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RESEARCH PAPER

From Electoral Politics to Long-Term Sustainability: Challenges and Prospects of Civil Society in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Pakistan's contemporary cultural of electoral politics and its evolution to attain the goal for the long-term sustainability and democratic culture.For years, electoral politics has been a key feature of Pakistan's political landscape, with political parties competing for power for the so-called democratic processes. This type of electoral politics typically promotes political myopia and ignores the very essence of political socialization and representative democracy. Despite previous failures, there's an opportunity to shift from a narrow electoral focus to a comprehensive approach ensuring well-being for current and future generations. The researchers examine variables like politics, institutions, and unconstitutional interventions, highlighting political transitions' role in long-term stability and offering pragmatic solutions for policymakers. By understanding and resolving such difficulties, Pakistan could hope to overcome the current problems of political adhocism and to adopt more pragmatic approach for sustainable growth and the fulfilment of its social agreement with its people.

| **Keywords:** | Civil Society, Democracy, Democratic Institutions, Electoral Politics, Political Leadership |

Introduction

Pakistan's political evolution has been marked by a tumultuous journey, characterized by complex challenges and resilient efforts towards democratic governance. Pakistan was founded on the principle of subsuming many languages and ethnic groups under a common religion. Deep rifts between various ethnic groups caused the concept of oneness to be destroyed after independence. Pakistan's national unity is hampered mostly by ethnic and regional differences. Even with the promise of a welfare state, problems with governance—such as weak democratic institutions, political unpredictability, and corruption—have slowed down development and prolonged the cycle of socioeconomic inequality and political unrest (Ahmed, et. al., 2015; Muzaffar, et. al., 2023). A complicated relationship exists between religious identity and political dynamics as a result of political actors' frequent use of religion as a tool to win support and legitimize power. Furthermore, military action in recent decades has exacerbated democratic collapse by disrupting civilian administration and eroding popular trust in democratic institutions. Aside from these hurdles, civil society, which plays an important role as a watchdog and advocate for election changes, has other problems, including political polarization and restrictive legislative settings, which limit its efficacy in promoting openness and accountability. Despite these problems, Pakistan is committed to democracy, as indicated by its active involvement in the political process and pursuit of an inclusive government. Sustainable political growth in Pakistan necessitates a multidimensional strategy that tackles governance issues, improves democratic institutions, encourages civil society involvement, and promotes socioeconomic

development. Investing in education, defending freedom of expression, and supporting ethical media are critical to building a thriving democracy.

Literature Review

Election politics in Pakistan has always been characterized by short-termism and a limited concentration on election triumphs, often at the expense of long-term policymaking and administration. It prioritizes short-term election victory above long-term development goals, resulting in political myopia. This myopia undermines the core of representative democracy and prevents successful political socialization (EU, 2018). Pakistan's political environment is significantly shaped by its socioeconomic context. Election results are influenced by social and economic inequality that is pervasive in the nation and adds to political instability. The researcher highlights the need of tackling these socioeconomic issues in order to foster an atmosphere that will support long-term political development (Javed, 2019).

The transition from electoral politics to a more comprehensive engagement with democratic values and governance is necessary to cultivate a sustainable democratic culture. Building civil society, encouraging political education, and guaranteeing inclusive governance are all part of cultivating a democratic culture. Building a robust democratic system that can endure sociopolitical crises is aided by this strategy (Ahmed, 2018). The political process in Pakistan is greatly influenced by institutions such as the military, the judiciary, and civil society organizations. regular use of unlawful tactics, such military takeovers, to interfere with democratic processes and obstruct the emergence of a stable political culture. For long-term political stability to be ensured, institutional integrity must be strengthened and such interference must be avoided (Asim, 2017). Use only sur name of authors In Pakistan, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have participated in electoral politics through voter education, election observation, and electoral reform advocacy. It addresses the advantages and disadvantages of CSOs in influencing election results and how they affect democratic processes (Siddique, 2020). Overcoming political adhocracy and guaranteeing sustainable growth require an integrated strategy to government and development. A more robust and successful society can result from the integration of social, economic, and environmental policy (Ali, 2017).

Material and Methods

In order to complete this research article, researcher used number of data collection approaches. primarily used the deductive mode of analysis to deduce data from descriptive research. In this research paper qualitative method of research is used. Qualitative research method includes data collection form journals, research articles and different website, also include supplementary comments, interviews, explanations, opinions, and different perspectives of individuals of different school of thoughts.

Results and Discussion

Pakistan and India have experienced two different political trajectories since their independence from the British Raj in 1947. Both of the countries were ploughed into various socio-economic challenges since their independence, include division of assets, financial pressure, lack of resources, governance and unprecedent mass migration. Yet, remarkably, the All-India Muslim League lacked a substantial organizational framework in the regions that formed Pakistan, with the exception of Sindh province. The concept of Pakistan in subcontinent was quite unique in a sense that it primarily intended to uniting the regions having different linguistics and ethnic groups consists of different cultures and traditions together in the name of religion. Soon after the independence different identities never manage to be united as a single nation. Even in religion, there are several schools of thought, some of which are contradictory and can't operate on the basis of a single identity. National

integration cannot be achieved until there is a unification of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups and the fair distribution of power and national resources. Since its establishment, Pakistan has experienced multiple serious crises, which is why the idea of a welfare state promised to the Muslims of subcontinent by the leaders of the Pakistan movement is still to be materialized and its shift from a security state to a welfare state has yet to be documented. External and internal security threats, economic bartering, frequent military interventions, a fragile judiciary, religious warlords, and resource mismanagement have collectively restricted the country's prosperity, progress, and institutional building. Moreover, initial problems also include political instability along with other administrative and refuge crisis for Pakistan. The main idea of politics and having a political party is to ensure the involvement of people in the decision making. In electoral democracy around the world people having resources and wealth usually win the elections. In history of Pakistan use of religion not only by the political parties but form military dictators had been a common trend. All India Muslim league primarily gathered its attention using religious sentiment throughout the Pakistan movement and even after the creation of Pakistan all the mainstream political parties have been using or making alliances with minor religious political parties for seeking support. Even military rulers used religion as a main source to be in political power and terms like Ayub's liberal Islam, Zia's fundamental Islam to Musharaff's moderate Islam have become common during their tenure. Over the years, biggest challenge remains for Pakistan is political instability (Muzaffar, et. al. 2017). Political instability in Pakistan can be attributed to several factors and some of the key reasons include frequently Military intervention, Weak democratic institutions, Economic challenges, political polarization, role of civil society, Economic challenges led toward Governance and corruption. The world has adopted the system of democracy to administer the state's affairs effectively and efficiently. For democracy to flourish requires a suitable environment in which it's every aspect and component perform autonomously. Timely, transparent, free and fair elections are the backbone of any democratic system only then a society can benefit from this in real sense. Over the period of time different countries have brandish their own form of democracy as they practice it and believing it to be the best. As Henry J. Steiner in his work states "Countries with markedly different political systems have termed political participation the vital human right. In its absence it is said; all other fall to a perilous existence". (Henry Steiner and Philip Alston, 2000) Following are the important components for sustainable political system in Pakistan.

Fair Elections

Elections system in a country is assumed to be a very important component of a democratic system. It gives the ability to check and empower the voters to control the legislators and the authority to verify the ruling class in many areas. It also provides its subjects with a sense of the state. As stated by Madison, "it is essential that the government in general have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the legislators have an immediate dependence on and intimate sympathy with the people. Frequent elections are unquestionably the only policy by which dependence and sympathy can be effectively secured."(Madison, 1787-88). Political parties and pressure groups emerge, develop and act as an integral part of representative democracy. Pakistan is an exceptional case for understanding the role of political parties and pressure groups in both civilian and military regimes. These political parties and pressure groups have worked for and against the development of a true democratic culture in Pakistan. Social forces and norms are far more influential than administrative measures in a society. Unlike some other countries where the institutions are strong and well-performing, people usually look to the government for guidance and direction, but Pakistan is quite different in the sense that different segments of society through their political affiliations, try to influence public policies in their favor. In the Pakistani democratic system, almost all political parties derive their power from the top leadership of the party, usually a charismatic personality who is a

main source of popularity. So, it is relatively easy for these pressure groups to influence the government in their favor.

Generally, a voter's electoral choices and decisions, is a result of several variables which are marked under the title of prejudiced considerations, environmental influences and other utility concerns. Political activities are a result of all these circumstances in which a voter finds themselves during elections. The study of politics and political behavior in Pakistan has been generalized by foreign and indigenous scholars with their particular perspectives without giving empirical observation, except for a few. Elections are an important aspect of democracy and the political process. Electoral politics is about participatory play in the governing process through elections, in which the voter and politician want to achieve power "to control the behavior of others through force, threats, or the holding of resources." (David Robertson, 1993)People of Pakistan never liked the sitting governments, as they never came up with their acceptances in short political history starting in from 1960s. Every popular leader soon after their takeover the government its opposition leaders and other political parties have been able to create resistance to the sitting governments in the general public, and in most cases, these oppositions manage to tumble the governments. So the political process that makes the institutions strong and self-motivated was never established on strong footing from the initial stage. The challenge for Pakistan's democracy is manifold. Every political government has remained surrounded by many controversies, challenges and hurdles.

Apart from their survival as governments representing their people, questions have always been raised about the competency and credibility of politicians. There are many classic examples of bad governance. Until it is not functional and performing for its people, following merit-based policies, and putting performing for its people and following the institution of electoral politics. In electoral politics and the subsequent institutions formed by it, it is true representations of society, while other institutions like the military or bureaucracy are state institutions. In developing countries, like Pakistan, few state institutions are strong enough to counter the influence of society and its representative governments. (Hussain & Kokab, 2013). The political history of Pakistan evidently indicates the supremacy of state institutions over political parties. Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan has witnessed three different martial law periods: periods from 1958 to 1971, 1977–1988, and 1999–2007. Even military dictators created a few political parties to gain political support and manipulate them to prolong their dictatorships (Cohen, 2005)). In Pakistan, democracy has many dimensions of social, cultural, and economic nature. That's why it's never easy to govern a state with much linguistic, social, cultural, and regional diversity and disparities, as well as some serious issues of human development and human rights. Therefore, it is still unable to relish the dividends of democracy that are being enjoyed by the west in abundance.

Growth of democratic culture and tradition is slow or even declining because of many elements, as we were not able to build institutions over certain periods of time due to the lack of an effective judicial system, the weakening of political parties with the hold of dynasties and families in the electoral process, the malfunctioning of parliament and the crises of federalism. As a result of federalism, today we have a controlled institutional democratic system. An independent institution with education and awareness is a prerequisite for the democratic culture to be fully developed in any country. In a country where 50% of its population is living below the poverty line, 60% of population does not have access to safe drinking water, and society is facing thousands of other issues of social and economic nature all the noble ideas of good governance and the value of voting in elections are less important to the common who is struggling to earn. Pakistan is expecting for democratic optimism since the political leaders and all major political parties have decided to continue the democratic process. Political parties have come to understand that weaking democracy through military alliances ultimately harm their own interests. (Rais)

Historical Context of Military Interventions

Since its inception in 1947, the country has multiple experienced where the military has directly or indirectly influenced political affairs. These interventions have significantly shaped Pakistan's political trajectory, often leading to adverse consequences for democracy, governance, and socio-economic development. In this critical note, we will delve into the detrimental effects of military interventions on Pakistani politics. According to Dryland (1992) "during the period 1950–1958, Pakistan appointed seven prime ministers and one commander in chief, a record which may be attributable to the political immaturity of Pakistan's political aspirants." "Pakistan's first military intervention occurred in 1958 when General Ayub Khan overthrew the civilian government through a coup d'état. This marked the beginning of a trend that persisted for several decades. Subsequently, General Yahya Khan's regime oversaw the disastrous separation of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971. The 1980s General Zia-ul-Haq's era, which witnessed the Islamization of society and a weakening of democratic institutions. The 1999 coup led by General Pervez Musharraf resulted in prolonged military rule that further undermined democratic processes. Military interventions in Pakistan have consistently undermined democratic institutions, preventing their organic development and consolidation.

Frequent interruptions in civilian governance have eroded public trust in democratic processes and institutions, thereby impeding the country's democratic consolidation. The military's interference often weakens the judiciary, media, and other crucial checks and balances, ultimately leaving the state apparatus susceptible to authoritarianism." "Military interventions perpetuate an unhealthy civil-military imbalance in Pakistan. The military, with its significant economic and political influence, operates as a parallel power center. This undermines the principle of civilian supremacy and weakens democratic accountability. The military's expansive role and its control over key state institutions, such as intelligence agencies, hinder the development of a mature democratic system based on civilian oversight and robust institutions." "Military interventions disrupt governance processes and lead to a lack of continuity and long-term planning. Frequent changes in governments and policies hinder the effective implementation of development programs, resulting in slow economic progress. The lack of a stable political structure inhibits foreign direct investment, slows economic growth, and worsens poverty and inequality." "Military interventions in Pakistan's political landscape have had far-reaching consequences, negatively impacting democracy, governance, civil liberties, and economic development. The frequent interruptions in civilian rule and the military's expansive role have created an environment of instability and undermined democratic institutions. To achieve sustainable progress and stability, Pakistan must break free from this cycle of military interference and focus on strengthening democratic processes, fostering inclusive governance, and ensuring civilian supremacy." (Dryland, 1992)

Civil society and sustainable politics:

"Civil society plays a vital role in the political process by acting as a bridge between the government and the citizens. It refers to collective organizations, institutions, and individuals outside of the government and the business sector who work together to advance the interests of the community." "Civil society serves as a watchdog for the government, watching its actions and holding it accountable for its decisions and policies. CSOs conduct research, fact-checking, and reporting on government actions to ensure transparency, fight corruption, and preserve democratic governance. They help the government make policies by conducting research, analyzing data, and offering suggestions. This feedback helps design policies that are more inclusive, effective, and responsive to the demands of society." " Civil society organizations frequently cover gaps in public service delivery, particularly in areas where the government cannot reach or when services are insufficient. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based groups, and voluntary associations supplement the government's efforts in areas such as healthcare,

education, poverty alleviation, environmental conservation, and more." They contribute to policymaking by doing research, analyzing, and giving suggestions to the government. This input helps design policies that are more inclusive, effective, and responsive to societal demands.

Civil Society in Pakistan: Prospects and Challenges

Prospects for Civil Society Engagement in Pakistan's Electoral Politics

Amidst several obstacles, Pakistani civil society organizations have a strong track record of participating in political politics. One of the most important ways that civil society can improve election accountability, openness, and inclusivity is by advocating for electoral changes (Siddiqa, 2005). Furthermore, through voter education campaigns and mobilization initiatives, civil society organizations can support educated and engaged citizenship, particularly among marginalized communities (Hussain, 2012). Monitoring and observation of elections remain pivotal, with civil society playing a vital role in documenting irregularities and human rights violations during electoral processes (EU, 2018). Furthermore, coalition building and networking provide chances for civil society players to strengthen their collective voice and influence political outcomes (Khan, 2010). Lastly, international support and solidarity can provide valuable resources and backing for civil society initiatives aimed at promoting electoral integrity and democratic governance (Repucci, 2022).

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Challenges Facing Civil Society in Pakistan's Electoral Politics:

Despite the great prospects, civil society in Pakistan has various obstacles to actively participating in political politics. Political polarization reduces the room for civil society to act autonomously, with divides along ethnic, religious, and ideological lines impeding open discourse and cooperation (Hussain, 2012). A restrictive legal framework further constrains civil society activities, with burdensome registration requirements and ambiguous legislation governing NGO operations (Siddiqa, 2005). Security concerns represent considerable dangers for civil society activists who frequently operate in a hostile environment characterized by threats, intimidation, and violence from state and non-state actors (Rais, n.d). Limited resources, particularly insufficient money and technical capacity, impede civil society's ability to mobilize grassroots constituencies, undertake voter education campaigns, and successfully monitor election (Khan, 2010). Furthermore, widespread suspicion in Pakistan's electoral institutions undermines public trust in the electoral process, inhibiting civic engagement and advocacy activities (Repucci, 2022).

Conclusion

Pakistan's political development has been defined by a turbulent path toward democratic administration, filled with difficult obstacles and tenacious attempts. Pakistan has had difficulty upholding national cohesion since its founding in 1947, when the country was intended to bring together disparate linguistic and ethnic groupings under the banner of Islam. Deep racial and regional divides, unstable political environments, corruption, and flimsy democratic institutions have all conspired to undercut the welfare state's promise and feed a vicious cycle of economic inequality and political unrest. The idea of unity that

Pakistan had at its beginning was swiftly shattered after independence, as ethnic and linguistic groups failed to merge into a cohesive national identity. Despite initial promise, governance difficulties such as political instability and corruption have slowed growth. Religion has frequently been used by political leaders to win support and legitimize authority, adding to the complicated interplay between religious identity and political forces. Furthermore, frequent military interventions over the last few decades have hastened democratic decline by disrupting civilian rule and undermining public trust in democratic institutions.

Despite these challenges, civil society in Pakistan serves as a watchdog and advocate for election change. Civil society groups (CSOs) engage in voter education, election monitoring, and electoral reform advocacy in order to improve openness and accountability. However, these organizations face a number of problems, including political divisiveness, tight legal regimes, and a lack of funding. Nonetheless, civil society's endurance and devotion are obvious as it continues to work for democratic integrity and inclusive governance.

A comprehensive strategy that tackles issues of governance, fortifies democratic institutions, encourages civil society participation, and nurtures socio-economic development is necessary for Pakistan to attain sustainable political progress. Building knowledgeable citizens who can engage in political discourse and think critically requires significant investments in education. Encouraging independent media and safeguarding freedom of expression are also crucial for promoting public dialogue and holding the government responsible.

Pakistan's socioeconomic environment has a significant influence on the country's political climate. Election results are impacted by social and economic inequality as well as political instability. Establishing a favorable atmosphere for long-term political development requires addressing these socioeconomic issues. It is imperative to move away from an election focus and toward a more comprehensive engagement with democratic values and governance. Fostering a democratic culture entail encouraging political education, bolstering civil society, and guaranteeing inclusive governance. Pakistan's institutions, such as the military, the courts, and civil society groups, have a big influence on politics. Regular military coups and other illegitimate interventions damage democratic processes and impede the growth of a stable political culture. Maintaining long-term political stability requires bolstering institutional integrity and averting such interference. The public's confidence in democratic processes has been steadily eroded by military interventions that have constantly threatened democratic institutions and prevented their organic growth and consolidation.

Pakistan's civil society has a great deal of potential to participate in electoral politics, despite several barriers. Promoting electoral changes is crucial to enhancing openness, inclusivity, and accountability. Election observation is still vital, with civil society pointing out anomalies and violations of human rights. Effective participation is hampered by money shortages, security concerns, legislative limitations, and political conflict. Politicians participate in society, set agendas, direct development, and establish goals. As such, they are accountable for social development. Pakistan must adopt a multifaceted strategy to bring about social change and political maturity. This includes bolstering democratic institutions like the judiciary, electoral commissions, and anti-corruption organizations, as well as making investments in education and raising public awareness. It is crucial to support civil society involvement and political participation, particularly for marginalized populations.

A vibrant democracy is supported by encouraging discussion and government accountability through the support of independent media, preserving free speech, and ethical journalism. In Pakistan, closing socioeconomic divides, promoting interethnic and religious harmony, and collaborating with other countries are all necessary for societal

progress. All three—free elections, civil-military ties, and constitutional reform—depend on the resuscitation of the 2006 Charter of Democracy. Political parties are frequently exploited by military dictators; Pakistan's political history demonstrates the superiority of state institutions. Even in the face of difficulties, Pakistanis are committed to democracy, holding political leaders responsible and taking an active role in it.

Pakistan needs to use a multipronged approach to achieve sustained political development, one that tackles issues of governance, fortifies democratic institutions, encourages civil society participation, and nurtures socioeconomic growth. A dynamic democracy must be fostered by making investments in education, defending the right to free speech, and supporting ethical media. Political leaders need to own up to their part in bringing about political and social growth that will lead to a prosperous and democratic Pakistan.

Recommendations

For social change, a great deal of responsibility lies with the politician, including how they are involved in politics what their priorities are. They are the ones who give visions and determine the path to reach them. Their public policies and initiatives paved the way for societies to flourish. For achieving social change, political development, and maturity in Pakistan requires a multifaceted approach that involves several key factors. First and foremost, it is imperative that funds be allocated to education and public awareness campaigns. By encouraging critical thinking and active engagement in political processes, access to high-quality education contributes to the development of educated citizens. Second, it is critical to fortify democratic institutions, including the judiciary, election commissions, and anti-corruption organizations. These organizations advocate accountability, openness, and the rule of law. Enhancing efficacy and autonomy while depoliticizing institutions is crucial. Supporting political empowerment, especially for marginalized groups, and fostering civil society engagement through voter education and quota systems are essential. Promoting public dialogue, holding the government accountable, protecting freedom of expression, supporting independent media, and ethical journalism all contribute to a thriving democracy. Furthermore, attaining social transformation and political advancement in Pakistan requires tackling socio-economic inequalities, advancing religious and ethnic unity, and pursuing global collaboration for enhanced capabilities and ethical leadership. Resurrect the 2006 Charter of Democracy for Civil-Military Relations, Free and Fair Elections, and Constitutional Amendments, among other things. People in Pakistan are not only queuing at polling stations but also taking to the streets to put pressure on governments and question their performance. The Pakistani people's active participation in the political process indicates the growing demand for accountability, transparency, and good governance. In order to create a more inclusive and democratic culture, the government can address important concerns pertaining to civil-military relations, electoral integrity, and constitutional revisions by bringing back the 2006 Charter of Democracy. By resolving socioeconomic inequities and fostering unity among many religious and ethnic groups, Pakistan can attain a stable and successful future. Politicians, who embrace democracy despite its shortcomings, are essential to advancing political progress and encouraging a sense of collective ownership among the populace. It is their duty to address the needs of the people who have trusted them with leadership in order to turn democracy into a workable social institution and make sure that it is successful and long-lasting.

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