

"DEMOCRATIC UNREST IN PAKISTAN: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES"

A. Introduction

B. Causes of Democratic unrest in Pakistan:

- (1) Lack of political parties manifestoes and their operationalization on dynastic politics are a dent to democracy.

Case in Point: Limited mainstream political parties that take turns to govern.

- (2) Weak law and order situation results in democratic distrust of public.

Case in Point: Natasha Riaz (offender of Karsaz Accident) was left free due to influential background.

- (3) Economic instability triggers public sit-ins and boycotts that weaken democracy.

Case in Point: Young Doctors Protests.

- ~~May~~ Business Community.

(4): Recurrent military regimes in history have contributed to eroding democracy.

Case in Point: Three Martial laws in 48 years.

(5) Rigged Elections throughout history have contributed to democratic unrest.

Case in Point: FAFEN reported rigging of polls in February 2024 Elections.

(6) Delayed institutional reforms weaken them causing unrest.

Case in Point: Election Commission of Pakistan.

C. Consequences of Democratic Unrest in Pakistan:

(1) Inconsistent policies due to fragmented tenures of governments.

Case in Point: Health Card scheme was halted after PTI's ouster from parliament in 2022.

(2) Loss of investor trust due to political instability. {MNCs exit}

Case in Point: China is skeptical to further invest in Phase 2.0 of CPEC.

(3) A weak centre results in provincial discords and grievances affecting national integration.

Case in Point: ~~Insurgency in~~ Sindh and Punjab's canal feud.

(4) Power vacuum filled by external proxies resulting in breach of national security.

Case in Point: Insurgency in Balochistan (BLA) and TTP in KP.

(5) Unresolved issues of utmost significance.

Case in Point: Kashmir.

(6) Emergence of autocratic institutions.

Case in Point: Amnesty Intl. Report
4th Schedule list

D. Conclusion

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Democracy in Pakistan has remained in shackles throughout its history. The state is characterized by hybrid regimes, recurrent regime changes and lack of separation of powers in truest sense. Democratic unrest has been a significant drawback to clearing the country's position worldwide. The issue is based on various causes. The first and foremost is the absence of true leadership and lack of political manifesto. Fragile law and order situation further deteriorates the democratic system. Declining economy and ever-increasing inflation are contributing factors to eroding respect for democracy. Each of its causes generates a consequence of a turbulent democracy for the people of the nation. Policy inconsistency remains at the heart of effects that public has to encounter. Moreover, democratic issues

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significantly impact investments from foreign countries. Chaotic federation has to manage inter-provincial differences as well. It is a pertinent fact that political, economic and social issues result in democratic unrest in Pakistan. The nation has to face the consequences in the form of governance and policy issues.

Politics in Pakistan is stimulated by dynastic agendas and personal gains. Political parties and their leaders are devoid of any absolute manifesto to take forward such parties, when in power, operationalize only for personal gains. This results in issues faced by the public because their whims and wishes are unattended for. The mainstream parties from 1980s are following a pattern to take turns in power. This corrupts the core idea of democracy.

The flawed mechanism of law and order situation in Pakistan

contributes to democratic erosion.

Unfortunately, the power elites are privileged to commit crimes and never be accountable for them.

Such proceedings cause polarized masses that do not value rules.

In turn, the entire system is corrupted.

For example, Natasha Riaz, who killed two people due to drunken driving was set free by law makers in Pakistan. Such cases picture the level of democratic unrest.

Economic deprivation is also a contributing factor to democratic unrest. A weak economy can result in public discords and issues of the masses. Over the years, Pakistan has witnessed this trend where people take their deprivations to the streets. Sitins and social boycotts like those of young doctors or trader associations show the weakening of democratic officials.

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Pakistan has been a victim to military interventions in parliamentary affairs. Recurrent impositions of dictators signify a threat to democracy and its basic principles. Over a course of 78 years, the country has faced three martial laws where constitutions were abolished and parliament was dissolved. This is a large dent to democratic norms.

Electoral processes are central to democratic setups. The intensity of democracy is reflected in the conduction of free and fair polls. Unfortunately, elections in Pakistan are marred by rigging, ghost voting and a counting that can not be explained. FAFEN has reported rigging of the recent polls held in 2024. It is a serious drawback to stable democracy in the country.

Weakened institutions are a setback to uphold democratic

values. The lack of internal reforms in institutions result in such a weakening. This causes impartial working and unfulfilled purposes. The Election commission of Pakistan, for instance requires an absolute revamping so that it can function in the best interests of democratic values. The use of digital voting machines and system for overseas voters inclusion in ballot process should be ensured.

Every action generates a consequence. Similarly each cause creates a result that the people have to face in terms of democratic barriers.

Policy inconsistency is a major drawback of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Frequent change of governments allows no developmental strategy to persist for long in the public interest. Social wellbeing and welfare of the people is

compromised. The Health Card Scheme, as an example, was discontinued in hospitals across Pakistan shortly after ouster of PTI's government. Patients under treatment suffered emotional and physical trauma.

Persistent changes in governance structure create a negative factor for investment in Pakistan. Foreign investors lose the trust in political stability. Market fluctuations further lead to pulling out of investments. Chinese CPEC Phase 2.0 investments are hanging by a thread due to this very factor. MNCs are actively pulling out of the country due to this issue - P&G, Shell, Total announced exits.

Democratic unrests results in weakening of federal structures. Internal discords overpower stable connections. The provinces as a result of internal turmoil are

affected in one way or the other. Such issues cause competition within the provincial governments and masses. The social fabric of the nation is fragmented and national integration remains weak. The canal water dispute between Sindh and Punjab is one such discord. The root cause lies in lack of transparent communication and information sharing.

Democratic unrest poses a threat to national security. Countries, where law and order situation is flawed, leave space for external powers to capture the void. This results in proxy wars, alienation of people or alteration of public narrative towards anti-state actors. The present scenario in Balochistan (separatist BLA) and insurgency in KP by TTP is an exemplary case study.

Unstable democracies ignore significant geopolitical issues. Such states are fighting within and on external fronts so much that the extension of national agendas remain the last priority. Pakistan could not free itself from governance issues, inconsistent tenures and military interventions. This caused the Kashmir issue to wait for era of stability. The people left to destiny's hand.

Unsettled dents to democracy can turn out to be foundation stones for autocracy. The gravest consequence of democratic unrest is the rise of autocratic sentiment in either the people of the state or state institutions. Amnesty International has already published reports regarding autocratic surveillance in Pakistan. The fourth schedule list

also indicates similar scenario.

In a nutshell, democratic principles are merely ceremonial values in Pakistan. Blurred boundaries between factions of power have resulted in emergence of dictatorial norms in the country. Almost every election is rigged, resulting in decline of democracy. Institutional reforms are delayed to mitigate any chances of survival. Such practices lead to eroding national unity and security issues for the country. Provinces fight each other and issue remain unresolved. However, there is still a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. With accurate leadership strategy, long-term planning, well-sought policy-making and equitable resource distribution, democratic values can be restored. The house can be brought back in order with the right determination to do so.