



**Electoral Forms without Democratic Substance:
The Persistent Paradox of Elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (1932–1977)**

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Abstract

The electoral history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North-West Frontier Province) formally began in 1932, following its elevation to a Governor's province under British rule. This study traces the province's political trajectory from that inaugural era of limited franchise through to the turbulent legislative crises of 1977. Adopting a descriptive historical lens, the paper investigates a central paradox of this forty-five-year period: the evolution of electoral "forms" without democratic "substance." The study navigates the shifting constitutional frameworks—from the colonial Government of India Act to the constitutions of Pakistan—and analyzes how these structures shaped political outcomes. It identifies the major stakeholders, from the early dominance of the Khudai Khidmatgars to the later ideological polarization between the National Awami Party (NAP) and centralist forces. Beyond a mere chronology of results, this paper critically examines the socio-political contexts of each election, highlighting how the promise of universal suffrage was frequently undermined by electoral irregularities and central interference. Ultimately, the study underscores how the struggle for genuine representation defined the province's formative political years.

Keywords: Electoral politics, KP, NWFP, Elections, Provincial politics

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Introduction

The political history and social landscape of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly the North-West Frontier Province, or NWFP) has long been defined by its distinct geostrategic location and a unique socio-political configuration. While the entire Pashtun belt has frequently been interrogated and critically examined through the lens of security and conflict, its institutional political evolution—specifically its electoral history—remains a critical yet under-investigated academic realm. Thus, making sense of the electoral pathways in the province offers significant insights into the development of democratic norms, the influence of local elites, and the friction between NWFP's provincial autonomy and central authority in a federal state like Pakistan. It is noteworthy that the administrative history of the region underwent a significant shift in the early 20th century. On November 9, 1901, the NWFP was administratively separated from Punjab. However, rather than being granted the status of a full province, it was initially placed under the authority of a Chief Commissioner, denying it the legislative powers enjoyed by other provinces in British India. It was only after the intense civil disobedience campaigns led by the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement (KKM) that the British administration revisited this status. Consequently, on December 1, 1931, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced the elevation of NWFP to a Governor's province. This transition – elevation to a Governor's province – marked a significant moment for representative politics in the Pashtun belt. Sir Ralph Griffith, the incumbent Chief Commissioner, was appointed as the first Governor on April 18, 1932. On the same day, the Viceroy of India, Lord Willingdon, inaugurated the NWFP Legislative Council, comprising 28 elected and 12 nominated members (Ahmad, 2011). Thus, NWFP formally attained the status of a full province in 1932 (PIPS, 2008), marking the genesis of its electoral history (Ahmad, 2010).

From this major transition in 1932 until the imposition of martial law in 1977, the populace of the province experienced a complex evolution of electoral politics, which includes the introduction of the Government of India Act 1935, the problematic elections of 1946 leading to Partition of British India in 1947, and the post-independence struggle for constitutional stability and continuity. It is evident that throughout these turbulent times, the electoral process in the region was often characterized by an enduring tension between the powerful feudal elites and emerging ideological social and political movements. The political scene evolved against a backdrop of changing and evolving legal frameworks. This study has set a humble take to achieve: it aims to provide a descriptive historical analysis of this forty-five-year period (1932 - 1977). It does so by examining the major power players, the changing nature of the franchise, and the instances of electoral irregularities. Consequently, this paper seeks to examine how the foundations of the province's modern political system were laid. It explores not only the statistical outcomes of these elections but also the socio-political contexts that influenced voter behavior and government formation in KP province.

The Genesis of Electoral Politics: The 1932 Polls

The inaugural elections for the NWFP Legislative Council took place in April 1932. The electorate was defined by a limited franchise, restricting voting rights to males over the age of 21. Qualification was further tied to socioeconomic status: voters were required to pay an annual tax of 10 rupees, possess property worth 600 rupees, or meet defined educational standards ("The first elections," 1934). Local issues and rivalries, tribal divisions, factional orientations, and religious issues played an important role in determination of election results (Ahmad, 2011). The Khudai Khidmatgars (also known as Red Shirts) was the only organized group in the province at that time but most of its top leaders were imprisoned and it boycotted

the elections. Polling stations were set in police stations, and the voters had to cover long distances on foot, in lorries or horse carts to cast their votes. As the KKM's boycotted the election and dissuaded voters from voting, only 10-15 % voters took part in the elections. The election results were surprising for many as strong candidates suffered defeat at the hands of less popular and less known figures ("The first elections," 1934).

The Legislative Council had 40 members with 28 elected and 12 nominated. Out of them, 22 were Muslims, 5 Hindus and 1 Sikh. Among the 12 nominated members, 5 were Europeans, 1 Muslim official, 4 Muslims non-official, 1 Sikh official, and 1 Sikh non-official (Shah, 2007). After the legislative council met, its members merged into four groups. Nine members formed Liberal Party, nine members formed Progressive Party, seven Hindu and Sikh members grouped into Minority Party while the remaining members formed nationalist block (Ahmad, 2011).

Ghafoor Khan from Swabi became the first President of the Council. Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum was appointed as the Minister in charge of the Transferred Departments, while Sheikh Abdul Hamid, a member of the Provincial Civil Service, was appointed as the Council's Secretary (Shah, 2007).

The Government of India Act 1935: The 1937 Elections

The 1937 elections were held under the Government of India Act 1935. Congress¹ won largest number of seats but it, as per policy of the All-India Congress, refused to form the ministry. Thus, the governor invited Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Khan to form government which he did (Shah, 1996). Muslim League had been trying to form its NWFP chapter since 1934, but it could not do so, thus it did not field any candidate in NWFP for these elections. However, it fielded its candidates in the by-elections in Mardan and Hazara and won the Hazara seat (Ahmad, 2011). Out of total 50 seats, Congress won 19 seats, Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party (HSNP) 7 seats, the Independent Party 2 seats, while the remaining 22 seats were won by independent candidates with 21 Muslims and 1 Hindu (Ahmad, 2010).

As stated earlier, Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum initially formed the ministry. However, Dr. Khan Sahib, being the leader of Congress in the province. later moved a successful no-confidence motion against the government to replace Qayyum as the chief minister (Shah, 1996). Dr. Khan Sahib, who also secured the support of HSNP, got the no-confidence motion passed with 27 votes against 21 votes (Ahmad, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Sultana, 2014). The Congress ministry ruled the province from 7th September 1937 to November 1939 when it resigned following the decision of the central leadership (Shah, 1996).

In these elections, Muslim League badly failed to establish itself as the sole representative body of the Muslims. It did not win any provincial seat from Sindh and NWFP, while it could win only 1 out of 84 Muslim seats in Punjab (Khan, 1987/1990).

The Build-up to Partition: The 1946 Elections

After World War II, Viceroy Lord Wavell announced elections for central and provincial legislatures and that a constitution-making body would be set up after the elections. Thus, elections were held in January-February 1946 under Government of India Act 1935 and results were announced by 18th February. Though several parties like the Congress (Khudai Khidmatgars), Muslim League, Akali Dal, Khaksars, Ahrars, and Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind (JUH) contested the elections, but the main contenders were Congress and Muslim League (Ahmad

¹ Khudai Khidmatgars were basically close allies of Congress and in N. W. F. P, Congress would award tickets to Khudai Khidmatgars.

et al., 2014). In some constituencies, Congress also made seat adjustments with Ahrar and JUH (Ahmad, 2010).

Congress mainly based its election campaign on promises in socio-economic fields and its strategy was to avoid words like Akhand Hindustan or Pakistan so that Muslim voters may not be alienated. It would ask for votes in the name of Khudai Khidmatgars Movement rather than Congress itself. Congress would also accuse Muslim League leaders of corruption and would term them as British agents. On the other hand, Muslim League mainly focused on the demand of a separate state for the Muslims as one banner in Hazara district read "if you want Pakistan, vote for Muslim League" (Ahmad et al., 2014, p.8). Though the demand for Pakistan had gained momentum among NWFP Muslims by the time, but Muslim League was suffering from inner divisions. For example, the provincial selection board denied tickets to senior leaguers like K. B. Saadullah Khan, Aurangzeb Khan, and Mian Ziauddin while Abdur Rab Nishtar secured his ticket with great difficulty. When the senior leaders appealed to the central leadership, only Mian Ziauddin was allotted the ticket. Several well-known figures decided to contest the elections as independent candidates which further deepened the divisions (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Even though the Muslim League enlisted the support of religious figures like Pirs and Mullahs against the Congress and tried to term it as a Hindu party, Congress did exceptionally well and won 30 out of 50 seats (Aman & Jan, 2015). Muslim League won 17, Jamiat-e-Ulema-Hind 2, and Akali Dal won 1 seat. Congress won almost all seats in the Pashtun inhabited areas of the province while Muslim League failed in all areas except Hazara- a non-Pashtun area. JUH, Congress' ally, won from Dera Ismail Khan (Ahmad et al., 2014). Out of Congress' 30 seats, 19 were Muslim and 11 non-Muslim seats while Muslim League's 17 were all Muslim seats. Thus, even among the Muslim areas, Congress won more seats than Muslim League (Bangash, 2013). As a result of the elections, Dr. Khan Sahib formed the government while Allah Nawaz Khan was elected as speaker (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Dr. Khan Sahib's ministry worked till 21st August 1947 when it was dissolved, and Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan was invited to form the government (Marwat, 2017). The dissolution of Congress' NWFP ministry despite its having majority support is still a loaded and controversial question. This step also led to divisions within Muslim League as Jinnah's decision to appoint Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan² as chief minister of NWFP alienated Pir of Manki Sharif who later responded by forming Awami Muslim League with Khan of Lundkhaur Khan Ghulam Muhammad. The new party was also joined by Suhrawardy and Pir of Zakori Sharif. Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan responded to these developments with use of force as Pir of Manki Sharif was banned from entering NWFP while other senior leaders of Awami Muslim League were arrested (Kamran, 2009).

² Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan was an active figure within Congress who would strongly criticize Muslim League and Jinnah in his speeches. In 1945, he wrote his book Gold and Guns on the Pathan Frontier in which he argued in favor of a united India and praised Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Dr. Khan. However, he banned his own book after becoming chief minister of NWFP. In 1937 elections, Dr. Khan won one seat each of Central Legislative Assembly and NWFP Assembly. He vacated the Central Legislative Assembly seat on which Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan was elected unopposed and later became deputy parliamentary leader of Congress in the assembly. During Simla Conference in 1945, Jinnah invited him to join Muslim League. To this offer, KAQK responded after some time by writing a letter to Jinnah to inform him about his decision to join Muslim League. After the creation of Pakistan, he was installed as chief minister of the province and served on this position till April 1953. Later, he left Muslim League and formed his own party Muslim League-Qayyum. After 1977 elections, the leadership of PML-Qy passed from KAQK to Kunwar Qutubuddin who then merged the party in Pakistan Muslim League-Functional and thus it ceased to be a separate and major force in the electoral politics of NWFP.

The Introduction of Universal Suffrage: The 1951 Elections

The first general elections for provincial assemblies following the creation of Pakistan were conducted in the early 1950s. Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) went to the polls in 1951, followed by Sindh in 1953 and East Pakistan in 1954. While the Muslim League secured landslide victories in Punjab, NWFP, and Sindh, it suffered a stunning defeat in East Pakistan at the hands of the United Front—an electoral alliance comprising the Krishak Sramik Party, the Nizam-i-Islam Party, and the Awami League (Baxter, 1971). After the federal government decided to hold elections in the provinces, Chief Minister NWFP, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan announced to hold elections in the province. Before the elections, the number of seats of NWFP Assembly was increased from 50 to 85 with 82 general and 3 reserved for women and minorities. The Delimitation Committee for NWFP divided the province into 82 constituencies with allocating seats to districts according to the 1951 census. Thus, Bannu was allocated 8 seats, Dera Ismail Khan 7, Hazara 21, Kohat 8, Mardan 15, and Peshawar 23 while among the reserved seats, two were allocated to Women (Muslims) and one to non-Muslims (Hassan, 2008).

The elections were held after the Constituent Assembly passed the NWFP General Elections Bill under which the provincial assembly was to be dissolved while the chief minister retained his position. Thus, Governor NWFP I. I. Chundrigar dissolved the NWFP Assembly on 10th March 1951, while Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan's government was allowed to work as interim set up till elections that were announced to be held in November 1951. Keeping in view Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan's previous record of misusing authority, opposition parties demanded his resignation and interim government before elections, but this demand fell on deaf ears as the central government, especially the then Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, was backing Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan (Hassan, 2015).

Neither the Muslim League nor the opposition parties had any manifesto or program for the elections (Ahmad, 2010). Instead of presenting any program to the voters, Muslim League coined election slogans like "vote for League is vote for progress" and that "League victory is the defeat of Pashtunistan" (Kamran, 2009, p. 269). It would propagate that voting for it, among other things, would mean completion of industrial projects in the province, end of capitalist exploiters, end of Pakhtunistan Movement and acquisition of Kashmir (Hassan, 2008). The Khudai Khidmatgars (which had already been banned and thus was not contesting the elections), through a poster displayed in Charsadda, announced that some candidates claimed Khudai Khidmatgars' support, but it was not supporting any group or individual. However, it was earlier reported that Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan had asked his workers to support any party which they thought to be in the best interest of the country (Hassan, 2015). Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan used all means to disturb the election campaign of his political rivals. The government banned the entry of Jinnah Awami League chief Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy into NWFP, the notice for which was served on him at Attock Railway Station when he was going to Nowshera to attend a party meeting (Hassan, 2008).

Nomination papers of Jinnah Muslim League's thirty-one candidates were rejected on frivolous grounds while of those who were contesting on Muslim League ticket were accepted even if faulty and several Muslim League candidates won their seats unopposed (Kamran, 2009). Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan himself was elected unopposed from two constituencies of Peshawar and Hazara as the nomination papers of his opposite candidates, Master Khan Gul from Peshawar and Akbar Ali from Hazara, were rejected (Hassan, 2015). Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan himself confessed the arrest of 60 political workers all of whom were from Red Shirts

(Kamran, 2009). The allocation of red color as a symbol of election was banned due to its link with the Red Shirts which had already been banned (Hassan, 2008).

Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan even made every effort to ensure that his party candidates who were not in his good books but got tickets from the central parliamentary board were defeated and for this purpose he encouraged independents to contest elections against them. When a leaguer Mir Alam Khan appealed against Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan's decision to refuse him ticket and the central parliamentary board awarded him ticket, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan asked Haji Muhammad Ali Khan to contest election against Mir Alam Khan as independent candidate from Charsadda. While attending a function of Haji Muhammad Ali Khan in Charsadda, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan threatened people that they would be hanged upside down if they did not vote for the candidate of his choice. In Karrak, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan fielded Watan Badshah, a peon, against Muslim League senior leader Muhammad Aslam Khattak and rigged the elections to ensure Muhammad Aslam Khattak's defeat. When 500 bogus votes were cast for Watan Badshah while only 32 had been cast as per record, the returning officer refused to sign the result and thus was sent without his signatures (Hassan, 2015). After the elections, Jinnah Awami Muslim League accused the government of rejecting 30% votes of opposition candidates. The elections were termed as "Hitlerian elections" by the 30th of December editorial of Pakistan Times. Due to extreme electoral malpractices, the elections were nicknamed as "Jhurloo elections"³ (Hassan, 2008, p. 22). Following the elections, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan tendered resignation as interim chief minister to form his government as regular chief minister (Hassan, 2015).

Reports and allegations of electoral malpractices in Punjab, NWFP, and Sindh were so widespread that ultimately the central government was compelled to form an Electoral Reforms Commission in 1955. The Commission observed that the provincial elections during the early 1950s were "farce, a mockery and fraud upon the electorate." It further noted that the central government acted with partiality and state functionaries interfered to influence the election results (Kamran, 2002, p. 82). Being the very first general elections in the province after the creation of Pakistan, they should have provided a sound basis to democratic norms. However, these elections proved just a formality. Syed Minhaj ul Hassan has recorded his observations in this regard in the following words:

These were the first ever elections in the province of NWFP after the creation of Pakistan but the way they were conducted, it set a very bad example for the coming generations. Instead of strengthening democratic institutions, it weakened them. It set an example of fraud, rigging and coercion to achieve desired results. These are those problems which still haunt the political institutions of the country. (Hassan, 2008, p. 28).

The lead-up to the break-up of the country: The 1970 Elections

The year 1970 was simultaneously thrilling, eventful, and catastrophic for Pakistan. It was exciting and eventful because the Yahya Khan regime decided to restore political activities in the country, hold general elections on the basis of adult franchise, and hand over political power to the civilians. The year was tragic not only because of the devastating floods that killed hundreds of thousands of people, damaged crops and houses in East Pakistan, but also because it brought home nearer the gloomy prospect of Pakistan's division into two independent states. The elections for the National Assembly were scheduled on 5th October

³ Jhurloo is basically a stick used by the jugglers to send the ball during demonstration from one place to another.

but due to floods in East Pakistan, they were postponed and were held on 7th December (Mujahid, 1971).

Before the 1970 elections, the Legal Framework Order (LFO) was promulgated by the Yahya Khan regime in March 1970 which provided a framework for the upcoming elections and framing of the future constitution. The LFO mandated the National Assembly to be elected as a result of the 1970 elections to frame a new constitution for the country (Feldman, 1976). Another important political and constitutional change before the elections was the disbandment of One Unit, thus re-establishing Punjab, NWFP, Sindh, and Balochistan as separate provinces as they existed before their unification into one province in 1955. One Unit was dissolved on July 1, 1970 (Qureshi & Hussain, 2022).

Unlike the provisions of constitutions of 1956 and 1962 that provided for equal representation of the two wings of the country in the National Assembly, the LFO of 1970 provided for distribution of NA seats on the basis of population. Thus, 169 seats were allocated to East Pakistan⁴ and 144 to West Pakistan⁵ (Mujahid, 1971). NWFP⁶ was allocated 25 National Assembly seats. In the NWFP Assembly, there were 40 general and three reserved seats with two for women and one for minorities (Baxter, 1971).

In NWFP, Pakistan Muslim League-Qayyum Group (PML-Qy), PPP, Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam Hazarvi Group (JUI-H)⁷ and National Awami Party-Wali (NAP-W) each had fielded at least 15 candidates for the province's 25 NA seats, (Mujahid, 1971) but the main rivals were PML-Qy and NAP-W with chiefs of both parties contesting elections from this province (Baxter, 1971). There was considerable similarity in the manifestoes of the contesting parties as almost all of them vowed not to make any law in violation of Islamic teachings, stressed non-aligned foreign policy and normalization of ties with India for resolution of disputes, and highlighted the need for ending regional disparities across the country. NAP-W used to stress provincial autonomy with only defense, foreign policy, and currency with the center (Mujahid, 1971) while one of its long-standing demands, dissolution of One Unit, had already been fulfilled. NAP-W mainly appealed to the voters in central NWFP from where Khudai Khidmatgars received great support in 1937 and 1946 elections. PML-Qy, led by former Chief Minister NWFP Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan was the main rival of NAP-W in NWFP. Several of the politicians who were earlier in Ayub Khan's camp also joined PML-Qy. He tried to get support of politicians who supported a strong central government and even advocated the idea of forming a confederation with Muslim countries lying to Pakistan's west like Afghanistan and Iran while in NWFP, he would attack NAP-W for its Congressite background. He also charged it with separatist tendencies and collusion with India and Afghanistan (Baxter, 1971).

⁴ Including 7 seats reserved for women.

⁵ Including 6 seats reserved for women.

⁶ Excluding the Tribal Areas which was allocated 7 seats at that time. It was merged with the province through a constitutional amendment in 2018.

⁷ In 1969, Jamiat-u-Ulema Islam split into two groups with the major faction led by Maulana Ghulam Ghaus Hazarvi and the other one led by Maulana Ehtesham ul Haq Thanvi. The Hazarvi group favored labor's participation in industries' ownership and end of landlordism. This group had a strong support base in NWFP which was also the home province of the group's top leaders like Hazarvi and Mufti Mahmood while the Thanvi faction enjoyed some following in Sindh and Punjab. Following Mufti Mahmood's death in 1980, his son Maulana Fazlur Rehman became the head of JUI. However, Maulana Fazlur Rahman's succession and disagreement over cooperation with the then military ruler General Zia ul Haq led to division within the party. Thus, it split into two groups--- JUI-F led by Rehman and JUI-Darkhwasti led by Fida-ur-Rehman Darkhwasti and Maulana Sami-ul-Haq. Later, the Darkhwasti faction disappeared and was replaced by JUI-Sami led by Maulana Sami-ul-Haq. It still exists.

In these elections, no single party could win a clear majority either on national or provincial level. Out of 25 National Assembly seats in NWFP, PPP won 1, PML-Qy 7, JUH 6, NAP-W 3, and JI 1 (Ahmad, 2010). In provincial assembly elections, out of 40 general seats PPP won 3, PML-Qy 10, NAP-W 13, Council Muslim League (CML) 1, JUI-H 4, Pakistan Muslim League-Convention (PML-C) 2, JI 1, and independents 6 seats (Baxter, 1971). Thus, NAP-W with 13 seats and JUI-H with 4 seats formed coalition government with JUI-H's Mufti Mahmood as chief minister (Malik, 2014). NAP-W also had the option to form coalition government with Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan's party which had won ten seats but due to Qayyum's pro-establishment profile and his notoriety for his views about Pashtun nationalism NAP-W preferred coalition with JUH despite the fact that the two had clear ideological differences with each other (Rizwan, 2014).

As compared to its performance in the National Assembly elections, NAP-W performed much better in provincial elections as it emerged as the largest single party. On the other hand, JUI-H failed to repeat its National Assembly performance in provincial assembly elections (Baxter, 1971). However, it performed very well in Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and Kohat (Malik, 2014). PPP, which won an overwhelming majority in Sindh and Punjab, failed to perform well in NWFP. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto contested elections from six constituencies winning two in Punjab, three in Sindh but in Dera Ismail Khan constituency of NWFP he was defeated by JUI-H's Mufti Mahmood (Baxter, 1971).

The Path Toward the Second Military Coup: 1977 Elections

Following the announcement by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto government to hold general elections, nine opposition parties formally launched their alliance called Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) on 11th January 1977 to jointly challenge PPP, which was in government at the time (Akhter, 2004). The PNA was a conglomeration of political forces that were ethnic, religious, socialist, and secular in nature. Its manifesto was based on religio-economic issues as it promised to enforce Sharia in the country, denationalize some industries, promote cooperation between industrialists and workers (Malik, 2014), end all forms of exploitation, and ensure fair distribution of resources and interest-free economy. It also promised to reverse the constitutional amendments which were introduced by the PPP government to strengthen the executive at the cost of a free judiciary and to give back civil liberties snatched by the previous government. The PNA manifesto also promised a high-powered inquiry commission to fix responsibility for the breakup of Pakistan and punish those responsible. Thus, PNA's main charge sheet against Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was inflation, breaking up of Pakistan, curbs on civil and political liberties, corruption, and compromise with India on Kashmir (Ahmad, 2018). As Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto wanted to stay in power at all costs, his government, among other things, even resorted to house arrests and kidnapping of opposition leaders to disturb PNA's election campaign. Many PPP candidates were declared successful unopposed because nomination papers of opposition candidates were rejected. As there was a ban on political meetings from the government, so PNA would use mosques for spreading its message (Malik, 2014). Use of state machinery reached such a point that even Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto used reports by district administration and intelligence agencies for finalizing candidates for party tickets (Rais, 1989). When election results were announced, they were simply beyond PNA's comprehension.

Though PPP's victory in the election was something expected but the margin with which it won was surprising for the opposition as PPP won 155 out of 200 seats while PNA was restricted to only 36 seats (Malik, 2014). Winning 36 seats was surprising for PNA because PPP leaders would publicly say that PNA will win 50-60 seats and in their private gatherings, they would concede that it can win even more seats (Weinbaum, 1977). Though PDA (PPP) won

more than 85% National Assembly seats in Punjab and Sindh, it secured only 8 out of total 26 National Assembly seats in NWFP as compared to 17 by PNA. One seat was won by PML-Qy (ECP, 1977).

One day after the elections to NA were held, PNA's working committee held its meeting in Lahore and accused the government of rigging elections, rejected the election results, directed its elected members to resign from their seats, announced to boycott elections for provincial assemblies, and appealed to the people for country-wide protest movement. PNA also demanded Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's resignation, appointment of impartial Election Commission, and fresh elections under the supervision of army and judiciary (Malik, 2014). The PNA, after receiving positive response from the people, decided to broaden its protest movement in support of its demands (Akhter, 2004). Reacting to opposition's protests, ministers also started pro-Bhutto processions in April 1977 (Malik, 2014).

The rigging allegations leveled by PNA were also vindicated by the statements of the then Chief Election Commissioner Justice Sajjad Ahmad Jan that he issued on various occasions or were reported by the press (Ali, 1977). Jan, after examining the results of two dozen constituencies, reached the conclusion that the elections were massively rigged and thus he suggested fresh elections. When he unseated a few PPP lawmakers and was busy scrutinizing the results of some 80 other constituencies, he was sent abroad on medical leave (Amin, 2007).

The PNA allegations, mobilization of anti-government protests and incidents of violence across the country created serious law and order issues for the government. More than 300 people were killed during the protest movement while more than 20,000 were arrested but still there were no signs of weakening of PNA's movement. Law and order situation and country's economic health were deteriorating with each passing day which finally forced Saudi Arabia, UAE, Libya etc. to intervene. Thus, the government and opposition softened their positions, the first by agreeing to hold fresh elections while the later by surrendering its demand of Bhutto's resignation. Though it seemed that they had reached an agreement but there again emerged differences between the two on some issues. It was in these circumstances that the army led by the then army chief General Zia ul Haq removed Bhutto and assumed direct control of the country (Amin, 2007).

Conclusion

The electoral pathway of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly NWFP) from 1932 to 1977 represents a complex evolution from limited colonial representation to a volatile struggle for democratic rights. The pre-partition era was defined by the sharp ideological rivalry between the Congress-aligned Khudai Khidmatgars and the All India Muslim League. Despite the growing national momentum for Pakistan, the Muslim League struggled to consolidate a base in the province during this period, leaving electoral politics largely dominated by the Khudai Khidmatgar alliance. The transition to the post-independence era began with the 1951 elections. While historically significant for introducing universal adult franchise, this milestone was undermined by state interference and allegations of systematic rigging, setting a troubling precedent for the province's democratic development. By 1970, the political landscape had shifted toward a polarization between centrist forces (PML-Qayyum) and proponents of provincial autonomy (National Awami Party). A remarkable feature of this era was the formation of a coalition government between ideologically divergent forces—the secular-nationalist NAP and the Islamist JUI—united by their opposition to central authoritarianism. However, this democratic experiment was short-lived; the 1977 elections were marred by accusations of manipulation by the federal government, triggering the PNA

movement and culminating in the imposition of martial law. Ultimately, a review of this forty-five-year history underscores a persistent paradox: while the *forms* of democracy—legislatures, constitutions, and voting rights—were progressively established, their *substance* was frequently compromised. The smooth functioning of these institutions was repeatedly derailed by electoral malpractices, weak party institutionalization, and, most critically, the recurring intervention of the central government, which prioritized control over genuine provincial representation."

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