

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Democracy in Pakistan: An Analysis of Institutional Role in Strengthening Democracy.

Sajjad Ali ^a Nelofar Ehsan ^b Hamza Abdur Rab ^c

Abstract: The research intends to explore the complex dynamics of democracy in Pakistan, placing special emphasis on the roles played by important political institutions and public perceptions on a practice of democracy. Even though Pakistan has a formal political system, it does not enjoy the effective functioning of democratic processes and is overwhelmed by a multitude of difficulties including but not limited to institutional weaknesses, military influence, political instability, corruption, and lack of an effective rule of law. The research observes all these institutions, executive, judiciary, military, and the electoral system, to see how they influence democratic outcomes. How exactly does that institution include or detract from the process of democratic consolidation. On top of that, the research also touches on how the common people perceive democracy, inquiring as to how the citizens of Pakistan view their democratic system and the effect that these perceptions have on political behavior and participation in elections. The research specifically investigates the causes of the problems created in Pakistan's democracy and seeks to strategize upon probable or viable solutions to strengthen democratic governance through a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology.

Keywords: Democracy, Pakistan, Institutional Role, Political Parties, Military, Governance, Youth

Introduction

The complex and multifaceted landscape of democracy in Pakistan comprises institutional interplay with public perceptions. The journey of Pakistan, in fact, is full of military interventions, political instability and corruption, and frail civilian governments and the impact itself is severe on the consolidation of democratic norms. In the present work, the demands of analysis will chiefly focus on important institutions like executive, judiciary, military, and parliament to understand the issues democracy in Pakistan faces today. Being the most important organ of governance, the executive wing is usually formed and headed by elected representatives. The unfortunate reality is that Pakistan has constantly faced disturbance and hurdles in functioning on account of military interventions in civil political affairs, which brought about a scale of power imbalance. These interventions tend to upset democratic institutions and create conditions that inhibit civilian governments from exercising authority (Inayatullah & Inayatullah, 1998). As the judiciary was granted the constitutional ability to check on the executive's powers, the judiciary itself has faced accusations of selective interpretations of the law, inconsistencies in rulings, and a sometimes-overt alignment with certain political forces, further contributing to the erosion of public confidence in democratic processes.

The military has historically been a strong player in Pakistan's political arena, with increasing power and sway over national security and foreign affairs, even with the backdrop of constitutional governments. This situation is seen as a danger to the democratic system in that it encourages the view that the military rather than the democratic institutions is the ultimate arbiter (Shafqat, 1998). On the one side, the military's shadow is cast over a number of areas, such as the economy and civil administration, in addition to matters

^a M.Phil. Scholar, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Pakistan.

^b Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

^c M.Phil., Department of Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad Pakistan.

concerning foreign policy, which complicate any attempt to consolidate democracy. The parliament, as the representative legislative body of the people, has its own woes of factionalism and corruption, leading to underperformance through terrible processes of legislation. While the formal democratic institutions exist, the very process of functioning is often subverted by rich political elites for whom the briefs of the parliamentary decision-making cannot supersede party interests. It is these institutional shortcomings that really prepare disillusionment and misperceptions of democracy in Pakistan (Rizvi, [2015](#)). There is a palpable aspiration for democratic rules among the masses, but generally speaking, their trust is quite low in democratic institutions. Elections are held within cycles, but the general feeling is that these elections are marred by a number of malpractices like voter manipulation, rigging, and electoral violence. Political polarization, corruption, and non-accountability create further barriers to public relations with democracy (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency, [2023](#)).

The conventional media, along with new media, plays a funny role at times endorsing democratic ideals and at times driving deeper wedges into political divides and undermining trust in institutions. Though these challenges confront the immediate future of democracy in Pakistan, clear prospects exist for its future. Comprehensive reforms-increasing transparency, accountability, and political stability-into institutional democracy, the strengthening of which requires an independent and consistent judiciary, as well as a minimal military role in politics for civilian supremacy, will guarantee free and fair elections (Khan, [2019](#)). Most importantly, electoral reforms will be centralized in guaranteeing free, fair, and transparent elections reflecting the people's will. Empowering political parties and developing a more robust and inclusive political culture will further strengthen parliamentary democracy as well. With the growing involvement of civil society and youth, who are increasingly being voluble about their demand for transparency, justice, and good governance, the prospect of democracy rests with Pakistan. Social media platforms and civil movements have given public voice to discourse and political engagement, thus indicating an alteration in the country's mind-set toward more accountable and popularly participatory democracy (AHMAD, [2015](#)).

While Pakistan's democracy faces significant institutional and public perception challenges, the prospects for strengthening democratic governance lie in effective institutional reforms, greater public participation, and a commitment to democratic norms. The future of institutional democracy in Pakistan depends on the ability of its institutions to function independently, the resilience of its political system, and the engagement of its citizens in the democratic process.

This analysis of data seeks to interact with and assess the major challenges and prospects to democracy in Pakistan regarding certain critical democratic institutions (like political parties, judiciary, military, and electoral processes). As well, it delves into the public perception of these institutions (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development And Transparency, [2023](#)). Through the quantitative and qualitative data, the study would seek to understand the nature of the influence of these institutions on the functioning of democracy in Pakistan on one hand, and also towards gauging the prospects with which to strengthen democratic processes on the other. This was the general election that saw approximately 55% turnout, down from 58% in 2013. The downward trend seems to suggest growing disillusionment in the belief that elections would get things done. Low voter turnout is often blamed among other things on political apathy and disillusionment on the part of voters for believing that there is no actual choice in politics corruption among those who use it (Qazi et al., [2024](#)).

In India, the First-order procedural: 45% of citizen politicians according to the survey by Gallup Pakistan conducted in 2018 about the perceived electoral integrity or freedom and fairness of elections. Another 40% never made any opinion regarding the elections and transparency in the electoral process. These things indicate a severe threat to democratic legitimacy. Such concerns have stripped away the credibility of the electoral system from the citizens of the country. Rigging, not transparent, and politically manipulated have formed a great corrosion to trust the electoral system (Choudhury, [1958](#)).

Trust in Institutions and Public Perception

Public perception of key democratic institutions such as political parties, judiciary, and the military has significantly affected democracy in Pakistan. Surveys and data from many sources including Gallup Pakistan and Pew Research reveal the extent of trust people have in such institutions.

Political Parties:

The trust that people have in political parties in Pakistan is really poor. A Gallup Pakistan survey from 2019 revealed that only about 25 to 30 percent of people trust the biggest political parties like PML-N, PPP, and PTI. For many Pakistanis, political parties are sources or the cause of corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement. This can erode belief in democracy, because parties are seen as concentrating on personal gain rather than doing the public good. Of those political parties, Pakistan has been struggling to sustain as instruments of interest representation and of the popular will (Ashfaq et al., [2023](#)). Political parties have endured over the past several decades despite rather disturbing measures, including Martial Laws and other Presidential interventions. Most political parties act as instruments of patronage and mass mobilization.

The skills of interest representation in Parliament are still including political parties mobilizing orientation provides for the fact that political leadership uses political parties for street demonstrations and agitation. So political parties have now matured into effective instruments of opposition to parliamentary work but are questionable in their contribution towards strengthening democratic norms or doing legislative/rule-making work peacefully in the Parliament. In Pakistan, the challenge of the party leadership is to change the character of the political party from an instrument of mass mobilization to one of interest representation and advocacy in the parliament (Inayatullah & Inayatullah, [1998](#)). An outstanding feature of party politics in Pakistan has been the formation and dissolution of alliances and coalitions.

To the Military

Traditionally, the military has been an influential factor in Pakistan's politics; it has frequently proved itself as a more stabilizing agent than undermining civilian rule. According to the 2018 Pew Research survey, 60% of Pakistanis agreed with keeping the military free from civilian hold. However, a very significant proportion (approximately 40%) believes that such involvement should not occur because it damages the goods of democracy (Ashfaq et al., [2023](#)). Therefore, most public opinions are divided on that issue (Khan & Khan, [2020](#)).

Corruption and Governance Issues

Corruption is still perhaps the most daunting challenge to democracy in Pakistan at present. Public perception data on corruption show that Pakistan is widely perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in the world and which has a severe impact on democratic institutions:

Damning Evidence of Corruption

Pakistan consistently ranks unsatisfactorily in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Its CPI score for 2020 was just 31 out of a possible 100, showing that the public sector comprises political parties, the judiciary, and law enforcement agencies: all are permeated by rampant corruption. In a survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan in 2019, over three-fourths of the respondents regarded corruption as one of the major obstacles to democratic efficiency, significantly affecting the public trust in institutions (Khan, [2019](#)).

Governance and Public Satisfaction

Data from World Bank and Gallup surveys indicate that a significant chunk of population does not appreciate the government's efforts in some major sectors, including health, education, and poverty alleviation. According to a 2018 Gallup Pakistan study, nearly 65 percent of people were not satisfied with the

government's handling of economic affairs, thus signifying the difficulty of ruling through democracy (Khan & Khan, [2020](#)).

The Role of Youth in Democracy

Youth is considered an important factor for the future of democracy in Pakistan. Data show increasing inclination of youth towards the political process, which can actually enliven democratic institutions. So, another important role of youth in democracy is active participation in leadership. Youth not only followers of a movement but also come as leaders championing many things on behalf of their peers. Many politicians across the globe started very young in their careers through inspiration of democracy and wanting to change their communities for the better. Involvement in youth political organizations, community work, or student government often forms a springboard for more formal political careers. Youth leaders offer a perspective that is generally more open to diverse ideas, more attuned to technological and social changes, and more eager to meet challenges that will define the future. In an era when technology is engulfing the current systems, young leaders will undoubtedly challenge most of the institutional structures, many of which are rigid and refuse to change. They will advocate for a political environment that favors a rapidly changing society. And yes, young people have organized themselves and initiated several things to give inclusive political systems, curbing corruption, and advocating for greater transparency in government (Taj & Rehman, [2015](#)).

Youth Engagement

The percentage of registered youth voters, according to the Election Commission of Pakistan, aged 18-35, increased by nearly 10 percent from 2013 to 2018. It reflects that young Pakistanis are more inclined toward becoming a part of the electoral process, which may steer the course of a more representative and dynamic democracy.

The social empowerment of youth through facilitating them with all forms of social media has increased their political awareness. Surveys show that social media is to be used as a major source of political information for 40-50% of youth in Pakistan and rather cares about what it means to democratize and participate politically (Ashfaq et al., [2023](#)). With greater engagement, this can lead to more opportunities for democratic reform and activism with young people, particularly with issues around corruption, good governance and accountability.

Conclusion

The research on the Challenges and Prospects of Democracy in Pakistan: Attempting to Understand Institutional Roles and Public Perception is an important facet of multiple democratic developments in the country. It identifies a significant case study as well to study the nature and interplay of democracy, governance, and institutional roles through examining and analyzing the country's history and standing amid tumultuous politics and varied socio-economic challenges. Through political transitions such as the establishment of a parliamentary democracy, Pakistan still faces some severe obstacles to the realization of true democratic ideals.

Democratic institutions come weakly to Pakistan, which the study identifies as one of the core challenges. The executive, the legislative, and the judiciary, all of which are so important for governing, face the serious issues of inefficacy, corruption, and politicization. Some of the basic things revolve around the political instability of the past, and with the state of governance in Pakistan today, it has not often been the way out; hence continuity in policies and leadership would further weaken already-stressed institutions. By virtue of sycophantic politics, the judiciary, although possessing potential to guard the rule of law and democratic values, actually finds itself embroiled with rivalries and institutional conflicts.

The elected legislature had suffered much limitation concerning freedoms and work effectiveness created by political parties, which pursued short-term political interests over long-range national interests. The interference of the executive, also, in the most vital institutions frequently disturbed the provision of checks and balances necessary for a democratic state to become solid. The historical role played by the military has further complicated the evolution of democracy in the country, as it has made an entry into the political landscape to a considerable extent. Continuous military interventions frequently follow them by the imposition of military regimes, and this has impeded democratic consolidation and created a loss of confidence in civilian governance.

The military establishment of Pakistan has performed a vital role in safeguarding national security. However, its encroachments in the political domain have usually dampened civilian democratic control, created power imbalances and disallowed political autonomy for elected governments in the country. The study, however, has some prospects for democracy in Pakistan in spite of these challenges. But civil society over the years gets more resilient and active, as non-government organizations, media houses, and ground movements come up to the fore to push for more democratic reforms and create accountability in regard to the government.

First, the mainstream media acted as a mouthpiece for the cause of political transparency, dissemination of public awareness about governance, corruption, and civil liberties, and the social media site above all empowered even the common people to show their large concern during those times, providing online platforms for political debate or even deliberation and mobilization. This research also emphasizes the strength of the institutional reform pathway to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. Reforming political institutions against corruption, strengthening transparency, and restoring accountability among them will go a long way in reestablishing public trust in the political system.

Electoral reforms that would solve the problems of voter representation and reduce the authority of political dynasties would also participate in the necessary structural change needed to create a very inclusive political environment. Reinforcing the judiciary as an independent and impartial institution is also imperative in ensuring that democratic principles are upheld. Educating and raising awareness through political adjunction are very important for such an electorate, which is likely to become far more informed. Civic education at all levels within society makes citizens realize how their rights and responsibilities function in the democratic setting.

It demands mobilizing and politically educating all sections of citizens, which would be an invaluable asset in mobilization against the entrenched political elite and in demanding accountability. Optimizing opportunities for democracy in Pakistan now appear grounded in widespread acceptance of the extreme need for decentralization. This might further improve governance at the grassroots level by creating a more direct avenue for democratic participation; this would empower local governments and develop their capacity to deliver services and respond to citizens' needs.

Moreover, empowering women, youth, and marginalized groups to take a more active role in political processes would make democracy more representative of and responsive to the diversity within the society. While Pakistan continues to face a slew of challenges on its path toward a reputable democracy, many opportunities are available for growth and progress. The most important thing is strengthening institutions and improving public perception as well as ensuring custodian democratic governance or responsiveness, inclusivity, and accountability.

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