



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Pakistanis in Sindh struggle for democracy, 1981-1984

- Asian Democracy Campaigns (1980s)

**Time period notes:** *Although the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy was begun in 1981, a sustained nonviolent campaign did not seem to begin until 1983*

July

1983

to: December

1984

**Country:** Pakistan

**Location City/State/Province:** Sindh

### Goals:

To force Zia-ul Haq's regime to suspend martial law, to hold public elections to choose a new head of state, to restore the 1973 constitution, and to restore power to the public representatives who had been stripped of office by the Zia regime.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 071. Consumers' boycott
- 097. Protest strike
- 138. Sitdown
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 195. Seeking imprisonment

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 195. Seeking imprisonment

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 124. Boycott of elections

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

**Notes on Methods:**

It is not clear what methods were used after the 1st segment, although many of the similar methods seemed to be used after the initial segment.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

**Group characterization:**

- citizens
- members of the MRD

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), which included: Rasul Bux Palejo, Sindhi Awami Tehrik (Sindhi People's Movement), Pir Makhdum Muhammad Zaman of Hala, Pir of Ranipur, Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League (Khawaja Khair Uddin Group), Pakistan Democratic Party, Pakistan Mazdoor Kisan Party, Pakistan National Party, National Awami Party, Quomi Mahaz-e-Azadi, Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI), Tahrik-I-Istiqlal (TI), National Democratic Party

**Partners:**

Labor Unions

**External allies:**

Student groups, business groups

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Labor unions
- Student groups
- business groups

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 3 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

The government of General Muhammad Zia-ul Haq

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

None known

**Campaigner violence:**

There were bursts of violence, in which many participants reacted violently when attacked by the military.

**Repressive Violence:**

General Zia sent in 45,000 troops to Sindh with orders to violently suppress the protests.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

1 point out of 6 points

**Survival:**

0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The campaign failed to achieve its goals, although it receives one point for success due to having forced Zia to form committees to "look into the issue." The movement also seems to have been dissolved in late 1983, but it was able to boycott elections in 1984 which shows that it had some level of survival.

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In July 1977 Z.A Bhutto, the democratically elected president of Pakistan, was removed from power by the Pakistani military, which was at that point under the control of General Muhammad Zia-ul Haq. General Zia promised to hold an election within ninety days of seizing power, yet upon taking office he suspended the constitution and dissolved many of the country's legislative bodies. Over the next years, Zia repeatedly postponed the promised national elections, leaving the country in the hands of a de-facto military dictatorship.

In February 1981, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was formed. The main goals of the group were to force Zia-ul Haq's regime to suspend martial law, to hold public elections to choose a new head of state, to restore the 1973 constitution, and to restore power to the public representatives who had been stripped of office by the Zia regime. The group was a partnership of eleven anti-Zia groups who were able to put aside their differences in order to campaign to bring the dictator to justice. Together, they announced in February their intention to press for immediate and open national elections.

The MRD's growth was immediately hindered in March when a radical group led by the ex-president Bhutto's son hijacked a plane and killed a number of its passengers, holding the rest for ransom. This prompted widespread resentment of any type of anti-government activity and crippled the MRD group for two years.

By August of 1983, the group had re-organized itself and once again began to agitate. Much of the resentment against the Zia

regime was rooted in the Sindh region, and this was the center of organizing throughout the campaign. Despite a speech by Zia on August 12 in which he again vaguely promised that elections were soon to occur, on August 14 the MRD announced the beginning of a large-scale campaign against the Zia government.

The leadership of the group often sought arrest, and people began to rally on the streets. Approximately 100 labor leaders endorsed the MRD, as did many student organizations, professional organizations, bar councils, trade unions, and more. The trade unions especially proved to be strong allies in organizing, and with the support of all the groups mentioned above MRD organized marches leading out of the Sindh province and called large-scale boycotts and strikes. These boycotts and strikes drew the participation of millions of people, and hundreds of thousands took part in public demonstrations. In September of 1982, the government passed "ordinance No. 53" which prescribed the death sentence to any individual found damaging social property. Even this did not slow the protests.

In order to control what was quickly becoming a large-scale nonviolent uprising, Zia sent 45,000 troops into Sindh where they brutally attacked protesters, being careful to avoid those seeking arrest and top-level leadership, thus averting the creation of martyrs. Many of those who were attacked by the military fought back using violence, which served to legitimize Zia's government. Violent clashes between the military and protesters became more common in September 1983.

On the 29 of September, around five hundred protesters from the region around Sakrand staged a nonviolent sit-in in the middle of a national highway, where they stopped all vehicles from passing while chanting slogans and quoting the Quran. Eventually, military trucks descended on the protesters and opened fire, over the course of three hours killing sixteen people and injuring another fifty-four. After shooting the protesters, the trucks drove over their bodies. Another fifty-four people were arrested.

In order to enlarge the movement, Sindhi activists attempted to reach out to Punjab for support. However, their efforts failed to spark protests similar to the ones seen in Sindh. This may be because the Punjabis interpreted the Sindhi protests as Indian backed and in favor of secession. This impression was due to the government's control of all media and a statement made by the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in which she asserted that India would stand in support of all people's movements in Pakistan.

The campaign's failure to expand outside of Sindh proved to be a critical one. Unable to gain momentum, the protests subsided under military repression. However, the protests do seem to have had some success in influencing Zia's behavior, if not in bringing him out of power. On October 30, Zia announced the formation of a federal and provincially based committee whose mission it was to inspect the causes of the protests in Sindh.

On December 19, 1984, Zia held a referendum that, when answered affirmatively, would give him five more years in power. Approximately ten percent of the voting-eligible population showed up to vote in the referendum, and the MRD boycotted the elections. Zia was elected to be president of Pakistan, which he remained until his death in a suspicious plane crash in 1988.

## Research Notes

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**Additional Notes:**

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