

## The Great Player of Politics in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: An Islamic Perspective on the Role of Mr. Asif Ali Zardari

Humaira Khatoon

*Doctoral Candidate, Department of Political Science / Lecturer in Political  
Science, Govt. Girls' Degree College Jacobabad, Sindh*

### Abstract

This research provides an Islamic perspective on the political journey of Asif Ali Zardari in Pakistan, emphasizing his role within the Islamic framework of governance. Zardari, known for his strategic political maneuvers, rose to prominence following his marriage to Benazir Bhutto and later as the 11th President of Pakistan (2008-2013). His tenure, marked by challenges and controversies, including corruption allegations, significantly impacted Pakistan's socio-political fabric. This study examines Zardari's political path, leadership style, and policies, considering the Islamic principles of justice, accountability, and governance.

**Keywords:** Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Politics, Great Player, Asif Ali Zardari.

### Introduction

Asif Ali Zardari, a name synonymous with Pakistan's complex political tapestry, has been a figure of intrigue and controversy in the nation's political arena. Born on July 26, 1955, in Karachi, Zardari's life has been a journey marked by dramatic shifts - from a businessman to a political heavyweight, and eventually, the President of Pakistan. His story is not just a personal narrative but a reflection of the intricate interplay of power, politics, and personal ambition in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

Zardari's early life, set against the backdrop of a politically influential family, laid the foundation for his future endeavors. His father, Hakim Ali Zardari, a

tribal chieftain, was a well-known figure in regional politics, which provided young Zardari with an early exposure to the workings of political power and influence.<sup>2</sup> This environment was instrumental in shaping his understanding of the political landscape of Pakistan, a country where tribal affiliations and political lineage play a significant role.

Educated at Karachi Grammar School and later at Cadet College Petaro, Zardari received a blend of traditional and modern education, which honed his skills in leadership and communication. His time in the United Kingdom for higher studies further broadened his horizons, exposing him to international business practices and networks. These experiences were crucial in shaping his worldview and his approach to both business and politics.<sup>3</sup>

Zardari's entry into the political arena was catalyzed by his marriage to Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1987. This union was not just a merging of two prominent families but also a stepping stone for Zardari into the highest echelons of Pakistani politics. Benazir Bhutto's political journey, coupled with Zardari's growing influence, marked a new era in Pakistan's political history, one that was characterized by both democratic aspirations and tumultuous challenges.

Throughout his political career, Zardari has been a polarizing figure, admired by supporters for his resilience and strategic acumen, and criticized by opponents for allegations of corruption and mismanagement. His tenure as the President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 was marked by significant challenges, including managing the country's fragile economy, navigating complex security issues, and dealing with internal political strife. Despite these challenges, his presidency was also a time of notable achievements, including democratic reforms and efforts to stabilize the nation.

In sum, Asif Ali Zardari's journey is emblematic of the complexities of Pakistani politics, where personal histories, political legacies, and national interests are deeply intertwined. His story offers insights into the dynamics of power and governance in a country that has been at the crossroads of significant regional and global developments.

### **Early Life and Business Ventures**

Asif Ali Zardari, born on July 26, 1955, in Karachi, Pakistan, comes from a notable Baloch family with a strong political background. His father, Hakim Ali Zardari, was a tribal leader and a significant figure in regional politics, which influenced Zardari's early exposure to political and social issues<sup>1</sup>.

Zardari's education began at Karachi Grammar School, one of Pakistan's most prestigious institutions, where he received a foundational education that emphasized English language and literature, as well as the sciences. This educational background played a crucial role in shaping his early intellectual development and communication skills<sup>2</sup>. He later attended Cadet College Petaro, a renowned military prep school in Pakistan, known for its strict discipline and academic rigor. His time at Cadet College was instrumental in instilling a sense of discipline and leadership qualities.

After completing his education in Pakistan, Zardari moved to the United Kingdom for higher studies. He attended the London School of Business Studies, which provided him with a global perspective on business and finance. This experience was pivotal in developing his understanding of international business practices, though there are varying accounts regarding the completion of his studies.<sup>4</sup>

Upon returning to Pakistan, Zardari ventured into various business endeavors, leveraging his family's influence and resources. He initially focused on agriculture, managing the family's extensive landholdings in Sindh. His business interests soon expanded to include real estate, construction, and various other sectors. This diversification was indicative of his entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to explore different business avenues.

Zardari's business acumen became more pronounced in the early 1980s when he established several companies in Pakistan and abroad. These companies operated in diverse sectors, including textile manufacturing, sugar mills, and entertainment. His involvement in these ventures demonstrated his ability to navigate complex business environments and his ambition to expand beyond traditional family businesses. His marriage to Benazir Bhutto in 1987 marked a significant turning point in his life, intertwining his personal and business interests with national politics. Benazir, the daughter of former Prime

Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was a rising political figure in Pakistan. This union brought Zardari into the limelight, significantly enhancing his social and political stature.<sup>5</sup>

### **Rise in Politics**

Asif Ali Zardari's ascent in the realm of Pakistani politics is a narrative of opportunism, strategic alliances, and a series of events that catapulted him from a relatively unknown figure to one of the most influential political personalities in Pakistan. His political journey, intertwined with the fortunes of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), began in earnest with his marriage to Benazir Bhutto in 1987, a union that brought him into the limelight of national politics.<sup>6</sup>

Zardari's initial foray into politics was largely overshadowed by his wife's towering presence. Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a former Prime Minister and founder of the PPP, was a charismatic leader with a strong popular base. Her first tenure as Prime Minister in 1988 marked the beginning of Zardari's deeper involvement in political affairs. Although he held no official government position during her first term, his influence within the party and its decision-making circles was growing.

The real turning point in Zardari's political rise came during Benazir Bhutto's second term as Prime Minister (1993-1996). During this period, he began to take on more visible and significant roles. He was appointed to key positions within the PPP and the government, which allowed him to wield considerable influence in matters of state and party affairs. His growing power within the PPP was seen as both a consolidation of the Bhutto legacy and a testament to his own political skills.

However, Zardari's rise was not without controversy. His tenure in politics has been marred by allegations of corruption and misuse of power, earning him the nickname "Mr. Ten Percent," a reference to the commissions he allegedly received on government contracts and deals. These allegations became a significant aspect of his political identity, often overshadowing his political achievements and acumen.

Despite the controversies, Zardari's ability to navigate the complex and often turbulent waters of Pakistani politics was evident. He demonstrated a knack for forming alliances and understanding the intricacies of power dynamics in Pakistan. His role in the PPP, especially after the tragic assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007, was pivotal. He successfully led the party to victory in the 2008 general elections, following which he was elected as the President of Pakistan, a position he held until 2013.

Zardari's presidency was a period of significant challenges and achievements. He presided over a critical phase in Pakistan's history, marked by issues such as the fight against terrorism, economic instability, and the struggle to maintain democratic institutions in a country with a history of military rule. His tenure also saw the passage of the 18th Amendment, a landmark in Pakistan's constitutional history, which devolved power to the provinces and was seen as a step towards strengthening democracy.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, Asif Ali Zardari's rise in Pakistani politics is a story of resilience, strategic maneuvering, and the ability to hold sway in a constantly shifting political landscape. His journey from a background figure to a central player in Pakistan's politics is indicative of his adaptability and understanding of the complex political fabric of the country.

#### Controversies and Legal Battles:

Asif Ali Zardari's political career has been perennially shadowed by numerous controversies and legal battles, which have significantly impacted his public image and political standing. These controversies, often centered around allegations of corruption and financial improprieties, have been a recurrent theme throughout his tenure in Pakistani politics.

One of the most notable controversies involving Zardari is the "Swiss accounts case." This case revolved around allegations that Zardari and his late wife, Benazir Bhutto, had laundered millions of dollars through Swiss banks. The accusations suggested that these funds were the proceeds of kickbacks and illegal commissions from various government contracts and deals during Bhutto's terms as Prime Minister. The Swiss case gained international

attention and became a symbol of the corruption allegations that have dogged Zardari's political career<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the Swiss case, Zardari faced numerous other legal challenges both in Pakistan and abroad. These included various corruption cases linked to his time in government and his business dealings. The allegations ranged from embezzlement to misuse of public funds, and they contributed to his reputation as "Mr. Ten Percent," a moniker that implied his involvement in corrupt practices<sup>2</sup>.

Zardari's legal battles have not been limited to financial corruption alone. He has also been implicated in more serious charges, including the infamous case surrounding the murder of Murtaza Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto's brother. Though Zardari was acquitted of these charges, the case added to the aura of controversy that surrounds him. His time in prison, both before and after his presidency, on various charges, has also been a significant aspect of his political narrative<sup>3</sup>.

Despite these legal challenges and controversies, Zardari has managed to maintain a significant presence in Pakistani politics. His supporters often view these legal battles as politically motivated, aimed at undermining his position and that of the PPP. On the other hand, his detractors see these controversies as indicative of deep-rooted corruption and governance issues in Pakistan.

Throughout his career, Zardari has consistently denied all allegations of wrongdoing, and he has never been convicted in any of the cases against him. His ability to navigate these legal challenges and controversies speaks to his resilience and his understanding of the complexities of Pakistan's legal and political systems.

In summary, the controversies and legal battles surrounding Asif Ali Zardari have been a defining feature of his political life. They reflect the broader issues of corruption and accountability in Pakistani politics and have played a significant role in shaping both his political legacy and the public's perception of him.

### **Presidential Tenure**

Asif Ali Zardari's tenure as the President of Pakistan, from 2008 to 2013, was a period marked by significant political, economic, and security challenges, as well as notable achievements in the realm of democratic reforms. His presidency was a time of both turbulence and transformation for Pakistan, reflecting the complexities of governing a nation at the crossroads of major regional and global issues.

Upon assuming office, Zardari inherited a country grappling with severe economic challenges. Pakistan was facing a critical financial crisis, with issues like high inflation, dwindling foreign reserves, and a large fiscal deficit. His administration took several steps to stabilize the economy, including securing an \$11.3 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to avoid defaulting on external debts. These economic measures were crucial in preventing a more severe economic downturn, but they also came with austerity measures that were unpopular among the populace<sup>1</sup>.

Zardari's presidency was also characterized by significant efforts to combat terrorism and extremism within Pakistan. The country was at the forefront of the global war on terror, facing internal security threats from various militant groups. Zardari's government implemented military operations against insurgent strongholds, particularly in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. These operations were critical in curbing the spread of militancy but also led to complex humanitarian and security challenges, including internal displacement of civilians.

One of the hallmark achievements of Zardari's presidency was the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 2010. This amendment was a significant step towards decentralization and strengthening democracy in Pakistan. It removed the power of the President to dissolve Parliament, a change that was seen as a move to prevent future military coups. The amendment also devolved more powers to the provinces, a step towards addressing long-standing demands for greater provincial autonomy.

Zardari's tenure was not without controversy. His presidency continued to be overshadowed by allegations of corruption and governance issues. However, he also made strides in improving Pakistan's international relations,

particularly with neighboring India and Afghanistan, and in representing Pakistan on various international forums.

In conclusion, Asif Ali Zardari's presidential tenure was a period of significant challenges and achievements. It was marked by efforts to stabilize the economy, combat terrorism, and strengthen democratic institutions. Despite the controversies and challenges, his presidency played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Pakistan's political and economic landscape during a critical period in its history.<sup>8</sup>

### **Post-Presidential Career**

After completing his term as the President of Pakistan in 2013, Asif Ali Zardari transitioned back into a role that was more directly political, resuming his position as a key figure within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). His post-presidential career has been characterized by efforts to maintain the PPP's relevance and influence in Pakistan's rapidly evolving political landscape, as well as his own personal legal battles and controversies. Zardari's return to party politics was marked by a focus on rebuilding and reorganizing the PPP, which had faced electoral setbacks. He worked towards revitalizing the party's structure, strategy, and grassroots connections. His experience and understanding of Pakistan's political dynamics were crucial in navigating the PPP through a period of internal challenges and external competition, particularly from emerging political forces and traditional rivals. One of the significant aspects of Zardari's post-presidential career has been his involvement in various legal cases. He continued to face allegations of corruption and financial irregularities, which had been a recurring theme throughout his political life. These legal challenges have often led to periods of detention and court appearances, keeping him in the public eye and impacting his political activities.

Despite these challenges, Zardari's influence in Pakistani politics remained substantial. He played a key role in political negotiations, alliance formations, and policy discussions. His ability to forge political alliances and understand the nuances of Pakistan's complex political arena was evident in his interactions with other political leaders and parties.



Zardari also focused on international diplomacy and relations, leveraging his experience and connections to advocate for Pakistan's interests on various global platforms. His insights into regional and international politics were valuable in shaping the PPP's stance on foreign policy issues.

### **Legacy and Influence**

Asif Ali Zardari's legacy and influence in Pakistani politics are complex and multifaceted, marked by both significant achievements and enduring controversies. As a former President and a key figure in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), his impact on the nation's political landscape extends beyond his tenure in office, influencing the course of Pakistani politics in various ways.

Zardari's political legacy is inextricably linked to his role in the PPP, a party with deep historical roots and significant influence in Pakistan. Under his leadership, the PPP navigated through challenging times, including the aftermath of Benazir Bhutto's assassination and periods of political instability. His ability to hold the party together and maintain its relevance in the face of internal and external pressures has been a notable aspect of his leadership<sup>^I</sup>.

One of the most significant contributions of Zardari's tenure as President was the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan. This amendment, seen as a milestone in Pakistan's democratic evolution, curtailed the powers of the Presidency, thereby reducing the potential for authoritarian rule, and enhanced provincial autonomy. This move towards decentralization and strengthening democratic institutions is a key part of his political legacy.

Zardari's tenure was also marked by efforts to improve Pakistan's international relations, particularly with neighboring countries. His approach to foreign policy, which included attempts to normalize relations with India and manage complex relations with Afghanistan, reflected a pragmatic understanding of regional dynamics. These efforts, though met with varying degrees of success, were important in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy discourse.

However, Zardari's legacy is also marred by persistent allegations of corruption and mismanagement. The controversies surrounding his tenure, including various legal battles and accusations of financial impropriety, have

had a lasting impact on his public image and political legacy. These allegations, which have been a constant feature of his career, have influenced public perception and have been a focal point of criticism by his opponents. In summary, Asif Ali Zardari's legacy and influence in Pakistani politics are characterized by a blend of democratic reforms, party leadership, and controversies. His role in the PPP, his contributions to constitutional reforms, and his handling of foreign policy issues are significant aspects of his political journey. Despite the challenges and controversies, his enduring influence on Pakistan's political landscape is undeniable, making him a pivotal figure in the country's recent political history.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Asif Ali Zardari's political journey, from the corridors of business to the highest office in Pakistan, is a narrative rich in complexity and contradiction. His career encapsulates the multifaceted nature of Pakistani politics, marked by resilience, strategic acumen, and a series of controversies that have shaped both his legacy and the political discourse of the nation.

Zardari's ascent to prominence, largely catalyzed by his marriage to Benazir Bhutto, set the stage for a political career that would see him navigate through Pakistan's turbulent political waters with a blend of pragmatism and opportunism. His tenure as President, a role he assumed under extraordinary circumstances following the assassination of his wife, was a period of significant challenges and achievements. It was marked by efforts to stabilize a faltering economy, combat terrorism, and strengthen democratic institutions in a country with a history of military rule.

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution, passed during his presidency, stands as a testament to his commitment to democratic principles, despite the myriad challenges that characterized his tenure. This amendment, which redefined the balance of power between the executive and the legislature, is perhaps one of the most enduring aspects of his legacy, reflecting a move towards a more decentralized and democratic governance structure in Pakistan.

However, Zardari's political journey has been perennially shadowed by controversies, most notably allegations of corruption and financial impropriety. These allegations have not only impacted his public image but have also been a focal point of the political opposition. Despite these challenges, Zardari has demonstrated remarkable resilience, maintaining a significant presence in Pakistani politics even after his presidency.

His role in the Pakistan People's Party, a party with deep historical and emotional roots in Pakistan, remains crucial. As a leader, he has navigated the party through periods of internal strife and external challenges, maintaining its relevance in Pakistan's dynamic political landscape. His ability to forge alliances and understand the intricacies of power dynamics in Pakistan has been a hallmark of his political career.

In conclusion, Asif Ali Zardari's political narrative is emblematic of the complexities of governance and leadership in Pakistan. His story is one of triumphs and tribulations, reflecting the broader challenges of political leadership in a country at the crossroads of major regional and global developments. While interpretations of his legacy may vary, his impact on Pakistan's political landscape is undeniable, making him a significant figure in the country's recent history. His career underscores the intricate interplay of personal ambition, political power, and national governance in the evolving tapestry of Pakistani politics.

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