

FAR REACHING EFFECTS OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN PAKISTAN

OUTLINE:

1) Introduction

"Pakistan has been facing political instability since birth. This instability has shown major effects on Political, social and economic fronts which ~~are required~~ need ~~prime~~ redressal.

2) The backdrop of political instability in Pakistan.

3) Maligning effects of political instability on governance and politics.

a) Inter and intra-institutional divide; the judicial crisis

b) Quakes in sanctity of constitution; constitutional crisis.

c) Political malpractices and polarisation of political parties

d) Brewing up impartiality with politicization of media.

4) Political instability; a fatal virus for economy

a) Foreign reserves and investments ~~are~~ ~~going~~ away.

b) The anticipated depreciation of Pakistani currency.

c) Inflation as a ripple effect of downwards economic trajectory.

d) Weakening of macroeconomy with surging dependency on foreign loans.

e) Paralysis of industrial sector; a major symptom of the crisis.

5) Society endures a lot owing to political instability.

a) Political divide among masses; political sentimentality.

b) Political malfunctioning maligning people's trust over state machinery.

c) Provocation of disobedience amongst masses against the state.

d) The exacerbating poverty as an indirect consequence.

6) What to anticipate from Pakistan's current political instability?

a) A callous precedent for future political discourse.

b) A bruise on Pakistan's international image.

c) The associated social dilemma of "Brain drain".

d) A "focus shift" from other looming crisis of Pakistan.

e) Democracy at a tailspin.

7) How to cure political instability and its ripple effects?

a) Upholding meritocracy to promote sincere institutions.

b) Maintaining the sanctity of constitution and law.

c) Political parties to unite over compliance of law.

d) Bolstering economy to neutralise the effects of political crisis.

It was the Radio Pakistan announcing birth of a new state. Who knew the new political system would have to face a tumultuous ride through its political discourse. From ~~Quar~~ Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the governor and ~~Quar~~ General Aali Khan as Prime minister till government of today, a constant bumpy shade has ~~power~~ painted the political journey of Pakistan. This political instability has dissipated multiple effects throughout Pakistan's 76 years of history and plagued the political, economic and social fronts. Within political domain, divide between institutions and non compliance of laws has been a major consequence along with the toxic politics culture. With the flickering politics, economy has been on a fluctuating discourse as well. History is a witness that all economic indicators like foreign investments, currency, inflation took a direction of downwards economic trajectory. As economic crisis brings social crisis, a political intolerance over support for political parties and mistrust over state machinery is needed among masses coupled to exacerbating poverty. However future holds novel challenges rippling from political instability which include brain drain, damage to international image and a negative example for future political culture. Overall democratic culture of Pakistan has been deeply challenged. The only way to uproot this issue, meritocracy & supremacy of constitution should be upheld. Also a strong economy will keep the ^{country} grounded and impede its effects of political instability.

Therefore it can be said that Pakistan has been facing political instability since birth. This instability has shown major effects on political, social and economic fronts which needs prime redressal.

First decade of Pakistan saw transition of seven prime ministers when finally after nine years a constitution was formed. Soon after that the country had to face 34 years of military coups which further pushed back political course of Pakistan. The chronology that followed was also studded with multiple shades of political challenges to the country. The Eighth decade of a resolute presence on world map, Pakistan again was struck with another political instability event of far reaching impacts when Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf government was ostracised via a no confidence vote leading to multi-winged challenges and pushing of previous ones. In past, Pakistani governments have faced varying degrees of instabilities with associated economic and social factors fluctuating to the same degree. The political instability has had impacted Pakistan not only in short term but long term as well.

Within political domain, the effect of political instability has been immense. Political parties having difference of opinion, disputes and rifts isn't anything abnormal but when the disputes start maligning other institutions, then that's a red flag. It has been seen quite a few times.

That when governments in Pakistan contradict to the judiciary, they resort to disobeying it. For example back in 1997, the PMU government got caught in judicial crisis. Similarly in the previous year, ouster of PM Imran Khan was followed by a judicial crisis when PDM government refused to obey orders of apex court. The internal divide within the courts and political polarisation are both interlinked with former being a challenge thrown by political rifts to Pakistan most recently. This institutional divide has been unprecedented maligning politics.

Non compliance to orders of apex court has a bigger side to it which is disobedience of constitution. Political parties for their personal interests sometimes go to any length but when they reach to constitutional disobedience, then that's a matter of serious concern.

Compliance to Supreme court orders is a constitutional obligation for any individual, party or private entity.

The political crisis of 2022-23 had a unique feature to it which was disobedience of judiciary. The government pursued its own motives taking the constitution as a piece of paper. As the famous quote of military ruler Zia-ul-Haq goes, "Constitution is just a piece of paper."

Hence constitutional crisis is a direct impact of political instability.

As the political parties go through ordeals of political crisis, they resort to malign ways to keep going. Political instability and polarisation go intertwined. Being a faction of democratic

system instability within political system, urges parties to use other tools of democracy for their interest such as elections. The 2022 political crisis presented a show of tug of war between political parties on scheduling elections which suited their motives. Political environment is filled with verbal abuse and dog pulling maligning the political setup.

The air of political divide flows through all major actors and formulates or tilts narratives. Media's bias towards one political party or another is a common sight after a span of political crisis. In Pakistan various news channels have been found to lose partiality and neutrality and ~~lose~~ gain biasness influenced by political polarisation. Regardless of the debate of right and wrong, ^{targeting} journalists has rose as a new norm on the basis of political affiliations or opinions. Arshad Shaif murder case is tip of the iceberg belonging to this entire glacier.

According to **World Press Freedom Index**, Pakistan ranks **150th** out of **180** ^{countries} which is alarming. This shows that political instability directly affects media freedom.

With fluctuation of political system, comes a fluctuating economic system. Political economy is a thing of today in which political situation determines economic conditions of a state. The military rules of General Ayub, Yahya and Zia ul Haq were studded with influx of foreign investments and using foreign reserves pertaining to a stability in political setup.

While the political flimsiness during democratic governments like in 2007-8 and 2022-23 was with economic turmoil. In 2022, the federal reserves of Pakistan fell to **9 bn\$** after the political clash between PTI and PM government. Also foreign investments flow away pertaining to unpredictability. But the economic downrun doesn't stop here.

Decrease in foreign investments and reserves causes currency depreciation. During the 2022-23 political unpredictability in Pakistan, the credit figure of Pakistani economy went to an all time low.

Since economic discredibility leads to weakening of state currency, Pakistani rupee depreciated with comparable value of dollar rising up to **300 PKR**. Rupee depreciation is symbolic of a dire state of affairs within the country specifically with regards to state of political atmosphere.

The dwindling value of currency coupled with negative trajectory of other economic determinants, is direct road to inflation. Everytime a political turmoil hit the country, inflation followed suit.

In **May 2023**, inflation rose to an all time highest **37%** according to **Pakistan Bureau of Statistics**. Regardless of the international factors in play as well such as global economic crunch fueled by Russia-Ukraine war, COVID-19's aftermath and many others, the ouster of PTI government leading to high times of political insurgency played their part in bringing Pakistan to the brink of default.

Rising inflation, near default situation and general shift of focus away from developing the export base, lead Pakistan to always knock the doors of international lenders. The crisis within political domain is a setback for the economy on megacscale as it increases dependency on foreign aids rather than developing indigenous export capacity. Also the political unpredictability maligns IMF operation as well as it requires the state to take responsibility for pay back scheme which is only possible with a certain level of political stability.

The entire economic crisis being fuelled by the political instability culminated in shutting down of industries. The general atmosphere of unpredictability blew away investments of companies as well as other states from Pakistan. In 2022-23 companies industries such as electromotive, automobile, petroleum, food and textile ~~indust~~ faced major setbacks. Major firms such as Toyota, Nishat, Diamond and Shell etc halted operations in Pakistan further adding fuel to the fire.

The parasitic effects of political crisis don't just halt till economic domain but also extend out to social aspects. People tend to affiliate with political parties and develop sentience for the leaders. During political divide, masses divide as well. The controversial role of Student unions and associations with politics

back in General Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto times is a show of such divide and unrest. Also in the political crisis of 2022-23, people were reported of violence and fighting over their affiliated political parties. This perpetuates anarchy and chaos in the society.

Another social effect of political instability and consistent tug of war between ruling elite that has been part of Pakistan's history is that it damages people's trust over the state machinery. Abrupt changes of governments, military coups and politics of revenge has deeply maligned credibility of state machinery specially when economic hardships befell Pakistanis. Looking forward to one political party after another, when all of them collectively failed to bring a sustainable prosperity, people start getting discouraged with democracy. According to **Economic Survey of Pakistan**, more than **50%** of people would **abstain** from **casting votes** from now onwards. Therefore political power plays derail subjects trust over state.

Rippling from political instability, disobedience against state machinery is another effect seen. Political elite caught in tug of war and unable to solve the basic challenges of Pakistan, maligned people's trust and provoked them to rebel. Multiple times in history the violent protests of people and refusal to pay taxes and obey the state, have been seen as a gradual build up after prolonged political unpredictability. The recent most show of same kind was seen on the **9th May, 2023** when people reacted with salvos.

Moving on into effects of social nature, political instability has been responsible for exacerbating poverty in Pakistan. Political instability takes the element of good governance away - governance is meant to serve people for their welfare. A similar case has long plagued the political structure of Pakistan. According to World Bank Report, 4 million people went down below the poverty line in April 2023 owing to the political & economic crisis. The victims of 2022 floods still remain suffering, right after the flood calamity, Pakistan was faced with political crisis rendering the poverty struck unattended.

In addition to the reactionary impacts of political upheavals, some long term prospects can also be felt. Man being a social animal adapts according to the surroundings; the atmosphere of recurrent political instability in Pakistan trains upcoming political leaders to pursue the same path of illegitimate use of democracy and self interest worshipping. Since day one, we have seen the democratic setup not ^{even} slightly shying away from pursuing politics for self interests; a legacy which continues till date. This gives a bleak and similar vision of Pakistan's political future. Thus when rulers achieve their interests hook or by crook, they set a negative example.

Another factor to anticipate from the past and present political inflammation is a serious blow to Pakistan's image in international community. Image building is a tool and necessity of modern political system with regards to soft power. Political stability attracts foreign investors and non state actors to benefit the country. Unfortunately in 2022-23 political crisis of Pakistan, mistrust of neighbouring and friendly states could be seen as Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states were reluctant to provide for Pakistan according to IMF conditionalities. Also China was apprehensive of Pakistan's dire political state of affairs.

Political instability has affected Pakistan by being a funnel for intellect. First time in history of Pakistan, the level of brain drain reached alarming levels. With the political and economic unpredictability fueling the mistrust of people over state machinery, people try to seek opportunities at other abodes. According to reports, a record-breaking 900,000 Pakistanis left the country in first half of 2023. This of dire consequences in the long term when just a handful of qualified people would be left in Pakistan. Thus the gradual brain drain will eventually show effects in every sector, eating the state from within like a termite.

Another malign way that political instability will affect the country in long term is by snatching away the spotlight. Political elite being caught in a tornado of malign politics and self interest have been found having insufficient focus on other fatal challenges for Pakistan such as Climate change, Disaster management, energy crisis and education. The obstructions caused by 2022 floods in Balochistan and Sindh could not be removed due to shift of focus towards the political crisis. Neither has Pakistan been yet able to take serious measures for climate change. This shows that at times of political insurgency, state institutions are rendered deviated from addressing other important challenges.

Last but not the least, the biggest threat that political instability poses to Pakistan is a challenge to democracy. The democratic dilemma has been there right from day one. Democratic transitions via elections were replaced with authoritarian ousters. Constitutions have been fought upon by political factions and rulers abusing democratic tools for self interests have deeply plagued democracy of Pakistan. The political crisis of 2022-23 was full of constitutional and judicial disobedience and maneuvering of election process to pursue self interests. Thus democracy has been at a tailspin in Pakistan.

Though crisis of politics has long plagued Pakistan at various fronts but a few sincere measures can potentially alleviate the issue. Political instability has been caused by ill practices and pervasance of self interests with egoistic approach of leaders instead of any ethics, technical or administrative reasons. Therefore if people are elected and appointed into political parties or state institutions based on merit and potential, then a stark decline in ~~the~~ political lag pulling and enhancement in prevalence of professionalism would prevail. In Quran Allah says **that give due right to those who deserve**, which means that responsibilities be given to only those who deserve and have the professional guts to indulge in good governance.

Promoting meritocracy ultimately in terms of state institutions and governance demands compliance to constitution and law. Sincerely abiding by charters of democracy has the potential to alleviate political instability, as it forbids the warring factions to misuse democratic tools like delaying elections. In the political upheaval ^{of} 2022-23, the PDM government was found not complying to orders of judiciary; a constitutional obligation of the government to abide by the orders of apex court. Only if they had ^{shown} compliance to constitution the upheaval would not have dragged that long and damage the state economy and society.

Lastly, a strong economy can protect the country from a lot of disastrous effects of political crisis. As seen throughout Pakistan's history, political unpredictability and economic crisis go intertwined with each other. Not that political crisis doesn't invade other countries but economic stability neutralises the effects from damaging the society in the long run. A strong economic base doesn't derail foreign investor's trust over the state. Also vulnerability of inflation and exacerbation of poverty with political turmoil is curbed with a functional economy.

To sum it up, our past is studded with events of political instability; - Prime ministers, governors or political parties plotting against each other and overthrowing governments via democratic or undemocratic means. All these spans were accompanied with economic and social turmoil as well with inflation surging and social life of people plummeting. Pakistan being a multi ethnic Islamic republic is a democratic country in which a piece of paper called constitution glued all the ethnicities to become part of one state, under one constitution. After addressing ethnic divisions, it also glues together and forms basis of our political setup; a common ground for all to agree. If our last abode that is compliance of laws is also

Let go of, then the system can turn into
banana republic where there is no will of law.
But as they say, "It's never too late for a good start."
if above mentioned remedies are acted upon,
surely we can bring political stability and put
Pakistan on a sustainable path of prosperity.

Good

Keep writing on different themes