

Democratic Unrest in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

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- g- Excess judicial activism
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(IV) Consequences of Democratic Unrest in Pakistan

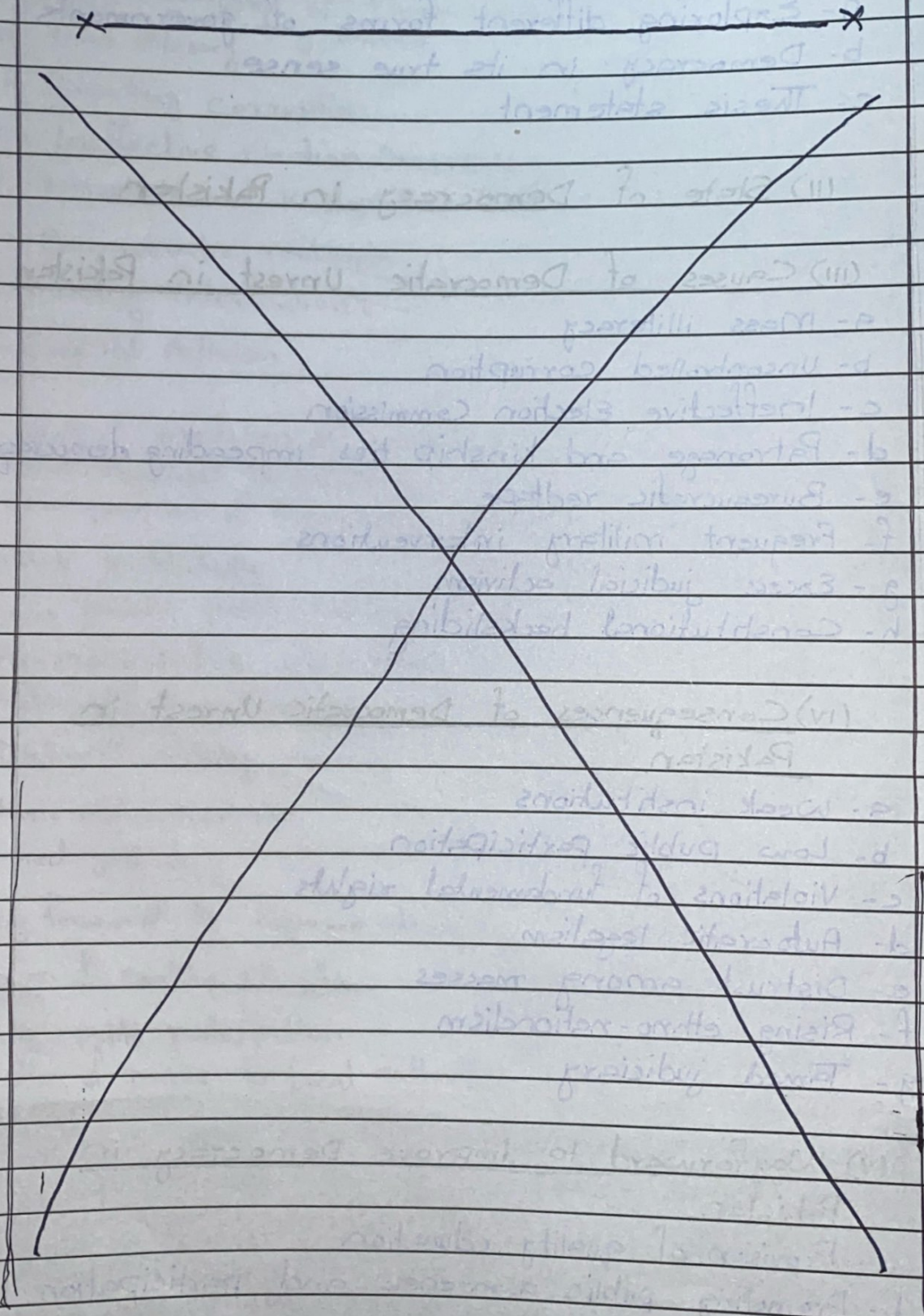
- a- Weak institutions
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The emergence of society has gone through many different forms of regimes and governments. The West that is recognized as champion of democracy has itself emerged from absolute monarchy to constitutional one and then to democracy. The shift from old system to a new one was based on will of local public, especially peasants and workers, who despite having majority had no say in affairs of state. Thus, there emerged a system which was based on representation of majority and protection of minorities. As Albert Camus rightly states, "Democracy is not the law of majority, but the protection of minority." Pakistan emerging as a democratic country in 1947 failed to stick to basic principles which deteriorated the state of affairs. Numerous causes play role in maintaining democratic unrest ranging from mass illiteracy, prevailing corruption, military interventions, judicial activism and ineffective institutions. Consequently, weakening the institutions, discouraging public participation and promoting autocratic legalism.

Firstly, this essay sheds light on causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Mass illiteracy impedes the smooth functioning of democratic institutions causing democratic unrest in Pakistan. The Economic Survey 2024-2025, provides that the literacy rate in Pakistan stood only 60.6%. This indicates that almost half of the population is illiterate which makes it sure that people are not aware of basic democratic norms and the rights guaranteed to them. resultantly, making impression that elected representatives

are like a boss. Thus it is certain that mass illiteracy causes democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Secondly, prevailing corruption plays equal role in democratic unrest in Pakistan. As reported by Transparency International, Pakistan ranks 135th out of 180 countries on its Corruption Perception Index. This indicates that corruption is a rampant issue in Pakistan. Corruption undermines public trust in institutions and when corruption is prevalent in all institutions as seen in Pakistan, this lets those people involved in those practices to do practices like rent seeking and not serving people. Thus making corruption a stumbling block in democracies working.

Thirdly, ineffective election Commission is also a cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. The body responsible for holding free and fair elections is seen to be ineffective in its working. As argued by Ishrat Hussain in his book *Governing the Ungovernable*, he lays that the ECP has failed to deliver resulting in failure to conduct fair elections, intra-party elections and following of democratic norms resulting in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Moreover, patronage and kingship is equal responsible for democratic unrest in Pakistan. Anatol Leven in his book *Pakistan a Hard Country* states that Pakistan runs on patronage and kinship ties resulting in weakening of public institutions and deterioration of public trust in democratic institutions. Therefore, patronage and kingship is also a cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

In addition, bureaucratic red tape also causes democratic unrest in Pakistan. It is argued by Ishrat Hussain that with change of democratic structures, there is a change of whole bureaucratic machinery in Pakistan. This results in corrupt practices by bureaucrats who have full support of those appointing them and therefore resulting in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Military interventions have also played a significant role in democratic unrest in Pakistan. Whenever, democracy seems to be mature, there is seen a military dictator sitting on the top and removing that government. Pakistan in its due course has remained under direct military rule for 30 years and the indirect influence asserted by military is found even today as Pakistan has been ranked as 'Authoritarian state' by Economist Intelligence Unit. Therefore, military interventions are of major responsibility in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Moreover, excess judicial activism is also a cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. In Pakistan the top judiciary (supreme court) has remained an organ which instead of discouraging military interventions has given the legal cover through 'Doctrine of Necessity'. This practice along with dismissal of popularly elected prime minister, as case of Nawaz Sharif, undermines public trust in the institution and results in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Another major cause for democratic unrest in Pakistan is constitutional backsliding. During its course of history, Pakistan has experienced three

constitutions with the third one being 1973 constitution. The abrogation and suspension of constitution by different military regimes has undermined the smooth functioning and enforcement of constitutional provisions. The state of constitutionalism is so weak that it can be observed in an interview given by former President and army chief Pervez Musharraf who cited that 'constitution is just a piece of paper to be thrown in dustbin'. This along with many other aspects has undermined smooth working of constitution resulting in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

The consequences that arise with democratic unrest in Pakistan are:

Firstly, democratic unrest weakens institutions. This is widely observed in Pakistan and asserted by a survey conducted by PILDAT in 2016 that public trust in institutions is just around 30-40%. This results in violent attitude of public towards institutions which is often observed in protests and uprisings. Therefore, it can be asserted that democratic unrest weakens institutions.

Secondly, the other consequence caused by democratic unrest is low public participation. It is observed that people in Pakistan do not feel their stake in any matters of governance which results in low public participation thus being another consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Thirdly, another consequence of democratic unrest is violation of fundamental rights. This is a prevailing issue in Pakistan. Despite having constitutional protections, people of Pakistan

do not feel safe as observed in a report by Rule of Law index by World Justice Project that rights violations is a norm in Pakistan. Thus it is asserted that violation of fundamental rights is the consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Moreover, another consequence of democratic unrest is autocratic legalism. In simple terms it means that using law to undermine law. As alleged by opposition in National Assembly, the current constitutional amendments, 26th and 27th, are referred to as autocratic legalism. Thus proving that autocratic legalism is also a consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Another consequence of democratic unrest is distrust among masses. The public at large does not have trust in democratic institutions and the process of election. As observed through a survey conducted by PIDE (2021). The people's trust in institutions has deteriorated. This is a direct consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

In addition to public distrust, rising ethno-nationalism is also a consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan. As asserted by Ishrat Hussain in Governing the Ungovernable, the structure of federal unity has weakened in Pakistan due to disappropriate distribution and exploitation of wealth and resources at expense of provinces, especially smaller ones. This gives rise to regional political parties and results in erosion of trust among federation. Therefore, it is said that rising ethno-nationalism is also a consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Another consequence of democratic unrest is taming of judiciary. As observed in Pakistan, due to frequent changes of rules and regulations, the judicial organ has weakened which has further been undermined through 26th and 27th Constitutional amendments. The curtailment of suo moto powers of High Courts, and the Supreme Court is therefore a consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

The wayforward for improving democracy in Pakistan are as follows:

Firstly, provision of quality education can ensure improvement in democratic structure of Pakistan. As enshrined in Article 25A of the constitution of Pakistan, it is responsibility of state to ensure quality education for all. However, it is under dismal state and for a smooth democracy it is essential that masses are aware of all the procedures especially the law and its consequences so that they take responsible action during elections.

Secondly, democracy can be improved by promoting public awareness and participation. As Abraham Lincoln states that 'Democracy is the government of, by and for the people' it is essential that political learning be promoted and public's participation be ensured in decision making so that democracy serves the purpose that it is observed for.

Therefore, to ensure public awareness and participation it is essential to devolve and delegate powers to local authorities, the local government. It is local government that is the grassroot and

pure form of representative democracy as it ensures that the authorities are selected from among the common masses and are directly responsible to them. As argued by Ishrat Hussain in his book 'Governing the Un-Governable', the approach of bottom-up should be adopted in Pakistan so that people are encouraged to participate in governance and the elected representatives are responsible to public. This approach can ensure the improvement of democracy in Pakistan.

Moreover, to ensure strengthening of democracy, the institutions responsible for executing and ensuring checks and balances (executive and judiciary) be strengthened. The bureaucrats responsible for enforcement and implementation of laws should be provided constitutional protections of service, appointment and promotion. Moreover, judiciary should be let work independently without any pressures. This resultantly will improve the democracy in Pakistan.

To sum up, the democracy in Pakistan is facing serious problems that undermines its smooth working and creates unrest. The cause being frequent military interventions, excess judicial activism, bureaucratic redtapism, mass illiteracy and prevailing corruption. Resulting in weak institutions, low public participation, autocratic legalism, rising ethno-nationalism and tamed judiciary. As Matternic says, 'Democracy could change daylight into darkest night'. This is the case of democracy in Pakistan which despite being called as a democratic country fails to observe it in true sense. The world however, has learned from the ages and has shifted from authoritarianism to pure democracy. This lesson

should also be learned by Pakistan.

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THE END

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