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Elaborat planning mechanism, Government in Pakistan are often critcized for short-shrifting longterm developments ---

I. Exordium:

Pakistan has one of the most elaborate formal planning architectures among developin states, including the Planning Commission, Vision Documents, PSDP, MTBF, and sectoral strategies. Yet, despite this institutional depth, Pakistan continues to underperform on long-term development indicators such as human capital, productivity, sustainability, and structural transformation. The criticism that Pakistan governments 'short-shrift' long-term sustainability is therefore largely valid. The fault lies not in the absence of plans, but in political economy, weak state capacity, and governance failures that undermine implementation and continuity.

II. Valid Arguments:

1) Planning - Implementation Gap:

Pakistan excels at plan formulation but fails at execution.

Evidence

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- over 60% of PSDP projects face delays or cost overruns.
- Repeatedly abandoned Five-Year Plans - last plan completed from 2008-2013.

Why Policy failed?

According to Pressman and Wildavsky, Implementation Theory stated that policy failures occur when multiple veto points disrupt execution.

2) Political Instability and Discontinuity:

Frequent government changes prevent long-term policy continuity.

Evidence:

Pakistan has averaged one major political transition every 2-3 years since 2008. Each regime resets priorities, disregarding the programs of predecessors.

Why Planning failed?

Political Business Cycle Theory stated that short political horizons distort development planning.

3) Weak Human Capital Investment:

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Long-term development is not possible without sustained human capital investment.

Evidence:

- Pakistan ranked low (26) on Human Development Index (HDI) in South Asia.
- Health Spending ~ 1.5% of GDP.
- Education Spending ~ 2% of GDP.

Policy Failure:

Human Capital Theory of Becker stated that growth depends on education and health accumulation. Under-investment in people undermines productivity.

4) **Electoral Populism over Rationality:**

Government prioritizes short-term populist measures over structural reforms.

Evidence:

Heavy reliance of Pakistan on subsidies (wheat, fuel, or energy) consuming over 2-3% of GDP annually.

Policy Failure:

Rational Choice Theory stated that politicians maximize electoral returns, not long-term

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welfare consumption is favored over investment.

5) Elite Capture and Interests:

Planning outcomes are distorted by elite interests.

Evidence:

Tax-to-GDP ratio remains 9-10%, among the lowest globally.

Policy Failure:

Development plans are captured by powerful groups. Public Choice Theory reflects that policies are designed by elite preferences not public interests.

6) Federal-Provincial Coordination Failure:

Devolution without capacity has weakened development planning.

Evidence:

Post-18th Amendment, provinces lack technical and fiscal policy.

Policy Failure:

Devolution requires capacity and coordination

between Federal and provincial government.
(Fiscal Federalism Theory)

7) **Bureaucratic Procedural Delays:**
Civil servants are rewarded for compliance, not results.

Evidence:
Performance evaluation focuses on procedures not results. And, low continuity of any policy due to frequent transfers.

Policy Failure Reason:
New Public Management says that absence of outcome-based accountability weakens effectiveness.

8) **Infrastructure Bias:**
In Pakistan, development is equated with visible infrastructure not productivity reforms.

Evidence:
High development spending on road, flyovers, and energy projects. Low investment in R&D (~0.3% of GDP) and industrial upgrading.

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Policy Failure:

According to Structural Change Theory of kuznets, development requires sectoral shift, not just assets.

II. Critical Analysis:

Critics argue that planning in Pakistan has become a symbolic exercise aimed at satisfying donors and political optics rather than guiding development. Plans are produced just to signal seriousness, but they lack proper implementation and ownership. The development planning is subordinated to electoral politics, where short-term visibility projects crowd out long-term investments in education, Health, and productivity-enhancing reforms.

Moreover, the political economy highly influences the plannings in Pakistan-reflects elite interests. In this regard, Pakistan lacks an accountability culture; leads to failure of plans, carries no cost of bureacracy, and encourage repetition

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of ineffective policies. Development experts argue that Pakistan's planning remains asset-heavy but people-light, failing to prioritize human capital, which is backbone for long-term growth and competitiveness. Furthermore, recycling of failed interventions is due to the near absence of impact evaluation and learning mechanisms. Finally, Pakistan operates in a permanent crisis mode, where firefighting economic and political shocks displaces strategic thinking and long-term planning.

IV. Conclusion:

Pakistan's problem is not how much it plans, but how little planning matters in decision making. Until incentives reward long-term outcomes over short-term survival, planning will remain aspirational rather than transformational.