

DEMOCRATIC UNREST IN PAKISTAN: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

OUTLINE

1) INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement: Democratic unrest in Pakistan stems from political instability, lack of accountability, dynastic politics and others ^{factors}, which lead to the trust deficit in governmental institutions, regionalism, brain drain and more. Therefore, government needs to take deep-seated measures in these areas to revive democracy in Pakistan.

2) CAUSES OF DEMOCRATIC UNREST IN PAKISTAN:

- a. Frequent Government changes makes makes sceptical about their future.
- b. Lack of Accountability eroding democratic norms
- c. Dynastic Politics as a barrier to diverse participation
- d. Elite capture de-throning the rights of common people
- e. Protracted media with no freedom of speech
- f. Suppressing independent Judiciary

3) CONSEQUENCES OF DEMOCRATIC UNREST IN PAKISTAN:

- a. Trust Deficit in Governmental Institutions.
- b. Socio-economic Grievances; Education, sanitation and poverty
- c. Political polarization in the society depleting civic norms
- d. Spread of Regionalist Ideologies, questioning national integration
- e. Brain Drain; As competent people leave Pakistan
- f. Non-State Actors exploiting public grievances

4) STRATEGIES TO REVIVE DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN:

- a. Entertaining Basic Human rights
- b. Establishing a New Charter of Democracy among the political parties
- c. Respect the rule of Law.

Democracy is said to be government of the people, for the people and by the people said by Abraham Lincoln. These words of Lincoln underscores the genesis of Democracy which is the prosperity and development of people. However, conditions of people in Pakistan is deteriorating day by day. A report of Pakistan's institute of Development economics (PIDEM) shows that 70%.

Pakistanis are facing hardships in getting their bread and butter. Pakistan having the population of 240 million, its participation in elections remain stagnant at 40-50%. (Election Commission of Pakistan) People's trust in democratic process is eroding day by day. The unrest in Pakistan for democracy is because of political instability, lack of accountability, dynastic politics and media censorship, which are impediments in the path of smoother democracy. This has led to the grave implications for Pakistan. These include trust deficit, polarized society, spreading regional ideologies, problem of brain

drain and external vulnerability. To overcome these, government needs to give equal human rights, to establish a charter of democracy among the political parties and respect the rule of law. By virtue of the fact, democratic unrest in Pakistan stems from political instability, lack of accountability, dynastic politics and others, which lead to the trust deficit in governmental institution, regionalism, brain drain and more. Therefore, government needs to deep measures to revive democracy in Pakistan. This essay discusses the causes and consequences of democratic unrest in Pakistan, along with some strategies to speed-up democratic culture in the country.

The first and foremost cause of democratic unrest in Pakistan is political instability. Frequent government changes makes masses sceptical about their future. As Malena Lodhi, former Pakistani

ambassador to the US says that economic prosperity is tied with political ~~instability~~ stability. In regime change, government abruptly changes policies that are not accepted by people. For example, cancelling pension funds of people drew unrest in masses. With the change of government, other economic indicators such as inflation, interest and debt become burdensome on the people. Hence, political instability gives an impetus to democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Moreover, democratic unrest in Pakistan is further worsened by lack of accountability, having check and balance in the society is the beauty of democracy. In Pakistan, there is no such effective mechanism for accountability. As per new IMF report on the corruption in Pakistan depicts that the "Auditor General" of Pakistan is biased and does not work neutrally. So, accountability

is compromised when state officials are biased. Lack of accountability lead masses to bring political strategies to solve their issues such as jirga. For common people, prolonged period on decision making of their issues destroys trust from judiciary. Today, millions of cases in session courts and high courts are pending questioning the smoothness in accountability process. Thus, lack of accountability dismantles democratic norms.

Besides, dynastic politics is an apple of discord in democracy in Pakistan. It gives no chance to other participants to compete in electoral process of country.

Pakistan, since 1980s has remained under the cultivation of Pakistan People's party and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz. This brings hurdles for new thinking tanks to change the fate of Pakistan. According world politics review, policies which are made for public purpose,

basically entertain the family politics such as giving subsidies and tax-rebates. Democracy becomes compromised when few political parties rule the country since decades. So, dynastic politics exacerbates the democratic unrest in Pakistan.

Furthermore, prevailing elite capture is a bone of contention in democratic process. elite capture works on the basis of zero-sum game. The estimation of Islamabad Policy Review denotes that only ~10% of Pakistanis holds 50%+ wealth of Pakistan. we can also witness the presence of elite capture when sugar crisis occurred. Actually elites stopped the passage of sugar to create artificial shortage by which they could earn huge profits. this state of affairs gives sense of marginalization of common people. Therefore, elite capture increases the unrest for democracy among the masses.

Another factor behind democratic unrest in Pakistan is frequent media censorship. Nowadays, media plays an important role in freedom of speech. Those who do not speak physically, are comfortable on media. It is their basic right. However, it diminishes when media outlets are bought, newsrooms are closed and social media remained censored. To critique the government policy is a viable approach to public participation in policies. In this context, PECA act is a stumbling block behind freedom of speech. It says any question on government would be considered as national propaganda against the state. Thus, media censorship erodes democracy.

The last factor which contributes to democratic unrest in Pakistan is oppression on judiciary. For any country, independent judicial system works as building block of democracy. In Pakistan judiciary has been curtailed in

the hands of executives. Some analysts such as deputy to prime minister "Ishaque Dar" says new court is formed to lessen the burden on the Supreme court. On the other hand, a deal of analysts say that the step taken in 27th amendment would squeeze the supreme court's authority as a session court. Hence, judicial suppression leads to democratic unrest in the country.

Democratic unrest poses multiple consequences on the country and from which trust deficit is the top-most. The unrest leads to deficit of trust in governmental institutions. People remain not relying on judiciary for solving their issues. They transfer their businesses outside the country owing to disintegration of institution. Zahid Hussain, author at Dawn says National Assembly becomes the house for personal debate and not for resolving public issues.

Gallop Pakistan survey shows that 60% of Pakistan does not believe in the institution. Therefore, democratic unrest leads to the issue of trust deficit.

Democratic unrest also lead to socio-economic grievance of people. When political parties work only for their vested interest but not for the national cause, it adds fuel to the grievances of the people. The first calamity falls on education. Today, Pakistan has 26 million out-of-school children and poverty rate has touched to 45%, and hardly 25% of Pakistani drink healthy water. These all happen when democratic norms ^(E-Survey 2025) are violated. Thus, socio-economic grievances can be witnessed against the backdrop of democratic unrest.

Further, political polarisation is induced by democratic unrest in Pakistan.

when equal rights and equal opportunities are not given, society becomes disintegrated.

Democratic norms is to treat everyone equally. In Pakistan, prevalent client - patronism, partisan politics and nepotism lead to polarization in the masses. Overall civic standard of society weakens.

Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi, historian, argues that Pakistani society is affected by client - patron politics which is a hurdle in equal opportunities. Polarization further leads to radicalism and extremism. People remain apprehensive among one another. Hence, democratic unrest leads to political polarization.

In addition to this, the spread of regional ideologies and regionalism is the flagrant repercussion of democratic unrest in Pakistan. When people remain unsatisfied with government performance, they begin to prefer their regional cause over national

national cause. Quality education, employment opportunities and political participation are the fundamental rights of Baloch and Pashtun People. When they are not given, then demand for separation. So, democratic unrest leads up to growing regionalism.

Also, democratic unrest leads to the crisis of brain drain in Pakistan. People prefer to go outside when they find no room for democratic rights in the country. Not having a peaceful environment, quality education, gender equality and ease of doing business, people find these in other countries and then settle. Human rights watch based in Pakistan says that every year 300,000+ people go outside the country and become settled there. Thus, democratic unrest is further aggravated by crisis of brain drain in Pakistan.

Lastly in the consequences of ~~of~~ democratic unrest in Pakistan is external vulnerabilities. People, goaded by subsequent governments shake hands with non-state actors. They exploit the separatist ideologies of people to damage the security of country. It is basically stems from the compromised democratic rights such as food shelter and health. For instance, Indian proxies like BLA and RPA, as named by ISPR, are violating country's security. They attract Pakistani nationals in exchange of getting back their land who are already resented by the democratic unrest. Hence, democratic unrest helps non-state actors to attack the country.

To revive the democratic spirit, government needs to take deep-seated actions. Among them, giving fundamental rights is the top-notch action.

As of 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, article 25A says that free and fair education should be given to a child from 5 to 15 years of age. So, Education is the fundamental right. Other rights such as food, shelter, security, and speech can revive the democratic spirit. Moreover, right to do business in peaceful environment and right to assembly, and right to equal employment despite gender disparity could work to reduce democratic unrest. Thus, giving fundamental rights, government can revive the democracy.

Secondly, government should establish "A Charter of Democracy" among the parties. Government should bring all parties on single platform, and should take oath from each party to help one another in decision making, politics of revenge will be ended and work would be done on the principle of consensus.

The charter should also give each party a right to critique for the betterment of policy making. Government should instil in the charter that no party would be taking any kind of help from any undemocratic tendencies. There should be a committee on the charter of democracy which will publish yearly performance review of the parties. This way democratic unrest could be overcome.

Lastly, government should empower judiciary to make independent decision making and spreading rule of law. For which, punishment mechanism should be effective so that people respect the law. Government needs to strengthen judicial commission of Pakistan devoid of any political or apolitical interference in it. Judiciary is the main pillar of democracy.

If it works on the principle of neutrality, democracy will prevail. Hence, respecting the rule of law will revive democracy also.

To sum up, Pakistan is experiencing a fragile democracy. Its people are reluctant in participating democratic process. It actually stems from political instability, lack of accountability, dynastic politics and elite capture.

These all lead to growing trust deficit in governmental institution, regionalism, political polarization, crisis of brain drain and non-state actors' involvement in the country. To overcome these, government needs to take deep measure while giving fundamental rights, establishing charter of democracy and respecting the rule of law. This way democratic spirit be revamped.