

Democratic Deficit in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Understanding the term "Democracy" and its features
3. Overview of democratic history of Pakistan
4. What are the causes of democratic deficit in Pakistan?

- A. Dynastic politics in Pakistan reduces public participation in political domain
- B. Inherited colonial mindset among leaders prevents empowerment of local population.
- C. Higher illiteracy rate in the country excludes role of majority 22% in the government affairs.
- D. Frequent military interventions weaken civilian institutions in Pakistan.
- E. Financial dependency on external organizations undermines domestic and foreign policymaking in Islamabad, leading to political instability.

5. Consequences of democratic deficit in Pakistan

- A. Establishment of hybrid system in Pakistani politics.
- B. Rising socio-economic crises are the result of elite capture in the country.
- C. Raised militancy and terrorism in marginalized communities are due to weak civilian institutions.
- D. Political instability leads to policy inconsistency in Pakistan.
- E. Control on dissent and civil liberty erodes violations of fundamental rights of people.

6. Recommendations to consolidate democratic system in Pakistan

- A. Reform political parties to bring meritocracy in the government.
- B. ^{Introduce} Bring economic reforms to empower local ~~local~~ communities of Pakistan.
- C. Strengthen civilian institutions ~~like~~ like Election Commission (ECP) to conduct transparent elections.
- d. Invest in education and human development to encourage pluralism in the country.
- e. Empower independent watchdogs like NAB (National Accountability Bureau) and Federal Bureau Board of Revenue (FBR) to enhance accountability of leaders in Pakistan.

7. Conclusion

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but it is a

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"A Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." Through these lines John Dewey, a famous scholar ^{philosopher} expanded the idea of democratic system. He has emphasized that democracy is not limited to political realm; it is more than that. It must be embedded in educational institutes, culture and society. It seeks the educational institutions should teach students about pluralism, freedom of expression, and a viable democratic system. Initially, Greeks used to practice democracy, but they did not protect minorities. Western countries like Spain, Portugal, and Britain ~~were~~ were large monarchs. They used to control colonies for wealth and influence. Gradually, political and philosophical enlightenment brought revolution in those colonies. Famous philosophers, such as John Lock and Jean Jacques Rosseau enlightened people with ideas of general will and natural rights of life, liberty and property. Additionally, Magna Carta was signed in 1215, in which kings surrendered their powers before law. Hence, democracy gradually evolved in these cultures. It is not just a political culture system to be adopted - Pakistan is a democratic country since its independence, but the democracy has faced many challenges. The causes of democratic deficit in Pakistan, include inherited colonial mindset from history,

frequent military interventions, dynastic politics, overdependency on external organizations, and higher illiteracy rate. These challenges have resulted in serious consequences, such as continued political instability, rising militancy and terrorism, unending socio-economic crisis, and elite capture of major resources. Additionally, an unclear hybrid system has developed with dominant role of military in civilian institutions. To counter this difficult and complex culture, the government should strengthen civilian institutions and independent watchdogs like Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and National Accountability Bureau (NAB). Along with this, political parties must be reformed to ensure meritocracy. Urban and Rural economic reforms must be introduced to contain elite capture in Pakistan. Similarly, education empowerment of the public can be the most influential step that will ensure active citizen engagement and inclusive role of majority to restore democratic deficit of Pakistan.

Before moving forward to democratic deficit in Pakistan, the term democracy must be discussed. Democracy is the government system where people are represented by their representative leaders. Popular sovereignty is the main idea of this system. The representatives formulate policies and implement them with the will of majority. Their power is bounded within limits by the constitution. To establish a

viable democratic system, there must be transparent and fair elections. Public must be educated enough to know about their rights. Free media and civil liberty are also significant features. Additionally, independent judiciary is also important to ensure equality, protection of minorities, and justice, so that misuse of power is prevented and held accountable. These are some of the essential features of democracy in any country.

The democratic history of Pakistan has been complex since its independence. After the demise of Quaid-e-Azam and Liaquat Ali Khan, the country faced continued turmoil. Intolerance among public and sectarian conflicts led to the start of military interventions in the government. After judicial legitimacy of military involvement, the country faced frequent martial laws. The military dictators hindered democratic development of Pakistan. Frequent regime change caused policy inconsistencies and socio-economic resentments. Even after the ban on military interference, military has developed a dominant role in civilian government. Additionally, feudalism and elite capture further worsened the democracy. That prevent the elites have captured major resources, and they prevent public participation in the significant issues, which is eroding the most features of democracy.

Firstly, dynastic politics in Pakistan limits public participation in political realm. Since three decades, two parties named Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) are ruling alternatively. They have established their dominance in policy-making and other resources. This alienates local people involvement in social and political issues of the country. Additionally, it is difficult for a common man to participate in election as a candidate, bearing its expenses and winning. It makes it almost idealistic for a local leader to emerge and work for welfare of the community. Likewise, dominance of few elites widens gap between poor and rich and fades the idea of popular sovereignty in the country. Hence, dynastic parties reduce public contribution in social, political and economic sphere, creating democratic deficit in Pakistan.

Another cause of democratic deficit in Pakistan is colonial mindset rooted in lifestyle. The mindset of most of the leaders that hinder empowerment of local communities. For instance, feudalism and Jagirdari system are inherited from Colonist British leaders. They used to control resources to continue their rule on the sub-continent. However, after independence, this mindset is still existing. Most of the rural areas are under control of feudals, such as rural areas in Sindh and Punjab. They interact with local communities only at times of elections and then disappear.

most of the time. This type of culture undermines effective public service delivery. Local population remains marginal weak both socially and economically. Hence, colonial culture among leaders and power misuse prevent local empowerment, thereby perpetuating weak democracy in Pakistan.

Moreover, low literacy rate of Pakistan leads to lower civil engagement and passive citizenship. Education is the basic requirement to empower any community. Without civic knowledge, people ~~can be~~ easily manipulated by the populist leaders. They can be exploited at all levels. According to Economic Survey of Pakistan, the literacy rate of Pakistan is 61%. It means 39% (almost half of population) lacks basic education. They are not aware of their rights and responsibilities in a community. It reduces citizen engagement in significant political and economic issues of the country. They remain excluded from influencing policy making or giving feedback on the existing policies. Hence, ^{higher} illiteracy creates vacuum for easy exploitation by the leaders, both at local and national level. Therefore, lack of education is another cause of democratic deficit in Pakistan.

Additionally, role of military is dominant in civilian authorities which compromise the feature of civilian supremacy in Pakistan. Frequent military interventions in the government affairs are evident in political history of Pakistan.

However, after 18th Amendment in 2010, government clearly halted pathways of military influence in Pakistan. Despite amendment, the establishment has a dominant hand on the authorities. It ~~has~~ indirectly shapes policies including domestic and foreign affairs. Democracy in Pakistan has changed into electoral autocracy where authoritarian regime has influence on policies, media, and civil liberty, and ~~reg~~ it is evident from a report of Economist Intelligence unit (EIU) that downgraded democratic condition of Pakistan from "hybrid regime" to "autocratic government". The ~~aggressive~~ policies, such as curbing of dissent ~~control~~ affects freedom of expression and public participation. Therefore, autocratic control of representative government on the civil liberties is another cause of democratic deficit in Pakistan.

Likewise, financial dependency on external organizations like World Bank (WB) and International monetary fund (IMF) ~~decreases~~ ~~autonomic~~ functioning of federal government. ~~These~~ organizations shape major policies, both in domestic and external affairs. Loss of autonomy at the center influences policies at both provincial and local level. In this regard, Pakistan acquired loan of \$7 billion ~~to~~ from IMF in 2005. In return, the government aligned ~~to~~ itself with conditionalities of IMF.

For instance, removal of subsidies and tax incentives on basic commodities disproportionately affected poor households. It resulted in inflation and erosion of public confidence in government policies. In addition to compromise on policy autonomy, conditions of external organizations lenders indirectly bring political instability. Hence, economic dependency of Pakistan indirectly creates democratic deficit in the country.

The democratic deficit in Pakistan produces an unending cycle of crisis in Pakistan. First of all, due to elite capture and feudalism, people are facing socio-economic difficulties. According to World Bank Report (W.B), almost 40% of people of Pakistan are below poverty line, they lack basic facilities of food, health, water, and education. Additionally, a report highlighted that approximately 26 million children are out-of-school. It illustrates precarious situation of education in Pakistan. Other problems include child labour, unemployment, hunger, and lack of human development. Concentration of power at central level reduces financial autonomy of local government, leading to increase of such problems. Therefore, elite capture concentrates power at higher level and leaves the public in dire socio-economic situation in Pakistan.

Apart from this, Pakistan is facing rising cases of insurgency and terrorism due to erosion of public trust in government institutions. Due to misuse of power and feudal culture in rural areas, there is a huge gap between rural and urban areas in development. This divide creates grievances in the marginalized communities which become vulnerable under influence of non-state actors (NSA). For example alienated communities of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) align with Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). While facing poverty and unemployment, the youth finds no other option than to align with non-state actors. Hence, socio-economic resentments makes communities aligned with external actors. It not only creates security challenges for the country but also compromises writ of the state. Therefore, weak democracy undermines creation of opportunities for the youth, pushing them towards other illegal activities that disrupt security situation in Pakistan.

In addition to this, power struggles and dominance of autocratic authorities damage political stability, leading to policy inconsistencies in Pakistan. Due to political chaos and weak civilian governments, no regime has completed its 5-year term since independence. Hence, policy continuity and therefore, public service

delivery (PSD). An example in this regard is China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The phase 2 of CPEC was to be launched in 2021, but due to political instability and bureaucratic delays, it ~~was~~ is significantly delayed. The true democracy demands peaceful transition of power between respective governments. However, Pakistan's history is filled with political turmoil that hinder effective implementation of policies in the country.

Likewise, democratic deficit in Pakistan sidelines its main idea of pluralism and civil liberty. Due to intolerance and polarization among leaders, the authorities try to curb dissenters pursue policies that do not start with the essence of democracy. The subject lies in empowered opposition leaders. They involve in constructive criticism of government policies that improve efficiency of the system. However, in Pakistan opposition leaders face imprisonments that erode basic feature of democracy. Additionally, strict social media regulations, internet blackouts during major protests, and narrative control of all stakeholders of the country. In 2025, World Freedom Index Report ranked Pakistan 180 out of 180 countries, underscoring press freedom and independence. Hence, autocratic regime behavior of leaders impedes participation of majority in democratic government of Pakistan.

To counter challenges of weak democracy, the government must introduce radical reforms in economic and political domains. For example, political parties should be reformed with introduction of intra-party elections. It will allow enhance meritocracy and provide opportunities to credible leaders to formulate country's policies. Additionally, timely elections must be conducted to give chance to other members of the party. Political party should run on the basis of rules and regulations. It means institutionalization of parties should be preferred instead of personalization. These reforms will create chances for other leaders having efficiency. It will ensure meritocracy and lead to effective governance in the country.

Likewise, the government should introduce economic reforms to contain feudalism and elite capture in Pakistan. There must be a rural and urban reforms in land distribution to prevent feudal control. Additionally, financial transparency is also important in taxes and collection. It must be digitized to enhance public confidence in the government. Through land reforms, local farmers will be empowered. An example in this regard is Kerala model of India, in which lands were redistributed among small and large farmers. It not only empowered local farmers but also transformed socio-economic situation of whole area. Therefore, economic reforms

are mandatory for local empowerment to restore democracy in Pakistan.

Another suggestion to revive democracy in Pakistan is to strengthen Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). It should be ~~not~~ independent and devoid of political influence with neutral members. Depoliticization of the election commission will ensure fair, transparent, and clear elections. In this way, accusations of manipulation and rigging will ~~not~~ fade away. It will restore legitimacy of the representative government. Apart from this, public confidence will also ~~rise to~~ in government policies. Ultimately, it will re-establish democracy in Pakistan.

Apart from this, the current regime should prioritize education and human development to enable active citizen engagement in political and economic affairs. Currently in fiscal year 2023, government ~~decided~~ decided to spend 0.8% of its GDP in education. It must be increased upto 4% to improve literacy rate of the country. Civic education will empower both rural and urban ~~and~~ communities. They will realize significance of voting both as public and as candidate. Active citizen involvement will aid in positive reforms in current policies. Also, people will hold accountable their leaders regarding ^{power misuse and} socio-economic crisis. Therefore, education empowerment is necessary to fill democratic deficit of Pakistan.

Lastly, civilian institutions must be empowered to enhance accountability of the leaders. For example, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and federal ombudsman are anti-corruption agencies to investigate, prosecute and prevent corruption. These watchdogs must be independent to carry out their functions effectively. Similarly, judiciary has a significant role in democratic system. Judges should be empowered to keep them away from influence of parliamentarians or elite societies. It will revive democratic deficit of Pakistan as well as bring prosperity in the country.

To sum up, Pakistan's democratic situation has remained in miserable ~~situation~~ condition with continued political instability, public mistrust, allegations of rigging in elections, and military dominance. However, the country has countered major challenges, but still some of the problems create negative results. For example, policy inconsistency undermines socio-economic development. It gives rise to public resentments and disillusionment in the representative government. The challenges of poverty, unemployment, food and water crisis push the youth towards militancy and separatist organizations. These problems initiate security issues and confront wait of the state. Additionally,

feudalism and elite capture ^{further} widen gap between poor and rich. These consequences diminish democratic essence of the current regime. To contain these ~~is~~ rising challenges, the ^{Pakistan government} should introduce comprehensive, and radical reforms. The country should reshape political parties to enhance meritocracy, introduce economic reforms to erase feudal culture and eliminate elite capture in the state. Additionally, ^{the country should} strengthen civilian institutes like NAB, Federal ombudsman and other independent watchdogs to reduce corruption at all levels. Likewise, the government should increase GDP spending on health and education to produce informed citizens in the country ~~that~~ ^{who} play active role in reviving democracy of Pakistan. These steps will-