

{ Poor Governance in Pakistan }

{ Causes and Reforms }

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Reforms for poor governance in Pakistan

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{ Poor Governance in Pakistan } Causes and Reforms

Pakistan has been facing governance crisis since independence. Almost all the problems of the country stems from poor governance. In order to deal with these prevailing problems, Pakistan must identify the underlying causes of poor governance and should implement long term reforms in order to progress. Currently there are a number of micro as well as macro issues which undermines governance in Pakistan. Lack of accountability and misuse of public funds further aggravates the situation. Dynastic politics has become the fashion of the day. It has resulted in undermining rule of law. Media is controlled and the citizens are not given full opportunity to participate in the government. Due to this a large amount of human resource is wasted. In addition to that there is inequitable distribution of resources.

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It has resulted in inter-provincial as well as federal-provincial rivalry. Such a scenario requires immediate long term implementable reforms. The most immediate reform required is the devolution of power to the local government. It can only be possible by strengthening provincial autonomy and aligning it with federal principles. Furthermore, institutional checks and balance is the need of the hour. Moreover, implementation of sunset clause is also vital to enhance legislation. Along with that, merit should be given priority over political influence and regulatory bodies should be strengthened. In order to implement these reforms strict investigation should be done to identify even the minute of causes.

The major cause of poor governance is undermining the rule of law. A country which undermines its rule of law, subsequently ends up undermining the quality of governance. According to World

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justice project rule of law index. Pakistan ranks 129/142 in rule of law. This current situation of Pakistan is further elaborated by Hasan Askari in the following words "When institutions are weak, rule of law becomes selective and inconsistent, eroding citizens trust in the state". Undermining rule of law also results in administrative interference.

Excessive political interference disrupts administrative autonomy. It leads to poor governance. The administrative decisions are politically influenced. Addressing the civil servants in Peshawar Quaid-e-Azam said "You must never be influenced by any political pressure, by any political party, by any individual politician. The services are the backbone of the state. Governments may come and go but you will stay on". Most of the scholars including Abdullah Hassan believe that, civil services which were neutral in the initial phase of the country are now a playground

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for political manipulation and military influence. It has disrupted the discipline of governance in Pakistan.

Another cause of poor governance is the misuse of public funds which has resulted in poor fiscal discipline. Weak fiscal discipline has eroded accountability and transparency. It has left the system prone to weakness. Misuse of public funds has also caused deterioration of various institutes. Corruption has prevailed and it decreased the workability of institution. A number of financial misuses are reported in annual audit reports.

Increase in dynastic politics is also a cause of poor governance. Dynastic legislators ^{accounts} contribute to more than 50% of ^{leadership} politicians elected in Pakistan. Owen Bennet reflecting to political dynasty contributing to rivalry, factionalism, and oligarchic capture in Pakistan said "Every Bhutto was the

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enemy of every other Bhutto. Politics have become a game of money which only the privileged class can afford. It has contributed more to the dynastic politics.

In addition to that lack of informed citizenry also contributes to poor governance. A strict control on media results in suppression of news and information. More than 60% of Pakistani reported encountering fake news on social media. It not only damages institutions but also erodes the trust in state. Rapid social media progress has ^{enabled} ~~been~~ ^{authoritarian} adopted by actors to use digital propaganda to influence public opinion. Controlling ~~of~~ media leads to a decline in constructive criticism which results in poor governance.

Furthermore, mismanagement of human capital undermines state efficiency. Pakistan's Human index

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Capital is 0.41. It means that every child will be able to reach 41% of his productivity provided excellent education and health. Due to low human capital management Pakistan is facing massive episodes of brain drain. According to Attia Javed "Mismanagement of human capital has systematically weakened the state's ability to deliver services efficiently". In global services index, Pakistan ranks 129 out of 137 countries.

Moreover, the weakness of institutes have also resulted in poor governance. The ~~consti~~ in Pakistan possess weak conflict resolution mechanism. They are unable to deliver efficiently. According to Saira Amin "Institutions in Pakistan are weak and poorly equipped with conflict resolution mechanism". It perpetuates instability which leads to poor governance. It has also led to ~~timely~~ ^{delayed} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ timely decisions and enforceability which subsequently weakens the

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Unit of State.

Poor governance is also caused by inadequate distribution of resources. It has resulted in inter-provincial conflict as well as federal provincial rivalry. Unequal distribution of resources have led to varying socio-economic condition in each province. In Balochistan more than 99% population lives in rural areas as compared to Punjab where only 38% population lives in rural areas. According to Dr. Adnan Rafique "Unequal distribution of natural resources both natural and financial has been a major factor in regional disparity. The provinces with better resources tend to have better developed infrastructure." This issue is also used by a number of politicians as a groundwork for their political manipulation.

Moreover, a number of constitutional loopholes undermine good governance in Pakistan. The country had to spend nine years without a Constitution. It

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has also seen successive military rules which resulted in abrogation and suspension of constitution. Presently the country is governed according to 1973 constitution. According to Dr Murtagh "The 1973 constitution lacks enforceable mechanism and it has structural weakness". It has resulted in institutional stability.

Subsequently, it has resulted in weak institutions and regulatory bodies. Regulatory bodies lack autonomy. According to Dr Ishrat Hussain "Regulatory capture by political elite remains a major challenge. Autonomy must be legally protected and financially granted. Improving regulatory bodies shall also strengthen the writ of state. However, currently the regulatory bodies in Pakistan lack enforceability mechanism which leads to poor governance

In order to deal with governance crisis immediate long terms reforms are required. The first and foremost important reform is to strengthen election

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Commission. All parties should be given a fair chance and maximum participation of voters especially women should be ensured. Election commission of Pakistan has identified more than 50% polling stations as sensitive. Strict security arrangement should be made on these polling stations in order to ensure transparency and fairness. According to senator Miraj-ul-Haq "A powerful election commission is need of the hour". Strengthening election commission is a vital step towards good governance.

Devolution of power is also essential to ensure good governance in Pakistan. Power must be devolved to grass root level. The political elite must understand that devolution of power is ~~essential~~^{vital} to strengthen democracy. According to planning minister Ahsan Iqbal "Service delivery and key outcomes cannot be achieved without devolving authority to local governments. Former ambassador Maleeha Lodhi has also stressed the devolution

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of powers in the following words
"Genuine local governance is essential to break the cycle of weak service delivery and political exclusion" Devolution of power to grassroots level would also introduce new blood in politics.

Another important step in order to promote good governance is to impose institutional checks and balances on executive, legislative and judiciary. Power must be decentralized and equally distributed between three pillars of state.

According to Dr. Fakhr Sakam
"The constitution of Pakistan provides for separation of powers. However, in practice a single institute gains vast powers and it results in weakening of other institutes". The system of checks and balances would also strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms. It would also enhance coordination between federal and provincial institutes.

Strengthening provincial

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autonomy in line with federal principles is also important to enhance governance quality in Pakistan. The political elite must realize that provincial autonomy is not a threat but a necessity of time. In the words of Dr Muhammad Waseem "The spirit of federalism requires that resources, legislation and policy making be equitably distributed". Lack of provincial autonomy will disrupt the fragile political federal balance.

Legislation plays a vital role in ensuring good governance in Pakistan. Efficient laws are essential in order to maintain discipline in society. However, there are many outdated laws in Pakistan. Most of these laws are from colonial period and are no longer used today. These laws consume a lot of administrative resources. In order to promote good governance, Pakistan must implement sunset clauses for outdated laws. India and UK both use sunset clause widely. UK inserts sunset clause in 20% of emergency situations while India in most

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Temporary ordinances According to cabinet division internal review, more than 40% sub-ordinate legislation is never reviewed after being issued. There are more than 800 federal laws on statute book from 1947, many of them obsolete and overlapping.

Another way to promote good governance in Pakistan is by strengthening federal-provincial relation through council of common interest. The CCI must meet regularly, not occasionally, if ~~if~~ cooperative federalism is to work in Pakistan. Strengthening CCI is essential to resolve disputes over resources, energy, and water among provinces. Cooperation, not confrontation between federation and provinces is the only path to good governance.

Good governance depends upon the well being of society. In order to ensure the wellbeing of society, merit must be given priority. Merit is often

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ignored in favour of loyalty. Officers are frequently transferred or sidelined for refusing political orders. Civil service must be reformed in order to prioritize merit over political inclusion. If you destroy merit from the society, you have destroyed everything.

Promoting civil society participation in governance monitoring can also enhance governance quality. In Pakistan only 4.5% NGOs are engaged in policy or governance monitoring while the rest focus on service delivery. According to planning commission internal review less than 20% of government development projects undergo third party monitoring. Civil society organizations are the eye and ears of citizens holding public officials accountable where state ~~oversight~~^{oversight} fails.

In order to promote good governance regulatory bodies must be enhanced. Weak autonomy of regulators contribute to poor enforcement and corruption risks. Pakistan ranks

133/180 on corruption perception index 2024. According to Dr Ishrat Hussain "Regulatory capture by political elite remains a major challenge". In order to enhance regulatory bodies autonomy must be legally protected and financially guaranteed.

To sum it all, Pakistan is engulfed in governance issues due to a number of causes. Governance issues are caused notably due to the undermining of law, prioritizing political influence over merit, and lack of devolved powers. Political elites often look towards their personal interest at the cost of national interest. Lack of transparency and fairness also aggravates the situation. Lack of informed citizenry and controlling of media has also resulted in overall manipulation by authoritarian actors. Furthermore, the rising trend of political dynasty has a detrimental effect on governance of Pakistan. It prevents the entry of new talent in politics.

It may also be noted that economic structure, social structure, and political structure all rest on good governance. Therefore certain reforms are needed in order to promote governance quality. Most important reforms include strengthening the election commission to ensure protection of public voice. Inter provincial rivalry should be dealt through council of common interest. NGOs should be empowered to promote civil society participation in governance monitoring. Institutes should be strengthened and merit should be prioritized. Provincial autonomy should be granted in line with federal principles. By implementing efficient and long term reforms, Pakistan can cope up with governance issues.