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No Easy Walk to Democracy: Security, Politics and the State in Pakistan

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**Abstract:** The successful transition of government from one democratically elected regime to another in 2013 marked a first in Pakistan’s history, and offered a message of hope in the democratic development of the country. Subsequent civil protests spearheaded by Imran Khan’s PTI party, however, pose difficult questions about the constitutional and democratic development of a state such as Pakistan. Structural deficiencies in the state’s ability to deliver security, furthermore, temper optimism over Pakistan’s pathway towards full democracy, and show there is much yet to achieve.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, democracy, transition, PTI, PAT, protests.

Independence Day 2014 in Pakistan proved itself to be a characteristically lively affair, marked by a major protest march on Islamabad by Imran Khan’s *Pakistan Tehrik-i Insaaf* (PTI; Pakistan Movement for Justice) and Maulana Tahir-ul Qadri’s *Pakistan Awami Tehrik* (PAT; Pakistan People’s Movement). Both parties demanded the resignation of the Nawaz Sharif government in the face of allegations of electoral fraud in the previous year’s elections.

At the height of the protest, the marchers converged on the parliament buildings in the Pakistani capital’s red zone, breaching a security blockade, and settled in to a long *dharna* (vigil). Both Khan and Qadri placed high stakes on the success of their protest, demanding no less than the immediate resignation of the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, and his brother Shahbaz Sharif, the Chief Minister of Punjab Province. The PTI has subsequently shown itself capable of mounting a number of very substantial *jalsas* (rallies) across the country, including in Larkana, the home town of the Bhutto family.

In the meantime, terrorist attacks by factions of the *Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) have accelerated, causing the tentative negotiations with government to collapse. The violence culminated in a brutal attack on an army school in Peshawar in December 2014, which left 153 dead, most of them schoolchildren. The attack has forced the government’s hand towards
a much more concerted and active policy of military action against militants in the tribal areas.

Such challenges come at an auspicious time in Pakistan’s history. The besieged Prime Minister finds himself well into a historic period of democracy, marked by the successful transition of power in 2013 from one elected civilian administration to another for the first time in the country’s history. The army, for many years the dominant political force in Pakistan’s governance, has so far remained firmly in the barracks as far as political intervention is concerned, despite occasional mutterings that it may act in the face of serious civil disorder. The fact that such a democratic transition was able to happen, and was characterised by the highest voter turnout in national elections since the 1970s, was testimony for many that Pakistan’s democratic transition is turning a corner into a more stable and resilient phase.

New politics?

One of the two leaders of the march on parliament in August 2014, the PTI leader, Imran Khan, himself played a significant role in the 2013 elections. Originally formed in Lahore in 1996, the PTI started life as a political movement pledging a new beginning in Pakistan’s political history by calling for the end of corrupt and feudal politics. The impact of the party was fairly muted in its early years, but in the run-up to the 2013 elections, Khan started to catch the attention of both domestic and international audiences through such activities as his march across northern Pakistan into the tribal areas protesting at drone strikes. By the time of the 2013 elections, the PTI seemed poised to make significant electoral breakthroughs and possibly hold the balance of power between the major parties. In the event, the results both were, and were not satisfying for the party. With a tally of 28 seats in the National Assembly, the party exceeded the expectations of many observers, and left it just a handful of seats short of the outgoing Pakistan People’s Party of Asif Ali Zardari. In this sense, the party had arrived firmly on the national political scene as the third largest party nationally. This was no
small feat in the context of Pakistan’s political history and its dominance by the two major parties, the PPP and PML. At the same time, the PTI was well short of Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), which swept into power with a clear majority. More importantly, the PTI failed to make much headway in Sharif’s home province, Punjab, and found its support largely concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where it now heads the Provincial Assembly in coalition with two smaller parties.

The other leader of the march on parliament in August 2014, the Sunni Muslim cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri, is a somewhat different proposition. Qadri has lived much of his recent life abroad in Canada, briefly returning to Pakistan in January 2013 to lead a largely unsuccessful “million-men” march on the Pakistani capital, protesting at the corruption, nepotism and incompetence of the then Zardari PPP government. The PAT is thought to have many supporters in parts of Pakistan and has attempted, like many parties before it, to appeal to a national constituency on thematic, populist issues rather than to particular regional ethnic or religious blocs. Also like those other parties, however, it has been unable to break through the established stranglehold of regional interests in Pakistan’s politics and has not yet scored any electoral success at the polls. Qadri’s anger with the Sharif brothers has been fuelled by an incident in June 2014 in which Pakistani police violently broke up a demonstration in Lahore outside the offices of Qadri’s Minhaj-ul Quran organisation. A number of protestors were shot dead in what became known in some quarters as the Model Town massacre. This incident has raised the profile of Qadri and the PAT, and attracted some support to its cause. By placing his protest marchers alongside those of the PTI in August 2014, Qadri’s PAT may be able to garner more support and publicity on the national stage.

By the Autumn of 2014, it was clear that the dismissal of the Islamabad government was not going to happen, and both the PTI and PAT have attempted graceful disengagement. In September, Khan instructed his elected MPs to take up their seats again, having held talks with a government-appointed “political jirga” to discuss and agree political reforms. (With
this said, Khan will clearly remain a political thorn in Nawaz Sharif’s side for the foreseeable future.) Qadri, meanwhile, abruptly left the country again at the end of October to undertake what he described as a fundraising trip for his organisation.\(^1\) Conspiracy theories talk of a substantial payoff from the government.

Despite the apparent lack of immediate success in their protests in terms of unseating the government, it is tempting to examine the PTI and PAT within the context of wider transformations in popular political mobilisation not only in the South Asia region, but across many parts of the world in recent years. Some observers have likened both the PTI and the PAT to the phenomenon of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP; “common man” party), formed in 2012 in neighbouring India following the foundation of a popular movement a year previously by the Maharashtrian social worker, Anna Hazare. Like its Pakistani counterparts, AAP has promised a new politics that challenges the existing social order and its patterns of corruption and patronage. Guru has described the emergence of AAP as a “republican moment”\(^2\) in Indian politics, challenging the dynastic and feudal patterns of traditional politics in the world’s largest democracy. AAP’s arrival on the political scene was much quicker and appeared more meteoric than the case of the PTI, when it won 28 seats in the Delhi legislature elections in December 2013, knocking the established Congress party resolutely into third place, and forcing a hung legislature. In the national elections of 2014, the AAP failed to win a seat, but forced the ruling Congress into a distant third place in many seats, reflecting a considerable shift away from the established voting pattern.

Some observers have therefore seen the likes of the AAP and PTI as harbingers of a new and postmodern form of politics that has the potential to turn existing elitist political structures in the South Asian region on their heads. Parallels are seen by many not only within the region but in the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street protests and the indignados popular movements in southern Europe that have championed the rights of the economically dispossessed. Imran Khan himself has clearly been thinking about the Arab Spring by
referring to Prime Minister Sharif as the Pharaoh\(^3\). However, in Pakistan’s case at least, care should be taken over drawing such parallels. Firstly, the phenomenon of massed public marches demanding the resignation of government is nothing new in Pakistan, and is arguably related in part to a long history of autocratic military rule, where orthodox processes of democracy were not available. The end of the Musharraf regime was marked by Benazir Bhutto’s triumphant return to Pakistan to campaign for elections, during which she commanded huge anti-government rallies of supporters across the country, eventually culminating in her assassination at a rally in Rawalpindi in December 2007. The rallies had echoed a similar return to Pakistan by Bhutto during the General Zia-ul Haq regime, in 1986. According to Lamb, the rallies accompanying that earlier return from exile had been inspired by Cory Aquino’s ultimately successful marches against the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, and, in Bhutto’s case, had reputedly brought more than a million people onto the streets of Lahore.\(^4\)

The 1980s was also the period in which the *Mohajir Qaumi Movement* (MQM; Mohajir National Movement) emerged in the city of Karachi to quickly command overwhelming support among the Urdu-speaking community in Pakistan’s largest city. A short while after its formation, in August 1986, the MQM mounted its first major rally in Karachi’s Nishtar Park, which is generally estimated to have attracted hundreds of thousands of supporters. Such has been the MQM’s subsequent grip on affairs in the city, it has fairly regularly mounted rallies of similar sizes, either lauding its leader, Altaf Hussain, or protesting at regional and national government actions.

The MQM’s rhetoric, while focusing on issues to do with the recognition of the “Mohajir” identity as a formal nationality within Pakistan, also included a heavy dose of anti-establishment new politics. The party’s leader, Altaf Hussain, explained in 1991 that:
A few families have for a long time ruled this country. It is impossible for common, poor, middle class to come into politics, in Assemblies, parliament...MQM has proved that it wants rule of 98% rather than rule of 2% [sic].

Despite its name-change to the *Muttahida (United) Qaumi Movement* in the early 1990s, and a professed desire to move beyond its limited regional, ethnic politics and reach out to Pakistanis nationally, the MQM has remained solidified in the urban areas of Sindh and has not managed to expand its appeal at all. It has certainly made no impact whatsoever on overturning the established, elite-dominated politics of the country. The MQM is perhaps an unusual case, but other parties that have expressed similar postmodern and revolutionary sentiments such as the PTI are facing the same frustrations in overturning the established order. Indeed, despite winning 28 seats in the 2013 elections, the PTI performed poorly in the key province of Punjab, where Nawaz Sharif’s party was strongly dominant. It is allegations of vote-rigging by Sharif’s PML-N party that drove the march on parliament and demands for the government to step down.

**Structural barriers to change**

Clearly, however, the PTI’s problems go beyond mere electoral irregularities. It is clear that the party structure were having difficulties in the run-up to the elections appointing and fielding sufficient numbers of credible candidates to contest the numbers of seats the party wanted to contest nationally. In this problem there was a particular conundrum: the quickest and easiest way to accumulate suitable candidates was to recruit established politicians to the PTI from other parties. But in doing this, the PTI was constantly running the risk of recruiting the very figures from the established political order – some of whom had allegations of corruption and patronage hanging over them – that the party was claiming to want to expunge from the political scene. It’s all very well claiming that a “new politics” is being delivered, but to find a large number of wholly new and untainted candidates to field credibly in elections is no easy task.
Wolf recalls the famous dictum made by Anthony Downs in the 1950s, that “parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies”. Parties need to get themselves elected to deliver on promises, but doing so may require populist sentiments and slogans that are later found to be lacking in feasibility. In some ways, this has been a feature of the more recent “anti-politics” of the street, or the “politics of din” as Alam describes it. Bayat further analyses the “exceptional” nature of street politics, where “the fiercest battles take place in the streets, the locus where revolutionary breakthrough is achieved”. But in the post-revolutionary period when the battle is won and new masters take power, the task of transforming street politics into real everyday deliveries can be a dangerous and surprising one. Clearly these problems have been demonstrated in post-Arab Spring countries such as Egypt, but they have also been encountered in numerous other places (take for example the electoral success of Beppe Grillo’s Five Star movement in Italy in the 2013 general election, and more historic revolutionary episodes such as France and Russia).

In South Asia, this may be part of the problem for the AAP in India and PTI in Pakistan, who, having won seats in national and regional legislatures, suddenly find themselves held to account against the lofty slogans they once delivered to the street. However, an additional problem in the South Asian context – and, indeed, to a certain extent across many parts of the developing world – is that the established feudal arrangement of power whereby wealthy landowning dynasties have evolved to have a stranglehold on political mobilisation across much of the still largely rural landscape is proving to be too difficult a nut to crack, especially for new political forces that operate outside of the established political order. In short, the entrenched “feudal democracy” in a state such as Pakistan may be just too deeply embedded to be vulnerable to attack from new political forces at this time.

As Schaefer describes, the conundrum thrown up by this state of affairs is that national leaders who aspire to hold on to power find themselves having to curry favour with a wide array of landowners and other community leaders in order to hold together any sort of
cooperative ruling coalition. This means that feeding channels of patronage and kinship can become more important and significant in day-to-day business than pursuing properly designed political policies and strategies. In Pakistan’s case, an additional structural impediment is that no one ethnic or regional bloc holds a sufficient majority across the country, and, given that politics in the country has shown an inexorable tendency to fall into regional and ethnic channels, politics can often be characterised by deals and “horse-trading” between regional power-brokers to hold together a sufficiently strong governing coalition at the centre. In this way, even the new political forces like the PTI, or indeed the AAP in India, tend to find themselves largely restricted in support to one particular region or ethnic community, despite the generic and trans-regional nature of their rhetoric. Breaking out of this cycle continues to be extremely difficult.

An interesting further aspect to this state of affairs in the Pakistani case is the continued failure of Islamic parties to score national impact in elections. At first glance, an Islamic party should be the perfect counterfoil to regional, ethnic and nationalist politics, since it offers a generic platform that theoretically unites all Pakistanis (notwithstanding the myriad strands of Islam). However, Islamic parties such as the JUP, JUI and Jamaat-i Islami have always found their support largely restricted to very specific regions and communities, and have never scored more than single-figure percentage points in national elections. The major secular parties such as the PPP and PML have always been the dominant political forces. The fragmentary effect on politics of regional and ethnic identities, coupled with Pakistan’s relative lack of experience of parliamentary democracy, go some way to explaining how Islamic forces have tended to have most influence outside of the norms of democratic politics. During General Zia’s rule, for example, the Jamaat-i Islami wielded significant power at the political centre, ensuring significant constitutional and legal changes such as the installation of Shariah (Hudood) ordinances. In the 2013 elections, however, JI secured just three
National Assembly seats, which is indicative of the party’s performance across all democratic elections in Pakistan’s history.

In a similar way, the march on parliament by Tahir-ul Qadri’s PAT party, which uses basic Sufi Muslim messages to appeal to supporters on a generic platform of justice, anti-corruption and anti-nepotism, can mobilise a seemingly large number of people and apply considerable pressure on the government. But this belies the fact that the party has not won a single seat in elections, and, indeed, that Qadri himself eschews politics somewhat, preferring to lead more of a popular movement than a political party. In the feverish conspiratorial nature of political discourse in Pakistan, the activities of parties such as the PAT are sometimes explained as being proxy movements orchestrated behind the scenes by the army, to be mobilised at times of disquiet with the elected civilian regime. Similar accusations have been levelled at other emerging movements in Pakistan’s history, such as the MQM in the 1980s, which some attributed to an effort by the Zia regime to manufacture a counter-force to the popular PPP.

Morality and ethics in the new politics

Indeed, there is a question as to the legitimacy of mass popular movements and protests during periods of civilian democracy as opposed to periods of authoritarian rule. The notion of civil disobedience during colonial rule or military dictatorships would appear to make perfect sense, when other political avenues are not open. It is reasonable to postulate that the whole raison d’être of the Arab Spring, was that of a spontaneous and revolutionary popular uprising against dictatorial regimes that otherwise showed no sign of relinquishing power. In Pakistan’s current situation, however, a mass popular movement could be said to be somewhat anachronistic and even cynical at a time when the country is painstakingly attempting to build a new chapter in continuous civilian democracy, albeit with numerous flaws to address. In Pakistan’s case, furthermore, there is always the risk that a period of considerable unrest and confrontation on the streets could cause the army to decide to intervene to restore law and order, as has been the case in previous periods of history.
Guru recalls the slogan of the AAP in India that “we do not want to do politics, but we want to change politics”. Such an aspiration offers hope in moving away from the sort of ethical relativism that characterises the politics of traditional political parties in a country such as Pakistan, where, as described, daily horse-trading with regional and other interest groups becomes the defining order of the day. And yet, there is an in-built paradox in wanting to change politics but not having a very clear agenda for how to do so. Indeed, aside from the practical difficulties of making such a change, there are moral questions to be asked about the tactic of mass civil disobedience in a fledgling democracy, and, indeed, whether such a tactic could ultimately drive support away from the party.

In a critical appraisal of Imran Khan’s recent campaign, Khawaja notes that Khan’s claims and demands “have gradually lost all constitutional legitimacy”. The PTI, she notes, “can grow into a serious political force only by replacing the street politics and childish agitation with parliamentary politics, which it has shunned since the elections”. In these admonishing words, we again see the inherent paradox of the new politics. It wants to change the political system and issues popular speech acts (in Guru’s words, “fashioning self-evident truths through public confirmation”), and yet it shuns the only practical means through which such changes could realistically be achieved, namely changing the existing democratic system from within. While the ability to change the system is severely hampered by the entrenched obstacles constituted by elitist strangleholds on power, the end results of million-men marches can often be more symbolic than actual, and can be quickly forgotten by the electorate. By August 2014, for example, reports were starting to suggest that participants of Khan and Qadri’s dharna were “growing weary”, and that day-time attendances were gradually reducing to a few hundred people. For Imran Khan, one of the big risks concerns the flogging of a dead horse, and this could affect the public’s perception of his ability to really change the political landscape.

Problems with the system
Given Imran Khan’s insistence that the 2013 elections were stolen by Nawaz Sharif’s government and that nothing less than his resignation will do, it is worth considering the merit of his claims. Interestingly, Khawaja’s criticism of the PTI is that his popular street protests are seen as a challenge to the constitutional order, and thus to the fabric of the democratic state. Khan, however, turns this around and claims that it is his constitutional duty to challenge an election in which widespread rigging is perceived to have happened, citing Article 6 of Pakistan’s constitution dealing with “high treason”, the wording of which was updated in 2010 in the eighteenth amendment to the constitution. This is an interesting appeal to the notion of a Hobbesian social contract in justifying popular resistance within the state.

The 2013 elections were observed formally by an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). In their final report, it was noted that Pakistan had finally ratified the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2010, and that the 2013 polls were the first to be held under that agreement. The final report was somewhat mixed. Despite acknowledgement being made of legal and constitutional amendments that are gradually bringing Pakistan into line with the ICCPR’s recommendations, concerns still remain about the process, notably in the area of general provisions for transparency to election observers. However, the general tone of the report was one of cautious optimism and congratulation. It was noted that “a strong democratic commitment was demonstrated in the 2013 elections, by the state authorities of Pakistan, civil society, political parties and voters”. Voter participation demonstrated a “marked increase”, and there was “overall acceptance of the outcome”. In these words we see the conundrum for a new political party such as the PTI. Clearly there are still some quite serious concerns about the electoral process in Pakistan, and much further progress needs to be made. But in the context of a long transition towards democracy after years of autocratic rule, it may be the case that progress is made only slowly and small gains are the best that can be expected in the interests of keeping the train on the track. For the likes
of the PTI, the question is how to balance working effectively within the system, with placing pressure on the system to hasten the march towards effective democracy.

Outside of the electoral system itself, the government of Nawaz Sharif continues to face enormous pressures within the state. On the economic front, a faltering economy with slowing GDP growth and evidence of a sharp drop in inward investment are undoubtedly serious problems. Closely connected with these issues and looming very large in the public’s consciousness is the ongoing energy crisis within Pakistan. This problem has grown gradually as the country has urbanized and demand has soared, such that, by 2012, the country was meeting barely just over half of the national demand. Long outages of electricity, often lasting for several hours, have become the norm for businesses and citizens alike. Such daily problems feed into a sense of resentment which can be mobilised politically as anger with perceived economic incompetence by the government. There is no doubt that this is one of the most pressing problems for the Nawaz Sharif government to tackle, and one on which it will be judged harshly if some progress is not made.

Security issues

On the security front, problems are no less pressing. In Baluchistan province, the long simmering counter-insurgency operation against Baluchi separatists, which has been rumbling fairly continuously since independence, is becoming further complicated not only by a growing level of sectarian violence in the province, but also by a number of critical human rights reports documenting extreme violence by the security forces and “disappearances” of captives.

Perhaps more significantly, the ongoing confrontation with the “Pakistani Taliban” in the shape of the Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has shown no signs of abating, as evidenced by the horrific Peshawar school attack in December 2014. One of Nawaz Sharif’s platforms prior to the elections was a promise to make progress on peace talks with the TTP, something on which the PTI was very much agreed. Matters became slightly complicated in November...
2013 when a US drone strike killed the TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud, leading to a bitter feud within the organisation over the succession to the leadership. The problem is essentially a tribal one between Mehsuds and non-Mehsuds, which became inflamed by the TTP Shura’s decision to appoint the non-Mehsud, Maulana Fazlullah Rahman as leader after Hakimullah’s death.

Fazlullah’s faction did commence peace talks with the Sharif government in March 2014, having ensured a temporary ceasefire. But ideological and tribal differences between factions have combined with a deep distrust of the strategy of peace and negotiation with the Pakistani government amongst many, leading both to bitter factional in-fighting, but also terrorist attacks aimed at derailing the peace process. The Nawaz Sharif government, meanwhile, must balance its strategy of negotiation with the militants, with extreme pressure from the US to take military action against insurgents in the FATA tribal areas. Just one month after the commencement of peace talks, a bomb attack occurred in an Islamabad vegetable market, killing 25. While the TTP claimed that such attacks are “un-islamic” and nothing to do with them, it seems highly likely this attack was the work of a splinter faction such as Ahrarul Hind, who were believed to be responsible for an earlier gun and grenade attack on the district courts premises in Islamabad in early March which killed 11.

By early June 2014, the talks were in serious trouble in the wake of a gun attack at Karachi’s international airport by ten militants, which took several hours to quell and resulted in the death of 28 people. Such a brazen attack in the country’s main city placed extreme pressure on the Sharif government to change tack on the strategy of negotiation. A spokesman for the TTP, Shahidullah Shahid, exposed the rift within the TTP by saying that the attack had been in revenge for the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud, and that the peace talks were a sham. It was not surprising, therefore, when a major military operation was launched by the Pakistani army in the tribal district of North Waziristan, aimed at rooting out militants close to the border with Afghanistan. The long-anticipated ground offensive followed weeks of airstrikes
and necessitated the displacement of thousands of local civilians. In the first 15 days of the operation, 376 militants were purportedly killed.\textsuperscript{24} Such a major military operation, which again places the PTI fiercely in opposition to the Nawaz Sharif government, reflects a further element in the horse-trading and balancing that the central government in a country such as Pakistan must perform. In this case, external strategic interests are the factor rather than internal interest-groups, and specifically Pakistan’s security relationship with the US, who have been pressing hard for a major ground offensive in North Waziristan for some years as the area is seen to be a major staging-post for militants crossing back and fore into Afghanistan. In terms of the positive effect of such action, however, the prospects are bleak for security in Pakistan. Peace talks with the TTP are now virtually dead – as many observers expected them to be – and the likelihood of revenge terrorist attacks following the army’s offensive must be high. Meanwhile, reports are starting to circulate of a further faction splitting away from the TTP, called Jamaat-e Ahrar, led by a former senior leader in the movement in the Mohmand agency, Omar Khalid Khorasani.\textsuperscript{25} While the split is essentially about a rift with Fazlullah Rahman and his policy of engagement with the Pakistani government, there is also evidence of an ideological difference in the sense that Jamaat-e Ahrar are thinking in grander terms of challenging the very fabric of the democratic state in the region and building an Islamic caliphate, inspired by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.\textsuperscript{26} While it is too early to tell whether such rhetoric is empty posturing and as much to do with tribal rifts as anything else, the spectre of a more emboldened millenarian Islamist movement in Pakistan which derives its inspiration from events in the Middle East, is a very worrying one and further underlines the fragility of democracy in the region. In this area as well, the central government may face the gravest of challenges to its ability to hold the democratic state together.

**Building civil society**
Both of the troubled legacies of autocratic government spread over many years of Pakistan’s independent life; and a tension between Western-style democracy and what might be described as fundamentalist Islam within Pakistani society, are posing extremely difficult questions of the process for building a stable civil society to accompany the steps towards resilient democracy. In two areas in particular, extreme problems persist at this societal level. One is the repression and sometimes murder of journalists who speak their minds, not just by the state itself in the case of reporting critical of the army or intelligence agencies; but also by extreme strands of society who take issue with those supporting supposed blasphemers or religious minorities. Political and nationalist groups, notably in the southern provinces of Sindh and Balochistan, have also targeted journalists on occasion for coverage deemed to be critical. Indeed, at the time of writing, the MQM chief Altaf Hussain is facing investigation in exile in London for inciting violence in Pakistan, including the intimidation and murder of political opponents and those critical of the movement.

In its report on the state of human rights in 2013, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan noted that eleven journalists were killed in the course of their work over the year, the highest rate across all South Asian countries. Not a single perpetrator of such attacks was prosecuted over the year, causing many journalists to self-censor their work for fear of retaliation. State control of social media and the internet grew, including a lengthy ban on Youtube dating from 2012, which has still not been lifted at the time of writing despite a resolution passed in the National Assembly calling for such in March 2014. In May 2013, the New York Times’ Islamabad Bureau Chief, Declan Walsh, was ordered to leave the country for “undesirable activities”. Many other domestic journalists were less fortunate, facing severe beatings or, in some cases, murder.

A culture of violence, vigilantism and revenge remains a persistent problem in parts of Pakistani society. In May 2014, the world was shocked by news of a stoning to death of a pregnant woman outside of a court building in Lahore by five of her relatives, for marrying a
man against their wishes. Such honour killings are depressingly familiar. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province alone, where *Pashtunwali* codes of honour and revenge are strong, police recorded 45 honour killings over 2013. The position of religious minorities in Pakistan is similarly parlous. Cases abound of violent persecution and intimidation, particularly of Christians, and *Ahmediyyas*, who have been declared non-Muslims under Pakistani law. Journalists and judges who represent such minority victims in blasphemy or other cases regularly face severe intimidation, to which the police can be apt to turn a blind eye. This is to say nothing of serious Sunni/Shia sectarian violence in the country, which, according to some analysts such as the Pakistan Institutes for Peace Studies, has been rising steadily every year since around 2009. During 2013, there were 658 recorded deaths from sectarian attacks, and more than a thousand injured.

Interestingly, five people were subsequently indicted for the Lahore stoning incident on charges of murder, but the question will be how easy it will be for prosecutions to stick. In the metropolis of Karachi, which is facing a virtual meltdown in the face of a combination of sectarian, ethnic, political and criminal violence, a lack of resources in the police and judiciary means that enforcing the rule of law is a very difficult business. The problem is a multi-faceted one, ranging from corruption and poor morale in the police, who are hopelessly out-gunned by militant and criminal groups; to a lack of a witness protection scheme. The effect of the latter is that it is the norm for those charged with targeted killings to be acquitted, in the face of threats of retaliation against the families of those giving evidence. Nationally, it is estimated that the overall conviction rate in serious and violent crimes is very low, and somewhere between five and ten percent. Such problems underlie the very considerable challenge that a country such as Pakistan faces in building a modern, liberal democracy in any established sense of the term.

**Conclusions: no easy walk**
When the elections of 2013 were successfully staged and a transition made from one civilian government to another for the first time in Pakistan’s history, many applauded the giant steps being made towards consolidated democracy in the country. But if they achieved nothing else, the crisis provoked by Khan and Qadri’s protest marches in August 2014 have shown that progress towards democracy is a slow and painful one, and nothing can yet be assured. The phenomenon of the PTI in particular is a fascinating one, and invites membership of the club of parties and organisations around the region that qualify as “new” political parties, forging a postmodern break with the established feudal and dynastic order. Whether such parties will be able to deliver the required transformations, however, remains a moot point. The scale of the task is indeed huge in the South Asian state. It is interesting, for example, that one of Imran Khan’s tactics of civil disobedience against what he perceives to be a treacherous government in Islamabad, is to demand that his supporters cease paying taxes to the state. And yet, in a country where the national tax receipt covers less than one percent of the population, such tactics seem inherently symbolic, and, at the same time, throw the depth of the structural problems in Pakistan’s society and economy into sharp relief.

In any post-authoritarian state such as Pakistan, the building of democracy will inevitably be a slow and painful process, and will entail much more than just addressing the actual process and machinery of electoral politics. Beneath such a process are situated the structures of the state, many of which will also be frail and underdeveloped. Many of the problems are interlinked. In Pakistan’s case, a culture of violence and revenge which constantly challenges the notion of the state’s monopoly on violence, combines with a desperately underfunded and ineffective judicial system. This only serves to erode the public’s trust in the state’s ability to deliver justice at any given time. Sometimes abuses are delivered by the state itself, in the form of intimidation of journalists or curbs on freedom of expression, or indeed, by electoral fraud. At other times, the state is trying to do the right thing, but violence in civil society undermines the delivery of justice and a rule of law. Overlayed on these problems is a
growing and serious terrorist situation which seems to be worsening by the day. The state’s ability to deal with this problem in an effective and just way will be closely scrutinised by the electorate and will test Pakistan’s fledgling democracy to the absolute limits. Building a democratic culture and a strong state whereby a second successful democratic transition can take place in 2018 will be no easy walk.

5 Interview with Julian Richards, Karachi, 13 March 1991
10 Ibid
13 Guru, Gopal, op cit, pp.112-3
15 Guru, ibid, p.114
17 Khawaja, ibid
18 Dawn, “Imran to announce...”, ibid
20 EU, ibid
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid, p.108
29 Ibid, p.112
Ibid, p.45