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DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN: HOPES AND HURDLES

Outline:

A. Introduction:

Notwithstanding the several hurdles faced by democracy in Pakistan, there are also many reasons for hope, such as reforms in Election Commission of Pakistan and accountability of political leaders.

B. Hopes of democracy in Pakistan

a. Reforms in Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)

Case in point: The 2022 ^{foreign} funding case against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) highlighted the ECP's role in ensuring transparency.

b. Emergence of free media

Case in point: During the Daska By - Election (2021), media coverage of polling station.

c. Strengthening of civil-society

Case in point: Organizations like the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) regular publish reports.

d. Emergence of regional political parties

Case in point: The Balochistan National Party (BNP) highlights issues like provincial autonomy, and the rights of the Baloch people.

e. Economic protests as a form of democratic expression

Case in point: Public protests against inflation (2022-2023)

f. Accountability of political leaders

Case in point: Money laundering allegations against opposition leaders (2020-2023) including former president Asif Ali Zardari and opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif.

g. Inclusion of minorities

Case in point: Special seats for minorities in the National and Provincial Assemblies have provided a platform for their voices.

h. Women's participation

Case in point: Female lawmakers have been instrumental in passing progressive laws, such as Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill (2020).

c. Hurdles of democracy in Pakistan

a. Weak political institutions

Case in point: The 2022 political crisis, which saw

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the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote.

b. Military intervention

case in point: During the 2022 political crisis, the military played a behind the scenes role in facilitating dialogue between the opposition and the ruling party.

c. Foreign interventions

case in point: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Chinese influence in Pakistan's decision making processes.

d. Political polarization

Case in point: The rivalry between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) highlights how political polarization affects governance.

e. Economic instability

case in point: Pakistan's frequent bailouts from the IMF have resulted in policy compromises and public discontent.

f. Media and censorship

case in point: The 2020 Citizen Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules, criticized by human rights groups.

g. Lack of political continuity

Case in point: The inability of the civilian governments to complete their five-year tenure.

D. Conclusion:

Essay

Democracy is government in which power and civic responsibility are exercised by all adult citizens, directly, or through their freely elected representatives. Democracy rests upon the principles of majority rule and individual rights. Soon after the independence, Pakistan adopted British legacy constitutional framework and introduced the parliamentary democracy, following much from the Government of India Act 1935. The following are the hopes for democracy in Pakistan. To begin with, reforms in Election Commission of Pakistan promotes democracy in Pakistan. In addition to this emergence of free

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media in Pakistan has been a beacon of hope for democracy. Furthermore, strengthening civil society in Pakistan offers significant hope for democracy by promoting citizen engagement. Moreover, the emergence of regional political parties offers hope for democracy in Pakistan. Despite the hope, there are also several challenges to democracy in Pakistan. Such as weak political institutions significantly hinder the development and functioning of democracy in Pakistan by undermining governance. In addition to this military intervention has been one of the most significant hurdles to the development and consolidation of democracy in Pakistan. Furthermore, foreign interventions has created a significant hurdle to the proper functioning of democracy in Pakistan. Notwithstanding, the several hurdles faced by democracy in Pakistan, there are also many reasons for hope such as reforms in Election Commission of Pakistan and accountability of political leaders.

To begin with, reforming in the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is crucial for fostering democracy in the country. The Election Commission of Pakistan is responsible for ensuring free, fair and transparent elections, a cornerstone of the democratic governance. Reforms aimed at improving the neutrality and transparency of the ECP can ensure that elections are conducted fairly, free from manipulation, rigging or external influence. Transparent and modernized processes build public confidence in the electoral system. The 2022 foreign funding case against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) highlighted the ECP's role in ensuring transparency. Thus, reform in ECP pave the way for democracy in Pakistan.

In addition to this, the emergence of free media in Pakistan represents a significant hope for the strengthening of democracy. If media would be independent then democratic system would be flourished in. one of the basic roles of media that is to inform the public and to keep them aware of the happening around. Media exposes corruption, maladministration, and abuse of power,

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ensuring that public officials are held accountable. It fosters political awareness and understanding of democratic rights and responsibilities. For instance, during the Daska by-Election (2021), media coverage of polling station. Therefore, the emergence of the free media is a beacon of hope for democracy in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the strengthening of civil society is a crucial hope for the advancement of democracy in Pakistan. Civil society organizations create platforms for individuals to express their views, advocate for their rights, and actively participate in decision-making processes. Civil society acts as a watchdog, ensuring transparency and accountability in public institutions. Civil society acts as a watchdog, ensuring transparency and accountability in public institutions. It pushes for legal and institutional changes to address societal challenges such as corruption, inequality and injustice. Organizations like the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) regularly publish reports on governance and institutional performance. Thus, strengthened civil society in Pakistan offers hope for a more resilient democracy.

Moreover, the emergence of regional political parties in Pakistan is a sign of democratic evolution and a source of hope for strengthening democracy. Regional parties advocate for a fair distribution of resources and power between the federal and provincial governments, strengthening federalism. Regional parties are often closer to the people, making politics more accessible and encouraging civic engagement. The Balochistan National Party (BNP) highlights issues like provincial autonomy, and the rights of the Baloch people. Therefore, the emergence of regional ^{political} parties in Pakistan signals hope for a more inclusive and participatory democracy.

Likewise, economic protests, as a form of democratic expression, are a significant source of hope for democracy in Pakistan. Economic protests give ordinary people a platform to demand better policies, wages, and economic opportunities. They draw attention to pressing economic issues, such as inflation, unemployment, and resource mismanagement, forcing these topics into public and political discourse. For instance, public protests against inflation

(2022-2023). Economic protests often call for reforms in key sectors such as taxation and energy.

Thus, economic protests in Pakistan reflect the resilience and determination of its citizen to demand a better future.

Besides this, accountability of political leaders is a cornerstone of a thriving democracy. Accountability drives leaders to prioritize public welfare and make informed, ethical decisions. Accountability mechanisms expose and deter corrupt practices among political leaders, fostering clean governance.

Accountability ensures that political leaders are subject to the same laws as ordinary citizens, reinforcing the principle of equality. Money laundering allegations against opposition leaders (2020-2023) including former president Asif Ali Zardari and opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif. Thus, accountability strengthens the democratic framework in Pakistan.

Even more, the inclusion of minorities in Pakistan is a fundamental pillar for fostering democracy in Pakistan. Recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds of minorities fosters

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national harmony and reduces societal divisions. Including minorities in political processes ensures their voices are heard in policymaking and governance. Minority representation in legislature and decision making bodies enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Special seats for minorities in the National and Provincial Assemblies have provided a platform for their voices. Thus, the inclusion of minorities strengthens the democratic fabric of Pakistan.

Additionally, the increased participation of women in Pakistan is a significant hope for democracy in country. Women's active involvement in politics is a crucial element for both gender equality and authentic democracy. When women are actively involved in politics, they bring perspectives and concerns that are often overlooked, such as issues related to health, education and child welfare. Female lawmakers have been instrumental in passing progressive laws, such as Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill (2020). Therefore,

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increased participation of women are a source of hope for the democracy in Pakistan.

Despite the hopes, it does not mean the absence of hurdles faced by democracy in Pakistan. The following are the hurdles to democracy in Pakistan.

To begin with, weak political institutions present significant hurdles for democracy in Pakistan. When political institutions are weak, they undermine democratic process and contribute to political instability, corruption and a lack of public trust. Fragile political parties with limited internal democracy and the absence of merit-based leadership often lead to fragmented unstable governments. Weak political institutions foster frequent changes in leaderships or coalitions, making it difficult to formulate long-term policies or implement reforms. The 2022 political crisis, which saw the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote. Thus, weak institutions in Pakistan are a major hurdle for the country's democracy.

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In addition to this, military intervention has been one of the most significant hurdles to democracy in Pakistan. The military's role in politics often exacerbates political instability and leads to increased internal conflict, as democratic forces resist military control. Constant military intervention in politics creates a culture where political elites may seek military support to gain or maintain power, rather than relying on democratic processes. During the 2022 political crisis, the military played a behind the scenes role in facilitating the dialogue between opposition and ruling party. Therefore, military intervention has been a major hurdle to democracy.

Moreover, foreign interventions are hurdles to democracy in Pakistan. Foreign influence often compels Pakistan's leadership to prioritize external interests over domestic welfare, undermining the government's accountability to its citizens. Over dependence on foreign military and economic supports constraints Pakistan's ability to chart an autonomous democratic

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path. For instance, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Chinese influence in Pakistan's decision making process. Therefore, foreign interventions in Pakistan have had a deeply negative impact on its democratic development.

Furthermore, political polarization is a significant hurdle to democracy in Pakistan. Polarization refers to the growing ideological, political, or social divide between different political functions. Severe polarization makes democracy vulnerable. Polarized political environments tend to lead to political gridlock, where opposition parties refuse to cooperate with the government, and policy making becomes highly contentious. In a highly polarized political environment, political parties often prioritize party interests over institutional strength and democratic norms. The rivalry between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) highlights how political polarization affects governance. Thus, political polarization in Pakistan presents significant challenge to the country's democracy.

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Likewise, economic instability is a hurdle to democracy in Pakistan. Economic crisis reduce the government's ability to meet the basic needs of the people. Economic instability can lead to corruption and mismanagement of public resources, as political leader may resort of unethical practices to secure financial support or control over state assets. Economic instability often forces Pakistan to rely on foreign assistance and loans, leading to external influence in domestic policy making. Pakistan frequent bailouts from the IMF have resulted in policy compromise and public discontent. Thus, economic instability poses a serious threat to democracy in Pakistan.

Besides this, media and censorship are significant hurdles for democracy in Pakistan. Censorship limits the ability of the media to report on issues of public interest, such as government corruption, military interference, and judicial accountability. This suppression of free speech prevents citizen from accessing accurate and unbiased information, which is essential for making informed decisions.

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in a democracy. In the digital age, censorship has expanded to include online platforms, with restrictions on social media and websites becoming increasingly common in Pakistan. The 2020 Citizen Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules, criticized by human rights groups. Thus, media and censorship poses a serious threat to democracy in Pakistan.

Last but not the least, lack of political continuity is a major hurdle for democracy in Pakistan. Political instability and the lack of continuity deter domestic and foreign investment, as business and investors require stable governance to make ~~long~~-term commitments. Pakistan has experienced numerous instances of premature dissolution of government, whether through military coups, judicial interventions, or political man-euvering. For instance, the inability of civilian governments to complete their five years-tenure. Thus, the lack of political continuity in Pakistan has severely hindered the country's democratic development.

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To conclude this, the hopes for democracy in Pakistan includes the emergence of free media and inclusion of minorities. However, there are also hurdles to democracy in Pakistan, such as weak political institutions and political polarization. The hopes of democracy in Pakistan are; such as economic protests, as a form of democratic expression, represent a powerful mechanism for citizens in Pakistan to voice their grievances and hold authorities accountable. In addition to this, accountability fosters a culture of responsibility and ethical governance, ensuring that political leaders act in the best interest of the nation. Furthermore, the inclusion of minorities in Pakistan is a fundamental pillar for fostering a robust, inclusive and participatory democracy.

Despite the hopes, the hurdles for democracy in Pakistan includes: political polarization is a hurdle for democracy in Pakistan, as it creates division within the society. In addition to this, economic instability is also a hurdle for democracy in Pakistan, as it affects the

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country's political stability. Moreover, media and censorship are significant hurdles for democracy in Pakistan, as they restrict the free flow of information. Although there are several hurdles to democracy in Pakistan, overcoming these challenges can foster the growth of democracy in Pakistan.

