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Since its inception, Pakistan has envisioned democratic governance, yet the path to its consolidation has been far from smooth. The democratic history of Pakistan is marked by crisis, instability, and recurrent authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, several democratic indicators, including strong public support for democracy, consistent elections, presence of multiparty system, and the growing debates for empowering local governments, reflect hope for democracy in the country. Unfortunately, numerous factors, such as low literacy rate, politicized judiciary, compromised electoral system, and restrictions on media and civil liberties, threaten the consolidation of democratic norms in Pakistan. In order for democracy to thrive in the country, state institutions—especially the judiciary and electoral bodies—need to be strengthened. In short, the prospects

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For democracy in Pakistan are strong, yet impediments to its consolidation persist which need to be addressed through structural reforms.

In early years, Pakistan's democracy was plagued by crises due to lack of strong leadership. Qaid-e-Azam died in 1948 and Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated in 1951. This created a leadership vacuum in the country as all the successors left behind were weak. Muslim League fragmented into several factions and polarization among the leaders deepened. As a result, the support base of Prime Ministers weakened and the governor general and later President Iskandar Mirza were able to remove the Prime Ministers with minimal resistance. From 1951 to 1958, six Prime Ministers were removed or forced to resign. This

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led Javalihal News to say, "I do not change clothes as frequently as Pakistan changes its Prime Ministers." Such democratic instability paved the way for authoritarianism in Pakistan.

Capitalizing on the political turmoil, military generals frequently sidelined democracy and established dictatorship. In 1958, President Iskander Mirza abrogated the constitution and appointed General Ayub Khan as Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA). In 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq overthrew Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and established military rule. Similarly, in 1999 Pervez Musharraf once again ousted the democratically elected Prime Minister—Nawaz Sharif—and imposed emergency. For all of these authoritarian regimes, political instability was presented as justification. However, these authoritarian interv-

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entions significantly eroded democracy in Pakistan and entrenched the influence of non-elected institutions in politics.

Democracy in Pakistan remains fragile and constrained even today. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index 2024 ranks Pakistan among the top 10 worst performers, classifying it as an authoritarian regime. The report notes that Pakistan faces significant challenges to its democratic process, such as electoral manipulation, divisive politics, and political unrest. Such bottlenecks keep the country's democracy in a perpetual state of erosion.

Despite such a dismal democratic history, hopes for democracy in Pakistan remain high.

There is strong public support

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For democracy in Pakistan, signifying a bright democratic future.

The Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOR) Islamabad conducted

a nationwide survey in 2025. It

reveals that 89% of Pakistani

citizens consider democracy

essential for long-term stability

and development. This demonstrates

widespread social acceptance for

democratic norms, which is

the foundation of democracy.

Moreover, this overwhelming

backing means authoritarianism is

not acceptable to the public,

and creates pressure on the

government to improve electoral

integrity, rule of law, and

governance. Briefly, such unwavering

support means that democracy

is not rejected, rather valued

by the citizens highlighting its

prospects in Pakistan.