

Democratic Unrest in Pakistan: Causes and consequences:

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The Essay:

In his book "Pakistan: A New History", Ian Taaboot argues

that Pakistan is a victim of pyrrhic democracy where byzantine conspiracies continues to fuel

democratic unrest. It indicates

the fragility of democratic framework

in Pakistan which stems from

a number of factors. First of

all, history of rigged elections in

Pakistan resulted in democratic

unrest due to question on legitimacy

of the governments. Secondly, Pakistan

is a country where every government

implements crack down on opposition

parties resulting in democratic

backsliding. Moreover, an important

pillar of democracy is freedom

of speech which is suppressed

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in Pakistan. Furthermore, military-oligarchic elite non-elected institutions in Pakistan fails the attempts to ensure democratic stability. Additionally, extractive political and economic institutions raises questions on the future of democracy in Pakistan. Moreover, These extractive institutions perpetuate structural inequalities and disinformation that results in democratic unrest in Pakistan by fuelling populism. Thus, there are a number of causes of democratic unrest in Pakistan notably including rigged elections, political victimization, suppression of freedom of speech, extractive institutions and social disinformation. This democratic unrest is having a wide range of consequences including political polarization, institutional decay, militancy and political instability etc.

Dem To begin with, democracy is the confluence of fundamental human rights, protection of liberty, popular sovereignty and pluralism. In Pakistan, a number of these factors are absent which puts the democracy at stake and results in democratic unrest. From

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1947-1956, bureaucracy dictated the legislation of Pakistan. As Pakistan move on the path of constitutional supremacy, military dictatorships, with episodes of civilian rule blocked the prospects of democracy in the country. After 18th Amendment 2010, in the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, a silver lining emerged regarding separation of powers which soon faded in the clouds of hybrid democracy. This democratic oscillation explains the democratic unrest in Pakistan which emerges from a number of causes.

First cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan is the rigged elections. It is because of the fact that electoral process in Pakistan has been conducted in doubtful manner with questionable legitimacy from opposition. Moreover, non-political factors influence the voting procedure in Pakistan.

According to Eurasia Review 2018, 11th general elections in Pakistan in 2018 were rigged by military-judicial complex. These rigged elections fuel protests, conspiracies and crack down on opposition which results in democratic

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unrest in Pakistan.

Secondly, political victimization causes democratic unrest in Pakistan. Every political party in power tries to put the opposition behind the bars.

In 2018, Pakistan-Tehreek-e-Insaf led government passed

anti-corruption bills to incarcerate the opposition. Similarly, post

2024 elections, the government is using every resource to

victimize opposition of Sunni Ittehad Council. It leads to political tussle among legislators resulting in political rifts and democratic unrest in the country.

Moreover, freedom of speech, an important pillar of democracy, is suppressed in

Pakistan. The government approves legislative measures to penalize

the people who criticize their policies. It results in frequent crackdown on journalists who

keep an eye on abuse of powers by the government. In 2025,

the parliament passed Pakistan Electronic crime (Amendment)

Bill to try civilians on suspicion in the pretext of

national security problems. As this legislation eroded the freedom of speech in Pakistan, World Press Freedom Index classified this act as threat to democracy which fuelled resulted in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Furthermore, over developed state structure of Pakistan is the reason of democratic unrest in the country. It is because the fact that nexus of non-elected institutions in Pakistan controls the legislation, executive and judiciary. These non-elected institutions include bureaucracy and military which rigs elections to favour a political party. Moreover, these institutions also control the actions of executive and judiciary to use state resources for their personal benefits.

[Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: Ayesha Jalal]

Frequent intervention of non-elected institutions frames extractive

institutions to destabilise democracy in the country.

Additionally, extractive institutions in Pakistan create a pattern of oppression which hinders democratic reforms in the country. Extractive political institutions concentrate political powers in the hands of landed elite of Pakistan. Similarly, extractive political economic institutions use hybrid democracy to concentrate resources of Pakistan in the hands of the few, people. As a matter of fact, International Monetary Fund, in its Corruption Diagnostic Report 2025, identified that "privileged elite" is inflicting a damage of 6% to GDP of Pakistan by using institutional framework. It highlights the role of extractive institutions to sustain structural inequalities and bring democratic unrest in the country.

Structural inequalities, emanate

from extractive institutions, is the notable cause of democratic turmoil in Pakistan. These structural inequalities include poverty, access to education and gender-based discrimination. It is an undeniable fact that poverty is increasing in Pakistan. However, it is about 30% in Punjab and 60% in Balochistan highlighting provincial inequality. Similarly, education is the constitutional right of every citizen. However, class-based education system favours privileged elite. Moreover, a number of girls have limited access to public service in Pakistan which shows the structural inequalities against the pluralistic pillars of democracy.

Furthermore, disinformation is the latest cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan. Disinformation maligns the credibility of institutions and brings political unrest in the country. Through social media platforms, people drive propaganda to mobilise the people against democratic

institutions to stir political unrest. As a matter of fact, a number of social media posts labelled the legitimate operation of Pakistan Air Force in Tirah Valley as "massacre". It indicates that disinformation can pit the institutions against ^{the} public which results in democratic unrest in Pakistan.

As there are a number of reasons to propel democratic unrest in Pakistan, it also yields numerous adverse consequences for the country:

First grave consequence of democratic unrest in the country is political polarization.

As a result of oppressive policies of state, people become disinterested in political processes. When their voice is banned by the state, they begin to believe in the conspiracy theories which makes them political extremists. In Pakistan, political victimization of

national decay in

opposition and legislative measures to ban freedom of speech is fuelling political extremism leading to political polarization among the youth.

As people extremely stick to their political ideas, it results in institutional decay in the country. In Pakistan, opposition has become powerless which has destroyed the process of checks and balances. In this situation, the government tries to concentrate all power in executive which results in institutional decay in the

country. Through 27th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, Federal ~~State~~ Constitutional Court has been established where judges will be appointed by executive. It highlights the fact that democratic unrest in Pakistan is yielding institutional decay by making ~~the~~ ^{institutions} ineffective.

Moreover, democratic unrest is

is leading to militancy in Pakistan.

As people are losing their right to choose their representatives due to involvement of ~~over~~ non-elected institutions, they ^{are} resorting to non-state actors to claim their political rights. It acts as perfect ground for separatism and militancy.

As It can be noticed that militancy is prevalent in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where people are disinterested in the affairs of state as their political rights are being taken away by the non-elected powerful elite.

Political polarization and militant tendencies erode the democratic culture of Pakistan. Due to polarised political environment, people resort to militant tactics to justify their point of view which erodes the democratic value of tolerance. Similarly, polarisation and militancy converts the democracy into majoritarian rule where powerful

defines the popular narrative. This majoritarianism erodes the positive democratic culture of pluralism.

In this way, Pakistan is also moving towards a country where democratic culture is in decline.

As democratic culture is being eroded in Pakistan, Pakistan is facing political instability.

Instead of constructive engagement, opposition is trying to ~~de~~ remove government. Moreover, government is taking the help of security apparatus to secure its tenure.

Therefore, it has been difficult for any prime minister of Pakistan to complete its tenure largely due to prevalent democratic unrest in the country.

Moreover, ^{democratic unrest} ~~political instability~~ in Pakistan replaces democratic political parties with dynastic politics. Due to erosion of democratic culture, powerful feudal lords and urban bosses are dominating the higher

echelons of political parties. This process limits political recruitment of new ideas due to conversion of political parties into powerful dynasties. In Pakistan, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (N) can be taken as case studies where erosion of intra-party elections have converted them to powerful dynasties which is inimical to democracy.

Moreover, democratic unrest in Pakistan has converted Pakistan into authoritarian regime. Due to super-powered executive, parliament and judiciary is unable to check their abuse of power.

Moreover, militancy and separatism have increased the role of military-bureaucratic elite in politics.

Furthermore, ~~no~~ opposition is missing in the legislation. All these factors have classified Pakistan from hybrid regimes ^{in 2021} to ^a authoritarian regime in 2025 according to

report of Economic Intelligence Unit 2025.

In this way, authoritarian regime in Pakistan is a sequel of democratic unrest.

To sum up all the facts which have been stated so far, there are a number of reasons of democratic turmoil in Pakistan including rigged elections, political victimization, ban of freedom of speech, extractive institutions and disinformation. It is resulting in political polarization, institutional decay and political instability in Pakistan. Due to political victimization, people are becoming disinterested in affairs of state resulting in political polarization. Moreover, the unchecked government is concentrating powers making institutions ineffective. Additionally, involvement of non-elected institutions is resulting in political instability in Pakistan. Thus, democracy in Pakistan is trapped in continuous unrest which necessitate structural overhaul.

of political framework to prevent
a Hobbesian state of war of all
against all.