**Targeting Politicians in Pakistan: Examining Laws and their Impact**

Since gaining independence in the year 1947, Pakistan has witnessed a complex bond between elected officials and legal matters concerning governance. Laws introduced in Pakistan to uphold law and order or to combat corruption have at times provoked debate and doubts of being politically motivated. Representatives from various political parties have often found themselves embroiled in judicial disputes, facing allegations ranging from corruption to disloyalty. Those accountable for investigating these politicians commonly involved the law enforcement agencies, judges, the court systems, police, the military and etc.

The Public Order Ordinance of 1963 was an act that offered law enforcement officials huge jurisdiction. In Pakistan, it has been used to bridge political differences and target opponents. The law banned political gatherings such as open meetings (jalsas), public protests and speeches, and also allowed the arrest of officials considered a threat to public order In 1968, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), became entangled in the grips of this law. Bhutto’s arrest under the Public Order Act was a direct response to his public challenge against the government of President Ayub Khan.

This crucial moment marked a turning point in Bhutto’s political trajectory. It eventually made him more famous. The arrests served as a boost to Bhutto's political organization, and galvanized support for his cause, like the arrest of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder and former chairman Imran Khan in August 2023. The legal employment of the Public Order Ordinance against Bhutto underlines the politically charged nature of the legislation, raising concerns about its potential misuse to suppress opposition voices. This moment stands as a reminder of the legal and political complexities shaping the course of democracy in Pakistan.

(Sayeed 1960)

The Anti-terrorism Act, passed in 1997 to deal with terrorist problems, has also been criticized for its broad and vague language, allowing for potential abuses of political opponents. Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan for three non-consecutive terms and the head of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PMLN), represents just one of the nation's numerous instances of taking advantage of the law unfairly. Nawaz Sharif was charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act in 1999, accused of hijacking and terrorism during the Kargil conflict. Concerns have been raised regarding the timing of this legal action, that coincided with rising political tensions between Sharif and the military establishment.

The case against Sharif was seen as primarily politically motivated, resulting from the purposeful application of anti-terrorism laws against a political figure. Sharif’s exile marked a watershed moment in Pakistan’s political history. This case highlights concerns about the potential for politically motivated weaponization of anti-terrorism legislation and highlights the need for safeguards to avoid abuses in the democratic process.

(Rizvi 2014)

In 1999, the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) established the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) with the primary objective of combating corruption. However, opponents say the law has been chosen to be used to target political opponents rather than achieve its stated goals. Asif Ali Zardari, president of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians and co-chairperson of Pakistan People's Party, is a prime example. Also known to be the wife of Pakistan's first female Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto.

Zardari faced allegations of corruption in the NAO, ranging from money laundering to suspected money laundering schemes. Circumstances surrounding his arrest and subsequent imprisonment was highly controversial, happening against a backdrop that included significant instability in politics. Many observers viewed these legal steps as driven by politics, raising is concerned about the National Accountability Bureau's independence and equality.

Zardari’s case illustrates the tight collision between politics and law in Pakistan. According to critics, the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), has been militarized with the goal to settle political scores, decreasing public faith in the accountability process. If we understand how they chose to target legislation this is influenced not only by individual politicians but also by the larger democratic system. It emphasizes the importance of anti-corruption measures not being seen as weapons of political vendetta but often used in a pragmatic way to promote democratic institutions.

(Khalid Zafar n.d.) (Express 2019) (News18 2019)

The cases of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari highlight the impact of laws like Public Order Ordinance, Anti-Terrorism Act and National Accountability Ordinance on Pakistani democracy Despite their stated objective of maintaining order and curb corruption, these laws became instruments of politics. It is concerned that judicial systems are being abused to target individual politicians and weaken political opponents, potentially threatening the vitality of democratic institutions. These developments highlight the critical need for a fair and transparent justice system. Such a system should vigorously safeguard concepts such as impartiality and the rule of law while safeguarding Pakistan’s stable and stable democracy. This underscores the need to ensure that laws intended to protect the public interest are not twisted to any narrow party, thereby safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes. (814 words)

USED WIKIPEDIA FOR DATES AND NAMES

# Works Cited

Express, Indian. 2019. *Asif Aki Zardari.* June 10. Accessed December 2, 2023. https://indianexpress.com/article/pakistan/asif-ali-zardari-pakistan-former-president-arrested-in-separate-corruption-case-5809266/.

2019. *Imran Khan .* November 29. Accessed December 2, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imran\_Khan.

n.d. *Khalid Zafar.* Accessed December 2, 2023. https://khalidzafar.com/laws-of-pakistan/national-accountability-bureau-ordinance-1999/.

2021. *Nawaz Sharif.* Accessed December 2, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nawaz\_Sharif.

News18. 2019. June 10. Accessed December 2, 2023. https://www.news18.com/news/world/pakistans-ex-president-asif-ali-zardari-arrested-in-money-laundering-case-2180619.html.

Rizvi, Hasan Askari. 2014. *Political Dynamics in Pakistan: The Role of the Opposition.* Oxford University Press.

Sayeed, Khalid bin. 1960. *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948.* ‎Oxford University Press.

2019. *Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.* November 29. Accessed December 2, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulfikar\_Ali\_Bhutto.