

Democratic unrest in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

1- Introduction

2- Historical Overview of Democratic Unrest in Pakistan

a- President Iskandar Mirza dismissing civilian government

b- Zulfikar Ali Bhutto not conceding rule to Awami party after its 1970 election win.

c- President Ishtar dismissing civilian government

3- Causes of Democratic unrest in Pakistan

3.1- Absence of democratic culture in political parties.

3.2- High polarization between political parties.

3.3- Establishment intervention in democratic system

3.4- Rampant corruption and weak governance

3.5- Economic decline

3.6- Rissing and electoral dispute over election.

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3.7- Weak Parliament and political parties.

3.8- Rising social inequality in the society.

4- Consequences of Democratic ^{crisis} in Pakistan

4.1- People losing confidence in democratic systems;

Freedom House report that globally people are losing confidence in democracy.

4.2- Loss of investor confidence;

FDI in lowest level during FY-23 due to rampant political instability in Pakistan

4.3- Loss of democratic values among people.

4.4- Emergence of autocratic leaders in disguise of democratic setup; Viktor Orban^{and} Imran Khan emergence, as populist autocratic leaders.

4.5- Declining rule of law

4.6- censorship over media and critical voices;

Human Rights Commission reporting high censorship over media reporting

4.7- Emergence of selective biased
undivine accountability

4.8- Establishment intervention in
politics became stronger than
ever.

5- Conclusion

President Abraham Lincoln once said, "democracy is the rule of the people, by the people, for the people." However, in Pakistan the situation became quite the opposite, as both democratic and anti-democratic forces together hallowed the system. For instance, political parties in Pakistan failed to foster an environment of dialogue, reconciliation and bargain. This provided anti-democratic forces the chance to meddle in civilian affairs, which led to high corruption, and misgovernance in Pakistan's peripheries. Moreover, allegations of electoral rigging resulted into the establishment of weak hung Parliament. Consequently, people started losing confidence in the democratic system. This exacerbated

economic decline, as foreign investors became wary of their investment prospects in Pakistan, which led to capital flight in 2023. Similarly, democratic values and culture became elusive with declining rule of law situation. ^{critical} Media reporting while, the rampant censorship over ^{critical} media reporting, and selective biased accountability amnesia for opposition made the idea of democracy for all redundant. Hence, in the following paragraph of this essay numerous causes and consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan will be discussed in details.

The democratic unrest in Pakistan, started soon after its inception. For instance, President Iskandar Mirza dismissed the civilian government of Prime Minister Bogra, on the accusation of misgovernance. Moreover, he invited the military chief Ayub Khan to join his cabinet, as defense minister. This ^{provided} military an opportunity in civilian affairs. Later, Ayub Khan overthrew President Iskandar Mirza and became the President of Pakistan. Similarly, the fall of Dhaka is another example of how democratic unrest divide a country. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Mujeeb-ur-Rahman failure to establish a working set-up

led to East Pakistan demise. Similarly, President Ishaq using Article 58(2B) to dismiss the civilian governments led to severe democratic unrest in Pakistan. Hence, it can be said that misuse of law, military interventions, and political leaders failure to establish a common ground, led to severe democratic in Pakistan's history.

The foremost cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan is the absence of democratic culture in political parties. Democratic culture establishes rules, regulations and train future political leaders the ethics of dialogue and reconciliation. However, in Pakistan's political parties, it is severely missing. Muhammad Waseem, in his book, Political Conflict in Pakistan, places absence of democratic culture and values, as the central reason of ^{Pakistan's} democratic erosion. Hence, it can be said that democratic culture absence leads to democratic unrest in Pakistan.

The phenomena of rampant political polarisation has exacerbated Pakistan's democratic unrest. This is because political parties unwillingness

to accept other side views has led to closure of dialogue. This has amplified existing fault lines, and ^{it} have given emergence to hard core policy issues. For instance, the emergence of 9th May is a case in point, where ^{certain} political party workers attacked military installations. This environment of high decisive polarisation is yet another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Similarly, establishment intervention in democratic system is yet another reason, why democratic unrest is prevalent in Pakistan. The back door intervention by establishment has led to loss of civilian supremacy. For instance, Muhammad Waseem, in his book, "Political conflict in Pakistan" calls that an 'establishmentern democracy' has emerged in Pakistan over the years. This shows that establishment meddling in civilian affairs has led to democratic backsliding in Pakistan.

Successive Democratic governments in Pakistan have been accused of high corruption and mis governance. The 2016 Panama scandal exposed Pakistan's political leaders involvement in corruption practices.

However, it also led to backsliding of democracy, as other institutions like Judiciary started meddling in civilian affairs. For instance, the the chief Justice Saqib Nisar started interfering in administrative measures, which compromised triarchy principle of power. Thence, this led to democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan has been the economic decline. Pakistan has failed to achieve a sustainable durable growth trajectory. This has led to high inflation, low growth and flight of capital. Similarly, state Bank of Pakistan in its study found political instability negatively impact economic growth. This shows that economic stagnation over the years have negatively impacted democracy growth in Pakistan.

In Pakistan's history no political party has ever conceded defeat, and ^{every party} ~~those~~ called each election as being rigged and compromised. This has led to severe democratic unrest, as

political parties don't have faith over the electoral process. Similarly, electoral procedure in Pakistan are flawed as per FAFEN Report. The report found high irregularity in 2018 and 2024 general election. Hence, such grave practices has dissipated democratic norms in Pakistan.

Historically, in Pakistan Parliament have been kept deliberately weak and compliant. As no political party is able to get two-third of majority. Moreover, at times Parliament has been reduced to 'rubber stamp' as law are enacted with out proper deliberation and consultation. PILDAT report that laws are being enacted without detailed deliberation and consultation. Furthermore, PILDAT argues that lawmakers are not aware of policy rules and procedures. This has led to democracy backsliding as Parliament appears as an institution of rubber stamp.

Lastly, rising social inequality in the society is causing democratic unrest in Pakistan.

As Pakistan is already resource
poor, and the ^{rising} gap between haves
and have not is deteriorating the
situation. As per ^{the} UNDP report, elite
capture in Pakistan leads to loss
of \$17.4 billion annually. This shows
that rising social inequality
is leading to lack of people trust
in the democratic system. Hence, this
can potentially lead to mass unrest,
that can hinder the system completely.

Democratic unrest in
Pakistan is leading to people losing
confidence in the democratic
system. As people are becoming
increasingly alienated with the
current setup. For instance, Freedom
House report that globally democracy
is in decline. However, in Pakistan
it argues that the country has
become increasingly authoritarian.
Hence, this shows that democracy
as a system is becoming less
appealing to Pakistanese.

Similarly, widespread
democratic unrest in Pakistan
has led to flight of capital.
This is because due to political unrest

investors become wary of their investment outlooks. For instance, in Fiscal Year 2024 Foreign direct investment fell to historic low. Moreover, the investment-to-GDP ratio is 13.4% due to political uncertainty in Pakistan. This shows that how badly democratic erosion disturb economic trajectory of a country.

When democratic unrest is high, people lose ~~democracy~~ ^{confidence} in democratic values. This is because multiple power center emerges, which leads to tussle of power in between institutions. Consequently, this loss of people confidence in democracy ^{that} translates into ^{loss of legitimacy and} poor service delivery. As per the Human Development Index Pakistan rank among the bottom countries of the world. Hence, it can be said that loss of legitimacy and poor service delivery are the outcomes of democratic unrest.

In Pakistan due to democratic unrest emergence of populist autocratic leaders are becoming common. These political leader flaunt rule of law, by pass

parliament, and adopt every anti-democratic measures possible to remain in power. For instance, ^{former} Prime Minister Imran Khan illegally dissolved the assembly, which was later revoked by the Supreme court. Hence, it can be said that populist democratic leaders adopt illiberal policies in the disguise of democratic values.

Similarly, in Pakistan the rule of law is declining due to democratic unrest. This is because the applicability of law is increasingly becoming selective. Moreover, courts in Pakistan are hearing 50% of political cases. This ^{high} burden of political cases is draining efficiency and resources of courts. Resultantly, 20 million cases are pending in judiciary due to this case backlog. People confidence in democracy is wanning.

In Pakistan media censorship is becoming more visible than ever. Protection of media and accountability of the

government are the two central feature of democracy. However, in Pakistan the situation is changing fast. The Human Rights commission of Pakistan argues that media in Pakistan is operating under heavy censorship. Moreover, financial issues ^{in media sector} are exacerbating the existing problems for media industry.

Likewise, the democratic unrest ^{in Pakistan} has led to the emergence of biased vindictive accountability procedures. The witch-hunt accountability measures are eroding democratic essence. For instance, illegal detention of former Prime Minister is a case in point. This has led to people less confidence in courts and institutions.

Lastly, democratic unrest has given an open opening to undemocratic forces, like establishment who are becoming stronger against Parliament. Moreover, institutional rifts and procedural delays are becoming common due to democratic unrest. Hence, it can be said that establishment is gaining power over civilian misrule.

In conclusion, it

can be argued in detail that Pakistan since its inception has forced democratic unrest. This democratic unrest is due to absence of democratic culture among political parties. Moreover, rampant polarization, establishment intervention, corruption, electoral rigging and weak Parliament has led to less people confidence in democracy. Resultantly, Pakistan's economy is in decline, autocratic leaders are becoming powerful and selective biased accountability has become entrenched in Pakistan.