

Research Article

Democratic Setback in Pakistan: Challenges, Implications, and Way Forward

Aftab Ahmad ^a

Abstract: This article explores the various aspects of the decline of democracy in Pakistan, which is a crucial subject with important consequences both within the country and on the global stage. Pakistan's democratic progress has been characterized by a succession of obstacles, alternating between periods of civilian governance and military administrations. This paper aims to examine the fundamental factors behind these disturbances in democratic systems, with a specific focus on the recent occurrences that have contributed to the current state of vulnerability in democratic governance. This analysis explores the complex relationship between political instability, governance challenges, the significant influence of the military, economic fluctuations, restrictions on media, and the deterioration of civil liberties. The study additionally provides a comparison analysis with other countries that have encountered comparable democratic obstacles, extracting insights and tactics that could be relevant to the Pakistani situation. The paper highlights the importance of a collaborative endeavour to develop a durable democratic culture, pushing for enduring strategies rather than temporary solutions. The primary objective of this article is to offer a thorough analysis of the democratic obstacles in Pakistan and to facilitate meaningful dialogues and effective approaches toward a more stable and democratic future.

Keywords: Pakistan, Democratic Challenges, Implication, Way Forward

Introduction

Pakistan's ebb and flow of democracy tells a crucial story of how politics have changed over time, with times of hope and danger. In this article, the problems that Pakistan's democratic institutions are having now are looked at in a more complex way by comparing them to a historical conflict between civilian rule and military control. The goal is to figure out all the difficult things that have gone wrong with Pakistan's democracy right now. Not only does this affect the 220 million people who live in the country, but it also affects the peace in the area and politicians around the world (AHMAD, 2022). Bangladesh was formed in 1947, and since then, it has been a battleground for both democratic and authoritarian groups (Hossain, 2012). The country's politics are complicated, with threads of citizen hopes, military acts, judicial activism, and effects from other countries. Democracy has often had problems because of these difficult interactions, which have caused it to rise and fall in a cycle. The first part of the piece gives a brief history of Pakistan's turbulent path to democracy. This look back at the past is very important for figuring out where the problems with democracy today came from and for getting ready to look at problems in the present.

The main point of the analysis is Pakistan's recent setbacks in democracy, which include political instability, problems with the government, and a strong military presence in civilian matters. The instability of the economy and problems with government have made democratic systems even less stable. The study looks at media freedom and civil rights, which are both important for a healthy democracy but have been getting less freedom in recent years. Pakistan's fight for democracy has effects on the area and around the world, not just in the country itself (Afzal, 2022). Because of its important geopolitical location and complicated ties with major world powers and neighbouring countries, the country's internal politics have effects that reach far and wide.

This article also does a comparative study, looking at how other countries have dealt with democratic problems that are similar to ours. Seeing things from a global point of view not only helps us understand Pakistan's position better it also helps us find patterns and strategies that might work in Pakistan. In the last

^a M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

part of the piece, which looks to the future, several strategies and policy suggestions are made to improve Pakistan's democratic institutions and norms. Not only does this mean changing the way the government works, but it also means giving power to civil society, protecting media freedoms, and creating an atmosphere that helps democracy grow. Working together and getting help from other countries is also very important in this process. This in-depth introduction sets the stage for a deeper look at Pakistan's political problems, what they mean, and possible ways to move forward. The goal is to add a full and varied view to the discussion about democracy in Pakistan by providing both critical analysis and useful suggestions for making the future more democratic.

Significant of the Research

The study is highly pertinent in intellectual, political, and socio-economic terms, both within Pakistan and on a global scale. An examination of democratic transitions and failures in Pakistan is essential not only for comprehending the country's internal dynamics but also for comprehending the broader consequences for regional stability, international relations, and worldwide democratic trends.

Research Question:

- ▶ How does the recent democratic setback in Pakistan impact the political stability and socio-economic development of the region, and what strategies could be implemented to mitigate these challenges and promote democratic resilience?

Objectives of the Study:

- ▶ The primary objective of this article is to conduct a thorough analysis of the recent democratic setbacks in Pakistan, identifying the underlying causes, examining their socio-political and economic implications, and proposing viable strategies for strengthening democratic norms and institutions.

Research Methodology:

The research will be quantitative in nature. In this regard, secondary sources will be used to gather the data through research journal articles, governmental records, newspaper articles, and books.

Literature Review

Pakistan was envisioned as a contemporary democratic nation. The entire struggle for the establishment of Pakistan was rooted in the fundamental principle of democracy, which emphasizes the importance of allowing the people to participate in the governance of the country (Akhtar, [2009](#)). During the initial stages of Muslim political engagement, Muslims in the sub-continent advocated for the protection of their minority rights (Pandey, 1978). However, the founders of Pakistan strongly believed that Muslims could only secure their legitimate position in the political landscape of India through the implementation of democracy. Allama Iqbal emphasized that establishing a province with a Muslim majority in the northwest of India would greatly benefit the entire country. Such a region would serve as a safeguard against any ideological or military threats originating from the West. Following independence, Pakistan had numerous obstacles in its efforts to develop a democratic system (Monshipouri et al., [1995](#)). Allan McGrath's book 'Destruction of Democracy in Pakistan' thoroughly examines the various factors that hindered the establishment of a robust democracy. The establishment and functioning of democracy in Pakistan were consistently hindered. An important determinant in this context is the observation that Pakistan continues to exhibit several attributes of medieval society in its rural regions. It is crucial to comprehend that the number of rural seats in the national and provincial assembly is significantly higher than that of metropolitan areas. Feudalism remains prevalent in Pakistan. In this particular political system, the general population, who are under the sway of their feudal lords, are deprived of the freedom to express their own viewpoints and are limited to voting for candidates who enjoy the backing of their feudal overlords (MUSTAFA, [2014](#)). While efforts are being made to question and dismantle these constraints, there is a significant amount of work to be accomplished in order for individuals to truly enjoy unrestricted freedom of expression.

The Sardari and Tribal system poses a significant obstacle to the establishment of democracy. Individuals adhering to the Sardari system exhibit a strong inclination to follow the decisions made by their Sardars (Mezzera, [2009](#)). Consequently, the entire voting bloc supports the candidate favoured by their Sardar, a preference that may change from one election to another. Democracy was introduced by the British in the sub-continent almost a century earlier, coinciding with the transition of education from traditional to modern methods from a political evolutionary perspective. The proponents of contemporary education during that era could assimilate political views and comprehend their relevance. Nevertheless, the British only made their high-quality education accessible to a select few individuals residing in urban areas, particularly those with a significant British presence. Regrettably, the British mostly neglected the Muslim-majority provinces that later formed Pakistan in 1947, leading to a situation where the local population was unable to fully engage with the principles and practices of modern politics (Ahsan, [2003](#)). Consequently, these regions remain far from achieving genuine political democracy. An important indication of this fact is that thus far, 'electables' have played a crucial role in the establishment of the government in the national and provincial assemblies. In the 1937 election, which marked the inaugural general election in the region, independent candidates achieved between 30 to 40 per cent of the total seats in provinces with a Muslim majority (Sandhu, [2009](#)). The prevalence of independent candidates prevailing over major political parties in their different constituencies highlights the significant disparity between political democracy and the general population of Pakistan.

In addition to these fundamental problems, the power struggle within Pakistan's institutions contributed to additional postponement in the establishment of a genuine democracy (Jan [2010](#)). On the brink of independence, Pakistan had to demonstrate its legitimacy as a sovereign nation. It confronted significant hurdles to its existence, including refugee crises, financial difficulties, antagonism from neighbouring countries on both the Eastern and Western frontiers and administrative crises. After assuming the position of the first Governor-General, Quaid-i-Azam appealed to British officials to remain in Pakistan and continue their duties. Competent individuals were scarce in practically every profession, and the most prominent one was the utter absence of political leadership capable of serving the entire nation of Pakistan and prioritizing the unity of Pakistan over regional interests. Following the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951, the void was swiftly occupied by bureaucracy. The bureaucratic elite, comprising competent administrators recruited and trained by the British, assumed control of the country and marginalized the political leadership. They eschewed democracy and persisted in their rule due to their insatiable lust for power. To prevent politicians from influencing the government, they incorporated service members into politics by appointing General Ayub Khan as the Defence Minister. In 1958, Ayub Khan retaliated against the bureaucrats by eliminating their political influence, mirroring how they had previously displaced politicians.

Subsequently, Pakistan has deviated from genuine democracy. The constitution of 1962 failed to offer any prospect of democracy and was ultimately abolished by its creator in 1969. The protracted refusal to share power and provide electoral representation in accordance with democratic principles ultimately led to the partition of Pakistan in 1971. Regrettably, as a collective, we have failed to internalize the lessons from the past and find ourselves once more embroiled in the identical struggle for control. The Constitution of 1973 initially brought optimism for democracy, but it was marred by several alterations made by different administrations, who used the document to serve their own interests. As a result, the original constitution was extensively distorted. The 8th Amendment in 1985 and the 17th Amendment in 2003 were significant changes to the constitution that shifted power towards centralization and authoritarianism (Azeem, [2022](#)). These modifications were strategically employed by their writers to advance their objectives. The 18th amendment, ratified in 2010, aimed to reinstate the Pakistani constitution to its initial state, with the participation of all political factions. The legislation was drafted and approved by the parliament with unanimous agreement. Nevertheless, the fundamental structure of the constitution, namely the parliamentary system, is currently being contested by a prominent political group that advocates for the adoption of the presidential form. They have initiated the debate and are even suggesting the possibility of a constitutional amendment once they return to power with a two-thirds majority, as they assert.

Pakistan has had a protracted and tumultuous evolutionary process in its journey towards democracy. We have experienced the adoption of three different constitutions, numerous revisions, the imposition of totalitarian regimes, the occurrence of midterm elections and the removal of popular governments, and most recently, the historic passage of the first successful motion of no-confidence against the current Prime Minister. However, it appears that significant restructuring will be necessary in the upcoming years to establish a secure democratic democracy. Pakistan, 75 years after its establishment, is yet to witness the successful completion of a full five-year parliamentary term by its inaugural democratic government, devoid of any disruptions. Allowing an elected administration to serve its full five-year term, irrespective of our personal preferences, would greatly contribute to the establishment of genuine democracy and solidify its credibility.

Analysis of Current Democratic Setbacks in Pakistan

The democratic structure of Pakistan has recently encountered substantial obstacles. Formerly a symbol of democratic optimism in South Asia, the country is currently facing a series of obstacles that jeopardize its democratic institutions and principles. The goal of this study is to look at the current political situation, the problems that institutions are having, and the social and economic factors that are making democracy worse.

Historical Background

The fights for democracy in Pakistan go back a long way. Since it became independent in 1947, the country has gone back and forth between civilian and military governments (Lal, [2010](#)). Pakistan's military has been in charge of running the country for about half of its history. Even when civilians were in charge, they greatly affected politics. Instability in politics in the past has made it harder for democratic institutions to grow healthily, leaving them open to threats now.

Overview of the Political Environment and Recent Developments

A string of unsettling events marks Pakistan's current political situation. A party led by Imran Khan, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), won the 2018 general elections (Hashim, [2018](#)). However, there were claims of military interference and election fraud. Khan's time seemed like it could be a new era of government at first, but it quickly became unpopular because he was autocratic, bad at running the economy, and stifled different points of view. The opposition parties have said that the PTI government is using state resources to silence critics and political opponents, which makes the decline of democratic values even worse.

Significance of State Institutions

The role of governmental institutions, namely the court and law enforcement, has been crucial yet subject to debate. The judiciary, known for its fluctuating adherence to democratic norms, is currently under scrutiny for allegations of bias and excessive exercise of authority. The neutrality of the organization has been called into doubt due to its moves to disqualify political leaders and intervene in parliamentary proceedings. Law enforcement agencies are frequently perceived as politicized, operating under the sway of influential political entities rather than maintaining impartial adherence to the law (Hathaway, [2002](#)).

Impact of the Military

Pakistan's democracy losses are still largely due to the military's control over the country's government. Throughout history, the military has exerted influence over political discussions by direct coups or covertly exerting authority. This influence has frequently resulted in the subversion of civilian administrations and the erosion of democratic institutions.

Socio-Political Factors

Socio-political variables exacerbate the democratic issues in Pakistan. The curtailment of civil liberties and media autonomy is an escalating apprehension. Journalists and activists encounter various forms of intimidation, censorship, and legal obstacles, which restrict the ability to engage in public dialogue and express criticism towards the administration. The erosion of democratic values is also evident in the diminishing scope for civil society and public protest.

Economic Consequences

The democratic issues have been worsened by economic mismanagement and catastrophes. The government's ineptitude in efficiently tackling economic challenges, including escalating inflation, unemployment, and debt, has resulted in popular disillusionment with democratic procedures. The presence of economic instability frequently shifts focus away from democratic reforms as the more pressing demands of immediate survival become the priority.

International Relations:

The democratic losses experienced by Pakistan have substantial ramifications for its international relations. The deterioration of democratic principles is a matter of worry for the entire community, especially Western democracies. This view significantly impacts foreign aid, investment, and diplomatic ties, leading to Pakistan's increased isolation in the global arena.

Challenges Faced by the Democratic System in Pakistan

Weak Political Institutions

Pakistan's Parliament and courts, among other political institutions, have been seen as weak and open to outside effects (Siddiqi, [2020](#)). People have said that the judiciary is biased and goes too far, even though it is very important for upholding democratic ideals. People have sometimes thought that its decisions were made for political reasons, which hurts the trustworthiness of the court system.

Electoral Fraud and Voter Trust

In Pakistan, the voting process has often been harmed by claims of fraud and trickery. People don't trust the voting system as much because of these worries. There are ongoing problems in Pakistan's democracy that make it less effective, such as vote cheating, a lack of openness, and the use of money and force in elections.

Corruption and Lack of Accountability

There is still a lot of corruption in the government, and it touches many levels. It hurts trust in political systems and slows down economic growth. The fact that there aren't any good ways to hold the government accountable and transparent makes this issue even worse.

Freedom of Speech and Media Censorship

The government and the military, among others, exert a great deal of censorship and pressure on the media in Pakistan. This hinders the press's freedom and the public's ability to get fair information. Attacks on journalists and activists who speak out against the government are bad for democracy because they silence critical views and dissent.

Socio-economic Disparities

Inequalities in Pakistan's society and economy make it hard for people to take part in democracy. A big part of the population can't fully participate in the democratic process because of differences in health, schooling, and job opportunities. Because of these differences, people from different social and economic groups are also underrepresented in politics.

Ethnic and Sectarian Divisions

Pakistan's mix of different racial and religious groups makes it hard to run the country democratically. These differences often lead to political and social problems, which makes it harder to build a strong national democratic character. The fact that the government can't handle these differences well makes things worse and can even lead to violence, which hurts democracy even more.

Implications

The loss of democracy in Pakistan has serious and many-sided effects, affecting the country in many areas, both at home and abroad. There is less rule of law and fewer civil rights in the United States because

democratic norms are being broken down (Abramowitz, [2018](#)). This includes freedom of speech and the press. People who disagree with the government are often silenced, and the media is often censored. This environment chills public debate and makes it harder for people to hold their government accountable. Because it is stuck in the middle of politics, the judiciary has had trouble staying independent, which has made people even less trusting of institutions. The social and economic life of the country is being affected by this weakening of political institutions. When politics are unstable, economic policies and changes needed for the people's growth and well-being often get pushed to the back burner. This causes things to stay the same and makes things harder for people who are already having a hard time.

Pakistan's democratic setback has affected its strategic relationships and image around the world (Zehra, [2022](#)). Concerns have been raised about the decrease in democratic practices by Western democracies, international human rights groups, and foreign investors. This might affect trade, government aid, and diplomatic links with other countries. Because of this, Pakistan might become more and more cut off from the rest of the world. This could make it harder for it to do things like trade, security, and foreign policy. Unrest in a country's government and the loss of democracy can also affect that country's ties with its neighbours and the politics of South Asia as a whole. It is harder for Pakistan to fight terrorism and keep the country safe now that it has had some problems with democracy. People often think that a strong democracy is a defence against terrorism and racial violence because it lets people argue without violence and speak out. When democratic norms are weakened, it could leave a space for extremists to fill, which would make the area even less stable. Pakistan's democratic problems have deep and wide-reaching effects on the country's government, society, and relationships with other countries. They also raise serious concerns about the country's future path to a stable and successful democracy.

Strategies and Way Forward

There are a number of possible plans and tactics that could help the country move towards a more stable and effective democratic system. Some of them are under

Getting Democratic Institutions Stronger

Building Institutional Capacity: To make key democratic organizations like the Parliament, the judiciary, and the election commission more effective, open, and free, you should make strengthening them a top priority.

Judicial Reforms: Make changes to the judiciary to make sure it is independent and can work without political influence. This will help people trust the legal system more.

Electoral Reforms

Transparent Election Processes: Make changes to the election process so that it is more open and fair. This includes using technology to stop people from messing with votes and making sure that elections are watched fairly.

Voter Education: Teach voters about their rights and why their vote is important. This will encourage them to take part in the political process in a smart way.

Measures Against Corruption

Strong Enforcement of Laws against Corruption: Make and execute strict laws against corruption to hold everyone in the government accountable.

Independent Groups Fighting Corruption: Set up separate, politically unaffected groups to look into and punish cases of corruption.

Support for Civil Rights

Free Speech and the Media should be Protected: Protect the right to free speech and the press. As a key part of democracy, support a free and impartial media.

Participation in Civil Society: Encourage a strong civil society where people can freely voice their views, criticise government actions, and fight for democratic standards.

Stabilisation and Growth of the Economy

Getting Rid of Economic Gaps: Put in place policies that reduce economic inequality and encourage growth for everyone. This will improve the economic foundations of democracy.

Socio-economic Development: To get more people involved in democratic processes work on making education, health care, and job prospects better.

Getting Past Racial and Religious Differences

Inclusive Governance: Support inclusive governance that includes all of Pakistan's different racial and religious groups, solving their concerns and lowering tensions.

Dialogue and Reconciliation: To help bring the country together and encourage attempts at dialogue and reconciliation between different racial and religious groups.

Keeping Civil and Military Relations in Check

Setting Clear Boundaries: Make sure there are clear lines between civilian government and military jobs so that the civilian government has the most power in making decisions and running the country.

Military Reforms: Push for changes in the military that will bring it more in line with democratic ideals and civilian oversight.

Support and Cooperation between Countries

Communicating with other Democratic Countries: Ask other democratic countries to help improve your democracy by giving you advice and sharing the best ways to do things.

Efforts to be Diplomatic: Use diplomatic avenues to improve Pakistan's image around the world and stress that it is committed to democratic reforms.

Education and Making People Aware

Democracy Education: To build a culture of democracy from a young age and make civics and democratic ideals part of the national curriculum.

Campaigns in Public: Start programs to teach people about how important democracy is and what they can do to keep it going.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article emphasizes that Pakistan's path toward a stable and efficient democracy, although filled with difficulties, is not impossible to overcome. The challenges encountered by the democratic system in Pakistan are fundamentally ingrained in historical, institutional, and socio-political factors. Nevertheless, the essay highlights that these obstacles might be effectively tackled by making focused and determined endeavours. Essential approaches for progress involve enhancing democratic institutions, enacting judicial and electoral reforms, combatting corruption, safeguarding human freedoms, and fostering socio-economic development. Furthermore, it is imperative to tackle ethnic and sectarian differences, maintain a harmonious civil-military relationship, and actively involve the international community in order to make progress. The paper continues by urging all key participants in Pakistan's democracy, including the government, civil society, media, and international partners, to actively cooperate in implementing these reforms. The statement promotes an unwavering dedication to democratic values and a collaborative endeavour to guarantee a democratic, stable, and prosperous future for Pakistan. The study suggests that the best course of action is to adopt a resilient approach, implement necessary reforms, and revitalize the democratic values in the country.

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