

# Democratic unrest in Pakistan

## Causes and Consequences

### Thesis Statement

Pakistan has been facing democratic unrest since its independence. Main causes of democratic unrest include ineligibility of Politicians, institutional interference, and mass illiteracy in the country. Moreover, the said unrest has resulted in poor economic growth, bad governance and terrorism; leaving the poor population stranded.

### I. Introduction

### II. A brief overview on democratic unrest in Pakistan

### III. Causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan:

- A. Ineligible and <sup>corrupt</sup> ~~poor~~ Politicians
- B. Politics based on hereditary principles
- C. Military and Bureaucratic interventions
- D. Judicial overreach and its adverse role
- E. Outdated electoral system.
- F. Mass illiteracy
- G. Ethnic based politics and ethnic conflicts
- H. Rising political polarization.

### IV. Consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan:

- A. Low economic growth.

- B- Reduced foreign Direct Investment
- C- Shameful Picture on Human Development Index
- D- Consistent military takeovers
- E- Bad governance and poor service delivery
- F- Rise in terrorism and extremism
- G- Absence of consensus on key issues i.e Construction of Dams
- H- Unnecessary protests halting economic activities

#### 5- Some suggestive measures to strengthen democracy:

- A- Providing education to citizens of Pakistan
- B- Ensuring provision of equal opportunities to participate in elections

#### 6- Conclusion

##### Essay

Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people, as famously quoted by Abraham Lincoln. It demonstrates the importance of democracy in any country. However, Pakistan has never witnessed a stable democracy in the past seven decades. Due to its inefficient political leaders, who are often involved in corrupt practices and are self-centered, Pakistan's democracy remains disrupted.

likewise, due to the democratic unrest in the country, Pakistan never has gained economic stability, neither does it has witnessed good governance. Moreover, due because of the above mentioned failures, there is immense rise in terrorism & extremism and many important issues that demand attention have remained ignored. Before digging into the causes of democratic disruptions or unrest in Pakistan, it is essential to look over its historical background.

After one year of independence of Pakistan, its founder and most determined leader died i.e. Muhammad Ali Jinnah died. After the death of Mr Jinnah, the second most credible leader, also known as right hand of Quaid-e-Azam, Liaquat Ali Khan was given the powers as a Prime Minister to govern the country. However, the Prime Minister was also martyred during a public gathering - giving a start to democratic unrest. Since then, country had numerous Prime Ministers, who never completed their five years tenure and was also taken over by military dictators. Even after 78 years, country strives for Robust democracy in order to gain economic development.

which only remains a dream for it - following arguments can describe the real causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

To begin with, ineligible politicians who are involved in corruption are the main reason behind democratic unrest in Pakistan. It is mainly the responsibility of politicians to strengthen democracy as it allows them to participate in the elections and work for the betterment of citizens. However, when the politicians of any country are corrupt and self-centered, then it indirectly weakens the democracy. The ineligibility of leaders in providing services paves way for non-democratic institutional interference and justifies their involvement. For example, political leaders in Germany have ensured service delivery and have restricted corruption - ultimately making the country one of the largest economies and strong democratic state. Thus, ineligibility and corruption in political institutions result in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Similarly, politics in Pakistan is based on hereditary principle. Which simply means that only those get a chance to participate in the democratic process, who are either children of existing

Politicians or have any relation with them. Democracy is itself a principle, where everyone get an equal chance or level playing field to become a part of executive pillar of state. However, Pakistan severely lacks in meritocracy in democratic process, due to which, only few are given leverage to be part of democratic process. For example, BBC reported that during last fifteen years, wherein three elections have been held, only 2 percent were belonging to common class. Which means that only those can compete elections who are already rich or otherwise related to political leaders. Hence, due to hereditary principle in politics, democracy remains uncertain in the country.

Furthermore, continuous military and bureaucratic intervention in the political process has weakened democracy. During the first decade of country's freedom, many bureaucrats took over the power. In doing so, no single Prime Minister was allowed to complete the tenure. Later, four martial laws were imposed in the country by military dictators, that never allowed democracy to operate freely.

in the Country. Countries, where institutions cross their jurisdiction and ~~interrupt~~ in politics, can never achieve robust democracy. For example, India which is seven times larger than Pakistan, has never witnessed martial law or bureaucratic intervention. Moreover, it is known to be a mother of democracies.

While, Pakistan having shared culture and values remains democratically vulnerable. In this context, bureaucratic and military interventions are major causes behind democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Likewise, the ~~country~~ Judicial branch of Pakistan has also played adverse role by legalizing military interventions. Judiciary of any country is thought to be a Protector of Constitution and savior of democracy. As per Montesquieu, out of all three pillars on which a state stands, judicial branch has significant role to play. However, judiciary of Pakistan also negatively impacted democracy by giving decisions in favour of military rulers. For example, Supreme Court of Pakistan gave verdict for hanging the former Prime Minister and dictatorship of General Musharraf was also declared

legal. Hence, the negative side of judiciary giving decisions on the basis of ~~the~~ theory of necessity has resulted in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Consequently, electoral system of Pakistan is outdated, allowing rigging in the elections. Elections are the pillar of democracy, that allow the people to choose their leaders. However, due to old and outdated election system, there are allegation of elections being rigged, especially in rural or backward areas. If the people don't even have right to appoint their own leader, then it will eventually damage the spirit of democracy. Case in Point is the report published by Al Jazeera, which stated that not even a single election in the last 20 years (which include elections held in 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2024) was free from rigging. In this backdrop, ~~the~~ rigged elections and ~~democratic unrest~~ outdated electoral system paves way for democratic unrest.

Moreover, majority of the population of Pakistan is illiterate, resulting in democratic

unrest in the country. To achieve a stable democracy, it is necessary for the country to have educated nationals. As democracy relies on the decision of the people, who choose their leaders. It is pertinent for these citizens to be educated to make a thorough decision. However, people in Pakistan are illiterate - not knowing the democratic process. This allows the non-democratic powers to interfere in politics. For example, criteria set for a person to be considered as educated is that he can read or write in Urdu. Still, almost forty percent of the population is illiterate. During a Gallup survey in 2013, 52 percent of the population declared the dictatorship good for the country. This means that illiteracy of citizens also weakens the democracy in the country. Additionally, Pakistan has different ethnicities living in the country. Moreover, politicians also promote ethnic disintegration for their personal gains. Due to which, the country faces leadership crisis and ethnic conflicts. These conflicts generate intolerance within the provinces and give birth to the problems affecting the democracy. Political leaders

often obtain benefits from these ethnic conflicts.

Accordingly, people in Pakistan abstain from voting to a person just because he belongs to a different Province or ~~is~~ speaks different language. For example,

Gallup survey before the election of 2027 revealed that a vast majority was supporting the political leaders just because they belonged to their own

Province. This ethnic based politics and ethnic disintegration damages the democracy of any country.

Finally, another major reason for democratic unrest in Pakistan is rising Political Polarization. It is prudent for strong democracy to demonstrate a

tolerance and accept the ~~opposite stance if~~

relevant. However, Pakistan's political parties get involved in unfair means to win the election.

Likewise, every ruling government targets the opposition in false cases - ultimately allowing the military or bureaucracy to intervene in the

Politics. Case in point is the report of CNN

in the year 2025, which demonstrates that Political Leaders of Pakistan are trapped in vicious

cycle i.e. every government puts the opposition in

soil, not allowing a balanced political system.

In this regard, ~~increasing political polarization~~ also paves way for democratic unrest in Pakistan.

~~Due to democratic crisis~~ caused by the above mentioned issues, following consequences have been faced by the ~~Country~~:

Firstly, Pakistan has been witnessing poor economic growth ~~due to democratic unrest~~. Economic growth in any country demands policy consistency and long term development plans. However, in Pakistan, not even a single Prime Minister has completed five years tenure. In addition, every new government ends or changes the plans and policies of previous government ultimately dragging the country towards inconsistency. Case in point is report of World Bank that proclaims that due to frequent reversal of policies in Pakistan, during 2013 to 2023, multinational corporations refrain from doing business in Pakistan. Thus, democratic unrest results in low economic growth in the country.

Secondly, Pakistan has been facing reduction in Foreign Direct Investment - critical for its development. ~~Foreign Countries~~ only invest in the countries where there are stable governments, who can protect their interests. However, Pakistan has a completely different case to offer, where governments change frequently. This frequent change hesitates the investors to invest in Pakistan. In the report of IMF, the issue of low foreign direct investment was linked with political instability. In this context, democratic unrest reduces foreign direct investment.

In Addition, the country has been placed lowest in the Human Development Index. Democratic Governments are judged for their progress on education, health and other sectors. However, due to unrest in democracy, no government in Pakistan bears responsibility to work on these issues. Moreover, every government blames previous government for poor progress. Pakistan has been placed lowest in gender equality, where 12 million children are out of school and only country after

Afghanistan, whose battling with Polio - On the other end, due to strong democracy, India has become fourth largest economy, with much better performance in Human Development Index than Pakistan - Thus, uncertainty in democratic process affects human development in the country -

Subsequently, democratic unrest paves way for military interventions - When the democracy weakens in the country, it ultimately leads towards economic problems causing poverty and increase in crime rate - These problems create resentment in the citizens against political leaders, providing way to military dictatorships - Military dictators further damage the economy of country and further drag the country towards poverty - Case in point is four military takeovers which came after political instability - Moreover, these military dictators allowed participation in war on terror and Afghan Jihad, costing lives of almost eighty thousand citizens and billions of dollars - Thus, another consequence of weak democracy is military dictatorship, that further damages the country -

Similarly, Poor democracy leads to ~~bad~~ governance and Poor service delivery. Democratic governments are responsible for good service delivery & to its Citizens and ensuring efficient governance based on accountability, answerability and justice. However, when governments are themselves weak and striving to save their position, then it is not possible to promote good governance. Each government works on selective accountability especially of opposition and makes compromises. During the recent PAB Gallup Survey of 2024, almost 70 percent of people were dissatisfied with service delivery in Pakistan. In this backdrop, another consequence is Poor governance due to democratic unrest.

Consequently, the democratic unrest in Pakistan gives rise to terrorism and extremism.

One of the major responsibilities of the democratic government is to ensure Law and order and security of the people. However, self-centred politics and weak governments pave a way for terrorism to exist. Furthermore, military dictatorship in Pakistan allowed weaponization in

~~areas of Balochistan and KPK - Pakistan is still~~  
~~Paying the price for these decisions of dictators~~  
Thus, democratic unrest leads to terrorism and  
extremism in the country -

Furthermore, another consequence of democratic unrest  
is ~~country lacks consensus on~~ key issues.  
Pakistan's major problem is ~~climate change~~, wherein  
it has been ranked among the top five most endangered  
countries. Thereby, its ~~need~~ to build  
dams needed to prevent disasters. However due to  
lack of consensus, Pakistan ~~just~~ ignores this  
important problem. ~~Pakistan has not constructed~~  
~~a single large dam in past three decades, one~~  
of the major reasons behind disastrous floods in 2022  
and 2025. ~~Thus, weak democracy restricts~~  
country to take necessary steps in order to mitigate  
threats, leaving its population vulnerable and stranded.  
Finally, democratic unrest leads to unnecessary  
protests, halting economic activities in the country.  
Democratic governments ~~put efforts to resolve~~  
the issue of its citizens. However, when  
democracy is ~~centered~~ towards selfishness of

Politicians, it ~~paves way for protests, that halt~~  
the economic activities and ~~severs connectivity~~.  
Case in point is report of ~~Asian Development Bank~~  
on economy of Pakistan, which stressed that Pakistan's  
export activities very severely damaged due to protests  
of Political ~~crises~~ - Thus, democratic unrests  
results in unnecessary protests ~~lasting for long time~~  
& ~~damaging economy of country~~.

Having established the causes and consequences of  
democratic unrest in Pakistan, it is prudent to  
mention ~~some suggestion that can improve the~~  
~~condition of democracy in the country~~.

First of all, Pakistan must provide education to  
its citizens. Educated citizens never allow the  
institutional takeover over government. Moreover,  
education will ~~provide~~ allow the citizens to choose  
leaders ~~justly~~ - not on the basis of ethnicity or  
religion. Democracies of Western Countries is an  
living evidence that if the national are educated,  
they ~~provide strong democracies and oppose the~~  
~~dictatorship or authoritarianism~~. In this backdrop,  
by educating the citizens, Pakistan can bring  
stability in its democracy.

Another step that can help in democratic certainty is ensuring participation on basis of merit. This means that Pakistan must create an environment where common citizens can also participate in democratic process, regardless of their social or economic status. This step will strengthen the system of accountability and answerability of leaders and also create competition to provide better services in order to get reelected in the government. Hence, democracy based on equal participation ~~is~~ the way that can bring certainty in the democracy.

Above in view, it is evident that Pakistan has been facing democratic unrest due to ineffectiveness of its politicians, lack of participation, institutional interventions and illiteracy of its citizens. These failures result in poor economic growth and poor service delivery, leaving the population vulnerable and stranded and not allowing the country to achieve stability. However, with few measures including promotion of education and providing equal opportunities at grass root level, can strengthen the democracy in Pakistan.

subject verb  
and object