

Democracy in Pakistan: Hopes and Hurdles

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"In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, freedom and democracy are more than ideal to be followed rather its necessary for survival" (Noam chomsky)

The history of democracy in Pakistan is not very pleasing. Despite the nation foundation on democratic ideals, the journey of democracy has been disrupted continuously. A true democracy can be characterised by certain elements such as frequent election, an independent election commission, free media and an empowered judiciary. While Pakistan has made notable progress in establishing the pillars for a flourishing democracy. The implementation of pro-democratic constitutional amendments, the strengthening of political institution, and the emergence of local government system are such developments that signal a desire for a representative system. However, these hopes are countered by persistent challenges such as military intervention, weak electoral system and the personalisation of politics. Furthermore, economic instability, mass illiteracy, and

deep rooted social issues such as extremism and ethnic division has created more problems for democracy.

For democracy to truly thrive in Pakistan, these political, social and economic barriers must be overcome.

Only then can Pakistan's democracy evolve into a system that truly represents the will and welfare of its people.

Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan's democratic journey has been the centre of disruptions causing political instability. In the very beginning of democracy military took control of the country in 1958 led by General Ayub Khan, setting a very wrong trend for the future of military interventions.

A very brief democratic period under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s ended abruptly with General Zia-ul-Haq martial law in 1977, which severely affected the political freedom. After Zia's death, the 1990s saw some civilian governments, which were full of corruption and governance failures, resulting in another military coup by General Pervez

Musharraf in 1999. It was until 2008 that democracy was fully restored, leading to the first peaceful transfer of power between civilian government in 2013, followed by another in 2018.

Despite all these achievements, Pakistan's democracy remains fragile, facing challenges such as political polarisation, military influences, and economic instability.

Today, democracy in Pakistan is still evolving, striving to find the balance between civilian supremacy and institutional reforms.

A. Pro-democratic constitutional amendments in Pakistan is a real hope for democracy. The reason is that it is very basic for making democracy better in a country. In past there were no such amendments. However, in 2010 the '18th Constitutional amendment' considered as major pro-democratic reform which ensures the federal structure, empowering the provinces and restored a more balanced division of power between the executive and legislature. Hence, for a democratic country pro-democratic constitutional amendments are very important.

B. For democracy to flourish independent and empowered Judiciary is very important.

Since for the reason that independent judiciary is the main pillar of a democracy. The claim can be validated by the "Panama Paper Case" in 2017.

where supreme court of Pakistan disqualified the prime Minister for corruption charges revealed in the Panama Papers leak, demonstrating that judiciary could act independently against powerful political figure. Thus, independent judiciary is a true hope for democracy in Pakistan.

C. Strengthening of political institutions are required for better democracy. Because political institutions are the very basic structure of democracy.

As the establishment of a "neutral caretaker government system" through the 20th constitutional amendment, which ensures that elections are held under impartial oversight, thus preventing manipulation by any party in the election. It may be said that for the betterment of democratic system strengthening of political institutions are mandatory.

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D. Strengthening of local government system is of great importance of better democracy, because it really helps in implementing democracy, ~~from~~ and the base of it. The 'Local Government Ordinance of 2001' which was introduced under Pervez Musharraf, was a pivotal development that established a three-tier local government structure comprising of district, tehsil and union councils. With such emphasis on local government system by empowering districts and union council, ~~our country~~^{is} on the right track. Resultantly, for good democratic system strong local government system is required.

E. Successful transition of political power is the real essence of a democracy. The reason is that for a good democratic system smooth transition of power has to be there. In 2013, when (PPP) Pakistan's people's party completed its five year tenure and handed over power to newly elected Pakistan Muslims League government, led by Nawaz Sharif, through transparent electoral process. Looking at this smooth transition of power one can hope for good democracy. Thus, for better democracy ~~Transition~~ of power has to occur smooth.

F. The role of Social media in political awareness. It has become very prominent, helping in making a better democracy. The reason for this is that Social media played crucial role in developing awareness in the youth of Pakistan. For example, the "Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)" led by Imran Khan utilised social media platforms extensively for campaigning, and highlighting political issues, contributing significantly to the party's electoral success. As a result, for best democracy in country role of Social media is of large importance.

G. Participation of women in politics is a true sign of a democracy. The reason for that is women are also an important entity of a democratic system. One major milestone was the introduction of reserved seats for women in the national and provincial assemblies under the LFO 2002. And with quota system the women representation has significantly increased, upto 69 women elected to National Assembly and 239 to the four provincial Assemblies in the 2018 election. Consequently, for a democratic country, participation of women's in politics is needed.

A. The increase of literacy rate plays a crucial role in the betterment of a democracy. Because through education, awareness can be created in mass which ultimately helps in making democracy better. Over the past decades, Pakistan has made steady progress in improving its literacy rate, despite numerous Socio-economic challenges. According to Pakistan Economic Survey (2022-2023), the overall literacy rate increased to 62.8% showing a gradual rise from 45% in early 2000s, which contributes to the development of more informed and politically aware citizens in Pakistan. Therefore, for the best of democracy, high literacy rate is very vital.

I. For the best democratic system in Pakistan, citizens should have the awareness about their rights and responsibilities. As democracy cannot flourish in a country where its people doesn't know about their responsibilities. Such as the campaign like "Vote for Pakistan" during 2013 and 2018 general elections, effectively mobilised millions of young voters, raising awareness about the importance of electoral participation. Similarly, the "Aurat March", held annually on international women's day, has created awareness of women's rights in political, economical and social aspects. Hence, awareness in citizens about their rights and responsibilities is the real hope for a better democracy.

A. Military interference in political affairs has been a major hurdle in Pakistan's democratic evolution. The reason is that this interference disturbs the political process and weakens the civilian institutions. As Pakistan has experienced three major military coups—in 1958, 1977 and 1999. ~~As a result~~ so repeated military interventions have disturbed the natural development of democracy. Consequently, it is said that the major hurdle in way of democracy is a repeated military interventions.

B. One of the main hurdle for better democracy is weak electoral system. As weak electoral system brings weak democratic system. A prominent example is the controversial 1977 general elections, which were widely criticised for massive electoral fraud, leading to a political crisis that paved the way for General Zia-ul-Haq's military coup. As a result, it is concluded that weak electoral system is the hurdle in the way of better democracy.

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P The use of politics for personal interests has long been a major obstacle to democratic progress in Pakistan. Because personalisation of politics has seriously weakened the democracy of Pakistan. For instance, during Nawaz Sharif's multiple tenures as prime Minister, allegation of using political influences for personal enrichment as in the case of 'Panama Papers Scandal (2016)', which exposed his family's offshore assets and ultimately led to his disqualification by the Supreme Court in 2017. Hence, for democratic system use of politics for personal interests is major hurdle in its way.

D. Regional politics and divisions have significantly hindered the democratic success in Pakistan.

The reason is that it leads to conflicts and political instability and in result disturbs the democracy.

For instance, as Awami National Party (ANP) in Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) plays politics on the basis of region and ethnicities sometime which lead to conflicts and thus weakens the democratic success in the country.

Resultantly, it has been observed that democratic process is shattered by regional politics and divisions.

E. Widespread corruption and poor resource management have created substantial challenges to the successful functioning of democracy in Pakistan. Because, corruption weakens the democratic system of a country. According to a report suggesting that corruption costs Pakistan over \$10 billion annually in lost revenue, largely impacting country's ability to invest in education, health which leads to better democracy. Thus, for democratic success corruption and poor management of resource is the major setback.

F. Mass illiteracy remains a main hurdle to the establishment of democracy in Pakistan. The reason is that low literacy rate produce inadequate democratic system. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics the literacy rate is very low as 62.8% as in comparison to US, which is more than 90%. Although in province like Balochistan literacy rate are low as 40%. Hence, it can be said that for the better democracy, mass illiteracy remains a major hurdle in its way of success in Pakistan.

Ethnic and regional conflicts have largely disturbed the democratic process in Pakistan. Because of conflicts political and economical instability occurs leading to weak democratic system. For instance, in the case of "Muttahida Qaumi Movement" (MQM's) influence in Karachi, where political power struggles among different ethnic groups which have led to violence and instability during elections. Such environment produce fear and distrust on the leaders of government. Thus, the democratic process in Pakistan is greatly obstructed by ethnic and regional conflicts.

H. Extremism and terrorism pose a great threat to democratic fabric in Pakistan, undermining political stability and civil rights. As every form of extremism is not good for democratic process.

Such as the '2014 Army Public School attack in Peshawar', which claimed the lives of over 140 students and staff members. Such extremism leads to weakening of democracy and create a distrust among public and government institutions.

A. To Counter military interference, the government should create such legislative reforms that reinforce civilian authority. By establishing a check on Army through parliamentary committees to monitor defence policies and security budgets, ensuring that military remains under civilian oversight. Such as "Right to information Act (2017)", which was introduced to promote transparency and accountability in governance. By giving access of information to all citizens.

B. For democracy to get its full strength in a country, empowering election commission is very important. As transparent elections brings good democratic system. One of significant step was "20th constitutional amendment" which aimed to enhance the independence of ECP by providing it with great autonomy and authority to conduct election. It can be conclude that for better democracy empowering of Election Commission is very needed.

C. Launching a nationwide literacy programme is vital for enhancing democracy in Pakistan. The reason is that only literacy is the solution to get true democracy. One of the most notable effort was "National Literacy Strategy (NLS)" launched in 2003, aimed at increasing literacy rate, including adult education, vocational training and community participation. Hence, for the best democratic system high literacy rate of a country is very important.

VI. To sum up, all the above made discussion, the journey of democracy in Pakistan is faced by both significant hope and formidable hurdles. On one hand, the successful transition of political power, the empowerment of election commission, and the efforts for increase in literacy rate through different practices and with various legislative reforms. Furthermore, the active engagement of youth and women in the political process is a hopeful sign for the future of democracy in Pakistan.

While on the other hand, challenges such as military interventions, mass illiteracy, regional conflicts and large scale corruption have disrupted the democracy.

These hurdles or obstacles not only undermine public trust in political institution but also disturbs the meaningful participation of citizens in the democratic process. Addressing these issues requires a concerted efforts from all stakeholder, government, political parties, civil societies and citizens themselves. By focusing on strengthening democratic institutions, education, and creating the culture of accountability. Ultimately, the future of democracy in Pakistan depends on the collective efforts to tackle all these hurdles while nurturing the hopes for a true democratic system.