



Democratic Conundrum: Introspecting Complexities and Dynamics in Pakistan's Political Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Research Problem: This research aims to explore the main obstacles hindering Pakistan's democratic transition, including weak economic policies, structural imbalances, and military interference, all of which have led to insecurity, conflict, and the oppression of civilian rule. In addition, this research also aims to understand Pakistan's political culture which combines autocratic and democratic ideologies, as well as how political satisfaction with different regimes impacts the acceptance of military regimes and the inability of marginalized groups to express their opinions under authoritarian rule.

Research purposes: The aim of this research is to identify and analyze the main challenges facing Pakistan's democracy, including issues of partisanship and segregation practices, as well as to understand historical and current issues that can help identify changes needed to strengthen democracy in Pakistan.

Research methods: This research uses a descriptive-analytical approach by collecting data through literature reviews and analysis of official documents, such as government reports and international agency reports. Interdisciplinary analysis is used to understand the impact of historical and socio-cultural factors on the development of democracy in Pakistan.

Results and Discussion: The research results show that the main challenges to Pakistan's democracy include fraudulent electoral processes, political centralization, segregation, and biased party politics. The lack of a dynamic civil society and military domination of civilian government are contributing factors to the failure of democracy in Pakistan. Discussions of history and current issues also provide insight into the changes needed to improve democracy in the country.

Research Implications and Contributions: This research has important implications for policymakers and stakeholders interested in improving democracy in Pakistan. By understanding and identifying the challenges faced, this research can provide guidance for developing appropriate strategies and measures to strengthen democracy and promote political inclusion in Pakistan.

Keywords: Democracy, Pakistan, Military Intervention, Authoritarianism, Partisan Politics, Inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

The democratic transition in Pakistan is extremely challenging. Because of weak economic policies driven by structural imbalances, Pakistan has not democratized. Pakistan's military-bureaucratic administration has overseen over democratic ones since the country's independence in 1947. The military's grip on civilian authority is a fundamental impediment to the establishment of a democratically accountable government in Pakistan. Inept politicians exacerbate the situation by giving the military forces more opportunities to usurp political authority. Even in today's contemporary federal setup, the army remains critical to maintaining Pakistan's rule of law. The country's constitution was repealed in 1969 to reinforce democracy (Saleem Ullah, 2022). Pakistan's original 1973 constitution is still in force, with a few minor changes. Ever since 2008, there have been prolonged demonstrations and derogatory remarks aimed at the military establishment for supposedly meddling in the general election (Saleem Ullah, 2022). Following departure from public office, the elite sought to influence election outcomes to

consolidate power throughout the nation. Because of Pakistan's troubled past, effective policy is essential in modern Pakistan (Saleem Ullah, 2022).

Discussions about democracy in Pakistan emerge from the incapacity of leaders and policy makers to surmount a range of socioeconomic obstacles. Pakistan's difficulties in democratizing are intimately related to the historical and sociocultural factors that have influenced the country's democratic development. Following its separation from India, Pakistan made a commitment to maintain an equitable and ethically grounded Islamic society (Weinbaum, 1996). The judicial and administrative traditions of Britain, along with a multiplicity of ethno-regional cultures, influenced Pakistan's parliamentary political culture (Weinbaum, 1996). However, the democratic administrations that followed, most notably the Zia regime, aimed to create a state that was less democratic, less inclusive, and more theocratic. Consequently, the goals of the Sunni Punjabi ethnic minority turned into the center of a limited and restrictive national identity for Pakistan. The Musharraf administration attempted to change this viewpoint by prudent moderation programs (Shah & Khan, 2022). The official language of Pakistan is Urdu, Punjabi predominates in central institutions, ethnic minorities are underrepresented, and the country is characterized by a regulated society with a high degree of centralization of power (Shah & Khan, 2022).

Likewise, academic discourse on democratization has already established the significance of civil society within a democratic framework. Civil society is essential to democracies because it defends citizens' rights and keeps the government responsible. Participatory democracy is characterized by a thriving civil society with a variety of autonomous political groupings, political tolerance, and a feeling of citizenship for democratic politics (Weinbaum, 1996). A well-functioning civil society ensures that the government's role is appropriate and constrained by serving as a buffer between the state and its people (Weinbaum, 1996). In addition to indirectly aiding in the maintenance and advancement of democratic values, civil society may actively address pressing issues (Stid, 2018). Political organizations and movements in Pakistan were able to organize and express their opinions even under authoritarian rule (Weinbaum, 1996). Nonetheless, Pakistan lacks the societal openness to accept divergent viewpoints and forces or to come to a consensus over a common political identity. Pakistan's election system often favors dishonest and immoral candidates, making it difficult for citizens to choose trustworthy and qualified candidates (Butt, 2018). To ensure genuine leaders and eradicate corruption, Pakistan's judiciary and military remain the sole avenue for significant changes, like those in the United States (Butt, 2018). Pakistan faces challenges in establishing effective institutions for democratic governance due to a lack of accountability and inclusion. The study seeks to comprehend the complicated problems of democracy in Pakistan, such as partisanship and segregation practices in Pakistan. Understanding the history and current concerns may assist in identifying changes in Pakistan's democracy, which is the major goal of this study.

This article explores the failures of democratization in Pakistan, a nation that gained independence in 1947. The study identifies challenges such as fraudulent election processes, political centralization, segregation, and partisan politics. The lack of a vibrant civil society and the military's extensive power over civilian governments contributed to the failure of democracy. The study aims to uncover the pertinent issues of democratization in Pakistan using empirical data and qualitative analysis, utilizing primary and secondary sources, e-resources, and news articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Pakistan's Democratic Landscape: A Comprehensive Analysis of Key Challenges

Pakistan's political landscape has always been complex and turbulent. Given the country's history of military takeovers, it is essential to critically assess the current situation and provide insight into the obstacles to and opportunities for the consolidation of democracy. Pakistan's uneven and unsatisfactory democratic transition may be attributed to a variety of factors, but military engagement in politics and an authoritarian political culture are intimately related to other issues. This is the reason this essay will mostly focus on these two primary reasons which will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

Military involvement has often undermined democratic processes in Pakistan. Attempts at military takeovers have historically impeded the expansion of democracy and created a climate of insecurity inside the democratic system. In 1958, 1977, and 1999, for example, martial rule broke the continuity of

democracy and established a narrative of military strength that continues to shape relations between the armed forces and the civilian population. In Pakistan, the military wields oppressive political power, impeding the development of democratic societies and augmenting the political clout of civilian administrations (Raja, 2022). On matters like ethnic strife, governance, and development, the military's political involvement has had a major influence. The military has harmed democratic institutions and politics by subduing civilian administrations via the use of both coercive and non-coercive means (Javid, 2014). In democratic regimes, weakly developed political parties' rule while the parliament, courts, and civil society fight for power over the armed forces. Bans of political parties, president rule, the repression of alternative politics, and the removal of democratically elected representatives are all prevalent in Pakistan (Javid, 2014).

Democracy is a system that requires a shared view of desirable values and norms, which define a country's common aims, identity, and moral standards. Politics alone cannot provide the necessary strength for democracy. The history and renewal of democratic core concepts are crucial. Globalization can promote democracy and wealth, but opposition often leads to violence. A free, democratic, and prosperous world that respects cultural and religious differences is as important as the relationship between culture, democracy, and globalization.

The middle and lower middle classes in Pakistan are among the influential elites who have great power and influence in the nation's polity. Their propensity for power and authority has shaped these elites' evolutionary trajectory. Traditional, colonial, and emerging elites are the three categories. Emerging elites were individuals who started participating in politics after 1947, colonial elites were from British control (1857–1947), while traditional elites were from Muslim rule (Rizvi, 2015 as cited in Ashfaq & Roofi, 2021). Every dictatorship emphasized an ideology to justify their systems, and each elite group mobilized resources to change the state and protect its interests. Political elites now make up a large portion of the cabinet of the Pakistani government and wield most of the political power (Hussain, 1976 as cited in Ashfaq & Roofi, 2021).

The political culture of Pakistan combines elements of both autocratic and democratic ideologies. Authoritarian reality is defined by authoritarianism, centralization, and the repression of dissent, while democratic ideals like consensus, trust, and tolerance are centralized (Shafqat, 1990). Following independence, friction and contradiction grew because of the struggle between military and civilian authorities, which kept the democratic ideal insecure (Shafqat, 1990). The democratic ideal is nevertheless a key component of Pakistani political culture despite these obstacles. Consolidating and institutionalizing democratic institutions and principles is the problem (Shafqat, 1990). This cleavage has led to a political culture of confrontation and dissension, resulting in the struggle for the democratic ideal and assertion of authoritarian rule in Pakistani politics. Political satisfaction with different regimes varies, with those who support centralization and authoritarian values generally accepting military regimes, while those who subscribe to democratic ideals and cultural pluralism generally show satisfaction with civilian party-led regimes (Shafqat, 1990).

Pakistan's class system, colonial heritage, and autocracy form the foundation of its elite system. The many social, religious, ethnic, political, and economic groups that each clan-elite represents combine to form an unbeatable elite (Mahmood Awan, 2022). The religious elite rules the state and society in tandem with other clan elites. They use political, cultural, and religious narratives to control the general populace and prevent middle-class parties and leadership from emerging. They subvert judicial and administrative checks and balances, exploit the economy, and establish cartels (Mahmood Awan, 2022). Without power clusters supporting a common clique and shielding one another, it is difficult to attain wide influence. Public institutional bureaucracies also become members of these elite groups due to their status and resources (Mahmood Awan, 2022).

The political culture in Pakistan has been marred by elitism, with traditional elites dominating the political landscape. The lack of inclusivity and representation has hindered the democratization process. This challenge is evident in the perpetuation of dynastic politics, where political leadership often remains within a few families. This elite-centric political culture impedes the emergence of a truly representative democracy.

Complex Interplay of Political Instability and Democracy in Pakistan

Pakistan is now experiencing political fragility as a result of the government's instability, the

disarray of political groupings, and a weak political culture. Since the founding of the Pakistani state, accommodating different communities has been a problem in a multilingual and multiethnic nation like Pakistan. For Pakistan's Baloch and tribal people in particular, the capacity to accept varied but impartial administration institutions that would ensure socio-political and economic justice has been a persistent concern. Pakistani people feel powerless and unsatisfied in the face of uncertainty, which causes them to lose trust in institutions and put their personal interests ahead of the state's, which eventually impacts society.

For example, since Nawaz Sharif assumed power after the 2013 elections, the political climate has been turbulent, leading to a faltering economy and a collapsing democracy. There have been accusations that the Nawaz regime has engaged in money laundering. Such acts of political parties and higher-ups in the leadership are the reason for Pakistanis' indifference in public institutions. Pakistan is a weak state on the international stage because of its uncertain political structure and inadequate socioeconomic policies implemented at both the federal and local levels.

Batool (2023) contends that constitutional liberalism nurtures political stability by establishing a system of justice and the rule of law, delineating a code of conduct for state and governmental institutions, and curbing their authority. However, Pakistan grapples with periodic political instability due to the imbalance of power between the military and the civilian government (Batool, 2023). Illiberalism in Pakistan allows military to capture vital state resources and allows them to control unprecedented authority. Because of excessive dominance of military over civilian government we witness a military state within the democratic framework of modern Pakistan.

The stumbling and fragmented nature of political organizations serve as the root causes of political instability in Pakistan. Governments in the country rely on coalition support to attain power, resulting in an incessant struggle to appease all coalition parties. The formulation of a sound policy in Pakistan is convoluted process as it involves participation of various political parties. Notwithstanding the shift towards a multiparty democracy, Pakistan underwent a lengthy phase of military control due to the underdeveloped state of democratic institutions (Nasir & Faqir, 2021). Elements that hindered the operation of parliamentary democracy included bureaucratic incompetence, leg-pulling, the apprehension of the president dissolving the government, military intervention, provincial autonomy, the *wedera shahi*, and the *malik system* (Nasir & Faqir, 2021). The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) coalition administration oversaw Pakistan's well-functioning governance from 2008 to 2013 (Nasir & Faqir, 2021). Following that, nevertheless, the coalition government often functioned under military coercion and encountered significant challenges in preserving a democratic environment.

Imran, Murtiza, and Akbar (2023) argue that Pakistani political parties commonly function inefficiently, which leads to the formation of coalition governments. Such governments face criticism and find it difficult to maintain a coalition government, which has an impact on decision-making processes both within and outside the country. In this volatile political environment, leaders take advantage of popular sentiment for their personal gain. The current coalition-building approach in Pakistan has added to the unrest within the nation. The formation of coalitions is a fleeting process that, if it is not successful, breaks down, leading to even more unstable circumstances. Political parties' lack of a definite majority reflects public mistrust, which causes support for each party to decline. A stable political system is established by the people's unwavering will, and political instability has been made worse by the collapse of the federal government. Inability to maintain a fair federal system led to a decline in trust in national leaders and a rise in faith in ethnic leaders who take advantage of people's emotions for their own gain. This phenomenon is problematic because it exacerbates the divisions already present in a society such as Pakistan and has an overall negative influence on the equitable allocation of power within the country's democratic framework.

A bottom-up, comprehensive strategy is needed in Pakistan to guarantee that the many voices of the country are represented in government decisions. A comprehensive and all-encompassing strategy will guarantee significant institutional transformation along with transparent election procedures. Pakistan desperately needs structural and policy changes to ensure civilian primacy, foster political pluralism, and close socioeconomic divides. As we can see, productive dialogue including all relevant parties is necessary to address Pakistan's democratic deficit. Pakistan's democracy may develop by adopting democratic ideas and fostering understanding among its varied populace if it remains true to these principles.

Military rule in Pakistani Politics and its impact on Democratization

The military in Pakistan has always taken center stage in political landscape. For nearly 70 years, the Pakistani army has not only looked after the security but also seriously engaged in governance, with many commanders finding themselves at the epicenter of economic and political might. However, civilian leaders, particularly the prime minister, have recently unleashed their political might, employing the military to fortify their blossoming democratic ideals. This not only reduces the military's thirst for influence but also dampens the likelihood of a coup. Nevertheless, the military will strive to retain its significance in the economy and government, all while upholding its historical duty as the country's guardian.

Pakistan has experienced three military takeovers and four subsequent governments, highlighting its ongoing issue with martial law (Kashyap, 2022). In 1958, President Iskander Mirza declared martial law and annulled the constitution, leading to a period of 44 months of military rule (Kashyap, 2022). This ended in 1971 with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rise to power (Kashyap, 2022). In 1977, Gen. Zia ul Haq and his army toppled the parliament, placing Bhutto under house arrest. In 1985, Zia ul Haq submitted his resignation (Kashyap, 2022). Nawaz Sharif's third and last military coup occurred in 2007 under Gen. Pervez Musharraf. In 2010, the 18th Amendment to the Pakistani Constitution was ratified, introducing a parliamentary government. This modification removed the President's power to dissolve the legislature. Despite recent events, the army's influence on decision-making bodies has not diminished (Kashyap, 2022).

Pakistan is an excellent example of the devastating results of military-dominated governments. Despite the promise of long-term political stability, many people relate representational democracy with benevolent dictators (Butt, 2022). Pakistan's military has been known for its command and instrumental advantages since the 1950s. Because of this notion, the army has staged coups and ruled the country for half of its history (Butt, 2022). The military has taken on a more menacing role in the other half, asserting control over security and foreign affairs. The pursuit of order by the military has produced discontent, resulting in coups, brutal civil wars, and covert discussions between divided elites. The implications of Pakistan's military-dominated governments have been far-reaching, as democratic institutions guarantee a calm and orderly transition of power rather than rapid economic growth or progressive social goals (Butt, 2022).

Military dictators often brandished fear as their weapon, and political elites eagerly collaborated to consolidate their rule and reap economic rewards. This paralyzed the political culture of the state, as political intellectuals defended the military and anointed military dictators as presidents (Butt, 2022). Pro-military politicians launched offensives against their adversaries, fanning conflicts and fostering opposition alliances. The government frequently employed state apparatuses against opposition parties, resulting in the exile and execution of politicians. This trend stifled the growth of the political process and corroded the image of democratic institutions. Efforts are underway to address the root causes of political backwardness, yet the military has eluded culpability. Legislation forms the lifeblood of a nation, and since independence, socio-economic progress in Pakistan has been impeded by various hindrances (Khalid & Yaseen, 2016). The fundamental purpose of democratic institutions was to enact laws and legislation, but this was eclipsed by presidential ordinances and inherited colonial rules (Khalid & Yaseen, 2016). Amendments were railroaded based on personal whims, with the consent of the majority disregarded. Politicians supported dictators in amending the constitution, granting them avenues for personal gain (Khalid & Yaseen, 2016). The military has sought to impose order, whether directly in power or orchestrating events from the shadows. However, the irony lies in the chaos it has sown in its pursuit (Khalid & Yaseen, 2016). The greatest reward of democratic systems lies not in rapid economic growth or progressive social policies, but rather in the certainty that the transfer of power from one government to another will be peaceful and predictable.

Societal Faultline: Ethno-Religious Divides and its impact on Democracy in Pakistan

Pakistan is a country diversified in terms of linguistic, religious, and ethnic strands. Five major ethnic groups are predominant in Pakistan namely the Pathans, Sindhis, Bengalis, Punjabis, and Baluchs. The mismatch between Pakistan's democratic structures and its diversity is the root cause of the country's ethno-national disputes (Kukreja, 2020). The ruling class refused to share power with majority and minority groups, resisting acknowledging that society is pluralistic. According to Mustaq (2009) as cited

in Kukreja (2020), this resulted in the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971. The leaders of the Muslim League misjudged the strength of language and regional allegiances in the years leading up to independence. Soon after foundation of modern Pakistan, the force that united the Muslim world disintegrated, leading various ethnic, sectarian, and other groups to seek recognition and accommodations in political and constitutional frameworks (Nazir, 2001 as cited in Kukreja, 2020).

The political climate in Pakistan has remain authoritarian despite formally setting up a federal structure protected by rule of law guaranteed under successive constitutions. After its independence Pakistan was engaged in an ethnic secessionist movement in East Pakistan. The problem of ethnic movement in East Pakistan is closely connected to the failure to yield a recalibrated politics of accommodation and reconciliation between the central authority and the provinces. Even after Bangladesh liberation war, this tendency of centralized authoritarianism persisted in Pakistan. Absence of inclusive policies often leads to clashes between the state and ethnic groups in Balochistan, as well as in rural and urban Sindh (Siddiqi, 2020). In 2009, after the 18th amendment of the constitution, then civilian government tried to reduce shackles of centralized politics. This amendment not only guarantees the much-needed provincial autonomy but also nurtures a democratic polity adorned with periodic elections (Siddiqi, 2020). Nevertheless, ethnic movements continue to reverberate. Balochistani secessionist activities became more visible, while fresh proposals for the creation of new province-level administrative divisions in Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Siddiqi, 2020). As the multi-ethnic fabric of the state poses a formidable challenge to a stable democracy. advocates argue that consociational democracy offers a viable solution for a deeply divided society, serving as a remedial measure for political instability in Pakistan (Kukreja, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The demise of democracy in Pakistan has had significant ramifications, leading to the inadequate institutionalization of public offices due to the absence of a robust democratic culture. Consequently, these venerable institutions are ill-equipped to address the diverse needs of Pakistan's multiethnic community, resulting in the country becoming a breeding ground for criminal and terrorist activities. The state's failure to provide employment opportunities across society, coupled with its heavy reliance on donor funding, further exacerbates this situation, tarnishing Pakistan's global standing as an impoverished and flawed nation. The root cause of Pakistan's democratic decline lies in periodic military coups and unconstitutional reforms, which have led to a lack of stability and citizen disengagement from domestic politics. This erosion of democratic principles has profoundly affected the economy, with Pakistan's status as a terrorist hotspot deterring international investors and impeding overall economic progress. To address the country's democratic deficit, decisive actions must be taken to address the diverse needs of Pakistan's multilingual and multiethnic population. The prevalence of dynasty politics, fueled by nepotism and cronyism, alongside corruption and a lack of accountability, further undermines public confidence and exacerbates socioeconomic disparities and disenchantment among marginalized groups. While daunting, acknowledging and exploring these challenges can pave the way for a more informed discourse on potential solutions. A comprehensive approach, involving institutional reforms, transparent electoral processes, socioeconomic inclusivity, and civilian supremacy, is essential to overcoming these obstacles and building a governance framework that truly represents and serves Pakistan's diverse population.

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