

# State, Military and Social Transition Improbable Future of Democracy in Pakistan

*It is because social groups and classes, who have the most to gain from establishing democratic institutions in Pakistan, already have access to the state and to the nexus of power, that they have little need for “messy” democracy, participation and accountability. Pakistan may be increasingly dominated by urban middle class factions and groups and has an “urban, modern, feel to it”. Unlike other countries where the rising urban middle classes have struggled for collective social emancipation and democracy, Pakistan’s middle classes, as this paper argues, have preferred to become partners of authoritarian and military governments. Moreover, Pakistan’s experiment with democracy in the 1990s was one that was controlled and dominated by the military; thus, the idea of democracy itself has found few enthusiasts in Pakistan.*

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## I Introduction

A few days following the largely unexpected defeat of the BJP government in the April-May 2004 elections in India, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen gave the 2003-04 Leslie Stephen Lecture at the University of Cambridge. His lecture was entitled ‘The Argumentative Indian’.<sup>1</sup> The lecture, which must have been prepared days or even weeks before the election results, dealt with what Sen called the spirit of the Indian who, he felt, given India’s syncretic traditions, was inherently democratic. He spoke about the Sufis and about Akbar, and about the numerous traditions which India had inherited building a discursive environment, where issues were raised, discussed and accommodated, which made it a natural candidate for the establishment of democracy. Amartya Sen’s argument was based on evidence that he found from centuries of an undivided India and where numerous cultures and religions had incorporated the best of all worlds, one of which was the ability to argue, debate and accept. The core argument which came through in Sen’s lecture, was that there is almost something natural and historical about democracy and the democratic tradition in India as it exists today, and based upon his reading of India prior to the 20th century, in south Asia, more generally.

When the floor was opened up to a question-and-answer session, a young student stood up and said that each year they (the students) were given a Tripos question which asks: “Why has democracy failed in Pakistan?” This student then asked Amartya Sen, that if his argumentative Indian thesis was correct, why then was Pakistan not a democracy? Sen’s reply: “That is a very interesting question, indeed”, which was followed up by “that is a difficult question to answer”, and then by some partial, though highly unconvincing, attempts at an explanation.

Clearly, this is a difficult question to answer and has numerous, partial, explanations, some of which Amartya Sen also touched upon.<sup>2</sup>

Amongst the few most general and partial explanations given for the lack of the establishment of democracy in Pakistan, especially in the first decade after independence, the following stand out: (i) Jinnah, who many scholars consider to be part of a modern, secular and liberal tradition, as opposed to an Islamic and authoritarian tradition, died very soon after Pakistan’s independence and so was unable to fulfil and give what many expected to be a democratic and secular vision for Pakistan; in particular, the contrast is made with India’s first few years of independence, where Nehru was able to impose his vision for India and rule India till 1964, by when democratic and secular norms had been moulded in a Nehruvian frame; (ii) a view is held that the elite who played the most active part in creating Pakistan had migrated from Muslim minority areas in undivided India and had moved to the newly created West Pakistan and established their base there. This political and economic elite had no indigenous roots in the newly created country and so was reluctant to initiate a democratic process since it would have lost out in any electoral contest; (iii) democracy in Pakistan in 1947 and soon after, would have meant that East Pakistan, which had more than half the population of independent Pakistan, would dominate any elected legislature, taking away the power that the leaders in West Pakistan felt was their right, since it was these leaders – most of whom came from north India – who felt that it was they who had helped create an independent Pakistan, both East and West; (iv) because of the low level of capitalist development and industrialisation, there were not many social groups who could have played an active role in establishing democracy, as the large landowners who had political and economic power were averse to the idea of democratising politics; and (v) the most

well-organised institutions in newly created Pakistan were the bureaucracy – large numbers of whom had migrated from the regions which were part of undivided India – and Pakistan’s military. It was the civilian and military bureaucracies which felt that they could best take Pakistan forward, developing it economically and defending its frontiers. This view was especially felt since politicians were thought to be unable to come to terms with their partisan differences and were disunited regarding their views and visions. The civilian and military bureaucracies felt that there was a need to unite the newly formed nation and lead it forward towards economic progress. Moreover, the January 1948 war with India over Kashmir, only strengthened the hand and resolve of the civilian and military bureaucracies in claiming the control of power in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

It is very likely that all these five partial explanations explain why democracy never took root in Pakistan in its early days. And once the early tradition of civilian, and particularly, military authoritarianism had taken hold, it was improbable that democracy could have subsequently dislodged that hold. While these explanations are true, this particular paper does not go into why democracy has not existed in Pakistan in the past, but tries to examine the possible future of democracy in the country. While there is no denying the fact that the experience of the past does have a very strong bearing on the future trajectory of democracy in Pakistan, our focus is limited to largely structural explanations as to why democracy has an improbable future in Pakistan.

A key argument made in this paper is that, while there always has been and will continue to be, a great tradition of active *politics*, even electoral politics, in Pakistan, there has not been and is unlikely to be, a process of the democratisation of politics. This distinction between politics (and/or electioneering) and democracy is crucial to the arguments presented in this paper. We do argue, however, that Pakistan’s society and its structures have been considerably democratised – in terms of greater access by lower social classes – but not Pakistan’s polity. Moreover, while mere formal democracy is necessary though not sufficient to build a more substantive and real democracy in Pakistan, we will also argue that given the historical developments resulting in the military emerging as the most powerful and dominant institution of the state and in the nexus of power in Pakistan, even the possibility of having a working formal democracy, without the intervention and manipulation by the military, seems improbable. At best, Pakistan’s democratic form will be a praetorian democracy, which will continue to be controlled, ruled, manipulated and determined by the military, its institutions and their interests.<sup>4</sup> The military has become incorporated and woven into the fabric of the state, society, economy and structure of Pakistan, as the most dominant of all forms of the country’s institutions and increasingly, the possibility of a Pakistan without the pervasive and intrusive role of the military, seems mere wishful thinking.<sup>5</sup>

The most important argument to be made in this paper, however, is that given Pakistan’s social and economic transition and its impact on social and class structures, we argue that the social groups most likely to demand and struggle for democracy, in order to impose their will on the state, already have access to the state (and its power) through partial state capture, and hence the most likely and “natural” vanguard for democracy has no need to struggle for democracy in Pakistan. We argue, that while there are numerous contenders who want to seize (or share) political power in Pakistan and who actively “do” politics, given

the social and economic structure and the social groups and classes that exist, at the moment there is no real constituency for democracy in Pakistan.

## II Transition, Class Formation and Politics 1947-2005<sup>6</sup>

### 1947-77

Pakistan’s first decade 1947-58 was one where bureaucracy-led and assisted industrialisation took place. The bureaucracy seemed to be the leading unequal partner in the political settlement that existed between the key players, and determined the outcome of policy and its application. Industry was the junior partner in this formation, and other political groups, many of which were nascent at that time, had little role to play in the political economy of the country. While the landlords and nawabs may have had some political clout, clearly economic policy was not focused towards increasing or improving their economic well-being. Much of the bureaucracy was composed of urban migrants from India, and had little knowledge of or interest in agriculture, and felt that manufacturing should receive far greater state patronage. Industrialists, while gaining economic clout through very high profits made in the early years, were never a political force and depended greatly on the benevolence of the licence-raj of the civil servants.

Between 1958 and 1971, the period of civil and military bureaucratic capitalism, the military emerged as the stabilising shell under which industrialisation, with the help of the bureaucracy and the emerging industrialists, could develop further. The very high growth rates in the economy and in large-scale manufacturing would not have been possible without a central command, and the only institution capable of providing that sense of order at the time was the military.

Following the 1959 land reforms, the 1960s witnessed the emergence and consolidation of many political groups and economic classes. In agriculture, the hold of the large landowners may not have been broken, but it was certainly shaken enough to allow other economic categories to emerge. Many of the large landowners had the foresight to read the writing on the wall, and accepted the green revolution technology package introduced by the government as a consequence of which, middle and kulak farmers, along with many other farmers at both ends of the spectrum, emerged as capitalist farmers, who were soon to become a dominant economic and political force, in agriculture and in the country.

In the rural areas, alongside this emerging capitalist farmer we also see the genesis of the small-scale manufacturers, and the skilled and technical workers, the growth of an ancillary service sector in order to service the new economy, and a disenfranchised, landless agricultural wage-labour class. On the industrial side, with excessive profits in industry and an industrial class protected by government policies, we see a great consolidation of the economic power of this class. Interestingly, despite emerging excessive wealth, the industrial capitalist class did not emerge as a political class in terms of seeking political office. Its relationship was that of a partner with the bureaucracy, through which it sought economic gain and wealth.

Hence the political nature of the regime, or the political settlement in Ayub Khan’s Decade of Development, was one where

the military and the bureaucracy governed Pakistan, assisted by allies in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Economic power lay essentially with industrialists, but with the capitalist agriculturists swiftly emerging to stake their claim.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this period also saw the rise of an aspiring, but small, educated middle class that wanted to impart a vision on the political scene, but which lacked the economic power to do so. In Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, it found a leader on whom it could pin its hopes of fulfilling a social and socialist agenda.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-77) emerged from the numerous contradictions of the Decade of Development. His constituency, which varied at different times of his political career, shows how all those social groups and classes which had not been direct beneficiaries in either political or economic terms rallied behind Bhutto. Hence, other than the large industrialists, the military, and the bureaucracy, Bhutto at different times reflected the aspirations of all classes. In the beginning, leading up to the general elections of 1970, and in the first two years of his rule, organised labour, peasants, middle farmers, the urban and rural middle class, and the educated professional urban middle class all supported Bhutto's left-leaning economic policies. The bureaucracy and industrialists were the key "enemies" of the new social programme of the early 1970s, while the discredited military, although not such a direct target as the other two, was marginalised and sidelined. The large landowning lobby, too, suffered the anger of the establishment, and the 1972 land reforms were meant to break their (dormant though aspiring) political ambitions.

However, the political settlement that emerged in the early years of the Bhutto regime soon changed, and the same classes which had been targeted, regained their prominence. The 1972 land reforms did not really break the hold of the large landowners and were more a showpiece political ploy, despite the avowed political programme of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Having abused and insulted the "feudal" landowners, Bhutto brought them back into his fold. The educated left-leaning urban middle class was in disfavour in the Bhutto ranks, although Bhutto persisted with much of his social reform agenda. With massive nationalisation, the bureaucracy was back in favour and began to consolidate its hold over the means of production. The military, too, found favour when Bhutto had to quell the armed rebellion in Balochistan. Hence, the political groups which had been discredited in the early Bhutto period re-emerged as Bhutto needed their assistance, and were ready to take revenge for the show trials of the earlier period.

The industrialists, however, were never welcomed back. The nationalisation of banks broke the critical link between finance and industrial capital, and much of the capital held by industrialists fled overseas. While this class of industrialists was discriminated against and hounded out, not just from the economy, but also from the country, Bhutto's reforms helped to consolidate the small-scale manufacturing process started by the green revolution. Small-scale industry and the informal sector became the backbone of industry, replacing the 22 families of Ayub's era. This urban middle class, which consolidated itself under Bhutto, eventually allied itself with other sections of the urban middle class, backed by the bureaucracy and probably the military, and was instrumental in removing Bhutto in 1977. Thus, the beneficiaries of Bhutto's economic programme led the movement to remove him from power, just as the results of Ayub Khan's programme caused the latter's downfall.

Hence, between 1947 and 1977 the following picture of Pakistan's political economy emerges. Large-scale economic development had taken place, in both urban and rural areas, giving rise to a middle class that was still young and economically prosperous, but was essentially non-existent in political terms. Industrialists, having made great inroads and achieved extraordinary economic gains in the first 25 years, were nowhere on the scene, even in economic terms, in 1970; many had lost their fortunes, while others had fled the country. The "feudals" had increasingly been losing economic power as mechanisation took hold in agriculture, and as capitalist agriculture began to dominate production. Those large landowners who could see the changes taking place and were able to adapt managed to survive financially, while others were forced to sell or rent out their land to the aggressive middle farmers. As a political entity, however, especially under a democratic order, the large landowners did control a number of seats, particularly in Sindh, southern Punjab and parts of Balochistan, where tribal lords held power. The civilian and military bureaucrats were the only political grouping which, despite a small period in quarantine, continued their influence on the political structure of the country. The heyday of the civil and military bureaucracy, however, was still to come.

### 1977-88

The takeover by general Zia ul Haq (1977-88) crystallised the hegemony of the civil and military bureaucracy, not just on the political map of Pakistan, where they had existed previously, but also, for the first time, in the generation and distribution of economic resources and wealth. With political and administrative roles and interests, the civil and military bureaucracy emerged as a key and entrenched entity in the economy. It established and consolidated its role in economics and politics throughout the Zia period, going from strength to strength. Many lucrative positions in the huge public sector were made available to retired and serving military personnel, and it became far easier for private companies to curry favour and make economic progress if they had close ties with members of the military establishment. Military personnel were invited to serve on the boards of companies to assist in negotiating the controls and regulations involved in investment decisions.

This networking paid great dividends both for industrialists and the private sector, and for individuals from the military. From the Zia period right up to today, the personal wealth of a very large number of military personnel has grown in a way that could not have originated from their official salaries. Today, many large businesses and enterprises are owned by retired military officials and they have joined the ranks of the industrialists, thanks to the links established under the rule of general Zia. Moreover, the armed forces also emerged as a collective economic institution, where the different welfare foundations of the army, navy, and air force became more involved in economic activities and even in direct economic production. In economic terms and by amassing huge fortunes, the military was a major beneficiary of the rule of general Zia ul Haq. The image of soldiers fighting to defend the motherland changed to one of serving military generals who were acting as corporate bosses, soldiering over tonnes of sugar, cement and steel.

If the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan prolonged Zia's political career, the Gulf boom resulted in unheard-of prosperity in most

of Pakistan's far-flung regions. While the amount remitted was itself very large, the geographical and locational dispersion of migrants, and hence remittances, was probably more important. Because this money was sent to numerous urban, peri-urban, and rural settlements of the country, it gave rise to economic development which was not concentrated in the more traditional regions of Karachi and central Punjab. The remittance economy permitted millions of individuals in thousands of villages to improve their standard of living by a considerable margin. It also gave rise to previously unskilled workers becoming shopkeepers, setting up small-scale industrial units, becoming transporters, etc. It allowed them considerable upward mobility and resulted in the broadening and strengthening of the middle class that had begun to emerge in the previous decade.

The main beneficiaries of the Zia regime were, then, members of the urban and rural middle classes, and members of the civil and, particularly, military bureaucracy. The large industrialists of the Ayub era also returned to Pakistan, although the nature of the entrepreneur under Zia was considerably different from that under Ayub. Rather than 22 families dominating Pakistan, there were perhaps a few hundred or a thousand under Zia. The industrialists under Ayub may have been richer than those under Zia, but there was probably less concentration at the top under Zia than under Ayub. However, despite this emergence of the middle class and of the new entrepreneur under Zia, political power was clearly retained in the hands of the military with a subservient bureaucracy alongside. Large landowners, too, had made a comeback under Zia, hovering around the political establishment and being allowed some room in the 1985 elections. Nevertheless, the power of the military was endorsed by the summary end to Mohammad Khan Junejo's tenure as prime minister in May 1988. The somewhat unique concept of a praetorian democracy worked rather well for many months, but once elements of the democratic forces began to impinge upon the terrain of the military, the military demonstrated that it was well in control. The period after Zia marks the first real demonstration and formal consolidation of the middle classes on Pakistan's economic and political map.

### 1988-99

In the democratic interregnum of 1988-99 four elections were held, of which with the possible exception of the first, all were highly rigged and manipulated. The intrusive and secret arms of the state and of the military, set about creating political parties and alliances and supporting specific candidates. Moreover, they had a key interest and hand in dismissing both the prime ministers who emerged in this 11-year period. In 1991, these organisations, largely the ISI of the Pakistan military, helped create an alliance of political parties called the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI), which led to Nawaz Sharif being elected prime minister. Nawaz Sharif and the group of people he cobbled together into his political party, were amongst the main beneficiaries of the economic policies of Zia ul Haq and several among of the economic and industrial elite now joined politics. Local, provincial and national level economic actors were now forging themselves into political actors supporting different contesting political parties. The 1990s were the moment where the economic interests of middle and elite Pakistan came to be articulated into politics, and into a desire to use politics for economic gain and for political power.

It is important to state, that this fusion of economic and political power amongst these groups, does not have anything to do with democratic politics. In fact as we argue in a section below, that once this fusion took place, and the middle classes acquired political power, they did not have any need for democracy; democracy and politics need not be coterminous.

Throughout the 1990s, and increasingly so as democracy "failed" in Pakistan, the ISI and other bureaucratic and hierarchical non-democratic organisations and institutions began to interfere in and influence Pakistan's democratic transition. Evidence now about the 1990s shows that what was called "democracy" in Pakistan was more a manipulation of political actors, processes and results, by such agencies, and less any sort of reflection of the "will of the people" or about what people really wanted or opted for. While the new economic groups were staking their claim in the political arena, their participation – as it was of everyone else – was dependent on the space allowed to them by the more powerful and organised institutions in the country. The economic transformation of Pakistan with the rise of the middle class continued, but their ability to participate in the political process was constrained and compromised by far greater and powerful institutional interests.

Economic power increasingly rested with a middle class, but with regard to political power, they had to be junior partners with the military. There were 11 governments in office – and while they were in office one can't really say that they were ever in "power" – during the 1988-99 period, with some governments consisting of technocrats from international financial institutions imported into Pakistan for just a few weeks. Clearly, the power to decide who was worthy of being in government throughout the 1990s, rested with groups and forces who had no tradition, experience or interest with democracy. This charade of who held real power in Pakistan, came to an unambiguous end on October 12, 1999.

### 1999-2005

Under the leadership of general Pervez Musharraf, the military claimed its central position in Pakistan's state structure and political scene, as it had in the past, but far more decisively and unashamedly. The naiveté, which led many of us to believe throughout the 1990s, that the military had removed itself from power and had allowed the democratic transition to continue unhindered – as it has in some countries – received a rude shock with Pakistan's third military coup and its fourth military head of government. In the six years that the military government of Musharraf has been around, major world and regional events have taken place which have had a significant political and economic bearing on Musharraf himself, on Pakistan's economy and politics, and on the process of democracy.

Six years into Pervez Musharraf's rule some trends are emerging which are different to those of earlier years.<sup>8</sup> The most important difference seems to be the almost formal cementing of the role of the military in Pakistan's constitutional set up, with the National Security Council having a critical role to play in the political process. The issue of whether a serving general, the chief of the army staff, can hold the office of the president, has also opened up a debate about formalising the role of the military. With hundreds of serving and retired military personnel in public positions, the individual and corporate interests of the military have also been further entrenched and consolidated in the Pakistani

state set-up. Perhaps, because of the US' war on terror in Pakistan's backyard, one also sees far greater presence and influence of US foreign policy in determining domestic and regional policies. While Pakistan's numerous governments have always towed the US line, Musharraf's government, since it is the main beneficiary of this tacit submission, has taken this appeasement to new heights.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps one of the more significant features of the Musharraf regime, unlike that of previous military governments, has been its ability to carry with it numerous differing social groups and factions. Pervez Musharraf's regime has been supported by large sections of the middle classes (of differing guises – see below); by political actors, most of whom belong to these middle classes, who have had no qualms of shifting alliances, where their politics has been based on opportunism and not principle; by a section of civil society, which considers itself to be “liberal” and democratic, which misled itself into believing that Musharraf represented some form of enlightened moderation in terms of religious sentiment; by the military and the beneficiaries of military rule; and by a small, though powerful, economic elite which considers the policies of the Musharraf regime “forward looking”. Unlike Zia ul Haq, for the most part, religious sections of society have distanced themselves from the Musharraf government on account of his government supporting US foreign policy so blatantly, although they too have had an ambivalent relationship with the military, supporting it at times, and opposing it at others.

### III

## Social Groups and their Location to Democracy

### *Pakistani Military's Economic Interests and their Consequences*<sup>10</sup>

One of the facets of Pakistan's political economy and especially with regard to Pakistan's military, has been the military's growing corporatisation and intervention and involvement as an economic, rather than simply a political, actor. With the growth of Military Inc, we see new vested interests and stakes being created by the military in the socio-political and economic structure that is Pakistan. In the past, with little direct involvement in the economy, the military was merely a protector of Pakistan's geographical borders. As time went on and as the military got further involved in the political sphere, it claimed itself to be the protector of Pakistan's state, nation and domestic political arrangements as well. Along with this, it then moved on to become the sole guardian of Pakistan's ideological frontiers, defining what was permissible under its own interpretation of what Pakistan meant – “Pakistan ka matlab kya?”

Since the military has been in government for many decades in the past, it has also been a key player in the management of the economy, and has been the sole arbitrator and controller of issues regarding the defence budget. It has expanded its role to economic and political development as well, and considers itself “an appropriate actor to enhance political and economic development, especially to fill the gap in these fields due to the absence of any other potent player with the capacity to do the same”.<sup>11</sup> However, it is only in more recent times that it has become an actor, a key one at that, within the economic structure of Pakistan. As Ayesha Siddiqi argues:

the Pakistan military as a major stakeholder in the economy has gradually moved from the traditional paradigm of claiming (the

state's resources from the national budget to a situation where it has built stakes in all segments of the economy such as agriculture, service and manufacturing industries.<sup>12</sup>

Ayesha Siddiqi continues, that “the military has arrived at the point where its business today control about 23 per cent assets of the corporate sector with two foundations, the Fauji Foundation and the Army Welfare Trust representing two of the largest conglomerates in the country”.<sup>13</sup> The political clout that the military has in Pakistan and the fact that it is more frequently a key part of the government itself, gives the military a dominating and overbearing advantage, which creates a very unfair, unequal, unlevel, playing field to its advantage. Because of the military's supremacy in Pakistan's political settlement and in the state, it has far greater power to influence economic decisions, both at a macro level related to the economy more generally, and also with regard to its own specific, micro level, interests.

While political reasons and interests are bad enough for militaries to interfere and intervene in a country's political process, when the military has substantial economic and financial interests and claims, it is less likely to give up control of the state or of its dominating position. Along with excessive allocations of the defence budget for its own interests – to which citizens of Pakistan have no right to information – the military can claim large resources for its own needs, especially when it is itself the government. It appropriates civilian positions and a large chunk of the administrative budget meant for non-military personnel is funnelled through to serving and retired military officers. The newspaper *Dawn* reported that there were “as many as 104 serving and retired Lieutenant Generals, Major Generals or equivalent ranks from other services (who were) among the 1,027 military officers inducted on civilian posts in different ministries, divisions and Pakistani missions abroad after the October 12, 1999 military takeover”.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, the civil-military divide is becoming increasingly divided and formalised in a manner that benefits the military far more than it does Pakistan's non-military citizens. As Ayesha Siddiqi argues, the military's economic interests create “a vested interest that would discourage the armed forces from allowing democratic institutions to function”, and since its economic empire has been constructed on the basis of the military's dominating political and institutional power, further encouragement for the military to enhance its economic power would lead to it increasing its entrenchment in politics.<sup>15</sup> This link between its political and economic role and interests “runs the risk of creating an environment where the military finds it more beneficial to stay in politics”.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, democratic forces in Pakistan now have to contend not only with the military's political ambitions and agenda, but as much with its economic programme and interests.

## Pakistan's State and Society

### *Groups, Fractions and Influence*

This discussion above shows very clearly that Pakistan's military is the most powerful and influential institution in the country. It dictates politics, foreign policy and now increasingly has a deep interest in the economy, making it Pakistan's most important interest group. The fact that the military – specifically, the army – dominates the state and its institutions, does not mean that there are no other contending institutions and social groups who have a bearing on state and society in Pakistan. In the 1960s, the

analysis of the state in Pakistan suggested that along with the military, it was the bureaucracy and the large landlords – often called “feudals” – who controlled the state. In the 1980s, the military was back in power and was the most important component of the state once again, this time in partnership with Islamic groups and a rising industrial and service sector bourgeoisie. The middle class, which is institution-specific and cuts across different, often contradictory, ideological divides, has numerous factions as part of it. Rather than a single or some unified class, it is perhaps more useful to talk about social forces as “fractions and factions”.

In the Zia period, what one can call the socially conservative and religious sections of the middle class, supported the military government, while the liberal and “progressive” elements of this class were against him. With the military back in government (it has always been in power, however) in 1999, it once again began to dominate the institutions of the state. But with Pakistan’s social structure and group formation having undergone considerable change, this time it dominated with the support of a different set of actors and social groups.

If one were to identify the main social groups and actors in Pakistan today, one would probably include the following: the military, Islamic political groups, members of Pakistan’s civil and political society and of NGOs, international powers and donors, and segments of the middle class who are to be found in all institutional and ideological moorings. The military as an institution, has representatives from very poor social and economic backgrounds, as well as from the very well-to-do elite, a position to which many serving and retired senior officers rise; it also has members of Pakistan’s conservative middle classes safely entrenched in the military’s political world view.

While there have been failures of democracy in Pakistan, as well as failures of the state and of governance, and despite the dominance of the military in Pakistan’s state and society, there has also been the noticeable failure of Pakistan’s civil society. Social groups and institutions located outside of government and not working purely for profit in the private sector; groups of academics, intellectuals and journalists; political groups and parties; non-governmental organisations and community and neighbourhood organisations; and other groups which in some way are perceived to be of a liberal bent, working to change/improve society, with some notion of justice, all tend to constitute what is commonly called “civil society”.<sup>17</sup>

Civil society, or at least important sections of it, are perceived to be groups which keep a check on government, and keep niggling the government regarding its policies and positions. The notion of civil society is not static and is a dynamic concept across time and region. What constitutes civil society in one era, may change form. The social and political groups which constituted civil society in eastern Europe in the Soviet era, were transformed into statist and government organisations, often becoming oppressive and as authoritarian as the statist institutions they replaced. Now, new social groups, often in opposition to the first in these countries, constitute civil society. Also, in stable democracies, the notion of civil society is very different and changing, from that found in undemocratic regimes. Although there is a tendency to use the term “civil society” rather unscientifically and loosely, it is not always an easy concept to understand or locate.

In Pakistan, the tendency has been to restrict the notion of civil society to NGOs and other groups, because they are seen to be working for change. Advocacy NGOs and groups, often criticising

government and ostensibly working for democracy, have been active components of civil society, as have writers and intellectuals. Yet, when these same groups have become apologists for government, particularly military rule, and have joined and become partners in military governments, their credentials to be part of “civil” society have to be questioned. In fact one would argue, that once civil society actors join the “other side”, they are no longer part of civil society.

One major reason why the military tends to dominate state, society and politics in Pakistan, is because of the failure of civil society in Pakistan. Like other social actors in Pakistan, members of civil society are eager to be co-opted and “serve” military governments, as has most recently been seen after Musharraf’s coup in 1999. Like technocrats, who perhaps make no qualms of their distaste and distrust of democrats, civil society groups and actors, many of whom had at least joined the chorus in favour of democracy in the past, also eagerly embraced Musharraf and his government and endorsed the military coup in 1999. Important, well-respected and articulate members of Pakistan’s civil society became ministers in the Musharraf government and justified their support for military government at the cost of democracy, by arguing that a liberal and efficient non-elected, undemocratic, authoritarian government, was preferable to an illiberal, inefficient and increasingly authoritarian democracy. For these actors, democracy as it was practised in Pakistan, had failed and was secondary, and what mattered was not a civilian/military distinction, but apparently, liberal values emanating from the person of one general, were preferable to illiberal policies being pursued by elected representatives.

Pakistan’s civil society has had a key role in strengthening and supporting military government in Pakistan at the cost of democracy. Members of the intelligentsia and academics in Pakistan, have done no better and have had no qualms in supporting military rule in preference to Pakistani style disfunctioning democracy. Unlike many other countries, in Pakistan, civil society actors and groups have been collaborationists, not confrontationalists, working with military governments, not against them.

#### IV Urbanism as a Way of Life

In recent years, a number of social scientists and urban planners in Pakistan have been critically examining demographic, political and social issues and the nature and question of transition in Pakistan. Much of their work and analysis has been on the growing urbanisation of Pakistan, on Pakistan’s middle classes and on what Lewis Wirth has called “urbanism as a way of life”. Their basic argument is that Pakistan is now largely urban and social and cultural, and most certainly economic, relations are predominantly urban.<sup>18</sup> This perspective also gives rise to discussion on Pakistan’s middle class and its impact on society. This section of this paper, raises some of the issues that have been articulated by the idea that Pakistan is now increasingly urban, and we try to assess how this urban phenomenon has an impact on state, society and transition in Pakistan.

The main argument that these scholars make, is that Pakistan no longer has isolated “rural” communities or settlements, that there are strong cultural, economic and social linkages which tie in urban and so-called rural areas. Rural populations and lifestyles are now perceived to be part of a continuum which is predominantly urban in complexion and integrated with the

urban and even with the global. Rural areas now have “ribbon like settlements” that are intertwined with the urban.<sup>19</sup> Those areas which still have agrarian economies, have been so densified that they are now being called “ruralopolises”. Mohammad Qadeer calls the process of spatial organisation taking place in Pakistan and elsewhere, where rural areas have lost their traditional form, “ruralopolises”. Ruralopolises are settlements of urban level population densities with an agrarian economy, and is not simply the periphery of an urban settlement, but extends far beyond a city’s region. Urban level densities in rural areas have transformative force, where they “change spatial organisation, the settlement pattern, the form and structure of villages and the land economy, including the provision of housing lots”; one outcome of this process is the “changing economic and functional bases of all levels of settlement hierarchy”.<sup>20</sup> As Qadeer argues, “it is becoming difficult to differentiate urban from rural areas. The homogenising influences of the nation state, the industrial mode of production and the communication revolution have almost eliminated conventional differences”.<sup>21</sup> In northern and central Punjab as well as in the heartland of the NWFP and in Sindh, there are contiguous districts which comprise major cities, medium sized towns and peri-urban settlements, and have formed into a large and significant urban system, with ribbons of urban settlements fusing into one another. Mohammad Qadeer shows that

from Sialkot to Multan, an area 55,738 sq km ... is a densely settled region dotted with cities, towns and sprawled villages and hamlets ... From Gujrat to Lahore and then onward to Multan, one is always in urban presence. Spatially this area is one extended urbanising region, one ruralopolis. The second ruralopolis is centred around Peshawar and extends across Peshawar Valley and beyond into lower reaches of Swat Valley. Karachi to Hyderabad is already a corridor of urban settlements.<sup>22</sup>

For Qadeer, as much as 56.5 per cent of Pakistan’s population is “urbanised by one or the other process of urbanisation”. For him, “villages are being infiltrated by motorcycles, videos, tea shops, snooker clubs, telephones and workshops, namely, the cultural artefacts forged in urban areas... The sum total of this argument is that purely rural population is a minority in Pakistan and even it is coming under urban influences”.<sup>23</sup> Urbanisation emerges as a catalyst for social and economic change and lays the bases “for the realignment of social organisation and the redefinition of social relations as well as cultural norms”. Urban and rural areas are being brought together resulting in the “urbanisation of everybody” and of everyday life, as rural areas assume urban characteristics.

Ali Cheema’s work on social classes on Pakistan over time, shows the location of the urban intermediate class which is an important part of the dominant coalition of classes in countries like Pakistan, and includes the urban lower middle classes, the educated and professional groups, and traders and medium and small industrialists, many of whom have evolved from rural backgrounds.<sup>24</sup> The rapid growth of urban towns and cities in the 1960s in the Punjab came about as a consequence of social, economic and political changes that took place following the green revolution. The political bargaining power of this urban intermediate class had increased substantially by the late 1960s. In the late 1970s, the absence of political stalwarts in local bodies elections “resulted in intermediate class-led factions capturing urban local bodies under the Zia regime, with large developmental funds at its disposal”.<sup>25</sup> Also, “medium-sized

capitalists and traders who emerged as an essential part of the core of urban political factions were able to capture chamber of commerce politics at the Punjab and the federal level. This became an important mechanism to enter national politics for small and medium sized capitalists and traders, who emerged as key members of these fragmented factions”.<sup>26</sup> As a result, many urban local bodies councillors and businessmen and traders, graduated from the local level politics of the 1970s to the national and provincial assemblies of the late-1980s.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence and through this process, the state was increasingly captured by these urban groups, many of whom were in partnership with the rural dynamic capitalist groups and the rural middle class, backed by traders. Along with substantial remittances from west Asia which helped consolidate the economic, social and political position of many rural intermediate classes, and with demographic changes, an urban Pakistan had been formed and consolidated.<sup>28</sup>

For Cheema, this demographic, economic and social transition taking place, resulted in creating “fragmented and decentralised cross-class factions”, and that there was “significant upward mobility into the ranks of the industrial class, by allowing members of the urban intermediate class easy access to state ‘transfers’ and especially state credit”.<sup>29</sup> There was also a change in the overall social profile of entrepreneurs from non-capitalists to capitalists. New social groups were being formed which were very different from the earlier “established” industrial houses. Many of the new breed of industrialists had links with the heartland of urban Punjab and had become politically integrated with the system. Arif Hasan argues that the increasing importance of urban middle classes in Punjab’s politics in the 1970s and 1980s, was underpinned by the socio-economic changes that the agriculturalists confronted, who were dependent on “mandi arhtis” and their transporters who controlled credit as well as the access to mandis with the connivance of the bureaucracy.<sup>30</sup> A new nexus of middleman-bureaucrat-local politician-transporter, emerged in mid-level and small towns in the Punjab.<sup>31</sup>

## Politics of Patronage

Whereas the earlier industrial groups in Pakistan kept their considerable distance from popular politics (although they had close links with the state and its institutions), this new breed of trader and industrialist, was also a political and politicised actor and continued to have strong links with the state as well, although the nature and form of the state had changed markedly since the 1960s and 1970s. In many ways, as a consequence of the social and economic changes that had taken place in Pakistan since the 1960s and 1970s, the state in Pakistan by the time of the mid-1980s, has become a far more participatory and inclusive state, reflecting the changed social and economic relations and modes of production. Perhaps because of these changes, it is also a much weaker state than it was in the 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, urban political parties consolidated their presence and hold on the political map of Pakistan largely through the process of local level elections. Cheema et al, argue that “the accommodation of urban middle class interests continued after the revival of elected federal and provincial governments as there was a steady consolidation of Punjab’s urban middle class vote in favour of Nawaz Sharif’s Muslim League. The political and economic consolidation of Punjabi urban middle class groups was facilitated by increased

remittances from migrant workers in the Gulf and due to fast rates of urbanisation".<sup>33</sup> Politics also, in many ways, throughout the 1980s under Zia ul Haq and the military, became localised, and patronage, personalised. In some ways, the culture of the politics of the local level was elevated and transplanted to the chambers of the national and provincial assemblies.<sup>34</sup> What is interesting, and as pointed out by Ali Cheema and his colleagues, is that while local government (decentralisation) reform has been enacted in Pakistan by the military to centralise its control over the state, it has led to a fragmentation of political issues, localising them, leading "to the reversal of a more universalistic basis of political organisation",<sup>35</sup> making politics simply a game of patronage.

## V Conclusion

The core argument of this paper on the future of democracy in Pakistan, is that since the social groups and classes who have the most to gain from establishing democratic institutions in the country, in order to access the state and its actors, already have access to the state and to the nexus of power. Thus they do not have the need for either messy democracy, participation or even, accountability. We argue that Pakistan's social structure is one where the urban and rural middle classes are already part of the nexus of power in Pakistan, and so they have all the benefits which accrue to groups which would thrive for such access through legitimate means, including the recourse to popular participation and democracy.

There have been two attempts at real democratisation in Pakistan, at precisely those junctures where the democratising forces had much to gain from capturing a share in the state's power. In the late 1960s, as we show above, capitalist development created new classes and new contradictions in the urban and rural structures of society. These new emerging social classes had not been part of the older political settlement. The movement for democracy under Bhutto at the end of the 1960s, took place (and successfully) precisely because the middle class vanguard of the democratic revolution was not part of the nexus of power of the state. The second moment came about under Zia ul Haq, when women and liberal sections of society were active in the movement to oust the military dictatorship since they had been excluded from access to the state and its resources and power, to the extent that they felt it necessary to raise the democratic flag. As long as the state – even a military state – allows multiple groups and classes access to the nexus of power, particularly those groups which can be mobilised and vocal, a movement for democracy in Pakistan seems improbable.

One of the wild cards in the political and social scene at the moment, is the Islamic movement. Ironically at the moment, the Islamic parties seem to be playing a pro-democratic (and in a sense, an anti-imperialist) role since they have taken it upon themselves to confront the Musharraf government, both on account of its domestic non-democratic agenda, and for its pro-US policies. However, the Islamic parties are in parliament largely because of the particular conditions and specific circumstances which existed at the time of the 2002 elections – the US role in the region and Musharraf's support for it, the exile of the three main political leaders, etc. This electoral presence of the Islamic parties should not be seen as a manifestation of the desire by Pakistanis for an Islamic theocratic state; these parties have been resoundingly routed in elections in the past. And while there is a noticeable

drift towards conservatism and even towards appropriating Islamic symbols and following rituals, this need not translate into the electoral triumph of Islamic parties. Leaders from these parties have been part of the oddest of alliances in the past with mainstream parties as well as with the military; these groups are just the same as other actors on the Pakistani political scene. It must also be emphasised, that Islam is very much part of the cultural and social milieu of Pakistan and Pakistan will not move towards becoming a secularised state for years to come, if ever. Yet, Islam is neither a problem nor a constraint towards any move towards a possible democracy; it has only been used as an excuse to abort democracy, an excuse which has been swept away every time there has been space created for people to register their genuine opinions. Our argument in this paper has been that it is largely structural factors, and a politics of opportunism – to which the Islamic parties are also a party – that hinders democracy. Islam is not a constraint.

This paper has also been arguing about the dominance of an urban Pakistan, one that is increasingly non-rural, non-agricultural, and certainly not "feudal". One, where social, economic, political and cultural trends and development are urban rather than rural. We have also argued that Pakistan is now dominated by urban middle class factions and social groups, and has an urban, modern, feel to it. Urbanisation has laid the "bases for the realignment for social organisations and the redefinition of social relations as well as cultural norms".<sup>36</sup> Yet, while this demographic, cultural and social account is real, it has not brought about a progressive political movement which is modern or democratic. Unlike other countries where the rising urban middle classes have struggled for collective social emancipation and democracy, Pakistan's middle classes have preferred to become partners of authoritarian and military governments. These groups have not been a "natural" ally for democrats and have displayed opportunistic (though perhaps, rational) behaviour, compromising at each historical juncture. Moreover, the experience that Pakistani citizens have had with democracy during the 1990s, a democracy which was controlled and manipulated by the military, has found few enthusiasts for the idea and practice of democracy in Pakistan.

Perhaps it would be no exaggeration to state, that based on experience and example from recent years, there is no substantial real and concerted constituency in Pakistan for democracy, and people in general, and the urban middle classes in particular, are largely interested in fulfilling their narrow economic goals and interests, as well as those related to the acquisition of power through whatever means possible. Or, as we also argue, perhaps these classes have partly captured the state and find representation more manageable through alliances and jore-tore, rather than through the cumbersome and less certain path of participation. Whichever way one looks at it, with regard to their antagonistic disposition towards democracy, Pakistan's urban middle classes reflect trends which seem to be against the norm found in other countries and also across time, and are perhaps unique to Pakistan. While there will always be a politics in Pakistan – of the politicians, of the military, of the mullahs and of the common man – there is no reason to expect that there will necessarily be any move towards a democracy. Amartya Sen's "Argumentative Indian", in the context of Pakistan, is a political actor, probably an authoritarian one, but certainly not a democratic one. ■■■

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## Notes

[This is a considerably shortened version of a paper originally commissioned by and written for the Lokniti, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, India, *State of Democracy in South Asia Project* and was part of the *Qualitative Assessment of Democracy in Pakistan* module. The paper was written in response to the specific framework developed by the project and was subsequently reviewed by an independent reviewer and revised. After being accepted by Lokniti/CSDS, I sent it for comments to a number of Pakistani scholars and have received numerous comments, many supporting the arguments made here, and some critiquing the views expressed here. I am very grateful to Kamran Asdar Ali, Arif Hasan, Nadeem ul Haque, Nadeem Khalid, Aqil Shah, Faisal Siddiqui and Hasan Zaidi for their numerous comments. I hope that they will, as promised, join the debate and contribute their arguments for a better understanding of the issues discussed here.]

- 1 This lecture finds itself represented in many of the articles in Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*, Allen Lane, London, 2005.
- 2 Perhaps the main problem with Sen's formulation about the argumentative Indian is, that he sidesteps, if not ignores fully, the essence of power in the context of argumentation and discourse, a crucial concept which just cannot be ignored in that other south Asian country, Pakistan. As Sunil Khilnani in a review of the book puts it succinctly: "The arena of politics is shaped by power (a concept that figures lightly in his work), in ways that can all too often leave reason disarmed" in *FT Magazine*, June 25-26, 2005, London. Also see the excellent review by Ramachandra Guha, 'Arguments with Sen: Arguments about India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 8, 2005.
- 3 Many of these themes are discussed in the following texts: Khalid B Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan: The Nature and Direction of Change*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1980; Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990; Mohammed Waseem, *Politics and the State in Pakistan*, National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad, 1994; Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995; Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, second edition, Oxford University Press, 2004; and S Akbar Zaidi, *Issues in Pakistan's Economy*, second edition, revised and expanded, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 4 Perhaps the term "praetorian democracy" ought to be replaced by "praetorian electoral process", for democracy under the control and rules of the military seems to be oxymoronic.
- 5 The general elections (no pun here) of 2002 and the local government elections of as recently as August-September 2005, only emphasise this truth. Political discourse in Pakistan revolves around how one can "work with the military" rather than contest its supremacy, a politics of compromise – on the military's terms, of course – rather than one of protest and confrontation.
- 6 Much of the material for this section has been drawn from chapter 22 of my *Issues in Pakistan's Economy*, second edition, revised and expanded, Oxford University Press, 2005, where arguments related to social transition and class formation in Pakistan have been elaborated upon at great length. Anyone interested in examining these issues in greater detail is requested to look at this chapter.
- 7 An important mechanism of the Ayub regime, as it was of generals Zia ul Haq and Pervez Musharraf much later, was the setting up of a patronage-oriented elected local government system which created constituencies which benefited participants through patronage and handouts and became an important political constituency supporting the military regimes. For greater details, see S Akbar Zaidi, *The Political Economy of Decentralisation in Pakistan*, Transversal Theme 'Decentralisation and Social Movements', Working Paper No 1, University of Zurich, Switzerland, and Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan 2005. A downloadable pdf version is available at [www.nccnorth-south.unibe.ch](http://www.nccnorth-south.unibe.ch) (then: Publications).
- 8 For a comparison of the three military regimes, see chapter 22 in S Akbar Zaidi, op cit, 2005.
- 9 See Ashley Tellis, 'US Strategy: Assisting Pakistan's Transformation', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 28, No 1, 2004; and Teresita Schaffer, *Pakistan's Future and US Policy Options*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 2004.

- 10 See the extensive work of Ayesha Siddiqi on this and her forthcoming book, provisionally titled *Military Inc: The Political Economy of Generals in Business*. See: Ayesha Siddiqi-Agha, 'Power, Perks, Prestige and Privileges: Military's Economic Activities in Pakistan', paper presented at the Soldiers in Business: Military as an Economic Actor Conference, Jakarta, October 17-19, 2000; 'The Political Economy of National Security' in S Akbar Zaidi (ed), *Continuity and Change: Socio-Political and Institutional Dynamics in Pakistan*, City Press, Karachi, 2003; 'The Politics of Military's Economic Interests', unpublished paper written for DFID, 2004.
- 11 Ayesha Siddiqi, op cit, 2004.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 *Dawn*, Karachi, October 3, 2003. Emphasis added; also see Ayaz Amir's article: 'How Many Generals Can a Country Afford?', *Dawn*, Karachi, March 1, 2002.
- 15 Ayesha Siddiqi, op cit, 2004.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 For an excellent discussion on the idea, theory, existence and practice of civil society, see Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.
- 18 The social scientists and scholars who have been studying social change in Pakistan and have been talking about an urban Pakistan, are: Ali Reza Ali Cheema, Arif Hasan, Mohammad A Qadeer and S Akbar Zaidi.
- 19 Reza Ali, 'Underestimating Urbanisation?' in S Akbar Zaidi (ed), *Continuity and Change: Socio-Political and Institutional Dynamics in Pakistan*, City Press, Karachi, 2003.
- 20 Mohammad Qadeer, 'Ruralopolises: The Spatial Organisation and Residential Land Economy of High-density Rural Regions in South Asia', *Urban Studies*, Vol 37, No 9, 2000, and 'Urbanisation of Everybody: Institutional Imperatives and Social Transformation in Pakistan', paper presented at the 15th Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists, November 1999.
- 21 Qadeer, op cit, 2000, p 1590.
- 22 Qadeer, op cit, 1999, p 9.
- 23 Ibid, p 10.
- 24 Ali Cheema, 'State and Capital in Pakistan: The Changing Politics of Accumulation', in A M Reed, *Corporate Capitalism in Contemporary South Asia: Conventional Wisdoms and South Asian Realities*, Palgrave, London, 2003. This and the next paragraphs draw on Cheema's work.
- 25 Ibid, p 156.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ali Cheema shows that by the 1985 election, the proportion of industrialists in the national parliament had increased considerably, and this was a "very different" industrial class, not like that of the 1960s. Ali Cheema, op cit, p 165.
- 28 For the process of social change triggered off by remittances, see the excellent book by Jonathan Adelman, *Undermining the Centre: The Gulf Migration and Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1992.
- 29 Ali Cheema, op cit, p 158.
- 30 Cited in Ali Cheema, et al, 'Decentralisation in Pakistan: Context, Contents and Causes', draft, forthcoming in Pranab Bardhan and D Mookherjee, 'Decentralisation in Developing Countries: A Comparative Perspective, forthcoming. Also see, Ali Cheema and Shandana Khan Mohmmad, 'Local Government Reforms in Pakistan: Legitimising Centralisation or a Driver for Pro-poor Change?', unpublished mimeo, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore, October 2003.
- 31 See Arif Hasan, *The Unplanned Revolution*, City Press, Karachi, 2002.
- 32 Ali Cheema argues that in the 1960s there was a small, centralised, bureaucracy and a small and politically weak capitalist class, and a consequence of this interaction resulted in "efficient accumulation". This structure unravelled in the 1970s and the state weakened and was fragmented, and there was also "fragmented growth of politically mobilised 'transfer-seeking' coalitions that were bidding for state "transfers". The structure of decentralised corruption was institutionalised by Zia-ul-Haq, who incorporated these fragmented factions in the state structure and further unravelled the rule-based nature of the state" – Ali Cheema, op cit, p 162.
- 33 Ali Cheema, et al, op cit.
- 34 See the excellent work by Andrew Wilder on Pakistan's elections: *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behaviour in the Punjab*, Oxford University Press, Karachi 1999.
- 35 Ali Cheema, et al, op cit.
- 36 M Qadeer, op cit, 1999, p 18.