

The Concept of Political Success: Reflections on Leftist Politics of Sindh

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Abstract

Success in politics plays a crucial role in today's democratic societies. A political party is considered successful when it wins elections and assumes control of the government. The primary factors that determine political success generally include the party's voter base, organizational strength, cohesive narrative, political vision, resource mobilization, and policies that resonate with the socio-economic and religious context of the country. Left-wing parties in Sindh struggled with these critical components, failing to meet the established standards of political success. This paper examines the concept of political success through a critical study of Sindh's leftist parties, utilizing qualitative methods and scholarly sources. The key findings of this paper demonstrate that left-wing parties fail to meet essential benchmarks of political success, including organizational structure, popular narrative, and electoral performance, leading to their irreversible decline

Keywords: political success, political parties, failure, leftist, Sindh.

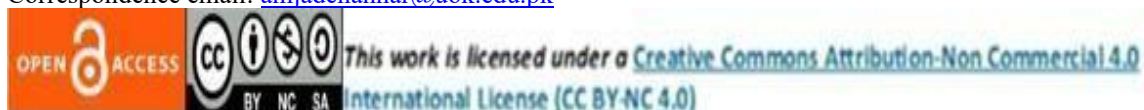
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Introduction

Sindh is one of Pakistan's provinces and has been a focal point for several political movements. Leftist movements have had marginal impact on Sindh's political, cultural, and religious spheres. The left-wing parties have failed to make a significant difference in public realm and electoral politics. Historically, left-wing parties in Pakistan have remained relatively minor and have occasionally seemed to disappear entirely. This can be attributed to factors such as government-imposed bans, including the prohibition of the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) in 1954, as well as internal conflicts within the parties themselves. To analyze the evolution of modern left-wing political parties and understand their lack of electoral success in Pakistan. It

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is essential to identify which parties are considered "leftist" and explore the reasons behind their limited influence (Shafqat et al., 2020). Marxist theory has played a significant role in strengthening leftist movements in Sindh. Organizations such as the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP), Awami Tahreek (AT), and Sindh Hari Committee (SHC) have actively resisted oppression and exploitation in the region. However, like other communist movements worldwide, leftist groups in Sindh were influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 has continued to inspire people worldwide, and it was seen as a path toward human freedom and social justice. It had a profound impact on communist parties and leftist movements across both European and non-European countries. Numerous scholars have analyzed leftist parties and communist movements globally². For instance, Bethel (2018), defines a leftist party as one seeks to transform society by redistributing wealth and power. Similarly, Cornell (1968), argues that communist parties vary across nation-states, losing their international identity and adapting to national and local contexts. As a result, these parties adopt different policies and objectives. He also argues that communist parties succeed more easily in weak states where governments lack popular support and legitimacy.

Vithal (1985), focuses on leftists in South Asia and argues that the Communist Party of India (CPI) was the epicenter of South Asian communist movements. Before India's independence, leftist movements had a unified stance and direction. However, after independence, they found themselves in highly distinct ideological and institutional settings. From the outset, leftist movements in region opposed authoritarian regimes and military rule in Bangladesh and Pakistan, along with the monarchy in Nepal. Consequently, unlike in India, the primary concern of communist parties was the fight for democracy and defiance against state repression. The Sino-Soviet divide led to extreme factionalism within the region's leftist movements. Meanwhile, communist parties in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India attempted to use ethnicity and religion for political purposes, whereas China, Vietnam, and Korea strategically and tactically employed nationalism against colonialism. The decline in the popularity of left-wing parties is evident not only in Europe but also in India. Bose (2019), reflects on the left's electoral position in the 2019 Indian general elections, noting that the left won only five seats in the lower house—four in Tamil Nadu and one in Kerala. The number of seats in the lower house has declined progressively, from 59 in 2004 to 24 in 2009, 10 in 2014, and only 5 seats in 2019. Alongside repeated electoral defeats, the influence of trade unions has also diminished. In contrast to India, left-wing parties notably the CPP, SHC, and AT have never been popular in Sindh and Pakistan. Various factors have contributed to the failure of leftist movements in the country, including military rule, a patronage-based political system, religious orthodoxy, a dominant feudal culture, and a lack of independent social and political institutions. These factors have suppressed the politics of difference and hindered the success of leftist movements in Pakistan. The left, particularly in Sindh and generally across the country, has struggled to establish a strong public image and achieve political success. However, weak organizational structures and ineffective strategies have also played a significant role in their failure. It is crucial to understand why the left has never gained political traction in Pakistan. This study will examine the leftist movement and the reasons behind its political failure in Sindh's political landscape.

² There is difference between the term "left" and "communist" in their definitions. According to L. Harry Gould (2019), communism is a higher form of society which can develop only after Socialism; and left is broader term for the Communist Party and other genuine militant and democratic groups (p. 22,49). I use the term 'left' to refer the progressive movements of Sindh that followed Marxist and communist ideologies, aiming to bring socialist revolution.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the reasons behind the political failure of leftist movements in Sindh. It relies on research papers, journal articles, and other academic sources that address political success. Additionally, the study incorporates reflective and critical analysis, along with observations of Sindh's leftist movements to explore the concept of political success.

The Concept of Political Success

It is widely believed that competence and the exercise of power determine both the success of living organisms in nature and people's success in society. Several conceptions of success demonstrate that there is no fixed definition of success in an abstract sense. However, this study focuses specifically on defining political success rather than success in general. Numerous academics have proposed different definitions of political success. Some argue that it depends on realizing a party's core aims through the exercise of political power via the legislature and administration. Bercovitch (2005, p. 289,302), contends that when a political organization demonstrates strong support and convincing narratives, it can overcome opposition and conflicts and be considered as successful. According to Šuvaković (2005), political power is exercised through parliament, and the government emerges from power relations. Therefore, it can be assumed that successful political parties are those that secure parliamentary representation. Siavelis (2020), offers a different perspective suggesting that success can be defined as consistently winning at least 10% of the vote in five or more consecutive national elections and maintaining stability even after the departure of the founding leader. Van den Berg (2013), emphasizes the importance of a well-organized political party in achieving success. This requires every party member to have a clear understanding of its core values, goals, and strategies for reaching those objectives. A strong organizational plan, combined with voter support is essential. Discussions about a party's organization often focus on its election-winning strategies. Crotty (1971, p. 439,50), argues that we still lack a comprehensive understanding of how political parties function to achieve their objectives, such as winning elections and attaining power. Academics have yet to thoroughly examine how effectively parties accomplish these goals, which are influenced by multiple dependent and independent variables. Ju (1994, p. 63), highlights that factors such as geography, economics, society, and culture play a significant role in explaining political success on a broader scale. Meanwhile, Golovakha (2005, p. 54), asserts that contemporary political success depends on mastering political marketing, management theories, and electoral strategies. Key focus areas should include electoral policies ,voter turnout, elections results, lobbying efforts, public opinion and voters' political intentions

Scholars often identify common elements that define political success in terms of electoral achievements. According to Palda (1975, p. 745,771), the definition of success varies for candidates, officeholders, and political parties, whether in opposition or in power. He suggests that political success for an individual can range from performing well in an election to attaining a high-ranking position. For those in power, public opinion ratings might also serve as a measure of success. A political party is deemed successful not only by forming a government but also by addressing key legislative priorities. White (2020), outlines six criteria for a successful social movement: societal deprivation, recognition of the deprivation, a proposed remedy, triggering events that set the movement in motion, openness to change within society, and the mobilization of resources In contrast, Willey (1999), emphasizes the adaptability of Western democratic parties to changing political landscapes. These parties have successfully transitioned from class-based to issue-based politics, allowing them to maintain political relevance. Conversely, parties heavily reliant on class-based politics have struggled

during periods of societal and economic transformation. This suggests that a political party's success depends on its electoral performance, ability to gain power, and adaptability to evolving conditions. Class-based politics seem progressively ill-suited to contemporary social and economic realities. Gross and Sigelman (1984), argue that the primary role of political parties are to nominate candidates for office, and the key measure of success is when their candidate win office. However, parties must also represent specific political perspectives, requiring unified policies and organizational strength. Electoral victories are not always assured; however, maintaining a cohesive political vision and mobilizing support for goal-oriented policies are essential components of politics.

In the context of political success, a fundamental requirement for left-wing parties in Sindh was to clearly articulate specific political viewpoints in the public sphere. Electoral victory serves as a primary measure of success, as winning votes is essential for any party's sustainability. Through electoral success, a party can form a government, either independently or in coalition with others. Once in power, it gains the capacity to influence numerous policy decisions at both national and international levels. A successful party can implement reforms and development initiatives that significantly impact society. Achieving electoral success requires a thorough understanding of the political, social, ethnic, and religious dynamics within society. Parties that skillfully adapt to existing parliamentary institutions and shape their narratives to align with both local and national contexts are more likely to attain political success.

Reflections on Sindh's Leftist Politics

Sindh has long been a center for political movements and struggles, both before and after Pakistan's independence. The criteria for political success include achieving key objectives, winning elections, organizing effective parties, demonstrating adaptability, maintaining a clear political agenda, and acquiring necessary resources. Unfortunately, leftist movements in Sindh have consistently failed to meet these benchmarks, reflecting a significant level of political weakness. For instance, leftist parties have never gained power or secured representation in parliament. They performed poorly in elections, failing to win any seats in Sindh during the 1970s and 1988 (Faiz 2020:90). The 1970s provincial election results showed that PPP won 18 out of 25 seats, and the NAP could not win a single seat in Sindh (Baxter 1971). The electoral defeat of the National Awami Party (NAP)³ revealed that the leftist had no future in the electoral politics of Sindh. Organizational weaknesses have led to their fragmentation into splinter groups. Many members have defected to right-wing parties, abandoning their leftist ideals. The tendency to adopt the agendas of other parties instead of adhering to their own principles further highlights their organizational shortcomings. As the NAP and other parties used the communist movement for their own ends. Eventually communists failed to establish an independent base for their movement. Thus, communist movement became dependent on the narrative of non-communist leaders within the NAP (Franda 1970). According to Khan

³ The National Awami Party (NAP) was widely recognized for its leftist political stance. Established in 1957, it was founded by leftist leaders, including Maulana Abdul Hamid Bhashani, who was influenced by Marxist ideology, after breaking away from the Awami League (AL). The party originated in Dhaka and brought together various factions, including Bhashani's breakaway group from the Awami League, the Azad Pakistan Party led by Mian Iftikharuddin, Sindh Mahaz led by G.M. Syed, Sindh Hari Committee led by Haider Bakhsh Jatoi, Wrar Pukhtun led by Abdul Samad Achakzai, Usthaman Gul led by Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Khudai Khidmatgars led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Ganantantri Dal led by Haji Muhammad Danesh. Until the imposition of Martial Law in 1958, NAP served as a vocal opposition in the National Assembly and played a key role in maintaining a balance of power between East and West Pakistan (Islam 2022).

(2014), the (CPP) failed to organize workers, peasants, and intellectuals into a cohesive revolutionary force. Lacking a solid political foundation, the CPP resorted to staging the coup with the support of military officers against the civilian government of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951. Its downfall stemmed from its narrow theoretical vision, as it adhered to the Ranadive thesis⁴ of military adventurism, which ultimately led to the collapse of the entire communist movement in West Pakistan.

Several scholars have analyzed the factors contributing to the failure of left-wing movements. Khan(2014) contends that Sindh's communists aligned with the NAP prioritizing ethnonationalism over socialism. Tariq (1971), argues that communists should have focused on building independent organizations rather than relying on the NAP. Amin (1987), suggests that the disintegration of the NAP marked the end of meaningful opposition to Ayub Khan's rule. Malik (2020), highlights the harsh suppression of leftist parties during Zia's regime, while Akhtar (2018), points to the strong influence of religiopolitical forces in shaping Pakistan's social and political structures, weakening radical political movements. A strong political party is defined by coherent policies and the ability to align with societal conditions. The leftist movement failed to benefit from the conducive conditions for radical politics. No political ideology can succeed without internal planning and organisation.(Leghari. 1979 n.d.). However, leftist parties in Sindh often lack unity, leading to internal divisions. Their inability to adapt to the evolving political, cultural, and economic landscape further weakens their position and political narratives. Around the world, political parties often adapt to changing landscapes by addressing current events and pressing societal concerns while striving to achieve social and economic goals. However, leftist parties in Sindh failed to develop any substantial economic or social plans for the people. The CPP lacked genuine political roots, and failed to organize peasants, workers, and intellectual in a revolutionary manner(Khan 2014). Instead, they largely functioned as pressure groups, relying on protests, demonstrations, and strikes rather than operating as organized, ideologically coherent leftist entities. Their political messaging was based on a weak narrative of class struggle, which had little influence on Sindh's political, ethnic, cultural, and religious dynamics. Frequently, these leftist parties pursued their political agendas under the guise of ethno-nationalism rather than asserting class-based ideological principles.

Influence of Ethnonational Politics

The history of leftist movements in Sindh demonstrates that the politics of left has never ever transcended ethnonational politics .First, there was struggle against the One- Unit scheme under the umbrella of the NAP. Second, the resistance against the military dictatorship of Ayub Khan. Third, participation in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD)⁵. Fourth, the opposition of Karabagh Dam and Thal Canals over water disputes. Fifth,

⁴ The Ranadive factions' advocacy for armed struggle was discussed in the Second Congress of Communist Party of India (CPI), held in Calcutta in 1948. The Congress sought to analyze the political situation in the Indian subcontinent and addressed three critical issues: the party's current policy, CPI elections, and formation of Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP).The first two points sparked divisions between rival factions. The Puran Chand Joshi group favored reformist policies, while Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive's faction favored militant revolutionary tactics. Ranadive's emphasis on armed struggle influenced the CPI to support the military coup in Pakistan(Khan 2014).

⁵ The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was an alliance of several political parties opposing the military rule of Zia- Ul-Haq regime. The coalition included leftist ,right-wing, nationalist, and religious factions led by the Pakistani Peoples Party (PPP) in 1981.

engagement in numerous local political issues, such as provincial autonomy, human rights violations, and feudal hegemony. In all these cases, leftist parties in Sindh framed these issues within ethnonational politics. Evidently, the character of leftist politics in Sindh remained predominantly ethnonational rather than Marxist. However, international scholars are divided on the compatibility of Marxism and nationalism. For example, Marxist scholar Rosa Luxemburg viewed nationalism as contradictory to Marxism, whereas Valdimir Lenin saw it as an initial stage toward socialism. The leftists in Sindh may assume that national politics would serve as primary step toward socialist revolution. However, since Pakistan's independence, neither class unity nor an independent class struggle has emerged. It would not be wrong to argue that Sindh is a multifaceted society, divided along ethnic, linguistic, cultural, mystical, and creed lines, even between rural and urban populations. Such deep division make it difficult to pursue a socialist revolution strictly following the Marxist agendas. It was doubly misfortunate for the leftist parties that they failed on both fronts as Marxists and as nationalists in the electoral politics of Sindh.

As Khan (2014), remarks that the leftist struggle in Sindh lost its coherence when it aligned itself with broader movements, as the emphasis on class struggle was overshadowed by the overarching goals of the people's movement. The success of a political party depends on its ability to clearly define and promote its ideas, distinguishing itself from others. However, leftist factions in Sindh struggled to establish a meaningful presence that resonated with the public. Their ideology lacked practical relevance in a predominantly religious society, which hindered its acceptance. The application of Marxist principles appeared disconnected from Sindh's social and cultural settings. Additionally, the left's criticism and dismissal of core religious values undermined its credibility in the region. As Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country founded on religious principles, the leftist movement faced significant challenges. Marxism focuses on material conditions rather than divine or religious authority. It views religion as a tool of oppression that hinders true human liberation. According to Glynn (2012), the ideological divide between Marxism and religion is grounded in their fundamental principles. Marxism is rooted in historical materialism, and religion is rooted in faith in a transcendent divine reality. Islam emphasizes on submission to will of God. While Marxism is anthropocentric, its central concern is human beings, their values, and emancipation from exploited classes; without appealing to transcendent divine beings. This perspective directly clashed with the conservative nature of Pakistani society and its religious foundation, making it nearly impossible for Marxist ideas to gain widespread acceptance. A successful political party must resonate broadly and address societal realities in ways that align with current conditions. For example, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) skillfully played with the dominant narratives of his time, particularly democracy, socialism, nationalism, and religion to craft a cohesive message that appealed to a wide audience across Pakistan. Bhutto pledged to eliminate feudalism and implement economic reforms to alleviate financial hardships. In one of his most politically charged speeches, he declared, "Islam is our religion, democracy is our policy, and socialism is our economy"(Abbas 2015). In contrast, leftist politics in Sindh failed to recognize the essential elements of political success. Resource mobilization is a key factor in achieving political influence, as outlined in White's theory, which emphasizes that public grievances can be effectively addressed through the mobilization of various resources—financial assets, labor, social influence, expertise, media, and support from influential elites(White, 2020).

Electoral Performance

Unfortunately, leftist groups in Sindh neglected several crucial aspects, including strategic electoral tactics, political influence, and effective tools for mass mobilization. Moreover, they

failed to learn from past electoral defeats in the 1970s and 1988, neglecting to analyze the root causes of their failures. As a result, the leftist narrative gradually lost coherence, leading to a decline in its distinct identity. The credibility of leftist parties has significantly diminished due to repeated electoral failures. While left-wing factions occasionally staged symbolic protests on important issues, political success is not achieved solely through demonstrations, strikes, or disruptive acts. Ultimately, success is measured by electoral victories and the ability to secure governmental positions. Non-parliamentary leftist factions, particularly in Sindh, have struggled to claim significant political achievements, as they failed to develop unifying ideas that resonated with the broader population.

The SHC primarily focused on dismantling the feudal system and advocating for peasants' land rights. However, it struggled to achieve its objectives as feudalism grew stronger, leading to a decline in the party's size and support among the rural population. Despite efforts such as advocating for land rights of the peasantry class under the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950, the SHC faced significant obstacles in implementation due to the influence of powerful feudal interests. The architect of the Sindh Tenancy Act of 1950, Hyder Bux Jatoi contended that landlords are a hurdle in the development of the country (Dali and Khuhro 2020). The failure of SHC became evident in the 1953 provincial elections. No single peasant was elected as 90 percent of Sindh Assembly members belonged to landowning families (Maniruzzaman 1966). Similarly, the CPP, which sought to abolish feudalism and champion the working class, faced comparable setbacks. Its strategies failed to bridge the divide between the oppressors and the oppressed, allowing Sindh's ruling elite to consolidate power and marginalize the party. Internal divisions between the CPP's rural and urban factions further undermined its ability to achieve its objectives. Tariq Ali, one of the progressive and leftist scholars remarked that it was regrettable that the CPP failed to operate successfully as a reformist organisation. Even more disappointing that there was no organized revolutionary force in West Pakistan (1971). The decline of leftist narrative can be observed through the electoral contests. Jam Saqi, the CPP's leader, was defeated in the 1988 Sindh provincial elections. He contested in PS.57, Tharparkar-Sindh, securing only 1,052 votes, while the PPP's candidate Haji Ghulam Muhammad Memon, won the seat with 11,862 votes (see Pakistan general election reports). Saqi became disillusioned and founded a new party, *the Jamhoori Tehreek* (democratic movement), in 1991. Subsequently, Palijo the AT's leader was defeated in the 1988 national elections. He contested in NA.182, Thatta-Sindh, securing only 9,813 votes. While the PPP's candidate Ghulam Hussian alias Babu, won the seat with 53,289 votes (Mehdi 2010). Such electoral defeat demonstrates the insignificant and marginal influence of the leftist movement. The AT, despite its goal of a national democratic revolution, struggled to gain substantial support in Sindh's political landscape. The party also faced difficulties in applying Marxism, Maoism, and Leninism within Sindh's complex socio-economic and religious context, making the socialist revolution even harder to achieve. Additionally, ideological differences further fragmented leftist parties, Such as the CPP sought to build strong connections with the urban working class, while the SHC focused on the emancipation of Sindh's rural peasantry. In contrast, the AT attempted to integrate both agrarian and urban working-class interests within the broader context of regional politics. These divergent approaches prevented cohesive policy formation and weakened the left's overall impact. Although these parties shared the common goal of eliminating exploitation and empowering the people, their policies and strategies varied significantly, preventing unified action. For instance, the SHC, as described by Yaqubi (2019), advocated land reforms, including land ownership rights for landless peasants, the complete abolition of landlordism, and the establishment of a socialist society. Similarly, the CPP aimed to create a socialist and communist state through revolutionary means. The AT, inspired by the ideologies of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, sought to eliminate feudalism, tribalism, and capitalism through political

activism(Palijo, 2007). As a result of these ideological and strategic differences, leftist factions in Sindh struggled to compete with more established political entities in the region. Although their manifestos outlined distinct goals, internal divisions and a lack of cohesive action ultimately weakened their ability to challenge mainstream political forces.

Party/ Leader	Election Year	Constituency	Votes Secured	Opponent & Party	Opponent's Votes	Outcome
Sindh Hari Committee (SHC)	1953 (Provincial)	Sindh Assembly	0 elected peasants	90% seats won by landowning elites	Not specified	Complete electoral failure for peasants
Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) – Jam Saqi	1988 (Provincial)	PS-57 (Tharparkar, Sindh)	1,052	Haji Ghulam Muhammad Memon (PPP)	11,862	Defeated by a wide margin
Awami Tehreek (AT) – Rasool Bux Palijo	1988 (National)	NA-182 (Thatta, Sindh)	9,813	Ghulam Hussain alias Babu (PPP)	53,289	Heavy defeat

Source: Compiled by the author

Conclusion

In Sindh, left-wing factions such as the CPP, SHC, and AT are widely regarded as unsuccessful in driving substantial social change. Several factors contribute to their declining influence. First, the patronage-based political culture, feudal dominance, and strong religious sentiments have all limited the appeal and effectiveness of leftist movements. Second, these parties have failed to establish an independent platform rooted in class-based politics, often aligning with larger, non-communist parties instead. As scholars have noted, political success and progress depend on winning elections and securing government positions. Political parties cannot effectively implement their policies, expand their influence, or drive meaningful social change without these accomplishments. Consequently, leftist movements in Sindh have consistently failed to secure popular support or achieve political success.

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