**Musharraf Era.**

General Pervaiz Musharraf followed the trend of his military predecessors in ruler ship. Like Ayub Khan and Zia Ul Haq, he endeavored to legitimize the martial law rule by constitutional means, and he remained successful to legalize his military rule. No doubt, the military coup of Musharraf gave setback to the democratic political culture of Pakistan. He launched military coup on 12 October 1999, overthrew the elected regime of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and come to power as a result. He justified martial law by proclaiming that military regime would prevent the country from political destabilization and economic repression. He criticized the popular elected bodies on the ground that they had failed to bring economic development and social stability in the country. After coming into power, he promulgated Constitutional Provincial Order. Now through PCO he shielded the military regime. The military junta thought that the judiciary might cause obstacles in the way of martial rule. The Supreme Court could have invalidated the military takeover as ultra-unconstitutional act. But judiciary yielded to the pressure of military. When General Musharraf won over the support of Supreme Court, he found his power on solid ground. In order to stay in power, General Musharraf announced the plan of referendum on 8 April 2002. Through referendum he wanted to elect himself as President. But according to 1973 constitution the President could not be elected through referendum. He must be elected by the Parliament and the Provincial National Assemblies. The Supreme Court did not challenge the referendum process. Military regime brought Election Commission to its command and conferred on it the responsibility to conduct and supervise the referendum. The Election Commission was no longer an independent body. The outcomes of the referendum were surprising for Musharraf. He secured 97% of votes to his favour. It is believed the ISI had rigged the polls on a massive scale. I A Rehman aptly said, “Referendum is unconstitutional and an old lever of the military to rule”.

After referendum, Musharraf promulgate Legal Framework Order (LFO) on 21 August 2002. Through LFO he done certain constitutional amendments. LFO strengthened the power of President. Article 58 (2) (b) was revived. Now President have a discretionary power to dissolve the Assembly. Article 112 (2) (b) was revived. Now the Governor have a power to dissolve the Provincial Assembly only with the consent of President. It allowed Musharraf to rule in uniform. In a nutshell LFO strengthened the power of Musharraf and helped him rule on a more secure manner.

Musharraf announced the General Elections for the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies. To secure his position as President, Musharraf needed political support in the National Assembly. The military junta formed political party named PML(Q). It was mainly consisted of dissenters from the PML(N) and the PPP-P. Those who felt threat from NAB started joining the King’s party. NAB crackdown on those politicians who declined to join King party. Musharraf and military elite supported the PML(Q). The net result was that PML(Q) secured 78 seats in the National Assembly out of 268. It bagged 128 seats in the Punjab. As a result, its position in the Punjab Assembly strengthened.

Another significant development that happened during that election was the coalition of six religious parties. They were calling itself as Mutahidda Majlis e Amal (MMA). MMA emerged as great electoral alliance. MMA gained wild popularity in the NWFP. They played the card of religion and swept the ground in that province by securing 47 seats. MMA secured 45 seats in the National Assembly. The major parties like PPP-P and PML(N) could not gain expected results. PPP-P gained 62 seats in the National Assembly while PML(N) secured 14 seats. Both parties were too incapable to make government in the center. PML(Q) got advantage from that political scenario. It made coalition with National Alliance (NA) which secured 12 seats in the NA. Through horse trading and other political maneuvering PML(Q) remained successful in swelling its ranks. Mir Zafarullah Jamali from Balochistan was elected as Prime Minister with 172 votes in the House of 342.

Musharraf’s long-standing rule strengthened the influence of military in politics. The military won over politician to its area of influence. PML(Q) was formed in order to secure the vital interests of military. The backdoor policies of military impinge on the democratic culture of our country.