

QUESTION 2

Democratic Unrest in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Understanding democratic unrest in Pakistan
- 3) Causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan
 - a) Politico-social Polarisation
 - b) Elite capture
 - c) Political instability
 - d) Strained economy
 - e) Non-existence of democracy at grass-root level
- 4) Consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan
 - a) Political uncertainty
 - b) Bad governance and dysfunctional

institution

- c) Weak economic health (repeated IMF programmes, bailout packages, debt roll over etc)
- d) Challenged the unity of federation
- e) Public trust in state's institutions weakened

5) Recommendations

- a) Giving politico-economic rights to people
- b) Ensuring socio-economic justice to people
- c) Adopting holistic and inclusive economic policy
- d) Electoral reform and strong local governments
- e) Media literacy and curbing disinformation
- f) Truth and Reconciliation commission

6) Conclusion

Democratic unrest has been a recurring feature in Pakistan's chequered political history. The country has witnessed four military take overs and has been ruled for more than half of its national life by military. These interventions, among other factors, have fuelled democratic unrest in the country. However, the causes of democratic unrest are multi-farious: political and social polarisation, elite capture, political instability, strained economy and deficit of democracy at grass-root level. These factors have resulted in political uncertainty, bad governance, dysfunctional institutions, poor economy, challenges to unity of federation and above all, the weakening of public trust in

state's institutions. These ill
can be cured by creating
political and economic rights,
socio-economic justice, electoral
reforms and strong local govern-
ments, inclusive economic policy,
Setting up Truth and Reconciliation
Commission and strong media
reform. As many ill in politics,
economy and society are contributing
to democratic unrest which have
bearing on almost every component
of state, so, Pakistan needs to
adopt strong governance and
policy reforms to mitigate and
cure democratic unrest in
Pakistan.

Democratic unrest means lack
of political stability, strong
institutional and trust of public
in state's institutions. It also
means dysfunctional institutions,

strained economy, socio-political polarisation and lack of democratic norms. Pakistan has been facing this phenomenon since its independence in 1947. Democracy couldn't take roots in Pakistan because it inherited weak and dysfunctional institutions, fragmented polity, opportunist political leaders, power-hungry civil and military bureaucracy. These historical factors have shaped the current causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Among the causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan, the foremost one is political and social polarisation. Due to politico-social polarisation between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, the country got disintegrated and lost more than half of its territory. Polarisation

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seeps ⁱⁿ through our society. Political rivals are considering each other as 'enemies' instead of rival. Political has been reduced to zero-sum game. Hate-speech, extremist narratives, slandering, abusive language against rivals and dissent are fuelling socio-political polarisation which in turn is contributing to democratic unrest in the country.

Another major cause of democratic unrest is elite capture. In simple terms, elite capture means capturing and holding of state resources by tiny number of people known as elite. It includes powerful businessmen, politicians, industrial leadership, high ranking members of judiciary, army and civil bureaucracy. They mold state laws, rules and policies according to

their interests. According to United Nations Development Report (UNDP), 17.4 billion dollars are spent annually on elite capture in Pakistan. They receive this amount in terms of subsidy, preferential treatment in terms of rules and taxes. Political instability also results in democratic deficit. Lack of political stability and harmony affect every facet of governance. It chokes economic growth, stifles normal functioning of the country and paralyzes the functioning of state's institutions. Pakistan's chequered history is a testimony to the fact that whenever political instability ensues, extra-constitutional forces intervene to fill the vacuum. 1970s political instability is the example

When military dictator overthrew democratic government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto owing to political instability. After the take-over, the country's democratic progress was delayed by many years. So, democratic unrest is the outcome of political instability.

No democracy can function without sound economy. Stagnated economy also contributes to democratic unrest. Lack of economic growth, per capita income and employment adversely affect country's democracy when people are not given their due economic rights, people choose violent and other illegal means to get their rights. The Green Revolution in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are examples when due to lack of economic rights, people v

the settled regime. So, strained economy also contributed to democratic unrest.

Non-existence of democracy is another cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Democracy

couldn't take strong roots in Pakistan since its inception.

Local governments provide essential services such as education, health, sanitation, road repairment and other public service delivery to people at grass-root level.

Local leadership has significant influence over their electorates as they are their chosen representatives.

Pakistan's constitution provided establishment of strong and empowered local governments under Article 140-A of

constitution. But, sadly, it has not been translated into action

Like Cuba, consequences of democratic unrest are multi-dimensional. The primary impact of democratic unrest is political uncertainty. It results into a climate where foreign investors shy away from investing in such country. Pakistan's FDI-to-GDP is 12.7%, which is lowest among global average. The primary cause of low FDI is political uncertainty. This political uncertainty further results in frequent change of governments in Pakistan which adversely affects democracy.

Another consequence of democratic unrest is bad governance and dysfunctional institutions.

Democratic unrest choked the economic growth of the country.

It paralyzes the normal functioning

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of the country. Political protests, Dharud (sit-ins), strikes and violent assemblies are ^{costing} ~~cost~~ million and billions to national exchequer. Similarly, the unrest pervaded to every institution of the government. It affects legislative, executive and judiciary. Weak economic health is direct outcome of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Pakistan had to go to IMF repeatedly for bailout packages and to friendly countries for loan and debt rollover. Pakistan's first IMF Programme was in 1957. Now the country is in its 28th IMF Programme. Since 1957 to 2025, the country has been entrapped in IMF's cage. One of the main reasons for it is democratic unrest.

One horrible consequence of democratic unrest is it challenged the unity of federation provinces and political parties fight for their due political and economic rights. The secession of East Pakistan is an example when democratic unrest resulted in break up of United Pakistan. Currently, people of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh are demanding their due rights. Many people have joined militant organisations from these areas. These organisations have created many challenges for state and federation.

Finally, public trust in state's institutions weakened as a result of democratic unrest. People lose trust in state's institutions for getting their rights.

and justice. They resort to violent means to achieve their objectives.

Many people join terrorist organisations to attain their goals by violent means. The peripheral areas of Balochistan and KP have been fertile source of recruitment of people in terrorist organisations.

There are many ways to curb democratic unrest in Pakistan.

The first and foremost is giving people their due political and economic rights. Poverty, unemployment and sense of deprivation and alienation drive people to militant path. State of Pakistan needs to provide and ensure political and economic rights of people.

By creating socio-economic justice to people, democratic unrest

Can be ensured. Education is a
 basic right of people under
 Article 25A of Constitution.
 currently, 26 million children
 are out of school in Pakistan.
 State needs to enroll them
 as soon as possible. Unemployment
 rate is 7.1% in Pakistan
 and it is 12% among youth.
 according to Labour Force Survey
 2025, state needs to provide
 economic opportunities to its people.
 Pakistan needs to adopt holistic
 and inclusive economic policy
 to make Pakistan an egalitarian
 society. Economic resources should
 be evenly distributed among
 masses. strong fiscal discipline,
 direct taxation, exports-oriented
 economy, globally-competitive industries
 are some steps to create strong
 economy.

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Electoral reform are necessary for curbing democratic unrest. After every election, political parties cast pre-poll and post-poll rigging allegations which results in democratic unrest in the country. All political parties should sit and craft electoral reform with consensus. Similarly, empowered and financially independent local governments should be established to take democracy at grass-root level to people. It will be of tremendous use in curbing democratic unrest in the country.

Another way to curb democratic unrest is media literacy and checking disinformation. Media give information without any substance and verification. It do 'media trials' of politicians

and Public official. Media is known as 'Fourth Estate' of the state. It has prime responsibility to air verified information and make democracy transparent. Strong defamation laws should be implemented to curb misinformation. Left but not the least, Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be setup to set the historical record straight. All the baggage of history should be settled by this Commission and unified resolve should emerge out of this Commission for betterment and prosperity of the country.

To conclude, democratic unrest in Pakistan has been a recurring feature in Pakistan's history. There are many political, economic and social causes

for democratic unrest in Pakistan. It has impacted every facet of state, society, politics and economy. It has resulted in bad governance, weak economy, fragile public trust in state's institutions and challenged the unity of federation. Pakistan needs to adopt strong remedial measures by giving political-economic rights, creating socio-economic justice, electoral reform, strong local governments, media literacy and setting up Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Pakistan needs to do it at a war pace.