

Khadija Saeed
Test : 03
Pak - Affairs

Q: How Democracy evolve in Pakistan? It was the democratic norms that defines the evolution democracy and political culture in Pakistan or its viz a viz. Argue in favour or against.

1. **Introduction:**

The evolution of democracy in Pakistan has historically been a victim of its political culture, which patroni prioritizes patronage, dynastism, and institutional power over established democratic norms like rule of law and constitutionalism. Despite the founding vision of a liberal, democratic federation, the country's political evolution has been characterized by "Bonsai Democracy", a system where democratic transition is not deep rooted in society but stunted by authoritarian tendencies.

2. **DEMOCRATIC EVOLUTION OF PAKISTAN - BRIEF SUMMARY.**

Here is the brief summary of democracy evolution in Pakistan, characterize into distinct phases.

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	Phases	Characterization	Impact on Democracy
1	1947-58	Nascent state and Instability	Bureaucratic dominance; absence of Constitution until 1956; Weak Parties
2	1958-71	Controlled democracy	Military rules; Basic democracies system; Stifle Institutional growth
3	1971-77	Populist Democracy	Bhutto era; Passage of 1973 Constitution
4	1988-99	Decade of Alternation and Power struggle	Frequent dismissals under Article 58(2)(b) - Cycle of PPP and PML(N) governments
5	2008-26	Hybridity and Backsliding	- Extreme polarization - Zero sum politics and disputed elections

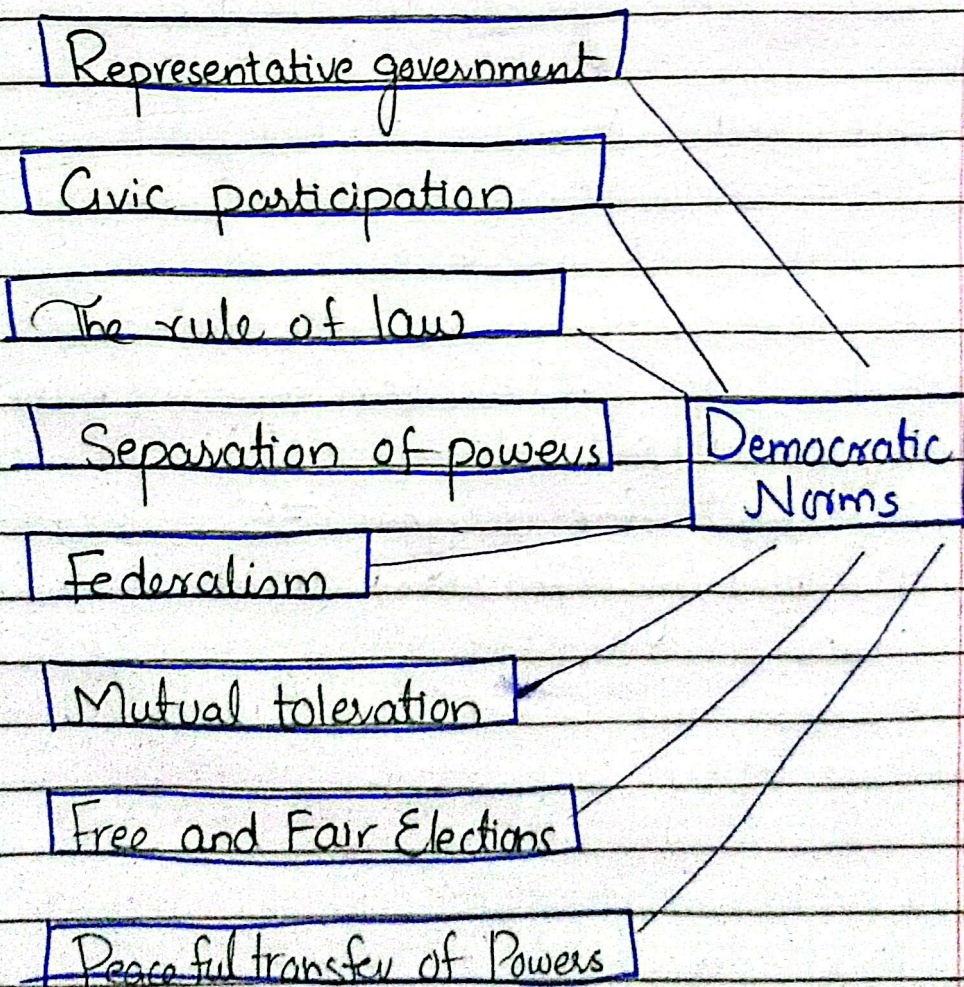
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3. DEMOCRATIC NORMS TO FOLLOW FOR A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY:

Democratic norms are the unwritten rules and expectations that guide the behaviour of political actors and institutions. Due to these norms trust has ^{been} developed between government and its citizens as well as help in dissolving a fight or chaos.

Basic democratic norms are



4. DEMOCRATIC EVOLUTION IN PAKISTAN: A FAR CRY FROM ESTABLISHED DEMOCRATIC NORMS:

The evolutionary history of democracy in Pakistan reflects the fact that the social, political and institutional fabric has historically undermined the democratic norms. Following are the ways through which democratic norms/values were ignored in Pakistan.

1. Frequent Subversion of Civilian Supremacy through direct Military Rule:

As democratic norms advocate for civilian rule, In Pakistan military rulers frequently subverted the civilian supremacy for roughly 35 years of its history. Through direct military coups (1958, 1977, 1999) democratic norms and Constitutions were completely suspended.

2. Lack of Peaceful Transfer of Power and Forbearance:

No Prime Minister in Pakistan's History has ever completed a full five-year constitutional term. Elected governments have frequently been dismissed through early military coups or controversial

Constitutional provisions - Moreover, lack of tolerance towards opposition members is also undermining the democratic norms. This has led to the continuous cycle of "blame game" and "political engineering" and "jailing of opposition leaders". Such as incarceration of leaders and members of the leading party after the 2024 elections.

3 Compromised Electoral Integrity Undermines the norm of free and fair elections:-

In Pakistan's democratic history the norm of free and fair elections has been systematically undermined by institutional engineering, beginning with the 1965 Presidential Elections, where state machinery was famously used to defeat Fatima Jinnah through "Basic Democracy" system. The precedent of manipulation evolved into the 1977 General Elections - Rigging and pre poll rigging through suppression of specific parties was also a norm of Pakistan's political culture. Furthermore the frequent weaponization of religion card - From 1950's anti Ahmadiyya agitation to Faizabad sit-in (2017) and 2024 Tehreek Labbaik Party Campaigns - has been used as a tool to disqualify or intimidate mainstream political rivals. Hence, the intervention of administrative and security apparatus in

election process undermines the will of public.

4 Weakening of Rule of Law and Judicial Independence

In Pakistan's democratic evolution, the systematic weakening of rule of law and judicial independence is a direct violation of the democratic norm of horizontal accountability, where the judiciary acts as a neutral check on executive & legislative powers. Historically and now, this erosion manifests in three primary ways.

1 Judicial legitimization of Extra-Constitutionalism

The "Doctrine of Necessity" invoked by CJ Muhammad Munir provide precedent for effectively shifting sovereignty from people to the executive - This doctrine was subsequently used to provide legal cover for 1958 coup, 1977 coup and 2008 coup.

2 "Authoritarian Proceduralism" via Constitutional Amendments.

Since 2024, legal procedures rather than military intervention has been used to bypass democratic norms known as Authoritarian Proceduralism - Recent Amendments in constitutions are the examples of curbing powers of Judiciary.

3 Executive Intimidation and Interference via Punitive Transfers.

The democratic norm of an impartial judiciary is further compromised by direct pressure on defiant judges.

For instance in 2024, six judges of Islamabad High Court formally complained to the Supreme court about intimidation by security establishments. Furthermore, under 2025 reforms, the executive-dominated Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) gained the power to transfer HC Judges across Pakistan without their consent, a mechanism viewed as a disciplinary tool to punish independent minded judges.

5 Restriction on Civil Liberties

The systemic evolution restriction on civil liberties has functioned as a primary tool to bypass democratic norms. These restrictions are enforced through legal weaponization, physical intimidation, and the shrinking of civic space to maintain institutional control.

1 Media Censorship: From Overt bans to "Hybrid Control"

Media censorship in Pakistan has evolved from direct dictates of military to sophisticated indirect pressures that force

"self censorship" among journalists. For instance, The Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO) 1963 under Ayub Khan set a precedent for state control over information. The PECA of 2016 and 2025 has been weaponized by civilian governments to criminalize dissent. Furthermore, targeted intimidation of journalists one another tactic to control information decimation. High profile cases include The 2022 assassination of Arshad Sharif in Kenya and the 2014 shooting of Hamid Mir.

2 Muzzling Dissent: Suppression of Political and Civil Rights.

The democratic norm of "freedom of speech and Assembly has been routinely ignored through mass arrests and the selective applications of security laws. Social movements like Pushtoon Tahajuz Movement and Baloch yakjehti Committee (BYC) face severe repression. A Ban was also attempted to impose on Pashtun National Tjirga in October 2024. Similarly, constitutional measures are also extended to restrict such movements and ability to organize i.e. Schedule IV of Constitution (anti-terrorism watchlist) and Exit Control list.

5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

By analysing the democratic evolution of Pakistan, one can clearly see the undermining of ^{core} democratic norms in the political culture of Pakistan. From an academic and constitutional perspective, the actions by the government of Pakistan represent "constitutional Hardball" i.e. the use of legally available means (court rulings, administrative orders) to achieve outcomes that violate the spirit of democracy. Moreover, the restriction on the civil liberties are related to national security or sovereignty, though in Constitution the liberties were provided to under the Article 16 and 19. All this discussion indicates that Pakistan functions as a "Hybrid Regime" where the democratic facade is maintained while the core norms of democracy are systematically eroded to protect the security of established and political elites.

However, one can argue that democratic norms have gradually influenced and challenged the autocratic culture through Constitutional continuity since 1973, through Institutional Strengthening after 18th Amendment in 2010, fulfilling long standing democratic norm of provincial autonomy and through media and civil society activism.

CONCLUSION:

In sum, the democracy in Pakistan has been a far cry from the core democratic norms that guide true democracy in a country. Democratic norms advocate for representative government with civic participation and rule of law as major components. The frequent subversion of civilian government via military rules, lack of tolerance for power transfer, compromised electoral integrity, weakening of rule of law and curbing of civil liberties during evolution of Pakistan's democracy represents the grim picture of Pakistan deviated political culture from core democratic norms. However, critics argue that certain tactics were only used to ensure the sovereignty of Pakistan. Moreover, continuation of 1973 constitution, 18th Amendment and ~~con~~ Institutional Strengthening via provincial autonomy and media and civil activism manifests that democratic norms were followed and is influential in this regards. Therefore, considering Pakistan's political culture a total deviant from democratic norms is a ~~false narrative~~ doubtful.

Q2 Is the economy of Pakistan fragile or resilient?

1 INTRODUCTION

The economy of Pakistan remains critically fragile despite showing some sign of macroeconomic stabilization. While structural reforms under the \$7 billion IMF Extended Fund Facility have improved indicators like inflation and credit ratings, the economy lacks deep seated resilience to internal and external shocks. Pakistan's economic fragility stems from a combination of chronic domestic issues and vulnerability to external shocks at regional and global level.

2 CURRENT ECONOMIC STATUS OF PAKISTAN.

In FY 2025, the economy of Pakistan shows sign of recovery with 3.7% of GDP growth, driven by agriculture, industry and services, while inflation significantly dropped in FY 2025. Furthermore, the State Bank of Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves also rose to \$14 billion ^{in 2025} from \$9 in 2023. Despite such improvements, as helped by IMF, Pakistan ranked among least resilient nations in global investment risk index, placed 222nd out of 226 countries highlighting persistent challenges in economic

stability, governance and investor confidence.

3 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR PAKISTAN'S FRAGILE ECONOMY:

Pakistan's economic fragility comes from a combination of domestic, regional and global factors.

1 NATIONAL FACTORS (DOMESTIC FRAGILITY)

On domestic level, Pakistan's economy suffers from deep-rooted structural and governance challenges.

* POLITICAL AND Governance Gaps:

Persistent political instability and "missed opportunities" in the FY 2025-26 budget to tax elite dominated sectors reflect deep governance failure that hampers sustained investment. The adoption of short term, populist fiscal measures (e.g. subsidies) balloons the budget deficit and national debt.

* Low Tax to GDP ratio:

Pakistan's revenue generation remains stagnant at around 9-10% of GDP from last few years, among the lowest globally. Key sectors like agriculture, real estate and retail largely continue to evade meaningful taxation, undermining fiscal sustainability.

★ Energy Crises and Chronic Circular Debt:

The energy sector circular debt remains a massive fiscal burden on Pakistan, reaching roughly Rs 2.4 trillion in early 2025. This results in tariff hikes on electricity as well as power outages leading to increase industrial costs and fuel public discontent.

★ Weak Export Base:

Pakistan's weak and low tech export base remains a central pillar of its economic fragility. The inability to move beyond traditional, low-value products has created structural trade imbalance with exports only 2% and imports surge by 9% within last few months.

★ Human Capital Crises:

Inefficient investments in education and health with over $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of school age children are out of school and high stunting rates, limits the productivity and long term economic potential.

★ Mounting Public Debt:

Due to increase in public debt that has reached upto 76 trillion by late 2025, over 50% of the budget continues to be consumed by debt servicing, leaving minimal room for development.

2 REGIONAL FACTORS (CONNECTIVITY VS CONTENTION)

Pakistan's location presents both opportunities and challenges, but regional instability has historically hampered economic integration and stability.

* Disrupted Regional Trade:

The closure of key border crossing with Afghanistan in late 2025 is costing exporters an estimated Rs 50 billion per month, eroding access to Central Asian markets.

* Geopolitical Tensions.

Lingering tensions with neighboring countries, particularly India & Afghanistan, have prevented Pakistan from fully utilizing its strategic geographic location regional trade and connectivity with CARs.

The upsurge in terrorism after US withdrawal from Afghanistan also had a significant negative impact on domestic economy and security situation.

* Heavy Reliance on China

While China remains top investors of Pakistan through CPEC, imports from China grew by 22% in early FY 2026, further tilting the trade balance and deepening economic dependence.

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★ Climate Change Vulnerability:

2025 monsoon floods caused an estimated Rs 800 billion in damage, affecting millions of people and GDP growth rate was downgraded to 3.2%.

★ Transboundary Water Issue risking Agriculture:

Melting Himalayan glaciers and erratic weather patterns threaten the water supply for the Indus basin, along with India's aggression, posing long term risks to agriculture productivity, which accounts for nearly 20% of GDP.

3 GLOBAL FACTORS (EXTERNAL SHOCKS AND EXTERNAL RELIANCE)

★ The global economic environment often amplifies Pakistan's domestic vulnerabilities, particularly its import dependency.

★ Global Commodity Price Volatility:

Pakistan is highly dependent on imported energy (oil and gas) and other raw materials. Spikes in global oil prices (e.g. during Russia-Ukraine conflict) have repeatedly strained Pakistan's external accounts, increased its import bill, and fueled domestic inflation.

★ Global shift towards Protectionism
A global shift towards protectionism and rising tariff barrier due to US-China rivalry in products of electronics and steel, threatens Pakistan's efforts to integrate into global value chains and expand its export reach.

★ Dependence on IMF.
Pakistan recurring need for IMF bailout packages reflects its deep integration into the global financial system and a chronic inability to manage its finances independently. These programs often come with painful austerity measures that can slow growth in short term and also adds up in public debt.

4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

~~Noted~~, The economy of Pakistan shows fragility owing to a number of domestic factors that critically amplify the negative impacts of external shocks. The economy operates in a vicious cycle; internal weaknesses lead to external dependency, which then impose constraints that exacerbate domestic issue - Conversely, the advocates of the argument that Pakistan is a resilient economy argue that

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economy of Pakistan did not collapse, despite repeated crises in mid 2023, and secured necessary financing from IMF and friendly nations to meet its external obligation. Under strict policy implementation, Pakistan improved its macroeconomic indicators in early FY 2025.

The strong remittance inflows from overseas Pakistani bridge the trade deficit gap. At least but not the least, despite vulnerable climate change aftershock country, the agriculture sector often acts as a buffer during global downturn that ensures food security and provides domestic economic stimulus, reducing reliance on global food markets.

5 Way FORWARD TO MOVE FROM ECONOMIC FRAGILE NATION TO ECONOMIC RESILIENT NATION;

- 1 Exports should be increased in order to bridge the trade deficit due to high imports.
- 2 Export base should be diversified, moving from textiles and cotton to high tech materials to increase the buyers.

- 3 The security and political conditions should be improved to attract Foreign direct Investments.
- 4 Government should focus on the development of human capital to produce creative minds to help in long run.
- 5 Trade with regional actors should be resumed and negotiation should be done with them improve economic conditions on both sides.
- 6 The CPEC project must be completed and focused on priority basis.
- 7 A balance foreign policy must be struck between the US and China, in order to be secure from their wrath of their rivalry.

6 CONCLUSION:

In short, despite showing signs of recovery in GDP growth and recession in inflation, the economy of Pakistan remains critically fragile. The economy of Pakistan fails to show deep resilience to domestic and global shocks. Political Instability,

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tax evasion, energy crises, public debt, and trade deficit has mounted the economic instability at domestic level. In order to gain stability, Pakistan went for a bailout package from IMF and loan from other countries, further exacerbating the already embroiled environment. This instability is further aggravated by the protectionist global policies and global price volatility along with disruption of trade on regional level. In order to move Pakistan to a resilient economy it has to work on its governance stability, regional dynamics and global outreach.
