
Chapter 1

NDI ACTIVITIES IN PAKISTAN

NDI has worked in Pakistan since 1987. During this period, NDI sent eight missions to Pakistan, five of which dealt specifically with the election process. This chapter reviews NDI's program activities.

A. Before and After the 1988 Elections

In 1986, a year after the cessation of martial law and the legalization of political parties, government representatives and opposition party leaders in Pakistan urged NDI to develop a program that would support the restoration of a democratically elected government. NDI responded by initiating a project that would help strengthen such critical democratic institutions as political parties, the parliament and the press, as well as promote free and fair electoral processes.

The proposed program called for a series of seminars that would have permitted Pakistanis to consider the experiences of other countries in charting transitions to democracy. As part of developing this program, NDI sent a two-member team to Pakistan for the 1987 Local Bodies elections. (See Appendix I.) NDI then scheduled the first seminar for 1988, but canceled it when President Zia ul-Haq dissolved the National and Provincial assemblies in May 1988. Zia ul-Haq's death in an airplane crash on August 17, 1988 and the scheduling of elections refocused NDI's program initiatives.

With elections scheduled for November 1988, attention was instead directed to the electoral process. In October, NDI sponsored

a six-member, bi-partisan delegation that evaluated the legal and administrative procedures for the November elections. (See Appendix I.) Parallels with the 1990 situation make it useful to highlight the major concerns of Pakistanis as reported by that delegation. There was concern regarding:

1) the constitutionality of President Zia ul-Haq's dismissal of Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo's government;

2) the partisanship of the appointed caretaker government;

3) the effect that violence in Sind and the floods in the Punjab might have on the willingness of the population to participate in the elections;

4) whether the elections would actually take place as announced; and,

5) the potential disenfranchisement of large numbers of voters, particularly in rural areas, as a result of requiring the presentation of identity cards at the polling sites.

Notwithstanding these concerns, the pre-election mission recommended that, assuming the government extended an invitation, NDI should organize an international observer delegation to the November elections.

Acting President Ghulam Ishaq Khan invited NDI to sponsor an international delegation, and the Institute organized an 18-member delegation that included nationals from five countries. (See Appendix I.) In its final report, the NDI delegation concluded that the electoral laws and procedures compared favorably with those used in other democratic countries and that the process was generally free and fair. The delegation complimented the acting president, the military and police forces, and the election officials for supporting the integrity of the election process. As a final statement, the delegation cautioned:

Pakistan's political leaders – those in the current PPP government and those representing parties in the opposition – must now work to consolidate democratic government. Institutions that contribute to the resilience of a free society – such as an accountable government, vibrant political parties, an independent judiciary,

democratic trade unions, and a nonpartisan military – must be nurtured and supported.

Unfortunately, as described in the next chapter, the subsequent 20 months did not allow for a significant consolidation of democratic government or a nurturing of democratic institutions.

Following the November 1988 elections and the formation of a government led by PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, NDI, working with the Turkish Democracy Foundation, sought to initiate an inter-parliamentary dialogue on legislative procedures and political party organization. Instability and political divisiveness in the Pakistan National Assembly, however, delayed implementation of the program.

In 1989, NDI conferred the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award on Prime Minister Bhutto in recognition of her role in restoring democratically elected, civilian rule in Pakistan. The award was accepted in Washington by Senior Minister Begum Nusrat Bhutto.

B. September 1990 Survey Mission

Soon after the dismissal of the Bhutto government in August 1990, NDI organized a five-member survey mission, which visited Pakistan from September 9-16. (See Appendix II.) The mission obtained information regarding the political situation, the pre-election environment, the laws and procedures for the elections and the feasibility of organizing an international observer delegation. The mission received considerable coverage in the Pakistani press. (See Appendix III.)

The mission reported the existence of comprehensive electoral laws that mirrored those implemented in 1988. At the same time, the delegation noted serious complaints, many of which were similar to those expressed in 1988, and a highly polarized political environment. The mission reported:

- 1) substantial legal and political controversy over the dismissal of the government;
- 2) challenges to the fairness and constitutionality of the special tribunals initiated by the caretaker government to hear charges

brought against former Prime Minister Bhutto, her family and officials of her government;

3) concerns about the appointment of partisan political personalities to the caretaker governments;

4) allegations that the caretaker governments were abusing the perquisites of office; and,

5) allegations of physical harassment and arrests of political activists.

The findings of the survey mission were reported in testimony presented on October 2, 1990 to the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs. (See Appendix IV.) The findings of the survey mission were also used to brief members of the observer delegation on the campaign period.

The mission found ambivalence regarding the presence of international observers. The posture of President Ishaq Khan is illustrative. When he dismissed the government and announced new elections, Ishaq Khan stated that he would welcome international observers. In meeting with the delegation, however, the president noted that observers often visit a country only for elections, while ignoring other serious impediments to democratization.

C. The International Observer Delegation

NDI proceeded to organize a 40-member delegation from 17 countries for the elections. The delegation was led by Vahit Halefoglu, the former Turkish minister of foreign affairs and Senator Stanislaw Dembinski of Poland. Nine of the delegates were nationals of countries with significant Muslim populations. The U.S. component of the delegation was bipartisan. The delegation comprised regional specialists, election experts, parliamentarians and political party leaders. The delegation also included four individuals nominated by the U.S.-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

The delegation arrived in Pakistan on October 21. After reviewing the terms of reference for the mission (see Appendix V), the delegation met in Islamabad, the federal capital, with government

and political party leaders, members of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and journalists. (See Appendix VI.) The delegation then separated into eight teams: the leadership team and one other team remained in Islamabad, and six teams dispersed to major cities in the four provinces. Before the elections, the teams met with local officials, candidates, representatives of human rights organizations and others in their respective regions to gather information about the election process. Members of the delegation also were assigned to functional teams to review the broadcast and print media's coverage of the campaign and the election; analyze the accountability tribunal process; and evaluate the CEC's handling of election-related complaints. (See Appendix VII.) On October 23, the delegation leaders discussed the delegation's role and plan at a press conference in Islamabad. (See Appendix VIII.)

On election day, members of the delegation observed balloting in more than 600 polling stations clustered in 30 constituencies throughout the country. Delegation members also monitored the counting at polling stations, as well as at district and provincial election offices.

The delegation reassembled in Karachi, and after a lengthy debriefing session, issued a preliminary assessment of the election process on October 26. (See Appendix IX.) The timing and content of this statement became the subject of discussion and some dispute in Pakistan; chapter 8 addresses the debate surrounding the statement. The following week, NDI representatives summarized the findings of the delegation in testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs. (See Appendix X.) Several delegates also published articles in their own countries regarding their personal observations.

Fifteen members of the delegation remained in Pakistan to observe the October 27 Provincial Assembly elections and to meet with political party representatives to obtain their evaluations of the election process. In addition, an NDI representative stayed in Pakistan until November 19, investigating allegations of irregularities in the election process. Finally, delegation member Lee Feldman

executed a comprehensive statistical analysis, comparing the 1990 results with those from the 1988 elections.