

The Future of democracy in Pakistan

Outline

1. Introduction

The democracy in Pakistan has seen various ups and down in the course of more than seven decades. Although, democratic process has shown some continuity in recent decade, but its path is still haphazard; However it can be hoped that democracy has bright future in Pakistan in long run.

2. Evolution of democracy in Pakistan

3. Major factors which are going to be deciding for future of democracy in Pakistan.

- Balance among the state institutions
- The role of citizens in electing parliamentarians
- The performance of Parliament.
- The regularity of democratic processes.

4. Prospects regarding the future of democracy (Positive Prospects)

- Continuity in electoral process
- Transparent elections
- Strengthening of democratic institutions
- Decrease in involvement of non-democratic forces in democratic processes
- Building of greater trust of public on democracy

(Negative Prospects)

- Greater political polarization and violence

- g. Increase in reliance of politicians on non-democratic forces for securing power.
- h. Conversion of democracy into majoritarianism
- 5. Suggestions for better future of democracy in Pakistan.
 - a. Strengthening of democratic institutions
 - b. Continuity of democratic process
 - c. Ensuring transparency and accountability
 - d. Raising awareness among citizens
- 6. Conclusion

The career of democracy in Pakistan is quite haphazard till now. This paradoxical journey of democracy in Pakistan also puts a question mark on future of democracy in country. Military has ruled the state directly for almost half of its history. The era of democratic government has not even been a wonderful experience for citizens. The major deciding factors for future of democracy in Pakistan would be institutional balance, performance of citizens and democratic institutions.

Moreover, regularity in democratic processes will also play major role. On the positive note, it can be expected that in future, transparent and regular democratic processes will be observed. Moreover, the role of non-democratic forces will be eliminated; And it will eventually lead to a true democratic state; But there are few realistic aspects that manifest that country can be pushed into polarization or it can even become a majoritarian state. However, strengthening of institutions, and continuity of democratic processes can save country from any disaster in future.

Talking about Historical aspect of country's democracy: It was initially ruled

by democratic institutions for first eleven years, but government remained quite ineffective. It was then followed by long military rule, with exception of 1972 to 1977 and 1988 to 1999. However, democracy was effectively restored in 2008, and from then continuity in process is there, but controversy still surrounds with allegations of involvement of non democratic forces.

As far as the future of democracy in Pakistan is concerned, it will be highly dependent upon the balance among the institutions. Four times in history of Pakistan, Military Commanders removed their bosses from their posts. Moreover, Judiciary and Parliament often found themselves in conflict leading to constitutional crises in the state. It was repeatedly observed in 2022. However, the level of conflict and harmony between state institutions will be important in deciding the democracy's future status in Pakistan.

The second major factor in deciding the future of democracy will be role of citizens. As Anatol Levien mentioned that voting behaviour of Pakistani citizens is quite

Paradoxical; They vote on the basis of caste and kinship but expect from politicians to resolve their local and national problems. (Pakistan A hard Country). If the voting pattern will remain same then the things will definitely go hard.

The performance of politicians which is directly linked with the performance of democracy is the most fundamental factor in the future evolution of democracy in Pakistan. The unsatisfactory performance of Pakistan Political class has widely been mentioned by all major academicians. For instance, Fareed Zakaria wrote performance of Pakistan's political class as dependent upon international and establishment's support instead of relying on public opinion and support. A complete paradigm shift in performance of politicians is required to bring hope

Despite difficulties, there are still positive prospects linked with future of democracy in Pakistan; and the most fundamental factor to practicalize these positive prospects is the continuity of political process. Major Political analysts

describe democracy as an evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary process. For instance, in European states like Austria and France, it took more than century for democracy to become mature. Similarly, Democracy in Pakistan will become mature after taking its time.

Along with continuity, Transparency is often crucial. Rigging in elections is a major cause that politicians blame each other, and situations lead to weakening of democracy. Major examples of it could be observed when Pakistan Tahreek Insaf blamed other parties of rigging in elections, and launched a nationwide campaign in 2013. Later after elections of 2018, Government coalition was declared 'selected' by opposition alliance. To avoid such unrest, high level of transparency is crucial.

As discussed that after 2018 elections, opposition alliance openly criticized the government coalition of taking support from non-democratic institutions. It can never be a good omen for government and democratic institutions. However, Analysts like Keylemen believe that in long run these

institutions will become ineffective in the case of politics, and role of non-democratic powers will become ignorable.

Another positive prospect regarding the future of democracy in Pakistan is that in future people will become used to with democratic institutions, and more vibrant and informed voting class will appear which will make democracy an inevitable part of Pakistan's political system. As in Turkey, where once military involvement, and public acceptance for military in politics was high; But failed Coup of 2016, showed a completely changed picture, with Turkish you more vibrant regarding democracy in their state.

Along with many positive prospects, some harsh truths can also become a reality in future; And among these the biggest fear is of polarization. Although, political polarization is a sign of healthy society; But polarization in Pakistan is reaching to extreme levels during recent years; Owing to unstable political situation. By mentioning the level of polarization, The Economic times wrote an ~~was~~ article

questioning the future existence of Pakistan, and even mentioned chances of ^{civil} war in Pakistan. Violence and tension can also become a common practice which would put the future of Democracy ~~of~~ in Pakistan at paradox.

Along with reliance on polarizing practice, Many political analysts, even military writers like General Shahid Aziz have mentioned the reliance of politicians on state institutions to maintain power. If this practice would continue then it will result into state institutions indulged ^{into} more and more in Political process resulting in Pakistan as an Authoritative State.

The threat is not only limited to authoritarianism; But in a society like Pakistan majoritarianism can also emerge. A major manifestation confirming this threat was seen in Jaranwala, Faisalabad where minority houses and churches were vandalised. Moreover, such examples appear frequently in Pakistan. Hence, if not countered effectively, a majoritarian state based on mobocracy can often threaten the existence of this state, and the values of democracy in it.

Owing to these enormous threats, if Pakistan wants to preserve and prosper democracy in it certain actions are needed at all levels, and fundamental requirement is strengthening of democratic institutions. The effective role of judiciary, independent election commission and vibrant parliament are necessary for growth of democracy, but above all, the informed public opinion is the base on which whole the tree of democracy will stand.

As mentioned earlier, continuity of democratic process is fundamental. Moreover, high level of reforms are required to remove structural flaws, and in order to make the process free from rigging. The maturity in political behaviour, non violence and commitment towards democracy are also required for prosperous future of democracy in Pakistan.

To sum up the discussion, the record of democracy in Pakistan is still haphazard and bumpy. The current situation is ^{even} not upto the mark. During recent years, the graph of democracy has further seen decline according to international organisations.

Although, the situation appears grave, but even worst situation can be altered and its consequences can be avoided if reforms based on inclusivity and transparency are introduced; and if public is educated regarding democracy and its values. Such massive steps can prove beneficial in changing the fate of polity, and making the future of democracy bright in Pakistan.