

MOCK EXAM

"Democratic unrest in Pakistan: Causes and consequences"

OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Hook

1.2 Background

1.3 Thesis Statement:

Democratic unrest in Pakistan is the result of historical legacies, institutional constraints, electoral challenges, governance limitations, and socioeconomic pressures. These factors collectively weaken democratic consolidation, reduce public trust, and create long term implications for political stability and national development.

2. CAUSES OF DEMOCRATIC UNREST:

2.1 Historical and Structural legacies:

2.1.1 Early administrative and constitutional

challenges after independence

2.1.2 Repeated political transitions affecting continuity of democratic norms

2.1.3 Evolution of civil-military relations shaping political dynamics

2.2 Constitutional and Institutional Challenges:

2.2.1 Periodic constitutional amendments influencing institutional roles

2.2.2 The 27th Constitutional Amendment (2023):

a) Reorganization of defence command structure

b) creation of new Judicial arrangements

c) Debate regarding institutional balance

2.2.3 Need for strengthened separation of powers and institutional clarity

2.3 Electoral and political gap Systems:

2.3.1 controversies during the 2024 General elections

2.3.2 Issues in electoral transparency, delayed results, and administrative weaknesses

2.3.3 Pakistan's democracy Index Score of 2.84 in 2024, indicating systemic political volatility

2.4 Governance limitations and public trust Deficit:

2.4.1 IPOR 2023 Survey:

- a) 89% believe democracy is essential
- b) 54% dissatisfied with its performance

2.4.2 Challenges in service delivery and policy implementation

2.4.3 Limited fulfilment of electoral promises by political parties

2.4.4 Growing public expectation-performance gap

2.5 Socioeconomic and Security Pressures:

2.5.1 Regional disparities contributing to political grievances

2.5.2 Economic challenges such as inflation, unemployment, and slow growth

2.5.3 Security concerns diverting attention from long-term democratic reforms

2.5.4 Impact of social inequality on political participation

3. CONSEQUENCES OF DEMOCRATIC UNREST:

3.1 Institutional Strain and Reduced Democratic Functioning:

- 3.1.1 Pressure on civilian institutions due to political volatility
- 3.1.2 Slowed progress in strengthening rule-of-law frameworks
- 3.1.3 Weak legislative performance and inconsistent policymaking

3.2 Declining Public Confidence and Civic Disengagement:

- 3.2.1 Reduced trust in elected representatives and political parties
- 3.2.2 Lower participation in political processes
- 3.2.3 Rise in political polarization and fragmented public discourse

3.3 Economic Implications and Governance Challenges:

- 3.3.1 Reduced investor confidence due to instability
- 3.3.2 Difficulty in executing structural economic reforms
- 3.3.3 Delays in development projects and policy continuity issues

3.4 Impact on civil Liberties and Media

Environment:

- 3.4.1 Concerns over freedom of expression and press constraints
- 3.4.2 Shrinking civic space for dialogue and constructive criticism
- 3.4.3 Limitations on peaceful political activities and mobilization

3.5 Long-Term Democratic Stagnation:

- 3.5.1 Slow progress in democratic consolidation
- 3.5.2 Persisting gaps in accountability and transparency
- 3.5.3 Challenges in aligning governance performance with public expectations

4. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS AND WAY FORWARD:

4.1 Strengthening Democratic Institutions:

- 4.1.1 Ensuring clarity in institutional jurisdictions
- 4.1.2 Enhancing parliamentary oversight and legislative capacity
- 4.1.3 Strengthening independence of constitutional bodies

4.2 Improving Electoral Processes:

- 4.2.1 Transparent result management systems
- 4.2.2 Stronger role for election monitoring
- 4.2.3 Capacity building of electoral institutions

4.3 Enhancing Governance and Public Trust:

- 4.3.1 Improved service delivery and accountability mechanisms
- 4.3.2 Performance-based evaluation of public representatives
- 4.3.3 Encouraging merit-based political participation

4.4 Socio-Economic Reforms for Democratic Stability:

- 4.4.1 Reducing regional disparities through equitable development
- 4.4.2 Addressing inflation and unemployment through targeted policies
- 4.4.3 Investing in education and civic awareness

5. CONCLUSION

THE ESSAY

As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "Democracy doesn't create equality; it simply recognizes it". Pakistan's democratic experience continues to struggle with Pakistan ranking 124th in 2024 Democracy Index. The recurring patterns of political volatility highlight the urgency of understanding the roots of democratic unrest. Since its independence in 1947, Pakistan has navigated a complex political trajectory marked by alternating phases of democratic progress and institutional strain. Frequent constitutional transitions, administrative challenges, and uneven political development have shaped a landscape where democratic norms continue to erode. In recent years, shifts in government structures, electoral controversies, and rising public dissatisfaction have further highlighted the fragility of democratic consolidation. Thus, it is evident that democratic unrest stems from historical legacies, institutional constraints,

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electoral shortcomings, governance gaps, and socio-economic pressures - factors that collectively influence the stability and effectiveness of its democratic order. To understand this evolving situation more clearly, it is essential to examine the key causes that have contributed to Pakistan's ongoing democratic unrest.

One of the foremost causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan lies in its historical and structural legacies. At the time of independence, the newly formed state inherited severe administrative pressures, uneven institutional development, and urgent governance challenges that left little room for democratic maturation. The early decades witnessed frequent political transitions, including short-lived governments, weak party structures, and constitutional uncertainties, all of which restricted the evolution of stable democratic norms. These formative disruptions gradually shaped an imbalance in institutional roles, where different organs of the state developed at unequal pace. As a result, Pakistan's democratic process grew with the firm

foundations - such as strong political parties, sustained parliamentary culture, and consistent constitutional practices - required for long term democratic consolidations.

Similarly another cause includes the periodic constitutional amendments influencing the institutional roles. One such example is the recently passed constitutional amendment, the 27th Amendment which established a new role of Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), consolidating command over all military branches - a major reorganization in state power structure. Simultaneously, the reform restructured judicial-oversight mechanisms: a new federal constitutional court (FCC) was introduced raising concerns about institutional clarity and separation of powers; this has collectively inundated the powers of Supreme court. Such structural shifts have stirred national debate over the balance between civil and military authority and the independence of constitutional institutions - especially judiciary. Thus, there is a dire need

for strengthened separation of powers and institutional clarity.

Additionally, the democratic unrest is further uprooted through the Electoral and political gap systems. It is evident by the 2024 elections which coincided with a drop in Pakistan's democracy ranking. ^{→ Pakistan's democracy index score of 2.84 in 2024} The EIU report links falling scores to weaknesses in electoral process, governmental functioning, political participation, and civil liberties. The decline in ranking suggests systemic problems in electoral transparency and political pluralism, rather than occasional anomalies. Observers reported delay in the announcement of results and irregularities at various polling stations, including instances where results were not properly displayed or verified, undermining public confidence in the process. Furthermore, internal democracy within political parties remains limited, with candidate selection and leadership decisions often concentrated in the hands of few individuals or family dynasties.

This centralization reduces opportunities for broader political engagement and accountability. Collectively, these electoral and systemic shortcomings create perceptions of political instability and exclusion, which fuel citizen frustration and contribute to ongoing democratic unrest.

Governance limitations and public trust deficit further fuels the democratic unrest. A recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) "Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Report" (2025) finds persistent, systemic weaknesses in Pakistan's governance. The report describes Pakistan's economy as "State-dominated" with complex regulation, overlapping institutional mandates, weak accountability, and fragmented oversight — conditions that facilitate corruption and undermine institutional effectiveness. Between January 2023 and December 2024, authorities reportedly recovered assets worth Rs 5.3 billion through anti-corruption efforts; but this represents only a fraction of the actual

losses caused by corruption and institutional inefficiency. Institutional weaknesses are not limited to economic sectors only rather the judicial system also suffers from backlog of cases, slow legal processes, weak enforcement of contracts which undermines the rule of law and discourage public faith in institutions. According to IPOR 2023 Survey; 84% of people believe that democracy is essential and it expresses the freedom of expression; in contrast 54% were dissatisfied with the performance—the governance quality, public services, accountability, and economic opportunities indicating the growing frustration at grass-roots levels. The IMF report suggest that if structural governance reforms are implemented properly—Pakistan could potentially raise its GDP by 5-6.5% over five years.

In addition to institutional and electoral weaknesses, socio-economic pressures and security challenges significantly contribute to the democratic

unrest in Pakistan. on the economic fronts while the most recent World bank update (2024) notes that economic activity strengthened with some recovery - real GDP rose to around 2.5-2.7% in the fiscal year 2024-2023.

However, this modest growth barely offsets long standing structural weaknesses: poverty reduction has stalled and even reversed in some years as World Bank warns sustained reforms remains critical for meaningful

poverty alleviation. Moreover, the structure of employment and production remains fragile.

Pakistan, being largely dependent on Agrarian economy has witnessed numerous economic setbacks ^{due to} ~~during~~ the cataclysmic effects of 2022 and 2023 floods displacing millions of people and largely effecting economy.

Keeping in view the security front, continuing internal conflict and periodic violent incidents - including militant attacks and regional instability has created an environment of uncertainty that deepens public anxiety, undermines normal political engagement and makes effective governance

more difficult. These security pressures often divert state resources towards defense and emergency responses, at the expense of development and public welfare. When citizens' basic needs are under threat, the ideals of democratic participation and institutional accountability tend to lose priority - fueling frustration, disillusionment and democratic unrest across the country.

The interplay of historic legacies, institutional weaknesses, electoral shortcomings, governance deficits, and socioeconomic and security pressures creates a complex environment in which democracy struggles to take firm root. While these factors explain why democratic unrest arises, their impacts extend beyond mere causes, shaping tangible outcomes for the political system, institutions, economy, and public trust. The next half of the essay would be about the consequences of the democratic unrest in Pakistan.

The persistent democratic unrest in Pakistan has placed considerable

strain on the country's institutions and governance framework. Structural imbalances, weak electoral mechanisms, and governance deficits have undermined institutional effectiveness. According to GCDA as aforementioned, systemic inefficiencies, overlapping mandates, elite capture hinder accountability and reduce institutional capacity. Additionally, constitutional reforms and restructuring of key state institutions have generated debate over the distribution of authority, creating uncertainty in policy implementation and weakening public confidence. Judicial delays, inefficient regulation, and opaque decision making processes further exacerbate institutional fragility.

Collectively, these pressures compromise the capacity of democratic institutions to respond effectively to citizens' need, undermining the legitimacy of governance structures.

Democratic unrest in Pakistan has also contributed to a significant decline in public confidence and widespread

civic disengagement. The 2024-2025 Democracy Index Ranks Pakistan at 2.84, placing it 124th out of 165 countries highlighting the political deficits. Surveys in various provinces indicates growing dissatisfaction with public services, transparency, and accountability, reflecting a perception that the state is unable or unwilling to meet citizens' basic needs. Socio-economic factors including inflation, unemployment, exacerbate frustration and promulgates brain-drain. As citizens become dissatisfied, voter turnout decreases and engagement in democratic processes weakens, reducing the effectiveness of participatory governance. This erosion of public trust undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions and creates a feedback loop.

In addition, persistent institutional inefficiencies weaken regulatory frameworks, and systemic corruption hinder effective economic management, reducing state capacity to deliver services and promote

Sustainable growth. Misallocation of resources, opaque procurement processes and delays in policy implementation exacerbate fiscal deficits and limit investment in critical sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure. Inflation and unemployment strains household incomes, particularly affecting rural communities and urban low income groups.

All these factors perpetuates socio-economic inequalities, thereby reinforcing a cycle of governance and economic challenges.

Another concern lies over the press constraints and providing little room for constructive criticism. The community suffering the most in this regard is the Journalist community, where time and again they've either been assassinated or jailed for voicing their thoughts. As evident by the Murder of Journalist Arshad Sharif by the Kenyan police in 2022; since then the list is going on with no checks and balance and with no provision of justice. It is the right of every citizen

to provide constructive criticism which broadens and expands their trust in the state affairs. In addition, transparency and accountability gaps should be bridged as soon as possible to alleviate the democratic unrest.

Building on the economic and governance challenges, the future implications of persistent democratic unrest in Pakistan are significant and multi-faceted. For this, strengthening the democratic institutions is essential to address the root causes of unrest. Effective reforms should focus on enhancing institutional capacity, and reinforcing accountability across government bodies. Strengthening the judiciary and regulatory frameworks ensures fair rule of law and prevents misuse of state resources, while transparent public financial management reduces corruption and fosters trust. Civic education and participatory mechanisms empower citizens to engage meaningfully in governance.

Similarly there should be transparency

in result management systems. Transparent and impartial elections ensures citizens' fair representation thereby enhancing legitimacy of elected governments. Measures such as: modernizing voter registration, implementing robust result-verification mechanisms, and ensuring timely announcement of outcomes can prevent disputes and build public trust. By reforming electoral laws and processes, Pakistan can promote fair competition, enhance political pluralism, and provide citizens with confidence thereby fostering stability.

Moreover, enhancing governance and public trust is crucial for consolidating democracy and reducing unrest in Pakistan. Transparent decision making, accountability mechanisms, and strict anti-corruption measures strengthen institutional credibility and demonstrate government commitment to citizens' welfare. Strengthening audit institutions and regulatory authorities ensures fairness and deters misuse of power. By prioritizing good governance

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and rebuilding public trust, Pakistan can break the cycle of disenchantment and create an environment conducive to sustainable development, social cohesion and the long-term stability of democratic institutions.

In a nutshell, Pakistan's democratic unrest is the result of a complex interplay of historical legacies, institutional weaknesses, electoral deficiencies, governance failures, and socio-economic and security pressures. These factors have not only strained institutions and weakened governance but also eroded public trust, hindered economic development, and fueled civic disenchantment. The future stability of democracy depends on comprehensive reforms, including strengthening democratic institutions, improving the electoral process, and enhancing governance and transparency to rebuild public confidence. Addressing these societal and structural challenges is essential to break the cycles of unrest, ensure political legitimacy, foster inclusive development

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and empower citizens to actively participate in governance. Only through sustained and credible reforms can Pakistan secure a resilient, stable, and prosperous democratic system capable of meeting the aspirations of its people.
