

THE HAMOOD-UR-REHMAN COMMISSION REPORT: POLITICAL RELEVANCE AND HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES IN PAKISTAN'S CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the political significance of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, which investigated the events leading to the 1971 East Pakistan crisis and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh. The paper employs qualitative research methodology, specifically document and literature analysis and secondary sources of data, to critically assess the report's role in shaping contemporary Pakistani politics, particularly its use by former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Through analyzing the authenticity of the report, its suppression, and its resurgence in political discourse, the study explores the motivations behind Khan's promotion of the report and its potential implications for Pakistan's domestic and international relations. The research also considers how political narratives surrounding the report contribute to ongoing debates about civil-military relations and democratic governance in Pakistan. A way forward would involve a deeper investigation into the long-term impact of these political narratives on national reconciliation and institutional reforms in Pakistan.

Keywords: Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, 1971 East Pakistan crisis, Imran Khan, Qualitative research methodology, Document and literature analysis, Civil-military relations, Political discourse.

INTRODUCTION

The Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, created after the 1971 East Pakistan crisis, is one of Pakistan's most controversial and influential documents. Commissioned by then-President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the report aimed to investigate the military's failure in East Pakistan and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh. Despite its significance, the report was not officially published for decades, remaining hidden from the public eye. Instead, it was first made public by an Indian media outlet, which raised questions about its authenticity and the potential political motivations behind its suppression. This delay in publication, coupled with the involvement of an Indian source, has

fueled ongoing debates about the report's credibility and the true reasons behind its concealment (Masood, Imran, & Arslan, 2022).

In recent years, Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, has reignited the debate surrounding the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, emphasizing its importance in understanding both Pakistan's political past and its present. By advocating for the public to read the report, Khan has positioned it as a critical tool for evaluating the country's historical political and military decisions. His focus on the report also serves as a platform to critique the civil-military relationship in Pakistan, particularly the military's

historical role in political affairs. Khan's revival of the report aligns with his broader political agenda to challenge the military establishment and question the legitimacy of its influence on civilian governance (ul Abidin, Khan, & Ameer, 2023).

This paper seeks to explore the motivations behind Imran Khan's emphasis on the report, its political implications, and how it is being used to reshape contemporary political narratives in Pakistan. The study employs document and literature analysis and secondary data sources to critically assess the content of the report, its suppression, and the broader political context in which it is being reintroduced. By examining how the report is being used today, the research sheds light on the ways in which historical documents are repurposed for modern political strategies, and how they influence public perceptions of power dynamics in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, completed in 1974, remains a significant document in understanding Pakistan's political history, particularly in the context of the 1971 crisis and the subsequent separation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The commission, established by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1972, aimed to investigate the factors leading to the collapse of East Pakistan. It not only analyzed the military's operations but also examined the political mismanagement and failure of the central government to address the grievances of the Bengali population (Khan, Zahoor, & Naz, 2018). The report's findings, especially its scathing critique of General Yahya Khan and the military leadership, highlighted a brutal crackdown on Bengali independence movements, resulting in allegations of atrocities including mass killings, rapes, and other human rights violations. Scholars argue that the report is crucial in understanding the military's role in Pakistan's political failures, with some suggesting that the military's refusal to acknowledge the political and cultural demands of East Pakistan's leadership played a central role in the secession of Bangladesh (Azeem & Azeem, 2017).

Despite its historical importance, the report was suppressed for decades by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Several scholars note that Bhutto's decision to withhold the report was politically motivated, aiming to preserve the reputation of the military, which was a powerful

institution in Pakistan at the time (Salim, 1971). Bhutto's actions led to widespread speculation and conspiracy theories regarding the report's contents, fueling debates about the military's role in the 1971 crisis and its subsequent involvement in Pakistan's political and security matters. According to Shah, 2021 successive civilian governments have been hesitant to confront the military's role in the loss of East Pakistan, thereby downplaying its involvement in the political and security dynamics of the crisis.

The leak of the report in the early 2000s, primarily through an Indian media outlet, India Today, reignited debates about the authenticity and political ramifications of the findings. Ali & Patman, 2019 argue that the publication of the report by an Indian media source raised significant concerns about its credibility, given the historical antagonism between Pakistan and India. Ali & Patman, 2019 suggest that the timing of the leak may have been strategically intended to emphasize Pakistan's military failure in East Pakistan, thereby serving Indian political interests. Critics have pointed out that the version of the report released by India was selectively edited, which further complicated the narrative and led to skepticism about its integrity. The Indian press's involvement in publishing the report led to doubts about its accuracy, contributing to a broader controversy surrounding the document's authenticity.

In recent years, the revival of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report has become an important tool in contemporary Pakistani politics, especially for political figures such as Imran Khan. Khan, who was ousted from office in 2022, has repeatedly referenced the report to critique the military's historical role in shaping Pakistan's governance. According to Naseer (2024), Khan's invocation of the report serves to challenge the military's dominance in Pakistan's political sphere. However, scholars like Ul Abidin, Khan, & Ameer (2023) have critiqued Khan's selective use of the report, arguing that it may be more about advancing his own political agenda than a genuine call for historical accountability. Khan's focus on the military's role in the 1971 crisis may be seen as an attempt to distance himself from the military establishment, particularly in light of his political struggles and imprisonment in 2023 (Imtiaz, 2021). The revival of the report also connects to broader discussions of civil-military relations in Pakistan.

Scholars have long argued that the military's pervasive role in Pakistan's governance has undermined the country's democratic processes (Janjua, 2021). The Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, by highlighting the military's role in the failure of East Pakistan, serves as a reminder of the military's unchecked power during times of political crisis. Nawaz, Mohsin, & Naeem (2024) suggest that the report's findings have continued relevance, particularly in the context of ongoing debates about the civil-military divide and the need for democratic reforms in Pakistan. These discussions, often sparked by Khan's use of the report, position it as both a symbol of the military's dominance and a call for greater political accountability.

In brief, while the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is a highly contentious and often polarizing document, it remains crucial in understanding Pakistan's political trajectory and the military's historical influence on the country's governance. Despite questions surrounding its authenticity, especially due to its publication by an Indian media outlet, the report continues to shape discussions about civil-military relations in Pakistan. Imran Khan's selective use of the report underscores its political significance in the ongoing struggle for democratic governance in the country, though its potential for manipulation in contemporary political discourse calls for a more nuanced understanding of its implications.

Research Questions:

1. How has the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report been used in contemporary Pakistani politics, particularly by Imran Khan, to challenge the military's role in governance?
2. What are the historical controversies surrounding the suppression and release of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, and how do these controversies impact its political relevance today?

Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the political implications of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report in Pakistan's civil-military relations, with a particular focus on its use by Imran Khan to critique military influence over civilian governance.

2. To investigate the historical controversies surrounding the suppression and eventual leak of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, and to assess how these controversies shape its current role in Pakistani political discourse.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology to explore the political significance of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report and its impact on contemporary Pakistani politics. Central to the methodology was document analysis, which involved a thorough examination of primary sources, including both the official version and the Indian-published version of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report. The analysis sought to uncover how the document had been interpreted, suppressed, and subsequently reintroduced into political discourse. By analyzing official statements by Imran Khan, other political leaders, and military representatives, the research examined how the report had been used as a political tool to question Pakistan's civil-military dynamics and critique past governmental decisions related to the 1971 East Pakistan crisis. The document analysis also included a review of reports and historical records about the 1971 crisis, which provided important context for understanding the motivations behind the report's creation, its suppression, and its potential impact on national security and political governance in Pakistan.

In addition to document analysis, the study employed literature analysis, focusing on scholarly works, academic articles, and books that discussed the 1971 crisis, the role of the military in Pakistan's political development, and civil-military relations. This analysis considered how various scholars, political analysts, and historians had interpreted the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report over time, particularly in relation to Pakistan's national security and democratic governance. The literature analysis helped situate the report within broader academic discussions on the political development of Pakistan, revealing how its findings had influenced the country's political trajectory. Furthermore, secondary sources, such as news articles, political commentary, and interviews, were used to track how the report's resurgence in contemporary discourse had shaped public

perceptions and political narratives. These secondary sources provided insights into the media's role in framing the report as a tool for political maneuvering, particularly in relation to Imran Khan's political agenda and the ongoing debates about civil-military relations in Pakistan.

The Role of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report in Pakistan's Political History

The Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, completed in 1974, was commissioned by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to investigate the causes of the 1971 crisis and the subsequent separation of East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh. The commission was tasked with examining not only the military's role in the conflict but also the political mismanagement that led to the collapse of East Pakistan. The report sought to assess the various factors—military, political, and social—that contributed to the secession, making it one of the most comprehensive investigations into the event (Shamshad, Sarwar, & Arshad, 2022).

The findings of the commission were highly controversial, particularly in their criticism of General Yahya Khan, who was the military ruler of Pakistan at the time. The report detailed the failure of the military leadership to recognize the political aspirations of the Bengali population and highlighted the mishandling of the crisis, which ultimately led to a full-scale conflict. Additionally, the commission addressed allegations of atrocities committed by the Pakistani military during the crackdown on Bengali independence fighters, including mass killings, sexual violence, and other human rights violations. These revelations were seen as deeply damaging to Pakistan's military and its image both domestically and internationally (Shah, Shahzad, & Uzma, 2023).

Despite the significance of its findings, the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report was never officially published, a decision attributed to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government. According to several accounts, Bhutto suppressed the report's release under pressure from military leaders who were directly implicated in its findings. These leaders feared that the publication of the report would damage their reputations and undermine the military's position of power in Pakistan. Consequently, the suppression of the report sparked widespread speculation and fueled

conspiracy theories about the true reasons behind its secrecy. Critics argued that Bhutto's decision to withhold the report was politically motivated, as it protected both his government and the military from potential public backlash (Khan, Khan, & Ahmad, 2020).

The suppression of the report and its subsequent leak to the Indian media in 2000 fueled further debates and controversy surrounding its contents and authenticity. Given the political context of Pakistan-India relations, the fact that the report was first published by India Today raised questions about the integrity of the document. Some analysts suggested that the version of the report published in India might have been selectively edited or manipulated to serve Indian interests, particularly in reinforcing the narrative of Pakistan's failure in East Pakistan. The secrecy surrounding the report, combined with the ambiguity of its release, has kept the debate alive for decades, making the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report a key focal point in discussions about Pakistan's political history and its military's role in governance (Niaz, 2020).

Imran Khan's Revival of the Report in Contemporary Politics

In recent years, Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, has revived the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report as a political tool to challenge the military establishment's influence over Pakistan's governance. Khan, who was ousted from office in 2022 through a vote of no confidence, has repeatedly referenced the report in his speeches and public statements. By emphasizing the report's findings, particularly the military's role in the 1971 crisis, Khan aims to highlight the long-standing issues of military interference in civilian politics. He argues that this interference has historically undermined Pakistan's democratic processes and stifled political accountability. Khan's call for the public to read the report is framed as an effort to spark a national dialogue on the need for civilian supremacy and the military's accountability in political affairs (Naseer, 2024).

Khan's invocation of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report comes at a time of heightened political polarization in Pakistan, with his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), locked in a bitter struggle with the military establishment and the

political opposition. His selective use of the report, however, has drawn criticism from various quarters. Scholars and political analysts have noted that while the report provides valuable insights into Pakistan's history, Khan's focus on it may be strategically aimed at diverting attention from his own party's internal challenges and his ongoing legal battles. By bringing attention to the military's role in the 1971 crisis, Khan attempts to frame his political struggle as part of a broader battle for Pakistan's future, casting himself as a champion of democracy and civilian governance (Bazmi, 2022). Critics argue that Khan's framing of the report, while resonating with his supporters, overlooks the complexities of the 1971 crisis and the broader political and military dynamics at play during that time. Many also point out that while Khan's critique of the military's political role is valid, his selective emphasis on historical events may serve to further his personal and political agenda, rather than promote genuine national reflection. As the debate surrounding the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report continues to unfold, it raises important questions about how historical documents are used in contemporary political discourse and whether they serve as tools for genuine political accountability or as instruments of political maneuvering (Bazmi, 2022).

Authenticity and the Indian Media's Role in the Report's Release

One of the central issues in the ongoing debate over the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is its authenticity. The report, which was never officially published in Pakistan, first came to light when it was made available by the Indian news magazine India Today in 2000. This unexpected leak has raised significant questions about the report's integrity and whether it can be considered a reliable historical document. Given that the report was not formally released by the Pakistani government, its authenticity remains a subject of contention, particularly in the context of Pakistan's complex political landscape. The fact that the report was published by an Indian outlet adds another layer of complexity, as it raises concerns about the potential influence of India's historical antagonism with Pakistan on the interpretation and dissemination of the document (Masood, Imran, & Arslan, 2022). Some analysts have pointed out that the version of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report

published by India Today may have been selectively edited or manipulated to emphasize the military's role in the collapse of East Pakistan. By highlighting certain aspects of the report that criticized the Pakistani military, particularly in relation to allegations of atrocities committed during the crackdown, the report could be seen as reinforcing the narrative of Pakistan's failure in East Pakistan. This selective presentation of the findings may have been designed to further India's own geopolitical interests, casting Pakistan in a negative light while bolstering its own historical narrative. These concerns have led many to question whether the Indian version of the report fully captures the nuance and complexity of the events it describes or whether it distorts the facts to serve broader political motives (Shakeel, 2023).

The role of the Indian media in publishing the report has fueled speculation about its potential use as a political tool in the Pakistani political landscape. Given the fraught relationship between Pakistan and India, the publication of the report in an Indian outlet raises important questions about the intentions behind its release and the broader impact it might have on political discourse in Pakistan. While some argue that the report's contents are crucial for understanding the events of 1971, others suggest that its publication outside of Pakistan may have been part of a broader strategy to influence Pakistan's internal politics, particularly in relation to the military's role in the country's governance. The Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report, therefore, remains a highly contentious document, its authenticity and potential political ramifications continuing to shape discussions in Pakistan today.

Imran Khan's Political Use of the Report Imran Khan's Strategic Narrative

Imran Khan's use of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report serves several strategic purposes, particularly in his ongoing struggle against the entrenched power structures in Pakistan. One of the primary ways Khan has leveraged the report is to criticize the military's influence over the country's political affairs. By highlighting the commission's findings, which criticized the military's role in the 1971 crisis and its handling of East Pakistan, Khan draws a direct parallel to his own political downfall in 2022. He argues that the military's interference in civilian

governance has long been a source of Pakistan's political instability and that his ouster from office was the latest example of military overreach. For Khan, invoking the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is not just about revisiting past mistakes but about underscoring the continuity of military dominance in political decision-making and its negative impact on the country's democratic processes (Masood, Imran, & Arslan, 2022).

Khan's appeal to the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report also serves to mobilize support among Pakistan's youth, a demographic that has increasingly become the backbone of his political movement. Many young Pakistanis see Khan as a symbol of resistance against the political elites and the military establishment, which they view as having controlled the country's political landscape for decades. By emphasizing the report's findings and using it to highlight the historical consequences of military dominance, Khan reinforces his image as a leader who challenges the status quo. For youth disillusioned with the established political parties, the commission's findings provide a compelling narrative of systemic failure that Khan positions himself as the antidote to. This framing allows Khan to cast himself as a reformist who seeks to correct past injustices and bring greater transparency to Pakistan's political institutions (Naseer, 2024).

Furthermore, Khan's strategic use of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is aimed at undermining his political opponents. He uses the report to delegitimize opposition parties, many of which he perceives as being aligned with the military. By focusing on the commission's criticism of the military's role in political affairs, Khan positions his opponents as complicit in a history of military control over Pakistan's politics. This framing casts the opposition as morally and politically compromised, reinforcing Khan's narrative of being a lone champion of democracy and national accountability. For Khan, the report is not just a historical document, but a weapon in his ongoing battle to discredit those he views as entrenched in the political system that has perpetuated military influence (Ul Abidin, Khan, & Ameer, 2023).

The use of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report also helps Khan to cast a broader critique of Pakistan's civil-military relations. By invoking the report, he challenges the narrative that the

military's role in governance is inevitable or beneficial for the country's stability. Khan presents the military as a destabilizing force that has historically undermined democratic processes and civilian leadership. This rhetoric appeals to a public increasingly skeptical of military involvement in politics, especially given the political instability and economic crises Pakistan has faced in recent years. Khan, therefore, uses the report to push a narrative of political reform, in which the military's grip on governance is loosened and democratic institutions are strengthened.

Finally, Khan's focus on the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is also part of his broader political strategy to build a legacy of resistance and national accountability. The report, which sheds light on the military's role in the collapse of East Pakistan, provides Khan with a historical precedent for his own campaign against the military's involvement in political matters. By framing the current political struggle as part of a larger, long-standing issue in Pakistan, Khan connects his fight to that of past leaders who have sought to challenge military control, presenting himself as the rightful heir to that legacy. In doing so, Khan positions himself not just as a populist leader but as the vanguard of democratic change, with the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report serving as both a symbol and a tool in his political battles.

The Military's Response and Political Polarization

The military's long-standing dominance over Pakistan's political landscape is a pivotal aspect of the country's political history, and it remains a central issue in contemporary political debates. Imran Khan's invocation of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report has brought this issue to the forefront, intensifying the divisions between civilian leadership and the military establishment. The report, which details the military's actions and mistakes during the 1971 crisis, offers Khan a powerful tool to question the legitimacy of the military's historical and current role in Pakistan's political decision-making. By framing the military's involvement as detrimental to the country's political stability, Khan positions himself as a critic of the entrenched power structure that has shaped Pakistan's governance for decades (Nawaz, Mohsin, & Naeem, 2024).

Khan's call for every Pakistani to read the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is not just a request for historical reflection; it is a direct challenge to the military's authority and control over Pakistan's political narrative. The military has historically sought to suppress or downplay information that could damage its reputation, particularly regarding its role in the 1971 East Pakistan crisis. By encouraging citizens to engage with the report, Khan confronts the military's efforts to maintain a sanitized version of history. In this sense, the report becomes a symbol of resistance to the military's dominance and a means for Khan to position himself as a champion of democracy and accountability (Naseer, 2024).

This challenge, however, has contributed to a polarized political environment in Pakistan, where debates about the past are deeply entangled with present-day political struggles. The military's involvement in governance, both in the past and in recent years, has led to heightened tensions between civilian leaders and military figures. Khan's focus on the commission's findings and his critique of the military have further entrenched this divide, fueling a broader national discourse about the balance of power between civilian governments and the military. These debates are not just about the historical facts of the 1971 crisis; they are also about the legitimacy and future role of the military in Pakistan's politics (Cook, 2023).

As the military's role in political decision-making continues to be a contentious issue, the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report has become a focal point in the ongoing struggle for civilian supremacy. By using the report to challenge the military's influence, Khan has forced a public reckoning with the country's political history, particularly the military's involvement in past political crises. This has intensified calls for greater civilian control and has deepened the divide between those who view the military as a stabilizing force and those who see it as a hindrance to democratic governance. The tension surrounding the report, therefore, is not merely an academic or historical issue, but a live political struggle that reflects the ongoing battle for control of Pakistan's political future.

Conclusion

The Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report is a pivotal yet controversial document in Pakistan's

political history. Commissioned in 1974 to investigate the causes of the 1971 crisis and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh, the report provides a critical analysis of military failures and political mismanagement. However, its authenticity remains a subject of debate, particularly due to its prolonged suppression and the circumstances surrounding its release. Despite these uncertainties, the report's political significance remains unquestionable, as it sheds light on the military's role in the crisis and its broader implications for Pakistan's governance.

Imran Khan's strategic revival of the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report has brought its contentious findings back into the national discourse. By emphasizing the report's contents, Khan seeks to challenge the military's historical influence over Pakistan's political affairs, especially its role in curbing democratic processes. His call for national reflection on the report's findings is framed as an attempt to expose the military's past misdeeds and hold it accountable for its actions during the 1971 crisis. In this context, the report becomes a symbol of resistance against military control and a means for Khan to argue for greater civilian supremacy.

However, Khan's invocation of the report also underscores the polarized nature of Pakistan's political landscape. The country's political environment remains deeply divided, with competing narratives about the past shaping contemporary political struggles. The tension between civilian leaders and the military establishment continues to define much of Pakistan's governance, and the report serves as a flashpoint in this ongoing conflict. While Khan's focus on the report may resonate with those who view the military as a hindrance to democracy, it also risks deepening political divisions, as the military remains a powerful force in Pakistan's political and security domains.

Ultimately, the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission Report functions not only as a historical document but as a potent tool in contemporary politics. Its revival highlights the continuing struggle for political legitimacy, accountability, and democratic governance in Pakistan. The report's findings, though rooted in the past, continue to shape debates about the future of Pakistan's political order. In this sense, the report remains a symbol of national tragedy and a weapon in the

ongoing battle between civilian governance and military control, reflecting the deep-rooted tensions that continue to define Pakistan's political landscape.

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