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DEVOLUTION UNDER AUTOCRACIES: EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Authoritarian regimes often direct the course of electoral politics in ways that allow them to concentrate and consolidate power. This observation applies well to Pakistan and its three military regimes: Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf. The political reforms enacted by General Zia ul-Haq, his devolution programme, and his mode of channelling development funds via elected politicians exerted a strong and enduring impact on the country's political system. Specifically, we argue that institutional changes under General Zia's regime have stimulated the rise of family politics in replacement of party politics, as well as the formation and consolidation of political dynasties. They have also contributed to the capture of local bureaucracy by elected politicians thereby entrenching clientelism.

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1. Introduction

Authoritarian regimes often direct the course of electoral politics in ways that allow them to concentrate and consolidate power (Svolik, 2012; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007; Gandhi, 2015). While a growing body of literature has devoted attention to studying politics under authoritarian rule, devolution under dictatorship remains a relatively understudied aspect. Why do autocrats devolve power to the local level and what are the long-run impacts of such devolution on political outcomes? In the present contribution, we study the impact of local government reforms carried out by Pakistan's military regime under General Zia-ul-Haq on the subsequent trajectory of electoral politics. Drawing on a rich dataset on genealogies of political families in Pakistani Punjab, we show how General Zia's devolution provided the staging ground for the entry of new family-backed elites into electoral politics, and how these political elites persisted long after his departure in 1988. The process was facilitated by the changes which he brought to the modus operandi of electoral politics and to the way of channelling funds earmarked for the provision of local public goods.

Our focus on Pakistan is derived from its relevance for studying devolution under dictatorship. All three major devolution attempts were carried out by the country's military dictators, Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf, respectively. Rather paradoxically, these reforms were guided by a desire to centralize political power in the hands of a non-representative government and to bypass party politics (Cheema et al., 2005). Relatedly, facing a legitimacy deficit in a formally democratic setup, the three military autocrats tried to fill it by cultivating alliances with local elites and powerbrokers. More precisely, devolution and the associated straight channelling of financial resources to local elites allowed military rulers to build up and maintain, outside the realm of mainstream political parties, a network of political patrons that were dependent on them for access to state patronage and political survival. Studying the Pakistani experience can therefore provide important insights for the understanding of authoritarianism in the context of electoral politics. Situating our analysis in the emerging literature on politics under authoritarianism, we argue that local government elections held by Pakistan's respective military regimes provided important instances of authoritarian power sharing through which military rulers co-opted elites by distributing the benefits of "joint rule" (Svolik 2012).

A central argument advanced in this paper is that the local government reforms introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq and the associated institutional interventions were a critical juncture in Pakistan's electoral history and left an enduring legacy for dynastic politics. This prior is based on at least four factors that distinguish Zia-era from other military regimes in Pakistan. First, it marked a turning point in the sense that Zia took drastic measures to kill mass politics in the form of a populist party which operated outside of the control of the military. Second, while the devolution under Ayub Khan (Pakistan's first military dictator) maintained a bureaucratic representation in local bodies, Zia completely dispensed with this practice so that local bodies were now under the total control of elected representatives. Third, a more elaborate system of dispensing state patronage through special development funds was devised that solidified the electoral hold of local elites and ushered in a new period of electoral clientelism. This has resulted in the political capture of state resources earmarked for development. It has also led to a greater "localization and personalization of politics" (Wilder 1999). Finally, due to his ideological leaning and, even more importantly, due to his political opportunism and pragmatism, General Zia wooed religious elites into the electoral fold. This was especially evident in the case of shrine-based religious families who have solidified their position in electoral politics since 1980s. For all these reasons, the Zia-period carries special relevance and significance for studying the long-run impact of authoritarian devolution on political outcomes.

Our analysis contributes to several related strands of literature. To begin with, we complement prior works on the political economy of devolution, in general (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006), and Pakistan, in particular (Cheema et al., 2005; Khan et al., 2007; Cheema et al. 2010). In this respect, our contribution consists of highlighting the role of local government elections in authoritarian regimes and to probe their impact on dynastic politics. It has relevance for the emerging literatures on authoritarian politics (Gandhi and Lust-Oskar, 2009; Boix and Svolik, 2013; Gehlbach et al. 2016) and democratic transitions (Geddes 1999; Murtin and Wacziarg, 2014). While the two literatures have sometimes developed in isolation, we show how political institutions under autocratic rule can shape electoral politics after autocracy has given way to democracy. Finally, our work makes a distinct contribution to the niche literature that studies dynastic politics (Dal Bo et al. 2009; Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2017; Querobin 2016). While prior literature has established the persistence of dynasties and explored their impact on economic development, we shed light on the institutional processes which trigger dynastic formation. Specifically, we show how institutional interventions under a military regime led to the formation of new political dynasties and consolidated the power of pre-existing families.

Before proceeding further, two clarifications are in order. The first point relates to the frequent reference to the term “devolution” in this paper. We recognize that devolution is typically a political decision that is, at least in part, guided by pressures from below and is a result of “political negotiations around the division of powers among levels of government” (Bresser-Pereira, 2004: p.3). On the other hand, “decentralization” is a top-down decision that is often part of a strategy for public management. Both processes involve devolution of power to sub-national levels of government and can possibly involve delegation of fiscal authority. While recognizing these distinctions, our core argument is essentially around local government reforms and the associated elections for local bodies. Our second clarification relates to the empirical analysis. The evidence we present in this paper is largely descriptive in nature and establishes robust empirical patterns. At this stage, we do not claim to have established any causal relationship.

The outline of this paper is as follows. In Section 2, we provide a background to the devolution reforms enacted by the military rulers of Pakistan, Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf. Section 3 examines some salient and recent literature about the mode of functioning of authoritarian politics and, in particular, it explores the motivation of military rulers to resort to elections. The case of Pakistan is explicitly linked to that literature. In Section 4 we discuss in detail the reforms adopted by Zia and propose a possible mechanism linking them with the rise of political families and dynastic politics in Pakistan. This is done in three successive subsections. Section 5 supplies descriptive statistical evidence attesting that Zia’s regime caused a discontinuity in the incidence of dynastic politicians and in the extent of electoral competition. Section 6 concludes.

2. Devolution under Pakistan’s authoritarian regimes

In this section, we provide a brief background of the three major attempts at devolution carried out by Pakistan’s three military rulers, General Ayub Khan (1958-1969), General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), and General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008). While Pakistan has witnessed occasional attempts by civilian regimes to devolve power to the local level, these were mostly half-hearted efforts that remain peripheral to our analysis. Given our focus on devolution under military regimes, the recently instituted local government reforms in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab also lie beyond the core remit of this paper. Gulzar and Khan

(2021) provide excellent experimental evidence on the impact of devolution reforms in KP. While summarizing the salient features of the devolution reforms implemented by the country's three respective military regimes, we draw on prior seminal contributions by Cheema, Khwaja and Qadir (2005), Khan, Khan, and Akhtar (2007), and Cheema, Khan and Myerson (2010). Additional resources on devolution include special reports by the International Crisis Group and the US Institute of Peace that mainly focus on the post-Musharraf reforms (ICG, 2004; Ali, 2018). Rather than re-inventing the wheel, we will synthesize existing analysis and highlight both similarities and differences across the three main devolution attempts by Pakistan's three military rulers. This will set the backdrop for our main conceptual and empirical analysis in sections 3 and 4.

Devolution as the handmaiden of centralized power

The coup-makers typically began their political life by dissolving national and provincial assemblies and imposing some form of presidential rule. Furthermore, soon after taking over the reins of power, each of Pakistan's long-serving military regimes initiated serious attempts at decentralization of power to local tiers of government. Facing a serious legitimacy gap, the military rulers tried to fill by holding elections for local governments. While this usually entailed some limited form of representation, political power was still centralized in the military. As a matter of fact, devolution was partial and incomplete, involving only limited administrative and financial autonomy. There is consensus in the available literature that past devolution attempts by successive military regimes were motivated by a desire to centralize power and co-opt local political elites in the service of authoritarian rule. Typically, members of local governments were tied in a system of patronage where state resources were distributed to allied local politicians, thereby allowing military regimes to build a stable political constituency. Let us now provide more details about the nature of the devolution reforms enacted by each military autocrat. We begin, however, by stressing the continuity, in intent and basic orientation, between these reforms and the colonial policy.

Local governance under British rule was limited in scope and explicitly driven by the need to support central imperial administration. Local panchayats in that period were more representative of a village's social and economic structure and subordinated to central bureaucratic authority. Pakistan's successive military regimes patronized the same system of indirect rule through local elites. In particular, the first military ruler of independent Pakistan, General Ayub Khan, adopted a local government system that closely followed the colonial template: like the latter, indeed, it offered limited representation to local politicians while retaining significant bureaucratic oversight. Also like the British, Ayub's local governance arrangements had a distinct rural bias in terms of distribution of resources. Local governments were dominated by rural elites who provided the basic support for his regime. During the 1950s, significant budgetary shares were allocated to urban areas. This was partly a response to the influx of Muslim refugees from India, who settled in large numbers in urban centers. This budgetary trend was reversed by General Ayub, who restored the British policy of favouring rural areas in development expenditures (Cheema and Mohmand 2003). In short, there are important historical continuities in the manner in which "non-representative regimes such as the British during the pre-independence period and the military during the post-independence period" have favoured local elected governments in a bid to centralize power (Cheema et al. 2005).

Let us now turn our attention to more specific features of political decentralization under Pakistan's military rulers. General Ayub's military coup in 1958 was followed by the introduction of a Basic Democracies Ordinance in 1959, which stipulated a multi-tiered system with villages (rural) and town committees (urban) at the lowest tier. The local government system consisted of both elected and unelected members who were both ultimately subordinated to bureaucratic authority. While the lowest tier consisted of members directly elected through adult franchise, the upper tiers included both members who were indirectly elected and members nominated by government officials.

Under Ayub, limited political representation was combined with bureaucratic control, the ultimate objective being to consolidate political power. This was first done by using the 80,000 so-called Basic Democrats in local bodies as the electoral college for the election of the President. Local governments were therefore used as a limited representative tool to "legitimize" Presidential elections under the 1962 constitution. A second instrument for consolidation of political power in the hands of the dictator was achieved through explicit bureaucratic control vested in the offices of commissioners and deputy commissioners. As Cheema et al. (2005, p. 6) note, bureaucratic authority could be used to "quash the proceedings; suspend resolutions passed or orders made by any local body" and prohibit actions undertaken by the local bodies. Moreover, even if local bodies enjoyed some "regulatory and development functions" these were effectively circumscribed by limited fiscal capacity (Cheema et al., 2005; Siddiqui, 1992).

The second major attempt at reviving local governments happened during 1979-85. Soon after staging a military coup, General Zia-ul-Haq issued special decrees and ordinances for local governments and held elections for local bodies in 1979 and 1980. Like Ayub's experiment for Basic Democracies, General Zia's local bodies elections were an attempt to centralize political power and co-opt local politicians. The need for central political control in the hands of the military was felt the more acutely as a populist political party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had gained ascendancy during the years preceding the run up to the coup. During this run-up, a broad anti-Bhutto mobilization of petty traders, religious parties, and the urban middle classes brought people to the streets to express their discontent against some policies favoured by Bhutto. Through clever political engineering, such as amendments to the Political Parties Act, General Zia disallowed PPP stalwarts from participating in elections. To facilitate the entry into politics of new actors and their local kinship networks, financial resources, and brokerage capacity, he used local brokers with a foothold in local politics. Many of the same families, which included traditional religious families (shrine guardians), were catapulted into provincial and national politics during and after the Zia period, thereby establishing new dynasties that continue to this day. In rural regions, the Zia rule sometimes saw the rehabilitation of old traditional elites in the national mainstream.

Zia's devolution reforms required that all members of local bodies are elected, dispensing with the past practice of combining elected with unelected officials. Direct bureaucratic representation in local governments was thus bridled so as to create greater autonomy for the elected tier at the local level, which obtained total control over local bodies (Cheema et al., 2005: 28). At the same time, however, the power of local representative institutions was circumscribed by limited financial and administrative autonomy. They were also subordinated to provincial governments, which could summarily dismiss them or undo the actions of local governments. Another important continuity between Ayub and Zia periods was the maintenance of separate jurisdictions for rural and urban regions, the former being defined as district councils and the latter as town committees and municipal corporations. The rural-urban divide was consequential in terms of income and revenue generation. Specifically, it meant that at a time when fast-paced urbanization was resulting in growing revenues for town and municipal committees, these resources could not be shared with rural areas, which remained relatively resource-starved and strongly dependent on provincial governments (Cheema, et al. 2005: p. 10-12).

Under Zia's rule, the allocation of party tickets and ministries clearly became more and more patently "an outcome of individual bargaining between powerful local brokers and party leaders" (Cheema et al., 2005: 13). What needs to be added now is that the system was given a strong boost in the mid-1980s when Zia gave elected politicians direct control over the allocation of special development funds. This practice, which allowed federal and provincial politicians to obtain unaudited control over local-level development allocations, continued unabated under all civilian governments after him and continues to grease the wheels of patronage politics until today. Moved by his ambition to suppress mass-appealing parties based on ideology, General Zia laid the groundwork for a persisting change in the way politics is run in Pakistan (Hasnain, 2008: 145; Ziring, 1988: 804; Martin, 2016: 74).

In a familiar pattern, General Parvez Musharraf's dictatorial rule also started with a promise to devolve power. One year after imposing a military coup, General Musharraf introduced a plan in the year 2000 to hold local bodies elections under a new framework for devolution that differed in some respects from previous experiments. Firstly, General Musharraf's devolution programme substantially altered the structure of local governments and made the local bureaucratic administration (e.g., deputy commissioners) responsible to elected heads of district councils. Second, Musharraf's devolution reforms expanded the scope of local governments in the sense of a greater decentralization of public service delivery to local tiers of government. Third, the reforms did away with the rural-urban divide in the administrative and financial operations of local governments.

Despite the expanded scope of reforms, General Musharraf's devolution was limited by several factors. Local governments lacked the capacity to generate revenues and are constrained by the absence of financial decentralization. While the devolution plan of 2000 did succeed in transferring some powers from provincial to local level, the transfer of power from federal to provincial governments was limited. As a result, the system retained significant centralization at the federal level. There was also variation in the extent of devolution between departments. Thus, key departments, such as police and irrigation, continued to be controlled at the provincial level. Even for departments that did witness a devolution of power, certain functions and services remained exempt. The specific institutional design for devolution also entrenched patron-client relations. Clearly, the devolution reforms of 2000 gave more executive authority to mayors (nazims), who were only indirectly elected and had a more elevated status than the union councillors representing the lowest tier of government. The indirect elections of mayors encouraged vote buying and corrupt practices (Cheema et al., 2010). Furthermore, the local union councils were elected through a multi-seat proportional representational system outside party lists. Commonly known as single non-transferable voting (SNTV), this electoral arrangement is widely recognized as favouring local brokers, including moneyed elites and tribal leaders “who exercise authority in patron-client relationships” (Cheema et al. 2010).

Political disqualification as a way to manipulate elections

Military rulers did not only impose a system of electoral contests run through local bodies which they could control, they also engaged in political engineering. Each of the devolution attempts was thus preceded by a wave of political disqualifications that selectively targeted political opponents. For example, after usurping power, General Ayub Khan promulgated the Public Offices Disqualification Order (PODO) in 1959—and later Elective Bodies Disqualification Order (EBDO)—which resulted in the disqualification of about 6,000 politicians and officials (Noman 1988). Similarly, General Zia-ul-Haq disqualified an entire generation of political actors affiliated with Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) whose leader Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was deposed by General Zia. A similar template was rolled out by General Musharraf when he used the process of selective accountability to disqualify non-compliant politicians. He also set out a minimum educational criterion for public office holders, effectively excluding several leading political faces from the electoral race. In addition, by holding elections for local bodies on a non-party basis, military regimes not only weakened the influence of grassroot participation through the channel of political parties, but also strengthened the role of local brokers who were able to leverage their de facto power to garner public support (we will discuss the specific implications of the Zia-era elections in subsequent sections).

7.3 Situating in the literature on authoritarian politics

In this section we situate our prior understanding of Pakistan’s devolution experience under military regimes in the emerging literature on “politics under authoritarianism”. While prior literature on Pakistan has provided a rich and deep context of various devolution attempts instituted by military regimes, our first contribution is to draw out the relevance of an exciting new strand of literature in political science that seeks to study the role of electoral politics in the political economy of authoritarianism. Our analysis will thus showcase a new understanding of devolution attempts under Pakistan’s military regimes while also illuminating the theoretical processes at work.

Recent scholarship on the political economy of authoritarian states has paid special attention to the role of electoral politics in sustaining dictatorial rule. Whether single party communist states, military dictatorships or monarchic regimes, autocratic states often hold local and national-level elections. In fact, a large proportion of autocracies in the world can be characterized as "electoral" autocracies where some formal institutions of politics exist alongside autocratic rule (Luhrmann, et. al. 2018). Even if such avenues for political representation may be limited or subject to manipulation, the question remains: Why do autocratic regimes permit electoral politics? Why do citizens and candidates, including those hailing from opposition, participate in it?

Dominant analyses of authoritarian politics show that, like any ruler, a dictator essentially cares about regime survival. Autocratic survival, in turn, is predicated on the challenge of authoritarian control and power sharing (Svolik 2012). The former implies that dictators face threats of a popular uprising from the majority who are excluded from power. Typically, authoritarian regimes counter the threat of popular opposition through repression. But repression is never sufficient on its own and must be combined with distribution of benefits to citizens and elites. Dictators frequently use both carrots and sticks to stabilize their rule. The combination of repression and redistribution is particularly important for two reasons. First, autocrats not only face the threat of a mass rebellion from citizens, but they also face an internal threat from members of the ruling coalition. Evidence suggests that two-thirds of rulers have been removed by insiders. Second, autocrats inherently suffer from a loss of legitimacy. This legitimacy deficit is especially pronounced for military rulers who were not part of liberation or independence movements (Auriol et al., 2022). To address these challenges, they typically share power with key elite groups and distribute rewards as binding commitments of support from competing elites.

Regime durability depends on how efficiently a autocratic ruler deals with threats from citizens, organized actors, and elite factionalism. While analysing the stability of autocratic regimes, Gerschewski (2013) emphasized two key pillars besides repression: legitimation and co-option. Both are important for understanding the role of devolution in autocracies. Authoritarian rulers need to legitimate their rule by building "active consent" and structures of voluntary obedience. In many Muslim societies, autocrats have leaned on Islam and religious classes to legitimate their rule. For example, the Islamization of the economy and the polity, and the ensuing patronage for religious clerics, can be viewed as an effort to legitimate military rule. The regimes of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, and of Nimeiry and al-Bashir in Sudan, are appropriate illustrations of this possibility. In other regimes, appeals to a nationalist and pan-Arab ideology have served the same purpose, as epitomised by the Baas regimes of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the al-Assad (father and son) in Syria. In Latin America, on the other hand, military rulers in the 1960s and 1970s often mobilized anti-communism to justify their seizure of power. Over time, a low *initial* legitimacy can increase if the military ruler adopts effective development policies that have the effect of significantly improving the people's levels of living. Examples that come to mind here are South Korea under General Park and Taiwan under General Chiang Kai-shek.

The Pakistani context shows that local governments can serve as another means of building legitimacy. As Cheema et al. (2005, p. 25) have argued, the "military's need for legitimization of state control appears to be a prime reason behind the recurring attempts at local government reform." This imperative to use local elections to close the legitimacy deficit is particularly strong in Pakistan given that the country's three main military dictators have assumed power by deposing elected civilian governments. They have also faced calls for restoring some form of electoral politics by the international community. Local elections help to relieve this pressure while affording the regime significant levers to retain its centralized political control. Incentivizing participation in local elections and actively encouraging the rise of supporting politicians thus enable autocrats to gain legitimacy.

Local elections not only help build legitimacy, they are also an important means for sharing power with elites. A military ruler needs to co-opt influential political elites and tie their interests with those of his regime. Elections facilitate this process by building a loyal clientele through which the "spoils" of office are accrued to elites (Boix and Svolik 2013). As pointed out by Cheema et al. (2005), the system whereby local self-governments give rise to "a localized patronage structure can be traced back to the British colonial rule. This system produces a class of 'collaborative politicians' who act as a conduit between local-level constituencies and the non-representative centre" (p. 24). In a wide-ranging review of elections under authoritarianism, Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) argue that elections are a preferred means of distributing resources to citizens and elites in many autocratic regimes. In this way, both candidates and voters participate in the electoral process to access state resources. As in democratic contexts, authoritarian regimes create electoral business cycles where contests for access to state resources intensifies during the election period (Blaydes, 2006).

From the perspective of the autocrat, elections are also helpful in managing elites. By tying state patronage with electoral participation, autocratic regimes keep elite defection under control. They also increase the opportunity cost of non-participation: opposition groups who stay away from military-supervised electoral contests are likely to lose access to the regime's favours. Autocrats can thus use elections to divide the opposition. Some of these dynamics have also been at work in Pakistan. When the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), whose leader was deposed by General Zia-ul Haq, decided to boycott elections held by General Zia, it lost its local electoral foothold. Revealingly, the PPP later regretted the boycott decision and rectified it on the next occasion, which happened under the rule of General Musharraf, the succeeding ruler.

Consistent with recent studies on politics under authoritarianism, military-supervised elections readily turn into an exercise in competitive clientelism. This especially holds true for Zia-era elections, which radically changed the electoral playing field through a set of radical institutional changes to be discussed in more detail in section 7.4. Apart from accessing state patronage, there are other important benefits of participating in electoral processes instituted by authoritarian regimes. One of these is the ability to influence electoral rules (Gandhi and Oskar-Lust, 2009). There is clearly some corroborative evidence of this in Pakistan where constituency delimitations under Pakistan's military ruler General Musharraf accommodated the interests of powerful local allies who helped tinker with constituency boundaries in ways that protected (and, in some cases, consolidated) their political turf.

All of this suggests that formal institutions, such as local governments and national legislatures, are important means of elite co-option and an important component of authoritarian political strategies. According to Geddes (1999), autocracies which hold elections are generally more stable. While autocracies also use informal means of co-option, such as clientelism and cronyism, these are generally more prevalent in rentier states (Gerschewski, 2013). In many electoral autocracies, such as Pakistan and Egypt, formal avenues for co-option seem to provide a surer way toward regime durability. For Gerschewski (2013), such regimes rely on a stable configuration defined by a diffused pattern of support for the ruler, high levels of repression, and formal co-option through local governments and legislatures. This configuration of "over-politicization" is clearly manifested during General Zia's rule and will be the subject of next section.

In conceptualizing the role of military-supervised devolution attempts in Pakistan, both legitimacy and reliance on loyal elites at local level are important factors to consider. This chimes in well with a spate of recent analytical works which highlight the inherent challenges that autocratss face in consolidating their rule and the way formal institutional mechanisms are used to address these challenges (de Mesquita et al., 2003; Svolik, 2012; Gehlbach et al., 2016). Typically, at the heart of analytical frameworks of non-democratic politics lie dynamic interactions between the autocrat and the ruling coalition. For example, according to the selectorate theory of de Mesquita et al. (2003), any political system, including autocracies, can be characterized as consisting of the following groups: the general population, a subset of the population called a "selectorate", in which groups select their own leader, and the winning coalition. The latter, in turn, forms a sub-set of the selectorate whose support is crucial for the ruler's survival. This general-to-specific characterization of societal groups hold the key to autocratic power.

To understand the function of devolution in autocratic regimes, it is useful to view interactions between the ruler and societal and elite actors as being plagued by serious problems, the solution of which calls for the sharing of power. Perhaps the most important one is the inability to make credible commitments. The promises made by autocrats carry little weight: institutions under authoritarian rule lack commitment power and have limited ability to resolve conflicts. Another problem stems from the fact that the interactions between the ruler and the dominant coalition are permeated by imperfect and asymmetric information (Gehlbach et al., 2016). Autocrats have imperfect information about the true extent of support they command from the elites and the masses. Furthermore, authoritarian rule is defined by secrecy and opacity, which allow the ruler to exploit his privileged access to information. At the same time, however, secrecy runs against the interests of the ruler's allies to the extent that their ability to monitor his compliance to the promises he made is thereby limited. Finally, the ruling coalition also has imperfect information about the ruler's actions, which makes it difficult to organize a rebellion.

In this environment, both the autocrat and the ruling coalition benefit from formal political institutions (e.g., parties and legislatures), since they can help to alleviate monitoring and commitment problems. The central dilemma in dictatorships is to establish mechanisms that commit dictator and allies to "joint rule" (Svolik, 2012; Boix and Svolik, 2013). Institutionalized interactions between the autocrat and the ruling coalition precisely contribute to the stability of authoritarian rule based on power sharing. In particular, formal institutions, such as local governments, facilitate regular contacts between the autocrat and his allies, conferring a role of consultation and decision-making on the latter. Moreover, formal rules defining the procedures, membership and jurisdiction of formal institutions "embody the power sharing compromise between the dictator and his allies" (Boix and Svolik, 2013). Indeed, compliance with rules and procedures constitutes a "publicly observable signal" of the autocrat's commitment to share power. All these elements are amply manifested in the various local government experiments instituted under Pakistan's successive military regimes. In addition, elections under autocratic rule serve a critical informational role: local bodies elections help rulers to determine who among this potential political agents and allies command greater popular support (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Likewise, local electoral contests reveal which geographic areas are important opposition strongholds. As Blaydes (2006) has shown in the context of Egypt, regions dominated by MPs of the Muslim brotherhood were systematically disadvantaged by the regime in terms of access to development funding.

In conclusion, in the light of the emerging literature on non-democratic politics, we can argue that the survival of all the three military rulers of Pakistan depended a great deal on their strategy of power sharing. This has involved co-opting elites and distributing the benefits of "joint rule" through strategically calibrated local government elections. Interestingly, the successive military regimes in Pakistan have preserved the colonial legacy of indirect rule through intermediaries. Such intermediaries form the constituency and the support base of the military regimes. According to Buena de Mesquita, devolution helps to support the formation of a "selectorate" and afforded it access to state resources. Importantly, local government reforms allowed military regimes to: (a) foreclose political mobilization around party platforms; (b) create non-party representative structures dependent on the autocrat's administrative machinery for the exercise of authority; and (c) institutionalize the ruling coalition through formal rules and establish tiers of patronage aimed at awarding payoffs to the regime's allies.

7.4 The revival of dynastic politics under Zia

Our central argument in this chapter relates to the enduring impact of Zia-era local government reforms. In other words, the Zia-era (1977-1988) served as a critical juncture in Pakistan's electoral history. Specifically, the reforms implemented by General Zia acted as a spur to the formation and consolidation of political dynasties: the radical institutional changes carried out by the Zia regime not only increased the entrenchment of existing political families but also led to the emergence of new dynasties over time. To elaborate our argument, we first describe the constellation of political and economic interventions that made Zia-era reforms a critical juncture. We then move to discuss a causal mechanism explaining why and how these reforms had the effect of encouraging family-based politicians and dynastic politics. Lastly, we show how the effects of the Zia-era reforms have continued to persist long after his departure, highlighting a path-dependent process.

Zia's reforms as a spur to family politics

General Zia's rule started in 1977 with a promise to hold general elections in 90 days. However, rather than fulfilling his promise, he followed the tried and tested method used by General Ayub in the late 1950s. Within two years of the military coup, General Zia held local bodies elections in 1979. Another round of local elections was held in 1983. These elections were held on a non-party basis in the sense that candidates could not reveal their party affiliations. Party-based competition was thus replaced by a contest between personalities. In this context, candidates relied on alternative structures of political mobilization linked to society's natural formations, such as clans, kinship groups, religious status, and wealth. In rural areas, candidates belonging to established propertied families availed themselves of their de facto power derived from their privileged status. Locally influential landed elites, including religious elites owning pilgrimage sites (the shrine guardians) and their networks (e.g. *biraderis*) acquired or regained political salience.

Two other factors combined with party-less elections to create a powerful electoral mix: co-option of local elites through state resources and political exclusion. The former is a classic carrot and stick policy that left some enduring legacies for electoral politics. First, as Mohmand (2019, p. 75) argues, "district councils were given considerable power to raise and spend money, turning them quickly into an alternative source of patronage". Subsequently, members elected for the national and provincial assemblies in 1985 were given direct access to development funding in their constituencies. This gave elected politicians direct and unaudited control over the provision of local public goods. They could therefore identify which development schemes are approved for their regions—and where and how they are implemented. While, previously, central planners and the bureaucracy had a great say over public goods provision, General Zia's government entrusted elected politicians with the task of devising and controlling development schemes. In this way, local politicians gained access to plentiful opportunities to direct lucrative contracts to allied contractors and to earn commissions in the process. They could also influence transfers and postings of local bureaucrats, such as service delivery staff in health, education, and irrigation departments. In short, Zia's radical shake-up of the system of public goods provision has had the effect of entrenching clientelism.

Turning now to the second factor, Zia's regime witnessed a large-scale disqualification of politicians who rose to the ranks during the 1970s and were affiliated with Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's PPP. Using the Martial Law Order No 65 and through a series of amendments in the Political Parties Act of 1962, Zia disqualified a large number of PPP-linked candidates. As discussed in section 7.2, all military regimes used legal and administrative measures to disqualify political opponents. However, both in terms of timing and intensity, the political disqualifications carried out by Zia radically altered the course of electoral politics. Zia's purge was more consequential because it was preceded by a period of intense political mobilization during the 1970s when Bhutto's party was successful in galvanizing grass-roots support and in propelling many new faces to the electoral stage, including middle class professionals and trade union activists. Many of Bhutto's die-hard supporters were thrown into jail or driven to exile. Zia's extensive disqualifications and the Peoples Party's decision to boycott elections created a political void that was either filled by new political actors or led to the entrenchment of powerful local intermediaries who participated in elections according to the new rules of the game.

Both the creation of new political space through disqualifications and a more institutionalized access to state patronage were undergirded by another important factor: the nexus between local bureaucrats and politicians. Pakistan inherited a colonial legacy of strong bureaucratic state and weak representative institutions. In this system elected politicians only had an "advisory role" and were effectively subordinated to an executive rule where the military and the civilian bureaucrats called the shots. As Wilder (2010, p. 3) argued: "From 1947 to 1971 the civilian bureaucracy played the dominant role in Pakistan's policymaking and, as such, was insufficiently controlled or influenced by elected politicians. During this period, there was limited scope for interference from politicians on the bureaucracy."

In an effort to reverse the legacy of "executive rule" and redress the "imbalance between elected and unelected institutions", Pakistan's first popularly elected leader, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, brought significant changes to the civil service, which ended up swinging the pendulum to the other extreme by politicizing the civil service (Wilder, 2010, p. 4). These changes included the removal of the constitutional protection available to civil servants and the possibility of lateral entry into the civil service ranks. The effect was to undermine the professional independence of civil servants and to make their postings, transfers and promotions subject to political interference (Mufti, 2020). The politicization of civil service, which started under Bhutto, was significantly accelerated during Zia's rule. Over-ruling the recommendations of the Civil Services Reform Commission, which was set up by his own regime, Zia not only retained the measures taken by Bhutto but he further reinforced the subordination of bureaucracy to elected politicians (World Bank, 1998).[1]

The political control of the bureaucracy was convenient for the new military regime which could use it to transfer uncooperative bureaucrats. It was also during the Zia era that the nexus between local bureaucracy—what Waseem (2021) termed as "the state in the field"—and constituency-level political stakeholders was institutionalized in ways that entrenched patron-client relationships. Local politicians began using their influence to transfer or suspend disobliging district-level bureaucrats. This prerogative afforded them unparalleled access to district administration officials inside departments critical for local service delivery, such as police, courts, irrigation, health and education. Local politicians began manipulating their privileged access to state institutions and their control over local bureaucracy to win an electoral advantage.

Together with the absence of party-based political competition and control over development funds that the Zia regime gave to members of parliament, the subordination of bureaucracy to local politicians carried profound repercussions. It turned them into gatekeepers of the state who mediated voters' access to essential services provided by government institutions (Cheema et al., 2007; Mohmand, 2019). A growing body of fieldwork-based research provides crucial evidence on the growing incidence of such brokerage. For example, while describing the power of a local landed clan, the *Maaliks* of Sahiwal, a *tehsil* (sub-district region) of Sargodha district in Punjab, Mohmand (2019, p. 113-114) notes:

> "The *maaliks* are also the village's main contact with the police and the courts. In cases when dispute resolution leaves the purview of the village panchayat, the *maaliks* can affect the manner in which the police choose to deal with complaints. Village residents believe that service delivery is dependent on the will and proactivity of the *maalik*, and that the cost of such delivery is usually deference and obedience". (p. 113-114)

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[1] Rather than inducting political appointees in the civil service through lateral entry, Zia encouraged his fellow military staff to enter into the civil service.

Another anthropological study on Sargodha district, by Nicolas Martin (2016), offers detailed insights on how “powerful landlords” offer their constituents “protection from the police” (Martin, 2016: p. 42). He further highlights that “most voters participate not because of socio-economic dependence but because they need access to a distant and unresponsive state that the leader is able, or at least promises, to provide” (Martin, 2016, p. 214). The Zia period ushered a noticeable shift in the structural sources of elite dominance: rather than being directly derived from their ownership of land and the employment they can thereby provide to local people, the staying power of traditional landed elites increasingly stemmed from their control over the state apparatus. Prior to Zia, these traditional elites were mobilizing a hierarchical social structure which they dominated to their electoral advantage. In the post-Zia period, by contrast, many landlords lost their absolute dominance and land ownership became a less important determinant of electoral success. Instead, “control over the state apparatus” became more “central to landlords’ strategies of accumulation and dominance” (Martin, 2016 p.4).

Using in-depth fieldwork, Martin (2016, p. 85) documents how local political elites not only mediate voters’ access to public services, but also frequently subvert and appropriate development schemes and profit from lucrative state contracts. In the words of Martin, the power of traditional elites became “transformed from domination to intermediation” (p. 119), and electoral politics emerged as a major inequality-reproducing mechanism (pp. 66, 119). The same idea is conveyed by Mohmand when she writes that the “involvement and investment” of traditional elites in politics substituted for their loss of absolute dominance (Mohmand, 2019: p. 114).

Mechanism

According to the above account, the devolution programmes conceived and implemented by military regimes in Pakistan have had the effect of markedly shifting the locus of political action away from political parties to unaffiliated candidates, thereby reinforcing the power of influential local intermediaries. In the process, the hold of traditional well-established elites appears to have been significantly extended, as indicated by Muhammad Waseem (2021) when he writes that “the local government elections only supplement the hold of the ‘dynasts’ in terms of fielding their lesser kith and kin into the electoral arena and keeping it all within the family.” (p. 31). The same idea is conveyed by Nicolas Martin (2016) who has stressed the growing role of middle-level zamindars (landowners): “When villagers needed to resolve a dispute or required patronage with a government institution, these [middle-level] Gondals were more readily accessible than were the members of the leading families…during elections they played an important role as brokers between the powerful [leading] Gondals and poorer villagers" (pp. 41-2).

The following question then arises: what is the precise mechanism behind the resurgence of dynastic politics, that is, how can this new political landscape be causally linked to Zia's devolution reforms? Our answer to this important question is based on the idea that the main purpose of these reforms was to annihilate political parties understood as mass-based machines driven by programmatic agendas and coalesced around a reformist ideology. This definition applied very well to the populist party, the PPP, constructed by Zulfikar Ali-Bhutto, which Zia saw as a direct threat to order and integrity of the Pakistani nation. During the Bhutto's regime, candidates to elections were fielded, and their campaign financed, by the political party in the name of which they were contesting. By closing the political space to well-organized parties, and allowing candidates to enter the political stage on their individual account, Zia created a new problem, namely how campaigning expenses would be financed in the absence of a supporting party machine. It is at this crucial level that powerful families and their personalized networks could offer an effective substitute for parties. Because they were well-established and well-to-do, they could provide the financial and manpower resources required to run an effective campaign.

Yet, the capacity to supply political resources is of no avail if it is not accompanied by a willingness to engage in the new political game. There are two main reasons why traditional landlord families were actually motivated to respond positively to the newly emerging opportunity. First, they are not interested in ideology or broad policy programmes, but in power and in the preservation of their own status and privileges. Therefore, the new political setup in which seats can be contested on the basis of identity attributes, suited them well. But there is a second feature of the new political system that was appealing to them, namely the clientelistic logic inherent in the way special development funds earmarked for the provision of local public goods were disbursed by the central state. Coupled with the predominance of elected politicians over bureaucrats in all sorts of strategic matters, these funds came to constitute an additional source of patronage to which traditional landlord families were quite sensitive. Not only could they thus expect to recover their campaigning expenditures but also, and most importantly, they were given a golden opportunity to enlarge the set of their followers and to increase their influence.

The above two reasons why traditional families were motivated to enter into the political field, or to strengthen their presence therein, are precisely the same reasons which aroused the interest of Zia and his military successors in seeking a more active political role for these families. First, Zia wanted to anchor his regime in the actions of non-ideological agents, people who do not think of changing the social and political order and do not want to call into question the manner in which central politics is run. Second, traditional families are considered as privileged sources of political support because in their constituencies they wield great social prestige and influence, which allow them to control large networks of dependent followers and allies, and to form strong and stable voting blocs. Therefore, reinforcing the means of patronage available to these families makes perfect sense for military rulers who, by definition, lack legitimacy.

As an important illustration of the latter consideration, we can refer to families which have acquired a high traditional status thanks to their occupation of a pre-eminent position in Sufi orders, the dominant religious organization in the Pakistani countryside. For a long time, Syed and Qureshi families have thus enjoyed a sacred status derived from their lineage associated with a holy Muslim saint. In many cases, members of these families, who are commonly respected under the honorific title of Makhdoom, fulfil the function of caretakers of a shrine. Shrines have been built to venerate saints credited with the merit of originally bringing local tribes into the fold of Islam. The religious authority associated with these shrines is conferred on the family rather than an individual, and it is transmitted from one next generation to the next, thereby ensuring intra-family continuity of the function and status. In other words, the political capital attached to guardianship of a shrine is maintained and accumulated within the family which originally built it and is usually able to claim blood ties with the saint. Shrine families are typically rich because they not only own large landholdings but also collect regular donations from the faithful.

The same families have historically acted as natural contenders for political power and have participated in elections held under both colonial rule and General Ayub's era (Ewing, 1983; Gilmartin, 1988). However, the Zia-era marked a decisive shift in their politicization and propelled a significantly larger number of shrine families into electoral politics (Malik and Malik 2017; Malik and Mirza 2022). One could think that Zia, himself a devout Muslim, gave prime importance to enlisting the support of shrine families. Yet, the reality was different. For as cunning and opportunistic politician as Zia, the interest they represented was a more mundane matter: they are influential and potentially command large vote banks. Moreover, we must bear in mind that Zia belonged to the Deobandi school of Islam, which is a rather puritan doctrine at odds with the flexible and syncretic approach to religion dominating among Sufi orders.

A plausible consequence of the replacement of party-affiliated by individual candidates is an increase in political competition as measured, in particular, by the average number of candidates per seat in election contests. Upon our reading, this will happen if the number of families entering the political stage are more numerous than the parties which were present before the change of electoral system. In the context of Punjab, such an outcome is the more likely as participating families do not generally correspond to whole extended families but to family factions or sub-clans and allies. A given *biraderi* may actually be divided into different factions (*dharras*) because of personality rivalries or the perceived need to diversify risks. In the former instance, factions can ally themselves with outsiders against their own clan members and even their close kin (owing to competition over land or over local dominance), sometimes leading to violent and enduring feuds. Bitter fights involve religious as well as secular elites. In the latter instance, the *biraderi*'s potential voting influence is put into several baskets (vote blocs) so as to avoid being stuck with a losing candidate.[2] Factions are then the outcome of a coordinated decision and their insurance function is especially important in contexts where the landed elite, eager to retain its erstwhile power and prerogatives, compete vigorously for vote bloc members (Mohmand, 2019, p. 250; Lyon, 2019, p. 109; Yadav, 2020,p. 1053). In many cases, the core of a faction seems to be based on cooperation between male siblings and preferential cousin marriages, as it yields prestige to keep daughters within the *biraderi* (Martin, 2016: 96, 117).

In short, not only did rural politics become more "parochial and kinship-based" under military rule, but immediate siblings rather than extended biraderis [clans] also tended to command people's political loyalties. As personalized ties became more central than programmatic agendas in determining the political allegiances of both politicians and their followers, private feuds and tensions often intensified inside big families (Martin, 2016, pp. 94, 118-9). By implication, candidates are not necessarily heads of lineages or large clans. They can be local brokers mediating between voters and big political families, or middle-level landlords or lesser figures in these families who stand on their own. In his in-depth study of Sargodha district, Martin (2016) explains the useful role of brokers thus:

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[2] Internal fights are illustrated by the old confrontation between the Gilani and Quraishi pîr families in Multan district.

> "When villagers needed to resolve a dispute or required patronage with a government institution, these [middle-level] Gondals were more readily accessible than were the members of the leading families…during elections they played an important role as brokers between the powerful Gondals [from leading families] and poorer villagers" (pp. 41-2).

Another indicator of enhanced pressures exerted by political competition following Zia's devolution reforms has been the rising cost of elections for candidates (Wilder, 1999). Combined with evidence, to be provided in the next section, about the higher average number of candidates per seat, the increased cost of electoral participation seems to confirm that the shift from party-based to family-based politics has, indeed, given rise to growing political competition.

In the foregoing analysis, we have provided an account of the rise of family-based politics in the wake of Zia's devolution reforms. There remains the question as to why this rise has taken the form of dynastic politics. What needs to be borne in mind here is that the patronage provided by politicians is not confined to the public goods financed by the state development funds which accrue to them if elected. It also includes key services valued by voters, such as protection against the police, legal defense in local courts, the obtaining of jobs, licenses, contracts, identity cards (which condition access to subsidized subsistence goods), and even fake high school matriculation certificates. For this reason, the de facto power of a politician very much hinges on his connections to persons who matter inside strategic departments and offices of the administration and on his capacity to activate them when their intervention is required. Such connections and capacity can be considered as an important component of a candidate's political capital, whose building obviously involves big sunk costs. In this respect, families which managed to jump into the running train of Zia's politics and establish the right kind of contacts with his government machine, gained a significant edge over political competitors, and this leverage quickly translated into an incumbency advantage.

Clearly, to be successful in the long term, a political family therefore needs to possess two abilities: the ability to harness resources, finance and manpower, for campaigning purposes, and the ability to accumulate and maintain the precious political capital that leads to patronage power (for related arguments, see Ghandi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Fiva and Smith, 2018). In the same line, it is interesting to observe that many candidates and families graduated from holding offices in local government councils to winning provincial and national level elections in 1985.

In fact, close to 50 percent of the elected members of Punjab Assembly were local counsellors (Niazi 1994).

Our last point in this section concerns the persistence of dynastic political families even after political parties were eventually allowed back to the political scene. In the discussion that follows, the central idea is that, at the time of their return, political parties had been transformed from machines articulated around a programmatic and ideological platform to machines instrumental to the ambitions of powerful families and their close allies.

The persisting impact of Zia-era reforms

The institutional ecosystem for electoral politics that took root during General Zia's rule has persisted over time, and continues to cast a long shadow. While the demise of General Zia and the democratic transition in 1988 reinstated the role of political parties, this was largely a *de jure* change as political parties remained weakly institutionalized. The revival of party-based politics in late 1980s did not mean the return of programmatic and ideological politics. Instead, political parties continued to serve as machines that served as instruments for ambitious powerful families and their close allies. As Cheema et al. (2005) note:

> "Since the current members of the provincial and national assemblies are, in a very large number of cases, a product of the 1979 non-party local elections they are more interested in organizing local-level payoffs than pursuing legislative questions" (p. 27).

While Zia's non-party elections had "decisively shifted political initiative towards electoral candidates", this continued to define the political landscape in the post-Zia period (Waseem 1994, p. 15; Wilder 1999). The role of factionalism, extended lineages, clan networks, religious status, and wealth continued to serve as important electoral advantages. Political brokerage rather than legislative action became the main purpose of electoral politics. Mainstream political parties have also avoided holding within-party elections. Such is the salience of "electable" families that Waseem (2021) noted that "The first rule of thumb is: no electables, no party as an election entity" (p. 193).

In the absence of political parties centered around a distinct programmatic platform or an ideology representing specific redistributive preferences, it has been easy for political opportunists to jump from one political party to another. Frequent shifts of party allegiances before elections have now become a pervasive feature of electoral politics, especially among leading political families. Focusing on the case of Muslim League, a mainstream political party that has perfected the art of survival, Waseem (2021) emphasizes the crucial role of such party switches:

> "The Muslim League's electables and legislators trafficked between the civilian-led and military led factions with great ease. Therefore, we can argue that this party is the symbol of the status quo in terms of representing the dynastic families from the districts."
>
> "The PML's organizational fluidity kept the boundaries of the party porous, which kept it as a fallback option for all kinds of political careerists. The party has typically shunned ideology. As a club of locally respectable and electable persons, the party's real concern is to acquire potential access to the state's administrative resources for articulation of the interests of their own members and their cohorts and constituents" (p. 192).

Another institution inherited from the Zia-era has proven remarkably resilient, namely the distribution of development funds through elected members of parliament. Despite the succession of many political governments and regular elections, the involvement of members of provincial and national assemblies in the provision of local public goods has remained intact. Curiously, Imran Khan is the only mainstream political leader to have challenged in his speeches the Zia-era policy of involving MPs in the distribution of development funds. His party's election manifesto emphasized the need to terminate the role of elected politicians in providing public goods and to carry out wide-ranging reforms. However, after coming to power in 2018, he failed to implement these reforms owing to stiff resistance from within his own party ranks.

The post-Zia period has also been characterized by a lack of enthusiasm among elected civilian governments for holding local government elections.[3] One reason is that political parties have viewed local governments as a "competing tier of patronage" (Cheema et al. 2005; Wilder 1999). Another reason is that the former are dominated by established political families and local brokers who fear the prospect of facing competition from potential new entrants emerging from local elections. This is a classic illustration of what Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) have termed the "political replacement effect", the idea that incumbent political elites tend to oppose reforms which can potentially threaten their future political power.

The higher degree of political competition compared to pre-Zia times is yet another feature that has persisted when political parties went back in action. The fact of the matter is that the factional logic of family politics then penetrated into the fabric of the parties, thus causing them to reflect the vested interests of the dominant member family. As pointed out by Waseem (2021):

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[3] It is only recently that the elected government of Imran Khan has held local bodies elections in one province after the Supreme Court intervened on the matter.

> "Divisions and sub-divisions in the political community are reflected through the personal cliques and factions that contribute to the increasing number of parties as players on the political stage. Conversely, parties formed new coalitions based on a shared interest to have access to state patronage irrespective of divergent ideological or policy orientations" (p. 195).

Because there is fierce competition for tickets inside the mainstream political parties, many prominent candidates who do not receive endorsement from a political party end up forming their own party or running in the election as "independents". Hence the relatively high number of candidatures per seat.

7.5 Evidence

Association between Zia-era reforms and dynastic politics

The previous section provided a conceptual framework within which the Zia-era reforms are understood as representing a shock to two distinct political processes. The first is the increasing prominence of 'natural formations' in electoral politics,[4] while the second is the increasingly competitive nature of electoral politics. This section adduces empirical evidence that strongly suggests that both processes have actually occurred as a consequence of Zia's military rule and aided by his local government elections.

Regarding the first process, we show how the Zia-era reforms led to a step change in the rate at which members of dynastic families both 'contested' and 'won' elections. This is followed by evidence pointing towards a clear emergence of new political dynasties after Zia seized power. Finally, we bring evidence of the persistence in power of those dynasties that emerged under this regime. With regard to the second process, we use various measures of political competition to show how electoral politics became more competitive under the Zia regime. Each measure we use represents a different dimension of political, or equivalently electoral, competition and will be described as and when the results are presented.

The evidence we present in this section is descriptive in nature and should be considered as being 'strongly suggestive' as opposed to 'causal'. To provide a causal interpretation to the patterns we would need to have an empirical strategy that 'identifies' the impact of Zia-era reforms on the formation and consolidation of political dynasties. Despite lacking such a strategy, we nevertheless believe that our empirical patterns provide an important step to an empirically more comprehensive study of the relationship under consideration.

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[4] Natural formations here represent families that derive their power from a traditional source of authority such as the tribe, clan or religious order.

Description of the data

For the empirical analysis in this section, we compiled an extensive database on political genealogies in Punjab that dates back around a century and covers the period, 1921-2013. To our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive data collection effort on political families carried out for Punjab to this date.

Using our detailed political genealogies, we have been able to map dynasties that range from having just one relative who contested in an election to having dozens of relatives participating in different election rounds. Most importantly for our purposes, we have been able to precisely identify the date of entry into electoral politics of each dynastic family in our dataset. This we define as the date at which the founder of the dynasty formally entered an electoral cycle for the first time. In a sense our data allows us to chart the evolution of dynasties over time, which is crucial to determining whether there is a shift in dynasticism around the time of Zia's military coup.

In addition to our database on political genealogies we also collected detailed data on all general elections held in the Punjab during the period 1970 to 2013. There was a total of 10 elections held in this period for which we were able to compile constituency-level information on candidate names, candidate party affiliation, candidate votes, total votes polled and total number of registered voters. Such level of detail allows us to construct a range of time-varying measures of political competitiveness which we then use to look at patterns of political competition before and after the Zia coup. Ideally, we would have liked to extend our electoral results dataset right back to first elections held in the Punjab in 1921. However, detailed data on elections prior to 1970 was hard to find despite our efforts at scouring through many different sources.

The rise of dynastic politics under Zia

Impact of Zia on the dynastic hold over parliaments

Figures 1 and 2 show the number of dynastic candidates running in each election that took place in post-independence Pakistani Punjab. As can be observed, there is a clear increase in the number of dynastic candidates running for elections in 1985, the first elections held under the Zia regime, for both the national and the provincial assemblies. In particular, there is an almost doubling of the size of the dynastic pool of candidates, going from 87 to 162 in the case of the national assembly and from 123 to 218 for the provincial assembly. Another important lesson from the figures is the following: in both assemblies the increase in the dynastic pool of candidates which was observed under Zia sustained itself and even increased over time during the post-Zia period.

There is, however, the concern that the upward trend in the pool of dynastic candidates could simply be driven by the mechanical effects of an increase in the size (i.e. number of seats) of both assemblies over time. To take account of such a concern, we normalize the number of dynastic candidates running in each election by the number of seats contested in Figures 3 and 4. This in effect separates out the mechanical effect of an increase in the number of seats from the overall increase in the number of dynastic candidates that run for elections. As can be seen in both figures, the Zia-era effect of an increased incidence of dynastic entry into politics is reinforced even after normalization by the number of seats. For both assemblies, there is an almost doubling of the number of dynastic candidates per seat with the ratio for the national assembly going from 0.75 to 1.4 and the ratio for the provincial assembly going from 0.51 to 0.91. Again, just like in the case of the number of dynastic candidates, we see that the increase in the number of dynastic candidates per seat has persisted throughout the post-Zia period.

Besides looking at how Zia influenced the rate at which political dynasties ran for elections, we are interested in knowing more about how his regime affected their overall hold over parliaments. To further probe such a phenomenon, we examine the change in the presence of dynasts in both the national and provincial assemblies of Pakistani Punjab over the post-independence period. Figures 5 and 6 show the number of dynastic members per seat in each post-independence national and provincial assembly, respectively. One pattern clearly sticks out from both figures: the number of dynastic members per seat rose dramatically after Zia took over and organized his first general election in 1985, and then it remained consistently high from there. Both figures thus indicate that the Zia-era reforms have permanently boosted the overall hold of dynasts over the national and provincial parliaments. In this sense these two figures combined with Figures 1-4 discussed previously provide strong suggestive evidence that the Zia regime represented a structural break in the process of dynastic consolidation.

Zia and the emergence of new dynasties

Thus far we have presented evidence to the effect that the Zia regime was associated with an increase in the likelihood that members of political families run for elections and in the likelihood that they win electoral seats conditional upon running. Both these factors are indicative of the fact that the Zia-era reforms reinforced the entrenchment of political elites, thereby consolidating the dynastic foothold in electoral politics. However, what we have not considered so far is how Zia's military regime could have impacted the process of dynastic 'formation'. In other words, was it simply the case that Zia encouraged more dynastic candidates to run for elections and increased their probability of success conditional upon running, or was it also the case that he formed new dynasties from scratch?

Accordingly, in Figures 7 and 8, we examine the change in the number of founders of dynasties who entered parliament for the first time (i.e. gained a seat for the first time) before, during and after Zia. Figure 7 charts the evolution of entry of founders for the national assembly, while Figure 8 repeats this exercise for the provincial assembly. In both cases, it is obvious that a clear majority of founders of dynasties entered parliament for the first time in the two general elections that were held under or immediately after the Zia regime—1985 and 1988. For instance, in the case of the national assembly, Figure 7 shows that of the 124 individuals who founded political dynasties between 1977 and 2013, 58 (*or 47%*) entered parliament for the first time in either 1985 or 1988. Similarly, for the provincial assembly, Figure 8 shows that of the 189 individuals who founded political dynasties between 1977 and 2013, 96 (or *51%*) entered parliament for the first time during the Zia era.

Just as was the case with Figures 1-2, these figures could merely reflect the mechanical effects of an overtime increase in the size of national and provincial parliaments. To rule out such a possibility, Figures 9 and 10 normalize the numbers in Figures 7 and 8 by the number of assembly seats in each election year. Again, reinforcing the message from the raw numbers, Figures 9-10 show that for both the national and provincial assemblies, the ratio between the number of founder members who entered parliament for the first time and the number of seats was unusually high for elections held during the Zia era. This can be gauged by comparing the size of the bars corresponding to the election years 1985 and 1988 to the bars related to the other election years. For instance, in the case of the provincial assembly, the ratio of founder members per seat in 1985 is more than double the ratio for any of the other election years.

Political persistence of Zia-era dynasties

We have just presented evidence that Zia's military regime led to an increase in the incidence of dynastic formation. Specifically, we showed how the number of dynastic founders who entered parliament for the first time increased dramatically in the two elections held under Zia. We would now like to assess the extent to which the families which entered electoral politics for the first time under Zia continued to contest and win elections in the post-Zia period. Toward this purpose, we turn to Figures 11 to 12. Focusing first on Figures 11 and 12, we observe that the proportion of Zia-era dynastic families contesting elections was quite high throughout the post-Zia period.[5] For instance, looking at Figure 12 the proportion of Zia-era dynasties contesting elections in provincial assemblies remained well above 20% throughout the post-Zia period. Similarly, the equivalent proportion for national assemblies remained above 20% throughout the post-Zia election years. Consistent with the patterns in Figures 11-12, Figures 13-14 show a higher proportion of Zia-era dynasties winning elections throughout the post-Zia period. The proportion hovers around 20% or above for the national assemblies, and it is well above 20% for the provincial assemblies. Such persistently high rates of 'contestation' and 'electoral success' suggest that the political system created under Zia produced dynasties that were both powerful and durable.

As mentioned previously, without rigorous statistical analysis it is not possible to attribute a causal interpretation to these empirical patterns. We nevertheless contend that the patterns we have documented shed an important light on the relation between political strategies of authoritarian regimes and the dual processes of dynastic 'formation' and 'consolidation'.

Political Competition and the Zia Era

To detect differences in the patterns of political competition around Zia's military coup, we make use of five different time-varying measures of political competitiveness. The first is the *number of candidates per seat*. This measure reflects the overall pool of candidates who contested the election for a given parliamentary seat. It is therefore indicative of the extent of the choice available to voters. The second measure is *one minus the vote share of the winning candidate*, where the winner's vote share is equal to the votes received by the winning candidate divided by the total votes polled in the constituency. Higher values of this measure reflect a lower victory margin of the winning candidate and, therefore, stronger political competition. The third measure is *one minus the vote share of the top two candidates*. Higher values of this measure reflect a lower margin of victory for the top two candidates. This, in essence, is similar to the previous measure in that it compares the strength of the top vote getters to the rest of the competitive field. Our fourth measure is defined as *one minus the vote margin of the winning candidate*, where the winner's vote margin equals the difference in votes between the winner and the first runner-up divided by total votes polled in the constituency. This measure represents the closeness of the election and the electoral strength of the winner relative to the first runner-up. The final measure is the *Herfindhal-Hirschman index of political competition*. This is defined as one minus the political Herfindhal index where the political Herfindhal index equals the sum of squares of the vote shares of each candidate running for election in a constituency (i.e. $1 - \sum VS_i$, where VS_i is the vote share of candidate i). The higher the number of candidates and the smaller their vote shares relative to each other, the closer will be the value of the HHI to 1. A description of the trends in each of these measures before and after Zia's military coup is provided in the following paragraphs.

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[5] We consider the 1990 general elections as being the start of the post-Zia period because they were the first elections held after the direct military rule associated with General Zia-ul-Haq had ended.

We first begin by looking at the number of candidates per seat. As can be observed from Figure 15, there is a dramatic increase in the number of candidates who competed for a seat after Zia's military takeover. For both the national and provincial assemblies, the candidate to seat ratio *almost doubled* in the post-Zia coup period. Turning to Figures 16 and 17, we observe similar increases in the other four measures of political competition between the pre- and post-Zia coup periods. The bars for all four measures PC 1 (*1 – margin of victory*), PC 2 (*1 – HHI of political competition*), PC 3 (*1 – winner's vote share*) and PC 4 (*1 – vote share of the top two candidates*) are clearly higher for the post-Zia coup period in both the national and the provincial assemblies. Admittedly, the increases are starker for the provincial assembly relative to national assembly. This is consistent with the view that Zia-era reforms had a comparatively large effect on entries into 'provincial politics' as access to state resources was growingly organized at that level. Juxtaposed with our results from the previous sub-section, these results indicate that the rise in the incidence of political dynasties under Zia happened in a context of greater political competition.

7.6 Conclusion

For various reasons authoritarian regimes tend to show a preference for electoral politics over direct rule. Electoral politics can help autocrats to concentrate and consolidate power. This observation applies well to Pakistan and its three military regimes: Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf. The political reforms enacted by General Zia ul-Haq, his devolution programme and his mode of channelling development funds in particular, have had an especially strong and enduring impact on the country’s political system. More specifically, these reforms have stimulated the rise of family politics in replacement of party politics, as well as the formation and consolidation of political dynasties. More ominously, they have also contributed to end the independence of the bureaucracy and to cause its capture by elected politicians acting according to the logic of clientelism.

In a companion paper (Malik et al., 2022), we have shown that in constituencies where dynasts have won elections (by a close margin), development outcomes are significantly worse than in constituencies where non-dynasts have (narrowly) won over dynasts. The implication is that, in their ambition to create popular support for their regimes, the military rulers of Pakistan have established a political system that is adverse for development. The political families which are the basis of this support tend to think in terms of their own power and prerogatives and not in terms of the general wellbeing of the population.

It may appear paradoxical that political competition has actually increased in the wake of Zia’s reforms. The clue behind this puzzle lies in the fact that enhanced competition between individual candidates at the constituency level can go hand in hand with the strengthening of political families acting as collective actors. A dynastic political family has several members contesting elections in various constituencies, and while one member may fail to win the seat in one constituency, another may win it in another.

There are two other important lessons to draw from our exploration of the long-term impact of Zia’s regime. First, the process of politicization of bureaucratic administration has been initiated under a democratic regime led by Zulfikar Bhutto, and Zia’s role mainly consisted of reinforcing and accelerating this process whereby elected politicians got an upper hand over civil servants. Second, when political parties, at least the most important among them, were allowed to contest elections again, their nature had been deeply transformed from machines based on a programmatic platform and an ideology to machines controlled by dominant families consolidating their own power through political clientelism.

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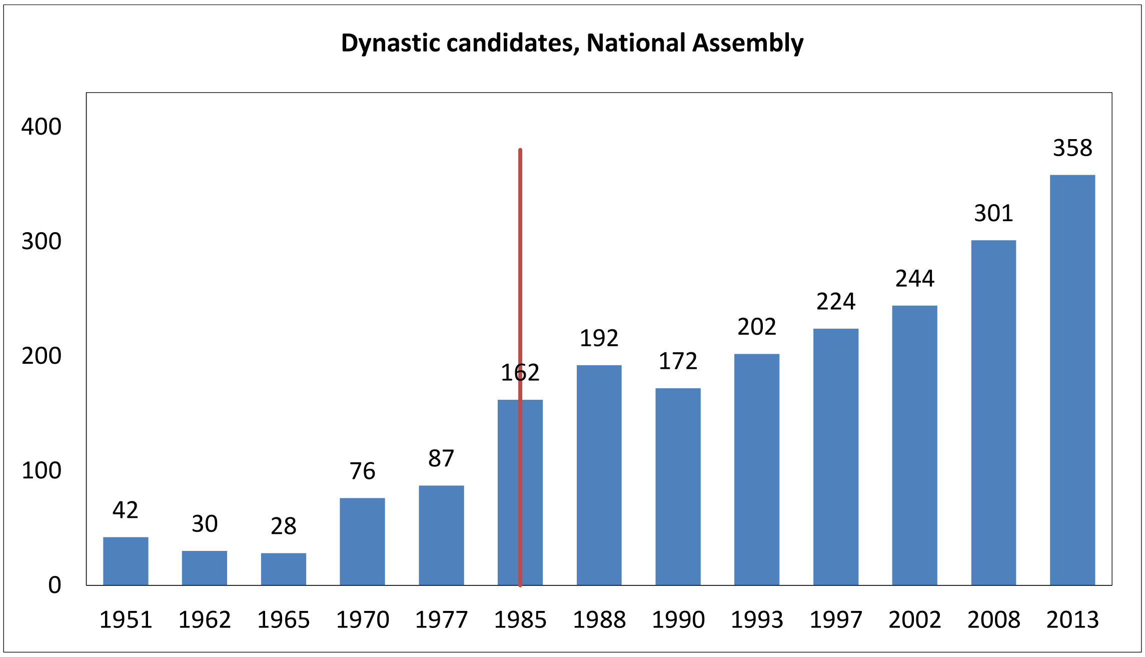
Figures

Figure 1



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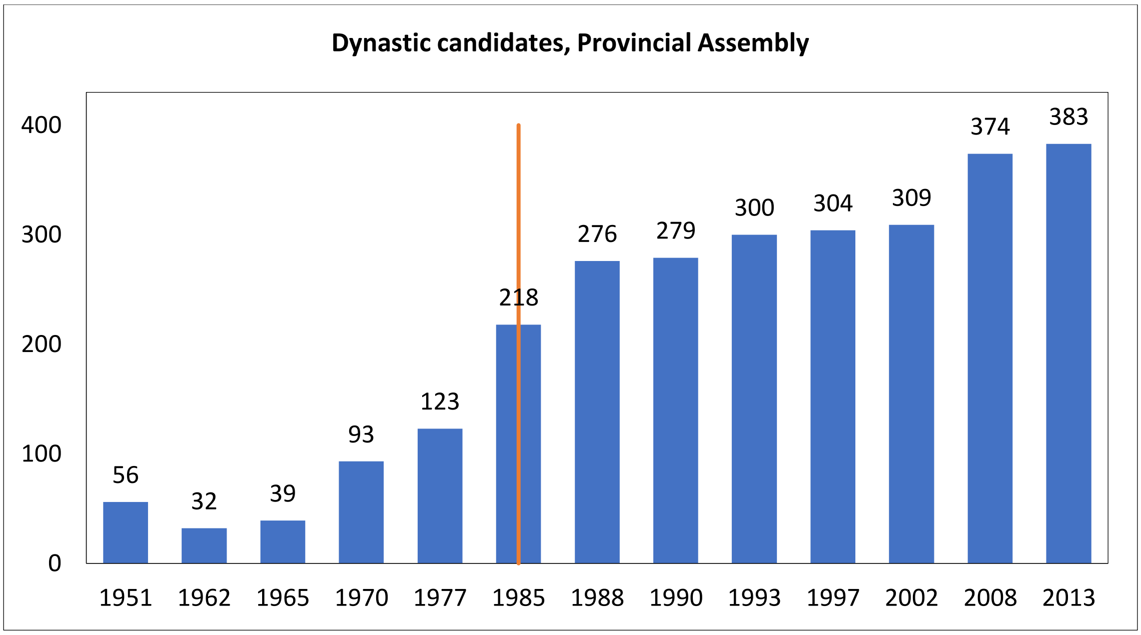

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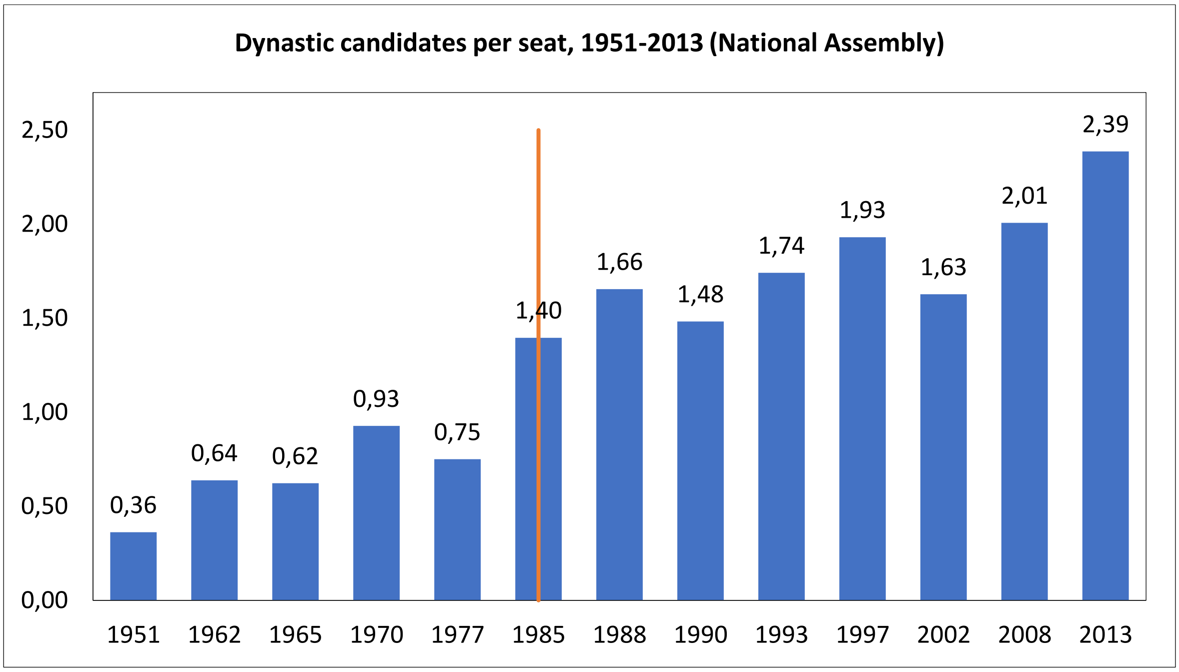

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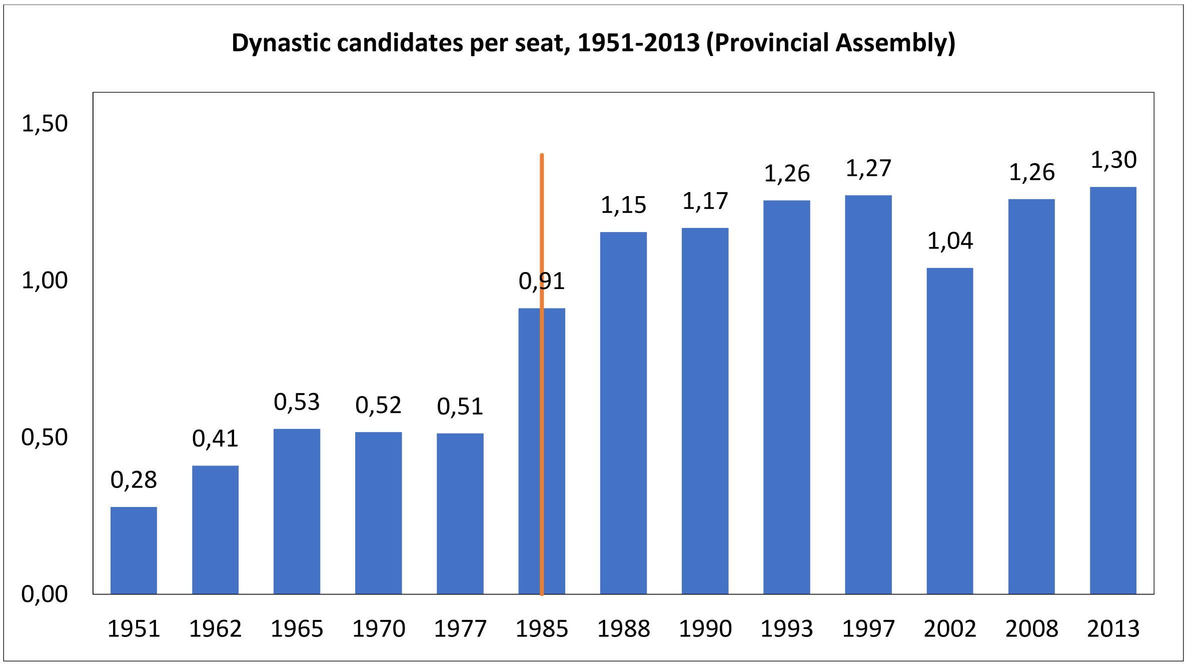

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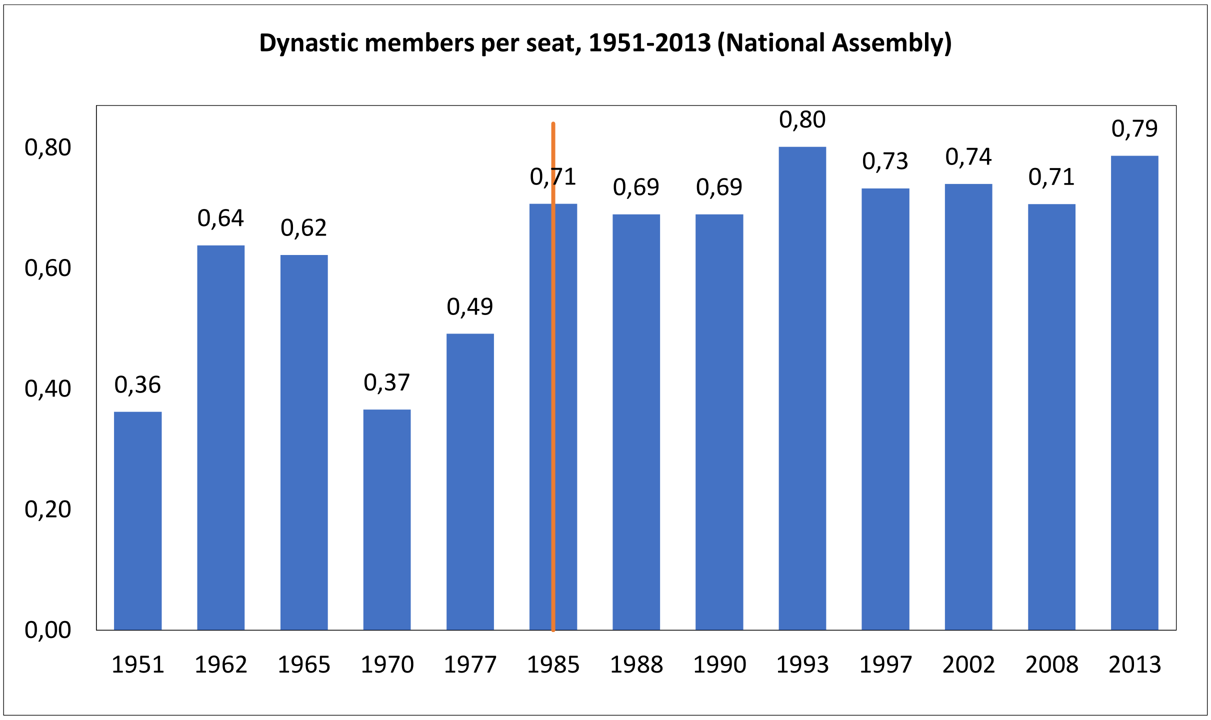

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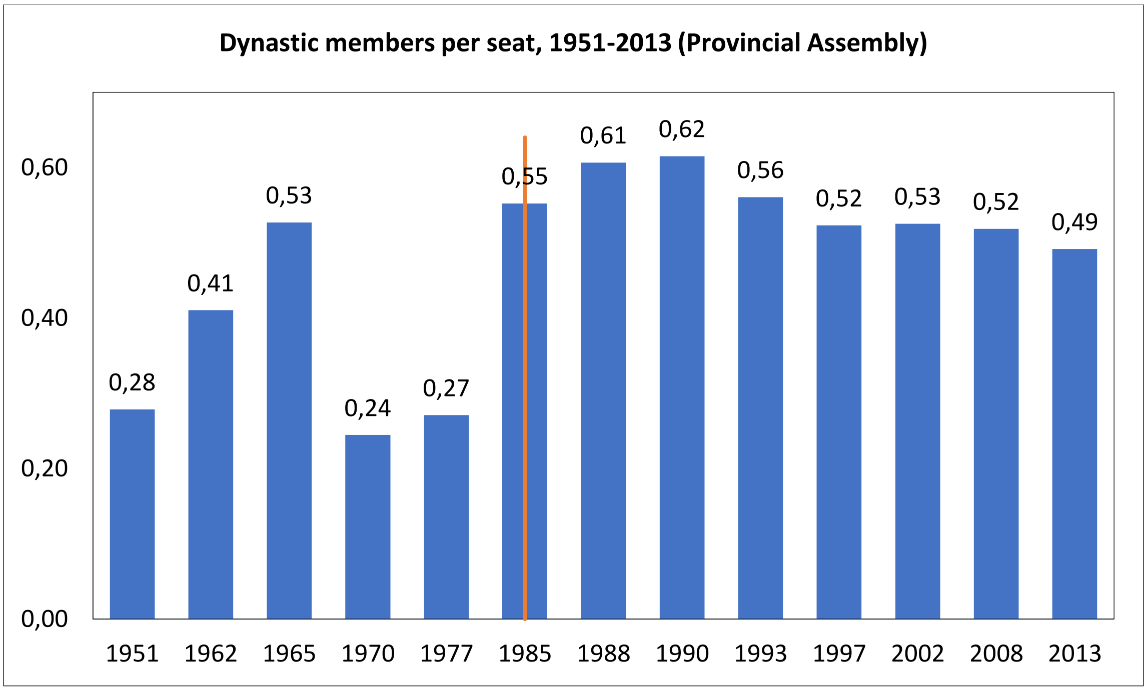

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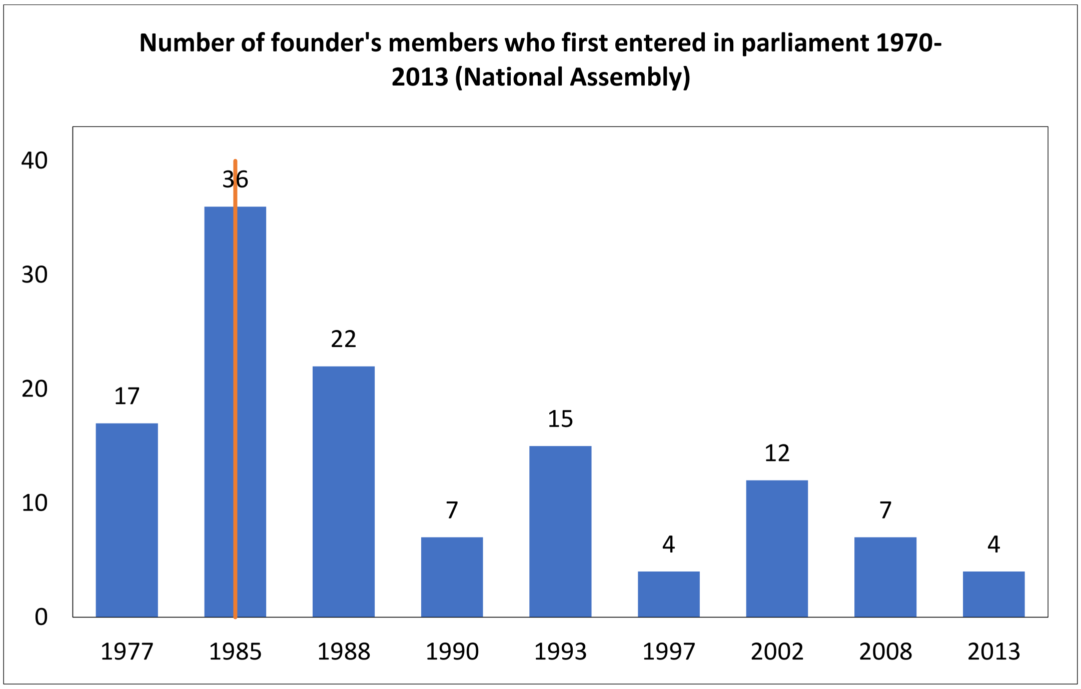

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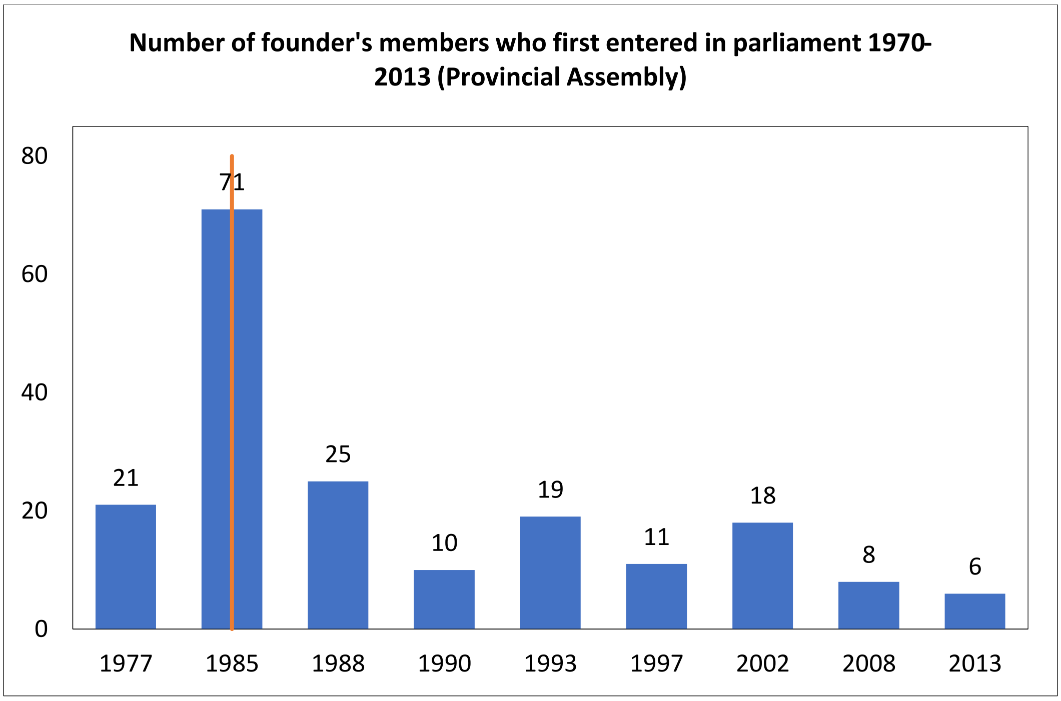

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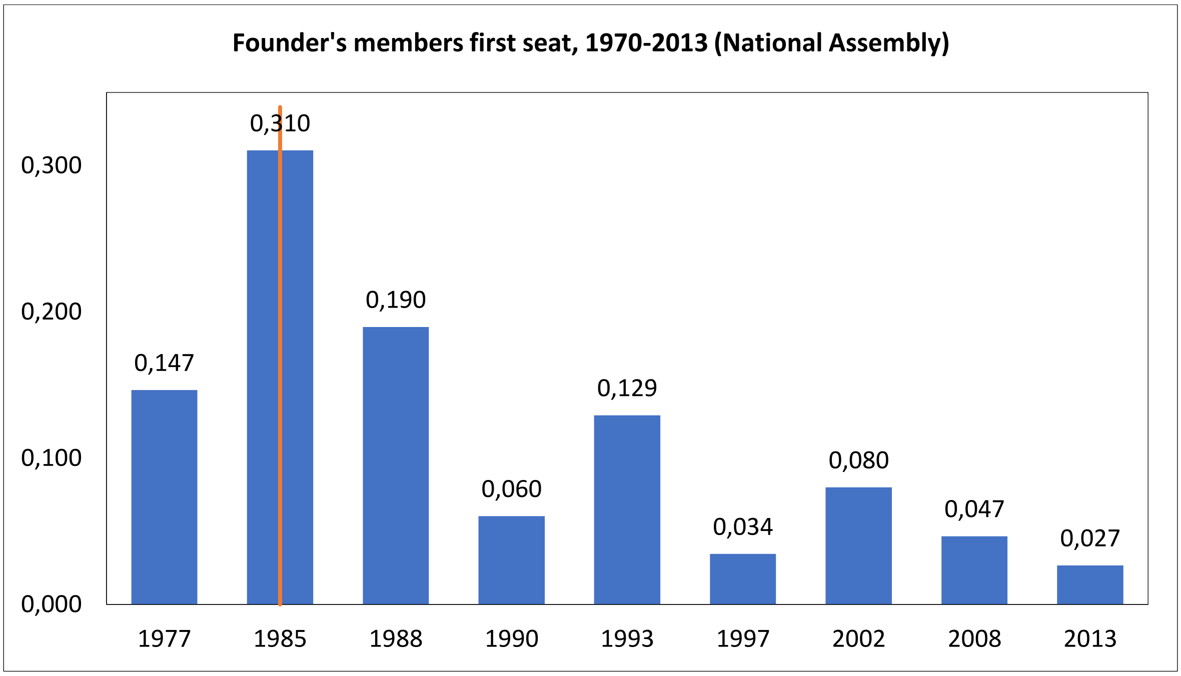

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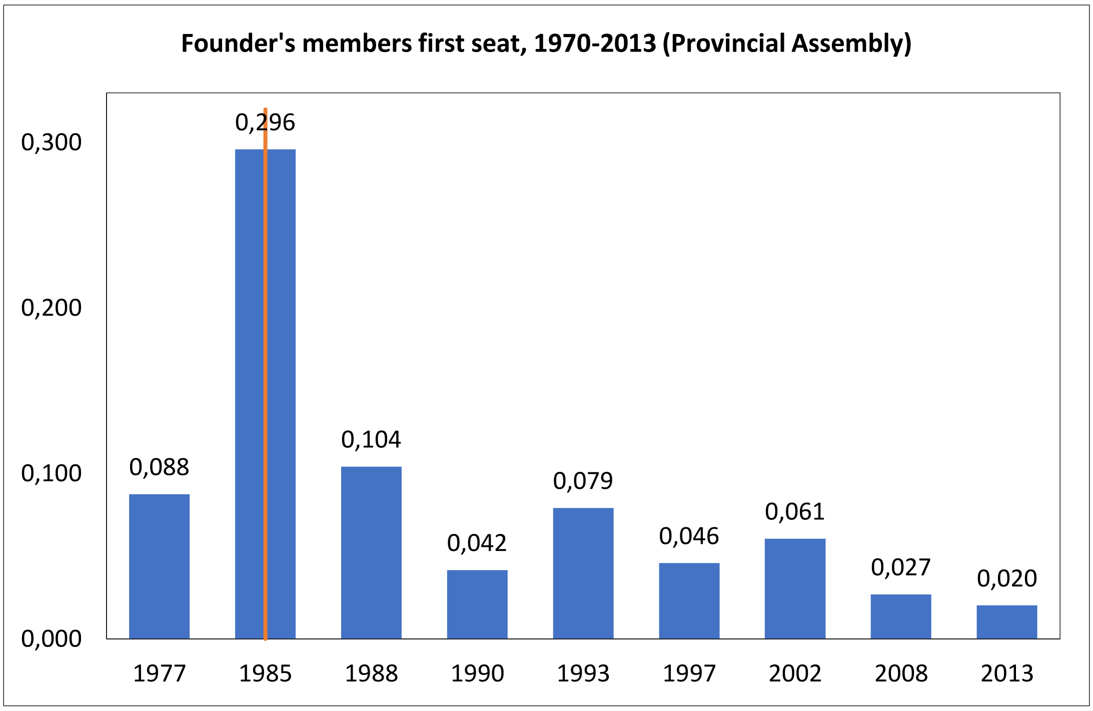

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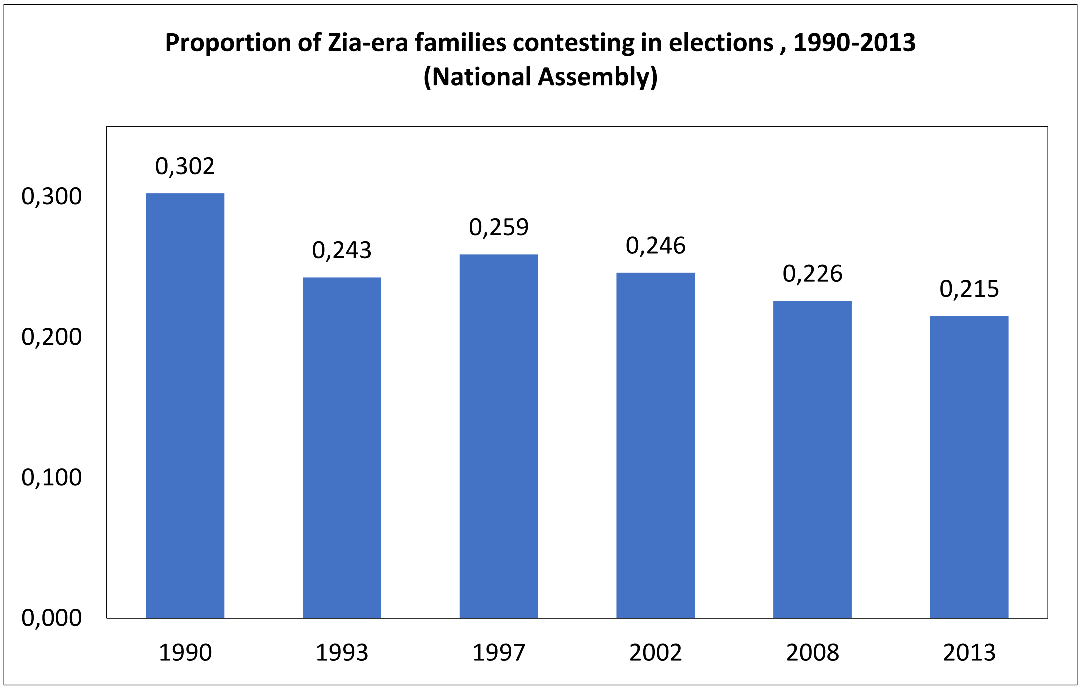

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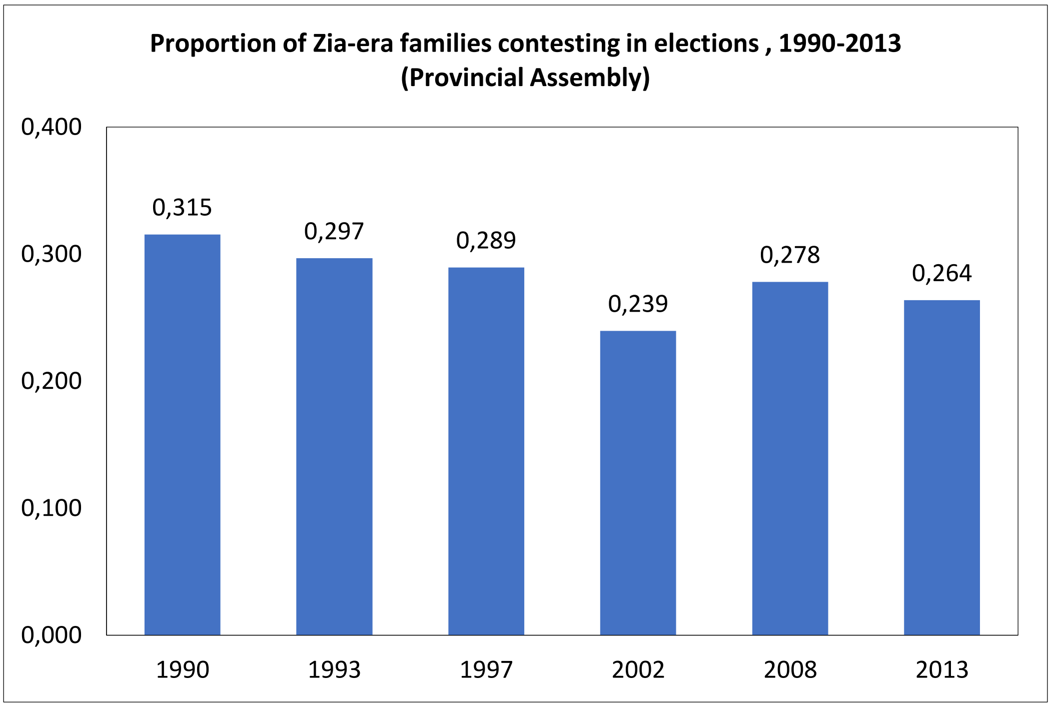

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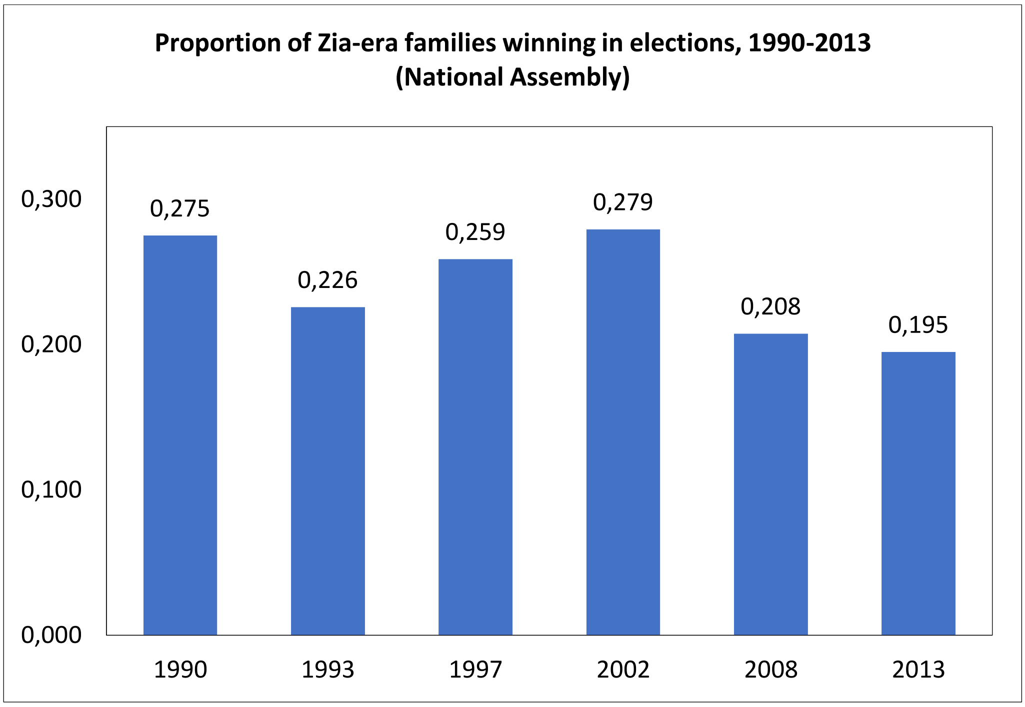

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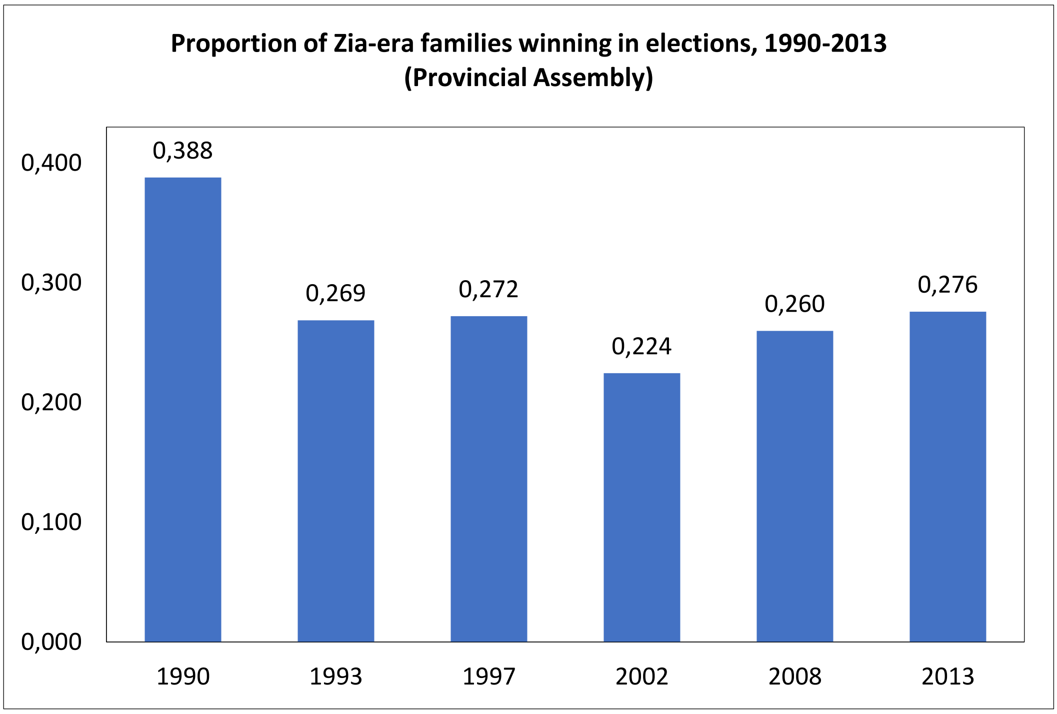

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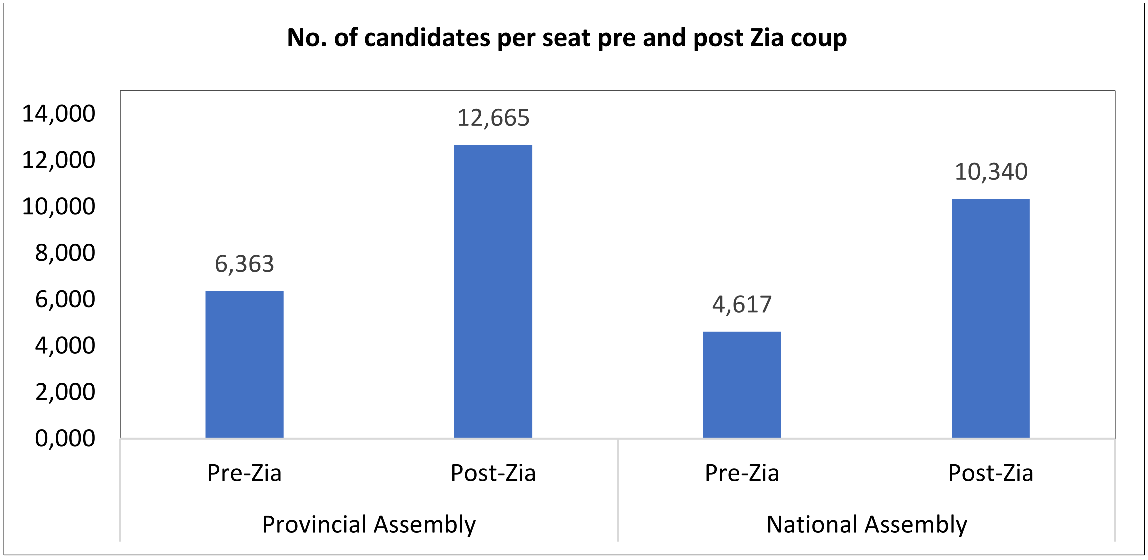

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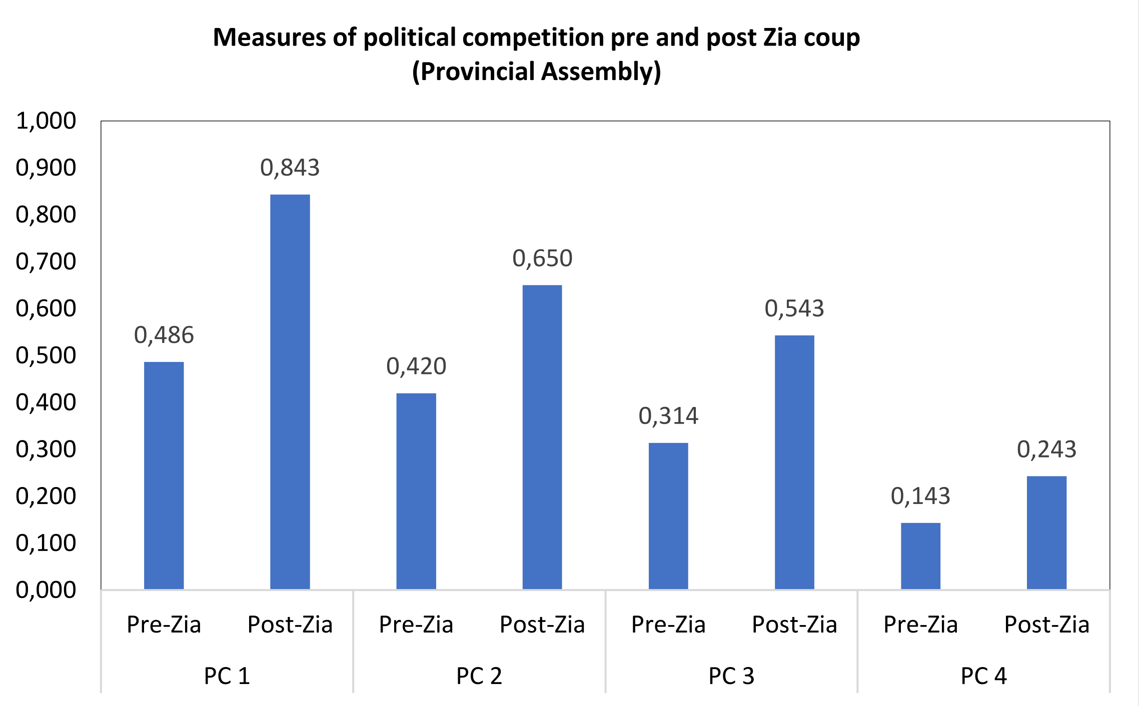

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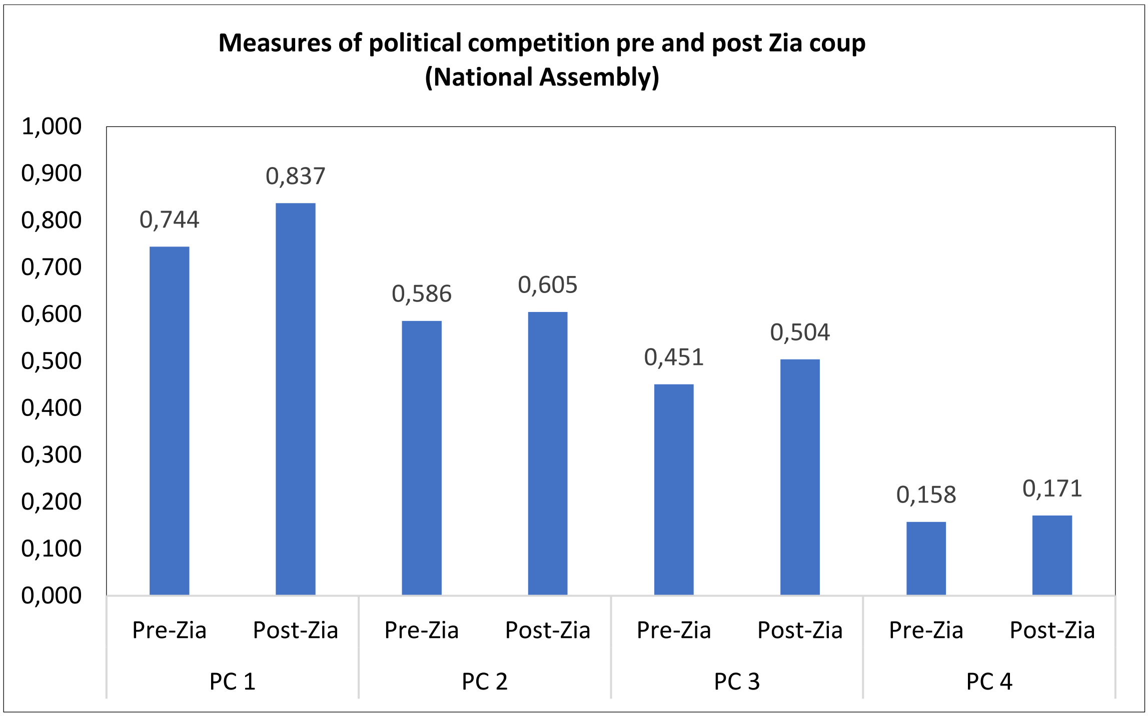
Measures of political competition pre and post Zia coup
(National Assembly)
1,000
0,900
0,800
0,700
0,600
0,500
0,400
0,300
0,200
0,100
0,000
0,744
0,837
0,586
0,605
0,451
0,504
0,158
0,171
Pre-Zia
Post-Zia
PC 1
Pre-Zia
Post-Zia
PC 2
Pre-Zia
Post-Zia
PC 3
Pre-Zia
Post-Zia
PC 4