to develop further.

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