# 5. Devolution under autocracy: evidence from Pakistan

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## Summary

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 autocratic regimes under military rulers General Ayub Khan (1958–69), Zia-ul-Haq (1977–88), and General Parvez Musharraf (1999–2008). The political reforms enacted by Zia-ul-Haq, his devolution programme, and his mode of channelling development funds via elected politicians exerted an enduring impact on the country's political system. Specifically, we argue that institutional changes under Zia's regime have stimulated the rise of family politics in replacement of party politics, resulting in the formation and consolidation of political dynasties. They have also contributed to the capture of local bureaucracy by elected politicians thereby entrenching clientelism.

Authoritarian regimes often direct the course of electoral politics in ways that allow them to concentrate and consolidate power (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2015; Svolik 2012). 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 this chapter, we study the impact of local government reforms carried out by Pakistan's military regime under General

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Zia-ul-Haq on the subsequent trajectory of electoral politics. Drawing on a rich data set on genealogies of political families in Pakistani Punjab, we show how 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 that 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, Generals Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf. Rather paradoxically, these reforms were guided by a desire to centralise political power in the hands of a non-representative government and to bypass party politics (Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan 2005). Relatedly, facing a legitimacy deficit in a formally democratic set-up, the three military autocrats tried to fill this deficit by cultivating alliances with local elites and powerbrokers. More precisely, devolution and the associated channelling of financial resources to local elites allowed military rulers to develop 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; Auriol et al. 2023). More precisely, we adduce quantitative evidence to the effect that the rise of General Zia to supreme power was associated with a clear strengthening of political dynasties, and we highlight the mechanism that plausibly lies behind this relationship.

Our central argument 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 in the sense that, after the interlude of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime, they not only marked a return to the old mode of politics dominated by influential political clans and families but also changed the political landscape in a deeper and more durable manner carrying profound implications for dynastic politics. In effect, the Zia-era changes brought back, with a reinforced vigour and longevity, a dynastic trend whose traces could already be found in the Ayub period. This prior is based on at least four factors that distinguish the Zia era from Pakistan's other military regimes. First, Zia took drastic measures to kill mass politics in the form of a populist party that operated outside the military's control. Second, while the devolution under General 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 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, owing to his ideological leaning and, even more importantly, owing to his political opportunism and pragmatism, 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 the 1980s. For all these reasons, the Zia period is especially relevant and significant 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 India (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006), and Pakistan in particular (Cheema, Khan, and Myerson 2010; Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan 2005; Khan, Khan, and Akhtar 2007). In this respect, we contribute by highlighting the role of local government elections in authoritarian regimes and probing their impact on dynastic politics. Our analysis holds relevance for the emerging literatures on authoritarian politics (Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Gehlbach, Konstantin, and Svolik 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 on dynastic politics (Besley and Reynal-Querol 2017; Dal Bó, Dal Bó, and Snyder 2009; Querubin 2016). While prior work has established the persistence of dynasties and explored their impact on economic development, we shed light on the institutional processes that 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 chapter. We recognise 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, 'decentralisation' is a top-down decision that is usually part of a strategy for public management. Both processes involve devolution of power to subnational levels of government and can possibly involve delegation of fiscal authority. While recognising these distinctions, our core argument is essentially around local government reforms and the associated elections for local bodies. Owing to lack of data, we are not able to go below the provincial level to measure election outcomes. This should not seriously affect our results, however, since politicians sitting in provincial assemblies have typically graduated from preceding wins in local body elections. In addition, it is at the provincial and national levels that we expect to see the most important changes, since the system of special development funds initiated by Zia was implemented in favour of elected members of provincial assemblies. Our second clarification concerns our methodology used in the empirical analysis. The evidence presented there is largely descriptive in nature and establishes robust empirical patterns. But at this stage we do not claim to have established any causal relationship.

The chapter is organised as follows. In Section 5.1, we provide a background to the devolution reforms enacted by the military rulers of Pakistan, Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf. Next (Section 5.2), we briefly review the political science literature dealing with the role of elections in autocracies. In Section 5.3 we propose a plausible mechanism linking the military regime of Zia to the rise of political families and dynastic politics in Pakistan. Insights are also provided about the post-Zia persistence of this phenomenon. The fourth section then offers descriptive statistical evidence consistent with the suggestion that the Zia's regime represented a discontinuity in the incidence of dynastic politics and the extent of electoral competition. Our conclusions summarise the argument.

## 5.1 Devolution under Pakistan's authoritarian regimes

Pakistan is a federal state with seven administrative units, including four different provinces (Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), one federal territory (Islamabad Capital Territory), and two parts of territories disputed with India. Within all of Pakistan's provinces and territories the next tier down consists of divisions, which are further subdivided into districts, and then tehsils, which are in turn partitioned into union councils. By far the most important province is Punjab, which is the area that we are concerned with in this chapter. In terms of political constituencies, the highest level is the National Assembly (NA) where groups of elected representatives from the four provinces sit together. Below the NA, we find provincial assemblies (PAs), one for each province. Members of PAs come from political constituencies that correspond either to a district (when the district has a small size) or a subdistrict (when the district is heavily populated and subdivided into several subunits). Finally, the lowest tier of the political structure is made up of local bodies, which represent several villages and/or towns grouped for the purpose of local elections.

Unfortunately, because we do not have the data pertaining to the latter, lowest tier of elections, our empirical analysis in later parts of the chapter rests on data from NA and PA elections. What needs to be stressed, however, is that the politicians who emerged as PA and NA members in the first post-Zia election in 1985 overwhelmingly came from the local elections that were held in the preceding period from 1979 to 1983. And this strong relationship between the 'national/provincial' and 'local' tiers of the electoral system has been maintained afterwards.

Turning to the devolution efforts of Pakistan's three military rulers, major attempts at decentralisation were carried out by Ayub Khan in the 1960s, Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, and Parvez Musharraf in the 2000s, which have been well covered in the seminal contributions by Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan (2005), Khan, Khan, and Akhtar (2007), and Cheema, Khan, and Myerson (2010). (Pakistan's civilian regimes have occasionally tried to devolve power to the local level, but these attempts were mostly half-hearted and remain peripheral to our analysis.[1]) Additional analyses on devolution reforms include special reports by the International Crisis Group and the US Institute of Peace, which mainly focus on the post-Musharraf reforms (Ali 2018; ICG 2004). Rather than reinventing the wheel, we synthesise prior work and highlight both similarities and differences across the three military rulers' main devolution attempts, setting the stage for the conceptual and empirical discussion in Sections 5.3 and 5.4.

Military rulers typically began their political life by dissolving national and provincial assemblies and imposing some form of presidential rule. Soon after assuming power, they initiated serious attempts at decentralisation of political power in favour of local tiers of government. The decision to hold local elections was motivated by the need to fill a critical legitimacy gap and co-opt local political elites in the service of authoritarian rule. It bears emphasis that decentralisation entailed only constrained forms of representation, so that political power remained essentially centralised in the hands of the military. It is thus not coincidental that devolution was partial and incomplete, involving only limited administrative and financial autonomy. Because state resources were distributed to allied local politicians who could then direct a portion of them to their clientele, military regimes tried to build a stable political constituency. Furthermore, elections for local bodies were organised on a non-party basis, thereby allowing military rulers not only to weaken the influence of grassroots participation via political parties, but also to strengthen the role of local brokers who were able to leverage their de facto power to garner public support. To achieve this, military regimes did not hesitate from disqualifying political opponents.

## General Ayub Khan (1958–69)

There are some 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 centralise power (Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan 2005). 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 patronised the same system of indirect rule through local elites.

In particular, the first military ruler of independent Pakistan, Ayub Khan, adopted a local government system that closely followed the colonial template: like the latter, it offered limited representation to local politicians while retaining significant bureaucratic oversight. Akin to the British, Ayub's local governance arrangements had a distinct rural bias in terms of distribution of resources, an expected consequence of the fact that local governments were dominated by rural elites who provided the basic support for his regime. During the 1950s, significant budgetary shares had been allocated to urban areas, partly a response to the influx of Muslim refugees from India who settled in large numbers in urban centres. This budgetary trend was reversed by Ayub, who restored the British policy of favouring rural areas in development expenditures (Cheema and Mohmand 2003).

The Basic Democracies Ordinance (1959), introduced by Ayub soon after he seized power (in 1958), provided for 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. Limited political representation was thus 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 'legitimise' 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, Khwaja, and Khan (2005, p.6) noted, bureaucratic authority could be used to 'quash the proceedings; suspend resolutions passed or orders made by any local body' and to prohibit actions undertaken by local bodies. Moreover, even if local bodies enjoyed some 'regulatory and development functions', these were effectively circumscribed by limited fiscal capacity (Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan 2005; Siddiqui 1992).

## Zia-ul-Haq (1977–88)

The second major attempt at reviving local governments happened during a six-year period, 1979–85. Soon after staging a military coup, Zia-ul-Haq issued special decrees and ordinances for local governments. Elections for local bodies were held in 1979–80 and, subsequently, in 1983. Like Ayub's experiment with Basic Democracies, Zia's local bodies elections were an attempt to centralise political power and co-opt local politicians. The need for centralised political control in the hands of the military was felt even more acutely as a populist political party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Pakistan's first democratically elected leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, had gained ascendancy during the years that preceded the coup. During this run-up, a broad anti-Bhutto mobilisation 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, Zia disallowed PPP stalwarts from participating in elections. Using the Martial Law Order No 65 and through a series of amendments in the Political Parties Act of 1962, Zia thus disqualified a large number of PPP-linked candidates. Many of Bhutto's diehard supporters were thrown into jail or driven to exile. Zia's extensive disqualifications radically altered the course of electoral politics 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. The elections were held on a non-party basis in the sense that candidates could not reveal their party affiliations. This implied that party-based competition was replaced by a contest between personalities who were leaders of so-called 'voting banks'. In this context, candidates relied on alternative structures of political mobilisation linked to society's natural formations, such as clans, kinship groups, religious status, and wealth.

In contrast to the programmatic politics of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia put in place a powerful system of clientelistic politics based on the co-option of local elites enticed by egregious advantages and privileges. It is not only the case that, 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' but also, and more ominously, members elected for the national and provincial assemblies in 1985 were given direct access to development funding in their constituencies. Such access to special development funds granted 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 greater say over public goods provision, Zia's government entrusted elected politicians with the task of devising and controlling development schemes. In this way, local politicians could avail themselves of plentiful opportunities of lucrative contracts to offer to allied contractors and of juicy commissions that they could themselves earn in the process. Even worse, they were allowed to influence transfers and postings of local bureaucrats responsible for service delivery in health, education, and irrigation departments.

It bears emphasis that the system of special development funds and the allocation of party tickets and ministries as a result of individual bargaining between powerful local brokers and party leaders has continued unabated under all civilian governments after Zia and it continues to grease the wheels of patronage politics until today. In this way, moved by his ambition to suppress popular parties, Zia laid the groundwork for an enduring change in the way electoral politics functions in Pakistan (Hasnain 2008, p.145; Martin 2016, p.74; Ziring 1988, p.804).

It is evident that the rising influence of local politicians and the growing nexus between them and officials would not have been possible if the autonomy of the bureaucracy had not been seriously impaired. Pakistan's inherited colonial legacy of a strong bureaucratic state and weak representative institutions meant that 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. In the words of Wilder (2010, p.3), '[f]rom 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.'

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first popularly elected leader (in office 1971–77), was effectively the first ruler to have attempted to reverse the legacy of 'executive rule' and to redress the 'imbalance between elected and unelected institutions'. Toward this purpose, he brought significant changes to the civil service, which ended up swinging the pendulum to the other extreme by politicising 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).

Initiated under Bhutto, the politicisation of civil service was significantly accelerated during the Zia era. Overruling 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 further reinforced the subordination of bureaucracy to elected politicians (World Bank 1998).[2] In parallel, Zia opted for devolution reforms requiring that all members of local bodies be elected, dispensing with the past practice of combining elected with unelected officials. Direct bureaucratic representation in local governments was thus throttled in order to create greater autonomy for the elected tier at the local level, which obtained total control over local bodies (Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan 2005, p.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.

In sum, central power was considerably reinforced under Zia's regime and the way this was done proved to be highly detrimental to the political fabric of the country. Unlike what was observed in South Korea and Taiwan, for example, it entailed the erosion of the bureaucracy's independence and the proliferation of a system of clientelistic politics in which the lust for power and its advantages replaced commitment to ideas and programmes of economic and social change. More power was devolved to locally elected politicians who showed loyalty to the regime, but at the same time they were dependent on funds and other privileges dispensed by the highest level of the political machine, the presidency.[3] 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, Naqvi, and Siddiqi 2007), as vividly illustrated by a growing body of fieldwork-based research.

One such study, devoted to Sargodha district by Nicolas Martin (2016), thus 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' (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 mobilising a hierarchical social structure that 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' (p.4). In urban areas, the political space vacated by mass disqualifications of PPP loyalists was taken up by new political actors, often traders and businessmen, who became more adept at playing by the new rules of the game. Their success was measured by entrenchment of their political position over time.

## General Parvez Musharraf (1999–2008)

In a familiar pattern, Parvez Musharraf's dictatorial rule also started with a promise to devolve power. One year after imposing a military coup, Musharraf introduced a plan in the year 2000 to hold local body elections under a new framework for devolution that differed in some respects from previous experiments. Firstly, Musharraf's devolution programme substantially altered the structure of local governments and made the local bureaucratic administration (for example, 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 decentralisation 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, Musharraf's devolution was limited by several factors. Local governments lacked the capacity to generate revenues and continued to be constrained by the absence of financial decentralisation. 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 centralisation at the federal level. There was also variation in the extent of devolution between departments. Thus, key departments, such as police and irrigation, remained controlled at the provincial level. Even for departments witnessing a devolution of power, certain functions and services were exempt. Clearly, the devolution reforms of 2000 gave more executive authority to mayors (*nazim*s), 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, Khan, and Myerson 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 recognised as favouring local brokers, including moneyed elites and tribal leaders 'who exercise authority in patron-client relationships' (Cheema, Khan, and Myerson 2010).

Looking across all three military regimes, a final observation applies: they not only imposed a system of electoral contests run through local bodies that they could control; they also engaged in political engineering aimed at manipulating the election process. Each of the devolution attempts was thus preceded by a wave of political disqualifications that selectively targeted political opponents. For example, after usurping power, Ayub Khan promulgated the Public Offices Disqualification Order (PODO) in 1959, and later the Elective Bodies Disqualification Order (EBDO), which resulted in the disqualification of about 6,000 politicians and officials (Noman 1988). Similarly, Zia-ul-Haq disqualified an entire generation of political actors affiliated with the PPP, whose leader, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was deposed by Zia. A similar template was rolled out by 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.

## 5.2 Electoral politics in autocracies

How should we understand the underlying logic of the reforms undertaken by the military rulers of Pakistan? The wider political science literature offers some key pointers. Autocratic states often hold local and national-level elections, whether they are single-party communist states, military dictatorships, or monarchic regimes. In fact, a large proportion can be characterised as 'electoral' autocracies where some formal institutions of politics exist alongside autocratic rule (Luhrmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). Even if such avenues for political representation are 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 these contests?

Dominant analyses of authoritarian politics show that, like any ruler, a dictator essentially cares about their regime's survival. For autocrats this is predicated on the challenge of authoritarian control and power-sharing (de Mesquita et al. 2003; Gehlbach, Konstantin, and Svolik 2016; Svolik 2012). The basic idea is that repression is never sufficient to guarantee the sustainability of dictatorial rule, nor the regime's ability to counter the threats not only of a popular uprising from the majority excluded from power, but also of an internal rebellion fomented by members of the ruling coalition or rivals within the autocrat's clique.[4] The second threat is especially important in the light of available evidence suggesting that two-thirds of rulers have been removed by insiders. The use of repression must therefore be combined with other tactics, foremost among which are legitimacy-building and elite co-option (Gerschewski 2013). The three tactics may be seen as complementary or as imperfect substitutes. Thus, strong legitimacy dispenses the ruler with resorting to some repression, and it may also reduce the need to have recourse to elite co-option.

To obtain legitimacy, authoritarian rulers need to build '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 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 Ba'athist regimes of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and theal-Assad (father and son) in Syria. In Latin America, on the other hand, military rulers in the 1960s and 1970s often mobilised support by using anti-communism to justify their seizure of power. In a medium- or long-term perspective, perhaps the best way of building legitimacy is by implementing effective development policies that have the effect of significantly improving the levels of living of a great number of people. Examples that come to mind here are South Korea under Park and Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek (see Bourguignon and Platteau, 2023, Ch. 8).

Another way of building legitimacy, achievable in a shorter time span, is by organising local elections in such a way as to allow the emergence of supporting elites. In return for the 'spoils' of office, these elites can form the basis of a class of 'collaborative politicians' who act as a conduit between local-level constituencies and the non-representative centre' (Boix and Svolik 2013, p.24). When state patronage is effectively tied to electoral participation and success, elite defection is kept under control and political opponents have to think twice about the costs of non-participation (remember the boycott of the first post-Zia election by the PPP in Pakistan) or of denouncing the ruling regime. Moreover, autocrats can skilfully use elections to divide the opposition. This is especially evident when military-supervised elections are based on competitive clientelism. 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 regimes, where 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 intensify during the election period (Blaydes 2006).

Finally, according to Geddes (1999), autocracies that hold elections are more stable than those that do not. Gerschewski (2013) refines this proposition by adding that electoral autocracies resting on formal avenues for co-option seem to provide a surer way toward regime durability than those in which informal means of co-option (such as cronyism) are predominant. Formal mechanisms can rely on a stable configuration defined by a diffused pattern of support for the ruler, lower levels of repression, and extensive co-option through local governments and legislatures. Several important works emphasise that, in an environment dominated by commitment and moral hazard problems, both the autocrat and the ruling coalition can benefit from formal political institutions, such as parties and legislatures (Blaydes 2006; Boix and Svolik 2013).

Perhaps the most important problem plaguing the interactions between the ruler and societal and elite actors is the autocrat's inability to make credible commitments (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Their promises carry little weight because institutions under authoritarian rule lack commitment power (the autocrat can change his or her mind) 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, Konstantin, and Svolik 2016). Because they suppress all opposition, autocrats have poor 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 autocrat's allies, limiting their ability to monitor the ruler's compliance to the promises they have made. In addition, the ruling coalition also has imperfect information about the ruler's actions, which makes it difficult to organise a rebellion.

The central dilemma in dictatorships is therefore to establish mechanisms that commit a dictator and their allies to 'joint rule' (Boix and Svolik 2013; Svolik 2012). Institutionalised 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 consultation and decision-making role on the latter. Moreover, 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. Moreover, elections under autocratic rule serve a critical informational role: local bodies elections help rulers to determine who among their 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 legislators of the Muslim brotherhood were systematically disadvantaged by the regime in terms of access to development funding.

In this vein, we can understand the local government reforms designed and implemented by Pakistan's military regimes as allowing them to: (i) foreclose political mobilisation around party platforms; (ii) create non-party representative structures dependent on the autocrat's administrative machinery for the exercise of authority; and (iii) institutionalise the ruling coalition through formal rules and establish tiers of patronage aimed at awarding payoffs to the regime's allies. The major turning point corresponded to Zia's regime. It instituted special development funds as a key patronage instrument in the hands of the central state, and it encouraged the politicisation of the administration, which thereby suffered a major blow in the form of a dramatic loss of independence and ability to direct development.

## 5.3 Dynastic politics in Pakistan: revival and persistence

A crucial additional feature of the Zia regime was the acceleration of dynastic politics. To facilitate the entry into politics of new actors and their local kinship networks, financial resources, and brokerage capacity, Zia used local brokers with a foothold in local politics. These political families were catapulted into provincial and national politics during and after Zia's rule. Although more an outcome than a purposeful policy effort itself, the revival of dynastic politics proved to be remarkably resilient even after Zia's demise.

### Why did dynastic politics first increase under Zia?

What were the precise mechanisms behind the resurgence of dynastic politics, and how was this new political landscape causally linked to Zia's devolution reforms? A plausible answer is that the main purpose of Zia's changes or '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 Pakistan People's Party (PPP), constructed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, which Zia saw as a direct threat to order and the integrity of the Pakistani nation.

The extensive political purge of PPP-linked politicians created a new electoral space that was filled by new political actors in urban areas. Many of them first honed their electoral skills in local body elections and subsequently moved up the political ladder to become provincial- and national-level legislators. These families were more likely to form new urban political dynasties in the post-Zia period. During Bhutto's rule, candidates for elections were fielded by political parties, and money played a less important role in electoral politics. By closing the political space to well-organised parties and allowing candidates to enter the political stage on their individual account in a party-less contest, Zia created a new problem, namely how campaigning expenses and other political mobilisation resources would be financed in the absence of a supporting party machine. Powerful families and their personalised networks now effectively offered a substitute for party-based mobilisation because they were well-established and well-to-do; indeed, they could provide the financial and manpower resources required to run an effective campaign and maintain a political clientele. In the absence of party machines and distinct ideological platforms, money thus came to acquire a more salient role in electoral competition, and patronage resources became an essential means of creating and maintaining a political following.

Yet the capacity to supply political resources is to no avail if it is not accompanied by the potential participants' willingness to engage in the new political game. For two main reasons, notable or big families were primed to respond more positively to this emerging opportunity. First, they were 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 set-up in which seats could be contested on the basis of identity suited them well. A second appealing feature of the new politics was the clientelistic logic inherent in the way that 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 big families were quite sensitive. Not only could the families thus expect to recover their campaigning expenditures but also, and most importantly, they were given a golden opportunity to enlarge the set of their own followers and to increase their influence.

For these same two reasons, Zia and his military successors were also interested in motivating the big families to enter the political field afresh or to strengthen their existing presence. First, Zia wanted to anchor his regime in the actions of non-ideological agents, people who were least likely to think of changing the social and political order and who did not want to call into question the manner in which central politics was run. Second, big families are considered privileged sources of political support because in their constituencies they wield great social prestige and influence, allowing them to control large networks of dependent followers and allies, and to form strong and stable voting blocs. So, co-opting and 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 this, consider those families that have acquired a high traditional status thanks to their occupation of a pre-eminent position within Sufi orders, the dominant religious organisation in the Pakistani countryside. For a long time, the Syed and Qureshi families have enjoyed a sacred status derived from their lineage associated with a holy Muslim saint. Members of these families are commonly respected under the honorific title of Makhdoom, and in many cases they fulfil the function of caretakers of a shrine. Across Pakistan 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. The political capital attached to guardianship of a shrine is maintained and accumulated within the family that originally built it and is usually able to claim blood ties with the saint. Shrine families are typically rich not only because they own large landholdings but also because they 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 Ayub's era (Ewing 1983; Gilmartin 1988). However, the Zia era marked a decisive shift in their politicisation and propelled a significantly larger number of shrine families into electoral politics, as illustrated in the next section (Malik and Malik 2017; Malik and Mirza 2022). One might think that Zia, himself a devout Muslim, gave prime importance to enlisting the support of shrine families. Yet the reality was different. For such a cunning and opportunistic politician as Zia, the interest they represented was a more mundane matter: they were influential and potentially command large vote banks.

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. This will happen automatically if the number of families entering the political stage is larger than the number of 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 correspond to whole extended clans but to family factions or subclans and allies. A given *biraderi* (kinship groups or 'brotherhoods') 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.[5] Factions are then the outcome of a coordinated decision. Their insurance function is especially important in contexts where, eager to retain its erstwhile power and prerogatives, the landed elite compete vigorously for vote bloc members (Lyon 2019, p.109; Mohmand 2019, p.250; 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, pp.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*) also tended to command people's political loyalties. As personalised 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, 118–19). By implication, candidates were not necessarily the heads of lineages or large clans. They could (and can) be local brokers mediating between voters and big political families, or middle-level landlords or lesser figures in these families that stand on their own. In his in-depth study of Sargodha district, Martin (2016) explained the useful role of brokers thus:

> When villagers needed to resolve a dispute or required patronage with a government institution, these [middle-level] Gondals (notables) 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.41–42)

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 about the higher average number of candidates per seat (see the next section), 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.

More specifically, we can ask why the rise of family-based politics in the wake of Zia's devolution reforms took the form of *dynastic* politics. What needs to be borne in mind here is that the patronage provided by politicians is not confined to public goods financed by the state development funds that accrue to them if elected. It also includes key services valued by voters, such as protection against the police; legal defence in local courts; the obtaining of jobs, licences, contracts, and identity cards (which condition access to subsidised subsistence goods); and even providing fake high-school matriculation certificates. For this reason, the de facto power of politicians hinges on their connections to persons who matter inside strategic departments and offices of the administration, and on their capacity to activate them when their intervention is required. This networking and mobilising capacity can be considered important components of a candidate's political capital, and building them up obviously involves big sunk costs. In this respect, the families that managed to jump aboard the running train of Zia's politics and establish the right kind of contacts with the government machine gained a significant edge over other political competitors. This leverage quickly translated into an incumbency advantage.

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 and patronage purposes, and the ability to accumulate and maintain the precious political capital that leads to patronage power (for related arguments, see Fiva and Smith 2018; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). 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 per cent of the elected members of the Punjab Assembly had previously been local counsellors (Niazi 1994).

## Why did dynastic politics persist after Zia?

By 1988, when Pakistan's political parties returned after Zia's departure, they had been extensively transformed from machines articulated around a programmatic and ideological platform to machines instrumental for realising the ambitions of powerful families and their close allies. The institutional ecosystem for electoral politics that took root during Zia's rule persisted over time and continues to cast a long shadow at the time of writing. Zia's non-party elections 'decisively shifted the political initiative towards electoral candidates', and this aspect continued to define the political landscape (Waseem 1994, p.15; Wilder 1999). Even when they returned, the political parties remained weakly institutionalised, and there was no 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, Khwaja, and Khan (2005) note,

> [s]ince 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)

Factionalism, extended lineages, clan networks, religious status, and wealth all continued to yield important electoral advantages. Political brokerage rather than legislative action became the main purpose of electoral politics. Mainstream political parties also avoided holding within-party elections. Such is the salience of 'electable' families that Waseem (2021) noted that '[t]he first rule of thumb is: no electables, no party as an election entity' (p.193).

In the absence of political parties centred on 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 Pakistan's electoral politics, especially among leading political families. This feature is entirely consistent with the fact, common to all political parties, that members of provincial and national assemblies emerged as gatekeepers to state benefits in the post-Zia period. Their political survival thus came to depend on continued access to the state administration, and these personalised links achieved more importance than loyalty to any party platform or discipline. Focusing on the case of the Muslim League, a mainstream political party that has perfected the art of survival, Waseem (2021) emphasises the crucial role of such party switches:

> The Muslim League [PML]'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 [the] 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, in his speeches Imran Khan has been the only mainstream political leader to have challenged the Zia-era policy of involving MPs in the distribution of development funds. His party's 2018 election manifesto emphasised the need to terminate the role of elected politicians in providing public goods and to carry out wide-ranging reforms. However, after subsequently coming to power, he failed to implement these reforms owing to stiff resistance from within his own party's ranks.

The post-Zia period has also been characterised by a lack of enthusiasm among elected civilian governments for holding local government elections.[6] One reason is that political parties have viewed local governments as a 'competing tier of patronage' to themselves (Cheema, Khwaja, and Khan 2005; Wilder 1999). Another reason is that the parties 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 that can potentially threaten their future political power.

When political parties went back in action, the higher degree of political competition compared to pre-Zia times is yet another feature that persisted. The factional logic of family politics 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):

> 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)

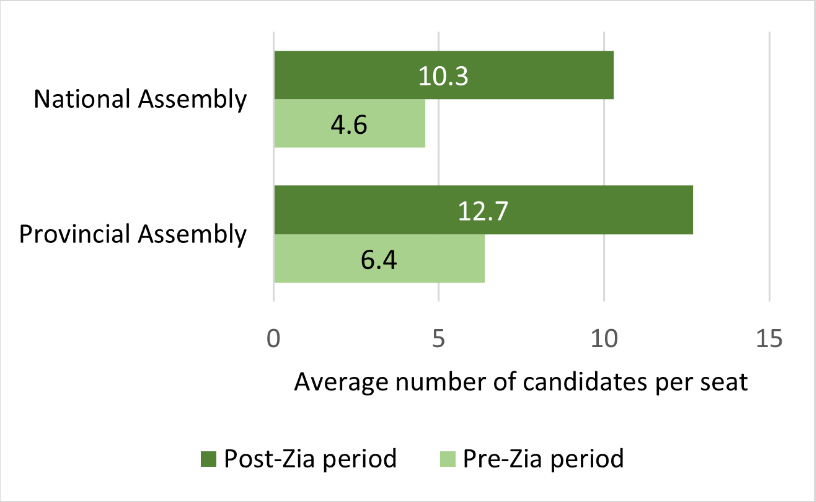
Because there has been fierce competition for tickets inside the mainstream political parties, many prominent candidates who did not receive a party endorsement ended up forming their own party or running in the election as 'independents'.

## Political competition and the Zia era

Which new patterns of political competition came about around Zia's military coup? To address this issue, we created a comprehensive data set of constituency elections held on five occasions from 1951 to 1977 (the pre-Zia period) and eight elections held between 1985 and 2013 (the post-Zia period). We used five different measures of political competitiveness. The first is the *number of candidates per seat*. Figure 5.1 shows that in post-Zia elections there were much higher numbers of candidatures per seat for both the national and provincial assemblies in Punjab province than had been the case for pre-Zia elections, virtually twice as many in both cases.

This measure reflects the overall pool of candidates who contested the election for a given parliamentary seat and indicates the extent of the choice available to voters. However, what matters for competition is not just how many candidates there are (since many minor candidacies may not be electorally significant) but how competitively votes are divided between them. A well-accepted key measure of political competition is the Herfindhal–Hirschman index of political competition, which in political applications and across political science is universally used in the form 1/HH, a measure known as *the effective number of parties (or candidates) in terms of votes*

**Figure 5.1: The average number of candidates per seat competing in Punjab elections in the pre-Zia period (1951–77) and the post-Zia period (1985–2013)**




Source: Author's database of dynastic candidates in constituency contests in Punjab province at all elections.

*(ENPv)*. This equals 1 divided by the sum of squares of the decimal vote shares of each candidate running for election in a constituency (that is, $1/\Sigma VS_i$, where $VS_i$ is the vote share of candidate $i$). Essentially, ENPv measure reweighs parties by the size of their vote shares, with larger parties counting most and the smallest parties least. Like any index, ENPv has some limitations (Dunleavy and Boucek 2003) but it also has some value in being intuitively interpretable. The lowest possible number for ENP*votes* is not 0 but 1, when the top party wins all the votes. In liberal democracies, ENPv is normally at least 2 (often denoting significant competition among two close top rivals), and in PR systems it may rise above 4 or 5 if party fragmentation increases. In the Punjab, Table 5.1(a) shows that the number of parties for NA elections stood at just over 2.4 before the Zia period, and changed only a bit (to just over 2.5) after it. In provincial elections there was more pronounced change, from just over 1.7 before (denoting top party/candidate dominance) to nearly 2.9 after the Zia regime (showing a clear increase in competitive elections).

The table also shows three other measures useful for gauging competition. Table 5.1(b) gives *the share of votes not included in the top candidate's winning margin*. Higher values on this measure reflect a lower victory margin of the winning candidate and, therefore, stronger political competition. There was a clear increase in provincial assembly elections, but only a modest rise at national level. Next, Table 5.1(c) shows *the combined percentage vote share of all the non-winning candidates*. From the pre- to post-Zia periods this

**Table 5.1: Changes in indices of political competition between the pre-Zia elections (1970–77) and the post-Zia elections (1985–2013) for the national and provincial assemblies in Punjab province**

| | Pre-Zia period | Post-Zia period | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| *(a) Average effective number of parties (ENP votes)* | | | |
| National Assembly | 2.42 | 2.53 | Not much change |
| Provincial Assembly | 1.72 | 2.86 | Clear increase |
| *(b) Average 100% minus winner's margin of victory (%)* | | | |
| National Assembly | 74.4 | 83.7 | Some increase |
| Provincial Assembly | 48.6 | 84.3 | Clear increase |
| *(c) Average 100% minus top party's vote share (%)* | | | |
| National Assembly | 45.1 | 50.4 | Some increase |
| Provincial Assembly | 31.4 | 54.3 | Clear increase |
| *(d) Average vote share of all third and lower placed candidates (%)* | | | |
| National Assembly | 15.8 | 17.1 | Not much change |
| Provincial Assembly | 14.3 | 24.3 | Some increase |

Source: Author's database of constituency contests in Punjab province at all elections.
Notes: Data in Table 5.1 shows averages (mean values) in the Punjab as a whole for the two pre-Zia elections and eight post-Zia elections, at National and Provincial Assembly elections.

measure rose noticeably for NA elections, but far more sharply in provincial elections. Finally, we looked at the *vote shares going outside the combined vote shares of the top two candidates* (that is, to third, fourth or subsequent parties) in Table 5.1(d). This metric was stable at national level but grew somewhat at provincial level. Looking across Table 5.1, the reasons for different patterns of change at the NA and provincial assembly levels are not immediately clear and would therefore warrant further investigation.

Overall, the profound institutional shifts under Zia corresponded to an important historical inflection point, or critical juncture, since the impact of the decisions and choices then made by the military regime continue to reverberate till today. Electoral politics continues to be shaped by the same rules of the game and the wheels of electoral politics continue to be greased by clientelism, the salient role of money and family status, and the ability of candidates to mediate the voters' access to the state. The establishment of dynastic political families and their interest in controlling special development funds channelled through politicians, an institution that persists to this date, ensures that the system endures and the bureaucracy remains essentially captured by political actors. Thus, the initial advantages conferred on specific groups in society have been significantly reinforced over time, and beneficiaries of these policies have become important gatekeepers of the existing institutional set-up. These important shifts have also occurred against a background of sharply increasing political competition in provincial elections, and somewhat increased contestation in national elections. Here is a vivid illustration of institutional persistence in the sense that, once profound institutional shifts are set in motion, individual political actors are pushed onto a path that is hard to reverse, thereby creating a powerful 'lock-in' effect (Pierson 2000).

## 5.4 Analysing post-dynastic politics and competition in detail

We examine here in more detail how the Zia-era reforms led to a step change in the rate at which members of dynastic families both 'contested' and 'won' elections, and a clear emergence of new political dynasties after Zia seized power. After having analysed how various measures of political competition increased as the power of dynasties persisted when the Zia regime ended, we present evidence on political dynasties, which is descriptive in nature. It should therefore be considered as being 'strongly suggestive', as opposed to 'causal' interpretation, for which we would need an empirical strategy that 'identifies' the impact of Zia-era reforms on the formation and consolidation of political dynasties. We lack such a strategy, but nevertheless believe that the patterns traced here provide an important step to an empirically more comprehensive study of the Zia era's impacts.

### Description of the data

We compiled an extensive database on political genealogies in Punjab province 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. 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 data set, defined as the date at which the founder of the dynasty formally entered an electoral cycle for the first time. Our data allows us to chart much of the evolution of dynasties over time, which is crucial to determining whether dynasticism increases around the time of Zia's military coup.

In addition to political genealogies, we also collected detailed data on all 10 elections held in the Punjab from 1970 to 2013. For each we were able to compile constituency-level information on candidate names, candidate party affiliation, candidate votes, total votes polled, and the 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 data set 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 impact of the Zia regime on the dynastic hold over parliaments

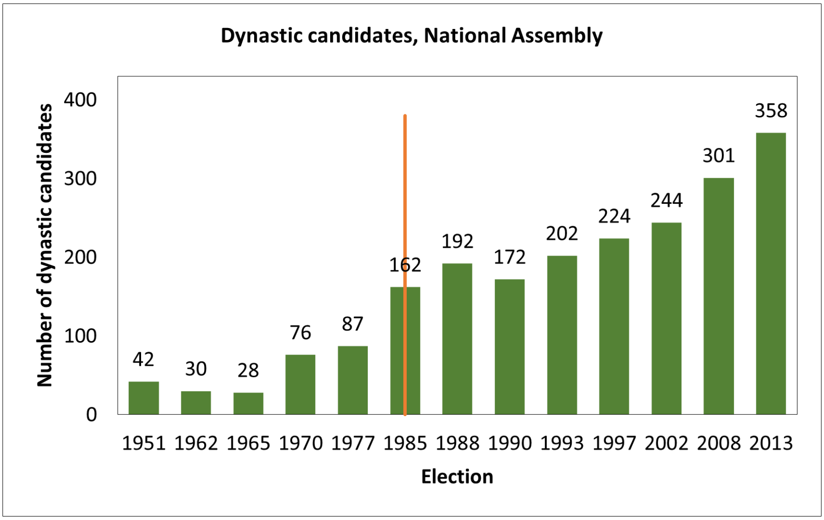
Figure 5.2 shows the number of dynastic candidates running in each election that took place in post-independence Pakistani Punjab. What emerges is an almost doubling in the number of dynastic candidates running for both the national and provincial assemblies in 1985, the first elections held under the Zia regime. And in both assemblies the increase in the dynastic pool of candidates under Zia was sustained and even increased over time during the post-Zia period.

One concern is the possibility that the upward trend in the pool of dynastic candidates could be affected by the mechanical effects of an increase in the sizes (that is, number of seats) of both assemblies over time. However, Annex Figure 5A (in the data annex at the end of this chapter) normalises the number of dynastic candidates running in each election by the number of seats contested, and so 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. The Zia-era effect appears to be actually reinforced. The number of dynastic candidates per seat for the NA increased from 0.75 to 1.4 in 1985 and the ratio for the provincial assemblies from 0.51 to 0.91, with both increases also persisting throughout the post-Zia period. Annex Figure 5B also shows that some of the same trends in the evolution of candidacies are visible when attention is limited to the religious, shrine-guardian families in the period since 1970, albeit with some more stability and less consistent growth in the post-Zia period.

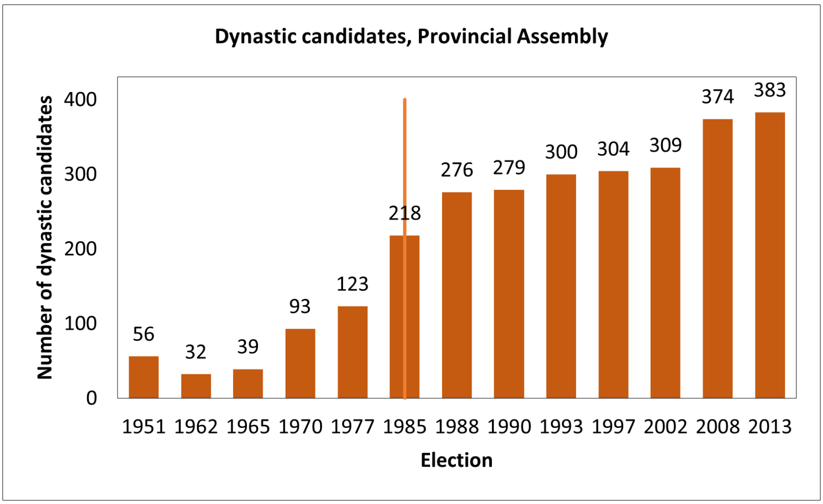
Did the Zia regime also influence the political dynasties' success rates in winning seats and thus their overall hold over parliaments? The two parts of Figure 5.3 show the proportion (%) of dynastic members holding seats in the Punjab for all post-independence national and provincial assemblies. The number of dynastic members per seat did not increase uniformly during the pre-Zia period: while it went up markedly between 1951 and 1962–65, it fell during the period 1970–77. In 1985, under Zia, it surged to levels surpassing the previous maximum at the NA level and stayed there afterwards. At the Punjab provincial level, the number of dynastic members increased sharply in 1985 and has stayed at levels above or at the previous maximum in 1965. At both levels the Zia-era reforms permanently boosted and clearly consolidated the overall hold of dynasts over the national and provincial parliaments. Rather than being a structural shift from party- to family-based politics, the Zia regime revived and reinvigorated a prior characteristic of Pakistan's

**Figure 5.2: The number of dynastic candidates in Punjab at Pakistani elections, 1951–2013, at national and provincial levels**

a. National elections




b. Provincial elections

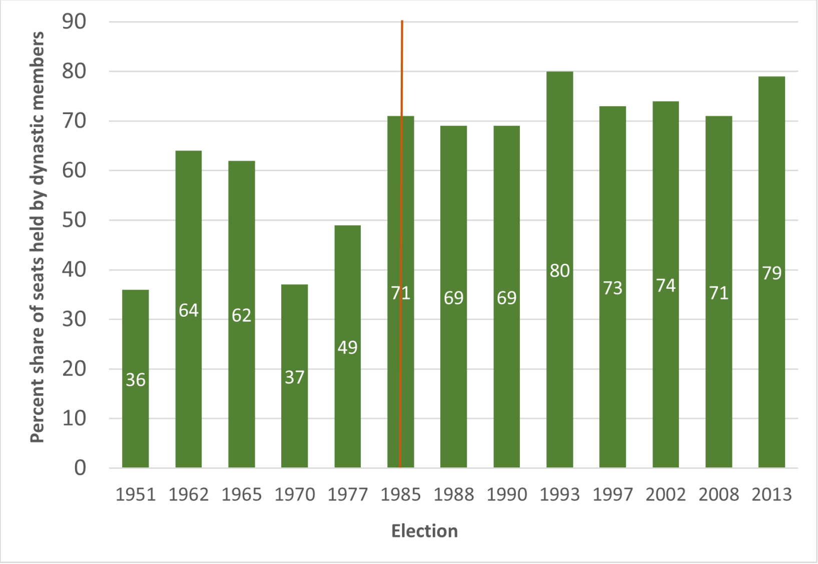



political system as well as putting it on a more stable footing, after the sharp dips in the 1970s under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

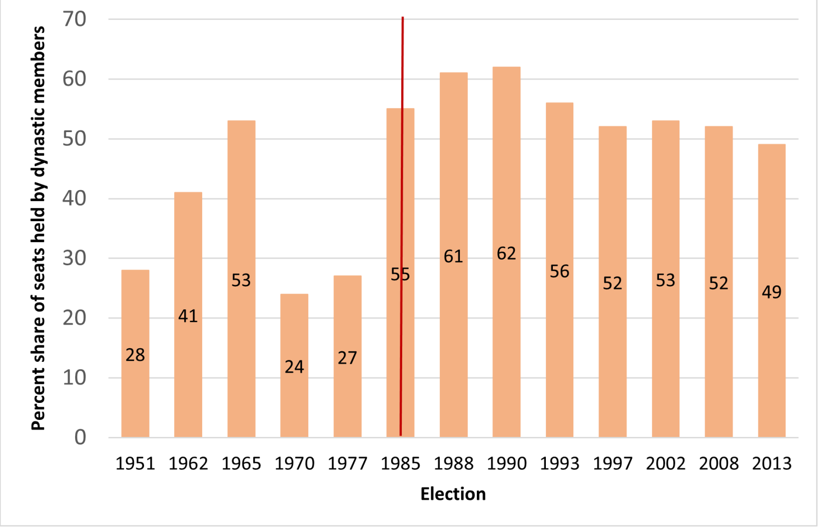
Before Bhutto, the opening of the political space to parties (conceived as platform-based organisations) was restricted and the bureaucracy was largely independent. Under Bhutto, the political landscape was inverted, as the political space became more open, and the autonomy of the state bureaucracy

**Figure 5.3: Dynastic members as a percentage of seat-holders in the Punjab at national and provincial elections, 1951–2013**

a. National assembly




b. Provincial assembly




was seriously encroached upon. Bhutto was himself the scion of a big landlord family, but his brand of politics can be characterised as populist. His approach was designed to break the hold of rural notables who had been courted in turn by the British colonisers, the Muslim League (at the time the new nation was formed), and General Ayub Khan. By taking politics to the grassroots and mobilising them around a common ideological platform, Bhutto brought a radical change into Pakistan's rules of political game. However, Zia did not only signal a return to the old political practices but he also modified the political landscape in a deeper and more durable manner. He considerably reinforced the subordination of the bureaucracy to politicians initiated under Bhutto, but in a different direction; he also expanded politicians' scope for political clientelism via control of development funds, as well as by disqualifying and repressing a wide range of political actors. The result was the opening, or the reopening, of a larger space for political families willing to play by the new rules of the political game.

## Zia and the emergence of new dynasties

Did the Zia regime simply encourage *more* dynastic candidates to run for elections and increase their probability of success conditional upon running? Or did it also encourage *new* dynasties to be formed from scratch? In Figure 5.4 we examine the change in the number of founders of dynasties from Punjab who entered the national and provincial assemblies (that is, gained a seat) for the first time before, during, and after Zia. In both cases, it is obvious that a clear majority of founders of dynasties entered parliament for the first time in the two elections that were held under or immediately after the Zia regime – 1985 and 1988. For the NA, Figure 5.4a shows that 124 individuals founded political dynasties between 1977 and 2013, of whom 58 (or 47 per cent) entered parliament for the first time in either 1985 or 1988. Similarly, for the provincial assemblies, Figure 5.4b shows that of the 189 individuals who founded political dynasties between 1977 and 2013, 96 (or 51 per cent) entered parliament for the first time during the Zia era. Again, we normalised the numbers shown in Figures 5.4 by the number of assembly seats in each election year, without any major effects on the results. The ratio between the number of founder members who entered parliament for the first time and the number of seats was unusually high for the 1985 election nationally and provincially. In the case of the Punjab Provincial Assembly, it was more than double the ratio for any of the other election years.

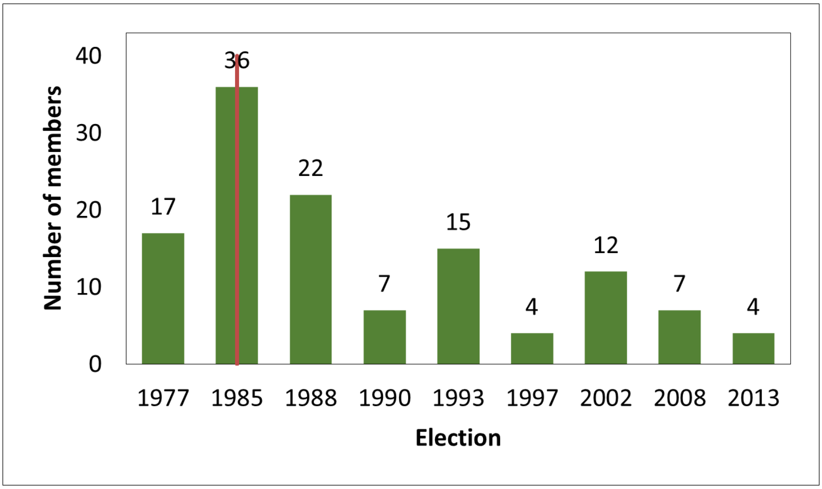
## Political persistence of Zia-era dynasties

To what extent did the new entrant families under Zia continue to contest and win elections in once autocratic rule was removed, that is, from 1990 to 2013? The proportion of dynastic families in the Punjab contesting elections fell very gradually over this period and averaged around a quarter of all families at most elections.

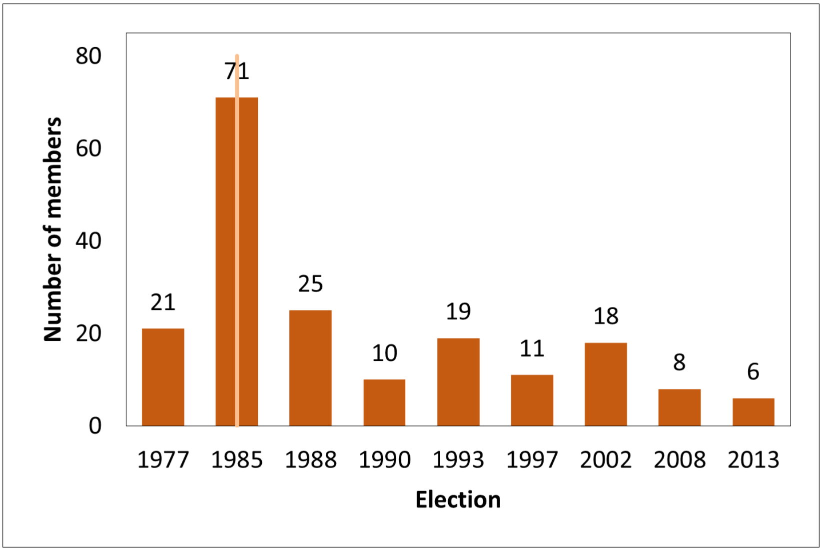
Did the families' fortunes decline once autocracy ended? We looked at what proportion of families won seats from 1990 to 2013. In the NA elections this

**Figure 5.4: The number of founder members who first entered the legislature in Punjab, 1970–2013**

a. National assembly




b. Provincial assembly




averaged around a quarter of families, but this share fell slightly to a fifth for the 2008 and 2013 elections. In provincial elections, 39 per cent of families won a seat in 1990, but thereafter it levelled off to around a quarter of families. Clearly, the families persistently stayed in electoral politics and enjoyed quite high rates of 'electoral success', suggesting that the Zia-era changes produced durable political dynasties. (For more detailed charts that support the interpretation of this section, see Figures S1 to S6 of this chapter's Supplementary Materials.[7])

Next, we examined how the Zia changes played out spatially. Urban areas witnessed significant political mobilisation during the Bhutto period (1970–77) and saw many new professional actors arriving on the political stage, including lawyers, doctors, and trade union activists. The anti-Bhutto movement was led by a right-wing political alliance of nine political parties and paved the way to Zia's military coup, and it too was also primarily centred in urban regions. After the coup, Zia purged the urban political landscape of Bhutto loyalists, encouraged the entry of new urban actors into electoral politics, and gave them access to state patronage. We should therefore expect a strong urban dimension to dynasticism in the post-Zia period.

To shed light on this, we looked at Punjab constituencies for the national and provincial assemblies in three more recent elections (2002, 2008, and 2013) that can be easily classified as urban – using a broad definition, a medium definition and a narrow definition of 'urban' seats.[8] The broad definition included predominantly urban areas, majority urban areas, and semi-urban areas. We calculated the proportion of elected dynasties that were either formed during the Zia period or after. In NA elections this index rose from 26 per cent in 2002 to 38 per cent in 2008 and 2013, and in provincial elections it rose from 20 per cent to 29 per cent. This ratio of urban dynasties first entering electoral politics during the Zia period increased slightly if we used a more restrictive definition of what constitutes an urban constituency, that is, if we exclude semi-urban areas, and it rose again if we focused only on predominantly urban constituencies. By 2013 on this most restrictive definition, 47 per cent of the total urban elected dynasties in the NA were formed during the Zia period, and 44 per cent in the provincial assemblies. (For more detailed charts supporting this analysis, please see Figures S7 to S12 of this chapter's Supplementary Materials.[9])

Finally, it may appear paradoxical that political competition actually increased in the wake of Zia's reforms, as we showed in Section 5.3, alongside the growing political importance of dynastic families. The puzzle can be resolved if we bear in mind that enhanced competition between individual candidates at the constituency level can co-exist with consolidation of dynastic power. As a matter of fact, a dynastic political family may have several members contesting elections in multiple constituencies and, while one member may fail to win the seat in one constituency, another may be more successful in another constituency.

## Conclusions

A key challenge confronting all autocratic regimes is how to build legitimacy and commit the ruler and his allies to 'joint rule'. Electoral politics offers one such mechanism to stabilise autocratic rule. This logic applies well to Pakistan, where the country's three long-serving military rulers, Generals Ayub, Zia, and Musharraf each began their tenure by holding local government elections. As prior research has shown, devolution experiments can be effectively used to undercut party-based politics and concentrate power in the hands of autocrats. In this chapter, we adduced evidence that the local government elections held by Pakistan's respective military regimes were important instances of elite co-option and authoritarian power-sharing.

Zia-ul-Haq's political and administrative interventions left the most profound and enduring legacy for electoral politics. Apart from the brief 1970s interlude of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's popularly elected government, political families have played a more important role than party-based politics. The Zia period restored the pre-Bhutto political equilibrium but in ways that not only further reinforced the pre-Bhutto order but also tilted the political landscape decisively. Zia was able to do so through a more intensive political purge, more political subordination of the bureaucracy, and greater political instrumentalisation of development spending. The resulting institutional ecosystem significantly expanded the scope for the emergence and consolidation of political dynasties and they clearly took advantage of these new opportunities.

As the literature on historical institutionalism has argued, critical junctures are shaped by 'antecedents': what happened before shapes the available policy choices. Zia brought into play a combination of the worst aspects of the two preceding regimes by suppressing party-based politics, and dramatically increasing politicisation of the bureaucracy. That political legacy continues to shape modern electoral politics in Pakistan. When political parties, at least the most important among them, were allowed to contest elections again, they had now become machines largely controlled by dominant families, who tried to consolidate their power through political clientelism.

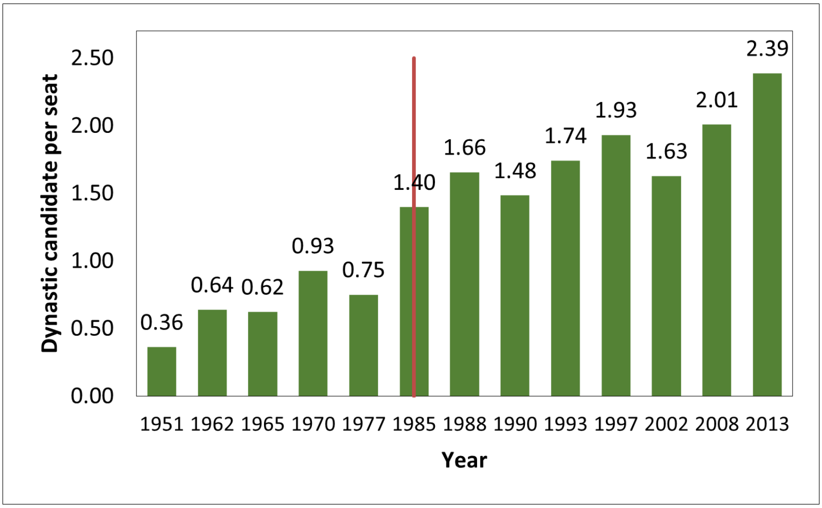
Beyond Pakistan, our analysis has important implications for the role of elections in other authoritarian contexts in the Muslim world, such as Egypt and Jordan, where ideology-based affiliations have been rendered insignificant relative to ties based on family, clan, tribe, or religion. The findings in this chapter also cast a grim light on equating elections with democratisation. As the recent political experiences of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya indicate, competitive elections without multiple institutions backing 'clean' politics are often reduced to a contest between different factions over control of state resources. Finally, our analysis has clear implications for donor agencies that support political and administrative devolution in developing countries by extending technical and financial assistance. When such support is given to autocratic regimes, foreign donors may effectively reinforce or help stabilise a system of authoritarian power-sharing.

While our evidence here is innovative and strongly suggestive of the soundness of our interpretations, it should be treated with a degree of caution. Without rigorous statistical analysis it is not possible to attribute a causal interpretation to the empirical patterns charted here. We nevertheless contend that the patterns we have documented shed an important and original light on the relation between political strategies of authoritarian regimes and the dual processes of dynastic 'formation' and 'consolidation'.

## Annex: Detailed statistics on competition and dynastic families' involvement at national and provincial elections in the Punjab

**Figure 5A: The number of dynastic candidates per seat at Punjab elections, 1951–2013**

a. National level




b. Provincial level

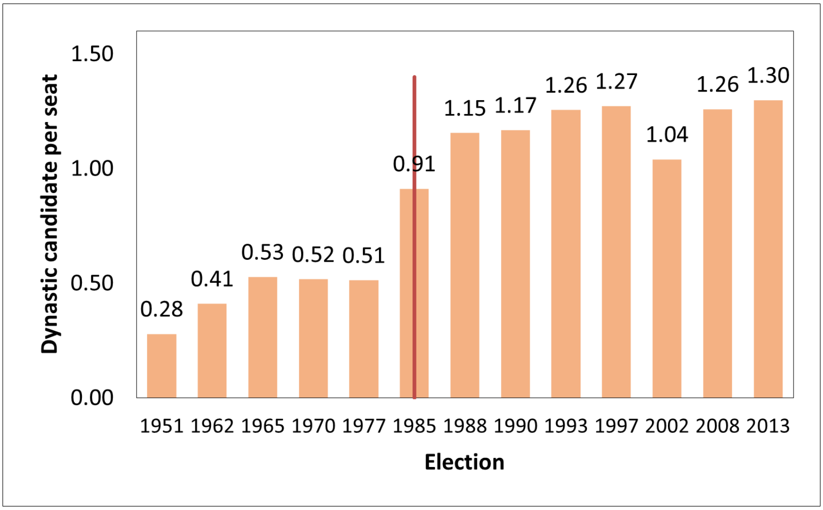
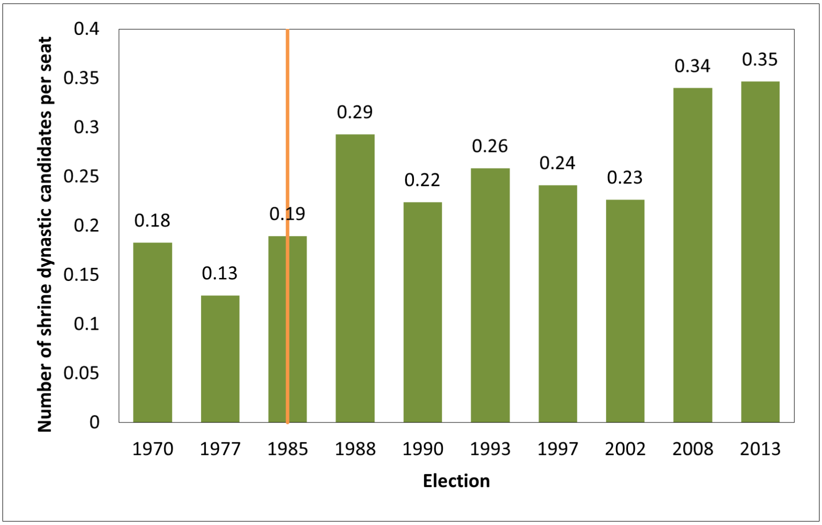
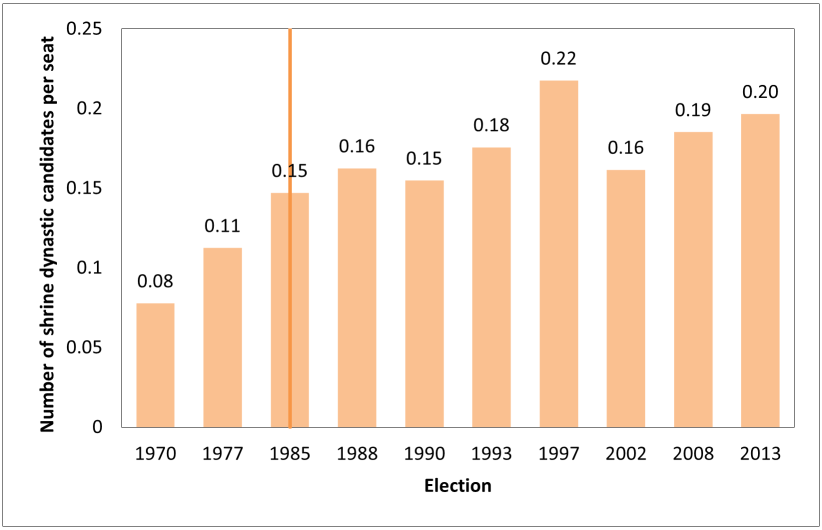


**Figure 5B: The number of shrine dynastic candidates per seat at Punjab elections, 1970–2013**

a. National level




b. Provincial level



## Endnotes

Supplementary material for this chapter is available on LSE Press's Zenodo site (https://zenodo.org/communities/decentralised_governance/). See: *Supplementary material for*: Adeel Malik, Rinchan Mirza, and Jean-Philippe Platteau (2023) 'Devolution under autocracy: Evidence from Pakistan', in Jean-Paul Faguet and Sarmistha Pal (eds) *Decentralised Governance: Crafting Effective Democracies Around the World*, London: LSE Press. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7920785

1 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 chapter (see Gulzar and Khan (2021) for experimental evidence on the impact of devolution reforms in KP).

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

3 Dependence from central political authority was especially strong in rural constituencies. Indeed, Zia maintained separate jurisdictions for rural and urban regions (introduced under Ayub), the former being defined as district councils and the latter as town committees and municipal corporations. The rural–urban divide was important in terms of income and revenue generation. At a time when rapid urbanization was resulting in growing revenues for town and municipal committees, these resources could thus not be shared with rural areas, which remained relatively resource-starved and strongly dependent on provincial governments (Cheema, Naqvi, and Siddiqi 2005, pp.10–12).

4 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 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 subset of the selectorate whose support is crucial for the ruler's survival.

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

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

7 Supplementary material for: Adeel Malik, Rinchan Mirza, and Jean-Philippe Platteau (2023) 'Devolution under autocracy: Evidence from Pakistan', in Jean-Paul Faguet and Sarmistha Pal (eds) *Decentralised Governance: Crafting Effective Democracies Around the World*, London: LSE Press. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7920785

[8] The definition is based on the classification of FAFEN (Free and Fair Election Network).

[9] Supplementary material, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7920785

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