

Democratic Norms and Extremism in Pakistan

Outline

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II. Understanding features of 'Democracy'

III. Background of democratic history of Pakistan

IV. How extremism can undermine democratic norms in Pakistan?

1. Ideological ^{and} religious extremism erupts ^{into} mob violence in the country.

Case study: Sectarian conflicts and misuse of blasphemy laws ~~is~~ are case in points.

2. Polarized political leaders weaken civilian institutions, impacting efficient governance in Pakistan.

Case study: Judicial reforms in 26th Amendment ~~were~~ a blow to the independence of judiciary, according to Amnesty International.

3. Extremism in the public gives rise to militancy that erodes trust in representative government of Pakistan.

Case study: Militant outfits like Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) in Pakistan.

4. Intolerance of dissent and control of media contain true democracy in Pakistan.

Case study: Curbing social media dissent through PECA Amendment (2015) reduces inclusivity of public in political and social matters.

5. Extremist religious beliefs hinder participation of women in social and political spheres, undermining democratic essence of Pakistan.

Case study: Women constitute almost half of the country's population but they remained alienated from politics and decision-making.

V. How weak democratic principles can give rise to extremism in Pakistan?

1. Weak governance in the marginalized communities drives the youth towards militancy and terrorism in Pakistan.

Case study: Almost 70% of Baloch population lives under poverty line.

2. Inequality in resource distribution produces ethnic rivalries among the provinces.

3. Weak rule of law provides opportunities for exploitation of the poor and minorities in Pakistan, reflecting extremism in the society.

4. Curbing of civil liberties

4. Frequent rigging of elections disrupts public confidence in the democratic government.

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VI. How strong democratic norms can control extremism in Pakistan?

1. Inclusive governance can reduce sentiments of alienated communities, decreasing seeds of militancy and extremism.

2. Transparent elections must be conducted to ensure legitimacy of the government of Pakistan.

3. High literacy rates among masses will decrease political manipulation of the public.

4. Rule of law and accountability will contain mob violence and blasphemy misuse in Pakistan.

VI. Conclusion

The Essay

Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest American presidents, once said, "Democracy is the government of the people, for the people and by the people". The statement indicates popular sovereignty in democratic system. It ensures civil liberty, inclusive functioning, protection of minorities, judicial independence, plurality, and legitimate representative government. Along with allowing freedom of expression, democracy prevents extremism and hate speech. In history, Greeks were the first who practised democratic government, but it was not a true democracy. Across Europe and America, colonialism and mercantilism were common. Spain, Portugal and Britain were large monarchs that used to control ^{vast} large areas. However, in 1215, Magna Carta was the first agreement in which kings surrendered their powers under law. Then, gradually American and French revolution transformed monarchs into democratic systems. Additionally, philosophical enlightenment, such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau and many other philosophers gave awareness of natural

rights of life, liberty and general will of the people. In Pakistan, democracy exists since independence, but it has faced myriads of challenges. Dominance of military and bureaucracy, weak civilian institutions, weak rule of law, and elite capture have undermined the efficiency of democratic system in Pakistan. Extremist religious ideologies, polarization of leaders, radical beliefs in the public, intolerance, and manipulation of religious ideologies are some of the causes that erode democratic norms in Pakistan. Additionally, weak governance, unequal resource distribution among provinces, frequent rigging of elections, fragile law and order situation provide opportunities for rising militancy and extremism in the country. To establish true democracy in Pakistan, it ~~is~~ must ensure inclusive governance, equality, transparent elections, rule of law, and high literacy rates. Through these measures, Pakistan can enhance legitimacy of the representative government and simultaneously counter extremism in the country.

First of all, true democracy contains some essential features without which it will become tyranny or worst form of government. Democracy requires fair and free elections, higher literacy rates among public, uncensored media, religious freedom, civil liberty and rule of law. Transparent election with

equal voting rights allows establishment of a true representative government. ~~In~~ In addition to this, civic education provides the people knowledge about their importance of their votes. They become aware of their ~~cit~~ social and political issues. The educated citizens are ~~be~~ difficult to manipulate in false agendas. Likewise, independent media highlights injustices and ~~false~~ inefficient policies of the government. Media also plays role in increasing participation of the public in policy-making and feedback mechanisms. Similarly, freedom of expression and protection of minorities are also significant basis of a true democratic system.

The democratic history of Pakistan has remained tumultuous since its independence. Security dilemmas dominated human development and socio-economic progress. The country has remained under military and bureaucratic dominance. Weak civilian institutions were unsuccessful in establishing strong democracy. Rediff award defined boundaries of Pakistan and India but it also planted seeds of intolerance and extremism against each other. Additionally, frequent martial laws hindered policy continuity that led to socio-economic crisis in Pakistan. ~~Efficient~~ ^{Poor} human development, and high illiteracy rate make the public vulnerable to manipulation, especially youth of Pakistan. Similarly, elite capture and

feudalism widen the gap between the rich and alienated communities. This gap has perpetuated extremism in Pakistan, thereby eroding democratic norms in the country.

The extreme ideological beliefs and religious manipulation by Islamic scholars create intolerance in the society, leading to mob violence and riots. The radical beliefs produce sectarian tensions among Shia, Sunni and other sects in the community.

One such example in Pakistan's history is **anti-Ahmadi riots in 1953 in Lahore**. It led to series of protests across the country. The religious intolerance ultimately led to imposition of martial law in the country. Most of the time, the aim ^{behind} of radicalism is serving the vested interests of political leaders. The religious scholars manipulate the public on the basis of sensitive topics to achieve their personal interests. Hence, instead of Islamic system, it leads the country towards long-term instability.

The extreme views among the public along with weak law enforcement authorities provide space for mob violence. Additionally, religious bigotry also became basis of many blasphemy cases ^{in Pakistan}. Although hate speech and blasphemy are intolerable in the Islamic country like Pakistan, many extremist groups use false accusations of blasphemy against individuals. **A report by National Commission of Human Rights**

(NCHRA) and Punjab police has highlighted blasphemy accusation groups working in the country. Hence, these incidents of extremism sabotage pluralism, the essential feature of democracy, in Pakistan.

In addition to this, polarization of political leaders shifts their focus from addressing serious issues to engaging in trivial discussions. While ignoring political and social crisis, leaders of the country manipulate religious beliefs and increase extremism in the public. It is due to weak rules in the institutions that give chance to the unaccountable rulers to spread radicalism in the country. Additionally, role of judiciary in Pakistan severely hampered after 26th Amendment. The coalition government reformed judicial appointment process that increased role of parliamentarians and placed judiciary under influence of executive. Such reforms in judiciary have compromised justice system. ~~Weak judiciary is unable to hold accountable~~ inefficient justice system leads to inequality and intolerance. Additionally, polarized leaders remain unaccountable and immune from law. In this way, lawlessness erodes democratic norms, and parochialism serves elite while alienating majority participation in the country.

Similarly, increasing intolerance on the basis ethnic, religious or language differences raises militancy in the country. Ethnic discrimination mainly initiates due to unequal resource distribution by the higher authorities. The marginalized communities face higher rates of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, crisis of clean water and food ~~crisis~~. These problems drives the youth towards create sentiments among the public, especially younger population, ~~towards~~ against the government. Due to lack of opportunities, youth increasingly involve in militancy and terrorism. Additionally, external rival states utilize these opportunities to create instability in the country. **Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)** and **Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)** are examples of militant groups in Pakistan. Hence, extremism in some individuals multiplies ^{in the community} due to socio-economic crisis. Ultimately, it confronts the representative government, questioning efficiency of democracy in Pakistan.

Another essential feature of democracy is acceptance of pluralism, which is contained ~~throughby~~ curbing the dissent and controlling media outlets due to extremism. The radicalist leaders are intolerant towards diverse views in the society. They misuse their power and try to control narrative building. Controlled media is unable to

deliver real public opinion. Additionally, it prevents the people to participate in policy making. The true democracy requires public opinion in all social and political matters. However, curbing of ~~the~~ freedom of expression alienates the majority public from decision-making. It widens the gap between government and people, hence, compromising democracy in Pakistan.

Moreover, extremist religious beliefs hinder participation of women in social, economic, and political affairs, undermining democratic system in Pakistan. Democracy means participation and protection of all, including women and minorities. However, extremism sidelines women and bounds them from participation. It not only compromises true democratic norms but also prevents the state ^{economy} from flourishing. In Pakistan, women constitute almost half of the population, but their contribution in economy and politics is minimal due to religious stigmas. Hence, extremism in Pakistan hinders the establishment of true democratic system.

On the other hand, weak democratic norms ^{solidifies} produce vacuum for solidifying the extremist views in the society. For instance, fragile communities like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) feel excluded from the government. Rising unemployment, higher poverty rates, resource exploitation, and lack of cooperation by the federal government produce resentment in

these communities. According to a report, almost 70% of Baloch population lives under poverty line. It makes the communities vulnerable to more exploitation and manipulation. Hence, terrorist organization like Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and RAW from India utilize this vulnerability to drive militancy in Pakistan. Hence, lack of inclusive approach by the government of Pakistan pushes the public towards extremism, preventing efficient democracy in Pakistan.

Likewise, democracy seeks equality and justice among the public, which is compromised through ^{due to} unequal resource distribution among provinces in Pakistan. It creates dissatisfaction in the majority and leads to ethnic discrimination. The example in this regard is ^{that} Sui gas was discovered in Balochistan in 1950s, and initially it was provided to Sindh and Punjab. Balochistan itself received natural gas supply in 1980s, almost 30 years after its discovery. It created a sense of exploitation among Baloch population. The centralized decision-making and inequality among provinces' resource distribution give rise to ethnic rivalries and intolerance. Hence, unjust policies initiate differences and extremist views in the society, thereby threatening democracy in Pakistan.

Additionally, weak rule of law provides opportunities for exploitation of the poor without accountability. Injustice prevails in the society that widens the gap between elite and the poor. Similarly, frequent rigging of elections questions legitimacy of the government. In Pakistan, accusations of rigging frequently in election erode public confidence in the government. These incidents are utilized by radical communities to create instability across the country. Hence, ^{judiciary} justice fails to protect rights of minorities, poor and fragile societies, giving rise to extremism and undermining democratic norms in Pakistan.

To counter extremism and strengthen democracy in Pakistan, the government must follow principle of inclusivity. It should involve all stakeholders in decision-making and policy formulation. Additionally, the higher authorities must ~~focus on~~ ^{keep} public opinion ^{in mind} while making agendas. It will ensure participation of all provinces as well as the community. In this way, government will be able to address the real issues of the society. For example, reducing unemployment by creating opportunities for the youth, investing in skills development, and reducing socio-economic crisis will reduce chances of militancy in fragile communities. In this way, people will be empowered enough against

manipulation by militant groups. It will ultimately strengthen democracy in Pakistan.

Alongwith this, the country must conduct transparent and fair elections to enhance legitimacy of the representative government. There must be equal voting rights, and people should be encouraged to participate in voting. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) should be empowered to conduct independent^{and} neutral elections to bring true-democratic government in Pakistan. In this way, Pakistan will get true leadership that will focus on real issues of the country instead of medicalization.

Another important factor is civic education among public to aware them about importance of their votes. Additionally, higher literacy rates will ensure constructive participation of the public in political and economic affairs. The educated citizens will understand country's crisis and focus on human development instead of extremism. In addition to this, public will be empowered and become vigilant against political manipulation. Currently, Pakistan's literacy rate is 61%, which is low, and it is one of the main causes of rising extremism and intolerance in the society.

Lastly, rule of law and justice system are very important to prevent mob violence or blasphemy misuse in the country. Mob violence mostly erupts in rural or less developed areas because of weak law and order situation. Democracy becomes efficient with strong laws and their implementation. Therefore, Pakistan must ensure ~~strong~~ implementation of stringent laws against religious bigotry, intolerance or discrimination in the society. Strict actions should be taken against fake blasphemy groups to spread message of intolerance against extremism in Pakistan. It will ultimately strengthen democratic system of Pakistan.

To conclude, democratic norms and extremism have paradoxical relation. Increasing extremism in religious leaders, politicians or public erode democratic efficiency in Pakistan. Likewise, weak democratic system, such as lack of participation of all stakeholders, rigged elections, higher illiteracy rates among masses, and inequality among provinces create plant seeds of extremist, and militancy in the society. To counter such challenges, Pakistan must ensure rule of law, inclusive policy making, and fair elections to flourish strong democracy in Pakistan. Additionally, education is one of the most significant factors that can control extremist and ensure strong democracy in Pakistan.