

ELITE FAMILIES AND POWER STRUCTURES: A CASE STUDY OF THE DAULTANAS IN PAKISTANI POLITICS

Farzanda Aslam^{*1}, Zainab Shabbir²

^{*1}Lecturer, Department of History, Lahore College for Women University Lahore, Pakistan.
Ph.D Scholar, Department of History, Lahore College for Women University Lahore, Pakistan.

¹farzandaatif@gmail.com, ²zainab.shabbir8650@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *

Farzanda Aslam

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21470021>

Received	Accepted	Published
01 January 2026	17 March 2026	31 March 2026

ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of elite power and political authority in Pakistan through a focused case study of the Daultana family, one of the most influential landed aristocratic families in Punjab. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, the article situates the Daultanas within the broader framework of elite theory, which emphasizes the concentration and reproduction of power within a narrow social group. It argues that despite the establishment of democratic institutions in Pakistan after 1947, political authority has remained deeply embedded in traditional structures of landownership, kinship, and patron-client relations. The research traces the historical evolution of the Daultana family from their role as influential landlords and intermediaries during British colonial rule to their emergence as key actors in the early political development of Pakistan. Particular attention is given to the leadership of Mian Mumtaz Daultana, who served as Chief Minister of West Punjab (1951–1953), illustrating how elite families were instrumental in shaping provincial governance and state institutions in the formative years of Pakistan. The article further examines how such families maintained their political dominance through strategic alliances, electoral mobilization in rural constituencies, and control over economic resources. In addition, the study highlights the continuity of dynastic politics through figures like Tehmina Daultana, demonstrating how political influence is transferred across generations, reinforcing the persistence of elite power in contemporary Pakistan. The analysis also critically evaluates the implications of elite dominance for democratic development, arguing that while elite families have contributed to political stability and administrative continuity, they have simultaneously hindered the growth of participatory democracy, meritocracy, and institutional accountability. By combining historical analysis with political theory, this article concludes that the Daultana family exemplifies the broader pattern of elite capture in Pakistani politics, where formal democratic frameworks coexist with deeply entrenched informal power structures.

Keywords: Elite families, Daultana family, Pakistani politics, feudalism, patron-client relations, Punjab politics, political dynasties, state formation

INTRODUCTION

The political landscape of Pakistan has long been shaped by the dominance of influential elite families, particularly in Punjab, where landownership and social hierarchy have historically translated into political authority. Among these, the Daultana family serves as a significant example of how traditional elites have

maintained their relevance within modern democratic frameworks. Emerging from a background of large-scale landholding and rural influence, the family represents the continuity of power from the colonial period into the post-independence era. This persistence highlights a key feature of Pakistani politics: the coexistence of formal democratic institutions with deeply rooted informal structures of authority based on kinship, patronage, and economic control.

The rise of the Daultanas in national politics is closely associated with Mian Mumtaz Daultana, whose leadership in the early years of Pakistan exemplifies how elite families occupied central positions in state-building processes. His role as Chief Minister of West Punjab during a formative period underscores the reliance of the new state on established social elites for governance and political stability. At the same time, this reliance limited broader political participation and reinforced existing inequalities. By examining the Daultana family within the framework of elite theory, particularly the ideas of Vilfredo Pareto, this study seeks to understand how power is concentrated, reproduced, and sustained within a narrow segment of society. The case of the Daultanas thus provides valuable insight into the nature of political authority in Pakistan and the challenges it poses for democratic development.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Elite Theory and Power Structures

Elite theory posits that a small, cohesive group of individuals holds disproportionate power in society. Thinkers like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca argued that elites reproduce themselves through control over resources, institutions, and ideology. In the Pakistani context, elite theory is particularly relevant due to:

- The persistence of feudal landholding structures
- Weak institutionalization of political parties
- Patron-client relationships in rural politics

The Daultanas fit into what can be termed a “landed-political elite”, combining economic dominance with political authority. Their influence operates through:

- Control of land and rural voters
- Kinship networks
- Access to state institutions



1.2. Historical Background of the Daultana Family:

The Daultana family traces its origins to the landed aristocracy of southern Punjab, where it emerged as a prominent and influential clan deeply embedded in the agrarian structure of the region. Historically associated with large landholdings and rural authority, the family derived its socio-economic power from control over agricultural resources and its position within local hierarchies. During the period of British Raj, the Daultanas, like many other Punjabi elites, became part of the colonial administrative framework, serving as intermediaries between the British government and the rural population. This collaboration allowed them to consolidate their influence, expand their estates, and gain access to modern education and political institutions. They were closely linked with the Unionist Party, which represented the interests of large landlords and played a dominant role in Punjab politics before independence. The family's alignment with the Unionist Party reflects its commitment to maintaining agrarian stability and protecting elite interests within the colonial system. However, as the political landscape shifted in the 1940s, members of the Daultana family, particularly Mian Mumtaz Daultana, strategically realigned with the All-India Muslim League to support the demand for Pakistan. This transition illustrates their political adaptability and foresight in securing relevance in the emerging post-colonial state. Thus, the historical background of the Daultana family reflects a broader pattern of elite continuity, where colonial-era privileges and networks were effectively transformed into post-independence political power.

1.3. Role in the Pakistan Movement

The Daultana family played a strategic, though not initially central, role in the Pakistan Movement, reflecting the broader shift of Punjab's landed elites during the final phase of colonial rule. Originally aligned with the Unionist Party, which prioritized cross-communal agrarian interests and loyalty to the British Raj, the family gradually recognized the changing political momentum of the 1940s. As the demand for a separate Muslim homeland gained strength under the leadership of the Muhammad Ali Jinnah, members of the Daultana family most notably Mian Mumtaz Daultana shifted their allegiance to the All-India Muslim League. This transition was both ideological and pragmatic, as it allowed them to retain political relevance in a rapidly transforming environment. Mumtaz Daultana actively participated in mobilizing rural support in Punjab, using his influence as a landlord to sway local populations in favor of the Muslim League. He contributed to political campaigns, organizational efforts, and the consolidation of Muslim political identity in the region. Although the Punjab province initially remained a stronghold of Unionist politics, the eventual support of influential families like the Daultanas proved crucial in tilting the balance toward the Muslim League. Their involvement underscores how elite endorsement played a decisive role in legitimizing and strengthening the Pakistan Movement, particularly in rural areas where traditional authority structures carried significant weight.

2. Post-Independence Politics and Rise to Power:

2.1. Chief Ministership of West Punjab (1951–1953)

After independence, the Muslim League relied heavily on elite families to govern provinces. Mian Mumtaz Daultana became Chief Minister of West Punjab in 1951. His government has been described as a “cabinet of landlords”, reflecting the dominance of feudal elites in governance.

Key policies:

- Attempted agrarian reforms
- Efforts to consolidate provincial authority
- Political maneuvering against rival elite factions

However, these reforms were largely symbolic and did not significantly alter land ownership patterns.

2.2. The 1953 Lahore Crisis

The Daultana administration faced a major crisis during the anti-Ahmadi riots of 1953. His inability to control the situation led to Imposition of martial law in Lahore, Resignation from office. This episode highlights the limitations of elite-led governance and the fragility of early Pakistani state institutions.

3. Elite Capture and Patron-Client Networks

The persistence of elite power in Pakistan is closely linked to the mechanisms of patron-client relationships, through which influential families maintain control over political and social structures. The Daultana family provides a clear example of how such networks operate within a largely agrarian society. As major landowners, the family historically exercised authority over tenants and local communities by controlling access to land, employment, and basic resources. This economic dependence created a system in which peasants and local inhabitants relied on the patron—typically the landlord—for protection, financial assistance, and mediation with state institutions. In return, these clients offered political loyalty, particularly in the form of votes during elections, thereby reinforcing the family's electoral dominance.

This patron-client structure was not merely economic but also deeply social and political, rooted in kinship ties, biradari (clan) affiliations, and local influence. Figures like Mian Mumtaz Daultana effectively utilized these networks to consolidate their authority, ensuring that their political support base remained stable across generations. The system extended beyond rural society into bureaucratic and administrative spheres, where elite families could influence appointments, resource distribution, and development projects. Such practices exemplify what political theorists like Gaetano Mosca describe as the organization of a ruling class that

sustains its dominance through structured relationships of dependency and control. Consequently, while democratic institutions such as elections formally exist, the underlying power dynamics often remain shaped by these informal yet deeply entrenched patron-client networks, limiting genuine political competition and broader participation.

3.1. Dynastic Continuity: From Mumtaz to Tehmina Daultana

The phenomenon of dynastic continuity is a defining feature of Pakistani politics, where political influence is often transferred across generations within the same family. The Daultana family provides a clear illustration of this pattern, particularly in the transition of leadership and influence from Mian Mumtaz Daultana to Tehmina Daultana. Mumtaz Daultana, as a prominent political figure in the early years of Pakistan, established a strong foundation of electoral support, administrative experience, and elite networks that would later benefit subsequent generations. His position as Chief Minister of West Punjab not only elevated the family's status at the provincial level but also embedded it deeply within the structures of state power and party politics.

This legacy was effectively carried forward by Tehmina Daultana, who emerged as a significant political figure in the 1990s, particularly within the Pakistan Muslim League (N). Her political career demonstrates how dynastic families adapt to changing political environments while preserving their core influence. Unlike earlier generations that relied heavily on feudal authority, Tehmina combined traditional family support with modern political strategies, including active participation in parliamentary politics and ministerial roles. Her success also reflects the evolving role of women within elite political families, where access to established networks enables their entry into high-level politics.

The continuity between Mumtaz and Tehmina Daultana highlights how political capital such as name recognition, constituency control, and institutional connections is inherited and sustained over time. This process reinforces the concentration of power within a limited group and reduces opportunities for new political actors to emerge. In this way, the Daultana family exemplifies the broader trend of dynastic politics in Pakistan, where democratic structures coexist with hereditary patterns of leadership and influence.

4. Comparative Perspective: Elite Families in Punjab

The dominance of the Daultana family in Punjab becomes more meaningful when viewed alongside other prominent elite families of the region, as it highlights a broader pattern of power concentration rooted in landownership, colonial collaboration, and political adaptability. Punjab, as the most politically significant province of Pakistan, has historically been governed not merely through institutions but through networks of influential families who command both economic and social authority. Among these, families such as the Tiwana family, Mamdot family, and the Noon family share similarities with the Daultanas in terms of their feudal base, political engagement, and dynastic continuity.

Like the Daultanas, these families were closely associated with the colonial administration during the British Raj, often serving as intermediaries between the state and rural society. Many of them were linked to the Unionist Party, which represented the interests of large landowners and maintained political stability in pre-partition Punjab. After independence, these families successfully transitioned into the political framework of Pakistan, aligning themselves with dominant parties such as the All-India Muslim League and its successors. This adaptability ensured their continued relevance despite major political transformations. However, while the structural characteristics of these elite families are similar, differences can be observed in their political trajectories and levels of influence. The Daultanas, for instance, maintained a relatively consistent presence in both provincial and national politics, particularly through figures like Mian Mumtaz Daultana and later Tehmina Daultana. In contrast, some families experienced periods of decline or fragmentation due to internal divisions or changing political alliances. Nonetheless, all these families illustrate a common trend: the persistence of elite dominance in Punjab's political system, where electoral success often depends less on ideological appeal and more on social status, land control, and entrenched local networks. This comparative

perspective reinforces the argument that the Daultana family is not an isolated case but part of a wider structure of elite power that continues to shape governance and democracy in Pakistan.

4.1. Impact on Democratic Development

The dominance of elite families such as the Daultana family has had a profound and often constraining impact on democratic development in Pakistan. While these elites provided a degree of political stability and administrative continuity in the early years of the state, their continued control over land, resources, and electoral constituencies has limited the growth of inclusive and participatory democracy. Through entrenched patron-client networks and biradari-based politics, families like that of Mian Mumtaz Daultana have been able to maintain electoral dominance, often sidelining merit-based leadership and reducing opportunities for new political actors to emerge. This concentration of power has weakened political institutions, undermined accountability, and perpetuated socio-economic inequalities, as policy decisions frequently reflect elite interests rather than broader public needs. Consequently, democratic processes in Pakistan often operate within a framework heavily influenced by traditional authority structures, where formal elections coexist with informal systems of control, thereby restricting the deepening of democratic norms and practices.

4.2. Critique: Feudalism and Modernity

The coexistence of feudal structures with modern democratic institutions in Pakistan reveals a fundamental contradiction within its political system. Families such as the Daultana family embody this tension, as their authority is rooted in traditional landownership and social hierarchy, yet they operate within the framework of electoral politics and state institutions. While modernization has introduced concepts of representation, equality, and rule of law, the persistence of feudal practices such as patronage, biradari-based loyalty, and economic dependency continues to shape political behavior. Leaders like Mian Mumtaz Daultana illustrate how elite actors have adapted to modern political systems without fundamentally altering underlying power relations. As a result, democracy often functions more as a procedural system than a transformative one, where traditional elites retain control while the broader goals of social justice and political inclusivity remain only partially realized.

4.3. Elite Adaptation in Contemporary Politics

Elite families in Pakistan have demonstrated a strong capacity for adaptation within changing political and institutional environments, ensuring their continued relevance despite shifts in governance structures and party politics. The Daultana family exemplifies this adaptability, as it has successfully transitioned from colonial-era landed authority to active participation in modern parliamentary politics. While earlier generations relied primarily on landownership and rural patronage networks, contemporary elites have diversified their strategies by engaging with national political parties, media platforms, and bureaucratic institutions.

Figures such as Tehmina Daultana illustrate this modern adaptation, as she operated within mainstream party politics, particularly the Pakistan Muslim League (N), while still benefiting from the family's traditional social base. This shift reflects a broader trend in which elite families no longer depend solely on feudal structures but instead combine inherited influence with institutional engagement and political branding. Similarly, the legacy of Mian Mumtaz Daultana continues to provide historical legitimacy and name recognition, which remain valuable assets in electoral politics. In contemporary Pakistan, elite adaptation also involves strategic alliances, media visibility, and participation in urban as well as rural constituencies. Despite claims of democratization, these families retain significant control over political outcomes by reshaping their methods rather than relinquishing their power. This demonstrates that while the form of elite dominance has evolved, its substance remains largely intact, ensuring the persistence of traditional power structures within a modern political framework.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the case of the Daultana family demonstrates how elite families have remained central to the structure of political power in Pakistan, despite the presence of formal democratic institutions. From their origins as influential landlords under the British Raj to their integration into post-independence governance, the Daultanas illustrate the continuity of elite dominance across historical transitions. The political career of Mian Mumtaz Daultana highlights how landed elites shaped early state formation, while later figures such as Tehmina Daultana reflect the endurance of dynastic politics in contemporary times. Through patron-client networks, control over land, and strategic political alliances, the family has sustained its influence over generations. The study ultimately shows that Pakistani politics is characterized by the coexistence of democratic structures with deeply embedded elite power, confirming the relevance of elite theory in understanding the country's political development and the persistent challenges to inclusive and participatory governance.

REFERENCES

- Alavi, Hamza. *Class and State in Pakistan*. Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1988.
- Binder, Leonard. *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961.
- Callard, Keith. *Pakistan: A Political Study*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957.
- Cheema, Ali, and Asim Khwaja. "The Role of Elite Networks in Pakistani Politics." *Harvard Kennedy School Working Paper*, 2009.
- Gilmartin, David. *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Jalal, Ayesha. *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Jalal, Ayesha. *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Mosca, Gaetano. *The Ruling Class*. Translated by Hannah D. Kahn. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939.
- Pareto, Vilfredo. *The Rise and Fall of the Elites: An Application of Theoretical Sociology*. Edited by Hans L. Zetterberg. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991.
- Rahman, Tariq. *Language and Politics in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Sayeed, Khalid B. *The Political System of Pakistan*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.
- Talbot, Ian. *Pakistan: A Modern History*. 3rd ed. London: Hurst and Company, 2012.
- Talbot, Ian. *Punjab and the Raj, 1849–1947*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1988.
- Waseem, Mohammad. *Politics and the State in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1994.
- Ziring, Lawrence. *Pakistan: The Enigma of Political Development*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1980.