



AN ANALYSIS OF THE VOTE NO-CONFIDENCE AGAINST IMRAN KHAN

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Abstract:

Imran Khan was the first prime minister in Pakistan who was removed from his office through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022. Before Imran Khan, such motions were initiated against Benazir Bhutto in 90s and Shaukat Aziz 2007, but the oppositions could not succeed. Both primary and secondary data have been consulted for identifying the factors which has been analyzed through content analysis techniques. This manuscript attempts to explore and analyze the factors that contributed to the successful culmination of the vote of no-confidence against Imran Khan. We found that Imran Khan's relations with the establishment, internal rift within the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf, stubbornness towards his rivals, over-confidence and Khan's policy towards Russia and America paved the way to the success of vote of no-confidence in April 2022.

Keywords: vote of no-confidence, Prime Minister, Parliamentary democracy, opposition, establishment



Introduction

Imran Khan was removed as Pakistan's prime minister in April 2022 by a motion of no confidence. Based on the Westminster system, the motion needed the National Assembly's majority vote in order to be approved under Article 91(2A) of the Constitution. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of the major political parties, brought together a number of opposition parties to jointly propose the motion. Their combined efforts led to Khan's ouster, which significantly changed Pakistani politics. This decision, which cast doubt on Khan's leadership despite his term with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) since the 2018 elections, came from a summit of opposition groups (Khan, Guramani, shahzad, 2022). On March 7, Khan claimed to have seen a US diplomatic cable implying that the US wanted him removed because of their disagreement with his foreign policy and travel to Russia (Baloch, Shah, 2022). On March 8, 2022, opposition party representatives filed a motion in the National Assembly to remove Khan from his position, citing concerns about his alleged hybrid regime, which is marked by ineffective governance, political persecution of opponents, and mismanagement of economic and foreign affairs. Additionally, Khan's relationship with Pakistan's military establishment, which has historically been a major ally of his administration, is said to have been damaged by these charges (Kermani, 2022).

On April 3, 2022, Deputy Speaker Qasim Khan Suri unilaterally dismissed the no-confidence resolution, citing "foreign interference." This prompted PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to announce plans to file a lawsuit in the Supreme Court (Haider, Qayum, Mangi, 2022).

A constitutional crisis was sparked when Khan recommended dissolving the National Assembly after the no-confidence resolution was rejected. The dissolution was declared unlawful by the Supreme Court, which then intervened and permitted the no-confidence vote to take place. The motion was approved on April 10 and Khan was fired as a result. Khan then called for large-scale protests against the new government and his overthrow (France24, 2022).

Prime Minister Khan advised President Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly and hold fresh elections after the proposal was rejected. Concerns about the constitution prompted the Supreme Court to step in (The News, 2022).

The Supreme Court found with a 5-0 majority that the deputy speaker's decision to deny the motion and the following dissolution of the National Assembly were illegal, enabling the no-confidence vote to proceed. Khan lost the confidence of the parliament and resigned as prime minister on April 10th, when the no-confidence motion in the National Assembly was approved by a majority of 174 votes (out of 342) (Chaudhry, 2022).

On 11 April, Shehbaz Sharif was chosen unchallenged by the National Assembly to succeed Khan as prime minister. Khan's PTI party boycotted the voting and resigned en masse from the National



Assembly (Dawn, 2023). Below is a detailed discussion on the factors contributed to the success of vote of no-confidence against Imran Khan.

The factors that caused the vote of no-confidence

Imran Khan's government faced a successful no-confidence motion because he resisted the establishment's influence during his tenure, questioning the longevity of this system and advocating for genuine national development and autonomy. As a result, the military, civil bureaucracy, religious parties, and capitalists opposed him, fracturing political unity by severing alliances between PTI and its coalition partners. Parties such as GDA, MQM, BAP, PML-Q, and some PTI members defected, securing the necessary votes for the no-confidence motion, which, while constitutional, was orchestrated by the Pakistani establishment in concert with opposition parties. This marked the first successful no-confidence motion in Pakistan's history.

Imran Khan aimed to reinforce democracy in Pakistan, but his vision of a state modeled after Medina alienated religious parties who felt threatened by his ideals. Nationalist parties opposed him because he advocated for the unity of all four provinces, including Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, rather than promoting a single-nationalist agenda (Personal communication with MPA, PK15).

When the Prime Minister loses the majority support of the elected members in the Assembly, the opposition can initiate a no-confidence motion in the National Assembly under Article 95 of the Constitution. If 172 out of the 342 members of the National Assembly vote in favor of the resolution, the Prime Minister is effectively removed from office. It is important to note that a no-confidence motion against the Chief Minister is brought under Article 136 of the Constitution, while against the Prime Minister, it is under Article 95 (Personal Communication with Secretary General of Peshawar High Court Bar Association, Alam Khan Adenzai, Date, May 27, 2024).

According to him; A no-confidence motion typically arises due to issues like corruption, inflation, civil unrest, or misguided government policies. However, in Pakistan, such motions are often driven by personal dislike and political opposition. Historically, Pakistan has seen two significant no-confidence motions. In 1989, a motion against Benazir Bhutto failed due to a lack of cohesion and trust among the opposition parties, and the unwavering support of the Pakistan People's Party members for Bhutto. Similarly, in 2006, a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz also failed. In contrast, the motion against Imran Khan succeeded due to a unified opposition that had already negotiated positions in the anticipated new government. Additionally, several coalition partners of Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), withdrew their support, and some PTI Members of the National Assembly were absent during the vote. This convergence of opposition unity and defections from the coalition ensured the success of the no-confidence motion against Imran Khan.



A vote of no-confidence against the Prime Minister in Pakistan is a parliamentary process that shows the Prime Minister no longer has the support of the majority of National Assembly members. If at least 172 out of 342 members vote in favor, the Prime Minister must resign. This constitutional mechanism ensures government accountability and can remove a sitting Prime Minister if they lose the assembly's confidence (Personal Communication with Naeem Ullah, Candidate PPP, PK 15 Date, May 30, 2024).

According to him; The Opposition Alliance (PDM) employed various strategies to topple Imran Khan's government, including organizing rallies and demonstrations. They repeatedly demanded that Prime Minister Imran Khan resign, dissolve the assemblies, and call for new elections. However, the government was unwilling to negotiate with the opposition and was imprisoning opposition leaders.

In response, the opposition parties decided to overthrow the government through constitutional means. They presented a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan in the National Assembly. Similar motions had previously been brought against Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Shaukat Aziz, but both had failed. The no-confidence motion against Imran Khan succeeded because he was overly confident and did not take it seriously. He believed that, like the previous two motions, this one would also fail. Moreover, Imran Khan threatened that if the motion did not pass, he would imprison all opposition leaders. This attitude posed a significant challenge for the opposition parties, prompting them to intensify their efforts.

Additionally, the parties allied with PTI were dissatisfied with Imran Khan's policies and the behavior of PTI ministers. The opposition parties capitalized on this discontent to break the alliance, ultimately leading to the success of the no-confidence motion (PPP Candidate PK 15). The majority party in the national assembly of Pakistan has the right to form the government. Currently, a political party with 169 members in the national assembly of Pakistan can easily establish a government. Pakistan usually has coalition governments. Previously, 172 members of the National Assembly were needed to form a government (Personal communication with Muhammad Bashir Khan, MNA NA 06 Date: June 3, 2014).

According to him; The no-confidence motion against Imran Khan was successful because he aimed to pursue a foreign policy for Pakistan that maintained equal relations with neighboring countries and the rest of the world. His policy was based on mutual respect: if a country respected Pakistan, Pakistan would respect them in return. His focus was on benefiting the Pakistani nation. During this shift in Pakistan's foreign policy, Imran Khan was also acting as a mediator to resolve the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. He sought to create unity among the entire Muslim community and initiate contact with all Muslim countries. Imran Khan himself began visiting Islamic countries, and heads of Islamic countries reciprocated by visiting Pakistan. He established contacts with friendly countries, including China and Middle Eastern nations, to promote a free



economic system where raw materials and manufactured goods could be freely imported and exported. Trade would be conducted in each country's own currency.

Following this, Imran Khan visited Russia and secured an agreement for Russia to supply Pakistan with cheap petroleum products, gas, and wheat. At that time, Pakistan's GDP growth was 6.1 percent, the country was thriving, and the people were prosperous. However, the United States did not favor these developments. They sent a cipher to Pakistan through the Pakistani embassy in the US, instructing that Imran Khan should be removed from power through a no-confidence motion. The Pakistani establishment, acting in collaboration with the United States, initiated this motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan in the National Assembly through the PTI government (PDM). Their strategy involved persuading twenty-two members of the PTI's elected National Assembly to revolt. These members, who were allied with the Pakistani establishment, took refuge in Sindh House. PTI's alliance with certain parties also began to fracture, with MQM stipulating that their support for PTI would continue only as long as it was necessary. Ultimately, only the GDA in Sindh remained allied with PTI, while all other parties withdrew their support.

All parties except Jamaat-e-Islami voted for opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, enabling the no-confidence motion to succeed. Shehbaz Sharif won by just three votes, marking the first successful no-confidence motion against Imran Khan in the country's history. This success was due to the influence of both the international and Pakistani establishments. The United States was displeased with Imran Khan's foreign policy and particularly with Pakistan's positive relations with Russia, as confirmed by Russian media, which stated that Imran Khan was removed because of his stance on these issues (MNA, NA 06).

A vote of no-confidence is a constitutional process clearly outlined in the constitution. It allows an elected government to be constitutionally removed before the end of its term. This process, known as a vote of no-confidence, is akin to the constitutional method for electing a prime minister, providing a legal means to remove them. In contrast, dictatorship is an illegal practice (Personal communication with Sher Hassan, Lecturer Political Science University of Malakand, Date, June, 22, 2024).

According to Sher Hassan, most of the developing countries have a multi-party system and coalition governments, as it is challenging for a single political party to form a government alone. In coalition governments, there is often political blackmail, and coalition members can be unreliable. In policy-making, power distribution doesn't always follow a straightforward formula. When a prime minister adopts an authoritarian attitude, it often leads to a loss of trust and the initiation of a no-confidence motion. However, if the government maintains the confidence of coalition parties, issues are less likely to arise.

In Pakistan's history, no-confidence motions have been presented before Imran Khan's tenure. His removal was due to the withdrawal of support from all allied parties and the defection of some



members within his own party. When the majority in the National Assembly slipped away from Imran Khan, he should have resigned. The successful no-confidence motion against him will be remembered in history. The primary reasons were the desertion of his party members and the loss of allied party support. There are also allegations that external forces, including the establishment and major world powers like the United States, influenced the outcome. However, the crux of the matter is that without the trust of one's own party members, governing becomes significantly more challenging.

A formal vote in which members of a legislature or similar deliberative body indicate that they no longer support a leader or government (Personal communication with ANP President UC Tazagram, Amir Shah Bukhari Date: 2024, June 13). According to him; The opposition parties did not have a majority for the no-confidence votes against Benazir Bhutto and Shaukat Aziz, so those votes failed. However, the no-confidence vote against Imran Khan succeeded because his government was a coalition government with various factions within his own party.

First, a rebellion broke out within the PTI, with the Jahangir Tareen group making statements against Imran Khan in the media. Imran Khan largely ignored them, and Fawad Chaudhry consistently claimed that the opposition would bring a no-confidence motion if they had the numbers. Meanwhile, the coalition parties were also unhappy, but the government initially did not take their concerns seriously. Some PTI MPs started communicating with the opposition, and the situation escalated. Imran Khan inadvertently facilitated the mistrust by failing to address the discontent within his party and coalition partners. His reluctance to engage with his party members and coalition allies in a timely manner contributed to the successful no-confidence vote. Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif secured 174 votes, making Imran Khan the first Prime Minister of Pakistan to be ousted through a no-confidence motion (ANP President UC Tazagram)

Conclusion

Imran Khan was the first prime minister in Pakistan who was removed from his office through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022. Before Imran Khan, such motions were initiated against Benazir Bhutto in 90s and Shaukat Aziz 2007, but the oppositions could not succeed. We found that Imran Khan's relations with the establishment, internal rift within the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf, stubbornness towards his rivals, over-confidence and Khan's policy towards Russia and America paved the way to the success of vote of no-confidence in April 2022. In addition, opposition (PDM) relations with the establishment and its struggle for the next Chief of the Army Staff was the main factor that contributed to the motion of no-confidence.



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