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**Green Party Politics in Pakistan: An Analysis of
Electoral Performance and Party Influence**

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Abstract

This research paper examines the emergence, evolution, and influence of green party politics within Pakistan’s complex political landscape. Amid severe environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and recurrent natural disasters, environmental issues have gained global prominence; yet Pakistan’s political arena remains dominated by economic and security concerns, leaving green political movements largely marginalized. This study investigates the factors that shape the formation of green parties, their strategies to gain electoral traction, and their capacity to influence policy debates and public opinion on environmental issues. Drawing upon a qualitative research design, the paper synthesizes data from document analysis, party manifestos, interviews with political and environmental experts. It employs theoretical frameworks from political ecology and green political theory to understand the disconnect between environmental urgency and political action. By comparing the Pakistani context with global and regional experiences, the study identifies key challenges and opportunities for green parties and offers recommendations for strengthening their role in driving sustainable governance in Pakistan. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how environmental sustainability can be mainstreamed in developing democracies facing competing priorities.

Keywords: Green politics, environmental policy, electoral performance, Pakistan, political ecology, sustainable governance

INTRODUCTION

Green politics, sometimes referred to as eco-politics, is a political ideology rooted in the promotion of ecological sustainability, social justice, nonviolence, and grassroots democracy. Originating in Western Europe during the 1970s (Carter, 2001), green parties have since gained respect and influence in several parts of the world by championing renewable energy, conservation, and environmental justice. In this global context, key environmental challenges such as climate change, air and water pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss have increasingly become central to public discourse and policymaking (Ahmad, 2022).

Despite these trends, Pakistan, a country that is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, has witnessed only minimal success by political parties explicitly focusing on green issues. Instead, environmental policies in Pakistan are often

amalgamated into the broader platforms of major political parties. This marginalization occurs even as the nation grapples with floods, water scarcity, and deforestation that imperil the livelihoods of millions. Given that Pakistan has a legally established environmental policy framework—anchored in instruments such as the Pakistan Environment Protection Act (1997), the absence of a robust, dedicated green political agenda raises questions about the dynamics of electoral performance and policy influence in a developing country where environmental imperatives are vital.

Amid an escalating “green emergency” that disproportionately affects rural communities and undermines sustainable development, green political movements in Pakistan have not gained the electoral momentum or political influence necessary to shape national policies effectively. While mainstream political parties occasionally integrate green policies into their electoral manifestos, these initiatives often lack depth and sustained commitment (Ahmed et al., 2020). The political landscape of Pakistan is still dominated by issues related to security, economic instability, and political corruption, thereby relegating environmental matters to the background. Thus, there is a clear need to analyze the extent to which green party politics have emerged in Pakistan, assess the historical and contextual factors that have shaped their performance, and evaluate their capacity to influence environmental legislation and public opinion.

In order to address the problem, the study is guided primarily by the research questions: What factors influence the formation and electoral performance of green parties in Pakistan?, and How do green parties impact environmental policymaking and public awareness in Pakistan?, to answer these questions, the study pursues three central objectives: To analyze the historical development and electoral performance of green parties in Pakistan, to assess the role of green parties in shaping environmental policies and influencing public discourse on sustainability and to identify key challenges and opportunities for enhancing the political influence of green parties within Pakistan’s marginalized political landscape.

This study holds particular significance in the context of climate-induced challenges that Pakistan faces and contributes to the broader literature on political ecology and sustainable development. By examining why green parties have struggled to gain significant electoral traction and political influence, the research informs both academic debates and practical policy discussions regarding democratic governance and environmental management in developing nations. Additionally, the paper’s comparative perspective, with insights drawn from global trends and experiences in other developing countries, offers recommendations on how targeted reforms and capacity-building measures could empower green movements to shape national and subnational policies. Ultimately, the study aims to assist political practitioners,

environmental advocates, and policymakers in navigating the intertwined challenges of environmental degradation and political marginalization.

This study employs a qualitative research design to capture the nuances and complexities of green politics in Pakistan, where quantifiable data are limited. Data is gathered through a systematic review of political party manifestos, policy documents, governmental environmental reports, and media articles; 10 semi-structured interviews with political analysts, environmental experts, party officials, and civil society activists. The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis and triangulation methods, with the aid of qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo) to ensure systematic coding of themes such as electoral performance, policy congruence, and institutional challenges, thereby linking empirical findings with theoretical insights from political ecology and green political theory. While the underdeveloped state of formal green political movements and political sensitivities present potential challenges and data gaps, stringent ethical guidelines (including informed consent and data anonymization) bolster the study's validity and reliability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Green political movements have emerged worldwide as responses to the degradation of natural environments, inequalities, and unsustainable development. Scholars like Carter (2001) and Tasleem (2022) offer compelling analyses of the evolution of green politics in Europe and North America, highlighting how these movements diversified from single-issue campaigns to robust parties that now routinely shape public policy in many advanced democracies. Notably, green parties in Europe have successfully integrated environmental advocacy with broader issues such as social justice and economic reform. Their evolution has often depended on their ability to build grassroots movements, foster a culture of participatory governance, and pivot public debate toward long-term sustainability rather than immediate short-term gains.

In contrast, green political movements in South Asia—and in Pakistan in particular—face distinct challenges. Pakistan's political arena has traditionally prioritized issues such as security, economic development, and nationalism, relegating environmental concerns to a secondary status (Ali, 2020). Studies indicate that while environmental degradation, climate change, and natural disasters are acute in Pakistan, the nascent green discourse has struggled to break through due to limited organizational capacity and intense competition from established parties (Tasleem, 2022). Mainstream political parties such as Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) have intermittently integrated environmentally friendly policies (e.g., tree plantation campaigns and renewable energy initiatives) into their broader platforms. However, these efforts are often criticized for being superficial and opportunistic rather than stemming from a genuine commitment to sustainability (The Knowledge Forum, n.d.).

Despite its marginal status, an emerging body of literature suggests that there is potential for a more politically influential green movement in Pakistan if structural and contextual barriers can be overcome. Research on political ecology in the region emphasizes the importance of linking local environmental issues with global sustainability debates while also adapting strategies to local socio-political realities (Tasleem, 2022). This literature review underscores the need for a focused analysis of electoral performance and policy influence as distinct dimensions of green party politics, a gap that the current study aims to fill.

The study of green politics benefits from integrating insights from political ecology and green political theory. Political ecology examines the complex relationships between political, economic, and social factors with environmental issues, and it is particularly useful in exploring how resource conflicts and environmental degradation intersect with power dynamics (Peet & Watts, 2004; Robbins, 2019). Green political theory, on the other hand, advocates for a rethinking of traditional notions of democracy to include lifelong sustainability, communal decision making, and environmental justice. This dual-framework approach helps explain why, despite the urgency of environmental crises, green political parties in Pakistan have yet to overcome significant structural obstacles and mobilize mass support.

While substantial scholarship exists on the global rise of green politics, relatively few studies have specifically examined the phenomenon within Pakistan. There is limited empirical work documenting the electoral performance of green parties, and even less attention has been given to their policy influence and public outreach strategies. Moreover, most available studies tend to focus on India or other South Asian nations with more developed environmental movements. This paper, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by providing an in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of green party politics in Pakistan.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND OVERVIEW OF GREEN POLITICS IN PAKISTAN

The evolution of green politics in Pakistan is closely tied to the nation's developmental history, marked by significant industrialization, rapid population growth, and a recurring pattern of natural disasters (Ali et al., 2024). Despite being highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation (Igini, 2024), Pakistan has historically prioritized economic growth and national security concerns (Chaudhry, 2022; Ali et al., 2024). While an environmental policy framework exists, most notably the Pakistan Environment Protection Act of 1997, the absence of a strong, dedicated Green Party has often resulted in environmental issues being integrated into the broader agendas of mainstream political parties (Ali et al., 2024).

The initial decades following Pakistan's independence in 1947 saw a period where environmental concerns were largely overlooked as the government focused on establishing the foundations of the new state (Ali et al., 2024). The emphasis during the 1950s and 1960s was primarily on development with minimal environmental regulation, leading to substantial industrial expansion

and infrastructure projects (Ali et al., 2024). It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that a growing realization of environmental challenges began to emerge at the policy level (Ali et al., 2024). This period witnessed the establishment of key environmental bodies such as the Pakistan Environmental Protection Council (PEPC) and the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (PEPA), along with the enactment of the Pakistan Environmental Protection Ordinance in 1983 (Ali et al., 2024).

The 1990s marked a period of increasing policy attention towards environmental degradation, with the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1993-98) being the first significant national policy document to explicitly include environmental challenges within its objectives (Ali et al., 2024). This era also saw the initiation of important environmental projects like the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy, which aimed to integrate environmental considerations into all aspects of the country's policies, especially economic ones (Chaudhry, 2022). However, its implementation faced challenges due to political instability in the 1990s (Chaudhry, 2022). The post-2000 era has been characterized by further developments in environmental policymaking, legislation, institutional frameworks, and public awareness (Ali et al., 2024). Significant policies and initiatives such as the National Environmental Action Plan (2001), the National Environmental Policy (2005), and the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami project (launched in 2018) indicate a growing, albeit sometimes inconsistent, engagement with environmental issues at the governmental level (Chaudhry, 2022; Syed et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2024).

Over time, mainstream political parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have occasionally introduced isolated initiatives that touch upon green political principles, including nationwide tree plantation drives and renewable energy projects (Chaudhry, 2022; *Green Promises*, 2024). For instance, the PTI government (2018-2022) emphasized initiatives like the Ten Billion Trees Tsunami project (Syed et al., 2022). However, these measures have often faced criticism for their limited scope, lack of sustained commitment, and potential for being politically opportunistic rather than driven by a deep-rooted environmental ethos (Tantray, 2022; Ali et al., 2024). The formal emergence of a dedicated Green Party in Pakistan occurred relatively late compared to many Western democracies, with the establishment of the Pakistan Green Party on April 28, 2002. Currently led by Liaquat Ali Shaikh (*Pakistan Green Party*, n.d.), the party's formation indicates a more recent formal political mobilization around environmental concerns in the country's political history. The party's ideology aligns with global green politics, emphasizing grassroots democracy, social justice, ecological wisdom, non-violence, and sustainability (*Lamb*, 2025)). It is also affiliated with international green networks such as the Asia Pacific Greens Federation and Global Greens (*Pakistan Green Party*, n.d.).

ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF GREEN PARTIES IN PAKISTAN

Electoral success in Pakistan is predominantly shaped by immediate socio-political and economic concerns such as security, economic stability, and corruption, often overshadowing the

long-term imperatives of environmental sustainability. While anecdotal evidence suggests that environmentally conscious individuals have occasionally achieved victories in local elections, a cohesive, nationally recognized green political movement with significant electoral traction remains largely absent. Mainstream political parties, in their pursuit of broader appeal, have periodically incorporated environmental rhetoric into their manifestos, touching upon issues like climate change mitigation, renewable energy adoption, and sustainable land management practices. For instance, the widely publicized "Billion Tree Tsunami Project" initiated by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) did succeed in elevating environmental awareness to some extent. However, as one interviewed political analyst noted, "Such initiatives, while laudable, are often seen as symbolic gestures rather than deeply ingrained policy priorities that would significantly influence voting behavior."

Analysis of available electoral data, corroborated by insights from environmental experts interviewed for this study, indicates a consistent pattern where environmental issues are relegated to the periphery of public discourse during election campaigns and subsequently in voting preferences. As Carter (2001) and Tasleem (2022) have observed in broader contexts, the Pakistani electorate, facing pressing daily challenges, tends to prioritize traditional governance domains over explicitly green agendas. An environmental activist interviewed highlighted this challenge, stating, "When people are worried about their next meal or the security situation, environmental concerns, no matter how critical in the long run, often take a backseat." This sentiment underscores the difficulty green parties face in translating environmental urgency into electoral mandates within the current socio-political climate of Pakistan. The marginal impact of even high-profile environmental projects on reshaping the overall electoral landscape further reinforces the notion that green priorities have yet to become decisive factors for the majority of Pakistani voters.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND POLICY IMPACT

Despite facing limitations in electoral victories, the principles of green politics have found avenues of influence within Pakistan's environmental policy landscape, albeit often indirectly through their incorporation into the agendas of mainstream political parties. In the relative absence of a strong, unified green party, individual environmentally conscious politicians and dedicated activist groups have emerged as key proponents of environmental sustainability. These actors have played a crucial role in advocating for specific policies, such as increased investments in renewable energy technologies, the implementation of more effective waste management systems, and the expansion of forest conservation programs across the country. As one environmental expert interviewed for this research pointed out, "While we may not have a powerful green party, the consistent advocacy from civil society and some forward-thinking individuals within larger parties has pushed certain environmental issues onto the policy agenda."

However, the extent of this influence is often tempered by the presence of competing political and economic priorities. Given that political power remains largely consolidated within major parties that juggle a diverse range of national issues, the genuine prioritization and sustained commitment to long-term sustainability can be undermined by the exigencies of short-term electoral strategies and calculations. A political analyst interviewed for this study elaborated on this dynamic, stating, "Mainstream parties might adopt green initiatives, but these are frequently balanced against more politically salient issues like economic growth or national security, potentially diluting their impact."

Interviews conducted with both political elites and environmental activists reveal a nuanced picture of growing public awareness regarding environmental challenges, a phenomenon often amplified by the increasingly visible impacts of climate change. Nevertheless, this heightened awareness has not yet translated into significant and measurable political influence for explicitly green political platforms. Many interviewees suggested that the integration of environmental policies into the manifestos of mainstream parties is often more a response to external pressures from international bodies and the adoption of global best practices rather than a genuine reflection of deeply rooted domestic environmental concerns within the broader populace. As one civil society activist noted, "The government often talks about environmental protection to align with international standards, but the actual budgetary allocations and on-the-ground implementation tell a different story." This observation points to the structural realities of Pakistan's political system, where budgetary allocations and legislative initiatives tend to favor environmental projects primarily when they are intrinsically linked to high-profile economic or large-scale infrastructural development, further marginalizing standalone environmental concerns.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Comparative studies highlight that several developing nations facing similar environmental vulnerabilities have achieved greater success in mainstreaming green politics by effectively mobilizing public support through civil society engagement and media outreach. For instance, in Brazil, environmental movements have forged strong alliances with indigenous communities and labor unions, successfully linking environmental sustainability with broader social justice agendas (Hochstetler & Keck, 2007). Similarly, South Africa has witnessed environmental organizations collaborating with social movements to advocate for environmental rights and justice, often framing environmental issues within the context of historical inequalities (McDonald, 2002).

In stark contrast, Pakistan's civil society landscape, while active on various fronts, remains relatively fragmented and has struggled to coalesce around a unified green political agenda. Interviewed civil society activists pointed to several contributing factors, including "significant regional disparities that often lead to localized environmental concerns not translating into national movements" and "the pervasive influence of ethnic politics, which tends to overshadow

broader, issue-based political mobilization." Furthermore, a lack of consistent institutional support and resources for environmental activism in Pakistan, as noted by an environmental lawyer interviewed, "hampers the ability of green initiatives to scale up and gain national prominence."

Consequently, despite sharing numerous environmental vulnerabilities with countries like Brazil and South Africa – including susceptibility to climate change impacts, deforestation, and water scarcity – Pakistan lags in the strategic and institutional mechanisms that have propelled successful green politics elsewhere. As a political analyst interviewed for this study summarized, "While the environmental challenges are undeniable, the enabling environment for a strong, unified green political movement, characterized by robust civil society engagement and consistent media attention, is still considerably weak in Pakistan." This comparative lens underscores the critical need to address the structural and contextual barriers hindering the growth and influence of green politics in the country.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Several significant challenges impeding the growth of a robust green political movement in Pakistan have been identified:

1. The absence of an independent green party means that environmental policies are typically filtered through mainstream platforms that prioritize other political issues.
2. With persistent economic instability and pressing socio-political issues, environmental sustainability is often viewed as a luxury rather than an essential element of national development.
3. Despite growing environmental awareness, political engagement on green issues is relatively low. This is partly due to the belief that environmental policies may threaten economic growth or disrupt existing political alliances.
4. Mainstream political parties, while superficially embracing green initiatives, are constrained by pragmatic electoral needs and often dilute green rhetoric to appeal to broader electorates.

However, there are also opportunities that could enable green politics to gain a stronger foothold in Pakistan:

- The frequent recurrence of climate-induced disasters, such as floods and droughts, is slowly shifting public opinion toward the necessity of sustainable practices.

- Global organizations are increasingly prioritizing environmental projects in developing countries. If harnessed effectively, foreign assistance can bolster domestic green movements.
- Enhanced collaboration among environmental NGOs, academic institutions, and the media can create a more vibrant civil society platform that champions green political issues.
- Even if not realized through direct electoral success, incremental improvements in environmental policy—such as revised forest management regulations and renewable energy incentives—can create a foundation for longer-term political change.

The analysis suggests that while green political movements in Pakistan face an uphill battle, strategic alliances, increased public mobilization, and targeted reforms could gradually redirect the political focus toward a more sustainable future.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study has explored the state of green party politics in Pakistan from multiple angles—historical, electoral, and policy-focused—and has found that environmental issues, although critical, are not yet central to the political agenda. Green political influence in Pakistan is largely limited to peripheral initiatives integrated into the platforms of mainstream parties. Despite visible efforts to address climate change and environmental degradation, key challenges such as institutional marginalization, economic priorities, and low public mobilization continue to impede the development of an independent and influential green movement.

POLICY AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the analysis, several policy implications emerge:

- There is a need for creating or empowering institutional frameworks (or even supportive alliances) that focus exclusively on environmental issues. This may include establishing governmental committees or public–private partnerships dedicated to sustainable development.
- Increasing environmental awareness through education, media campaigns, and the active participation of local communities is essential. Policymakers and civil society must work together to translate rising environmental consciousness into tangible political action.
- Mainstream political parties need to refine their green policy proposals so that they are not merely symbolic but are backed with clear strategies, adequate funding, and measurable targets. This could involve incorporating expert opinions and scientific inputs into party manifestos.

- Pakistan can benefit from international funding and technical assistance by aligning national environmental policies with global sustainable development goals. Such external support can also help offset domestic financial constraints.
- Learning from the experiences of other developing nations with successful green political movements can help Pakistani stakeholders identify best practices and adapt them to local realities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies could extend this research in several ways:

- Incorporating quantitative data on electoral trends, voter behavior concerning green issues, and budgetary allocations to environmental projects could provide further empirical rigor.
- Conducting comparative research with other South Asian and developing nations might yield insights into how similar political and environmental challenges are addressed in
- As environmental disasters become more frequent, a longitudinal study tracking changes in the political influence of green parties over time would be valuable.
- Further work may integrate advanced models of political ecology and behavior to better understand the interplay between environmental crises and political mobilization.

CONCLUSION

The research underscores the paradox of green politics in Pakistan: despite the acute need for environmental sustainability, political attention remains largely diverted to more immediate and visible issues. Addressing this disconnect requires not only political will but also a redefinition of long-term national priorities. As environmental concerns continue to intensify, there is hope that strategic reforms, robust civil society engagement, and targeted policy interventions may eventually pave the way for a more meaningful role for green politics in Pakistan's democratic landscape.

It is evident that green politics—while still in its formative stages in Pakistan—possesses the potential to transform the country's environmental governance. To achieve this, however, both political leaders and civil society must recognize that sustainable development is inextricably linked to long-term national prosperity and social justice.

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