



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Pakistan's Azadi March to Overthrow Prime Minister, 2014

August 14th

2013

to: December 17th

2014

Country: Pakistan

Location City/State/Province: *Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Multan, Mianwali, Sargodha, Gujrat, Rahim Yar Khan, Nankana Sahib, Sahiwal And Jhelum, Larkana, and Gujranwala*

Location Description: *(Marches travelled throughout many regions of Pakistan)*

Goals:

Vote recount in four National Assembly constituencies of Lahore, Sialkot and Lodhran; establishment of an independent commission to analyze the entire general elections held in May 2013; initiation of severe action against the returning officers found involved in rigging; fresh parliamentary polls if rigging was proved in the elections; reconstitution of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and massive electoral reforms.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 004. Signed public statements
- 038. Marches
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 138. Sitdown
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 4th segment:

- 038. Marches

Methods in 5th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 090. Revenue refusal

Methods in 6th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 038. Marches
- 090. Revenue refusal
- 199. Nonviolent confinement

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Pakistani citizens

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Imran Khan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party (PTI), vice-president Shah Mehmood Qureshi

Partners:

Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, Pakistan Awami Tehreek, chief minister Pervez Khattak, Qamar Zaman Kaira, federal interior minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan

External allies:

Media outlet sympathizers (ARY News, Samaa TV, Express News, and Dunya News), Paktoon Nation, Muttahida Qaumi Movement

Involvement of social elites:

Pop Singer "Suleman"

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

On the night of August 16th, many PTI protestors left the campaign due to lack of confidence in the party when leaders left early in the bad weather

Segment Length: 21 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (PML-N party), Pakistan Muslim League government, Lahore High Court Bar Association

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Nonviolent occupation of Parliament House

Campaigner violence:

"The protestors entered Pakistan Secretariat and damaged some vehicles. They also broke gates and entered the headquarters of national television PTV and ransacked it. PTV briefly went off air, although PTI denied its involvement in it"

Repressive Violence:

Killings, beatings, and teargassing of protestors and media by police

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

The government of Pakistan under Nawaz Sharif was widely mistrusted by its people. Prior to the parliamentary election in May of 2013, Sharif had already declared himself Prime Minister of Pakistan before citizens had even voted. In 2014, former national cricket player-turned-politician Imran Khan led a campaign that made six demands in response to the widely shared notion that Sharif had rigged the 2013 elections in his favor. These demands included a "vote recount in four National Assembly constituencies of Pakistan; establishment of an independent commission to analyze the entire general elections held in May 2013; initiation of severe action against the returning officers found involved in rigging; fresh parliamentary polls if rigging was proved in the elections; reconstitution of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and massive electoral reforms." Ultimately, Khan and his supporters called for the resignation of Sharif and anyone who was involved in the fraud.

In the province of Punjab, Muhammad Tahir-ul Qadri, cleric and leader of the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) party, spoke openly against Sharif and his party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz; PML-N). On 10 August, 2014, a clash between Qadri's supporters and police erupted, injuring at least one hundred people and killing two protestors. Four days later,

on the 67th anniversary of the country's independence, civilians against the illegitimate Sharif government gathered for a more peaceful protest in Islamabad, drawing tens of thousands of supporters to the streets. Qadri announced the beginning of a month-long "Inqilab March", or "Revolution March". Simultaneously, Imran Khan declared the beginning of the "Azadi March", or "Freedom March", organized by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which began at his residence in Lahore. Together, these two massive protests put pressure on the government by inspiring other marches to occur throughout the nation for months until the demands were met. Qadri expressed that "we reject any kind of manifestation of militancy," and that he will kick anyone who supported violence "out of his company", and Imran Khan assured the government that his marches would remain peaceful and culminate in sit-in protest. He gave the PML-N government one month until the protests would begin to march to the "Red Zone," the diplomatic district that contained the national Parliament.

PTI convoys were quickly mobilized as the Azadi March and rallies headed to Islamabad. PTI shared and live-updated the campaign plans via their twitter account (@PTIofficial), allowing for mass involvement. En route to Islamabad on 15 August in Gujranwala, a few PTI activists were injured when they were pelted with stones by PML-N workers. According to video footage, workers incited a riot against the activists. Two factors suggested to many that the police were aware and in favor of the PML-N action: photo evidence of PML-N workers throwing stones from Gujranwala police cars, and the fact that the police who were present did not arrest any of the instigators.

Over the next three days, the march reconvened in Islamabad where leaders spoke to the crowd in torrential rain. Khan called for the campaign's dedication to civil disobedience and for protesters to stop paying taxes and utility bills to weaken the government. At one point, Khan left the protesters in the rain and addressed them virtually via webcam from inside his home.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Pervaiz Khattak also left the rally for shelter. The PML-N utilized this opportunity to convince many frustrated protesters that Khan did not care to suffer along with them and that Khattak only attended the march for a photo opportunity, and the size of the crowd dropped sharply. Khan returned, however, and vowed to stay the night with the people on the street.

Police detained thousands of protesters as the rallies continued. The Lahore High Court Bar Association attempted to pass a petition against the marches in the Supreme Court. Allegedly, the Punjabi Taliban made several threats against Khan's life. In a press conference on 17 August, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, the federal interior minister, expressed that he was impressed by the campaign's vow to civil disobedience and said the "government is willing to listen to each and every constitutional

demand of PTI and PAT" by creating two committees to negotiate with each opposition group. However, the PML-N government quickly rejected Khan's demands, as the campaign was "illegal [and] unconstitutional". The federal interior minister also released the news that approximately 60,000-70,000 votes in every constituency could not be verified. Imran Khan alleged in a speech that a PML-N worker printed hundreds of thousands of extra ballots and distributed them among fellow workers, rigging the vote in Sharif's favor.

By 19 August, many PTI leaders expressed weariness with Khan's decision to approach the Red Zone that night, fearing that confrontation might turn to bloodshed. Khan declared that he would physically lead the campaign himself. The Red Zone was blocked with shipping containers, so PTI workers moved in with cranes to make room for the march. The PML-N government was instructed to not harm protestors, as federal information minister Pervez Rashid said, "We will not use force. They have brought innocent children with them."

The next day, the Pakistani army occupied the law ministry control room and all of the lights were turned off in the Parliament house as the Azadi March approached. Khan informed the crowd that they would sit outside the Parliament and give Sharif until 4pm to resign. Qadri also instructed his supporters to block the exit to the Supreme Court until Sharif resigned, trapping judges inside the building. After almost a week of sit-in protest in the Red Zone, the Supreme Court gave the protesters 24 hours to clear the area, and police prepared for a potentially violent crackdown outside of the Parliament building.

On 30 August, protesters attempted to march towards the Prime Minister's house. Though generally peaceful, some attempted to force their way through the gates to the house and police tear-gassed the crowd of men, women, and children. Police injured more than 500 people were injured, and a small but undetermined number of people died. The police-protester clashes continued for days until thousands of arrests and jail sentences reduced the strength of the crowd. Sharif continued to cling to power and ignore requests to resign.

Marches continued throughout Pakistan, with varying amounts of success. A rally of 150,000 people was held in Karachi on 21 September and a rally of 250,000 people was held in Lahore on the 28 September, impressing many as a show of the political strength of PTI. On 2 October, the protest in Mianwali became notable as the largest public display of participation of women in Mianwali's history. The march reached about nine additional stopping points, some in which injury and death occurred due to the chaos and disorganization of such large numbers of people. Protesters further accused Sharif of spending millions in taxpayer money in a time of panic. Though Sharif had not budged, many agreed that the campaign was only gaining influence to make change. However, on 16 December, the protest came to a halt. The terrorist group

Tehrik-i-Taliban attacked the Public Army School and massacred its students and teachers, which prompted a time of national mourning and feared security. In the wake of the deadliest terror attack in Pakistan's history, the campaign came to a close in late March of 2014 when both leaders and civilians were fearful of another attack. The campaign was unable to reach its objectives of a vote recount, and Sharif remained in power.

Research Notes

Influences:

Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry standing against a dictator General Pervez Musharraf and his decision of 2009

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