

Essay

## Democracy in Pakistan: Hopes and Hurdles

**Thesis Statement:** Democracy in Pakistan has been showing hopes of continuity of democratic government, no military intervention and increased political participation. However, there are also hurdles such as electoral reforms, dynastic politics and lack of political consensus. It is need to address these problems, so that democracy may function smoothly in Pakistan.

### Introduction

I What is democracy?

→ Rule of people

II How democracy has evolved in Pakistan?

1- Repeated military interference in the past

Case in point: Four undemocratic government

2- Continuity of democratic government since 2007

Case in point: Four democratic government by PPP, PML-N, PTI

## and Coalition democratic government

### III What are the hopes attached with democracy in Pakistan

#### 1 Successive government

- A. PPP - 2008
- B. PMLN - 2013
- C. PTI - 2018
- D. PMLN and coalition - 2024

#### 2. No military intervention Case in point: vote of no confidence against Former Prime Minister Imran Khan

#### 3 Increased political participation

Case in point: "60.8 million voters exercised their right to vote in Pakistan's general election 2024." - Free and Fair Election Network



4- Increased political participation of women  
Case in point: "The number of women candidates rose from 465 in 2018 to 902 in 2024." - Free and Fair Election

5- Independent media  
Case in point: "Media is a robust tool in 21<sup>st</sup> century" - International Growth Centre

6 Active role of civil society

IV What are the hurdles confronted by democracy in Pakistan?

1 Lack of political consensus  
Case in point: Kala Bagh Dam construction block

2. Non-democratic culture within the political parties  
Case in point: Dynastic politics of feudal lords

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3. Polarized politics  
→ provincialism

4. Biased Mechanism of accountability  
Case in point: "Pakistan's rank in corruption is 132 out of 180 countries"  
- International Transparency Index

5. Unstable economy  
Case in point: inadequate spending on health and education

6. Poor image of Pakistan  
Case in point: passport ranking is abysmally low

IV Ways forward for democracy in Pakistan

- A. building political consensus
- B. Improving socio-economic opportunities.

Conclusion



In a world where democracy is hailed as the beacon of freedom and justice, Pakistan stands at a crossroads, its political landscape shaped by a turbulent history of military rule, authoritarianism, and civil unrest. For over seven decades, the nation has struggled to balance the ideas of democracy with the harsh realities of political instability, corruption and entrenched power structures. As Pakistan moves forward, the hopes for a flourishing democratic system are tempered by significant hurdles, from the military's influence in politics to the challenges of economic inequality and governance. Democracy in Pakistan has been showing hopes of continuity of democratic government, no military intervention and increased political participation. However, there are also hurdles such as electoral reforms, dynastic politics

and lack of political consensus. It is need to address these problems so that democracy may function smoothly in Pakistan. Exploring the hopes and hurdles in Pakistan's democracy, the essay defines the term of democracy and its historical development in Pakistan. After that, the discussion highlights the historical development of Pakistan's democracy. This essay also ~~or~~ describes hopes attached with ~~the~~ democracy in Pakistan and finally it indicates towards hurdles on the way of democracy in Pakistan.

Democracy refers to a form of government where people elect their own representatives for rule. There are various definitions of democracy as, a prominent author, Will Durant defines, "democracy is the government of middle class,



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or the government of second best." Besides, former president of U.S.A Abraham Lincoln explained, "Democracy as a form of government that is for the people, by the people and of the people." Therefore, democracy can be defined as the rule of people.

To understand the historical development of Pakistan's democracy, there is an imperative need to take microscopic view of Pakistan's democratic history.

Pakistan has faced repeated four military interference in the history of the country.

General Ayub Khan ruled in the period of 1958 to 1969.

General Yahya Khan came to power in 1969 to 1971.

General Zia-ul-Haq imposed worst martial law during the period of 1977 to 1988.

Finally, General Pervez

Musharraf ruled on Pakistan in 1999 to 2008. These four worst non-democratic rules have presented the darkest picture of democracy in Pakistan. They undermined constitution and public desire by creating an environment of uncertainty within the country.

Evolving a green signal of democracy in Pakistan, the democracy has been started ~~from~~ since 2007 when General Pervez Musharraf resigned from its authoritarian government. During the period of 2007 to 2013, the first democratic party, 'Pakistan Peoples Party', came to power. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz PML-N ruled between 2013 and 2018. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf also elected in 2018. The coalition governm-



ent of PML-N and PPP  
made government since 2024.

So, these four successive govern-  
ment are great harbingers of  
democracy in Pakistan.

Moving forward, successive  
government since 2008 is a greater  
sign of democracy in Pakistan.  
After the resignation of  
General Pervez Musharraf,  
democratic parties have  
been ruling in Pakistan.

In general election 2008,  
Pakistan Peoples Party 'PPP' came  
to power and in 2013  
PML-N ruled in Pakistan.  
PTI also elected in  
general election of 2018. Moreover,  
in general election 2024 PML-N  
and PPP announced a coalition  
government. Therefore, it refle-  
cts that democracy has been  
flourishing in Pakistan  
which is a hope for democr-  
atic culture in Pakistan.

Furthermore, one of the most important hopes attached with democracy in Pakistan is no military intervention in political affairs. People has the potential to remove sitting government by their representatives. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan removed from the office of P.M by vote of no confidence in May, 2022. Before this, military imposed martial law, and it ruled over the people but currently people themselves can remove or support any government. Thus, no military intervention is a good hope for democracy in Pakistan.

To prove there is hope of democracy in Pakistan, it is pertinent to mention that increased political participation has



been showing an amicable environment for democracy in Pakistan. The tendency of vote casting "has increased from past." 60.6 million voters exercised their votes in Pakistan's general election 2024." — Free and Fair Election Network. The report indicates people are more inclined to participate in democratic rule in Pakistan. The response of the citizens towards vote casting is fruitful for not only the progress of the country but also the development of the citizens. However, political participation presents big hope for democracy in Pakistan.

Not only political participation of men but also political participation of women has emerged as a tool of democratic process in

in Pakistan. "The number of women candidates rose from 465 in 2018 to 902 in 2024." — Free and Fair Election Network. This is a sole secret of women empowerment which allow them to participate in the function of government. These women can raise their voices and they also can represent other women at the country world forum. Hence, political participation of women is a hope for democracy in Pakistan.

Independent media is a tool for flourishing democracy in Pakistan which is a hope for democracy. Media has the ability to create awareness among people to play role in strengthening democracy. International Growth Centre states that



social media can play significant role in creating democratic environment by spreading awareness about vote casting and remembering people to go for exercise right to vote on the date of election. There is no denying the fact that media in 21<sup>st</sup> century is the greatest power in the world which can mould people mind. Thus, independent media is a hope for democracy in Pakistan.

Creating an amicable environment for democracy in Pakistan, civil society is playing admirable role in flourishing democracy. Currently, people are aware of their rights and needs, and they raise question about their desires. If a representative ignore public's desires and needs, they

decide to oppose such representative in election.

So, the situation has changed, now <sup>active role</sup> of civil society is a good hope for democracy in Pakistan.

On the other hand, there are numerous hurdles are attached with democracy in Pakistan. The most important hurdle confronted by democracy in Pakistan is lack of political consensus. It creates obstacle on the way of any decision making and policy formulating. Kala Bagh Dam did not constructed so far because of lack of political consensus. If the dam constructs, <sup>people</sup> are enjoying numerous advantages. Unfortunately, lack of political consensus is posing serious threat to democracy in Pakistan.



In addition to, Pakistan is suffering from non-democratic culture within the political system which is a huge hurdle in the path of democracy in Pakistan. Dynastic politics is a critical challenge in political field. It is evident the fact that the history of Pakistan shows each ruler prepare his son or daughter for top leadership. Such attributes stifle democratic government and create an uncertain environment for democracy.

Therefore, non-democratic culture within the politics of Pakistan is a significant hurdle for democracy in Pakistan.

Furthermore, polarized politics is also serious threat to democracy in Pakistan. There are three mainstream

political parties in Pakistan like PML-N, PPP and PTI which represent and support only their provinces rather than represent and support the country. Hence, polarized politics is also important hurdle for democracy in Pakistan.

Moreover, democracy of Pakistan is suffering from biased mechanism of accountability which is a mammoth menace for democracy in Pakistan. The dismal panorama of corruption is painting dark picture of country. "Pakistan's rank in corruption is 132 out of 180 countries." — International Transparency Index 2024. Such perception erode public trust on public sector. Therefore, biased mechanism of accountability poses serious threat to



Furthermore, unstable economy is a critical hurdle on the way of democracy in Pakistan. Due to low economy, the government is unable to spend more on education and health. The government of Pakistan allocates only 1.5 percent for education while the global standard is 4.6 percent. It is a core cause of illiteracy within the country. Moreover, the country also allocates negligible budget for the health sector which indicates that the government is neglecting fundamental human right given by the constitution of Pakistan. Hence, economic crisis of Pakistan posing serious threat to democracy in Pakistan.

To highlight the main hurdles on

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the way of democracy in Pakistan, it is also pertinent to mention that a poor image of country poses a serious threat to democracy in Pakistan. Unfortunately, various countries have banned to allow Pakistanis to enter their countries. As of 2024, Pakistani passport is ranked 100th in the world by the Henly Passport Index. It is considered one of the lowest-ranked in the world. It ranks higher than only Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. Thus, a poor image of Pakistan is a big hurdle on the way of democracy in Pakistan.

However, the situation is not all bleak, Pakistan can improve and can bounce back from this quagmire by building political consensus and improving



socio-economic opportunities.

There is dire need to promote table talk rather than go to street and crushing the opposition by using anti riot gear. Moreover, it is also significant to provide socio-economic opportunities to people by reducing poverty, providing employment and announcing supportive programs for the people of Pakistan. Hence, to flourish an environment of democratic culture, there is need to build political consensus and improve socio-economic opportunities.

**To conclude,** democracy in Pakistan showing both hopes and hurdles in the turbulent history of democratic process in Pakistan.

There are various hopes are attached with democracy

in Pakistan including:  
the democratic rule since  
2007, no interference of  
military within politics, highest  
political participation and  
independent media which  
are opening the door of  
democratic culture in Pakistan.

On the other hand, there  
are numerous hurdles on the  
way of democracy like dynastic  
politics, lack of political consensus  
and biased accountability. As  
every cloud has a silver  
lining, the democracy can  
flourish by ~~also~~ developing  
political consensus and improving  
socio-economic opportunities.