

Policy

Manifestoes without Substance

NADEEM UL HAQUE and SADDAM HUSSEIN

WHAT IS A MANIFESTO?

The word “manifesto” is derived from the Latin word “manifestum,” meaning clear or evident. It serves as a comprehensive and detailed document that outlines a political party’s vision for society, its proposed solutions to various issues, and its commitments to the electorate if they are elected to govern. Manifestos are also a means for political parties to establish credibility and demonstrate their understanding of the challenges faced by society. They serve as a roadmap to convince voters that the party’s vision aligns with the aspirations and needs of the public. A typical political manifesto includes several key components:

- Presents the party’s overarching vision for the country or region it aims to represent and highlights the core values that guide its decisions and actions.
- Outlines specific policy proposals on a wide range of subjects such as the economy, education, healthcare, environment, foreign affairs, defense, social welfare, and more. These proposals detail the party’s stance on each issue and how they plan to address them.
- Promises made by the party to the electorate, aimed at winning their support and trust. These promises can vary from tax cuts, job creation, and infrastructure development, to improvements in various sectors.
- A critique of the policies and ideas put forward by competing political parties. This is to highlight the differences and contrast their approach with that of the opponents.
- Historical context, explaining how certain societal or economic issues have evolved and how the party’s proposed policies can address those issues effectively.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of a manifesto of a political party is to present a clear and persuasive case to the voters about why they should support the party in an upcoming election. It aims to showcase the party’s ideology, principles, and policy priorities, providing a blueprint for governance if the party is elected to power.

Nadeem Ul Haque <vc@pide.org.pk> is Vice Chancellor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad. Saddam Hussein <saddam@pide.org.pk> is Assistant Chief (Policy), Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of a manifesto of a political party cannot be overstated. It plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and informing voters about a party's platform. Voters often use manifestos as a basis for assessing whether a party's proposed policies and ideas align with their own values and interests. A well-crafted manifesto can have a significant impact on an election campaign. It can rally party supporters, attract swing voters, and sway undecided individuals. Additionally, once a party is elected, its manifesto serves as a benchmark against which its performance and progress can be measured. However, it is essential to note that not all parties adhere strictly to their manifesto once in power due to practical challenges, changing circumstances, and compromises during coalition governments.

PIDE'S THOUGHTS ON A MANIFESTO

In the grand theatre of democracy, a manifesto is the opening act that captivates minds, fuels discussions, and rallies support. It stands as a testament to a party's integrity and ability to forge a path forward. The significance of a political party's manifesto is akin to the foundational blueprint of a grand architectural masterpiece. It embodies the very essence of a party's ideals, aspirations, and commitment to its constituents. Just as a skilled architect meticulously plans each detail before constructing a magnificent edifice, a manifesto outlines the principles, policies, and proposed pathways that guide a political party's journey. Everything in the realm of politics starts with a manifesto. Much like the first brushstroke on a canvas, a manifesto shapes the contours of a party's narrative and sets the tone for its engagement with the electorate. Moreover, a manifesto is a covenant of accountability. By pledging specific courses of action, a party makes a solemn promise to its people. This binding commitment holds a party answerable to its stated goals and, in turn, empowers the electorate to demand transparency and efficacy in the realisation of those promises. Thus, everything, from the shaping of policies to the forging of a nation's destiny, starts with the resolute words etched within a manifesto.

PAKISTAN'S CASE

Political manifestos of political parties in Pakistan vary in nature and quality. Some manifestos are well-crafted documents that outline a party's vision, policy goals, and plans for governance. However, these manifestos seldom include detailed proposals, which provide a clear roadmap for how the party intends to address these issues if elected to power. This is why political manifestos are often criticised as being mere promises without a concrete plan for implementation. Manifestos of almost all political parties in Pakistan lack specificity, feasibility, or practicality, leading to skepticism about the party's intentions and ability to deliver on its commitments.

So, for this reason, we have attempted to draw a comparison of 2018 manifestos amongst three mainstream political parties that are front-runners in formulating governments during last three tenures, against the benchmark of "What PIDE proposes" in parallel.

HOW DID WE CALCULATE?

PIDE has been proposing reforms in various dimensions for quite a long now. These targeted reform proposals are based on years of research, evidence and are in

line with the global best practices. So, we have picked some key issues/sectors which we at PIDE think are fundamental in nature. This means that if we are to kick-start the reform process, addressing these primary issues comes first, acting as a bedrock for further comprehensive reforms. We summarised PIDE proposals in four points for each theme, having equal weightage for each point i.e. 25 percent, making it 100 percent for all four points. We then compared it with what each political party is proposing against the same theme. If their manifestoes proposed one of the points that PIDE proposes, then the score will be 25/100 and if their proposals included all that PIDE proposes, then that manifesto will get full marks i.e. 100/100. It is pertinent to note that, manifestoes are being evaluated on actual reform intervention, not mere promises, slogans and sweeping statements. For instance, strengthening local government is merely a promise and scored as zero. In contrast, allowing the property tax regime to serve as the primary revenue generator for local government is a concrete point. Thus, this point had been given a 25 score.

Scorecard* Political Parties' Manifestoes

Key Reform Areas	PPP	PMLN	PTI
Local Government			
Parliament			
Elections			
Cabinet			
Police			
Bureaucracy			
Budget Making			
Debt Management			
PSDP			
Real Estate			
Agriculture			
Energy			
Taxation			
Tariff			
Trade			
Internet			
Cities Reforms			
SOEs			

0/100
 25/100
 50/100
 75/100
 100/100

Note: Here the latest manifestos of 2018 are being analysed.

*For the detailed comparison, please see the Appendix.

ANALYSIS

As evident from the scorecard, all three political parties do not do any homework, except for a couple of themes - in those too, the score is not remarkable. One can only find big slogans, sweeping statements, and hollow promises. There is no clear road map, no concrete intervention proposals, no blueprint for reform implementation.

As shown in the scorecard, PPP scored zero in 17 indicators, PTI in 13 and PML-N in 12. Overall, the three major political parties scored less than 20 percent, which means that they talk about or have some solid ideas about only 20 percent of the key economic and policy issues of Pakistan. Further dissecting the figure 20 percent tells us out of the country's key issues, only 12 percent of these find space in the PML-N manifesto, 7 percent in the PTI manifesto and 1.5 percent in PPP.

One wonders, how and on what these political parties compete with one another. A look at the above scorecards would imply that more or less all three parties are the same, as far as the manifestoes are concerned. It is a point to ponder, why the public is divided over more or less alike political parties, as reflected from the manifestoes. It is time to take manifestoes seriously, and compel our representatives to focus on manifestoes and add issues of concern to common people, along with proposing comprehensive proposals and clear-cut implementation strategies. This would allow the public to compare the manifestoes in a better way and consequently would do better in voting most deserved political party – the one having done proper homework, knowing what to do if they come into power and if they do, the implementation can start immediately. This would also save time from making misfit task forces to propose reforms that usually mean nothing but optics – only bureaucratic and administrative shuffling, whereas reform means setting the fundamentals right.

CONCLUSION

The superficiality of Pakistani political parties' manifestoes, particularly the economic side of it, is a technical shortcoming that has far-reaching implications for the country's economic development. The absence of quantitative targets, shallow policy proposals, and neglect of structural reforms, trade, and investment strategies, as well as human capital and innovation, signify an alarming lack of technical rigor. A more evidence-based, quantifiable, and technically detailed approach is imperative to tackle Pakistan's intricate policy challenges effectively and drive sustainable economic growth.

PIDE hopes that insights from this knowledge brief will make political parties ponder over the upcoming manifestoes. Thus, anticipating that latest manifestoes will be not be just hollow ones, but having concrete and targeted blueprints for reforms to put Pakistan on the right track.

APPENDIX

**PIDE Reform Agenda and Manifestoes of Major Political
Parties of Pakistan—A Comparison**

	What PIDE suggests	PPP	PMLN	PTI
Local Government	Ensure the existence and continuity of local governments. LGs imply local administration, not just local politics/elections. Devolve power to the LGs and empower them financially and operationally. LGs also means empowered city governments in metropolitan cities with an elected Mayor as the Chief Executive of the City.	Legislation for enhancing the role of local government.	Strong legal framework to ensure continuity and empowerment of LG; devolving functions to give LG a meaningful role in areas such as healthcare, education, policing; strengthening the LG capacity by introducing specialised sub-cadres, and encourage PAS and PMS officers to work in the LG; provide financial autonomy and allowing property tax regime to serve as the primary revenue generator for the LG.	Steps to further improve the local government system, bringing in the city government model of having a directly elected Mayor.
Parliament	Term and family limits for parliamentarians must be introduced. The focus of parliamentarians must be on policy and decision-making through legislation. No development funds are to be expended through a member of parliament. Parliament must not be taken as a way to ministership.	NIL	Building consensus on constitutional amendments to strengthen the role of Parliament for good governance and oversight, along with establishing an Ethics Committee under the parliament pertaining to the role and conduct of the members of parliament.	Constitutional amendment to give Parliament the authority to rectify all international treaties after being presented for debate.
Elections	Introduce staggered elections. Direct elections for the Senate. Reduce Assembly limit to 03 years. Consider compulsory voting, internet/e-voting procedures, proportional representation, ranked choice, second-round voting and NOTA (None of the above).	NIL	NIL	NIL
Cabinet	Limit cabinet members from parliament to 10. Experts should be inducted into the cabinet. Total cabinet members must not cross 25. The cabinet must focus on Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) of the policy decided through parliament and implemented through relevant institutions.	NIL	Inclusion of more women in Cabinet.	NIL

Continued—

Appendix—(Continued)

Police	Police force must be brought under the local government and delinked from the centralised control. Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Rangers and other such law enforcement and investigative agencies can rest with the federal government. Police Order 2002 must be implemented as an immediate reform measure. Investigations should be separated from other functions of the police, i.e. law and order, patrolling etc. Police should be given operational independence.	Comprising police records and supporting close interaction of the police with institutions such as NADRA to aid crime prevention and detection.	Reforming the police service through Smart Policing and Community Policing, in order to make the police force citizen friendly and an efficient crime-fighting agent.	Creating specialised training institutions. Investing in new policing systems and processes by tracking
Bureaucracy	The generalist colonial examination to recruit for a lifetime should be scrapped. Lifetime career guarantees to be replaced with continuous recruitment at all levels. No transfers across government to allow any single group to control all activities, especially given the costs incurred. Compensation to be market-competitive but monetised. Discontinuation of perks, plots, privileges, ex-officio appointments, and arbitrary allowances. The pension should be fully funded and invested. Moreover, pensions should be portable, even across the public and private sectors, to allow and encourage mobility.	Establishing a task force with equal representation from all political parties in parliament as well as other stakeholders and experts to recommend reforms.	Transforming civil service into a highly capable service provider by promoting a merit-based system at all levels through improvements in recruitment, postings, promotion, training and incentives.	Transforming the civil service into a merit-based, depoliticised cadre of professionals.
Budget Making	Establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office to advise and support the parliament in the budgetary process. The budget proposed by the parliamentary budget office and the final budget passed must be publicly available. Implementation of the budget in its full essence must be ensured. Mid-term budgets through supplementary finance bills must be avoided. Five-year plans must again be introduced to ensure consistency of budgetary and policy direction.	NIL	NIL	NIL

Continued—

Appendix—(Continued)

Debt Management	<p>Establish an autonomous debt agency (consolidating all debt functions and at par with the central bank and the independent planning commission) with the mandate to oversee and manage Pakistan's long-term debt profile.</p> <p>Debt management reports must be submitted to the parliament for a quarterly review, followed by a mandatory debate and discussion with possible directions for the future by the parliamentarians. The report must also be made open to public hearings for the inclusion of diverse views.</p> <p>All proceedings of the parliament and public hearings must be made part of the public record.</p>	NIL	<p>Eradicating circular debt and reducing losses by enhancing transmission/distribution infrastructure, smart, reverse and prepaid meters.</p>	NIL
PSDP	<p>The focus must be diverted from hardware to the software of the economy, such as investment in research and development (R & D), developing human capital, universal internet access, and procedural and administrative reforms in all aspects of government.</p> <p>There must be limited national development projects at the federal level, while most of the effort and focus must be on reforms.</p> <p>Ensure timely completion of the projects funded through public investment schemes, followed by full review and feedback on the effectiveness of the completed projects.</p> <p>Parliament must develop and monitor complete transparency in this process through regular reporting.</p>	NIL	NIL	NIL
Real Estate	<p>Abolish multiple price administration practices, i.e. Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) rate and District Collector (DC) Rate.</p> <p>Online multiple listing model must be followed with an auction mechanism embedded into the market.</p> <p>Review and update rental laws to promote the rental investment industry.</p> <p>Encourage Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)</p> <p>The focus must be diverted from urban sprawl to vertical expansion of the cities.</p>	NIL	NIL	Electronic mapping of property, linking it to the owner's CNIC.

Continued—

Appendix—(Continued)

Agriculture	<p>The government footprint must be reduced in the input markets such as fertiliser and water markets and allow private sector to enter the procurement and transportation business. No fixing of minimum support price. Approval for new seed varieties must be processed quickly and swiftly. Water used for irrigation must be fairly priced to encourage efficient cropping pattern.</p>	<p>Introducing Zarai Inqilab Strategy which would include registration of farmers and agricultural workers under the Benazir Kissan Card scheme. Overhauling of the price support system. Crop insurance scheme for small farmers. One window operation for accessing government facilities, market linkages and subsidies. Legal recognition and registration of women agricultural workers under the registration of women agricultural workers under the Benazir Women Agricultural Workers Programme. Deploying drip/sprinkler irrigation systems on 4 million plus hectares of agriculture farmlands.</p>	<p>Transitioning of the agriculture sector towards value-addition and yield productivity. For farmers, this will translate into generating more income from the same area of land and quantum of water.</p>	<p>Promise to transform and expand the Agri-extension programme to provide effective on-farm technical support. Incentivising farmers to conserve water, a</p>
Energy	<p>Restructuring focus must be on renewable energy for electricity generation. Renewable sources for electricity generation shall be used to develop a retail supply market for off-grid areas. Prepaid billing must be introduced. Distribution Companies (DISCOs) must be decentralised. A uniform tariff system must be eliminated.</p>	<p>Pledge to complete all affordable and feasible projects related to hydro-electricity. Complete Bhasha Dam soon. We will ensure that the Bhasha Dam project. Resume work on the Pak-Iran pipeline. Facilitate provinces to have their own grid systems for the transmission and distribution of power. Promotion of clean energy (micro-hydel, solar and wind energy) at different scales through provision of financing and 'one window' approvals.</p>	<p>Promoting off-grid solar and cluster-based mini-grid solutions supported by innovative concessional financing in remote areas, especially for tube wells. Extending the grid through rural electrification plan. Opening of distribution market to the private sector to break monopolies and enhance competition. Building a hub for regional energy trade. Doubling transmission capacity through a South-North and Gwadar-Nawabshah pipelines, replacing petroleum trucking with pipelines, reducing Unaccounted For Gas (UFG) through smart metering and improving collection rates to reduce the economic cost of energy.</p>	<p>Shifting away from rent-seeking models to increase system efficiency. Completion rural electrification through renewable and off-grid solutions. Transitioning towards "power exchange", allowing more efficient technologies to get precedence in dispatch. Incentivising the adoption of energy-efficient initiatives on demand side and reducing transmission losses.</p>
Taxation	<p>The tax system must be made more progressive while eliminating tax breaks. Instead, universal income tax treatment must be followed. The tax system must be more straightforward and user-friendly and have increased transparency and fairness. A revenue-yielding buoyant tax regime must be formulated, with a focus on expanding the tax net and not raising revenue from only the existing taxpayers. Mechanisms to monitor and catch tax evasion and corruption must be developed and implemented.</p>	<p>Free installation of Point of Sale (POS) system will be offered by the government for the retail sector to economy, along with soliciting track and trace software to prevent tax evasion.</p>	<p>Double the tax revenue. Operationalise National Single Window, reducing time and trade costs and bringing over 20 government departments under one window. Establish Directorate for immovable property to stop under-declaration of immovable assets. Establish online connectivity within provinces for automatic business registration for taxpayers. Introduce electronic real-time data exchange to check mis-declaration and under-invoicing for imports.</p>	<p>Integrating tax registration with associated processes to reduce the transaction cost of paying taxes. Incentivising businesses to become a part of the formal economy, thus adding larger sources of tax income to the national exchequer.</p>

Continued—

Appendix—(Continued)

Tariff	Tariff lines must be rationalised. Tariff lines must be reduced. A clear perspective is required regarding the extent of openness. Broader guidelines for policy directives must be present.	NIL	Rationalising tariff structure to remove anti-export bias.	Introducing cascading tariffs on raw materials, intermediates and finished goods to move production toward value-added exports.
Trade	Trade policy focus must be on increased production for export promotion purposes. A comprehensive long-term export policy must be introduced, supported by a well-chalked-out industrial policy. A 15-year Export Policy - owned and monitored by an "Export Cell" at the Independent Planning Commission. It is pertinent to note that the policy should be targeted to enhance competitiveness rather than spoon-feeding.	Trading arrangements involving currency swaps will be pursued to reduce dependence on foreign currencies.	The market would be deregulated in favour of innovation-driven FDI and investment-friendly regimes. Complete the Integrated Transit Trade Management System (ITMS) at Torkham, Wagha and Chamman borders with modern trade facilities to reduce dwell times and enhance regional economic integration.	Ensuring cohesiveness between revenue policy, trade policy & national industrial policies. Making sure that our foreign exchange rate is based on economic fundamentals. Implement a technical and vocational education reform programme for upskilling our labour force in demand-driven trades.
Internet	Universal internet access at affordable rates is the need of the hour and must be considered a fundamental right of citizens. Greater internet access will help facilitate and remotely provide services, including education, health, and legal services. Consider fully funding fast internet access across the country till the end of 2025. Spectrum auctioning must be considered as a way of providing internet access to all areas of the country and not be taken as a revenue generation activity. Consider fully funding fast internet access across the country till the end of 2025. Spectrum auctioning must be considered as a way of providing internet access to all areas of the country and not be taken as a revenue generation activity.		Improve access to IT services such as high speed internet for citizens with the aim of facilitating knowledge acquisition as well as encouraging innovation.	
Cities	Commerce and entrepreneurship must be the driving force behind designing and planning cities. Rigid master plans must be let go immediately and replaced with loose guidelines. Zoning should only differentiate between city centers and suburbs. City management must be handed over to a single authority, i.e. Local Government (LG). Vertical expansion must be encouraged by relaxing the floor area ratio. All cities must have well-developed and dense downtowns. Cities must be developed on the lines and idea of 15-minute cities. Unlocking the dead capital must be a priority. Street vending zones must be created in all cities. The rental housing market must be developed through necessary facilitating regulations. A modern urban transport policy must be adopted.	NIL	NIL	NIL

Continued—

Appendix—(Continued)

SOEs	SOEs must have a budget constraint and not be bailed out by the government repeatedly. SOEs must be run through a corporate set-up, including an independent Board of Governors (BOG) and not be under the influence of bureaucracy or ministries. All PSEs must be answerable to the cabinet and parliament against pre-defined objectives and KPIs. Unchecked hiring, primarily politically motivated, must be immediately eliminated. Hiring must be against only the number of positions sanctioned by the SOE's BOG. Inefficient and unnecessary SOEs must be privatised entirely through management transfer to the private sector or even closed down.	Launching of a People's Reform Programme in the loss-making and investment-starved SOEs, in partnership with their workers and relevant provincial governments. A duly empowered task force consisting of independent and reputable experts as well as workers' representatives will be set up with the first three months of government to prepare, execute and oversee the People's Reform Programme, which will be comprehensive, consultative and time bound.	Decrease the loss incurred by SOEs to zero. Developing an IT	Corporatisation all SOEs and transferring ownership to a wealth fund, modelled along the lines of Khazanah in Malaysia. Appointing and empowering non-political and autonomous boards. Signing performance contracts with boards and agreeing on KPIs.
------	---	--	--	---

REFERENCES

- Haque, N. & Hussein, S. (2022, July). Charter of Economy, PIDE.
- Haque, N. (2020, March). Doing Development Better: Analysing the PSDP – PIDE.
- Haque, N. & Kakar, A. (2022, May). 15-Minutes City, PIDE.
- Hussein, S. (2021, July). Critical Evaluation of the Budget Making Process in Pakistan, PIDE.
- Khan, F. J. (2017, February). Strengthening Public Sector Capacity for Improved Governance in Pakistan – PIDE.
- Nayab, D. & Haque, N. (2007, January). Renew Cities to be the Engines of Growth – PIDE.
- Nayab, D., Haque, N., Faraz, N., & Siddique, O. (2021). Cash Poor, Perk Rich! Civil Service Compensation: Incentives, Dissatisfaction, And Costs, PIDE.
- Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (2018). Manifesto.
- Pakistan People's Party (2018). Manifesto.
- Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (2018). Manifesto.
- PIDE. (2021). The PIDE Reform Agenda for Accelerated and Sustained Growth, PIDE.
- Qasim, A. W. (2022, May). The Real Estate Price Quandary: Issues and Way forward, PIDE.