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DATE: _____

DAY: _____

The State of Democratic Governance in Pakistan

Outline

A- Introduction

I- Thesis Statement:

The ^{State} democratic governance is mixed with many challenges stemming from the dynastic politics, the continuous political instability, the curb over civil liberties and weak institutions among many others.

B- Democracy and its Principles

C- Challenges faced by Pakistan

I- Dynastic Politics

II- Political Instability

III- Rigged Elections

(2)

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

IV - Lack of Judicial Independence

V - Curb over civil liberties and free press

D - Way Forward

I - Adopt democracy with its form and structure.

II - Adopt a bottom-up approach

III - Abrogate 26th Constitutional Amendment

D - Conclusion

- Challenges faced by democracy in Pakistan
- The true principles are lacking
- Ways to reform.

Essay

In light of the diverse ethnic and linguistic communities Pakistan have, democracy is the only viable choice for Pakistan, they say. In its almost 80 years history, Pakistan has been a strong advocate of democracy. However, the tussle between democracy and authoritarianism has also been the fate of Pakistan. Nonetheless, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in 2007 was greatly celebrated by many. Today, Pakistan is said to be a democratic state. However, Democracy is not like a 'pick and chose' option. It has a form and substance. The state of democratic governance in Pakistan has the form of democracy but it lacks substance. It is mired with many challenges stemming from the dynastic politics, the continuous political instability, the curb over civil liberties and weak institutions among many others. The democratic governance in Pakistan is hardly based on the principles of democracy. Democracy is a form of government

that is based on inclusivity and transparency. Unfortunately, Pakistan is not seems to be sliding back on those principles rather improving its position. The current state of democratic governance is bleak. However, the future could be more bright if pragmatic measures were to be taken.

Among the many forms of government, democracy is considered as one of the best forms. Democracy, in its true essence, is based on giving the masses what they want. In such case, people chose their own representative by voting system. The elected representative must pay back to the people by serving them. Similarly, principles of democracy are of huge importance as well. These widely accepted principles include meritocracy, civil liberties, free and fair elections, free press, independent judiciary and strengthened local governance. Democracy can only thrive if its principles are implemented. However, Pakistan do not seems to be fulfilling the required criteria. The state of democracy in the country is not representing an

⑤

DATE:

DAY:

image of true democracy.

First of all, the dynastic politics in the country is a hindrance in the true democratic governance.

The current political parties are the ones which has deep ancestral roots in the political history of Pakistan. Due to their monopolistic approach to governance, there is very little space for meritocracy in the country. The institutions are mostly based on nepotism and they rarely gave space to people who are not from 'their circle.' Despite the notion of democracy that these institutions mostly adopt, their governance structures are often consist of nepotism who comes from wealthy and influential families.

Antol Lieven in his book "Pakistan: A Hard Country" also stresses over this point by analysing the kinship groups in the country. He states that the strong and powerful familial networks weaken the existing structure of institutions by allowing their kins to dominate the political culture. Due to such state of patronage and favours, the state of democratic governance is rendered weak and

6

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

crippling.

Additionally, it adds salt to the misery when even the dynastic political parties are not contented with their position. The continuous tug of power among the many political parties bring continuous political instability. Unfortunately, it is not a new phenomena in the country. It has been a part of Pakistan's undemocratic fate. Because of their unending tussel, no Prime Minister in the country has ever completed their 4 years term.

Even more unfortunate is the fact, that the country do not just lose a PM, but also policies and programs that party ^{has} initiated. Due to the inconsistency of political parties and their policies, Pakistan continues to grapple with the same old economic and political challenges. Samwar Bari, in one of his articles in the Dawn newspaper "The Shame of Inaction" notes that due to political instability and undemocratic nature of governance, only 27% of Pakistanis have trust in government. On the hand, 84% Vietnamese have complete trust on their government. Despite Vietnam's 20 years war, its population is

(7)

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

political parties are more stable and works for the true democratic governance. However, Pakistan's State of governance is shadowed with undemocratic political parties.

Moreover, free and fair elections is the pillar of democracy that Pakistan lacks. From the country's first ever general election in 1970 to the last one conducted in 2024, every election was alleged as rigged. Whether the allegation were true or not, it still affects the legitimacy of the ruling party/parties. People see them with suspicion which lead to their dissatisfaction with government. Another factor that free and fair elections are so uncommon in the country can be the unwillingness of the political parties to accept their defeat. "Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections" However, political parties rarely accept their defeat and instead do the blame-game. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblitt in their book "Tyranny of the Minority State" also address this issue. They are of the view that democracy cannot take roots if political parties do not learn to accept defeat and transfer

power willingly. Hence, free conducting free and fair election and accepting the result are the requisites of true democracy. However, Pakistan severely lacks such these things which ultimately impact its democratic governance.

In addition to that, the lack of judicial independence is also rendering the state of democratic governance as undemocratic.

As propounded by Montesquieu in his theory of separation of power, judiciary must be independent of the executive branch. However, after passing the 18th Amendment in November 2024, the country's executive and judicature are no more independent of each other. The judicial decisions are greatly influenced by the ruling parties. This state of authoritarianism is unethical to the notion of democracy. If a judiciary cannot provide justice to itself, how can it provide justice to others? Moreover, the independence of one branch from other was a form of check and balance. Sadly, the

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

can no more exercise this check and balance. It will ultimately lead to power centralized in few hands.

Similarly, Apart from this it also violates the constitution of Pakistan. It is against the original principles of the constitution. In such bleak situation, one cannot expect democracy from the current governance and institutions but authoritarian tendencies.

Additionally, the current state of democracy offers a more dismal picture of civil liberties.

The curb over free speech, right to protest and free media is more visible than ever. These

liberties promote pluralism in the country. It provides space to the diverse ethnicities of the country to express themselves and be part of the system. However, Pakistan is seems to be diverting from the democratic principles by curbing all these liberties.

Among all, free media is greatly threatened and imposed restrictions on. More dismal is the killing of journalist. According to a committee

DATE: _____

(b)

DAY: _____

to protect journalists, 2024 was the deadliest year for reporters and media workers. Pakistan ranked number 2 in the list of journalist killing. This gloomy situation strengthen the fact that Pakistan's state of democracy is based on its form but not substance.

Although this picture of democratic governance ~~fact~~ evokes a sense of hopelessness, it only need an honest political will. As it goes if there is a will, there is a way.

Pakistan can also improve its situation if adopt some pragmatic measures. From the visionary founding fathers to the current young and passionate blood, the country has a lot of potential for improvement. It has one of the best policies in the world and a bulge of youth which is considered by many as an asset. Democracy is nothing but giving space to this very youth and integrating them in the governance structure. Implementation of the policies and in light of the constitutional provision can break the chains of many ills of undemocratic structures. Apart from these, Pakistan can also

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

adopt the following measures to improve its democratic governance.

Firstly, the country needs to adopt democracy along with its form and substance. Without these things, democracy is nothing but a rhetoric. It can be adopted by providing awareness to people what democracy is, in its true structure. It is not limited to the right of vote but also to hold the elected ones accountable if they fail to serve. If people are aware of their rights and duties, it can have a ripple effect on the whole democratic state of the country. An educated and aware group of people can force the leaders to adopt and implement democracy with its true principles.

Secondly, to strengthen democracy, a bottom-up approach should be adopted. Giving voice to the unheard population should be the top most priority. When the leaders are aware of the problems and challenges faced by their people, they would only

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

serve them. If democracy is 'for the people' then the people must be integrated to the system otherwise there is very little chance for improvement.

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Thirdly, abrogating const 26th constitutional amendment is also necessary to restore the true nature of democracy. One cannot hope for democracy to flourish in the country if its wings are clipped. Independent judiciary is the only way to hold the oppressors accountable. Therefore, it is important to repeal this amendment and restore transparency. Democratic governance without transparency and accountability can only end up in authoritarianism. And the country cannot afford another autocratic regime.

The state of democratic governance is not very bright in the country. It is grappling with many challenges. The true principles of democracy that is civil liberties, meritocracy and independent judiciary among

DATE: _____

DAY: _____

other are lacking in the country. The current state of governance is based on dynastic politics, political instability, curb over free press and free judiciary. The challenges are huge but the future can be optimistic if concrete steps are taken. The country has immense potential and if it use that it in the right way, the day is not far that it would be one of the true democratic states.