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Since its inception, Pakistan has
enjoyed democratic governance, yet
the path to its consolidation has
been far from smooth. The demo-
cratic history of Pakistan is
marked by crisis, instability, and
recurrent authoritarian rule. Neverthe-
less, several democratic indicators,
including strong public support for
democracy, consistent elections,
presence of multiparty system, and the
growing debate for empowering
local governments, reflect hope for
democracy in the country. Unfortuna-
tely, numerous factors, such as
low literacy rate, politicized
judiciary, compromised electoral
system, and restriction 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 impediment 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 Jawaharlal Nehru 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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entirely 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 dem-
ocratic process, such as electoral
manipulation, abusive politics, and
political unrest. Such bottlenecks
keep the country's democracy
in a perpetual state of erosion.

Despite such a dismal democra-
tic history, hopes for democracy
in Pakistan remain high.

There is strong public support

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well done

For democracy in Pakistan, signifying a bright democratic future.

The Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOP) 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

embraced by the citizens, highlighting its prospects in Pakistan.