Pakistan Social Sciences Review
www.pssr.org.pk

Political Culture of Pakistan and Democratic Stability: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interdependence between Pakistan's political culture and democracy. Democracy in Pakistan is not weak due to system only; it is highly affected by political culture and working of institutions. Due to deeply rooted problems, Pakistan has been unable to develop a proper democracy. This study shows that authoritarian past, elite control, patronage system, weak political parties and minimalist political involvement of youth make the democracy fragile and vulnerable. All these interrelated factors develop such environment where democracy remains unstable. Qualitative methodology has been acquired in this study. The findings show that democratic instability in Pakistan is due to social norms, political behavior and power structure which weakens the democratic values particularly rule of law, accountability and tolerance. Civil military relations, role of political parties, governance style and media are also considered important factors which influence democracy and public trust. The study also discusses that the increased youth political awareness and media scrutiny could be beneficial for democracy but there are some barriers including political polarization and interference of institutions. For strong and stable democracy in Pakistan, civic education, political participation and responsible media is necessary.

| **KEYWORDS** | Political Culture, Democratic Stability, Civil-Military Relations, Media And Democracy, Accountability, Political Participation, Pakistan |

Introduction

Political culture is a vast and complex concept. It refers to the norms, values, beliefs and attitudes of people and political elites that shape politics and governance. Political culture make it clear how people view democracy, accept power and behave with institutions. In order to understand democracy in Pakistan, it is essential to understand political culture first as democratic stability is not merely about elections or institutions, it deeply rooted in political culture.

Pakistan's political system has been unstable since independence in 1947 due to strong military rule, weak civilian governments and political crises. These factors combined have obstructed the reinforcement of democratic norms and institutions. This instability is the result of such political culture that normalizes authoritarian tendencies, patronage politics, personality-based leadership and elite dominance. This culture undermines the democratic norms such as tolerance, accountability, rule of law and constitutional supremacy.

Political culture in Pakistan has been hierarchical and centralized where power concentrated on limited groups. This resulted in the weak parliament, political parties and democratic institutions. Lack of internal democracy in political parties, dynastic politics and loyalty-based politics have made democratic stability even more fragile. Along with this, civil military relations have also shaped political culture. Strong role of military interventions and unelected institutions undermined the civilian governments resulting in disruption of democratic continuity. People have started to support conditional democracy, where outcomes are in their favor.

This study argues that democratic stability is possible on political culture transformation. Elections or institutional reforms are not enough, political leaders and society have to adopt democratic values like accountability, tolerance and participation. For strong and resilient democracy in Pakistan, it is important to understand the link between political culture and democratic stability. Civic education, media scrutiny, major reforms in institutions, and rule of law can shift political culture and result in democratic consolidation.

Literature Review

Shafqat (1990) states that there are three perspectives namely cognitive, emotive and evaluative which are significant in understanding political culture. He has criticized the ideal political cultures which are subject, parochial and participant in his article. He explains that country's political culture demonstrates confrontation between democratic principles and autocratic reality. While autocratic reality entails centralization and autocracy, democratic ideals place a strong emphasis on consensus, trust, and parliamentary norms. Since independence, there has been more conflict between these, which has led to public discontent and cynicism. Despite these obstacles, democratic ambitions continue to play a major role in Pakistani politics, showing a continuous fight for the establishment of democratic institutions and ideals. Political satisfaction in Pakistan has been split on ideological views. There are people who support democracy and cultural pluralism following the civilian government. Along with that there are people who prefer centralization backed by military governments due to which political scene has become confrontational resulting in democratic instability.

Akhtar (2008) investigates the democratic trajectory and focus on the historical reasons which have been the core of political instability resulting in the democratic problems. She states the during the early years of independence of Pakistan, Institutional flaws were common. In 1954, Constituent Assemble got dissolved and power was subjected to Governor general which diminished the parliamentary authority. This precedent of centralization and authoritarian tactics is been practiced in the political history of Pakistan. Furthermore, support to military regimes backed by US and foreign interventions have hampered the development of democratic norms and values. She argues that patronage networks, coalition politics and continuous military influence create new problem and challenges to the democracy of Pakistan. Despite institutional reforms and democratic initiatives, these structures are fragile and establishment of sustainable democratic government is difficult. For long-term democratic growth, strong institutions, enhancement of public accountability and empowerment of civil society is important.

Akhtar (2009) focuses on historical and contemporary issues like political polarization, security risk, military rule and dominance of elite interests. She states that religious divisions, ethnic diversity and feudal systems increase the internal conflicts and

stop the unified governments. Political parties are mostly run by landlords and elites, maintain the patronage network that reflects their personal interests over national unity and hinder the public oversight which result in democratic instability. According to Akhtar, establishment of media accountability is very essential. Media encourages the public participation and exposes the flaws pf government. The political immaturity of leaders and elites power conflicts harm the democratic culture and create fragmentation in society. Overall, undemocratic governance, elite dynamics and military influence are the major challenges to the political stability of Pakistan. Strengthening of civil society, institutional reforms, improvement of political accountability and enhanced citizen involvement are significant for strong, stable and resilient political culture which will eventually result in democratic stability.

Mehmood, Sohail, Mukhtar and Rizvi (2014) argue that there is a gap between state and public due to ineffective governance and unaccountable political leaders. Little participation of population weakens the democracy because influence of public on policies and leaders become less. According to author, political participation is not merely voting but joining political parties, volunteering, attending public meetings and participating in protests and strikes. Violation of political rights and sociopolitical barriers give rise to undemocratic barriers. Democracy cannot become stable without active and informed public participation. Public needs to be empowered for long term democratic stability.

Siddiqi (2020) state that the research on Pakistan has primarily focused on political culture rather than political processes, especially political parties. According to him, political parties shape the public opinion, political philosophy and citizen involvement. In order to understand political culture, it is essential to consider political parties. His study shows that Pakistan subcultures are competitive and shape upon history and policy setting. The combination of public perception and party ideology strongly influence the political behavior as parties shape the citizens expectations and democratic engagement. Research in Pakistan should focus on political structures and role of parties for democratic reinforcement and adopt an integrated approach that should consider both cultural and political factors.

Ali (2023) examines the political instability in Pakistan. He rejects the conspiracy theories which blame the foreign powers for every domestic crisis. According to him, such theories ignore the structural and institutional problems. Dr. Ali emphasizes on understanding of scientific and evidence-based approach which are important for understanding political instability. Political and social institutions shape the change in society and this change depends on civil society, political parties and accountability of actors. Analyzing the role of institutions deeply can hinder the political instability. Institutional weaknesses, historical legacies and external influences hinder the democratic development. Strong institutions and accountable political actors play important role in long term political stability.

Ayaz and Baqi (2024) indicate that since independence of Pakistan in 1947, its political environment has undergone various changes like military regimes, democratic governments and sometimes strong movements have shaped politics. According to them, political culture of Pakistan is mix and complex due to religiously and ethnically diverse society. Their study has focused on ethnic federalism and political stability. When powers and resources are distributed on ethnic lines, the effect unity of society and politically stability. Ethnic federalism makes the social cohesion stronger and if not managed properly, it results in instability. Before partition, religion played a strong

political role. But after the emergence of some secular political organizations and state institutions, its direct political influence has been decreased. Cold war and external forces have made the politics of Pakistan even more complicated. Political stability is important for both democracy and economic development. They have also argued that new political ideas and ideologies can challenge old political patterns but their impact is only significant if institutions are strong, laws are implemented effectively and meaningful reforms are held.

Habib, Aziz and Salim (2024) demonstrate that Pakistan's politics and governance act upon various factors including religion, military role, globalization and regional diversity. these factors shape the governance system, youth political participation and behavior of politicians. Political culture of Pakistan is a result of a complex process deeply rooted in historical, cultural and regional influences. Strong rule of political Islam, power struggle between civil-military leadership and legacy of British colonial rule plays a strong role. Authors suggest that unique political development and regional political environment of Pakistan can be understood better upon comparative studies with the neighboring countries. They state that Pakistan has faced several challenges but civil society and media have played significant roles in promoting democratic values. Along with that, democracy disrupt again and again due to military interventions and operations. Pakistan's ethnic and regional diversity, international pressures and global forces have also deeply affected democratization process. Overall, Pakistan's political culture has a mixed and complicated structure that shape on both internal and external influences.

Din and Usman (2024) examine the reasons for instable democracy in Pakistan since 1947. He states that structural, political and socio-cultural problems have been a problem to the democracy of Pakistan. Moreover, widespread corruption and conflict between elite class are the biggest challenges for democracy. Along with that, feudal system has distributed uneven power among elite class creating a division system in society which challenges the democratic governance. Authors argue that public interest on institutions has declined. People feel that state do not recognize their problems. Elite conflicts and lack of accountability in governance give rise to this distrust and create an environment of political instability. The external factors like geopolitics pressures and foreign interventions also undermine the democracy of Pakistan. Along with those cultural factors including tribalism and gender inequality limits the political participation resulting in the decline of public support for democratic values. They suggest that serious political reforms, strong institution and cultural transformation is important for democratic stability.

Jamil, Salam and Muzaffar (2024) explain the interaction between informal power strictures and form democratic institutions. They argue that despite availability of constitution and democratic frameworks, military influence and patronage networks hinders the effective functioning of democracy. Authors highlight that lack of accountability, politicized judiciary and military interference undermines the democratic process. Moreover corruption, weak civil society and insufficient state institutions have raised the problem of democratic governance in Pakistan. For stable democracy, strong check and balances, judicial independence and public political participation is necessary. Transparency of civil society and institutions also promote democratic stability.

Mubarak, Nawaz and Khalid (2024) states that democracy plays an important role in the development of Pakistan as it promotes accountability, representation and public participation. Military interventions and corruption are the problems that

weakens the system despite institutional and economic growth. This problem creates public distrust. According to youth population. Political polarization and economic inequality is a problem to democratic consolidation. Strong institutions, electoral reforms, rule of law, civic education and media freedom is important for democratic stability. Working of leadership and youth together can promote strong and inclusive democratic system.

Hassnain (2025) argues the political parties are essential for democracy but their role get undermine due to certain reasons. In Pakistan, political parties work under military influence, feudal system and bureaucratic pressure due to which accountability and democracy in party do not exist properly. He states that political parties are subjected to issues like clienteles, family rule and strong division of society. these issues result in the failure of national unity. Although parties like PTI emerged but PML-N and PPP still dominate the politics of Pakistan. Parties rely more on ethnic appeals and patronage networks rather than ideology and this weakens the public trust. This results in the fragmentation of politics and arise problems in governance. He also addresses that Public little political participation hinders legislators to address the real-life problems. Along with this, he acknowledged that due to media freedom, public scrutiny on politicians has increase which is a positive sign. He concludes his study with that political parties are important for Pakistan but structural problems, elite control and power concentration do no allow the development of strong and political culture due to which democratic stability has always been a risk.

Farhan, Akhtar and Intizar (2025) states that the constitutional democracy is confronted by historical and structural problems. Inefficient government, weak political parties and military inventions restrict the formation of strong democratic institutions. There is a gap between goals of government and public due to corruption and misuse of resources. Moreover, religion and extremism increase the polarization in politics and dependence on foreign aid increases the democratic instability. Authors also point out that external factors favor historically military governments due to which process of civilian rule is weak and fragile. Democracy do not flourish properly under these circumstances. They suggest that serious structural reforms are essential to create strong political institutions in Pakistan and elected representative implement the policies effectively. Moreover, media independency is important for transparency and accountability resulting in democratic stability.

Material and Methods

Using qualitative methodology, the political culture of Pakistan and democratic stability has analyzed. The data is collected from different sources for providing an in-depth analysis into the study. The data collection includes different books, documents, research papers, research articles, speeches and news report. Qualitative methodology is significant as it is easy to adopt and provides methodological analysis and integration of data.

Results and Discussion

There is a plenty of literature on political instability in Pakistan but insignificant studies view how the democracy is affected by the political culture including norms, legacy and political behavior. Most research is particularly on institutions, economy and security issues neglecting the cultural norms. The study fills this gap and explains that democracy is not the name of elections, accountability, strong institutions, public

participation and independent judiciary are also the part of democracy. the research reveals the dominance of unelected institutions, extended role of military that undermines the elected governments. As a result of this, the legitimacy of democratic rule is weak. Accountability institutions being used for political purposes and judiciary being politicize undermines the public trust on rule of law. Pakistan has experienced both military and civilian regimes over time, still it has failed in developing firm and prudent democratic culture. Although all political leaders feel concerned for democracy nevertheless their democratic behavior alters on gaining power. Election campaigns are merely for gaining power. True democracy is based on free and fair elections but in Pakistan elections are predominantly controversial. Losing parties claim rigging and on assuming power manipulates the election process. There is an ongoing cycle of corruption. Owing to multi-party system, clear majority to one party is difficult. Consequently, political tensions and instability arise. Bad governance, corruption and weak accountability have alleviated the public trust on democratic institutions. Weakened public administration, politicized accountability agencies and courts further makes the system unpredictable. Colonial legacy and international geopolitical pressures have also affected political culture of Pakistan to an extreme level. Centralized administrative systema and foreign powers supporting authoritarian governments are also detrimental to the democracy. These factors have pushed Pakistan into the state of dependency and hindered the development and strengthening of a stable democratic system. Political parties are considered to be a backbone of democracy but predominantly parties in Pakistan focus on patronage and power politics. Public interests are not presented in parliamentary system. Predominantly politicians in Pakistan works on authoritarian mindset neglecting rule of law and democratic norms which hinders the process of strong and firm democracy.

This paper investigates that political culture is deeply linked with the democracy. Democratic stability is not associated with rules and institutions only, political culture plays a vital role in shaping democracy. Pakistan's democratic instability is entrenched in long standing political norms and institutional practices. Pakistan's political climate is marked by regime changes, contested authority and power struggle due to which political elites and public behavior of governance is influence. This denotes that the obstacles are not temporary but are deeply rooted in history. Pakistan's democracy is shifted towards the culture of conditional democracy. This means that elites and people support democracy when their and dominant power's interests align together. When democracy do not benefit them, democratic mandates are ignored and disturbance of civilian rule is considered normal. As a result of this, the hierarchical and centralized distribution of power has weakened the functioning of parliament, political parties and other democratic institutions, reducing their ability to effectively represent and govern the public and exercise power. The role of political socialization has also become very strong. People accept the patronage politics, dynastic leadership and personalized authority and these become norms. Due to this cultural development, civic duty has become fragile and people's involvement in democracy is only for short-term gains not for long-term accountability. Political culture reflects the governance failure, in which there is no transparency and rules are enforced biasedly which results in weak democratic legitimacy and provide chance to authoritarian tendencies. Still the political culture of Pakistan is not fully static. Negotiation and opposition between democracy and authoritarianism is an on-going process. Civil society organizations, media activism and politically aware youth are the forced working against the entrenched power structures. Still structural and historical barriers are firm. It is important to understand that democratic consolidation is achieved with transformation in political culture along with the institutional reforms. Leaders must adopt value of accountability, tolerance and

constitutionalism for stable democracy. The role of media in shaping democracy, authority and accountability perceptions is significant. It not only provides information, but is also an agent of political socialization. Due to access to digital and electronic media, people have become much more aware about the political information and governance shortcomings. Media has empowered citizens and their demand for accountability has increased. Along with this, role is media is sometimes complex and contested. Due to political polarization, commercial pressures and selective narratives, media becomes the part of political disputes sometimes. Sensationalism and biased reporting undermine the public trust in institutions and results in political instability. Media plays a double-edged tole in political culture and democracy of Pakistan, promoting democracy and creating mistrust and polarization. This needs to be understood for long term and resilient democracy in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the obstacles to democracy in Pakistan is not exclusively due to electoral and constitutional flaws. Political culture of Pakistan is linked with historical factors, centralized power, military interventions, elite dominance and weak institutional accountability which results in unstable democratic system. Another interesting contradiction is that people promote the principles of democracy but their actions are mainly authoritarian which frustrates the political process and results in the fragmented or selective political participation. Political parties exclusively operate under patronage systems in which internal democracy and representation is often weak. Civil and military ties deeply effect the political environment in Pakistan. Military power overpowers the civilian government and dominates decision making. Despite this, the study validates encouraging evidence of democratic endurance. Civil society is flourishing, media scrutiny is intensifying and youth is becoming more politically aware and demanding accountability. Although there are some limitations but youth political consciousness is gradually changing and they are accepting democratic norms. True democracy is not merely associated to elections, it requires strong institutions, rule of law, independent judiciary, accountability and active citizen participation. For long term stability, Pakistan needs to reform its political culture, strengthen its democratic institutions, lower the elite and military influence, develop inclusive government and encourage civic participation. If cultural and institutional barriers are not addressed, there is a high risk of failure of democratic reforms.

Recommendations

In the light of findings of the research, alternation of election system and rules are not sufficient for strengthening democracy in Pakistan. Pakistan should improve political culture. Political institutions should address the basic deficiencies for strengthening democracy. People should participate sincerely and actively in politics. Social barriers and economic constraints should be reduced for active engagement of people including youth, women and communities with limited resources. Democracy remains weakened if people are unable to participate due to financial barriers. For stable democracy, civic education programs, political awareness campaigns should be appreciated.

Election transparency is one of the core elements of strong and firm democracy. Elections should be free and fair. There should be transparency and credibility in elections which enhances the public trust in government. Election Commission should

strengthen its responsibility and introduce higher technology for voting process to make it secure and transparent which eventually will lead to stable democracy.

Corruption and accountability challenge the democracy. Unaccountable political parties and leaders make the system weak. For this, whistleblower protection should be implemented. Moreover, independent oversight agencies should be promoted for accountability of political parties and leaders.

Socio economic inequalities should be addressed. Economically and socially weakness hinders and minimizes the political participation and encourage elite dominance. Policies should be adopted for promoting economic inclusion, social justice and expanding education. These steps are crucial in minimizing the inequality and in encouraging active participation of people in democracy. Active involvement strengthens the democracy and representation in government gets improved.

Judiciary should be strong and independent for firm and secure democracy. Judges should be provided by tenure security for lawful decisions despite external pressure. Moreover, transparent procurement and accountability procedures should be implemented for enhanced public interest on courts and protected rule of law.

Media should be independent and follow ethical journalism. Misinformation and biased narratives of government spread through media. Media should be funded. There should be investment in digital literacy programs for active participation of people in constructive debates and decision making.

Pakistan should tackle the long-standing political instability. For this, there is dire need of changing political leaders' mindset first. Political leaders focus on power and short-term benefits which threatened the stability of democracy. Following this internal shift, they should adopt a comprehensive strategy to implement reforms in both constitution and state structure. These reforms should identify the gaps in existing laws and should focus on strengthening the structure of check and balance. True democratic consolidation in Pakistan demands systematic and long-term structural reforms.

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