

Dilemmas and Dynamics: Introspecting the Challenges of Democracy in Pakistan**Dr. Subhash Kumar Baitha**

Assistant Professor

Department of International Relations

Central University of Jharkhand

Introduction:-The journey of democracy in Pakistan has been a subject of profound deliberation and scrutiny, a narrative shaped by challenges encountered from Pakistan's independence. While the nation's transition to democratic governance represented a momentous milestone, Pakistan has been accompanied by an array of intricacies that have hampered its consolidation and efficacy.

The complexities of democratic development in the Pakistani context have engendered persistent discourse and reflection. While acknowledging the strides made towards democratic governance, it is imperative to dissect the various issues that have influenced the course of democracy's growth and resilience in Pakistan. By delving into these challenges, we can glean insights into the multifaceted dynamics that have shaped the trajectory of democracy in Pakistan.

This analysis is not only an exercise in historical examination but also an exploration of the present challenges that continue to influence the democratic landscape. The amalgamation of historical context and contemporary realities serves as a foundation for comprehending the intricacies that have beset democratic progression. In this pursuit, this article endeavors to shed light on a spectrum of issues that have collectively cast shadows upon the democratic terrain of Pakistan.

Unstable Foundations: Interplay of Political Instability and Democracy in Pakistan-The government's wobbling, the disarray of political factions, and a feeble political culture have birthed a state of political fragility in Pakistan. Pakistan has spent half of its existence engulfed in internal political turmoil. The quandary of political instability poses graver implications in a multiethnic nation like Pakistan, where diverse cultural attributes abound. In the face of instability, individuals feel dissatisfied and impotent, as they lose faith in institutions and prioritize their own interests over the state's, ultimately leading to societal destruction. Underdeveloped nations, such as Pakistan, grapple with the challenges of decentralizing authority, fostering national unity, fostering economic growth, promoting political engagement, and ensuring social welfare. The political landscape in Pakistan has been in disarray since the 2013 elections, with Nawaz Sharif's regime at the helm, resulting in a stumbling economy and a crumbling democracy. The involvement

of the Nawaz regime in money laundering has spawned an unstable political structure, dividing the masses, impeding economic and social progress, and projecting a feeble state on the global stage (Rakhshani, 2021). 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. Illiberalism grants the military unchecked access to state resources and authority, culminating in the establishment of a deep state within the state. This enables the military to challenge the power of politicians, manipulate the media and the market, and exert control (Batool, 2023).

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 both domestic and foreign policies necessitates the backing of all factions within a party, rendering policy formulation a formidable task for the government (Rakhshani, 2021). This organizational void paves the way for the formation of coalition governments that face constant pressure from their partners. Such dynamics significantly impact the processes of internal and external policy-making.

Imran (2022) underscores the imperative of robust public support for the successful implementation of domestic and foreign policies. When political parties function ineffectively, they sow division and exploit public sentiment for their own gain. The political landscape has descended into chaos, with leaders manipulating emotions to further their own interests. Religion remains a sensitive subject in society, and the populace is plagued by a lack of information, rendering them unable to make informed choices between parties. This engenders a chaotic and dependent political landscape. Military rule in Pakistani Politics and its impact on Democratization The military's theatrical prowess has always taken center stage in Pakistan's political arena. For nearly 70 years, the army has molded the

nation's security agenda, at times even dictating the very core of 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 quenches 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 bore witness to military rule in 1958 when President Iskander Mirza declared martial law. Gen. Ayub Khan assumed the role of Chief Martial Law Administrator, and following the 1971 war with India, he was succeeded by Gen. Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan (Kashyap, 2022). The inaugural military coup unfolded in 1977 when Gen. Zia ul Haq dissolved the parliament and confined Bhutto to house arrest (Kashyap, 2022). In 1985, Zia ul Haq resigned, and the final military coup occurred in 2007 with Gen. Pervez Musharraf seizing power. In 2010, the National Assembly passed the 18th Amendment of the Constitution, transforming Pakistan from a Semi-Presidential to a Parliamentary Republic in an endeavor to forestall military coups and curtail military influence on decision-making bodies (Kashyap, 2022).

Pakistan stands as a vivid testament to the tragic repercussions of military-dominated administrations. While representative democracy offers a greater promise of long-term political stability, many associate the instability of democratic systems with benevolent dictators. Since the 1950s, Pakistan's military, renowned for its all-encompassing control and instrumental advantages, has been steeped in this conviction. The army has acted upon this condescension, staging coups and officially ruling the nation for half of its existence. In the other half, the military has assumed a more sinister role, exerting control over security and foreign policy, casting an ominous shadow (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, progress 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. Amendments were railroaded based on personal whims, with the consent of the majority disregarded. Politicians supported dictators in amending the constitution, granting them carte blanche to pursue personal gain. 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.

Pakistan has endured four military rulers through three military coups, signifying the absence of complete democratic rule in any generation. The military's incursion has led to the people accepting these intrusions and control within the democratic framework. Decades of patronage politics have left Pakistan teetering, with the economy plummeting in the latter half of 2019 and inflation soaring (Kashyap, 2022). This lack of democratic experience and excess exposure to patronage politics directly impact citizens' expectations of a leader, exposing the consequences of Pakistan's democratic inexperience on its citizens' expectations.

Societal Faultline: Ethno-Religious Divides and its on Democracy in Pakistan Pakistan pulsates with a tapestry of diversity, boasting an intricate web of ethnic, linguistic, and religious threads. It was once cleaved into five dominant ethnic clusters: the Bengalis, Punjabis, Pathans, Sindhis, and Baluchs. The ethno-national conflicts that plague the nation arise from the profound incongruity between its heterogeneous society and its political institutions. Pakistan's ruling elite has been obstinately averse to embracing the pluralistic composition of its populace, adamantly refusing to relinquish power to any minority or majority faction. This deep-rooted resistance culminated in the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, an irrevocable rupture (Kukreja, 2020).

Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has grappled futilely with establishing an organic and efficacious covenant among its federating units, despite sporadic advances toward provincial autonomy and devolution. Federalism was enshrined as a cornerstone for Pakistan's

formation in the Lahore Resolution of 1940, yet it has languished in its quest to materialize as a federal state (Kukreja, 2020). The political climate in Pakistan has remained steeped in authoritarianism, unabated by the ostensible presence of federal characteristics in successive constitutions. The tumultuous chapter of ethnic secessionism in East Pakistan failed to yield a recalibrated politics of accommodation and reconciliation between the central authority and the provinces. Instead, the trajectory of centralized authoritarianism persisted following Pakistan's fragmentation, leading to militarized clashes between the state and ethnic groups in Balochistan, as well as in rural and urban Sindh (Siddiqi, 2020). Since 2009, Pakistan has seemingly broken free from the shackles of centralized politics through the 18th Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment not only guarantees the much-needed provincial autonomy but also nurtures a democratic polity adorned with periodic elections and partisan rivalry (Siddiqi, 2020). Nevertheless, ethnic movements continue to reverberate, with a secessionist fervor gripping Balochistan and fervent demands for new administrative units in Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. Pakistan's democratic-federal state in transition presents an opportunity for the constructive regulation of ethnic aspirations, albeit paradoxically fueling the urgency for ethnic assertions as the state grapples with the devolution of administrative powers from a deeply entrenched federal bureaucracy to provincial entities (Siddiqi, 2020).

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 fractured society, serving as a balm to alleviate the ailment of political instability (Kukreja, 2020).

Democracy Deferred: The Absence of Democratic Political Culture in Pakistan

The Pakistani government lacks the vibrancy required for democracy, resulting in a feeble democratic framework. Ali Jinnah established a democratic precedent by relinquishing his position as president of the Muslim League, granting the Muslim League the freedom to engage in political endeavors without official interference (Aqdas, 2020). However, Liaquat Ali Khan later disregarded this practice, enfeebling the Muslim League and reducing it to a puppet of the government. The Pakistani democratic system also suffers from military interventions, such as coups in 1958, 1977, and 1999, which enervated democratic institutions and cast a detrimental shadow on constitutional and legal advancements (Aqdas, 2020). Military regimes suffocate freedom of expression, the birth of political parties, healthy

competition, and the liberty of press, all of which are crucial ingredients of a democracy. Consequently, democratic values have withered away in Pakistani society, leaving the governmental system bereft of political awareness (Aqdas, 2020).

Political parties in Pakistan are organized public collectives striving for political supremacy, fulfilling three pivotal roles: mobilization, electioneering, and governance. They showcase diverse organizational characteristics and agenda structures (Murtaza, 2023). Party leadership is either personalized or merit-based, often shaped by captivating individuals and transforming into dynastic entities. Pakistan's five major parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League, Pakistan People's Party, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, are dynastic institutions, while the remaining two, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, continue to orbit around charismatic founders (Murtaza, 2023).

Pakistan's political culture and precarious parliamentary democracy primarily stem from a frail and undemocratic party system. The country's political parties are top-heavy, lacking a middle layer that connects them to the masses. Traditional elites dominate these parties, garnering votes solely based on familial history and social status, rather than their dedication to the communities they claim to represent. Consequently, mainstream parties have stagnated, with the same leaders, voices, programs, and propaganda echoing through the corridors of power. The absence of fresh recruits restricts the entrance solely to the younger generation of traditional elites. The dynastic nature of leadership obstructs the democratization of political parties, a vital prerequisite for the success of any parliamentary system. To truly thrive, a system of checks and balances must be in place, including institutional oversight from organized party systems, a robust opposition, democratic functioning within the party, party discipline, and a clear separation of powers. In Pakistan, these requisites have remained relatively feeble.

Faltering Democracy: The Consequences of Democratic Shortcomings in Pakistan

The downfall of democracy has also birthed a plethora of predicaments, with Pakistan's institutions being debilitated and incapable of flourishing over time. This has transformed Pakistan into a hollow nation, akin to a malnourished body. The country has metamorphosed into an orphan child, reliant on foreign funds, and a breeding ground for terrorist activities. The dearth of democracy has reduced Pakistan to a destitute nation in the eyes of the world, tarnishing its reputation built on lofty ideals.

The frequent disruptions in the democratic process, encompassing military coups and unconstitutional shifts in governance, have engendered political instability and a corrosion of democratic norms and values. This has engendered a sense of uncertainty among investors and impeded economic growth and development. The economy is a treacherous terrain for habitation and commerce, as the general public has fallen prey to terrorist assaults. Foreign investors and traders are hesitant to infuse capital into Pakistan, enfeebling the economy. To invigorate the nation and foster its prosperity, drastic measures must be implemented. Education must permeate from the apex to the base, ensuring equal opportunities for all, as education is the sole conduit to achieve affluence and progress. The absence of genuine political competition and the prevalence of dynastic politics have led to feeble and ineffectual governance, with a culture of nepotism and patronage overshadowing meritocracy. This has resulted in a misallocation of resources, feeble policy implementation, and a paucity of efficient public service delivery, further eroding public trust in democratic institutions. The pervasive corruption and lack of accountability have corroded public trust in the democratic process, fostering a perception of systemic injustice, which in turn fuels social inequality, alienation, and frustration among marginalized groups.

Conclusion-In conclusion, various challenges that have beset the democratic landscape of Pakistan paints a complex portrait of a nation grappling with the multifaceted dynamics of governance. The issues highlighted within this paper, ranging from political instability and military influence to weak civilian institutions and socio-economic inequities, collectively underscore the formidable hurdles that have hindered the seamless development of democracy in the country. Political instability has perpetuated a cycle of uncertainty, undermined the continuity of policies, and engendered a lack of public trust in democratic institutions. The recurring specter of military influence has led to an uneven power balance, stifling civilian governance, and sidelining elected representatives. Weak civilian institutions plagued by corruption and inefficiency have thwarted the state's capacity to effectively address pressing societal challenges. Ethno-religious divides have acted as both a source of strength and friction within the democratic framework. The inability to effectively manage these differences has, at times, led to tensions, conflicts, and disruptions, diverting attention from broader governance objectives. The persistent battle against terrorism and security concerns has frequently diverted focus from vital socio-economic and developmental issues, occasionally resulting in an imbalance between civilian and military authority. Electoral irregularities and manipulation have eroded public faith in the electoral system, potentially tainting the democratic process. Political polarization and a lack of consensus

among parties have hindered the effective functioning of governance mechanisms, leading to policy deadlock and disillusionment among the population. Socio-economic inequities, perpetuated by poverty and limited access to basic services, have marginalized certain segments of society, impeding their meaningful participation in the democratic process.

However, it is imperative to recognize that these challenges in Pakistan are not insurmountable. The acknowledgment and exploration of these issues pave the way for a more informed discourse on potential solutions. It is the collective commitment of political leaders, civil society, the military, and the public that holds the key to charting a path toward a more stable and inclusive democratic future for Pakistan. Addressing these challenges demands a holistic approach that encompasses institutional reforms, transparent electoral processes, bridging socio-economic gaps, nurturing a culture of political inclusivity, and ensuring civilian supremacy. The lessons drawn from the analysis of these problems can serve as a foundation for constructive change. Ultimately, the resilience and adaptability of Pakistan's democracy will be defined by its ability to transcend these challenges, embracing democratic values while finding common ground among its diverse populace.

References

1. Aqdas, T. (2020). The Dilemma of Democracy: Why has Pakistan Failed as a Democratic State? *Modern Diplomacy*. Retrieved from <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/09/10/the-dilemma-of-democracy-why-has-pakistan-failed-as-a-democratic-state/>
2. Batool, F. (2023). Political crisis in Pakistan: is democracy responsible? *The Loop*. Retrieved from <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/political-crisis-in-pakistan-is-democracy-responsible/>
3. Butt, A. I. (2022). Why Pakistan always seems on the brink of collapse. Retrieved from <https://journalofdemocracy.org/why-pakistan-always-seems-on-the-brink-of-collapse/>
4. Imran, M. (2022). Political Instability in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences. *UOS Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 6(1).
5. Kashyap, S. (2022, January 12). 'Pakistan's rise to Military Rule and its Political and Societal degeneration.' Retrieved from <https://www.claws.in/pakistans-rise-to-military-rule-and-its-political-and-societal-degeneration/>
6. Khalid, I., & Yaseen, Z. (2016). Role of Military as the Guardian of Democracy in Pakistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 22(1).
7. Kukreja, V. (2020). Ethnic Diversity, Political Aspirations and State Response: A case study of Pakistan. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 66(1), 28–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556120906585>
8. Murtaza, N. (2023). Pakistani political parties and the democratic deficit. *East Asia Forum*. Retrieved from <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/04/20/pakistani-political-parties-and-the-democratic-deficit/#:~:text=Since%20independence%20in%201947%2C%20Pakistan%20has%20experienced%20democracy,unelected%20institutions%20like%20the%20military%20to%20derail%20democracy.>
9. Parvez, F. Pakistan's Military-Democracy complex. Retrieved from <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/pakistans-military-democracy-complex>
10. Rakhshani, B. (2021, June 14). Political instability and Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/political-instability-and-pakistan/>
11. Siddiqi, F. H. (2020). Ethnic Movements and the State in Pakistan: A Politics of Ethnicity Perspective. In M. Weiner (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Race and Ethnicity in Asia*. Routledge.