

**Political Dialogue and Media: A Critical Analysis  
of Dawn's Editorial Page on Charter of Democracy  
(2006) and Musharraf-Bhutto Deal (2007)**

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**Abstract**

*For stable democracy political dialogue and positive opinion making through media are the most crucial pillars. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, our political system is not accommodating to both; neither the political stakeholders involve in political dialogue, nor does media try to develop positive opinion about it among the common masses. That is the reason we are currently in the situation of political deadlock since 2022. This research paper is an effort to analyze the political dialogue between PPP and PML (N), charter of democracy in 2006; and the deal between Gen. Musharraf and Ms. Bhutto in 2007 and the role of the English newspaper Dawn in developing positive public opinion through the articles and columns of its editorial page. For this purpose qualitative approach has been adopted along with inductive methodology, and the editorials and columns have been selected through random sampling. The paper argues that Pakistan's stable democratic future requires more frequent political dialogue and the media to play its role like Dawn played for the charter of democracy and the Musharraf-Bhutto deal.*

**Keywords:** Charter of democracy, Dawn, Martial Law, Musharraf-Bhutto deal, Public opinion

## **Introduction**

After Imran Khan was removed from office as prime minister in 2022 due to defections within his coalition and a vote of no confidence in the parliament, political scenario in Pakistan is still tense. The nation faced a serious economic crisis as a result of the diminishing foreign exchange reserves, which the successor Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), coalition of a motley mix of 13 political parties, including Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML (N)) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), couldn't handle.<sup>1</sup> The continuity of the political democracy that Pakistan was experiencing since 2002 shattered and the general elections couldn't be held on time. This situation intrigued a debate about the incapability of the political leadership to sit together and have consensus about the issues of major national interest.<sup>2</sup> This requires some serious academic analysis to understand the significance of such consensus, especially from the context of the past experiences, i.e. charter of democracy (2006) and Musharraf-Bhutto deal (2007).

Pakistan has unfortunately suffered from political instability ever since its creation in 1947. No political figure could establish the public stature of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the nation's rescuer and rescue it from the abyss of political and economic issues. Additionally, there was constant political chaos and unstable governments for 11 years, from 1947 to 1958. The Muslim League ignored the political lessons imparted by the nation's founding fathers during the freedom movement, believing it to be their innate right to control the nation. The first martial law was imposed in October 1958 as a result of this circumstance. It is an unfortunate fact that the first martial law did not instill any feeling of accountability in our political leaders.

After Gen. Ayub opted to resign, Gen. Yahya, the second martial law administrator, took over. In 1972, democracy was reinstated; however, this also resulted in the imposition of new martial law by Gen. Zia ul Haq. Benazir Bhutto was the next elected prime minister after Gen. Zia perished in an aircraft accident in 1988.<sup>3</sup> The administration bounced back and forth between the PPP and PML (N) over the next eleven years. And as a result of the politics of both the

parties, martial law was imposed once more. Regarding strategies for seizing power and maintaining control, all four military regimes were similar; except the fourth military coup differed in one particular way; and it had to do with the media's slow shift in role. Media went through significant changes during this fourth military rule.

On October 12, 1999, martial law was declared, and the media immediately praised the monarch and denounced his predecessor. However, the media's actions saw a dramatic shift following the 2002 elections. There was a rivalry among the numerous newly established private channels to be the most critical, current, and informed. Moreover, the print media policy was impacted by the modification to the electronic media policy. This research is primarily focused on studying charter of democracy and Musharraf-Bhutto deal from media's perspective, especially the newspaper *Dawn*. This research is an effort to understand the context of *Dawn*'s reaction to these two significant mileposts for Pakistan's journey towards stable democracy and also the role it played in shaping the public opinion in the country.

### **The Dawn Group of Publications**

*Dawn* newspaper was inaugurated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1941, but wasn't published until 1947.<sup>4</sup> It is the second-largest print media group in Pakistan, after *The News*. The three main publications of the *Dawn* Group are *The Star*, *The Herald*, and *Dawn*. *Dawn* is the largest English-language newspaper published in Pakistan. More than 138,000 copies are sold each day, and there are over 759,000 readers in total.<sup>5</sup> The success of this publication can be attributed to its moderate, liberal, and tolerant positions.

### **Why Dawn?**

Martial laws have been imposed three times in Pakistan's history: first by Gen. Muhammad Ayub Khan in 1958, then by Gen. Yahya Khan in 1969, and last by Gen. Zia in 1977. But the print and electronic media did not effectively respond to these martial laws. With no ability to influence public opinion, the military administrations had no need to draw attention from the media. Military administrations had complete autonomy

over their operations. As a result, Ayub's autocratic rule persisted for eleven years. Gen. Yahya Khan, the second administrator of martial law, was too busy living an opulent and happy life to give a damn about the political squabbles between the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Awami League. The third army ruler, Gen. Zia, had been in power for almost ten years, until 1988, when he was killed in an aircraft crash.

The opposing roles of the print media, left and right, against the dictatorial policies of Zia ul Haq and Z. A. Bhutto were not insignificant, but they were not very successful. The fourth martial law case, however, was distinct since public opinion began to gradually change in 1999 as a result of media coverage. Over time, Pakistani media became an increasingly important watchdog to prevent any despotic actions by the country's fourth military government. We can observe that *Dawn* has never been a passive newspaper by using its editorial page as our primary analytical unit. Rather, *Dawn* has always been a premier national daily that regularly supports fair and reasonable opinions. The dramatic change in media policy that took place during the Musharraf government also had an impact on *Dawn*; it was perceived as becoming more open, influential, and objective.

### **The Charter of Democracy 2006**

While the legislatures that were elected in 2002 were set to serve until 2007, the leaders of two significant political parties remained in exile. Religious parties in the country had unrestricted access to steal PPP and PML (N) supporters. Free and fair elections in 2007 would allow democracy to be restored, but under Gen. Musharraf, who wanted to be re-elected as president by the same parliament elected in 2002, free and fair elections did not appear to be a realistic goal. When word leaked out about the PPP and PML (N) leadership meeting in London, the political landscape in the country was deteriorating daily. The outcome of the meetings between Ms. Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif was the "Charter of Democracy," which was signed on May 14, 2006.<sup>6</sup>

The charter had 36 clauses related to the constitutional amendments after 12 Oct 1999 military coup; appointments of governors, three services chiefs, Chairman Joint Chief of Staff Committee, and the judges of superior courts, etc.; code of conduct for National Security Council and National Security Accountability Bureau; free and fair elections; and accountability of ISI, MI and other security agencies to the PM through defense ministry, etc.<sup>7</sup> It was for the first time in the country's history that the two major opponent political parties joined hands against the despotic ruler of their time, apparently in the larger interest of the country and also perhaps for their own benefit.

### ***Dawn and the Charter of Democracy***

Gen. Musharraf did not embrace the charter of democracy at all, and the administration initiated measures to break up this coordination between the two opposing parties through discussions and deal-making. As described in Ayaz Amir's column, 'It is understandable that there is unease in the halls of government, even though the administration was attempting to appear unconcerned by this partnership. The administration is making a lot of noise to criticize the charter; early on, even Gen. Musharraf lost his composure and joined the chorus of disapproval. Such hefty guns would not have needed to be trained on a sheet of paper if there was nothing to fear.'<sup>8</sup> Both sides agreed that the general alterations to the constitution would be void through the charter. Regarding the fairness and freedom of the elections under President Musharraf and the PML (Q) government, both parties' politicians voiced their concerns. Before the elections, Mian Nawaz and Ms. Bhutto made the decision to return to Pakistan together.

The charter of democracy, which was signed by the two parties, was the topic of intense media debate. The editorial in the daily *Dawn* on May 16th made the following observation: 'Since the nation is already suffering from the political turmoil these politicians produced, the army authorities do not see any more issues with the charter.'<sup>9</sup> The remark was spot on, considering that the President understood their psychology

based on his prior interactions with the PPP and PML (N). After MMA (*Mutahida Majlis-i-Amal* ironically Mullah Military Alliance) voted in favor of LFO (Legal Framework Order)'s inclusion in the constitution through the 17<sup>th</sup> amendment, religious parties received backing to establish a significant political presence in the Punjab and the NWFP (now known as KPK), regions with strong PPP and PML (N) base. The same editorial addressed the concerns expressed by the PPP and PML (N) on fair elections being held by the Musharraf administration, saying that any electoral misconduct by the government would only prolong the current crisis and render democracy an unattainable goal.<sup>10</sup>

The nation would revert to the chaotic state that existed under the 1999 military takeover if the elections were rigged by the Musharraf administration. However, the prospect of fair elections was dwindling due to the rumors that President Musharraf will be re-elected by the parliament. The editorial published on May 17<sup>th</sup> raised concern about election manipulation, stating that there was a possibility that Gen. Musharraf might be elected president while still serving as army head. However, there is reason to believe that Pakistan might actually have a system of self-government.<sup>11</sup> Since Gen. Musharraf did not share the military predecessors Gen. Ayub and Zia's distaste for politicians, he had forbidden both leaders from returning to the country during the 2002 elections.

As a result of numerous accusations, both presidents were forbidden from entering their own country. He was now extremely frightened by the decision of both leaders to return to Pakistan. Gen. Musharraf chastised their choice and reminded them of the corruption cases that exist in Pakistan involving them. As noted in the editorial on May 17, 'democracy is the most effective means of ridding the political system of dishonest people. Numerous corruption scandals are making headlines in America, Japan, Western Europe, and India, a neighbor. However, that doesn't cause democracy to collapse or cause elections to be delayed.'<sup>12</sup> However, just like other military dictators, Gen. Musharraf fell prey to the ideology that claimed he alone was the greatest for the integrity and interests of the country and that all politicians were dishonest and

shouldn't be permitted to hold office. To lead them in the proper direction, he must stay above them. This served as the primary motivation for the president's reelection. In order to change the methods of the politicians, he desired to retain total control over authority. Gen. Ayub introduced "basic democracy" in the same way as Gen. Musharraf did, using the phrase "essence of democracy."

The presidential re-election question cast doubt on the likelihood of the 2007 elections. The editorial on May 20th stated, "It appears that the upcoming elections will be rigged." The leaders of the PML (N) have often stated that the elections may be delayed by a year; nonetheless, the announcement of the president's reelection is further heightening concerns regarding the future of democracy in the nation. Is it time to bid democracy adieu?<sup>13</sup> After his death, Jinnah's country, whose foundations were set by a constitutionalist, would be ruled in an unconstitutional, apolitical, and immoral manner. In addition to being against the constitution, the presidential reelection presented a moral dilemma for the political establishment. In actuality, the nation had suffered greatly as a result of numerous military takeovers, which threatened the democratic system, abused its political authority, and prevented democracy from establishing itself. As Javed Hussain observed, 'It is frequently stated that the conflict is too serious a matter to be left to the Generals. As our own country has convincingly demonstrated, the Generals' performances to deal with matters of politics, peace, and economy are even worse. National politics have taken on the role of the military's housekeeper, and in order to escape this predicament, political parties had to make amends.'<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the charter of democracy was an expression of hope for the nation's democratic future, one in which the nation's elder statesmen would take responsibility for their past transgressions and instill fresh hope in the nation. They ought to acknowledge that, at one point or another, they made blunders from which the country suffered greatly. In his column Javed Hussain, the former ambassador voiced optimism for the future, 'We should be optimistic by the recent signing of the democratic charter in London by former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Theoretically, the

ratification of this charter will not only help to establish a time of stable democracy across the country, but it will also stop political parties from making the same mistakes that in the past allowed military takeovers.’<sup>15</sup> The union of two opposing political parties was encouraging for the political climate of the nation. The 36 points of the charter largely dealt with Gen. Musharraf’s proposed constitutional reforms and the 2007 elections that were soon to be held.

In his column, Kunwar Idris raised an intriguing point, ‘according to the signed charter of democracy, the prime minister alone has the authority to appoint the heads of the armed forces, while parliamentary committees, the bar, and the opposition were involved in the selection of Supreme Court judges and chief election commissioners. History has taught Nawaz Sharif nothing.’<sup>16</sup> Because Gen. Musharraf was chosen by Mian Nawaz Sharif through the dismissal of Gen. Jahangir Karamat, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the disregard for Gen. Ali Kuli Khan, a senior of Gen. Musharraf. And the first and primary cause of the October 12, 1999, coup was the selection of Gen. Zia-ud-din, a General, lower on the list, to succeed Gen. Musharraf. However, this plan was thwarted when the army chose to defy it and seize control of the nation’s executive branch, overthrowing the Mian Nawaz Sharif government. Political parties and the people as a whole needed to work together for the restoration of true democracy (as opposed to the quagmire democracy that was reinstated in 2002), even though the politicians’ attitudes did not appear to have changed.

As Ghayoor Ahmed said in one of his columns, ‘It is time to recognize that the dictatorial form of government is more prone to division and mistrust, and a nation like Pakistan, which has been destroyed since its founding by deprivation, illiteracy, dispossession, and the rejection of fundamental human rights, is likely to descend into anarchy. Thus, it is imperative that we learn from our previous mistakes and refrain from ruthlessly reserving the nation’s democratic institution. It goes without saying that democracy is required in the current world, not an option.’<sup>17</sup> The Pakistani army, which regards itself as the protector of the country’s political stability and



security, has been interfering in governance under the pretext of political incompetence and corruption, thereby undermining democratic progress and political growth. Ironically, though, the army did nothing to change the situation while it was in charge.

The union of the two political parties, was another notable development in our nation's political history, as the parties had previously engaged in oppositional campaigns and were fierce political adversaries. In essence, the Muslim League was a right-wing party that promoted Muslim nationalism, the two-nation theory, and Pakistani ideology, whereas the Pakistan Peoples Party was founded on Bhutto's socialist theories. It didn't appear that the two parties would remain united for very long. As Anwer Syed noted, 'although it would be difficult to establish and sustain, we may conclude that a cooperation between them in governance need not be ruled out.'<sup>18</sup> Later on, as a result of this disagreement, both parties broke away from their coalition in accordance with the democratic charter. However, this charter worried Gen. Musharraf about allowing the political parties to run in the upcoming elections. For this reason, Ms. Bhutto was permitted to enter the 2007 elections upon her return to the country.

The 2007 elections offered fresh hope for democracy's return. Even if the National Security Council and article 58-2(b) posed a threat to democracy, the president's deployment of these two instruments of state had rendered the idea of popular sovereignty laughable by placing elected officials under military rule. However, as our past demonstrates, these kinds of tyrannical laws are never sustainable. The editorial of June 25 noted that 'Since the 1973 constitution was adopted by the people's elected representatives, it has endured all highs and lows.'<sup>19</sup> 58-2 (b), LFO and NSC, these kinds of constitutional aberrations only make matters worse, when the country has to start over every time a Bonapartist leaves office. In our political history, Gen. Ayub's own constitutional modifications were broken when he gave Gen. Yahya the authority. The constitution's amendments made by Gen. Zia were removed by his own protégé, Mian Nawaz Sharif. Because the military despots brought these alterations to the constitution for their own personal gain, they did not last. The 1973 constitution,

which was established by the People's Representative Parliament, is still in effect today.

These laws are only beneficial to the authoritarian who enforces them; Gen. Musharraf's powers were only expanded by the 17th Amendment. With those weapons in his possession, President Musharraf played the most significant and pivotal role in the post-election scenario. According to I. A. Rehman, 'the president is solely responsible for the post-election system, particularly if he has military leadership authority over the constitution. The primary goal of the general elections was effectively undermined if the assembly chosen in the 2002 elections chose to re-elect Gen. Musharraf. Not only do we need to know if the current assemblies have the right to re-elect the president, but also, if doing so won't deny future assemblies the opportunity to complete the general election process.'<sup>20</sup> This will just prolong the army's arbitrary reign. In spite of all of his assurances, General Musharraf extended his reign immediately following the army coup on October 12, 1999, citing the preservation of the integrity and interests of the country. With the pseudo-elections of 2002, the pledge to bring back the fundamentals of genuine democracy was not fulfilled.

Because of General Musharraf's stronghold on the nation's politics, the democracy that was restored through those elections was a hybrid of military and civil society. Being both the president and the army head, Gen. Musharraf continued to be the most powerful and decisive figure. With the establishment of the NSC and the imposition of the LFO, he gave himself considerable authority prior to the 2002 general elections. The reinstatement of article 58-2 (b) through the application of LFO, empowered the president to dismiss the elected government. Despite the Supreme Court's May 2000 ruling exempting the General from assembly approval of his LFO, he nevertheless sought the elected assembly's consent to change the constitution in a totalitarian manner.<sup>21</sup> The MMA led opposition was also a result of the army in the assembly, despite the opposition's protests against these autocratic developments. Following nearly a year of political impasse, the opposition gave consent to vote for the 17<sup>th</sup> amendment

(inclusive of LFO and NSC Award) while in exchange, Gen. Musharraf agreed to remove his uniform until December 31, 2004. However, the General did not fulfill his commitment to take off his uniform, and he chose to continue leading the army in the greater good of the country. The uniform, he said, was like a second skin to him.<sup>22</sup> Gen. Musharraf appeared to be more confident in the use of his autocratic decree even during his second period of rule. His degree of confidence was demonstrated when he declared that the current legislature could re-elect him as president. He knew full well that he had the current assembly in his pocket and could use it for whatever purpose, but that following the 2007 elections, he could feel a little more obligated to the newly elected MPs.

The president has made adequate preparations so that, in the event that he is elected, no assembly could pose a threat to him because he is armed with the 58-2(b) weapon. Furthermore, this armament was more than sufficient to set any elected assembly in motion. The preceding instances demonstrate how our presidents, both military and civilian, effectively used this article to achieve their intended goals. The president, who was also the army head at the time, was unwilling to take off his uniform. Since his primary power was concealed by his outfit, it's possible that he knew that his transformation would take him back to his hometown. As he was taking off his uniform before to the 2008 elections, the elected assemblies decided to impeach him, which resulted in his resignation.<sup>23</sup> Gen. Musharraf also did not give much thought to the charter of democracy since he was fully aware of the internal division and power-lust of our political leaders. For this reason, he delicately began to make deals with the PPP leadership, which ultimately led to the split of the PPP and PML (N). Compared to his military predecessors, this fourth military dictator really governed the government with more tact since he had the political acumen of Gen. Ayub and the poise of Gen. Zia.

He continued to be America's favorite and had the backing of the nation's liberal elites because of his image as a progressive and enlightened leader. However, he had excellent influence over the religious parties. He used them to break the PPP and PML (N)'s support base in Punjab and Sind, but he also kept them dependent on the army to help them establish

themselves in the two provinces. Without the army's backing, PML (Q) and MMA could never have reached such a significant number in the parliament. During this second phase, the daily *Dawn* played a crucial part in all of the autocratic actions of the government that supported the military. In addition to being openly discussed, all of the key political topics were also harshly condemned in the newspaper's editorials and articles. When it was possible, fair comments were also made. This was particularly true during the political impasse between the government and the opposition over the uniform and LFO issues, when many good suggestions were made in both the paper's editorial and column sections. There was much debate about the charter of democracy, with many pointing out its important features and how they would affect future developments in addition to its benefits. The cordial greeting following the military takeover has now evolved into a preference for the same politicians to be allowed to return to their home country.

#### ***Dawn* and Musharraf-Bhutto Deal**

The PPP and the PML (N) signed the charter of democracy on May 14, 2006, which offered new optimism for the 2008 elections. Despite the fact that this political activity occurred outside of the country, it was nevertheless necessary because there was little to no rivalry amongst the political parties in the 2002 election. Due to their leadership being in exile, the two main parties, the PPP and PML (N), were unable to receive any meaningful mandates. The military government helped PML (Q), the king's party, and the religious groups break up the PPP and PML (N) voter base. The country could clearly see that the pledge to bring back true democracy was untrue. The public therefore applauded the PPP and PML (N) signing of the charter of democracy, which was eventually joined by numerous other Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) parties.<sup>24</sup> The authorities disseminated rumors of a settlement between Musharraf and Ms. Bhutto as the charter of democracy was being signed. Ms. Bhutto refuted the claims, saying that even if Musharraf is attempting to reach an agreement, she is not open to doing business with a military regime. When the media began to disseminate stories of a meeting between Ms.

Bhutto and Gen. Musharraf, PPP kept telling PML (N) that all these speculations are false. The political parties that had ratified the democratic charter were dealt a blow by these findings.

However, others in Pakistan who were looking forward to the next elections were not interested in hearing about the agreement. When Ms. Bhutto revealed the arrangement on August 11, 2007, it sparked a flurry of irrational remarks and conjecture.<sup>25</sup> The general consensus was that the PPP chairperson had betrayed the country's interests and cut a deal with a military ruler in order to further her own political ambitions. Because she promised in the charter not to support military regimes or governments that are sponsored by them, nor to ask for military assistance in order to seize power, PML (N) saw this as a betrayal of the democratic charter.<sup>26</sup> The media saw the deal in both favorable and negative light. The editorial page of the daily *Dawn* published thoughts and accorded them weight. In a brief discussion, Kaiser Bengali's column judged the arrangement to be necessary at the time. Kaiser Bengali thoughtfully examined the political requirements of both Ms. Bhutto and Gen. Musharraf. Without the assistance of the army, the PML (Q) and MMA could never have garnered the support of the Pakistani people or be present in such large numbers at the national parliament. The president desperately required legitimacy, thus, the PPP was the only political, moral, and national authority from which the General could obtain the necessary support for its reelection to the presidency. However, in light of the historical lessons, this was the ideal time to work for PPP. PPP was aware that no popular movement or political party could cause the military to unilaterally resign from government and cede control to political parties. There must be a discussion about the shift.

Keeping in mind the earlier instances, Ms. Bhutto chose to follow the bargaining approach. Kaiser remarked in 1977 that APDM seemed to be a PNA rebirth. Another coup was brought about by the PNA's reluctance to engage in talks with Z. A. Bhutto. Another military takeover is a risk associated with the APDM's comparable unyielding struggle.<sup>27</sup> Z. A. Bhutto spearheaded a massive political party campaign against Ayub, and as she was unwilling to make any concessions to the

military dictator, she also installed Gen. Yahya as a military ruler. Thus, PPP has chosen the proper course of action in their negotiations with Gen. Musharraf to compel him to remove his uniform. Negotiations with Gen. Musharraf were urgently needed, particularly as he was prepared to engage in talks with PPP. The editorial board of the newspaper *Dawn* likewise viewed the news of the 'deal' favorably and suggested that it receive public approval to have a moral foundation. The editorial went on to say, 'this deal is a chance to remove article 58-2(b), and terminate the presidential power to dismiss the elected Prime Minister.'<sup>28</sup> The NSC ought to become an advisory group and fall under civilian supervision. There should be free and fair elections conducted with an impartial electoral commission and caretaker administration.

Even though the *Dawn* newspaper saw the agreement favorably and saw it as a move in the right direction for democracy, it also allowed for opposing viewpoints. Ayaz Amir viewed the agreement between Ms. Bhutto and Gen. Musharraf with extreme skepticism and wrote in his column that 'Gen. Musharraf had planned a cunning ploy against the Pakistani people in order to win reelection to the assemblies, which were about to expire. He has successfully tethered the Daughter of the East and the Darling of the West to his chariot in order to achieve his goal. It's an excellent plan. Mohterma wants to be cleared of all charges of corruption and money laundering that she will have to confront in, God knows which international tribunals.'<sup>29</sup> The General wants to keep his skin intact.' It is a reality that the people of Pakistan have lost hope after learning about the Musharraf-Bhutto deal because the terms of the agreement are still unclear. What compromises have been made on this deal? It remained a puzzle. There were lots of stories floating around, and there was a lot of controversy around the president's reelection. The arrangement made by Ms. Bhutto to run for president again was derided in the nation's political circles. General Musharraf did not keep his earlier pledges. His ill-advised referendum brought an end to his pledge to restore true democracy, and the rigged elections of 2002 made good on his vow to give more authority to the people.

Thus, the people's suspicions were not unfounded. As Kh. Sajid Saleem pointed out so well in his column, 'people are anxiously awaiting the elections because they dread instability both before and after. Gen. Musharraf needs to understand that elections must be fair and honest in order for losers to accept the results in order for democracy to function. Whether it was accomplished by negotiating or by using the democratic charter, holding free and fair elections was the main popular demand made of Gen. Musharraf at the time.'<sup>30</sup> Because there were reports at the time that an emergency would be declared, which would undoubtedly force elections to be postponed or cast doubt on their impartiality. The political charges over the independence of the higher judiciary, the escalating radical violence, particularly suicide bombings, and the US threat to invade Pakistan's tribal regions provided sufficient justification for the declaration of a state of emergency.

The daily *Dawn's* editorial board offered a very critical assessment of the prospect of delaying elections. 'The government ought to take into account the fact that delaying elections will not only heighten the sense of confusion already present but also make it more challenging for the country to successfully reestablish democracy. The nation is currently under severe pressure, which only the administration equipped with popular approval could handle.'<sup>31</sup> When the Sharif brothers were granted permission by the Supreme Court to return to their native country on August 23, 2007, the government's position grew increasingly precarious. This move not only strengthened the PML (N)'s position and provided them with significant political backing to return to Pakistan, but it also further confounded the Musharraf administration and maligned the PPP. Because the Pakistani people and the Supreme Court's decision in favor of the Sharif brothers did not receive a positive reception to the announcement of Ms. Bhutto's bargain, PML (N) gained political score, while PPP's standing was hurt and future elections became more difficult for them. The August 24 editorial shed light on how the Supreme Court's decision would affect political parties, saying that 'under the current situation, Ms. Bhutto's acceptance of the bargain between her and Gen. Musharraf will not increase her popularity. With the Sharif brothers return, Ms. Bhutto will no

longer be able to take for granted the PPP's smooth transition, which was most likely arranged to facilitate her accord with the government.<sup>32</sup> As this concept loses traction, PPP's political status will likewise deteriorate.

The political climate in the country and the media have undergone a discernible change. This is especially true of the daily Dawn's interpretation of the Supreme Court's decision that the exiled Sharif brothers were the corrupt political figures that Gen. Musharraf removed from office and that they were returning as political heroes to save the nation from a military dictatorship. This is indicative of the mindset prevalent in our country and the media: military rule is initially welcomed as a means of eliminating dishonest politicians, but eventually, the populace wants to return to their political representatives in order to end military rule.

### **Conclusion**

In actuality, since Quaid-e-Azam's passing, our nation has consistently lacked a genuine political leadership. Military repeatedly intervened, taking full advantage of political corruption. Our politicians welcomed them as well, and they received military help to maintain and consolidate their own authority. The parliament, the executive branch, the judiciary, and the press are the four institutions that function well in contemporary democracies, according to Tasneem Noorani. Whether there is an elected or non-elected administration in our nation, the army assumes the role of these four institutions. The coup is explicit when it comes to non-elected administration and tacit when it comes to elected government.<sup>33</sup> The primary concern for the country and the media was whether the elections that follow the agreement will be free and fair and lead to democracy or manipulated and lead to a government that is mostly military and partially civilian, similar to what happened in the 2002 elections. There is renewed hope that PPP will not be the only option after the Supreme Court decided to permit the Sharif brothers to return to the country. There would be fierce competition from PML (N) as well. The



daily *Dawn* performed a very good role in representing to the government the aspirations and anxieties of the people.

Pakistan has failed to establish stable democracy throughout its 76 years of independence, either as a result of overt or covert military meddling in the political system or because the country's political elite has shown unable of politely opposing such meddling. Every nation's political leadership frequently engages in corruption and other wrongdoings, yet democracy remains stable and strong as long as the political process continues. The Musharraf-Bhutto agreement and the Charter of Democracy guaranteed the continuation of the terms of the following two governments, the PPP (2008–13) and the PML (N) (2013–18). Political discourse is crucial to the democracy's stability, and *Dawn* has maintained this position throughout the two events. In addition to supporting political agreement between the PPP, PML (N), and Musharraf administration, *Dawn's* editorials also attempted to refocus these discussions on ways that would best serve the nation's democratic future. *Dawn* fulfilled the job of an opinion leader by putting several points of view on the table, encouraging constructive debate, and allowing the general public to make decisions about their own future.

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