

# POLITICAL PARTY MANIFESTOS: DOES POPULATION GROWTH AND STABILIZATION MATTER IN POLITICS?

## Background

With an estimated population of 180 million, Pakistan ranks as the 6<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world and may soon overtake Brazil for the 5<sup>th</sup> place. Unless significant policy and programmatic interventions are put in place to stabilize population growth, the population will increase by 55% by 2050. This rapid population growth has serious repercussions since two-thirds of the total population already lives below the poverty line<sup>1</sup> and infrastructure, energy, education, employment, and health needs of the growing population are already being strained. These have led to an unstable security situation and poor health of the nation as seen by some of the worst maternal and child health indicators in the World.

In this challenging scenario it is critical for political parties to understand the complex relationship between population growth, development of social capital<sup>2</sup> and their long lasting implications on economic, political and social stability and wellbeing.

## Methodology

A **Political Manifesto** is a public declaration of a party's ideology and position on issues (i.e. party intentions, overarching goals, policy plans) and their differences with their rivals. Information was collected from 1) websites of respective political parties, 2) through media interviews<sup>3</sup> with party officials/representatives and stores, and 3) review of the available documents and information in the public domain using the following criteria for the review:

- Stated party position on population issues that reflect the importance given to population welfare issues.
- Specific strategies or commitments identified for improving population stabilization and growth
- Gaps in the party manifestos where advocacy can play a role

## Findings

1. **Awami National Party (ANP)**– identifies itself as a nationalistic party with the core goals of narrowing the rich-poor income gap and reducing the poverty trap in society. In the broader health area their manifesto mentions “ANP will emphasize on child & mother care, by the provision of clean drinking water and preventive medicine”

2. **Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)** – The core goals of the party are to eradicate political authoritarianism, abolish feudal systems, promote cultural pluralism, devolve power to the grass root level and achieve maximum provincial autonomy. The MQM believes that access to a quality healthcare system is a right of every Pakistani regardless of his/her income level and social status. MQM stresses upon primary and preventative healthcare, instead of the tertiary healthcare, which has been the main stay of the Health Policy in Pakistan for the last 65 years.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Pakistan Report 2011 i.e. less than \$ 2 (Pak Rupee's 200) per day

<sup>2</sup> Can Pakistan Reap its Demographic Dividend? Policy Brief # 16, [www.resdev.org](http://www.resdev.org) (August 2012)

<sup>3</sup> For example, GEO “Debate on Population Issues”, print media stories, etc.

## SALIENT POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Only 4 out of 8 major parties connect the rapidly growing population with social issues such as joblessness, social unrest and terrorism
- Even for these parties, there is a need for articulating effective strategies for controlling rapid population growth
- There is a need for national consensus on the importance of measures that reduce population growth
- Measures to reduce population growth and develop a productive population should be a central part of the national finance and growth strategies

On Population Issue, the manifesto states: “Targeting population planning, as this is the most important issue that is not receiving the attention it deserves.

3. **Pakistan's People's Party (PPP)** – has been the party in power for the past 5 years. Its theory of change, as highlighted by its manifesto, hinges upon the notions of employment, education, energy, environment and equality for the elite and the common people.

On Population the manifesto states: “Pakistan's current population stands at an estimated 180 million, with an annual population growth rate of 2%, the highest in the region. A rapidly growing population adversely affects the well-being of our people by diluting the impact of economic gains, placing a strain on our natural resources and contributing to environmental degradation.

The party believes that the well-being of the population is a national priority, and promises a sustained commitment to population issues at the highest level by:

- Bringing down the population growth rate from the current 2 per cent to 1.6 per cent by 2018.
- Implementing an accelerated family planning program in coordination with initiatives in health, education, nutrition and poverty eradication, using family planning staff and LHWs for a nationwide outreach campaign.
- Promoting the family planning services as a right, and enhancing, improving and expanding access to these services through both the public and private sectors.
- Ensuring that all health outlets provide mandatory services to increase current contraceptive prevalence from an estimated 35 per cent to at least 45 per cent by 2018, and 55 per cent by 2020.
- Enhancing budgetary commitments to family planning services both at the federal and provincial levels.
- Developing a comprehensive nationwide training program for public health service providers to enable them to offer family planning services proactively.

## DISCUSSION OF POPULATION IN PARTY MANIFESTOS

Party	Population Mentioned	Stated Party Position on Population Issues	Specific Strategies for Population Stabilization	Comments
<b>ANP</b>	No	No reference to population issues present outside of mother and child care services	None	Connection between population growth and socio-economic development indicators including poverty alleviation not recognized in the party manifesto
<b>MQM</b>	Yes	Recognizes the need for reducing population growth down from 1.9% to 1.6%	None	While the party acknowledges population growth as hampering economic development there are no details on how this will be addressed In health, much of the focus is on high cost curative (medical) care interventions that generates political capital but does little to improve overall health status
<b>PPP</b>	Yes	Recognizes the need for reducing population growth, increasing contraception prevalence rate, and the connection between improved maternal health	Mentions the targets of increasing CPR from 35% to 55% by 2020, and reducing growth rate to 1.6% by 2018.	Draws strong connections between maternal health and family planning and national development along with some level of target setting. Specific steps to accomplish the desired goals are not described Lack of funding which is highlighted is not a critical issue that is holding back FP in Pakistan. Ineffective use of existing funds which is the main problem is not mentioned
<b>PTI</b>	Yes	Refers to population and family planning as an important national issue	Mentions the need for expanding FP coverage, national media campaign, education to increase awareness and coverage	Draws strong connections between population issues and development and education Specific steps to accomplish the desired goals are not described
<b>PML – N</b>	Yes	Refers to population growth as a problem with plans for reducing growth to 1.5%	None	Mentions reducing population growth but does not identify specific actions to do so
<b>PML – Q</b>	No	No reference to population issues other than “protection and promotion of the rights of the female population and providing freedom from fear and oppression”	None	No recognition in the party’s manifesto of population issues or evidence for any actions to address the challenges of population growth
<b>Jl</b>	No	No reference to population issues besides mentioning “female staff” will get paid maternity leave.	None	No recognition in the party’s manifesto on population issues or evidence for any actions to address the challenges of population growth
<b>JUI</b>	No	No formal manifesto available to review	None	Cannot determine party’s position on population issues or evidence for any actions to address the challenges of population growth

4. **Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)** envisages creating a modern, democratic Islamic republic which advocates complete political, religious, and economic freedom and hopes to change the status quo in Pakistan. Their manifesto states that:

- The continuing high population growth rate is a major national concern and strain on national resources. Rapid population growth means greater development needs and stress on the existing physical infrastructure.
- The PTI will launch a national campaign on population welfare and make it an integral part of the national health policy.
- Greater access to quality education in order to create greater awareness on population related issues.
- Programs to reduce the population growth rate from 2.2 percent to 1.6 percent
- Introduce integrated comprehensive population welfare Programs to improve the impact of existing projects by expanding coverage and improved management

- Introduce modern family planning methods that allow women increased family planning options.

5. **Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML N)** wants to establish a government that serves its people and enables them to achieve a higher quality of human life through a knowledge economy, modern infrastructure, good governance, equality and peace.

Their **manifesto** states that without a healthy nation, there can be neither development nor progress. Pakistan has lagged behind other developing countries in terms of its social development. In the last ten years, due to Social Action Program, initiated by PML-N government, there has been considerable progress in improving the social indicators and controlling the population growth rate as it mandated the provincial governments to make significant allocations for the social sectors, despite the frequent change of governments in the 90s.

- PML-N remains committed to social sector and will pursue policy of providing quality health care to all citizens whether poor, rural, or urban.
- Population growth rate shall be brought down to 1.5 percent, and safe motherhood programs shall be promoted.

6. **Pakistan Muslim League – Quaid e Azam (PML Q)** aspires to promote a culture of reconciliation and accommodation in politics that is based on the principles of democracy, development and diversity. It has launched a massive campaign to organize itself at the grassroots and plans to introduce reforms in the social, economic and other sectors of the society in order to bring about a real change in the life of the common man.

On the **issue of health**, the PML-Q aims to have a National Health Service with sustained investment in hospitals to provide better treatment to the patients and give doctors special incentives to serve in rural areas. They also plan to upgrade and expand the existing health care structure of the country, specially focusing on the far flung and the less developed regions of the country. This would include expansion and up-gradation of the existing health care network with modern medical facilities and setting up of separate female/gynecology units in each hospital and medical center.

7. **Jamat –i-Islami (JI)** is a religious political party that proposes an Islamic State governed by Shariah law. Although population per se was not mentioned as a topic, the only reference in its manifesto regarding reproductive health was:

- Female Government staff to be allowed 4 months paid maternity leaves, and also leave with half salary if they have to take care of their family. During this period female staff will be provided complete protection with regards to service and transfers

8. **Jamiat – Ulema Islam (JUI-F)**—is right wing Islamic party that follows Islamic injunctions and principles in guiding the State. They do not have a formal political manifesto so it is hard to conclusively determine their position on population issues.

## Discussion

A rapidly expanding population and its consequences are becoming increasingly recognized as seen from their mention by 4 of the 8 leading political parties. These parties relate the expanding population to some of the social problems such as stalled economic development, reversals in social sector progress, and show concern for the link between growing political instability and youth bulge and high numbers of unemployed.

While these parties correctly identify increasing population as a problem, few suggest effective remedies to address it. One party that did identify some solutions-PPP, focus mainly on funding without recognizing the

already sufficient funding for family planning programs and the fact that the main problem has been inefficient use of available funds due to political interference and other governance issues.

Around half of the parties did not mention population as an issue. Some of these do suggest some reproductive health facilities for women, although these are framed in a narrow conservative framework. The problem is further compounded by a growing culture of religious conservatism that deters politicians from supporting critical reproductive health policies, services and interventions and taking unpopular decisions.

Given the limited success for controlling the population so far, it is imperative for public health experts, economists, civil society advocates and government decision makers to make concerted efforts to “strategically inform and influence” politicians to prioritize long term policies on population stabilization. Both firm political will (including lack of political interference in existing government programs) and committed resource allocations are needed to prevent the deaths of mothers and newborns across Pakistan that are due to unwanted pregnancies and to keep the population from outpacing the limited resources of the country.

## Salient Recommendations

1. **One Long Term Population Goal** While individual party support remains critical but Population Growth and Stabilization must be articulated as one long term policy declaration/commitment endorsed by all political parties in Pakistan. This agenda needs to be independent of the whims of political party in power, as past experience shows population growth is often side tracked in the face of political expediency and “business as usual”.
2. **Effective Advocacy to Make Population a Priority** There needs to be effective advocacy that helps politicians and decision makers in public sector understand the macro-economic benefits of “planning” population growth and development of social capital (through education and economic opportunities) with a prosperous and labor supply driven economy.
3. Effective population control efforts must be part of a nationally ratified financial and growth strategy with adequate funding and its targets followed regularly as if it were a national emergency.

Supported by USAID’s Small Grants Program: **Synthesizing Evidence for Policy and Action: Bridging the Gap between Knowledge and Results to Improve Health Outcomes**

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This report was made possible with support from the American people delivered through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Research and Development Solutions, Private Limited and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of USAID or the U.S. Government.

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