

## Why Pakistan's Democracy Failed: An Analysis of Political, Social, and Economic Challenges

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### Abstract

Pakistan remains a prisoner of its own constitutional democracy as it continues to face obstacles towards formulating a stable and functional democracy. This paper attempts to discuss and analyze the numerous factors that are responsible for the collapse of democracy, partitioning based on Pakistan's history, politics, institutions, and socio-economics. To start with, the author elaborates the account of history such as the genesis of Pakistan as well as the active political role of the army which has undermined self governance and democracy as a whole. Moreover, the author studies the feebleness of political parties and the absence of powerful political system that translates into bad governance, corruption, and poor public sector management. The rest of the paper tries to capture the politics and social life of Pakistan with the help of religion and religious extremism and the consequences that have resulted in deepening the political chasm and instability within Pakistan. Korean style economic development of misallocation of resources, wealth gap, and foreign aid dependency has deepened the wounds of democracy. The growing influence of foreign actors in Pakistan's domestic politics also adds another layer of complexity. Besides the formal structures of democracy, democratic practice in Pakistan is constantly deteriorating due to the prevalence of weakness of institutions, corruption, militarization, and fragmentation of the society to name a few. This research shows the intricacies of Pakistan's democratic timeline and sheds light on the systemic reforms that can enhance democratic governance in the country in the years to come.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Political instability, Corruption, Military intervention, Islamization, Terrorism, State, Governance, Economic

### Introduction

Pakistan has faced the challenge of democracy since its formation in 1947. Even though a democratic system, encompassing elections, a constitution, and civilian governments, is in place, there have been constant interruptions in the form of military coups, political instability and authoritarian rule. This tussle between the hopes for democracy and political governance has created an intriguing conundrum: Pakistan is a democracy in name only, since the construction of the polity has been far removed from the revered terms democratic consolidation. To respond to Pakistan's democracy not taking root, it is crucial to comprehend the context it emerged from. The partition of British India in 1947 into Pakistan came with multi-ethnic, religious

and regional fault lines that further complicated the formation of an integrated national identity. Given this political fragmentation, paired with the political elite's failure to create broad-based coalitions, set the stage for future instability. In addition, Pakistan's political institutions lacked strength to begin with, and former Pakistan leaders constantly found it difficult to align competing ideas on how to run the governance of an independent state. Pakistan had allowed its democratic government to be unstable due to a few main reasons, one being the frequent intervention of the military. The military has taken control of Pakistan for almost half its age, in the shape of coup d'etats or indirect through manipulating civilian leaders. Even if military rule brought some stability at times, it severely weakened the growth of democratic rule and value systems. The everlasting conflict between soldiers and civilian leaders has resulted in an intensely weak political culture where democracy was unable to blossom. Every new established civilian government has been unable to dominate the soldier heads, and this imbalance has made it impossible for Pakistan to ensure democracy for long. Apart from the political disarray due to military intervention, an insufficient division of power within the political parties has contributed to undermining democracy in Pakistan. Parties in Pakistan tend to revolve around specific persons rather than an idea or doctrine, leading to inconsistency in governance, and policies, and outcomes over an extended period of time. Loyalty is given to a party not due to the cherished use of those policies but to friendships and patron-client relationships instead. Consequently, power tends to fluctuate ephemerally, governance suffers, and meaningful enduring political change goes unachieved. Furthermore, the Pakistani ruling class has been awash with corruption which makes people lose remaining faith in the political setup and democracy. The issue of religion in Pakistan's politics is also very important in understanding the democratic failures in the country. From the beginning, Islam has been used to justify the birth of Pakistan and naive political Islam has, in conjunction with the traditional, merged into Islam itself to capture the populace's sentiments. The increasing fusion of religion with politics has, to some degree, produced Islamization of state policies in general. This promotion of religious fundamentalism and the growing power of non-state actors such as militants has further fragmented the society of Pakistan. It has made so much more difficult to construct a democratic multicultural society where political and religious disagreements are solved through a peaceful democratic process instead of warring violence. Democracy's survival has also been hampered by these economic problems which Pakistan faces. Pakistan is experiencing severe economic problems. Inflation is very high, the country is impoverished, and there is a growing deficit which the country fails to meet, and all of this leads to a loss of faith in the democratic institutions. The combination of poor economic management fueled by heavy dependency on foreign aid and loans created and sustained an economy that is permanently dependent on outside help. This in turn affects the domestic politics of Pakistan. This economic weakness is blocking the capacity of elected governments to meet the urgent demands of the citizens and also to take decisions which, if implemented, would increase the democracy. The impact of media and legal powers in Pakistan is good and bad. Press also has a responsibility to report corruption, seek for changes in programs, and demand accountability from the government. But at the same time, it is controlled by the military and the power political forces hence suffer from intervention and control.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the deeper issues that account for the collapse of democracy in Pakistan. The aim is to provide holistic reasons as to why Pakistan has been unable to successfully implement democracy as a system despite having all the necessary components by looking at historical, political, economic, and social angles

along the country's democratic trajectory. The paper will analyze possible routes towards the future of democracy in Pakistan, which includes outlining reforms needed for systematic consolidation of democracy and offering suggestions on how the country can improve its democratic governance to meet the expectations of its citizens.

### **Historical Context**

Democracy has been a complex issue for Pakistan, and over the years the country has made much progress as well. The relations between Pakistan and India has always been hostile and kept worsened the situation, with the constant threat of military intervention and terrorism, coupled with corruption had put Pakistan in a dire political state.

### **The Formation of Pakistan and its Early Politics Issues**

In 1947, Pakistan was created as a means for Muslims from the Indian subcontinent to safeguard their identity and political interests from the Hindu-dominated India. The events that lead to the parts emergence can be best described as primitive rage, large scale movement of populations, along with political chaos. This country emerged from ethnic and sectarian rifts that made nation building seem impossible. The Partition of British India into two states was brutal with widespread death and the displacement of millions. This violence did not only inflict national trauma, but also set the foundations for inter-ethnic, and inter-religious violence bearing further impact on Pakistan's history. When Pakistan was being formed, the founding father Muhammad Ali Jinnah had the foresight of a democratic, pluralistic state where the rights of minorities were assured. Unfortunately, the dream of a democracy was stymied by political fragmentation and absence of a unifying political ideology. The first few years after independence saw creation of more or less non-functional governments with weak leadership and order. The first attempt at constitution building, which resulted in the 1956 Constitution, was marred by internal strife and was never effectively executed or enforced (Nasr, V. 2004). In addition, there was also lack of a clearly defined system of governance that was supposed to guarantee national unification or integration with the state.



**Source:** *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Partition of India,"

### **Military Interventions and the Civil-Military Divide**

The fragility of Pakistan's democratic institutions was soon exposed when, in 1958, the military intervened for the first time in the country's politics. General Ayub Khan, the then Commander in Chief of the Pakistan Army, assumed headship after leading a military coup against President Iskander Mirza, who was suspended along with the constitution. This was the initiation into a long lasting era of military governance in

Pakistan. Military rule exercised by Ayub Khan delivered not just power, but also sponsored political advancements, economic development and industrialization. Albeit with some economic growth, Ayub Khan's regime, born out of dissent, manifested tyrannical rule by countering any political opposition and branching the power purely unto the army. During this military governance, known as The Ayub Era (1958-1969) a system of presidency was introduced focusing power into one executive center. Khan first attempted to perfect the political landscape through opposition suppression and nurturing Basic democracies and a new Constitution in 1962 that projected false hope of controlled democracy. The imbalances crafted through the reforms to aid the brute force of military junta and systematized elimination of opposition left a blistering discontent amongst the trade unions and political parts resulted from the absence of purposeful civil freedom and political participation. This civil chaos and breach of order caused Ayub Khan to step down in 1969 and suffocated the idea of democracy yet again. General Yahya Khan, the successor, was welcomed with a fragmented nation which needed to tackle political instability, and unrest from eastern peasant territories which were seeking independence. Yahya Khan's military regime did nothing to unify the country, and during the first elections of Pakistan in 1970, the numerous rifts within the country were made apparent. The very undemocratic political reaction towards the elections, which bore witness to the victory of a Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League in eastern Pakistan, was not approved of by the ruling military establishment of western Pakistan. This catalyzed the civil war of 1971 and eventually led to eastern Pakistan gaining independence and transforming to Bangladesh. As the crisis deepened, the control of military on politics of Pakistan increased significantly (Siddiqi, A. 2007).

### **The Era of Zia-ul-Haq and The Islamification of Politics**

Post the defeat in the 1971 war, internal politics of Pakistan were divided. General Zia-ul-Haq took control of the government in a military coup in 1977, gaining rule over the country's affairs after toppling Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government. After being a key figure in formulating the 1973 Constitution, Bhutto became a highly divisive figure with his government being marked as corrupt, authoritarian, and irresponsible. The military coup conducted by Zia was initially claimed as a justification to control the political unrest and suspected fraud, but it soon became apparent that he was trying to "Islamize" the political structure and laws of Pakistan. The period of Zia's rule (1977-1988) can be characterized by his ultra-nationalist abusive policies, such as declaring martial law, violent oppression of members from other political parties, and installing harsh Islamic laws that forever shattered the political harmony of the country (Rashid, A. 2007). Zia's implementation of the controversial Hudood Ordinance along with other constitutional amendments imposed a savage constraints on the interpretation of religion in the columns of law involving criminal activity and female rights. Adopting Zia's policies not only altered the identity of Pakistan from the vision of the creators, but also established it as a center of conservatism, Islam, and fundamentalism. In light of the global Cold War, and the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, Zia's regime generated acceptance both within the borders and out by supporting the United States, leading Pakistan becoming a frontline state against Soviet dominance. Zia's military rule also provided key assistance to the Afghan mujahideen as well. This alignment aid in both the economy and military, but politically it worsened the situation by empowering the military's involvement in politics as well as expanding the military's scope of foreign relations.

### **The Shift to Civilian Governance and Ongoing Turmoil**

Zia's death in 1988 from a dubious plane crash signal the cessation of a military

dictatorship, but as civilians took control, democracy was still very absent. In the elections of 1988, Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, returned as the first female prime minister of Pakistan. However, her government was extremely unstable and is considered to be one of the most corrupt and economically worst periods of Pakistan. Scope of problems does not stop there because Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), also had to deal with political difficulties when he rose to power in 1990. The military had been a problem with the country ruling from behind the curtains, which resulted in them having much power. During this time period, Pakistan encountered the inevitable problem of short term governments, because of the continuous rule of the corrupt military over headless political parties. Both Benazir and Nawaz had to bow down to the popular sentiment and resigned to join a caretaker government in 1993. All these issues combined together created a lot of chaos along with absence of educated strong politicians which led to citizens being fed up with Pakistan's so called democracy (Khan, s. 2012). The government's inaction on concerns like poverty, unemployment, and increasing religious radicalism resulted in widespread dissatisfaction during this time.



Source: *The News*

### **The Military Returns to Power: The Musharraf Era**

In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf, who had served as the Chief of Army Staff, led a military coup against Nawaz Sharif's government after her power battle with the military regarding control of foreign policy including the Kargil issue with India. His rule from 1999–2008 is remembered for his attempts to modernize the economy and introduce new reforms, but his continued consolidation of military control over national security and foreign policy also defined this period. While permitting a return to civilian rule in 2008, Musharraf's remaining years in office prolonged the military's dominance over Pakistan's political landscape (Plides, R.H. 2012).

### **The Continued Civil-Military Struggle and Current Dynamics**

Pakistan experienced a restoration of civilian rule in the post-Musharraf period, yet the military remained significantly powerful. Even under civilian governments like Benazir Bhutto's PPP or Nawaz Sharif's PML-N, there has been a continuous struggle to control the military, which further exacerbated the already unstable political situation. The military still controls and is involved with important facets of the state such as national security, foreign relations, and internal politics. Rather, the emergence of new political actors like Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have made an already complicated environment even more complex, but the state of democracy is still weak.

## **Weak Political Institutions in Pakistan: A Key Factor behind the Failure of Democracy**

Pakistan's democracy has not been successful due to weak political institutions, one of the main reasons for its failure. In any democracy, political institutions serve as the building blocks because they provide the essential checks and balances on government's governance and ensure transparency, accountability, and representation. They define and give the structure through which power is exercised, control is enforced, and public policies are formulated. In the case of Pakistan, however, these institutions have always been superficial, too young, and susceptible to bureaucratic political, military, elite and other interest group pressures. There is so much discontinuity and instability that has impeded the attempt to consolidate democracy.

### **Fragmented Political Party System**

Another characteristic of weak political institutions in Pakistan is the split-shattered political party system. The political parties in Pakistan have been constructed over the years upon individual leaders instead of ideologies and clear policy frameworks. The over-dependence on charismatic leaders like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, and more recently, Imran Khan, has resulted in loyalty dominated by personal subordination to the leader rather than any ideological or institutional loyalty. Such ideological ambiguity results in political parties that are almost always ineffective, incapable of retaining some internal order, and likely to break apart after the exit or decline of their leaders. Such a breakdown is further aggravated by the lack of strong grassroots support structures or sustained organizational development. Most political parties do not possess a well-defined party organization or a local base. They depend on patronage networks more than politically motivated followers, winning support through material gifts and personal ties instead of nurturing ideological loyalty. Consequently, Pakistan's political parties have been incapable of building institutional strength and policy competence for effective governance. This has created an uncontrollable change in politicians in office and of the parties in control, which leads to more instability in the country (Hussain, I. 2003).

### **Lacking in Strong Legislative Institutions**

Since its inception, Pakistan's legislature, guarding the National Assembly, has been marked by persistent inadequacies. It has often been neglected as the executive, especially the military and presidency, took charge of the decision making. The overwhelming influence of the executive created a scenario where the legislature turned into a rubber stamp for decisions made by the military and political elite. The systematic toppling of elected governments, both by military coups or through judicial interference, has greatly weakened the legislature's authority and function (Jaffrelet, C. 2002). The Pakistan Constitution of 1973 had been expected to make great strides to empower the lawmaker's body as the years unfurled, however, this has not been the case. Numerous parliamentary sessions have seen chaos, laxity, and inefficiency. Responsible political parties in National Assembly should have shown the maturity and capacity to legislate and make the government answerable to its citizens, which has not been the case. The Pakistan Parliament's inability to make law and democratic norms, combined with lack of accountability, has led the nation control the place that democracy deserves.

### **Judicial Independence and Integrity**

Judiciary independence and integrity, while formally existing in Pakistan's laws, has evolved and consistently faced obstacles. In general, Zia-ul-Haq and other military rulers tried to fabricate an authoritative regime by utilizing the judiciary under their



control, and throughout history, the courts have had a passive relationship with the power elites. Even though power changed hands to political civilians, the courts remained stuck to their politically driven decisions which, without question, were positively inclined towards the elites' whims. Judiciary weakness is best portrayed by the military rule of General Musharraf who, in 2007, dismissed Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as Chief Justice. The long standoff that ensued illustrated the profound absence of constitutional authority of the judiciary relative to the executive. Even though the post-Musharraf era saw the beginnings of increasing judicial activism, there remained a thin line wherein external forces strangled that drive and the democratic essence throughout the chaos, the drive remained directionless (Cheema, A. S. 2009). Furthermore, the courts in Pakistan have faced difficulties related to corruption, ineptness, and a large number of pending legal cases. This erodes public faith in the judiciary and hampers its ability to actively promote democratic values or guarantee responsibility. An independent and efficient judiciary is non-existent in Pakistan, which is why political institutions have considerably weakened. This is because the courts have failed to apply the law and order principle as well as the division of authority needed for a democracy to operate.



Source: *The News*, "Lawyers call off strike," Apr 15, 2018,

### **The Military's Contribution to the Decline of Political Institutions**

The military in Pakistan has been key to the gradual decline of established political institutions. From 1958, and General Ayub Khan's first military coup, the military has continuously meddled in the political domain. It has used direct military rule in the form of coups or indirect control using civilian governments. Every military ruler, including Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq, and Pervez Musharraf, has sought to consolidate power in the executive branch to the neglect of the parliament, political parties, and other democratic institutions. Since 1988, we have witnessed the recurrence of a democratic civilian rule under which the military has dominated crucial aspects of governance such as foreign affairs, internal security, and military defense maintenance. This has caused a widening gap with the army having a superior view of itself while regarding civilian institutions as feeble and incompetent. Failure to fully achieve democracy, in the eyes of the public, has led to a discouraging political culture where the emergence of a capable independent political elite that could confront the military's self-assumed authority is discouraged. The negative implications of military rule were even more severe in respect of Pakistan's civilian political institutions. The military's grip over national security, especially with regard to Pakistan's nuclear capabilities, and its international posture, has furthered the alienation of civil political institutions. The unchecked powers of the military have also stalled the construction of efficient political institutions that can exercise democratic functions in the absence of strong military influence (Dawn, 2019).

### **Dishonesty and Lack of Responsibility**

Dishonesty and corruption works like a poison in most factors of a country, especially in regards to political institutions of Pakistan. Corruption exists in every segment of government, from the top executive level down to the judicial and legislative branches. Political parties operate pretty much as personal business ventures for the benefit of certain individuals such as leaders and party members who engage in patronage politics where political loyalty is associated with government or state contracts and materials plus other advantages. This corrupt system of governance has deeply weakened the functioning of democratic institutions. This issue of no responsibility stems out from this corruption, lack of accountability. Political institutions of Pakistan have never been capable of providing an adequate framework that would provide them with the necessary system of checks and balances to their own actions, while the servants of the people never or rather seldom become responsible for their deeds. Power also resulted to a systemic as well as rational public corruption, deep operational dysfunction, enormous popular cynicism, and alienation from all governing bodies and the state. Insufficient service rendering and inadequate rule of law forces the citizens into looking for other alternatives to democracy such as military regimes or even religious militant movements.

### **The Consequences of Political Patronage and Clientelism**

Political patronage and Clientelism systems have worsened political institutionalism gaps in Pakistan. In Pakistan's political system, infamously built on political favor, networks got defined as the patronage system where favors and resources are exchanged for support. This reliance on political elites creates parasitic dependency that follows the political elite and disables any sound decision making, resulting in socially unjust systems. This system does not create robust and functional institutions; instead it increases the dominance of political families and political elite which in turn weakens the already fragile political system and stops the country from attaining a real representative-based democracy which is accountable to its constituents.

### **Pakistani Democracy's Economical Problems**

Pakistani's economic problems are marked as important issues regarding establishing existing democracies. The combination of economic hardship, suffocating government regulations, social imbalance, and international loans causes constant strife in and out which is harmful for democracy as it makes it impossible to build stable institutions and leads to a crippling environment internally. Such financial downturns lowers the credibility and reputation of sitting political leaders resulting in aversion towards democracy which invites authoritarian and military control. Economically, Pakistan remains in this problematic endless loop that forestalls any form of democracy or advancement of political systems and institutions which makes it stunted.

### **Long Lasting Poverty and Inequality**

One of the most pressing issues that Pakistan has to deal with is poverty and income disparity. Pakistan, although being a resourceful country, suffers from economic stagnation which results in high poverty levels within the region. Many people in the country live under the poverty line, especially in the rural regions which lack even the most rudimentary facilities like education, healthcare, and safe drinking water. The persistent poverty makes people lose faith in democracy as most of the citizens do not feel the benefits of having a political system when they struggle to meet the basic necessities of life. Political parties do not deal with poverty and inequality problem and instead focus on consolidating their power and patronage network instead on



developing policies that might help reduce poverty levels. Without a sufficient amount of economic development, provide in the form of a stable government, disenfranchised groups will resort to seeking alternatives to the process, such as military rule or extremism that promise change or governance that is different from the current system(Agha, A. 2017).

### **Infrastructural Problems and Economic Subservience**

We know that a few members of society hoarding the collective wealth increases the societal cleavage and creates room for political fiddling. The political Elites have completely alienated the already poor and marginalized, which, in turn, has destroyed the possibility of a participatory democracy. In addition, the neglect of the agriculture activities and the associated employment has made economic mobility elusive. The structural shortcomings of the economy have transformed Pakistan into an economically dependent nation. While agriculture does employ a large chunk of the population, it is rudimentary in nature, plagued with inefficiency, outdated methods and a low resistance to climate change. Pakistan's economic difficulties are related to foreign aid dependency. This too has limited the government's reasonability to service foreign debt and invest heavily in necessary domestic aspects and development like infrastructure, education, and healthcare ( Fair, C. C. 2014). Relying on other sources has also resulted in countries losing freedom in decision-making as institutions like IMF/World Bank controlling economies have proven detrimental to global growth. Economically powered from the outside, has remained detrimental to the democracy in Pakistan. Democratic institutions have weakened, as with the economic policies of a host country there is little room to develop and control growth. Political leaders have no choice but to follow foreign criteria that results in spending cuts and increase in taxes. All these factors, combined with low stability and political unsafety, leads to public anger and a reality shock to elected governments.

### **Unemployment and Underemployment**

Unemployment and underemployment are problematic in Pakistan, especially among the youth. Pakistan is one of the countries with the youngest people; more than sixty percent of the population is under the age of thirty. With such a youthful population, the country does not generate enough employment for the incoming labor force. This failure to create new jobs has resulted in a large number of people being underemployed in insecure, low-paying positions that do not utilize their skills or education. The growing unemployment rate, particularly among the youth, has led to severe dissatisfaction with the government and all but eliminated confidence in democratic institutions. The youth, who form a significant part of voted, are often left with limited options which can lead to lower electoral participation (Gul, I. 2013). Such frustration can trigger social disorder, disillusionment with politics, or in extreme cases radicalization. The failure of the government to deal with such issues has deepened the erosion of democracy because perpetuates the cycle of political violence, instability and economic hopelessness.



**Source:** *Center for Research and Security Studies,*

### **Deficits in Infrastructure and Energy Supply**

The very backbone of Pakistan's economy is heavily reliant on the ever evolving energy sector, but the country has been facing an energy crisis for several years. At the same time, electricity outages and unreliable supplies hinder industrial development and investment. Citizens on the other hand, are highly frustrated. These industries, small businesses, and the manufacturing sector are all facing losses due to the energy shortages which do not allow full themselves to be fully operational. Poor infrastructure development like lack of control on urbanization, water, and transportation has intensified the problem. The condition of roads and rail systems in Pakistan is not good and urban areas are poorly planned and do not have the necessary basic facilities. The economy suffers as a direct consequence, and citizens are unable to have easy access to essential services and basic needs which in turn causes them to lose trust in the government. Along with in excess energy supply, the country having no modernized infrastructure makes it extremely hard to integrate within the ever changing global economy. As a result, competition is limited which in turn restricts foreign investment. Consequently, this severely limits the ability of the Pakistan government to fulfill its economic goals, forcing citizens to lose faith in the already weakened democratic framework (Khan, A. 2015).

### **Corruption and Mismanagement**

Corruption and public mismanagement are no strangers to Pakistan. Public resources have always been lost from education, healthcare, and other important sectors through the dishonest dealings of politicians, civil servants, and certain businessmen. Throughout the years, these practices have created a huge gap between the living standards of the various populations in Pakistan. Corruption, on the other hand, discourages new investors, as they must pay unreasonable amounts of money just to get basic level business entitlement. As a result, the economy can become stagnated, and the standard of living deteriorates constantly. If certain policies are made to serve the interests of a minority, these policies are not good for the economy, which creates weak democratic standards if political rulers do not care much about citizens. This means that there is no responsibility and citizens are not motivated to participate in the process of lawmaking or in managing government affairs.

### **Gaps in Development and Autonomy of Provinces**

Pakistan is a country full of ethnic and geographical diversity and faces sharp

differences in regional economic activities. The socio-economic development among the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Balochistan is uneven, which has led to inter-province tensions. Punjab, the most developed province and the most populated, has traditionally been the center of economic and political power while the less developed provinces tend to feel neglected. In particular Balochistan has been economically neglected over the years and lacks basic infrastructure, education, and healthcare facilities. Such disparities have made people more politically volatile in terms of asking for greater provincial autonomy, especially in the more resource-endowed regions that remain underdeveloped. The federal government's inability to curb regional disparities greatly contributes towards the discontent that challenges the credibility of democracy in Pakistan. Regions that believe that they are economically marginalized or ignored often take part in separatist activities, violence, or extremism, which puts a strain on the political structure (Waseem, M. 2006).

### **Democracy in Pakistan and International Politics**

The geopolitics of both powerful states and neighboring countries have, to a great extent, shaped the political context of Pakistan. Their interaction has most of the times worked towards weakening the processes of democratization as superpowers have directly intervened in Pakistan's internal politics, foreign relations, and economic policies. The global context in which Pakistan operates, characterized by militarized alliances and geopolitical interests alongside foreign meddling, have had both direct and indirect impacts on the working of democratic institutions there and vice versa.

### **Role of the Armed Forces and International Security Partnerships**

Democracy in Pakistan has been especially impacted by the relationships it maintains with powerful states like The United States and China. Because of its location between emerging regional powers and its participation in the War on Terror, it has been strategically important for Pakistan giving rise to increased military dominance over its politics. In an effort to weaken Soviet dominance in the region during the Cold War, Pakistan's political and military leaders sought partnership with the West, especially the United States. In exchange for cooperation, the U.S. provided aid and military assistance which caused the Pakistani military to gain political prominence. This cooperation with superpowers often led to military rule as the men in uniform rationalized their governance under the guise of national security. It is safe to say that the US has always been at the forefront that provided military assistance to Pakistan while ignoring issues regarding democracy. There is therefore ample international military aid and diplomatic relations which provides suppression towards civilian governance in Pakistan, making it difficult for independent no ideological citizens to foster authority. Together with other foreign nations, the US chose to overlook the suppressive violence that Pakistan undertook on its own citizens which were labeled as 'other' and perceived to be supporting a stable region because of the dreadful war revolving in Afghanistan. These shows of support on an international scale have on some occasions damaged civil rule in Pakistan as the military and other self-serving elites take advantage of weak regulations(UNDP, 2017).



**Source:** *Atlantic Council*, “Kayani and Pakistan’s Civil–Military Relations,

Recently, Pakistan has fostered warmer relations with China, especially with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This economic cooperation has led to massive infrastructure investments, which have further cemented the military’s control of the Pakistan political system. CPEC has the ability to turn around Pakistan’s economy, but it has also made Pakistan more dependent on China, which diminishes the possible civilian government control over political and economic decision making. The growing involvement of China in Pakistan's development makes the already challenging triad of military, civilian, and international factors that influence Pakistan's political system more difficult.

### **Economic Interdependence and Globalization**

Pakistan’s economic strategy as well as its democratic evolution has been directed by international funding institutions, particularly the IMF and the World Bank. The country has gone through a set of financial crises over the years, which resulted in a cycle of negotiations for financial assistance. Such loans typically come with strings attached, most of which include austerity cuts, slashing government spending, and other changes that can undermine democratic action. International institutions have at times conflicted with Pakistan’s social development goals through their recommended liberalization and market integration policies. The privatization of state-owned enterprises that are a prerequisite for numerous loans has frequently resulted in work redundancies, deepening poverty, and a loss of government income, which has been spent instead of unused for public service investment. The effects of the IMF and World Bank policies have at times been assumed to have a negative impact on socio-economic wellbeing of the citizens of Pakistan, which leads to issues of discontentment in the society and alienation from the government (Ziring, L. 2003). Pakistan's ever-increasing external debt means that the country’s creditors have considerable control over its economic and political activities. With considerable portions of the country’s budget being paid to servicing of the debt, the government often has to fulfill external demands at the expense of the welfare of the citizens. This situation causes major strain on the government which provides little opportunity to devise new policies which are of real substance or introduce genuine changes. It is essential for Pakistan’s immediate economic survival to rely on external financial institutions and loans, but this jeopardizes the country’s independence and democratic framework as government is left with little scope in deciding what is best for the nation.



### **Ongoing International Conflicts and Competition**

Pakistan's and India's, as well as Afghanistan's, geopolitical rivalries have shaped Pakistan's domestic political divisions, often prioritizing foreign policy and national security over democracy. The strained relations with India, especially over the contested Kashmir territory, have repeatedly contributed to Pakistan's turmoil. The military, which dominates national security, has allowed the subordination of politics to military power by claiming that India poses a threat. The ongoing rivalry with India has prompted Pakistan to allocate significant resources toward military spending and defense, which has slowed social and economic progress. The military's predominant position in issues of national security has restricted the ability of civilian governments to control foreign relations and matters of defense, which in turn has lessened democracy. In some cases, military leaders have claimed justification for authoritarian rule in terms of national unity and security against external forces. Pakistan's assistance in the Afghan war during the 1980's, when it became a major partner of the US in combating the Soviet Union, had far reaching effects on the political balance of power within Pakistan. The flood of arms, the emergence of extremist movements, coupled with the ensuing chaos in Afghanistan helped to foster a militant political culture in Pakistan. Such policies have aggravated the situation in the country, because the military almost exclusively concentrates on external security threats, and ignores the needed changes towards democracy and vertical socio- economic development (Zahid, F. 2019).

### **The Influence of International Organizations and Human Rights**

The United Nations (UN), or other associational bodies like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have directly impacted Pakistan's democracy with regards to human rights, and so have other international organizations. International expectation is focused on Pakistan to improve its democratic procedures and practices owing to the existing norms and standards of human rights, democracy and governance. Pakistan is regularly scrutinized by international bodies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International on their treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, law enforcement agencies, and freedom of speech, to mention a few. While these international criticisms can be useful in fostering democracy, they have also produced some political backlash within Pakistan: especially when such critique is considered interference by nationalists. Pakistani authorities have at times relied on negative external perceptions of human rights and democracy to stir up nationalistic fervor and discredit both alien critics and local opposition. Society has been subjected to both positive and negative influences: while some changes, including advancement of women's rights and freedom of media, have been officially accepted, others sought to exploit the changes for political gain, negating real democratic evolution.

### **International Influence on Elections and Political Legitimacy**

Pakistan has undergone extensive foreign meddling in relation to elections. Within Pakistan, elections have always been shaken with suspicions of electoral fraud both from local vested political groups and foreign elements. Like other groups, the military also stands accused or suspected of meddling with elections in a bid to ensure that certain political parties sympathetic to it claim victory. On some occasions, foreign nations have also been accused of trying to aid certain political groups most often than not when these groups tend to fulfill their geo-political interests (Rashid, 2007).

Especially the American superpower along with other western countries have been accused of trying to aid certain political candidates or political parties during election times on the basis of their willingness to cooperate in the War on Terror. Such kinds of



outside dominations of the electoral processes do not help the case of democracy in Pakistan in the sense that it strengthens the belief that Pakistan is not a self-governing country and is instead dominated by a foreign country which severely questions its electoral credibility.

### **The Role of Media in Pakistan's Democracy**

The media, for example, is expected to contribute towards the health of the democracy by shaping and influencing the opinion of the citizens, providing them the information they need, and making it impossible for the government to exploit the democracy. For Pakistan, the role of media is rather different and challenging. In as much as media has been able to contribute to the democratization process through offering the platform to debate on politics, promoting openness, and investigating corruption, some forces have been so much powerful than the media and that has made it impossible for the country to develop a democratic political environment.

### **The Role That Media Plays in Political Engagement and Public Education**

In Pakistan, media has aided political mobilization and has also contributed to the political socialization of citizens through the use of television channels, newspapers, and lately social media. They have also played a role in providing information about elections, political activities, and other government undertakings. The role of the media in public discourse has enabled the formation of opposition parties and many political movements. For example, during the military rule of General Pervez Musharraf, the media played a very crucial role to restore democracy. The way the media covered the Lawyers' Movement (2007-2009) for restoration of the judiciary and the rise of political parties later on showed how the media could transform into an instrument of change. Media has enhanced public awareness of issues related to poverty, inequality, corruption and human rights violation. In doing so, it has made the people more apathetic toward social issues and more participative in politics. The media, at times, collaborates with marginalized communities by giving them a platform to voice their concerns which contributes towards the vigorous socio-political participation of communities.

### **A Rise in the Private and Digital Branches of Media**

For the last couple of decades, Pakistan has sustained remarkable diversity in the media sector. The non-restrictive policies towards the media sector during the early 2000s enabled a rapid growth of private television stations which greatly pluralized the media industry. This growth in private media decreased the dominance of the pro-government broadcasting media. The development of digital and social media has changed the dynamics of public relations within the politics of Pakistan. Citizens can now participate in politics, disseminate information, and even advocate for issues using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Previously, the youth and political activists who were silenced by the authorities are now able to directly participate in the political discourse due to social media. During elections, social media is crucial in shaping the political campaigns. It allows heads of states to appeal directly to the citizens, avoiding the mainstream media walls. Social media was quite prevalent in the political sphere during the 2013 and the 2018 general elections as parties used it to not only communicate with voters, but also break campaign messages and build support from the public (The Express Tribune, 2020). As much as the growth of private and digital media has encouraged pluralism, it is quite unfortunate that spillover of misinformation, fake news and sensationalism is also a consequence of it. Social media especially is a fertile ground for political exploitation because it is the ideal platform for the dissemination of false information and propaganda with ease as the public.



Source: *Pakistan Today*, “Social Media and Politics in Pakistan”

### **Media Freedom and Censorship**

With the impressive growth of media in recent times within Pakistan, there are dire challenges with respect to free speech. The media faces both state and non-state harassment and censorship which puts the whole country’s journalistic practice under severe political scrutiny. The lack of freedom to operate independently removes the media’s ability to perform as a core component of democracy. The control and censorship of the media is not new for the Pakistani government. There always has been a tight restriction on political coverage, news reporting and even public discourse during military regimes, and there continues to be even under civilian- governed policies. Media censorship is arguably omnipresent in political states, and journalists too have to be careful with their public exposure to exposing government corruption or critiquing other sensitive issues. The use of social media has not eased the pressure targeting the media as censorship and monitoring is on the rise in Pakistan especially against anything goes against the state or the army. Moreover, the military establishment has a strong influence on the media, especially on issues of national security, military, and international relations. This raises the problem of self-censorship of the media, in which journalists and media agencies ignore some issues in their stories in order to avoid negative consequences. The attention given to the military by the media has resulted in the deepening of the division of the media into different factions along political lines, where media houses support specific political or governmental powers.

### **The So-Called “Independent” Media in Electoral Politics**

The media in Pakistan has a very powerful role to play in the elections as it helps in formation of public opinion about the candidates, political parties and the elections in general. The media can alter the vote decision as candidates and parties intend to use the media to reach out to the public. During election contests his advertisement for the leaders of opposition becomes the order of the day, with the media being the informellers about the leaders’ policies of the parties and the promises made during elections to the people. But, the media's role in politics is not as virtuous. The quality of coverage by Pakistani media during election times has always been under scrutiny due to a general need for certain political sensationalism along with favoritism. There are accusations about certain media agencies supporting specific political candidates because of their pre-existing political affiliations or association with certain businesses. The opposition voices are also sub-themes of the few dominate groups that own media which denies and blocks the public from seeing equally important political angles. Moreover, certain media outlets also sensationalize news stories of celebrities at the expense of serious political journalism. Such forms of media mystification further remove core subjects and principles of politics from the public and voters, thus affecting the way citizens view politics, After all, the media’s influence on democracy through image construction and publicity is a relevant issue for Pakistan (Dawn, 2019).

### **Media's Role in Providing Oversight and Disclosure**

The media's role in every democracy relies on ensuring that any sitting government is held accountable by checking its plans and activities. Pakistan has had its fair share of uncovered wasteful spending, corruption, and incompetent practices that sit under government power, but it is the media that works towards bringing this to the light. Investigative journalism has exposed numerous scandals such as the misuse of public funds by politicians, the bureaucratic class, and big business people. In doing so, the media has stirred greater public interest toward government officials and has made it possible for the public to hold the government to a higher standard of accountability. Diverse misinformation is one of the many factors that has limited the media's role in promoting transparency, including fear of retribution or legal action. Powerful political and economic elites undermine the media in order to control the information that may prove damaging to their image. As a consequence, journalism that needs research and thorough examination of information is increasingly becoming a dangerous activity, leading many journalist to resort to self-denial of their freedom in order to escape the dangers (Hussain, 2010).

### **Polarization and the Role of the Media in Pakistan**

One of the critical issues with the media in Pakistan which needs immediate attention is how it contributes toward the already fractured lines of political polarization. Different media houses in the country appear to be split on political lines, with varying channels and newspapers belonging to a certain political party, ideology and/or interest group. As a result of the media divide, the public is further divided due to varying exposures and the consumed media decided reality. The situation is aggravated, particularly with the proliferation of social media as people and communities can build strong bands of followers who share the same political views. The rise in the dissemination of fake news, hate speech, and conspiracy theories on social media platforms has deepened societal divisions and hindered the practice of democratic values like consensus building, tolerance, and civil discourse. Therefore, the media's contribution to polarization has counteracted the attempts to achieve a cohesive, unified democratic society in Pakistan.



**Source:** *Arab News Pakistan*, "Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)"

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan has suffered from numerous difficulties to set out on a democratic path like historical and institutional weaknesses, the legacy of the military, and other external forces. It has struggled to become a functional democracy and instead remains an incomplete democratic republic due to these multifaceted challenges. The historical and political context with periods of military rule has influenced the democracy Pakistan has. The political system of Pakistan has been devastated by military coups

because the military has dominated, sidelined, and weakened the democratic institutions civilian governments. The political culture has been unstable, and the absence of strong democratic traditions makes it tough for political parties to consolidate their power and build democratic norms. Weak political institutions have hindered the country from achieving a democratic level of development and prosperity. Pakistan's democracy has suffered due to the lack of autonomy, coherence, and professionalism of political parties, the judiciary, and the legislature. Plundering political meddling, lack of accountability, and rivalry among partisans have prevented any form of effective governance. This issue has created a situation whereby political leaders attempt to implement long lasting reforms without considering the issues that matter most to the country. These economic problems, such as chronic poverty, corruption, and unfavorable resource allocation, have further deepened the already weak foundation of democracy in Pakistan. Lack of economic activity for a significant portion of the population has led to increased dissatisfaction, thereby decreasing faith in democratic systems. Pakistan is economic mismanagement, combined with an over dependence on foreign aid and loans, has made the country susceptible to external domination while also restricting the country's ability to implement measures that would help solidify democracy. International interference, especially that of the United States, China, and bordering states, has significantly influenced Pakistan's political environment. While these countries have aided Pakistan financially, they have also provided Pakistan with strategic partnerships, but have deepened internal socio-economic divides, as foreign forces have often lend support to military or ruling authoritarian regimes while neglecting civilian democratic rule.

Pakistan has struggled with developing a complete democracy due to China's growing power as well as military influence from other countries. The media has both informed the population as well as deepened the divide by spreading lies and favoring one side over the other. Although media plays an important role regarding the government, they have very limited power due to interference from the politicians and military. To summarize, there are many factors which make it challenging for Pakistan to develop as a democracy such as historical issues, the economy, foreign influence, and the lack of free media. The heavy focus from the government on militant power, political corruption, and loss of economic value along with media bias are all factors to blame for the undeveloped state of democracy in Pakistan. Political institutions need to strengthen, politicians have to take charge of setting policies, and the media needs more freedom. If Pakistan manages to overcome these problems, they have the potential to become a successful and powerful democratic country.

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