# LEGITIMIZING A MILITARY DICTATORSHIP: THE REFERENDUMS AND GENERAL ELECTIONS OF AYUB KHAN AND ZIA UL HAQ

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When a dictator begins to lose legitimacy, they try framing themselves as democrats. This paper explores how two military dictators in Pakistan- Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq - attempted to strategi- cally use the electoral process to legitimize their regimes. Guided by Carl J. Friedrich’s definition of legitimacy, the paper comparatively analyzes Ayub Khan’s 1960 referendum and 1965 elections as well as Zia ul Haq’s 1984 referendum and 1985 elections. This is done by contextualizing the regimes’ desper- ations for legitimacy that led to the referen- dum/elections, narrating the events of the polling exercise and then evaluating how it affected public perceptions of legitimacy and, in turn, the power of the two leaders. Accordingly, the paper relies on primary sources (interviews, newspaper articles and speeches) as well as secondary sources (research papers, journals and books) to provide a broader understanding of the two leaders’ electoral maneu- vers. Ultimately, the paper concludes that both Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq failed to legitimize their rules through their manipulated referendums and general elections; however, Ayub Khan was able to maintain a firmer control of state affairs during this process than Zia ul Haq.

Keywords: politics, military, Pakistan, legitimacy, elections

## Introduction:

In just over eleven years after independence from the British in 1947, Pakistan was governed by four heads of states and seven prime ministers. In the following eleven years, it was ruled by one presi- dent, Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, who spearheaded Pakistan’s first coup d’état and imposed the country’s first martial law in October 19581. Eight years after his resignation due to social

and political unrest, a cluster of high-ranking army generals led by General Zia ul Haq dislodged the civilian government of the populist Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, suspended the constitution and declared martial law again2. While Zia assumed power as a “reluctant coup-maker” promising to hold elections within 90 days, he went on to serve for a record eleven years as Pakistan’s longest serving ruler before his mysterious death in 19883.

It is interesting to see how military administrators in Pakistan have been able to rule a nation with such strong cultural diversity and political sentiments for decades. While researchers often individually discuss the policies of Pakistan’s military rulers and their socio-economic impacts, this exploration aims to comparatively analyze how Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq tried to deal with perhaps the most pertinent threat to military rulers anywhere in the world: the dilemma of legitimacy.

In an interview with Roedad Khan, a senior bureau- crat during the two regimes, he explained that a lack of legitimacy was the single most significant factor threatening both rulers. Both rulers were “painfully aware” of how they were, at the end of the day, “usurpers”, and hence were ultimately “bound to fail, bound to be thrown out”.4 For military rulers, as argued by political theorist Robert A. Dahl, “an indispensable ingredient for their legitimacy is a dash or two of the language of democracy”.5

As a critical part of their attempts towards legitimacy, both Zia and Ayub had, similar to other military rulers in Asia and the Pacific like Bangladesh’s General Ziaur Rahman, stressed on how their rules were a “transitory (but entirely necessary) stage along the road to a fully democratic political system”6. To this end, Ayub

1Wayne Wilcox, “Pakistan: A Decade of Ayub”, Asian Survey 9, no. 2 (1969)

2Shahid Javed Burki, “Pakistan under Zia, 1977-1988”, Asian Survey 28, no. 10 (1988)

3Masood Akhtar Zahid, “Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era”, Pakistan Journal of History and Culture, Vol.XXXII, No.1 (2011)

4Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

5Robert A. Dahl, Democracy and its Critics, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1989).

6May, R.J., Stephanie Lawson, and Viberto Selochan. “INTRODUCTION: DEMOCRACY AND THE MILITARY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE.” In

The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific, edited by R.J. May and Viberto Selochan, 1–28. ANU Press, 2004.

devised a system of indirect elections, called Basic Democracies, which he strategically used to achieve victory in both the 1960 referendum and the 1965 elections, while Zia capitalized on prevalent religious sentiments, using his Islamization program to be reinstated for a further five years in the 1984 referen- dum, and then installing the Prime Minister of his choice in the 1985 elections.

In this paper, I examine how both rulers attempted to use the power of the polls to their advantage, by conducting referendums and general elections that would provide legitimacy for their governments without compromising their control over state affairs. In doing so, I comparatively analyze the events leading up to and after Ayub Khan’s 1960 referendum and 1965 elections as well as Zia ul Haq’s 1984 referendum and 1985 elections to evalu- ate their impact in legitimizing the two regimes.

## Methodology

The methodology of this essay draws upon both primary and secondary sources. As part of primary research, I conducted two in-depth interviews: one with Dr. Rasul Bakhs Raisani, an award-winning author and a professor of Political Science at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, and another with Mr. Roedad Khan, a retired civil servant of Pakistan who occupied senior positions in the bureaucracy under six different heads of state, including both Ayub and Zia. Combining factual historical narratives, public perceptions about both rulers’ actions and their informed opinions about the motives of the rulers’ moves, both individuals thoroughly discussed the economic, socio-political and ideological differences of Ayub and Zia’s regimes as well as the tactics of legitimacy they used to garner stability.

Apart from these interviews, I also examine primary sources such as newspaper articles and speeches to gain a better understanding of the climate around the referendums and general elections, such as by looking at documented polling figures and turnout rates as well as by analyzing direct quotations from both leaders.

In terms of secondary sources, I use research

papers, journals, books and newspaper articles to evaluate the success of both leaders by gauging public perceptions and analyzing historians’ informed perspectives on the referendums and general elections. I also draw upon theoretical literature to explore the definition of legitimacy that guides this paper.

## What is Legitimacy?

Legitimacy matters. In addition to being a central concept in political science and a question that almost all political philosophers have to grapple with, it also embodies “a fundamental process that is basic to social organization” as a whole.7 But there are significant theoretical and methodological differences between what scholars mean when they refer to legitimacy.

Weber famously classifies legitimacy in sociological terms as a subcategory of domination, noting the most stable form of order is one which “enjoys the prestige of being considered binding”, a trait he classified under the banner of “legitimacy”8. This paper’s notion of legitimacy is guided, however, by Friedrich who offers a much clearer definition of legitimacy. In his view, the “question of legitimacy” is the “question of fact whether a given rulership is believed to be based on good title by most men subject to it [italics mine]”.9 Friedrich adds to his definition by asserting that legitimacy does not always equal legality; it is more a ‘question of fact’ than a question of law. Moreover, as Stillman elabo- rates, the phrase ‘believed to be based’ signals that legitimacy is judged by the “opinions or feelings of men” or, to put it another way, in the court of public perception.10 This court is determined by the beliefs of ‘most men’ (a majority opinion) and consults only men ‘subject to’ the rule. Furthermore, Stillman explains a title as “the reasons for or justifications of the ruler's ascension to and continuation in rulership” — such a title is considered good when it is “congruent with the beliefs of most men”.11

Barring their androcentric language, the character- istics of Friedrich’s notion of legitimacy are especial- ly important in defining the legitimacy this paper discusses. Since it deals with military rulers who rose to power through unconstitutional and, by exten-

7Morris Jr. Zelditch, “Theories of legitimacy.” In The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Inter-group Relations, ed. J Jost, B Major (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 33-53.

8Max Weber, Economy and Society, eds G. Roth and C. Wittich (New York, Bedminster Press, 1968), 3 vols., vol. I, p. 212. Carl Friedrich, Man and His Government (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 234.

9Peter G. Stillman, “The Concept of Legitimacy.” Polity 7, no. 1 (1974): 34.

10Stillman, “Legitimacy”, 34.

11Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

sion, illegal means, the distinction between legality and legitimacy is an important one, since the two rulers were more focused on establishing a ‘good title’ to extend their reign than attempting to legal- ize it. Furthermore, the emphases on public percep- tion and majority opinions of those who are ‘subject to [the rule]’ are also especially important, since the legitimacy that the rulers derived from referendums and general elections is ultimately determined by the views of the electorate and not of any other external actor.

## Zia ul Haq and Ayub Khan: Legitimate Leaders or Military ‘Usurpers’?

Both Zia ul Haq and Ayub Khan rose to power by the strength of their uniform and not of the ballot box; they did not enjoy the legitimacy of being lawfully chosen representatives.12 Therefore, both the lead- ers presented the same rationale as a justification for their takeovers: that the intervention of the military in state affairs was the need of the hour to save the country from a plunge into chaos and anarchy.13 As Marcinkowska observes, both leaders were fully aware of the inevitability of failure of an illegitimate regime, and had risen to power by capi- talizing on the public’s skepticism about elected leaders and propagating the illusion that their take- over is a temporary phase in the country’s transition towards a democratic system where free and fair elections would be held to respect the opinions of the public.14 Following Marcinkowska’s observation, it is fair to say that both the leaders set out to try and legitimize their rules through manipulated electoral exercises with the dual purpose of securing the consent of the masses and, simultaneously, main- taining a firm grip over the state machinery.

Contrasting the two rules, Dr. Rasul notes how Ayub tried to legitimize his rule with reference to the secu- lar notions of stability and modernity, but Zia, being a far-right pan-Islamist leader, legitimized his rule with reference to his Islamization program, harness- ing the strength of Pakistan’s “strong religious constituency”.15 Yet while both leaders existed at two ends of the political spectrum and differed

ideologically, their strategies to gain legitimacy still bear remarkable similarities.

## The Referendums of 1960 and 1984

Evident in Zia’s defensive remarks of being “as legiti- mate as anyone else” in a press conference before the referendum and Ayub’s premature reassuranc- es of respecting “the wishes and desires of the people”, the illegitimacy of the two rules was as glaringly obvious to the leaders as it was to the public.16 Both leaders recognized the need to seek, or create the illusion of seeking, public consent for governance in the form of a vote-of-confidence. These referendums were an attempt by the two leaders to seek a “good title” for their personal authority so that they could consolidate their own power before they stepped towards the sham elections that they would later hold.

Unlike Zia, who made little effort to conceal the source of his strength, Ayub wanted history to view him as a political reformer and a democrat rather than an authoritarian military dictator.17 He rejected calls of direct elections by universal adult franchise on the premise that voters could not resist the temp- tation of bribery and only millionaires would dare contest elections, while adding that: “[…] at the same time we cannot divorce the broad mass of the people from the affairs of the state.”18 Rejecting direct democracy, Ayub implemented a new indirect electoral system of Basic Democracy, where he divided the country into 80,000 tiny constituencies divided equally between West and East Pakistan: “bodies of men which represent the people and are in close touch with them so that the functions of rural development, social welfare, and national reconstruction can be carried out.”19 This was the birth of a system of indirect elections in Pakistan, which Ayub used to attempt to seek public validation through a vote of confidence on 14 February 1960. As expected from an election run by a dictator, the result was very one-sided: an overwhelming majority of Basic Democrats (95.6%) expressed confidence in the Presidency of Ayub.20

12Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

13Grażyna Marcinkowska, “Military Coups D’état in Pakistan: Reasons, Execution and Methods of Legitimization”, Politeja , No. 10/2 (2008): 149-182

14Rasul Bakhsh Rais, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 2)

15Pakistan Times Overseas Weekly, December 16, 1984, p. 3; The Editorial Staff, Dawn (Karachi), 2 December 1958

16Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

17D. N. Wilber, Pakistan: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture, (New Haven: H.R.A.F., 1964), 25; Altaf Gauhar, “Pakistan: Ayub Khan’s Abdication”,

18Third World Quarterly 7, no. 1 (1985): 102-31

19Embassy of Pakistan, “BASIC DEMOCRACIES TO BE ESTABLISHED”, Pakistan Affairs 12, no. 10 (May 15, 1959), p.4

20Hamid Khan, Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2

Similarly, Zia announced a national referendum on December 19, 1984, explaining in a television address how people would be asked simply if they supported the “Islamic ideology of Pakistan” and the government efforts for the “Islamization” of all laws.21 The misleading nature of the referendum, however, was evident in how a *yes* vote to Islamiza- tion would be translated as a vote of confidence in Zia, electing him as President for a further five years. Despite his claims of basing the referendum on the “principles of free and fair elections”, it was unsur- prisingly a “rather one-sided affair” similar to Ayub’s referendum.22 The official tally, which stated a turnout rate of 60% where 97.7% of valid votes had been positive, was challenged by both opposition leaders, who claimed a turnout rate of between five and ten percent, and independent observers such as the Washington Post, who reported major voting irregularities and questioned whether the turnout had exceeded even 30%.23 At the time, the poet Habib Jalib wrote this couplet of the voting climate: “shahr meñ hū kā aalam thā / jin thā yā referendum thā. [There was an air of solitude in the city / It was either a ghost or the referendum]”.24

Some believed that if Ayub had conducted the referendum based on the universal suffrage of an adult franchise similar to the methodology employed by Zia, rather than in the form of indirect election through 80,000 Basic Democrats, Ayub would have still received a majority vote.25 Altaf Gauhar, a senior bureaucrat, commented how in a referendum under universal suffrage, “a majority of the voters would probably have expressed confi- dence in [Ayub Khan], given him a popular man- date and relieved him of his anxiety about legitima- cy.”26 While the impartiality of Gauhar’s claim is questionable as he was a close aide of Ayub Khan, the leader’s decision nevertheless signified his desire to play his cards safe. Zia was able to do the same by the tricky nature of the question posed, where a ‘*no’* to Zia essentially meant a ‘*no’* to Islamization. As the Economist dubbed it, it was “a heads I win, tails you lose referendum”.27

But how successful were both these overwhelmingly state-manipulated exercises in legitimizing the two leaders’ military rules?

In Zia’s case, despite the absence of transparent voting figures of the turnout rate and the referen- dum results, critics highly dispute the claim that the referendum allowed Zia to redeem himself and secure the willful consent of the governed, and argue conversely that in many cases the referen- dum proved counter-intuitive. Zahid’s claim that the “exaggerated [referendum] results tarnished the presidency and its incumbent” is reinforced by the public discontentment around the Hobson’s choice they had been presented with, evident in how some voters marked the *yes* column of their ballots "Islam yes" and the *no* column "Zia no”, and subse- quently had their votes declared invalid.28 For most of the country, the day held no significance and there seemed to be no point in casting a vote. To call upon Jalib as a voice of the people again: “din unnīs december kā / be-ma.anī be-hañgam thā [The day of 19th December / Was meaningless and unexciting]”.29

For Ayub, too, the establishment of the Basic Democracy system and the indirect elections carried out were, as Kundi remarked, “[a] quest for the legitimacy of his rule which he could not afford otherwise.”30 Since Ayub’s declared purpose of the political framework was political education, as he believed that “such important issues should not be left to the people”, the design of the system received some praise from external observers; Tinker, for example, found the ideology of the system to be “genuinely revolutionary” in the rejec- tion of the Western dogma of a parliamentary party system.31 But in reality, the system only strengthened the power of the wealthy feudal elite who “benefit- ted hugely from state patronage” and helped Ayub bypass senior political leaders through a system “that was ideally suited to bureaucratic control and manipulation”.32 The “revolutionary” system had become “an easy prey to bribe and

21The Editorial Staff, Pakistan Times Overseas Weekly, December 9, 1984, 1, 3.

22William L. Richter, Pakistan in 1984: Digging in, Asian Survey 25, no. 2 (1985)

23William L. Richter, Pakistan in 1984: Digging in, Asian Survey 25, no. 2 (1985); The Editorial Staff, Washington Post, December 20, 1984, p. A-31

24[https://www.rekhta.org/nazms/referendum-shahr-men-huu-kaa-aalam-thaa-habib-jalib-nazms](http://www.rekhta.org/nazms/referendum-shahr-men-huu-kaa-aalam-thaa-habib-jalib-nazms) 25Altaf Gauhar, “Pakistan: Ayub Khan’s Abdication”, Third World Quarterly 7, no. 1 (1985), p.102-31 26ibid.

27The Editorial Staff, The Economist, December 8, 1984

28The Editorial Staff, Indian Express, December 21, 1984, p.1

29Habib Jalib, “Referendum” [Translation by Author], [https://www.rekhta.org/nazms/referendum-shahr-men-huu-kaa-aalam-thaa-habib-jalib-nazms](http://www.rekhta.org/nazms/referendum-shahr-men-huu-kaa-aalam-thaa-habib-jalib-nazms)

30Mansoor Akber Kundi, Militarism in Politics: A Case Study of Pakistan, Pakistan Horizon 56, no. 1 (2003)

31Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1); Arif Hussain, “Inside Pakistan: An Assessment of President Ayub Khan”, The World Today, vol. 23, no. 8, 1967, pp. 339–347

32Kunal Mukherjee. “Ayub Khan’s Basic Democracy and Political Continuity in Contemporary Pakistan.” India Quarterly 72, no. 3 (2016): 268–77. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/48505506.](http://www.jstor.org/stable/48505506)

corruption” – the same evils it had meant to tack- le.33 In short, the Basic Democracy system was “neither basic nor democratic”, as Paul remarked, and instead symbolized a “top-down model designed by the military and its chief so that real democratic forces would not emerge as a challenge to the garrison state.”34

While the referendums in practicality were very similar due to their undemocratic nature, they affected both leaders differently. In Zia’s case, the referendum became a subject for comics, with Zia’s own political ally Pir Pagaro humorously attributing the high turnout to “voting by angels”.35 Despite Zia’s attempts to justify the question posed in the referendum by denying that he had asked for a vote on Islam, but on his government’s services for Islam, it was an open secret that the referendum was another attempt by Zia to use the banner of Islam to consolidate his own political position. Dr. Rasul attributed his ideology to “political interests” and Roedad Khan termed Zia the first military leader “who realized that he must have his own constituen- cy” and hence “made full use of Islam”.36 Zia’s refer- endum, therefore, accomplished little more than having exposed his desperation in covering the illegitimacy of his reign under the banner of Islam.

Ayub, however, followed his referendum with a range of skillful political maneuvers aimed at consolidating his power. To subdue political elites who may have posed resistance or opposition to his regime, he enacted the “Public Offices Disqualifica- tion Order and Elective Bodies (Disqualification) Order”, which allowed him the power to dismiss whichever politician he deemed ‘corrupt’ for seven years.37 This enabled him to govern with virtually no political opposition for the first six years of his reign, having “inhibited political activity” through the “firm policies of the Government and the disarray of the opposition grouping”.38 Ayub’s rule started to become increasingly paternalistic as the state

“eschewed the language of public participation in the name of nationalism”, establishing what Waseem termed a “cult of unity”.39

By combining his referendum with such maneuvers, Ayub was successful, to a great extent, in fostering an environment conducive to his rule in a fashion that Zia was unable to replicate. Hostile criticism from political parties and the general public was eventually minimized, and at times even rendered ineffective. While it is controversial whether the people of Pakistan welcomed Ayub’s move towards Basic Democracies or not — Alavi asserts that the “system was universally hated due to its oppressive nature” while, on the contrary, Saikia believes that an “overwhelming majority supported the referendum” — the absence of a strong resistance movement against the referendum means that any feelings of resentment stayed latent and did not translate into mass mobilization until the end of the decade.40 Therefore, Ayub was able to use the political climate after his referendum to strengthen his grip over the state machinery and start creating the illusion of a “good title” before the country moved towards the general elections of 1965.

## The General Elections of 1965 and 1985

Ayub, in his rise to power, had promised democratic elections by declaring that “When the time comes, your opinion will be freely asked”, having conve- niently added that “events alone can tell” when that time would be.41 In a political déjà vu for Pakistanis, Zia, too, tried to present his military take- over as a 90-day transitory period before general elections would be held in October 1977, declaring in his maiden speech that “only democracy can salve the nation” and promising to not “dissipate [his powers] on anything else”.42 But the crisis of legitimacy was ever present and “pricked Zia as much as it had pricked Ayub”.43

Long overdue, in 1965, Ayub held the first presidential

33Arif Hussain, “Inside Pakistan: An Assessment of President Ayub Khan”, The World Today, vol. 23, no. 8, 1967, pp. 339–347

34T. V. Paul. The warrior state: Pakistan in the contemporary world. (Gurgaon: Random House India, 2014): 75.

35Masood Akhtar Zahid, “Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era”, Pakistan Journal of History and Culture, Vol.XXXII, No.1 (2011) 36Interview to Hussain Haqqani, 7 December 1984, “President of Pakistan General Zia-ul-Haq’s Interview to Foreign Media”, Vol. III, Jan-Dec 1984, (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan), pp. 275-81; Rasul Bakhsh Rais, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 2); Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

37W. M. Dobell, “Ayub Khan as President of Pakistan”, Pacific Affairs 42, no. 3 (1969)

38Norman D. Palmer, "New Directions for Pakistan," Current History, February 1964

39Waseem, M. (1989). Politics and the state in Pakistan. Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 164-165.

40Alavi, H. (1983). The state in crisis. In H. Gardezi & J. Rashid (Eds), Pakistan: The roots of dictatorship: The political economy of a praetorian state (pp. 40–93). London: Zed Press; Saikia, Y. (2014). Ayub Khan and modern Islam: Transforming citizens and the nation in Pakistan. South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 37(2), 292–305.

41Mansoor Akber Kundi, “Militarism in Politics: A Case Study of Pakistan”, Pakistan Horizon 56, no. 1 (2003).

42Grażyna Marcinkowska, “Military Coups D’état in Pakistan: Reasons, Execution and Methods of Legitimization”, Politeja , No. 10/2 (2008), pp. 149-182; The Pakistan Times, Lahore, 6 July 1977.

43Zahid, “Dictatorship in Pakistan”, 18.

elections of Pakistan under the same system of Basic Democracy, or indirect elections. The elections saw Ayub’s political strength challenged by a united opposition led by the sister of Pakistan’s founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Fatima Jinnah, whose emotional appeal to Pakistan’s masses “had remained unabated since independence in 1947”.44

Similarly, having promised elections within ninety days of his takeover, the party-less elections Zia held also came after eight and a half years in the spring of 1985, aiming to politically isolate the dominant Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and populate the National Assembly with “political lightweights”, while retaining his seat as the President.45

Ayub was able to secure the Presidency with a decent majority of 62.7%, which strengthened his self-portrayal of a democratically elected President ruling by the will of the masses and not a military leader ruling by force.46 Zia also succeeded in being able to appoint a candidate of his choice as the Prime Minister following the 1985 elections, the Sindhi Muhammad Khan Junejo from the Muslim League.47

Neither of the two elections, however, were devoid of controversy and allegations of using state machinery to influence election results. Ayub’s political opposition repeatedly pressed on the government’s unfair regulations before the polls, publishing a “34-page White Paper, listing ten specific charges and demanding a judicial inquiry” and accusing the government of politically motivated "kidnapping, coercion and arrests all over the country" just three days before the elections.48 In Zia’s 1985 elections too, political parties were greatly agitated by the exclusion of party platforms from the election; while most of them, including the influential Movement for Resto- ration of Democracy (MRD) chose to boycott the elections, Zia detained almost all the opposition’s leaders for the period of elections as a “safety

precaution”.49 To top it off, election campaigns were severely restricted as candidates were restrict- ed from using loudspeakers, holding public meet- ings or carrying out processions.50

But despite their victories on paper in the polls, were the two military leaders successful in ‘legitimizing’ their rules through their attempted ‘civilianization’ and ‘democratization’? An analysis of the events that followed both elections may help answer this question.

In Ayub’s case, critics believe that despite his electoral victory, Ayub had failed to cultivate public trust in the system of Basic Democracy, with Altaf Gauhar noting how people’s loss of faith in the system was “among the first seeds of disenchant- ment” to spark nineteen weeks of the most wide- spread urban unrest Pakistan had seen in Novem- ber 1968, which culminated in Ayub’s forced resig- nation from the Presidency in March 1969 and his re-imposition of martial law.51 Commenting on Ayub’s political ideology, Roedad Khan attributed the agitation of the people of Pakistan, mobilized by the political parties, in 1968 to a rejection of Ayub’s political philosophy, as they “saw through” the covert attempts of Ayub to set up a dynasty, rather than a democracy, and hence “threw him out” when given the chance.52 But before these mass protests happened, Ayub still enjoyed the same kind of unfettered control over state machin- ery that he had held before the elections had happened. In this way, although the elections did not consolidate Ayub’s position and instead sowed the seeds for his eventual overthrow, they did not challenge his authority in their immediate after- math.

Zia’s fate was worse. The newly elected Prime Minis- ter Junejo confronted Zia ul Haq on their first meet- ing with an unusual query: “When will you withdraw martial law?”53 Junejo repeated his praise for democracy and criticism for martial law until Zia

44Al-Mujahid, “Pakistan's First Presidential Elections”, 280.

45Zahid, “Dictatorship in Pakistan”, 22.

46Al-Mujahid, “Pakistan's First Presidential Elections”, 292

47Babar Ali, “Pakistan: Dim Prospects of Free and Fair Elections”, Economic and Political Weekly 23, no. 31 (1988), p. 570-572

48Al-Mujahid, “Pakistan's First Presidential Elections”, 287; Leader (Karachi), Dec. 29, 30 and 31, 1964, and Jan. 1, 1965; Dawn, Dec. 4, 24, 28,

30 and 31, 1964.

49Hamid Khan, “Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan”, 2001, pp 373

50Tahir Kamran, “Politics of Elections and Autocracy in Pakistan: Apprising the Electoral Process during Zia ul Haq’s Regime”, Journal of Political Studies 15 (1), p. 25-39

51Altaf Gauhar, “Pakistan: Ayub Khan’s Abdication”, Third World Quarterly 7, no. 1 (1985), p.102; W. M. Dobell, “Ayub Khan as President of Pakistan”, Pacific Affairs 42, no. 3 (1969)

52Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

53Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

lifted martial law on 31 December 1985. According- ly, Zia’s grip over the country began to loosen as Junejo began to act independently, taking “his office too seriously”, as Roedad Khan put it.54 As the army started to feel “sidelined” and “dominated” by the civilian bureaucracy and the democratic setup, Zia exercised his constitutional powers as President, granted by the Eighth Amendment, to dismiss Junejo along with his cabinet on May 29, 1988, promising yet again to hold “fair elections” within 90 days.55 Zia’s attempt to install civilian rule in Pakistan thus proved to be a “blunder” as Dr. Rasul called it, and an “experiment” that “failed” in Roedad Khan’s view, since the legitimacy lent by civilian rule came at the cost of undermining Zia’s position as the Head of State and compromising the undisputed powers he once enjoyed.56 Zia’s politi- cal experiment, far from legitimizing his rule in the eyes of the masses, isolated him even more on the public front. At the same time, some political observers characterized the public response to the dismissal as “indifferent”, owing to a lack of public support of the Junejo government, since Junejo had been a ‘selected’ rather than an ‘elected’ Prime Minister from the start.57 The dissolution of the National Assembly though exposed openly Zia’s lack of sincerity in his resolve to restore democracy. With his fate to be sealed by an unfortunate plane crash in less than three months, Zia had, towards the end of his rule, “exhausted all of his political cards, including Islam, to legitimize his rule”.58

## Conclusion

Having differed vastly in their political ideologies, both Ayub and Zia had risen to power as a result of military coups and hence employed similar tactics to seek legitimacy for their rules. This paper aimed to comparatively evaluate the success of the leaders’ electoral maneuvers — referendums and general elections — in convincing the general public that their rulership was “based in good title” and, simul- taneously, in maintaining a firm control of state affairs amidst these measures.

While Ayub’s indirect electoral system of Basic Democracies received criticism from historians, his 1960 referendum may have succeeded in adding a touch of legitimacy to his rule. His aggressive politi- cal measures following the referendum ensured

that there was no significant reactionary outcry of the public and, more importantly, any legitimacy acquired did not come at the cost of his hold over the country. On the other hand, Zia’s 1984 referen- dum was largely rejected. Zia had tried to create the illusion of giving the people a choice but his low-turnout referendum signaled a lack of confi- dence in his regime and proved futile in providing his rule with any legitimacy. Yet, in both Ayub and Zia’s cases, the referendums had not compromised their control over state affairs.

The two elections, on the other hand, sowed the seeds for both rulers’ declines. Ayub’s indirect Presidential election provided only short-term stabili- ty to his rule, extending it for a few more years. Even- tually, his Basic Democracies system failed to secure the public acceptance needed to lastingly relieve him of the title of being a military dictator and large-scale citizen mobilization within three years of the election led to his downfall. The aftermath of Zia’s elections was even more disastrous. The exclu- sion of major political parties and the heavy restric- tions on candidates had agitated both the public as well as his opposition and openly exposed the undemocratic nature of the elections. Even though Junejo’s public support was also fragmented, Zia’s decision to sack him exacerbated the legitimacy crisis, alienating the public more than ever. Clearly, Zia’s attempt to install a subservient civilian rule in Pakistan was a political blunder, forcing him to choose between acquiring legitimacy or retaining undisputed powers — a choice that ultimately proved fatal.

To sum up, both Ayub and Zia ultimately failed to legitimize their rules through their undemocratic referendums and general elections. To refer back to the definition of legitimacy outlined earlier, neither of the rulerships were “believed to be based on good title by most men subject to it”. At the same time, Ayub’s referendum and general elections may be considered more successful, since at least his own power remained relatively uncompromised in the short-term. Zia’s crisis of legitimacy, as an active threat to his own power, proved to be more severe; neither his ideology of Islamization nor his flirtation with civilian rule could help overcome it.

54Rasul Bakhs Rais, “Pakistan in 1988: From Command to Conciliation Politics”, Asian Survey 29, no. 2 (1989), p.199-206; Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1)

55Babar Ali, “Pakistan: Dim Prospects of Free and Fair Elections”, Economic and Political Weekly 23, no. 31 (1988), p.1570-572 56Rasul Bakhsh Rais, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 2); Roedad Khan, Interview with author, April 2019 (Appendix 1) 57Politics of the Power Elite, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 23, No. 26 (Jun. 25, 1988), p. 1302

58Rasul Bakhs Rais, “Pakistan in 1988: From Command to Conciliation Politics”, Asian Survey 29, no. 2 (1989), p.199-206

Evidently, as both these histories make clear, a dictatorship’s quest for legitimacy will always be futile unless the regime is prepared to alter its nature to that of a true democracy.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my teacher, Sahir Butt, for his guidance and constant feedback during the Fall of 2019 when I originally wrote this paper. His mentor- ship allowed me to write my first significant piece of academic work and strengthened my resolve to become a scholar in the social sciences. I am also very grateful to my teacher, Zubia Akbar, for her valuable input that informed the thesis of this paper and helped me polish my ideas. Additionally, I want to thank my professor, Rabbi Michael Cohen, for supporting my work and helping me find avenues to share my research with the world as well as Rotimi Suberu, whose mentorship through my undergradu-

ate degree has informed my political science education.

I would like to acknowledge a dear friend’s contri- butions towards this paper. She graciously volun- teered to proofread my paper and provided her valuable feedback on it before its submission, which helped make my arguments so much more coher- ent and accessible. Her constant support for my pursuits is truly appreciated.

I would like to thank my father for his unwavering support for all my endeavors, my mother for empowering me to become who I am today and to my sister for preserving my sanity with her unique sense of humor. Lastly, I wish to thank Beaconhouse Margalla Campus’s International Baccalaureate Program as well as Bennington College for provid- ing me with intellectually stimulating environments to thrive both as an academic and as an artist.

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