

Challenges to PTI Government during First Three Years of its Tenure (2018-21): The Way Forward

Ayesha Khalid

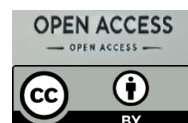
Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Kinnaird College, Lahore. Email: ayesha.khalid@kinnaird.edu.pk
(Corresponding Author)

Zoya Shaffay

Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Kinnaird College, Lahore.

Abstract

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf rose to power for the very first time in 2018 and got grappled with different socio-political, economic and external challenges that stared right in its face and could not let it stay afloat in the turbulent political waters. This research specifically aims at highlighting all the grave social, political, economic and external challenges confronted by PTI government along with some viable suggestions and recommendations that could have been helpful in overcoming and encountering all these challenges efficaciously. Survival challenge posed by PDM, the 'burden of hopes' like creation of Naya Pakistan and Riasat-e-Madinah and staggering economy can be reckoned amongst the foremost and major challenges faced by PTI government. The main motive and reason behind conducting research on this topic is to highlight the challenges confronting a government that assumes power for the very first time after defeating the two ever dominant parties, PPP and PML-N. It is a qualitative research where renowned politicians, journalists and educationalists have been interviewed while different reports and research papers have been consulted for secondary data. The research concludes that PTI government could have encountered the 'survival challenge' posed by PDM efficaciously and averted its downfall and ouster if it had given priority to the actual concerns and issues of the masses like inflation and unemployment instead of just remaining on political witch-hunting spree and setting it as its main priority and agenda.



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Introduction

Elections are reckoned to be one of the most important facets of a parliamentary democratic system which is meant to bring about and ensure

transition of power from one government to another. The same is the case with Pakistan where general election in 2018 paved way for a new party named Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) to assume power with the most sanctimonious claims of ensuring transparency, social equality, justice, corruption free Pakistan and most importantly, 'Naya Pakistan', a mantra that assumed untold and unprecedented popularity with the ranks of the masses.

It is an indubitable reality that the more sanctimonious promises a party makes, the more challenges it faces after assuming power because the fulfilment of sanctimonious promises and claims cannot be reckoned as simple as it seems. The same is the case with PTI that confronted myriad of challenges after rising to power.

The main objective of this reach is to find out and highlight some grave challenges confronted by the new Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf government both at internal level and international arena. Since the PTI government assumed power for the very first time, one of the main reasons behind conducting research on this topic is to highlight the challenges faced by PTI government in the context of its being a new party assuming power after 22 years of incessant struggle. It is qualitative research where politicians, journalists and educationalists/experts in political affairs have been interviewed. The research concludes that PTI would have averted and eschewed this ouster and downfall if it had stayed cautious while setting its priorities and addressed and paid attention to the actual problems of the masses like inflation and unemployment instated of focusing mainly on targeting and punishing the alleged corrupt political opponents.

Research Objectives

- To highlight the main socio-economic and political challenges confronted by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf government during the first three years of its tenure.
- To highlight the challenges faced by PTI government at foreign front.
- To evaluate the role of PDM and its successful vote of no confidence move as a grave challenge to PTI government.
- To investigate the impact of these challenges on PTI government's popularity.
- To evaluate PTI's narrative and claim of establishing 'Naya Pakistan'.
- To highlight some viable suggestions that could have been helpful in overcoming all these challenges efficaciously.

Literature Review

PDM Challenge

Different research papers prove the fact that PTI government faced myriads of challenges at social, political, economic and diplomatic front. Shafqat (2021) in her research paper ‘Pakistan in 2020: The Opposition Fights Back’ highlights the how the opposition alliance PDM can be reckoned as one of the fierce challenges faced by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf government that can also make it difficult for the nascent government to stay afloat in the politically troubled and troubled waters.

Grave Governance Challenges

Ashraf, Begum and Ishtaque (2018) in their research paper ‘National Plan for Devolution of Power under 18th Amendment: Challenges for Government in the New Pakistan’ have very vividly highlighted the task of ensuring smooth devolution of power after 18th amendment and coping with governance issues as one of the gravest challenges and problems confronting the novice Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf government.

Economic Challenges

Shukla (2018) in his research paper ‘Challenges before the Imran Khan government’ has very vividly highlighted three main challenges encountering PTI government which include averting the economic crisis, keeping the deep state satisfied and addressing key foreign policy issues. Malik, Shahid, Ijaz and Khan (2020) in their research paper, ‘Myth, Exaggeration or Challenging Reality: Creation of 10 million Jobs by PTI Government’ have highlighted unemployment and creation of 10 million jobs as the biggest challenges encountering PTI government. Meo, Sabir, Chaudhry, Batool and Farooq (2020) in their research paper ‘Addressing the Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak: Pakistan's Preparations and Response’ have highlighted some grave challenges and impacts of COVID-19 pandemic for a developing country like Pakistan which include lower demand for commodities, lower earnings, lower production, supply chain disruption and high demand for health care etc.

Lack of Implementation

Hussain, Aqeel, Muhammad, Khan and Asghar (2021) conducted research ‘Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf Government Policies for Socioeconomic Uplift of Pakistan: A Study of Public Perception and Satisfaction’ to gauge public response towards the socio-economic programs initiated by the PTI government like Health

Cards, interest-free loans, Kafaalat program etc. The respondents appreciated the initiation of welfare programs but showed reservations over their efficacious implementation at grass root level.

Methodology

Case study research design has been used for this research. The first three years of the PTI government have been taken as case study. It is qualitative research. Different research papers have been consulted for secondary data while different politicians, journalists and educationalists have been interviewed for primary data. Purposive sampling has been done as pertinent and renowned politicians from both government and opposition side, journalists and educationalists have been interviewed. Sample size is six for interviews.

Major Findings

The following table vividly encapsulates all the main challenges confronted by PTI government during first three years of its tenure.

Table 1

Challenges confronted by PTI government

Political Challenges	Social Challenges	Economic Challenges	External Challenges
Opposition/ PDM/ Successful vote of no confidence move	COVID (Waris, Atta, Ali, Asmat & Baset, 2020)	Rupee devaluation (Salman & Ali, 2022)	US withdrawal from Afghanistan and strained ties with USA (Javaid, 2016)
Corruption (Awan, Akhtar, Rahim, Sher & Cheema, 2018)	Single National Curriculum (Naqvi, 2021)	Inflation (Faiz, 2022)	CPEC (Hadi, Batool & Mustafa, 2018)
Lack of administrative capability	Religious extremism (Human Rights Watch Report, 2022)	Unemployment (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021)	Kashmir/ Revocation of Article 370 (Lalwani & Gayner, 2020)
Electronic voting machines (Achieng & Ruhode, 2013)		Surmounting debts (Hussain, 2019)	
		Strict IMF conditionalities (Shaheen, 2022)	

Strained ties with bureaucracy	FATF (Amin, Khan & Naseby, 2020)	Russia-Ukraine conflict
Old team for new slogans	Creation of 5 million houses and 10 million jobs (PTI Manifesto, 2018)	Islamophobia (Helbling, 2013)
Maafias		
Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP)		
Local government elections (Abdul & Yu, 2020)	Industrial development through CPEC (Mamoon, 2019)	
Declining popularity within the ranks of the masses (Gallup Survey, 2022)		

Inner party rifts

Note: First three years of PTI government (2018-2021)

However, economic challenges stand paramount over all other ones and most importantly, the unprecedented inflation and price hike (Schmall and Masood, 2021). COVID-19 and the resulting socio-political and economic problems can be reckoned as another main challenge faced by PTI government that has exposed serious and grave governance problems as well (Javid, Ali & Javed, 2020). The regime changes in Afghanistan, the thumping defeat of USA and the subsequent baseless allegations by the US government also gave a hard time to PTI government at foreign front. However, PDM can be reckoned as the biggest challenge that even did not let PTI government stay afloat in the turbulent political waters through a successful vote of no confidence move on April 10, 2022.

Main Socio-Economic and Political Challenges Confronted by PTI Government

Mrs. Alia Hamza Malik mentioned that COVID and inflation are the main challenges confronting the government. Mr. Ahsan Iqbal highlighted inexperience of PTI government, narcissist approach of the Prime Minister, his failure to opt for an all-inclusive approach and governance issues in the important provinces like Punjab and KPK as some of the main challenges confronting PTI government. Dr. Mehbooh Hussian termed political instability and uncertainty as a grave challenge confronting the government that always gives birth to myriad of social and economic challenges. Dr. Asma Hamid Awan mentioned the economic issues inherited from previous government, constant reshuffling of economic team, COVID and resulting social, economies and domestic crises, international pressures like FATF and IMF, devaluation of currency and most importantly, 'burden of hopes' and 'survival challenge' posed by PDM are amongst the grave challenges confronting PTI government.

Factors Behind PDM's Vote of No Confidence Move

Mrs. Aliya Hamza Malik did not consider PDM a considerable challenge as she said that they are together since they know they have a very fair idea that their political identity, existence and narrative is sinking. Mr. Ahsan Iqbal mentioned that PTI's disrespect towards parliamentary norms and constitution, issuance of presidential ordinances, lack of consultation over important appointments, oppressing the voice of the opposition parties, disrespecting the judicial decisions like withholding and suspending the local government set up for around 7 months and chaos in the federation urged the opposition parties to join hands against the government. According to Dr. Mehboob Hussain, the grave governance issues gave a chance to the opposition parties to join hands against the government. Dr. Asma Awan termed the factors like COVID and the resulting socio-economic challenges, staggering economy, opposition's rhetoric of performance-based manifesto, PTI's inability to fulfil its sanctimonious claims and promises, the burden of hopes and the disappointment of the masses, especially the lower strata of society and the intellectual and enlightened middle class led to the creation of PDM.

Factors Behind PTI Government's Declining Popularity

Mrs. Aliya Hamza Malik mentioned that PTI lost local government elections in KPK because of internal disarray within the party ranks. Tickets were given to own family members in KPK local elections and since PTI sheerly opposes hereditary politics, people in KPK disliked it and did not vote for the

party since it ran counter to PTI's sanctimonious claims of curbing hereditary politics. Mr. Ahsan Iqbal mentioned that the recent local government elections in KPK have revealed that people in KPK have rejected PTI since it has not been able to introduce an efficacious local government setup and governance system in the province. According to Dr. Mehboob Husaain, factors like PTI government's incapability of establishing an efficacious local government system, COVID and lack of performance became a reason of PTI's defeat in KP local elections. Regarding PTI's defeat in the local government elections as a challenge, Dr. Asma Hamid Awan highlighted the opposition parties' rhetoric of 'performance based' mandate that turned into a challenge for the government and became a factor behind PTI's thumping defeat in the local government elections in KPK.

Factors Behind Constant Cabinet Reshuffling

Mrs. Aliya Hamza Malik stated that Imran Khan makes changes in his team to ensure 'right person for the right job'. Mr. Ahsan Iqbal mentioned that the constant reshuffling of cabinet and government officials reflects that PTI has no idea of governance. When you have a failing team, you keep changing the batting order and nothing works. Dr. Mehboob Hussain highlighted the fact that the coalition or weak governments like PTI also turn into a challenge since it also has to accommodate the will, wishes, desires and demands of their allies. Dr. Asma Awan highlighted a pertinent fact that the constant reshuffling of cabinet reveals the government's uncertainty and lack of prior homework.

Suggestions to Encounter these Challenges Efficaciously

According to Mrs. Aliya Hamza Malik, efficacious steps must be taken by the government to increase exports and assume self-sufficiency in agricultural domain. Mr. Ahsan Iqbal was of the view that only early elections and an elected representative government can bring the country out of this political chaos, turmoil and mayhem. According to Dr. Mehboob Hussain, PTI government must opt for an all-inclusive approach and bring consensus amongst all political parties to avert and eschew sheer political disagreements and bring about political stability. Dr. Asma Awan suggested that we need to introduce a uniform or streamlined educational system. Educational Emergency is the need of the hour so that the masses make a wise and prudent choice while casting their vote and electing their representatives.

Challenges Confronted by PTI Government at Foreign Front

While highlighting the challenges confronting PTI government at foreign front, the rising Islamophobia in India, its intrusion into Pakistan's territory in February 2019 and its aim of creating a civil military discord are the main challenges confronting PTI government according to him. Also, the four major Western powers USA, UK, France and Australia, instead of condemning India's move, urged Pakistan to accept it and wipe out terrorism from its own territory. So, the government is standing isolated from the super power USA and its allies. He also mentioned that the foreign policy of the major European and Western powers is dictated by the USA, and since Pakistan does not enjoy cordial relations with USA and India, Pakistan is unable to establish good ties with all these Western and European countries like France, Germany, Italy and Spain etc. Though Pakistan was able to establish cordial relations with the Middle Eastern countries like UAE and Saudi Arabia etc., it is also evident that all these Middle Eastern countries are greatly under USA's sphere of influence as UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman are also inclined towards Israel. So, the Arab countries continue to play 'hide and seek' with Pakistan.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's Visit to Moscow

Regarding Prime Minister Imran Khan's Moscow visit, he mentioned that the Russian Prime Minister Putin exploited Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit and launched formal strikes on Ukraine that could have been delayed but postponing this visit could have brewed more challenges for Pakistan and PTI government.

Afghanistan Imbroglio and PTI Government's Response

He highlighted the fact that the government inherited the Afghanistan issue as a grave challenge and the 'absolutely not' by the Prime Minister Imran Khan was a move to showcase and display an independent and sovereign foreign policy.

FATF as a Grave Challenge Confronting PTI Government

Terming FATF as a political issue, he mentioned that courtiers having strained relations with the USA like Pakistan and Turkey and those trying to establish ties with Russia like UAE find themselves in the FATF grey list.

Economic Challenges Confronted by PTI Government

Regarding the economic challenges confronting the government like inflation, unemployment and rupee devaluation etc., Mr. Fawad Murtaza mentioned that a government has to perform three most important functions to ensure smooth economic growth. If it is not performing and fulfilling all these responsibilities efficaciously, it will encounter serious and grave economic challenges like the PTI is facing these days.

- Government has to work as a regulator. It has to provide a level playing field to everyone.
- It has to ensure conventional growth and increase in economic activities.
- It has to provide and establish an efficacious legal and judicial system otherwise there will be a severe trust deficit that will ultimately hamper the foreign direct investment.
- It has to provide public good like health, education and transport etc.

Discussion

From the above literature review and interviews, it can easily be analysed that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) assumed power for the very first time by defeating and outclassing two ever dominant political parties, Pakistan People's Party and PML-N after 22 years of incessant political struggle. PTI's rise to power was very different and unique in the sense that it came up with some sanctimonious claims and promises of establishment of 'Riyasat-e-Madina' and 'Naya Pakistan'. It raised the hopes of the masses by making claims of bringing about an overnight-night change (tabdeeli), eliminating corruption in hundred days, creating 10 million jobs and 5 million houses. However, there cannot be an iota of doubt that the situation and realities turn out to be entirely and wholly different once you are at the helm of affairs. Though the above findings reveal the fact that PTI government confronted myriad of social, political, economic and external challenges, however it would be utterly unfair to call it outrightly a failure as its performance in some domains was worth appreciating. For example, the government's efficacious handling of COVID received global appreciation and recognition. The initiation of PM portal and distribution of health cards were also some laudable initiatives. Likewise, PTI government was able to establish good ties with the Islamic countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. The PM's visit to USA, Saudi King Muhammad bin Salman's visit to Pakistan, the declaration of 15th March as World Islamophobia Day by the United Nations as a result of PTI government's efforts and recent OIC conference in Pakistan can also be reckoned as some remarkable achievements of PTI government.

PDM Challenge that did not Let the PTI Government Stay Afloat in the Political Waters

However, it is also evident that the challenges confronted by it seemed to be overshadowing its achievements. PTI remained unable to translate its sanctimonious claims into policies followed by an efficacious implementation since it lacked a cautious and people-centric approach while setting its priorities. Good governance seemed to be non-existent as targeting and punishing corrupt politicians remained PTI government's main priority and agenda due to which the actual issues and concerns of the masses got side-lined, compromised, neglected and unaddressed. Ideal good governance based on 'Riasat-e-Madinah' model and 'Naya Pakistan' mantra remained a far cry from reality. Resultantly, disappointment rippled within the ranks of the masses and especially the middle and lower strata of society that were looking forward to an actual 'Naya Pakistan'. It all ultimately led to the decline in government's popularity. So, the 'burden of hopes' turned into a grave challenge for the government. PDM exploited the whole situation and all the socio-economic and political challenges combined together posed survival challenge to the government and resultantly, PTI government failed to stay afloat in the turbulent political waters as a result of a successful vote of no confidence move by PDM on April 10, 2022.

Gallup Survey 2022

The recent Gallup Survey also proves testimony to the same fact that PTI government's lack of people-centric approach by pursuing political witch-hunting agenda as a main priority led to a decline in PTI's popularity within the ranks of the masses as 57% people are happy with Imran Khan's departure according to Gallup Survey and 71% are happy with PTI government's ouster because inflation and poverty rose according to the respondents during its tenure. Another Gallup Survey entitled 'Public Opinion Regarding Imran Khan's Government over the Past Three Years' also reveals government's inefficacious performance pertaining to people-centric issues as government performed worst in running economy in the past three years according to the respondents which vividly shows and reflects the disappointment of the masses and PTI's declining popularity as a result of not addressing the issues pertaining to the common men like inflation and poverty.

It can reasonably be assumed that PDM's vote of no confidence might not have succeeded if the PTI government, instead of focusing primarily on targeting and punishing corrupt politicians, had adopted an agile and proactive approach to addressing key public concerns such as unemployment and inflation. This could

have transformed its lofty claims of establishing ‘Naya Pakistan’ and a ‘Riasat-e-Madinah’ based on ideal governance into reality.

Conclusion

So, to conclude, we can say that PTI assumed power for the very first time after giving a thumping defeat to the two ever dominated political parties, Pakistan People’s Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N). It encountered myriad of socio-economic, political and foreign challenges like devaluation of currency, inflation, current account deficit, lack of efficacious administrative capacity, COVID, unemployment, lack of cooperation from bureaucracy, grievances of provinces, single national curriculum, USA's evacuation from Afghanistan, Ukraine-Russia stand-off, declining popularity within the ranks of the masses, disappointment in middle and lower strata of society, etc. and may more. However, the opposition alliance PDM turned into a grave challenge for PTI government that posed serious ‘survival challenge’ to it and ultimately became a reason and factor behind its downfall. The ‘burden of hopes’ also turned into a challenge for the government as people were actually looking forward to ‘Naya Pakistan’ and ‘Riasat-e-Madinah’ based on an ideal governance system. It can be concluded from this research that PTI would have averted and eschewed this ouster and downfall if it had stayed cautious while setting its priorities and addressed and paid attention to the actual problems of the masses like inflation and unemployment instead of focusing mainly on targeting and punishing the alleged corrupt political opponents. Mr. Imran Khan’s rigid and stringent approach towards his opponents urged them to join hands against PTI government and the resulting political instability turned into a challenge for the government and ultimately paved way for its downfall and departure.

Recommendations-How PTI Government Could Have Encountered the Challenges Efficaciously?

- Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan must have tried to bring about political consensus to avert and eschew the creation of opposition alliances like PDM.
- Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan, being the Chief Executive of the country, must have opted for a very flexible approach over important issues like replacing and changing CM Punjab Usman Buzdar and approaching IMF in time to avert economic and governance challenges.
- The government must have opted for a flexible approach at diplomatic and foreign front as well. Opting for a hardline approach like 'absolutely not' can bring about serious consequences and challenges for the government.

- Special attention should have been given by the government towards the establishment of an efficacious local government setup to cope with the governance challenges.
- PTI government kept the policy and agenda of targeting and punishing corrupt politician's paramount due to which the main issues and concerns pertaining to the masses and common men like inflation remained side-lined and unaddressed. PDM exploited the whole situation and the major chunk of the masses also got disappointed. So, PTI government should have given priority to the actual needs and concerns of the masses and common men to avert and eschew this downfall.
- PTI government must have done proper prior homework so that it could have performed more efficaciously and efficiently.
- Most importantly, actions must have spoken louder than words.

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Annexes

Respondents

Respondent 1: Mrs. Aliya Hamza Malik, Former MNA on reserved seats by PTI

Respondent 2: Mr. Ahsan Iqbal, Current secretary General of Pakistan Muslim League-N,

Current Interior Minister and Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms

Respondent 3: Dr. Mehbooh Hussain, Head of History and Pakistan Studies Department,

University of the Punjab, Parliamentary Studies expert

Respondent 4: Dr. Asma Awan, Head of Political Science Department, Kinnaird College

Lahore, having profound interest and expertise in Political Affairs

Respondent 5: Dr. Moeed Pirzada, a prominent and renowned Foreign Affairs and Political

Analyst and Commentator, Journalist, TV Anchor and Columnist. CEO Global Village Space

Respondent 6: Dr. Fowad Murtaza, having profound interest and expertise in Economic

Affairs, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, University of Essex, UK

(Interviews were conducted when PTI government was in power)

Interview Questions

Question 1: What are the grave socio-economic and political challenges confronting the PTI government during first three years of its tenure?

Question 2: Which factors urged the political parties to join hands against the PTI government and form PDM. How it can be reckoned as grave challenge confronting the government?

Question 3: The PTI's defeat in the first phase of KPK local government elections has revealed the fact that the government's popularity is declining. How it can turn into a challenge for PTI government, especially in the context of upcoming general elections?

Question 4: What are the reasons and factors behind the constant reshuffling of cabinet?

Question 5: How the government can overcome these challenges efficaciously?

Question 6: What are the main challenges confronting the government at foreign front?

Question 7: What are the main challenges confronting the government at economic front?