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Democratic unrest in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences.

1- Introduction

2- Causes of Democratic unrest in Pakistan

2.1) Dynastic politics challenges democracy

i- Domination of few families

ii- Increasing nepotism

2.2) Feudalism is prevalent in political arena

i- 75% of the government's legislative branch is composed of Landlords.

2.3) Illiteracy poses serious challenge to democratic stability

i- Illiteracy rate of Pakistan is more than 40%.

2.4) Repeated military coups

i- "The Army and Democracy" by Aqil Shah portrays 70 year history of civil-military relations.

2.5) Manipulation of electoral process

ii- Chaudry Shujat in his book alleged General Musharraf for rigging the polls.

2.6) Weak party system

i- Factionalism within parties

ii- Neglect of party manifestos.

2.7) Ethnic and religious divisions.

2.7) Interference in democratic institution:

i- Use of media for propaganda

ii- Controversial role of judiciary

3- Consequences of Democratic unrest in Pakistan.

3.1) Political instability

i- Politics of rallies, protests and marches.

3.2) Economic instability

i- Pakistan has lost \$38 billion because of FATF decision to grey list.

3.3) Constitutional controversies and deadlocks.

i- Controversy over 18th amendment, and lack of consensus.

3.4) Erosion of civil liberties

i- Increased surveillance

ii- Limitations on freedom of speech and assembly

3.5) Damage to country's image

i- Negative impact on diplomatic relations.

ii- Deterring trade and tourism.

3.6) Weak and ineffective governance

i- Politicization affects governance effectiveness.

3.7) Prevalence of gender inequality

i- Pakistan is ranked 161 of 191 in Gender Equality Index (2022).

ii- 20% representation of women in national Assembly.

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4.1) Free and fair working of state institutions.

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4.2) Economic development for ensuring democracy

i- Economic development provides more resources to invest in public interest.

- 4.3) Youth participation must be encouraged and ensured.
- i- New ideas and approaches revitalize democratic processes.

5- Conclusion

"The only negative thing in Pakistan is not having a democracy", says former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Democracy is widely accepted form of government. The main purpose of democracy is inclusion of public in all systematic spheres of state. It includes provision of basic necessities of life to masses, rule of law, free and fair election, freedom of speech, gender equality, and independence of judicial system. It can be best defined in the words of Abraham Lincoln as "Government of the people, by the people and for the people". As far as Pakistan is concerned, it has had erratic history of democracy since it came into existence. Democracy is challenged by dynastic politics and feudalism. Illiteracy and weak political party system have further

deteriorated the situation. Manipulation of electoral process and repeated military coups has not let the democracy grow in Pakistan. It can be seen from the condition of political and socio-economic progress in country. Democratic failure has also eroded civil liberties and made state institutions weak and ineffective. Gender inequality is omnipresent in all spheres, worsening the country's international image. Pakistan needs multifaceted approach to counter democratic unrest. It should ensure transparency and accountability in working of state institutions. Inclusion of women and youth in all domains is the dire need of democratic growth.

To begin with, dynastic politics has been a deeply embedded phenomenon in Pakistan's politics. Some of the families dominating political landscape at national and provincial levels for decades. They often cultivate strong loyalty within their constituencies, ensuring a secure voter base and facilitating electoral success. Although their supporters argue that dynastic families inherit political

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knowledge and skills, allowing them to effectively navigate the complex world of politics. But in reality, dynasties create barriers for talented individuals and newcomers from outside, hindering diversity and fresh ideas. When power is consolidated within families, it gives rise to nepotism, potentially hindering good governance and harming public trust. Therefore, dynastic system perpetuates inequalities, as power remains concentrated within few families, resulting in democratic unrest.

Similarly, another biggest reason of democratic failure is prevalence of feudalism in political arena of Pakistan. Feudal lords have historically exerted significant influence over Pakistani politics, often dominating local and general elections through patronage networks and control over resources.

Senior political economist and author Manzur Ejaz says, "the provincial and national assemblies are dominated by feudal landowners, at least 75% of the government's legislative branch is composed of landowners". These feudal lords create barriers in progress of democracy. Rural areas with strong feudal systems often lack basic infrastructure like education, healthcare and

Sanitation, further marginalizing the population. Thus, the implementation and potential of several democratic reforms offered by government is limited by powerful landowners.

Feudalism and other such perspectives are strengthened by illiteracy, which poses serious challenge to democratic stability. Literacy and democracy are essential for each other.

As Franklin D. Roosevelt, former American President said; "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education". Literacy rate of Pakistani population is in worse situation.

Latest available official report put literacy rate at 59%, mean more than 40% are

illiterate [Huma Yusuf, No easy solution, September 2023]. The perilous literacy rate adds fuel to the fire of democratic decline. One

cannot assure the healthy democratic values without attaining reasonable literacy rate of masses.

Moreover, repeated military interventions in politics have disrupted democratic advancement in its

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brief history four coups and military dictatorships have occurred. Each takeover, respectively in 1958, 1969, 1977 and 1999, possesses their own specific features, but the ^{one} thing that was common ^{in all} was that, all incidents have negative impacts on democracy. In his book "The Army and Democracy", Aqil Shah portrays, "how the British-trained army slowly morphed from considering itself an 'apolitical professional military' into the sole guardian of the very reason for existence of the state." And this military's involvement and influence has not ^{yet} over. Recent months have witnessed a severe criticism over military for partaking in politics. Therefore, the connivance of army in politics is a setback to democratic development.

Likewise, manipulation of electoral process is also a hazard to democracy. In political culture of Pakistan, elections have always been controversial. Neither of two sides have same stance on election arrangements. Losing side always alleged the winners for rigging the polls or electoral fraud.

Both civil and military authorities are criticized for this manipulation. Chaudhry Shujat Hussain, former Prime Minister of Pakistan in his book "Sach Tou Yeh hai", alleged "General Pervaiz Musharraf for rigging elections of 2002 and 2008. In 2002 to help them to win and in 2008 to defeat them". Manipulation of election also includes vote buying, bribery, Intimidation and threats to voters. Free and fair elections are basis of democracy. Thus, exploiting electoral process will result in collapse of democracy. Also, the party system of Pakistan is so weak to ensure democratic development. Fragmented parties with unclear ideologies can lead to unstable coalitions, political infighting, and a lack of clear direction for the country. Also, the factionalism within parties can hamper decision-making and erode public trust. Politics of Pakistan is personality oriented. Public reliance is more on charismatic leader rather than party narrative. It results in the neglect of party manifestos. Hence, political parties are not really concerned of party manifestos.

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Last elections 2018, all major political parties revealed their manifestos less than a month before polls. It means manifestos are considered a mere formality" [Ahmed Bilal Mehbob, The making of manifestos, November 2023]. Therefore, weak party system is also reason behind democratic decline.

In addition to that, control over democratic institutions ensues democratic unrest. Independent institutions like the judiciary, legislature and free press hold each other accountable, preventing any one branch from becoming too powerful and potentially autocratic. This system protects the core principles of democracy like transparency, rule of law and individual rights. But when institutions operate under influence, they become susceptible to manipulation and corruption by vested interests. In case of Pakistan, role of judiciary and media has never been positive. Media is allegedly used for propaganda, and its independence has always been challenged by those in power. Its Freedom of speech, the basic theme of media, has been never ^{been} permitted. Similarly, role of judiciary from Maulvi Tamizudin's case till present has been

disputed. Thus, political interference in democratic institutions resulted in democratic unrest.

In the above lines the essay has discussed the various causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

In the following paragraphs, it will describe the consequences democratic unrest has brought in Pakistan.

Firstly, instability has widely been seen in political history of Pakistan. From the assassination of first prime minister of the country to present, it has not witnessed any tenure of stability. None of the pre-elected premiers has completed its tenure. They were either impeached by judiciary or dethroned by military interventions. Unfortunately, the general elections of 1970, which are regarded as one of the fairest elections of the country, resulted in separation of eastern wing of Pakistan. In recent few months, the situation has further deteriorated. Revenge politics and accusations on military establishment have exacerbated a strong opposition movement and deepened political polarization. Rallies, protests, speeches, long march, have fueled the democratic unrest. So, this

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political instability over the course of years is because of democratic decline. Not just ^{Political} economic instability, ^{pol} economic instability is also result of democratic unrest. A sustained and healthy democracy ensures the prosperity and growth in economy. Former South-Korean President Kim Dae-Jung said; "Democracy is the absolute value that makes for human dignity, as well as the only road to sustained economic development and social justice." The economic woes of Pakistan are ubiquitous because of uncertain democratic situations. Pakistan is facing challenges to accept conditions of world's financial institutions, to get more loan. These challenging conditions are ^{being} implemented, keeping in view the perilous democratic situations. Due to these set of circumstances, Pakistan was pushed to grey list in FATF. It badly affected economy of country. According to a Tadlab's report, "Pakistan lost \$38 billion because of FATF decision to grey list". Many of countries are reluctant to invest in Pakistan because of fail democracy. Thus, it is summarized that economic instability is because of democratic unrest.

Along with that, democratic unrest has also resulted in controversies and constitutional deadlocks in constitutional procedures. 18th Amendment, which transformed the center-province relations is most prominent in debate. Although formulated by a 27 members committee, after 77 meetings, it still faces disputes and opposition. The division of power between the state and its units has been amongst the most contentious and recurring issues in Pakistan since its creation. 18th Amendment was a significant step in this regard. But political entities have failed to develop consensus upon this issue. Critics give arguments that 18th Amendment has deprived center of powers and share of provinces are not just, thus it should be revised. Lack of consensus on such constitutional issue is because of democratic flaws. Moreover, democratic unrest also deprives people of their civil liberties. Although civil liberties have freedom from interference by any individual or by government. But during periods of democratic unrest, government may feel threatened and restrict civil liberties.

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Pakistani public to have witnessed several times suspension of civil liberties by government. In 1979, when democratic values were suppressed, Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote, "we shall bear witness to the promised day written into the canvas of eternity".

His famous poem was against the dictator, who deprived them of their basic human rights. Such restrictions are prevalent till today. These include increased surveillance, limitations on freedom of speech and assembly, and even crackdown on peaceful protests.

Thus, democratic decline results in abrasion of civil liberties.

Similarly, democratic unrest damages country's reputation and international image. It badly affects the diplomatic relations of country.

It can raise concerns about Pakistan's stability and commitment to democratic values. In this way it can make it more difficult to attract foreign investment and forge positive relationships with other countries. In recent

few months, widespread protests, demonstrations, or violence ^{have} created an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty, deterring foreign trade and tourism. These activities also convey the message

of lack of trust in the state institutions. It can damage the country's reputation for upholding the rule of law and human rights. International media coverage often focuses on most dramatic aspects, potentially reinforcing negative stereotypes about Pakistan. Hence, democratic decline and unrest incidents badly portrays image of the country.

Similarly, democratic decline results in weak and ineffective governance. Protests and demonstrations can temporarily disrupt government operations, making it difficult to pass legislation or implement policies. Continuous unrest in Pakistan has eroded public trust in government institutions and weakened their ability to govern effectively. Institutional challenges exist as barriers in the smooth governance. Institution of the country, including the judiciary, bureaucracy, and security forces, have often faced issues like corruption, weaker rule of law, and politicization, affecting governance effectiveness. Democratic unrest triggers extreme political polarization and deep divisions between different political factions, making it difficult to reach consensus and implement

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effective policies. Therefore, democratic unrest hinders governance to be effective.

Also, prevalence of gender inequality shows the picture of democratic failure. Democracy, in its true definition, cannot be achieved unless women have equal chances as man.

Julietta Kirkwood, a Chilean sociologist wrote; "There is no democracy, without feminism". Gender inequality condition in Pakistan shows very grim picture of democracy. "9th

Gender Inequality Index, Pakistan is ranked 161 out of 191 countries" [Human Development Report, 2022].

Gender inequality is present in all spheres of society. The main organ of a democratic state is legislature, and women are underrepresented in it.

According to report published by PILDAT, "Pakistan has merely 20% representation of females in National Assembly". Hence, gender parity cannot be reached without healthy democratic values.

Although, various causes of democratic unrest are present in Pakistan, and their outcomes are prominent. Concerted efforts are required to counter democratic decline and ensure government of the people,

by the people, and for the people. Certain measures are discussed below in following paragraphs to address democratic unrest.

Firstly, free and fair working of state institutions must be ensured.

Democratic institutions are basis for sustained democracy. American writer, David Remnick writes that,

"Democratic institutions, even in the oldest operating democracy in the world, are anything but perfect".

When state institutions like, Police, National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Anti Corruption, etc. will function independently and impartially; they hold the government accountable for its actions. This ensures that power is

not abused and that decisions are made in the best interest of public. Fair

State institution will ensure rule of law, where everyone, including the government, is subject to the same law. Therefore, it's accurate

to say that the free and fair working of state institutions is not just important, but essential for a healthy and functioning democracy.

Secondly, economic development guarantees democratic development. Some authors

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hold that democracy and economic development have a reciprocal effect on each other. Peter Drucker wrote that, "the ultimate resource in economic development is people. It is people, not capital or raw materials that develops an economy". Since democracy is a rule of people, it is best summarized that both economic prosperity and democracy are essential for each other. Considering current situation of democracy and economy of Pakistan, it is concluded that, one is not possible without progress in other. Because economic development will provide governments with more resources to invest in public goods and services, which can strengthen democratic institutions and promote political participation. Therefore, economic development is strictly necessary for democratic advancement.

Thirdly, participation of youth must be encouraged and ensured in all spheres of state. Approximately, 64% of Pakistani population lies in category of youth. Their potential can be utilized and, it can have positive contribution in democratic growth. Young people often bring

new ideas, approaches, and technological savvy to the table, which can revitalize and improve democratic processes. Their lack of cynicism or ingrained beliefs can lead to creative solutions to long-standing issues. Their inclusion also strengthens the legitimacy of democratic institutions. As Barack Obama said; "the youth are the future of our nation and custodian of our democracy". Youth are often at the forefront of advocating for social and environmental justice, issues that are crucial for the sustainability and well-being of democracies. So, youth has potential to strengthen and secure democracy.

In a nutshell, one may say that democracy promotes equality and fairness. Pakistan lags in democratic progress. Its advancement in democratic sphere is retarded by various factors including domination of few families and feudal lords. Also, military interventions and illiteracy of masses have crippled economic growth. Electoral frauds and rigging of the polls have eroded democratic values. Weak party system and

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Factionalism have further fueled this dilemma. The decline in democracy has brought negative impacts on country's political and economic domains. It also resulted in controversies over constitutional processes due to lack of consensus. Situation of Pakistan to achieve gender parity is very grim. Erosion of civil liberties and ineffective governance have damaged international image of country, which ultimately affected its diplomatic ties with many countries. Democracy is in perilous condition in Pakistan, it needs concerted efforts to counter this unrest. Mainly, ensuring rule of law by free and fair working of state institutions. Economic development is also must for democracy, because ^{you}one cannot have one without other. Lastly, we need new ideas from youth to revitalize democratic processes.
