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Has democracy failed to deliver in Pakistan

Outline:-

1. Introduction

Despite respected democratic transitions, democracy in Pakistan has largely failed to deliver institutional stability and socio-economic development. Weak governance, elite capture, and policy inconsistency have eroded public trust in democratic processes. For democracy to deliver, Pakistan must strengthen accountability, rule of law and inclusive governance.

2. Historical Perspective of Democracy in Pakistan

3. Key Reason for the Failure of democracy in Pakistan

3.1 Frequent military intervention

(i) Pakistan has faced three

Major coups (1958, 1973, 1999)

(ii) Doctrine of Necessity in Pakistan

3.2 Extreme Poverty Confirms the failure of democracy

- (i) 44.7% of total population lives below Poverty line: IMF Report

3.3 Corruption and Poor governance

- (i) Nepotism and misuse of Authority are common complaints

3.4 failed to ensure national integration

- (i) Insurgency in KPK and Balochistan

- (ii) Pakistan Rank 2nd in Global Terrorism Index Report

3.5 Lack of Political continuity.

- (i) No elected PM in Pakistan completed Five-Year term
- (ii) Frequent dissolutions of assemblies

3.6 Weak Political Institutions

- (i) Political Parties often lack internal democracy and are led by dynasties

- (ii) State organs are frequently influenced by executive or military

3.7 Manipulated elections

- (i) Low voter confidence
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3.8 Drawbacks of democratic governance and failed to enhance FDI

- (i) Repeated democratic breakdown hurt Pakistan global reputation

4. Recommendation for democratic revival

4.1 Freedom of Press

- (i) Emergence of Social Media and Private channels

- (ii) World Freedom Index

Report: Norway, Estonia

4.2 Electoral Reforms

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- (i) Introduce biometric verification
- (ii) Ensure free access to media and campaign resources for Parties

4.3 Strengthen local government

- (i) Empower local bodies with financial and administrative authority
- (ii) Encourage civil engagement and grassroots democracy

4.4 Educate the masses democratic rights and duties

- (i) Strong civic educational Program of Denmark (Skolevalg)
- (ii) Sweden: engage students in democratic Processes

4.5 Establish transparent System to root out corruption

4.6 Promoting Political Stability

4.7 Promoting Economic development and Socio-economic Partnership

- (i) World Economic Forum Report: Denmark Rank top in Social Mobility Index

4.8 Supremacy of Constitution Should be ensured

(i) USA, Canada best constitutional countries

5 Conclusion

Essay

"Democracy is a device that ensure we shall be governed no better than we deserve"

— George Bernard Shaw —

Democracy is often hailed as the most inclusive and accountable form of Governance, Promising rule of law, civil liberties and public Participation in decision-making. In the case of Pakistan democracy was envisioned as the foundational Pillar of the State, following its creation in 1947 through a

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Political and constitutional struggle. However, over the decades the democratic experience in Pakistan has been marred by instability, weak institutions, and repeated military interventions. While the country has witnessed periodic elections and civilian governments, the promised outcomes of democracy, good governance, economic developments, social justice, and institutional accountability remain largely unfulfilled. Despite respected democratic transitions, democracy in Pakistan has largely failed to deliver institutional stability and socio-economic development. Weak governance, elite capture, and policy inconsistency have eroded public trust in democratic processes. For democracy to deliver, Pakistan must strengthen accountability, rule of law and inclusive governance.

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Pakistan has experienced frequent military intervention, which have severely disrupted its democratic evolution. Since independence, the country has faced three ^{major} military coups that brought the armed forces directly into power. The first coup occurred in **1958**, when General Ayub Khan overthrew President Iskandar Mirza, marking the beginning of military dominance in politics. The second coup came in **1977**, when General Zia-ul-Haq ousted Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto amid political unrest and allegations of election rigging. Zia imposed martial law and ruled over a decade. The third coup happened in **1999** when General Pervez Musharraf toppled the elected government of Nawaz Sharif following civil-military tensions. These interventions not only derailed democratic process but also

Weakend institutions, centralized power in the military, and fostered a culture of authoritarianism. Even during civilian governments, the military continues to exert significant influence over national security, foreign policy and internal affairs.

Besides, extreme poverty in Pakistan highlights the failure of democracy to deliver meaningful change to the lives of ordinary citizens. Despite decades of elected government, a large portion of the population still lacks access to basic necessities such as clean water, health-care, education and employment. Democratic institutions have failed to prioritize the needs of the poor, often focusing instead on political rivalries and power struggles. Corruption, poor governance, and lack of

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accountability have diverted resources away from development and social welfare. As a result, poverty remains widespread, especially in rural areas and marginalized provinces. According to the World Bank Organization, in Pakistan 44.7% total population lives below the poverty line.

This persistent deprivation in a democratic setup rises serious question about the system ability to represent and uplift the common people it claims to serve.

Corruption and poor governance are major indicators of democratic failure in Pakistan. Successive civilian governments have been accused of misusing authority, promoting nepotism, and prioritizing personal or party interest over national welfare.

According to Transparency International's

2023 Corruption Perception Index ,

Pakistan ranked 133 out of 180 countries reflecting wide-spread institutional corruption. Political appointments are often based on loyalty rather than merit, weakening public institutions. Funds meant for development Projects are frequently embezzled or misused, depriving the poor of essential services. The absence of accountability and weak rule of law further fuels public distrust in democracy. When elected people or leaders fail to govern responsibly, democracy becomes a tool of power rather than a system for public service and justice.

“ The Duty of Youth
is to Challenge
Corruption ”

— Kurt Cobain —

Pakistan's democracy has failed to ensure true national integration, especially in conflict-prone regions like Balochistan and Kyber Paktunkhwa (KPK). In Balochistan, decades of political neglects, economic marginalization, and lack of autonomy have fueled separatist and armed insurgencies. In KPK, the rise of militancy, particularly Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has been a response to weak governance, poor security, and public alienation. Democratic governments have largely ignored the root causes of unrest, opting for military solutions instead of inclusive political dialogue. The failure to deliver justice, development and representation to these regions has deepened ethnic and regional divides. This lack of integration and trust in the democratic

process highlights a major shortcoming of Pakistan democratic institution in uniting nation under a common identity.

On the other hand, the key reasons for the failure of democracy in the Pakistan is the lack of political continuity. Since independence, no elected Prime Minister has ever completed a full five-year term, which reflects deep rooted political instability. Governments are frequently dismissed through controversial court rulings, internal conflicts, or pressure from the military establishment. For example ~~ex.~~ Nawaz Sharif was disqualified in 2017 before completing his term, while Imran Khan government was removed through a no-confidence vote in 2022. Additionally, the dissolution of

assemblies before term completion, often on Political grounds, disrupts governance and Policy consistency. This repeated instability weakens institutions, delays reforms, and erodes public trust in the democratic process, preventing long-term planning and national progress.

Moreover, the failure of democracy in Pakistan is closely linked to Weak Political Institution and the dominance of dynastic Political Parties. Major Parties like the Pakist Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People Party (PPP) are family-controlled, where leadership is inherited rather than earned through merit or internal elections.

This lack of internal democracy undermines Party structure and promotes loyalty over competence. Moreover, State institutions such as

the judiciary, bureaucracy, and election bodies often operate under the executive or military, rather than functioning independently. This erodes the system of checks and balances essential for a healthy democracy. As a result, democratic institutions become tools for power struggle rather than instruments of public service, weakening the democratic process and trust of the people.

One of the key reasons for the failure of democracy in Pakistan is the manipulation of election and interference by non-democratic forces, particularly the military establishment. Elections are often marred by allegation of rigging, pre-poll manipulation and favoritism, leading to low voter turnout and declining public trust.

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in the electoral process. The 2018 general elections, for example very widely criticized by being engineered in favor of a particular party, undermining democratic fairness when voters believe their votes do not matter.

Confidence in democracy weakens. The constant involvement of non-elected institutions in political affairs disrupts democratic continuity, making elected governments seem powerless. This manipulation of the people's mandate has severely harmed the credibility, legitimacy, and sustainability of democratic governance in Pakistan.

"Democracy needs support
and the best support for
democracy comes from
other democracies"

—Bengir
Bhutto

Pakistan's democratic governance has often failed to provide a stable and transparent environment necessary to attract **foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**. Frequent change in leadership, inconsistent economic policies, and bureaucratic hurdles deter foreign investors. Moreover, corruption, weak rule of law, and poor infrastructure reflect the inefficiency of democratic institution.

For example, Pakistan's repeated failure to meet **IMF Reform Conditions** and being placed on the **FATA grey list** damaged its international image and economic credibility. These factors signal instability to global markets, discouraging long-term investment.

As a result, Pakistan lags behind regional competitors like India or Bangladesh in attracting FDI. This failure to capitalize on democratic governance for economic progress highlights

a major shortcoming of Pakistan's political system.

Addressing the failures of democracy in Pakistan, several recommendations and policies must be followed by the Pakistan take holders which are given below.

Firstly, promoting freedom of the press and encouraging the responsible use of social media are essential. An independent media holds power accountable, (express) exposes corruption, and educates the public. Countries like Norway and Estonia, which constantly rank at the top of the World Press Freedom Index, show that Press freedom strengthens democratic institutions. In Pakistan, private news channels and social media platforms have played a key role

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in raising political awareness. Ensuring media independence, protecting journalists, and resisting censorship can help restore public trust and support the development of a more transparent democratic system.

Secondly, to strengthen democracy in Pakistan, electoral reforms are urgently needed to ensure transparency and fairness. Introducing biometric verification and electronic voting systems can help prevent vote rigging and strengthen voter confidence. Additionally, ensuring equal access to media coverage and campaign resources for all political parties is crucial to a level playing field. Currently, allegations of pre-poll manipulation and biased media coverage undermine the legitimacy of elections. A reformed and empowered Election Commission

of Pakistan (ECP) must be free from political and institutional pressure to function independently. Transparent and credible elections are the foundation of a functional democracy and political stability.

Thirdly, to address the failure of democracy in Pakistan, it is essential to strengthen local government system. Empowering local bodies with financial and administrative authority ensures better service delivery and makes governance more responsive to grassroots needs.

Decentralization allows citizens to directly participate in decision-making, enhancing transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, local government in Pakistan are often dissolved or sidelined by provincial authorities, limiting their effectiveness.

Encouraging civic engagement at the local level can foster political awareness and community responsibility.

A robust local government system promotes inclusive governance and builds a strong foundation for democratic stability and national development.

Fourthly, to educate the masses about their democratic rights and responsibilities, is the key recommendation to counter the failure of democracy in Pakistan. A well-informed citizenry is essential for holding leaders accountable and participating meaningfully in governance. Countries like Denmark and Sweden have strong civic education programs that teach students the importance of voting, rule of law and active citizenship from an early

age. In Pakistan, however, civic education is either absent or outdated in the curriculum.

Introducing modern, inclusive civic education in schools and community program can raise political awareness, reduce voter apathy, and strengthen democracy values across society.

Fifthly, Promoting economic developments and socio-economic partnership is vital to counter the failure of democracy in Pakistan. When citizen see real economic progress, their trust in democratic institutions strengthen.

According to the World Economic Forum, Countries like Denmark

Successfully combine democracy with strong economic policies and inclusive growth through public Private Partnership and

transparent governance. Pakistan must adopt similar models by encouraging investment, reducing inequality, and supporting small business. Socio-Economic reforms that create jobs, improve public services, and ensure fair wealth distribution will not only reduce poverty but also foster stability, public trust, and a deeper connection between citizens and democratic governance.

Lastly, the Supremacy of constitution must be ensured above all institution and individuals to control the drawback of democracy in Pakistan. In true democracies like the United States and Canada, the constitution serves as the ultimate legal authority, guaranteeing the separation of power, protection of rights, and checks and balances. In Pakistan, frequent constitutional violations, such as,

dissolving assemblies or undermining civilian authority, have weakened democratic foundations. Upholding constitutional supremacy ensures that all branches of government function within their limits. Strengthening judicial independence and literacy among citizens can help build a democratic culture rooted in legality, fairness, and accountability.

To be concluded, no doubt, the failure of democracy in Pakistan stems from weak institutions, military interference, dynastic politics, and poor governance. Issues like electoral manipulation, lack of political continuity, and corruption have eroded public trust. Insurgencies in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa further highlights the failure to ensure national integration. To strengthen democracy, Pakistan must implement electoral

reforms, ensure press freedom and empower local governments. Promoting civic education, socio-economic development, and upholding constitutional supremacy, as seen in countries like Sweden, Denmark, the USA, and Canada, can provide a strong foundation. Only through inclusive governance, informed citizenry, and constitutional transparency can Pakistan overcome its democratic challenges and build a system that truly serves the people.

“The future of democracy lies in the hands of those who believe in its promise and are willing to defend it.”

— Anonymous —