

Democratic Unrest in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

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2. Lack of intraparty elections
 - Heritage of party position. for example Bhutto family and Sharif family
 - PILDAT - major political parties have weak internal democratic structures
3. Absence of astute leadership
 - None of the Pakistani Prime ministers has been able to complete full tenure.

4- Political parties ; inclined towards slogans rather than ideology

- Manifestos are having tall claims but no strategy of resource mobilization - PIDE

5- Undermining independence of Judiciary

- 26th amendment
- 'How Democracies Die' by Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky

6- Violation of fundamental rights

- Defamation bill and Peca
- Ban on student union

7- Lack of open governance

- Pakistan ranks 106th in open governance which limit the public involvement - world justice project report

IV - Consequences of Democratic Unrest in Pakistan

1- Hampered economic growth

- GDP growth rate is 2.8% - Economic survey of Pakistan 2025

2- Discourage investors from investing in Pakistan

- Example: Nishat, Shell oil, Telenor and Gultahmad announced exit

3- Rise in corruption

- Pakistan ranks 120th in corruption - world justice project report

4- Decline public faith in democratic institutions.

- Example: protests and marches
- Massive displacement and migration

5- Loss of tourism revenue

- Pakistan's tourism revenue has declined due to democratic unrest and security concerns - PTDC

6- Weak law enforcement

- Pakistan ranks 140/142 in rule of law - WJP report

7- Losses: dignity and reputation before the world.

- International criticism and concerns
- Democracy Index and Pakistan ranking 124/167 - Economist intelligence unit

V. Wayforward to address democratic unrest

- By promoting multilateralism
- Educating masses and promoting awareness
- Engaging youth and promoting peace, justice and human rights
- Strengthening democratic institution and fostering culture of tolerance and preservation
 - How Democracies die by Daniel Ziblatt

VI - Conclusion

On a quiet street in Islamabad, an old lamp flickers every night — not because it lacks fuel, but because every passing hand tries to adjust its flame. Pakistan's democratic and political landscape often resembles that fragile lamp: full of potential light, yet trembling under too many competing forces. Pakistan has been facing democratic unrest since its inception. This unrest is a major obstacle in its way to prosperity, because strong democracy ensures that everyone's voice is heard and no group is excluded from the political landscape of the country. It further ensures that leaders are accountable to the public and it prevents any one person or a group from holding too much power. In contrast, democratic unrest brings instability in society and paves the way for the rise of authoritarian leaders and demagogue leaders. In Pakistan, factors which are responsible for democratic unrest are intervention of anti-democratic forces, lack of intraparty elections, absence of astute leadership, lack of

open and fear governance and undermined independence of judiciary. These causes have drastic impacts such as hampered economic growth, rise in corruption, declined foreign investment, loss of tourism revenue and loss of dignity and international reputation. Practical measures are necessary to be taken in order to address this issue properly else Pakistan can neither become prosperous nor respectable.

For decades, Pakistan has been facing democratic unrest. Since its independence, the country has struggled to establish a stable and effective democratic system of governance. Different factors have contributed to the instability which hindered the economic development of Pakistan. Not only it hindered the economic progress and protection of human rights which but also social progress. For instance, Pakistan's constitutional history has been criticized since its inception. Pakistan was unable to form its constitution for approximately 9 years after the independence. The current democratic unrest in Pakistan is a

complex issue. It began in 2022 when a non-confidence motion was tabled against Ex-prime minister, ultimately leading to his ouster which leads to protests and marches all over the country. These kind of situations bring fear in public and led to the breakdown in the democratic process and have sparked widespread unrest in Pakistan.

To begin with the causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan, first come the intervention of undemocratic forces. Especially Pakistan's army has been accused of exerting significant influence over the country's politics, foreign policy and economy. Pakistan's military act as a deep state power in the country which undermines democratic institutions and processes, leading to decline democratic governance. Additionally, the military has historically played a significant role in politics. For instance, four martial laws have been imposed in Pakistan in the years 1958, 1969, 1977 and 1999 consecutively. Imposition of multiple martial laws clearly

manifests the undemocratic intervention and influence in politics of Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan's democracy has grappled with an overbearing military intervention.

Along with interventions, lack of intra party election is another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Intraparty elections are one of the key characteristics of democracy. However, heritage of party position undermines effective democratic rule in Pakistan. For instance Bhutto family and Sharif family are clear examples of how party position and leadership passes from generation to generations of the same family. PILDAT report highlights that major political parties have weak internal democratic structures in Pakistan. This lack of intraparty elections and heritage of party positions undermines democracy and pave the way for authoritarianism in the country. Hence, lack of intra-party elections poses a threat to democracy in Pakistan.

Furthermore, absence of astute leadership is another hurdle for democracy in Pakistan. Pakistan has been witnessing democratic unrest from its inception. Demise of Quaid-e-Azam in the initial year and assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan created a political vacuum within the politics of Pakistan and the country could not come out of the political crisis since then because of absence of strong leadership. For instance, none of the Pakistani Prime Ministers has been able to complete full tenure. On the other hand, the neighbour country India had done comparatively better in its democracy and politics mainly due to presence of astute leadership. Therefore, it can be concluded that absence of astute leadership also undermines democracy in Pakistan.

In addition, inclination of political parties towards slogans is another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Prime focus and agenda of political parties should be ideology and strategies for the development and

public service rather than ~~id~~ slogans. Parties should present their main agendas and practical measures to fulfill those claims. However, in Pakistan parties as well as public both are more interested in slogans which are based on nationalism and ethnicity. PIDE report clearly indicates that political slogans and manifestos are having high tall claims but no strategy of resource mobilization. This sort of approach also hampers political culture and democracy in Pakistan.

Moreover, undermining independence of Judiciary causes democratic unrest in Pakistan. Judiciary is also one of the three crucial pillars of state and its independence is essential for balance of power. However, in Pakistan judicial independence is undermined through different approaches. For instance, 26th Amendment, along with some positive outcomes, undermines judicial independence by placing the appointment of judges under executive control. This could influence judicial appointments.

Daniel Ziblatt in his book 'How Democracies Die' also highlights how elected authoritarians consolidate power by capturing the referees, side-lining the key players and rewriting the rules of the game. It clearly depicts that rewriting the rules of the game also poses major threat to democracy in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, violation of fundamental rights also causes democratic unrest in Pakistan. Fundamental rights include freedom of speech and which is one of the key characteristics of democracy. However, exploitation of these basic rights undermines democracy. For instance, Defamation bill and Peca are clear examples of violation of fundamental rights. Similarly, Ban on students union such as in the year of 1974 and 1984 also hinder the democratic culture in Pakistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that violation of fundamental rights also causes democratic unrest in Pakistan.

~~Furthermore~~ ^{Finally}, lack of open governance is also a major

cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. In true democracy, public is taken into account before any decision making and commons must have access to information regarding government schemes and progress. However, Pakistan lacks such fear and open governance due to which public lose trust in government hence hampering democratic culture. World justice project report of 2024 ranked Pakistan 106th in open governance. This ultimately limits public involvement which leads to democratic unrest in Pakistan.

This essay has discussed the major causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan. This essay would further shed light on the consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

To begin with the consequences, first come the economic instability. political stability and economic growth both go hand in hand. Instability of one ultimately impact the later. Pakistan's economic crisis has

one permanent factor and that is political instability and democratic unrest. Democratic unrest causes public protests, ~~and~~ marches and strikes which hamper economic growth. Pakistan's GDP growth rate, according to economic survey of Pakistan, 2025, is 2.8% which is comparatively lower than neighbouring countries and other developing countries where there is political stability. Therefore, this comparison clearly depicts that democratic unrest causes economic instability.

Furthermore, democratic unrest discourage investors from investing in Pakistan. When country faces political and economic instability, foreign and local businesses shift to the countries where they are provided with stable environment. In Pakistan, due to democratic unrest major investors are either shutting down their businesses or announce exit to other countries. For instance, Nishat, Shell Oil, Telenor communication has announced their exit and recently Gul Ahmad also announced its exit. It will further undermines the economic condition

of the country. Therefore, it can be stated that democratic unrest also causes discourage foreign and local investments.

Additionally, rise in corruption is another major consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan. When democratic institutions are weak or unstable, there is less accountability and oversight. People lose trust in governance, and bribery, embezzlement, and favouritism increase as leaders focus on consolidating power rather than serving the public. According to corruption perception index of Transparency international, Pakistan ranks 135 out of 180 in 2024. This ranking shows that Pakistan is struggling with its democracy due to which corruption rate is higher in the country.

Along with corruption, declining public faith in democratic institution is another consequence of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Frequent protests, strikes and marches indicates public anger and loss of trust in democratic

Institutions. This lack of trust in government cause mass displacement and migration towards another country. It is human nature that they want peace and stability in their life and to gain that stability, people often migrate to developed countries. According to IOM, Pakistan had over 1.1 million migrants in 2020, mainly due to conflicts and instability. Hence, democratic unrest is responsible factor for migrations and displacements.

Furthermore, loss of tourism revenue is also one of the consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan. No one would like to go to the country where there is instability because due to instability any mishappening can occur. Pakistan, despite being one of the beautiful countries in the world, enjoys very little revenue from tourism. PTDC report indicates that Pakistan's tourism revenue has declined due to democratic unrest and security concerns. Therefore, it can be stated that loss of tourism revenue is one of the major consequences of the democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Finally, the major consequences of democratic unrest is the loss of dignity and reputation before the world. Due to struggling democracy Pakistan faces international criticism and concerns. Because world appreciates the legitimacy of any government and in Pakistan every government is accused of rigging the elections within the country, hence question of legitimacy raises upon the governments of Pakistan from international community. Pakistan also ranks lower in international ranking index. For instance, According to Economist Intelligence unit, Pakistan ranks 124 out of 167 countries in democracy index. Therefore, weak international image is a major impact of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

To conclude, Pakistan has been struggling with its democracy due to intervention of undemocratic forces, absence of astute leadership, lack of impartial election and lack of open governance. This essay discussed the major consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Although Pakistan is struggling with its democracy, it

can overcome these crisis through practical measures. There is always a silver lining in the dark clouds. The hope for Pakistan lies in nurturing a resilient democracy that serves its people rather than political ambitions.