

Democratic Unrest In Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

The Outline

(1) Introduction

(2) Understanding the term 'Democracy'

(3) Causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan

(a) Shadow of colonial past prevails in the democratic culture of Pakistan

(b) Political polarization hinders consensus dialogue, ~~creating~~ ^{contributing} to democratic unrest in Pakistan

(c) Ineffective and Non-uniform Education system of Pakistan produce uninformed citizens, enhancing democratic unrest in Pakistan

(d) Selective accountability and weak rule of law erode public trust in institutions, causing democratic unrest in Pakistan

(e) Controlled media refrain from exposing elite capture, weakening democratic culture in Pakistan

(f) wide socio-economic inequality and poverty alienate citizens of Pakistan, causing democratic unrest in the country

(4) Consequences of Democratic unrest in Pakistan

(a) Low voter turnout during elections is the outcome of democratic unrest in Pakistan

(b) Rise in extremist and separatist movements in marginalized areas is due to weak democracy in Pakistan

(c) Declining legislative productivity occurs due to polarization among leaders and democratic unrest in Pakistan

(d) Rising illiteracy and social injustices are results of democratic unrest in Pakistan

(e) Policy inconsistencies and deepening economic gaps are consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan

(5) Recommendations: Paving the ways for consolidation of democracy in Pakistan

(a) Introducing reforms in accountability institutions to ensure their autonomy

(b) Conducting transparent elections to restore public trust in the institutions

(c) Ensuring independent media and free speech to flourish true democracy in Pakistan

(d) Addressing socio-economic gaps to reduce grievances of rural communities

(e) Reforming education system to produce informed citizens in the country

(6) Conclusion

The Essay

19

Since inception, Pakistan is a democratic country but this democracy is symbolic with complex hybrid system in reality. Frequent political instability, exclusionary institutions, censored media, manipulated elections, and weak judiciary are present in democratic system of Pakistan, illustrating democratic unrest. Shayan, a young boy from rural area of Pakistan, always desired for to bring change in the country. He went to school located in his village but found broken chairs and buffaloes grazing in classes. When he became young, he was enthusiastic to win in elections but always failed to bear its expenses. He started his own campaigns but ^{his voice} was stifled by feudals of his own village. These failures shattered his trust in the government. Democratic unrest in Pakistan prevails due to shadows of colonial culture and political

polarization among leaders. Ineffective education system produce non-participatory citizens, and selective oversight creates vacuum for corrupt practices. Additionally, controlled media and widening poor-rich gaps alienate citizens, contributing to democratic unrest in Pakistan. Due to this, people refrain from voting and engage in extremist movements, threatening security situation of the country. Moreover, legislative productivity decreases, deepening gaps between public and elite class. In addition to this, democratic unrest results in inconsistent policies and rise in poverty, creating a vicious cycle of unrest. Therefore, it needs reforms in institutions, and multi-faceted steps to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. The causes of democratic unrest are historical, institutional, governance related; and its consequences unfold in form of ~~a~~ extremism, illiteracy, low participation, and deepening poverty in Pakistan.

Before delving into causes of democratic unrest, the term democracy is focused. Democracy is system of popular participation either directly or indirectly. The pre-requisite required for a democratic system are: independent judiciary, transparent elections, freedom of speech, civic education, and rule of law. Without these factors, it is difficult to establish a democratic system in any country. In Pakistan, there are various causes of democratic unrest which are discussed in following paragraphs.

First of all, a perpetual shadow of colonial past prevails in democratic culture of Pakistan, contributing to democratic unrest since its independence. British used colonial policies to establish their dominance on people of sub-continent. However, British left, but their culture of dominance still influences in the form of feudalism, manipulations, and wide gaps between public

officials and the public. According to Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) democracy index report, Pakistan ranks 125 out of 165 countries, calling it 'authoritarian' regime. Hence, it is one of the causes of flawed democracy in Pakistan.

Apart from this, political polarization among leaders hinders consensus dialogue, contributing to political instability and democratic unrest in Pakistan. Democracy flourishes with dialogue and compromise. However, in Pakistan, political leaders engage in unimportant discussions to avoid their accountability. They prefer street protests, social unrest, instead of constructive parliamentary debates. Additionally, due to lack of consensus political instability prevails in Pakistan. It was one of the main causes of military interventions in the past as well. Therefore, divisiveness in decision-making is another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Additionally, non-uniform and ineffective education system produces uninformed citizens, causing weak democracy in Pakistan. Education is the critical component that enlightens citizens about their rights and responsibilities. Contrarily, in Pakistan education system mainly focuses on cramming and reproducing the same knowledge. Civic education, leadership skills, and political affairs are widely ignored. Hence, citizens become apathetic towards participation in decision-making. Additionally, Pakistan has a non-uniform education system with public, private, elite and madrasah education producing huge differences among citizens. These disparities unequivocally weaken democracy, creating unrest in Pakistan.

Moreover, selective accountability and weak rule of law erode public trust in institutions, causing democratic unrest in Pakistan. Independent judiciary is one of the pre-requisite for true democracy.

However, in Pakistan, there is selective oversight with immunity to powerful and affluent individuals. According to World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2024, Pakistan ranks 129 out of 142 countries. This demonstrates fragility of the system. Also, there is delayed justice with millions of cases in backlog. Resultantly, it erodes public trust in institutions, contributing to democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Furthermore, controlled media refrain from exposing elites, weakening democratic culture of Pakistan. Undoubtedly, there is rise of social media platforms. ~~and~~ Formal media channels still remain conscious about talking about elite business and how they control policies in their favour. Additionally, the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2025 also raised concerns about free speech in Pakistan. Therefore, without "(stringent)" open discussions about massive corruption and policy control, democratic unrest

perpetuates in Pakistan.

Similarly, wide socio-economic inequality and poverty alienate citizens of Pakistan, causing democratic unrest in the country. The great American President, John F. Kennedy, once said Democracy is not just a system of government, but it is a form of life. In this system, all people are equal and all are required to contribute. However, in Pakistan, there is huge disparity between rich and poor. This wide inequality leaves people struggling in their lives ~~life~~ for bread. In this struggle, they become apathic to contribute in governance. Ultimately, they remain alienated for their whole life. According to World Bank Report 2025, almost 44% people remain under poverty line. Hence, it is another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

There are multi-dimensional consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan. One of them is

low voter turnout during elections.

Due to allegations of frequent rigging, manipulations, and internal changes, people's trust erodes. For instance, skepticism about Form 47 regarding current government undermines its legitimacy. According to Election Commission of Pakistan, voter turnout hovers around 40-50% during elections. It is the consequence of long-term democratic unrest in Pakistan. These participants are also manipulated by feudal lords, continuing the vicious cycle of instability in Pakistan.

Likewise, rise in extremist and separatist movements in marginalized areas is due to weak democracy in Pakistan. According to report of UNESCO, there are almost 60% young people below the age of 30 years in Pakistan. This youth is active on social media and well-aware about social injustices prevalent in Pakistan. However, they face unemployment, poverty, and injustices which compel them to

engage with extremist organizations. This happens mostly in rural areas of Balochistan and KPK. Pakistan is facing unprecedented rise in extremist and separatist movements in the form of TTP, BLA, BLF and Majid Binnigale. These movements not only threaten security situation but also undermine image of Pakistan internationally. Therefore, the outcomes of democratic unrest are very serious, demanding urgent steps.

Adding more to the above discussion, democratic unrest compromises legislative productivity in Pakistan. Due to political chaos, economic fragility, and power struggles, political leaders engage in unending conflicts. Resultantly, their focus shifts from parliamentary debates to other things. For instance, according to Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Administration (PILDAT), the legislative productivity ~~of~~ remained almost 40% during 2018-2022. As policies^{formulation} remain hindered and their implementation is not monitored, then unrest multiplies instead of reduction. In this chaotic system, efficiency becomes

becomes elusive dream. Therefore, democratic unrest not only impedes legislative effectiveness but also worsens already struggling democratic system of Pakistan.

In essence, democratic unrest in Pakistan is due to historical influence of colonialism, weak institutional accountability, outdated education system, and controlled media. Its consequences unfold in the form of rising extremism, illiteracy, poverty, and low participations. Without adequate reform, this cycle of unrest^{will} continue in Pakistan. The colonial culture dominates in the shape of feudalism and dominance of elite. Due to this behavior, political leaders remain rigid in their perspectives, undermining consensus dialogue. Additionally, current education system worsens the already fragile situation of chaos and turbulence. Moreover, weak rule of law and manipulated media further change public narratives. Due to instability, socio-economic crises rise in Pakistan. The consequences of democratic unrest are prominent in the country. For instance, there is low voter turnout,

high illiteracy, policy inconsistency, and rising separatist movements. Hence, to raise citizens like Shyam, who want to change conditions of Pakistan and bring prosperity, the government needs to make multifaceted reforms to consolidate democratic culture of Pakistan.