

**CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS (2013-2023)**



Researcher

Fawad Ali

Reg. No. 176-FSS/MSPS/F22

Supervisor

Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Naazer

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD PAKISTAN
(December 2024)**

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

I hereby recommend that the dissertation submitted by Fawad Ali titled, “Challenges to Democracy in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis (2013-2023)” be accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MS in the discipline of Political Science.

Supervisor

Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Naazer

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Naazer whose guidance was a driving force throughout this journey. It would never have been possible without his timely assistance. His expertise and encouragement made this research a recreation. I would also like to extend my thanks to my family members whose unwavering support and encouragement were invaluable throughout this endeavor.

Fawad Ali

176-FSS/MSPS/F22

DEDICATION

*I DEDICATE THIS THESIS TO MY
BELOVED FAMILY MEMBERS,
SPECIALLY TO MY MOTHER THIS
DREAM HAS COME TRUE AS A
RESULT OF HER PYAPERS.*

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LIST OF ACRONAMS

COAS:	Chief of Army Staff
GDA:	Grand Democratic Alliance
JIT:	Joint Investigation team
PAT:	Pakistan Awami Tehreek
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
NAB:	National Accountability Bureau
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
FCR:	Frontier Crime Regulation
NFC:	National Finance Commission
FAFEN:	Free and Fair Election Network
PMB:	Private Members Bill
AIML:	All India Muslim League
MMA:	Muttahida Majles-e-Amal
PTI:	Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf
PCO:	Provisional Constitution Order
NDA:	National Democratic Alliance
ANP:	Awami National Party
EC :	Election commission
PILDAT:	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
COD:	Charter of Democracy
PML (N) :	Pakistan Muslim League (Parveen & Bhatti)
PPP :	Pakistan Peoples Party

Abstract

This research focuses on the state of democracy in Pakistan that has encountered numerous challenges over the history, including extended periods of authoritarian rule. The primary emphasis is on the period following 2013, where democracy in Pakistan gained some stability. The years from 2008 to 2018 can be marked as a better period for democracy as the two governments of PPPP and PML-N completed their five years tenures respectively, restoring constitution and strengthening federation of Pakistan. Challenges had always been there but a noticeable shift in the trajectory of Pakistan's democracy started after 2013 general elections in the country, there had been protests from the opposition parties in massive numbers. The research seeks to critically analyze the major challenges to democracy in Pakistan including the role of political parties and bureaucracy, the economic disparities and electoral irregularities. This study employs two arenas "Political Society and State Apparatuses" as theoretical framework taken from the theory, "Five Arenas of Democratic Consolidation" given by Linz and Stepan. This study will be qualitative by nature and use thematic tool for data analysis. The research also aims to provide recommendations for reforms to safeguard Pakistan's democratic future.

Keywords: Democratization, bureaucracy, electoral processes, irregularities.

CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

The decline of democracy is evident globally in major democracies such as the United States, India, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh. Challenges such as political polarization, erosion of democratic norms, and attacks on freedom of expression have weakened democratic institutions. In the United States, polarization and attempts to undermine elections raise concerns, while in India, ethnonationalism and religious intolerance threaten inclusivity (HR, 2020). The United Kingdom faces divisions exacerbated by Brexit (Freedom House, 2021) and Bangladesh grapples with political repression and censorship (Amnesty International, 2021). To reverse this trend, safeguarding democratic institutions, promoting civic engagement, and upholding democratic values are crucial.

Democracy in the contemporary world is facing a concerning decline on a global scale, with various regions experiencing setbacks in democratic governance. This trend is particularly evident in the Asia-Pacific region, which has regressed to democracy levels last seen in 1978, along with Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Latin America reverting to levels reminiscent of the Cold War era. The rise of autocracy is challenging the foundations of democracy, with more closed autocracies than liberal democracies for the first time in over two decades. This erosion of democratic principles poses a significant challenge to the maintenance and promotion of democratic values and institutions.

Since 2013, Pakistan has also faced several challenges to its democracy, including political instability, corruption, and a strained civil-military relationship. The frequent changes in government, often through non-democratic means such as forced resignations, have undermined the stability of the democratic process. Corruption remains pervasive at various levels of government, eroding public trust in democratic institutions and hindering effective governance. Moreover, the power struggle between civilian leaders and the military has led to periods of tension and political gridlock, inhibiting progress on key democratic reforms and policies. These challenges collectively pose significant obstacles to the consolidation and sustainability of democracy in Pakistan. Despite periodic transitions of power through elections, the journey towards a stable and robust democratic system remains fraught with obstacles. This research seeks to delve into some major challenges that undermine the democratic fabric of Pakistan: role of political parties, bureaucracy, economic instability, and the weaknesses in the electoral system. By examining the intricate interplay of

these challenges, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impediments to democratic governance in Pakistan and propose avenues for addressing these pressing issues.

The major political parties, such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Awami National Party (ANP), and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), have all contributed to the democratization process in their own ways. The PPP, historically known for its focus on social democracy and representing the interests of the working class, has advocated for inclusive governance and social welfare policies, aiming to strengthen democratic institutions and promote equitable development. However, its governance record has been marred by allegations of corruption and dynastic politics, undermining its credibility as a champion of democracy (Shah, 2016). The PML-N, under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif, has emphasized economic development and infrastructure projects as drivers of democratization, seeking to consolidate power through electoral victories and centralized authority. While the PML-N has made efforts to promote democratic norms, its tenure has been marked by confrontations with the military establishment and accusations of authoritarian tendencies (Nasir, 2018).

The PTI, led by Imran Khan, emerged as a populist force promising to combat corruption, enhance transparency, and empower grassroots democracy. Despite its initial rhetoric of political reform and anti-corruption measures, the PTI has faced criticism for its heavy-handed approach to governance and reliance on technocratic solutions, raising questions about its commitment to democratic values (Khan, 2019). Other parties like JI, JUI, MQM, ANP, and TLP have also contributed to the democratization process through their respective ideological positions and electoral mandates. However, challenges such as factionalism, extremism, and lack of intra-party democracy have hindered their ability to effectively promote democratic governance and institutional reform (Siddiqi, 2015).

In recent times, political parties in Pakistan have often functioned as vehicles for personal or familial interests, patronage networks, and clientelism, rather than as genuine representatives of the people's aspirations. Dynastic politics, where leadership positions are inherited rather than earned through merit, have further entrenched elite capture of the political system, limiting the space for genuine democratic participation and accountability. While political parties in Pakistan have played a role in the democratization process, their

effectiveness and commitment to democratic values have been mixed. Addressing challenges such as corruption, institutional weaknesses, and political polarization will be essential for fostering a more robust and inclusive democracy in Pakistan.

1.1 Problem Statement

The objective of the study is to examine the obstacles that democracy in Pakistan encounters, with a particular emphasis on the roles of political parties and bureaucracy in the democratization process. The research endeavors to identify the primary obstacles to democratic consolidation in Pakistan and evaluate their impact on governance, accountability, and political stability by analyzing the interaction between these key actors. The study's ultimate objective is to offer recommendations and insights for overcoming these obstacles and cultivating a democratic system that is inclusive in nature.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in a sense that it provides a detailed study for the readers to understand the major challenges that democracy is facing in Pakistan. These challenges include economic instability, civil-military relations, electoral irregularities as well as the role of political parties and bureaucracy. This study contributes a valuable analysis of the existing challenges to Pakistan's democracy in the academia. It will help the readers to develop an impartial opinion about the political processes and its functioning.

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To explore the major challenges to democracy in Pakistan since 2013.
- ii. To analyze the role of political parties and bureaucracy in the process of democratization in Pakistan since 2013.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What are the major challenges to democracy in Pakistan since 2013?
- ii. How the political parties and bureaucracy played their role in the process of democratization in Pakistan since 2013?

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses specifically on the challenges to democracy in Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on the role of political parties and bureaucracy in the process of

democratization. While other factors may also influence democratic governance in Pakistan, such as social dynamics, institutional weaknesses, and external pressures, this research confines its scope to the aforementioned areas. Additionally, the study primarily examines the contemporary landscape of democracy in Pakistan, acknowledging that historical factors have contributed to the current challenges but limiting the analysis to recent developments and trends. Furthermore, the study does not seek to prescribe specific policy solutions but aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential avenues for addressing them within the context of Pakistan's democratic framework. Literature review

Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018) in their book *How Democracies Dies* argue that the trajectory of democracy has faced a regressive shift, primarily due to the rise of authoritarian tendencies within political institutions. Moreover, the author astutely points out that the catalyst behind contemporary democratic erosion is not an abrupt, dramatic transition from democracy to authoritarianism but rather a gradual erosion of democratic norms and principles. Notably, the author underscores the perils of political polarization, where political adversaries are viewed as existential threats, coupled with the stifling of free speech, curbing press freedom, and targeting political opponents as dire threats, all contributing to a slow and insidious erosion of democracy. Additionally, the author sheds light on how populist leaders, often positioning themselves as champions of the people, can inadvertently become agents of democratic erosion within a nation. Critically, the author raises concerns about the media's role in perpetuating false narratives, which has significantly contributed to the erosion of democracy worldwide. In conclusion, the author asserts that halting this erosion requires the collective strength of a robust civil society, vigilant citizens, and the active engagement of political parties committed to upholding democratic values.

Huq & Ginsburg (2018) in their research piece "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," contend that the 2016 election campaign and the actions of newly inaugurated President Donald J. Trump may serve as a trigger for the onset of democratic backsliding in the United States. The paper examines two modalities of democratic deterioration: authoritarian reversion and constitutional retrogression. Authoritarian reversion refers to a swift and total disintegration of democratic institutions, whereas constitutional retrogression denotes a gradual loss of essential democratic components, including competitive elections, rights to political expression and association, and the rule of law. The paper emphasizes that, during the last 25 years, the likelihood of democratic revision globally has diminished, and the probability of retrogression has increased. It also underscores that the United States is not

impervious to these patterns and indicates that regression is a considerable issue. Moreover, the authors indicate that constitutional protections against retrogression are inadequate.

Levitsky and Way (2010) support their arguments through detailed case studies from multiple countries, including Russia, Venezuela, and Egypt, among others. These case studies demonstrate that elections in competitive authoritarian contexts are frequently biased in favour of the ruling party or incumbent, significantly hindering the ability of authentic opposition forces to establish a presence. The authors' detailed examination of these cases enhances the theoretical framework and highlights the practical implications of competitive authoritarianism.

Levitsky and Way's work enhances our comprehension of the persistence and adaptability of competitive authoritarian regimes. The book emphasises that democratic erosion encompasses not only the suppression of opposition but also the establishment and preservation of an ideological facade that legitimizes authoritarian governance, offering a nuanced understanding of the endurance of such regimes.

Ozturk (2021) has conducted a detailed analysis unfolding the factors responsible for democratic erosion in India since the arrival of Narendra Modi into power. He explains that the worrying decline in Indian democracy is believed to have begun with the 2014 general elections, which saw the rise of Narendra Modi and the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power. Before Modi, Manmohan Singh of the Indian National Congress, a center-left party with a significant historical role in India's independence movement, held the prime minister's office. The Congress Party had been in power for a considerable portion of India's post-independence history, with the BJP coming to power only twice prior to 2014.

Modi's victory was seen by many as a response to concerns about inefficiency and corruption in the preceding Congress-led government, which had been in power since 2004. However, the BJP is distinct from the Congress Party in that it is associated with Hindutva, a Hindu nationalist ideology inherited from its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist group. The RSS has been controversial due to its historical association with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by one of its members. Following the BJP's victory in 2014, questions arose about whether discriminatory practices were being implemented, particularly with regard to India's Muslim population. This raised concerns about the direction of Indian politics and the potential erosion of secular and inclusive principles in the country's democracy.

Riaz (2021) The research article argues that Bangladesh has experienced a notable decline in democracy over the past decade. The decline is characterized by manipulated elections in 2014 and 2018, limitations on freedom of expression, extrajudicial killings, and perceived judicial interference. The author asserts that Bangladesh has transitioned from an electoral democracy to electoral authoritarianism, especially following the rise of the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) to power in 2009. He delineates a three-stage process of democratic backsliding, which includes alterations in governing rules, the targeting of opposition and critics, and effects on essential institutions such as the judiciary. The article illustrates that Levitsky and Ziblatt's framework of democratic backsliding possesses analytical significance, despite variations in sequences arising from particular political contexts and strategies employed by incumbents. Additionally, it highlights the necessity of developing an ideology to justify the actions of incumbents during democratic backsliding. The conclusion underscores that Bangladesh's shift from democratic potential to electoral authoritarianism is concerning, indicating a deviation from the previous rate of democratic decline in the nation.

Lodhi (2023) highlight that many democracies around the world are confronting issues such as polarization, intolerance and restrictions on civil liberties, media restrictions, and dissent suppression. Notably, worldwide surveys, such as the V-Dem Institute's Democracy Report 2023, show a considerable decline in democracy over the last decade, with autocracies that outnumbered liberal democracies for the first time in years. The article also notes that Pakistan has experienced democratic regression since 2018, with the military gaining major political influence, opposition figures facing corruption allegations, and parliament being marginalized.

Baqai (2014) in her paper "*Pakistan in Transition towards a Substantive Democracy*," described democracy in Pakistan before 2008 as stunted, comparing it to a bonsai tree nurtured but shallow-rooted and underdeveloped. She highlighted that the 2008 elections marked a turning point, introducing a new era of democratic governance. Key state institutions like parliament, the media, and the judiciary began to play vital roles in supporting democracy. She identified three major shifts during this period: a stronger judiciary, an empowered media, and changes in civil-military relations, along with Pakistan's evolving ties with the US and India.

Noonari & Dashnyam (2022) investigate the impact of political instability on numerous socioeconomic parameters in Sindh province, Pakistan, from 1988 to 2008. Political instability has been cited as a serious challenge to democracy in the region. The study looks into the connections between political instability and democracy, education, health, and economic development. Political instability in Sindh, caused by malfunction, incompetence, and corruption within ruling parties, has slowed democracy's advancement. The research findings demonstrate a negative influence of political instability on democracy, indicating that periods of political turbulence and instability have led to a slowdown in democratic processes. The study shows a substantial association between political instability and democracy through statistical analysis and hypothesis testing, emphasizing how a lack of political stability can inhibit democratic growth and functioning. The findings indicate that political instability weakens the stability and efficacy of democratic government in Sindh, making it difficult to develop and maintain democratic institutions.

Hussain et al., (2022) contend that media freedom, a cornerstone of democracy, has come under examination in Pakistan under Imran Khan's populist rule, which lasted from August 2018 to April 2022. This research looks into the state of media freedom by conducting semi-structured interviews with leading journalists from major media outlets. The findings illustrate the enormous challenges that journalists encountered during this time, including intimidation, threats to their families, and removal from their positions. To control the media, the government took a dual strategy: reward loyal media with financial and professional rewards while constantly monitoring and punishing critical publications. Furthermore, the investigation revealed that journalists faced online abuse coordinated by government-affiliated troll farms. Notably, the Pakistani populist regime's techniques are consistent with strategies used by other populist-led regimes across the world. However, the effectiveness of restricting free expression in Pakistan can be linked to a lack of strong institutional backing for journalists, which distinguishes it from democratic standards elsewhere. This paper lays the groundwork for a thorough examination of media freedom in Pakistan during this critical era, giving light on the complex relationship between populism and the media in the context of democratic decline.

Khan (2023) In his research essay titled *The Role of Election Commission in Strengthening Democracy System of Pakistan* makes the argument that the Election Commission plays a significant role in guaranteeing the strength of the democracy system in Pakistan by monitoring elections that are free, fair, and transparent. Khan underlines the need

of a vigorous electoral process as a means of constructing and preserving public trust in the democratic system that the country has in place. The Election Commission is confronted with a number of issues, including claims of rigging and manipulation, which have led to questions over the integrity of the democratic process. These challenges are discussed in depth in the article. Khan argues that in order to overcome these difficulties, it is very necessary to establish an Election Commission that is not subject to political interference and is independent and unbiased. In addition, the author emphasizes the significance of implementing technology-based initiatives such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and the Result Transmission System (RTS) in order to bolster the effectiveness, precision, and openness of the electoral process. Khan also emphasizes the importance of comprehensive voter education initiatives in order to raise the level of civic involvement and understanding among the electorate. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the need of adopting stringent controls on campaign financing in order to guarantee that all candidates are competing on an equal playing field. Khan, in conclusion, is an advocate for the deployment of law enforcement personnel to preserve a peaceful political process in order to prevent electoral violence from occurring.

Shafqat (1998) In their article *Democracy in Pakistan: Value change and challenges of institution building* delves into the evolution of democracy in Pakistan, focusing on value changes and the hurdles encountered in establishing robust institutions. The author emphasizes the importance of dissent, opposition, and protection of minorities in a democratic system. The author highlights the role of free and fair elections, rights of political opposition, protection of civil liberties, security of citizens, an independent judiciary, and bipartisan consensus on social and economic policies in sustaining democracy

Furthermore the growing costs of elections in Pakistan, leading to concerns about the exclusion of middle-class candidates. It also touches upon the discontent among the middle classes due to perceived ineffectiveness in providing justice and security. The author advocates for a concerted effort by opposition parties to engage in dialogue to strengthen democratic institutions and build consensus on key democratic principles.

Additionally, the challenges posed by authoritarian tendencies within political leadership, the impact of patronage politics on administrative institutions, and the need for a shift towards constitutional governance to combat corruption and ensure fairness in

administration. Shafqat underscores the importance of aligning political conduct with democratic values to enhance the sustainability of democracy in Pakistan

Jatoi et al., (2022) delves into the concept of judicial activism and its profound impact, particularly during the era of Saqib Nisar. The author argues that this period witnessed an unprecedented level of judicial activism that encroached upon the powers of the legislature and the executive branches of the government.

Kanwal (2017), in her study *“Political Development in Pakistan: Continuity and Change During Zardari,”* delves into the country's political journey. She argues that Pakistan’s political history reveals a pattern of neglect toward building a stable democratic framework. This neglect stemmed from centralized power, authoritarian tendencies, self-serving political parties, uneven civil-military relations, and institutional weaknesses. Kanwal highlights that the PPP government (2008-2013), by completing its full five-year term, revisited the political dynamics and laid the groundwork for democracy through good governance, economic balance, inclusive participation, and regular elections.

Jatoi et al., (2022) delves into the concept of judicial activism and its profound impact, particularly during the era of Saqib Nisar. The author argues that this period witnessed an unprecedented level of judicial activism that encroached upon the powers of the legislature and the executive branches of the government. Saqib Nisar's time as Chief Justice was characterized by pronounced judicial activism and the regular use of suo motu measures. These initiatives, although sometimes well-intentioned, faced criticism for taking up valuable court time and for encroaching onto domains typically overseen by the legislative and executive departments. These efforts encompassed prohibitions on kite flying, fundraising for dam building, and the mitigation of child abuse.

The article prominently emphasizes the disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during this timeframe. The author asserts that increased judicial activism is more common in contexts when governmental institutions are viewed as inefficient. He acknowledges that the public often embraced suo motu action when pertaining to issues of public concern, including instances of forced labor, fraud, kite flying, Hajj corruption, and missing persons. Nonetheless, it also highlights occasions where the court encroached onto areas outside its conventional jurisdiction, such as seeking to regulate oil, power, and sugar prices, so raising concerns of overreach. He emphasizes that the post-Musharraf era was distinguished by the consolidation of democracy, defined by resilient institutions and a court

that was instrumental in preserving democratic principles. The paper concludes that Pakistan's democratic transition depends on establishing a delicate equilibrium between an autonomous judiciary and robust governmental institutions, so preserving the stability and advancement of democracy in the nation.

The articles and texts discussed above highlights the importance of how democratic backsliding can challenge or damage the democratic norms and values that lead to the decline of any democracy in the world. This research thesis aims to conduct a critical analysis of the challenges to democracy and its accelerated backsliding after 2013 in Pakistan.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This research thesis develops a theoretical framework using *Five Arenas* model of democratic consolidation given by Linz and Stepan. Five arena concept of Democratic consolidation can be the best theoretical support for my topic explaining the state of democracy in Pakistan since 2013. According to Linz and Stepan, democracy in a particular State will be considered consolidated, if the five arenas, that will be mentioned later, perform their duties aligned with the laws given by the constitution of the state. On the other hand, if these arenas fail to execute quality professionalism lacking honesty and loyalty for longer periods of time, the democratic values are compromised. The concept of five arenas fit perfectly for this research thesis as the aim of the study is to explore the challenges to democracy in Pakistan. This research thesis takes Linz and Stepan's theory of Five Arenas as theoretical framework. The researcher will thoroughly describe the meaning of Linz and Stepan's five areans that are required for a country to fulfill democratic consolidation. The following table shows the five major arenas of a modern consolidated democracy;

Five Arenas	Features
i. The civil Society	Freedom of association and communication
ii. The political Society	Free and inclusive contestation
iii. Rule of Law	Constitutionalism
iv. The State Apparatus	Rational legal bureaucratic norms
v. The Economic Society	Institutionalized market

(Lenz and Stepan 1996)

- i. **Civil Society:** Civil society refers to a diverse spectrum of non-governmental organisations, associations, and citizen groups. It is the forum where people may express their interests, concerns, and ideals. A healthy civil society is critical in keeping the government responsible, pushing for human rights, and encouraging civic participation. It functions as a check on the state's authority.
- ii. **Political Society:** The term "political society" refers to the formal political institutions and procedures that exist inside a nation. These political institutions and processes include things like elections, political parties, and governmental structures. This is the arena in which political players, including elected officials work in order to formulate and carry out policies. Elections that are free and fair, the separation of powers, and opposing political views are the defining characteristics of a democratic system that functions well.
- iii. **Rule of Law:** The rule of law is the notion that all persons and organisations, including the government, must follow and be responsible to the law. It guarantees that laws are consistently and fairly implemented, therefore preserving people' rights and freedoms. The rule of law is critical for avoiding arbitrary abuse of power and ensuring that individuals have legal remedies if their rights are infringed.

- iv. **State Apparatus:** This domain pertains to the government entities in charge of enforcing regulations and preserving order. It consists of the executive, legislative, and judicial departments of government, as well as bureaucracies and law enforcement agencies. An effective state machinery is required to offer public services, enforce laws, and ensure that government runs smoothly.
- v. **Economic Society:** The economic society refers to the economic structures and activities of a nation. It takes into account issues such as wealth distribution, access to economic opportunities, and market functioning. A healthy economic society is distinguished by equitable economic growth, employment opportunities, and a fair allocation of resources. Economic stability is critical to overall social and political stability.

Linz and Stepan's model suggests that these five arenas are interrelated and the health of each arena can impact the overall stability and success of a democratic system. The interplay between civil society, political society, the rule of law, state apparatus, and economic society is integral to democratic governance and development.

The researcher aims to use the Linz and Stepan's five arenas theoretical framework in order to investigate the case study of the challenges leading to democratic erosion in Pakistan since 2013.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Research Design

This study undertakes a qualitative analysis of the democratic process in Pakistan since 2013. The challenges to democracy are critically analyzed on the basis of events happened during the selected time period. It also involves textual analysis of certain articles written in the context of democratization of Pakistan.

1.7.2 Data collection

The data is collected primarily from debates, interviews and conferences being done upon law making and policymaking. The secondary are authentic news sources, reports articles, journals, magazines, and books written by think-tanks and experts of this field.

1.7.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used for data analysis in this research. It is a tool of qualitative research methodology that is used for data analysis in the qualitative research.

Thematic analysis will allow in-depth analysis of the topic through creating different themes and codes of data to answer the research questions.

1.8 Organization of the study

This study is comprised of five chapters and conclusion. They are as follows.

1. Introduction
2. Democracy's Crossroads: Navigating through uncertainty
3. Evolution of Democracy in Pakistan
4. Challenges to Democracy in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis
5. Research Findings, Conclusion & Recommendations

CHAPTER-2

DEMOCRACY'S CROSSROADS: NAVIGATING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

Democracy is fundamentally a governance system where authority is derived from the people. This system is underpinned by the rule of law, the right of citizens to participate equally in the democratic process, the conduct of free and fair elections, and the safeguarding of fundamental human rights (Dahl, 2008). Despite these principles, democracy faces significant challenges, both within nations and globally. For instance, the events of January 6, 2021, in the United States serve as a notable example, where supporters of then-President Trump, driven by the belief that the 2020 election results were fraudulent, stormed the Capitol. This violent attempt to prevent the certification of the election results exposed vulnerabilities in the democratic framework of one of the world's oldest democracies (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2020). The legal repercussions and congressional investigations that followed highlighted the severity of the threat to democratic institutions.

On the global stage, democracy is under pressure from various forces. Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, violated the sovereignty of a democratic nation and posed a serious challenge to international democratic norms. In South Asia, countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have witnessed democratic erosion in different forms. Pakistan, in particular, has faced democratic backsliding exacerbated by the roles played by political parties and the bureaucracy, especially after 2013. The political dynamics in Pakistan, marked by power struggles, corruption, and military influence, have undermined democratic institutions. Similarly, in India, increasing authoritarian tendencies and the marginalization of minorities under the current leadership have raised concerns (Jaffrelot, 2021). Bangladesh faces challenges related to electoral integrity and political violence (Riaz, 2016). Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's recent political and economic crisis, culminating in mass protests and the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022, underscores how economic instability can exacerbate political crises in a democracy (Uyangoda, 2022). In Europe, the 2022 re-election of President Emmanuel Macron over right-wing populist Marine Le Pen was a critical moment, reflecting the ongoing tension between democratic values and the rise of populism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). These domestic and international threats underscore the urgent need to thoroughly analyze the concept and historical development of democracy to safeguard it against current and future challenges.

2.1 Definition and concept of Democracy

The concept of democracy resists a singular, static definition due to its complex nature and the various historical contexts in which it has evolved. The origins of democracy are often traced back to Athens in the 5th century BC, which marked a significant shift towards governance by the people. According to the Webster New Encyclopedia Dictionary (1995), democracy is defined as a system of government where the ultimate authority is vested in the people, who may exercise it either directly or through elected representatives. Lindell and Scott (1999) note that the term “democracy” is derived from the Greek word "demokratia," itself a compound of "demos" (meaning people) and "kratos" (meaning power or rule). This classical origin underscores the principle of popular sovereignty, a cornerstone of democratic governance. Expanding on the classical definition, (Diamond & Morlino, 2004) identifies four key elements that are essential to any democratic system:

1. The conduct of free and fair elections for the purpose of choosing and replacing the government.
2. Active engagement of citizens in both political and civic spheres.
3. Protection and respect for the human rights of all individuals.
4. The rule of law, which guarantees equality before the law for all citizens.

When contrasting democracy with autocratic systems, (Popper et al., 2012) emphasizes the importance of mechanisms that allow citizens to hold their leaders accountable and effect change without the need for violent revolution. This viewpoint highlights the diverse ways in which democracy manifests in modern societies. One such form is direct democracy, where citizens are directly involved in the legislative decision-making process. Alternatively, representative democracy entrusts elected officials with the responsibility to make decisions on behalf of their constituents. The Encyclopedia Britannica notes that the concept of representative democracy has roots in intellectual developments during the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and was significantly shaped by the American and French Revolutions. According to (Dahl, 2008) representative democracy is characterized by electoral equality, minimal barriers to political participation, and the safeguarding of citizens' freedoms through constitutional rights and liberties. A notable example of representative democracy is the Westminster system, which combines a sovereign monarchy with parliamentary sovereignty and judicial independence, as practiced

in the United Kingdom. This model contrasts with the United States' system, which distinctly separates powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Consequently, democracy guarantees that the perspectives of all eligible citizens are taken into account during the legislative process. This inclusive governance maintains democracy's adaptability and evolution in accordance with the aspirations and desires of its populace

2.1.1. The historical development and origin of democracy

This section examines the historical foundations of democracy, following its development from ancient Greece to the Roman Republic and highlighting the important contributions of the medieval and Renaissance eras. The analysis of these basic stages allows us to understand the degree to which early democratic principles have shaped modern democratic institutions.

2.1.2 Ancient Roots of Democracy

Democracy originated in ancient Greece, particularly in Athens during the 5th century BCE, which is often regarded as the foundation of this governmental system. Athenian democracy was marked by its direct nature, with individuals participating actively in the decision-making processes that governed their community. This initial model established a precedent and laid the groundwork for future democratic systems by highlighting the importance of citizen participation and the principle that political authority should originate from the populace (Fleck & Hanssen, 2002).

Two of the most important institutions of Athenian democracy were the Assembly (Ekklesia), which was a place where people gathered to discuss and vote on various policies and legislation, and the Council of 500 (Boule), which was in charge of setting the agenda for the Assembly and conducting other administrative tasks. In order to encourage wider participation and limit the accumulation of power within a small number of individuals, positions within these groups were frequently assigned through the use of a lottery system. This system, however, had restrictions; participation was restricted to adult male citizens, which meant that women, slaves, and foreigners were not allowed to participate. These groups of people made up a sizeable portion of the population.

Despite these exclusions, the principles of isonomia, which denotes "equality before the law," and isegoria, which signifies "the right to speak in the Assembly," represent revolutionary concepts that have persisted and evolved over time. The democratic experience

in Athens significantly influenced contemporary political thought, especially in the development of democratic practices in the Roman Republic and later in modern democratic governments. The Athenian model established a historical precedent that continues to shape modern democratic theory and practice, emphasizing both the inherent advantages and difficulties of direct democracy(Raaflaub, 2004).

2.1.3 Roman Republic and Beyond

The Roman Republic (509–27 BCE) signifies a notable advancement of democratic ideas, expanding upon the foundations laid by ancient Greek rule. In contrast to the direct democracy of Athens, the Roman Republic established a representative system in which elected officials represented the populace. This system, while not fulfilling contemporary democratic norms, significantly contributed to the evolution of democratic institutions and republicanism, profoundly influencing Western political philosophy for centuries (Lintott, 1999).

The Senate was a key component of the Roman Republic's government, with patrician elites controlling significant power over issues pertaining to legislation, finances, and foreign policy. Senators were appointed based on experience and ancestry rather than by popular vote, in contrast to democratic assemblies, which reflected the oligarchic character of Roman politics(Morstein-Marx, 2004).

This oligarchy was counterbalanced by popular assemblies like the Centuriate Assembly (Comitia Centuriata) and the Tribal Assembly (Comitia Tributa), which enabled Roman citizens to vote on legislation and elect magistrates. The Centuriate Assembly, structured by wealth classes, was in charge of electing senior magistrates like as consuls and praetors, and the Tribal Assembly, organized by geographic tribes, elected subordinate magistrates and ratified legislation. This dual system attempted to balance power between the elite and the general public, yet richer classes frequently retained disproportionate authority (Hölkeskamp, 2010).

The yearly election of two consuls, who shared executive power and could reject each other's decisions, was a prime example of the Roman Republic's system of checks and balances. The government's accountability and the avoidance of a power grab were the goals of this system. The Republic's capacity to install a temporary dictator during emergencies was another sign of its flexibility and its emphasis on maintaining law and order. Public

service and civic duty were deeply ingrained in Roman republican political culture; for example, magistrates sometimes served without compensation because they considered it their moral duties to the state. This emphasis on the rule of law and virtuous citizenship has left a lasting impact on Western political thought.

The Roman Republic's innovations, particularly the mixed constitution and the separation of powers, had a direct influence on Enlightenment thinkers and the framers of modern democratic constitutions, including that of the United States. While the Roman Republic was not a democracy in the contemporary sense, it played a pivotal role in shaping the foundational principles of republicanism and representative government that underpin modern democracies (Millar, 1986).

2.1.4 Medieval and Renaissance Contributions

In the Middle Ages, feudalism and monarchical authority predominated over democratic ideals. The feudal system, characterized by rigid hierarchies and decentralized power, afforded local lords significant autonomy, although monarchs and emperors retained ultimate authority. In this context, the concept of democracy, as comprehended in ancient Greece and Rome, was mostly inactive. The signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 was a pivotal measure in limiting the monarch's power and establishing legal rights for subjects. This charter, imposed on King John of England by insubordinate barons, stipulated that the king was subject to the law and conferred specific rights to free individuals, including protection against arbitrary detention and the entitlement to a fair trial (Drew, 2004). The Magna Carta influenced later legal and political systems in England and other countries by promoting constitutionalism and the growth of parliamentary systems.

The Renaissance (14th-17th centuries) revived interest in classical concepts, especially democracy, laying the groundwork for subsequent democratic evolution. This period saw a resurgence of Greco-Roman thought, driven by the recovery of ancient texts and the emerging humanist movement that highlighted the importance and agency of individuals. Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas More critically examined the legitimacy of absolute power and advocated for more inclusive governmental frameworks (Marino, 1988).

Drawing inspiration from ancient models, republican systems of governance arose in Italian city-states such as Florence and Venice. Although predominantly oligarchic, these city-states possessed elements of civic responsibility and public engagement. For example,

Florence investigated numerous republican governance structures, such as the appointment of the “Gonfaloniere” and the establishment of the “Signoria”, a council that represented a variety of societal factions.

A prosperous and powerful bourgeoisie that demanded more involvement in politics emerged as a result of the Renaissance's thriving commercial economy. Feudal systems declined as a result of the change in the balance of economic power, and early modern governments with more sophisticated and representative political systems came into being.

The establishment of the English Parliament was one of the major political developments that occurred in England during the Renaissance. The framework for contemporary democratic government was laid by the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the Bill of Rights (1689), which solidified the ideas of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary authority by the late 17th century. The changes represented a growing recognition that legitimate political power comes from the agreement of the governed, and that those in power are answerable to the people as well as the law(Condren, 2016).

Consequently, despite the predominance of monarchical and feudal governance during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, these periods also witnessed significant changes that established the foundation for modern democracy. The Magna Carta's affirmation of legal rights, coupled with the Renaissance's revival of classical political concepts, contributed to the gradual re-establishment and evolution of democratic ideals across Europe..

2.2 Phases of Democratic Consolidation and Their Reversal

Democracy has experienced multiple phases of consolidation in its history, characterized by intervals of advancement and subsequent regression. Early democratic practices in ancient Athens and the Roman Republic exhibited foundational principles; however, they were often subjected to internal conflicts and external pressures. Similarly the modern era has experienced significant waves of democratization, characterized by a rise in democratic transitions followed by subsequent reversals. The American and French revolutions shaped the first wave, which witnessed the birth of early democratic institutions but later faced severe problems. The second wave, following World War II, was driven by decolonization and Cold War dynamics, leading to the establishment of new democratic administrations, although with challenges. During the third wave, which began in the 1970s, there was a widespread proliferation of democracy around the globe. However, this progress

was frequently followed by democratic regression, which highlights the ongoing difficulty of preserving democratic rule in the face of shifting particular sociopolitical conditions.

2.2.1 The First Wave and its Reversal

According to Samuel P. Huntington, the first democratic wave started in the early 1800s and continued until the interwar era in the early 1900s. This wave was propelled by revolutionary movements in the United States and France that established essential democratic principles and institutions. The American Revolution (1775–1783) and the subsequent adoption of the United States Constitution in 1787 were crucial events that inspired democratic principles globally. The French Revolution (1789-1799) similarly advanced the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, challenging monarchical and feudal systems throughout Europe (Dahl, 2008).

The initial wave was characterized by progressive political transformations and the expansion of suffrage in various Western countries. The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884 in the United Kingdom progressively broadened suffrage, indicating a movement towards more inclusive political institutions. Other European nations, such as Norway and Switzerland, similarly implemented democratic reforms during this period. This movement was bolstered by socioeconomic transformations instigated by the Industrial Revolution, including increased urbanization, elevated literacy rates, and the emergence of a politically active middle class (Moore, 1993).

Notwithstanding these advancements, the initial wave encountered significant obstacles in the early twentieth century. The onset of World War I (1914-1918) and the subsequent economic turmoil led to the collapse of certain democracies and the rise of authoritarian regimes. The regression is evident in the Russian Revolution of 1917, which established a communist regime, alongside the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany during the interwar period. Consequently, by the 1920s and 1930s, numerous countries that had initiated the democratic process reverted to authoritarian governance, culminating in the cessation of the first wave of democracy.

2.2.2 The Second Wave and Its Reversal

The second wave of democratization began in the aftermath of World War II. This decade saw a significant increase in democratic transitions, due to postwar geopolitical shifts and ideological conflict. The collapse of totalitarian governments in Germany, Italy,

and Japan prepared the door for democratic changes in these and other Western European countries. The Marshall Plan and other American-led measures for rebuilding and stability aided in the formation of democratic institutions (Huntington, 1991).

A notable feature of the second wave was the decolonization process, during which several nations in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East attained independence from colonial authorities. Newly sovereign states often adopted democratic frameworks as part of their nation-building efforts, influenced by the democratic ideals espoused by their former colonizers and the international community. India's independence in 1947 and its subsequent establishment of a democratic constitution exemplify this trend (Diamond, 1999)

In addition to decolonization, the Cold War context significantly influenced the second wave of democratization. The ideological battle between the United States and the Soviet Union created a global environment in which democracy was promoted as a counterbalance to communism. American foreign policy, characterized by both diplomatic pressure and economic aid, encouraged democratic transitions in strategic regions. For instance, the establishment of democratic regimes in West Germany and Japan was closely linked to U.S. interests in containing Soviet influence (Whitehead, 2001).

However, the second wave of democratization also faced challenges. Many newly independent governments had enormous problems, such as ethnic strife, economic instability, and inadequate political institutions, which often resulted in democratic backsliding or the rise of authoritarian regimes. In Latin America, a succession of military coups replaced democratic governments with authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s, underlining the fragility of democratic advances at the time (Diamond, 1999; Huntington, 1991).

Despite these reversals, the second wave had a long-term influence on the worldwide democratic scene. It broadened the geographical scope of democratic government and laid the groundwork for following waves of democratization by demonstrating the idea that democracy can be a viable political system in a variety of cultural and socioeconomic situations.

2.2.3 The Third Wave and Its Reversal

The third wave of democracy, a concept popularized by Samuel P. Huntington, began in the mid-1970s and has profoundly transformed the worldwide political scene. This wave was instigated by the democratic changes in Southern Europe, namely in Portugal, Greece,

and Spain, during the mid-to-late 1970s. The Carnation Revolution in Portugal (1974) and the collapse of the military dictatorship in Greece (1974) established significant precedents, followed by Spain's transition post-Franco's demise in 1975 (Huntington, 1991).

The third wave accelerated throughout Latin America in the 1980s, with a series of transitions from military dictatorships to civilian democracies. Countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile saw dramatic political shifts as a result of economic crises, civil society movement, and international pressure for democratic government. The financial crises of the 1980s also had an important impact, as economic mismanagement by authoritarian governments weakened their legitimacy and boosted popular desire for democratic changes (Diamond, 1999).

A pivotal moment for the third wave occurred with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. These events triggered a cascade of democratic transitions across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states. Countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia embarked on rapid democratization processes, influenced by the disintegration of communist control and the allure of integration into Western political and economic structures, notably the European Union (Przeworski, 1991). The end of the Cold War marked a significant ideological victory for democracy, reinforcing its global appeal (Huntington, 1991).

The third wave extended beyond Europe and Latin America to parts of Asia and Africa. The democratization of South Korea and Taiwan in the late 1980s and early 1990s represented critical advancements in Asia, facilitated by economic development, internal pressures, and geopolitical changes (Shin, 1994). In Africa, countries like South Africa and Nigeria transitioned to democratic rule, overcoming entrenched systems of apartheid and military dictatorship, respectively (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997).

Despite its broad impact, the third wave has faced significant challenges. Many new democracies struggled with institutional weaknesses, corruption, and political instability. Hybrid regimes emerged, blending democratic and authoritarian elements, complicating the consolidation of democracy (Levitsky, 2010). Moreover, the early 21st century witnessed democratic backsliding in several regions, reflecting the ongoing contestation between democratic aspirations and authoritarian resilience.

2.3 Challenges to Democracy in the contemporary world

After examining the historical development of democracy, it is crucial to confront the current concerns jeopardizing its integrity. The democratic landscape has transformed, exposing new pressures and complexities that differ from prior challenges like military coups. The stability and performance of modern democratic institutions are affected by numerous complex difficulties. The emergence of populism, escalating political polarization, democratic regression, and declining public trust in institutions constitute these concerns. Comprehending these modern concerns is essential for assessing their impact on democracies worldwide, especially in Pakistan.

2.3.1 Populism

Populism has emerged as a significant danger to democratic systems worldwide. Populist movements, characterized by anti-establishment rhetoric and appeals to public sentiment, can erode democratic values by centralizing power and destabilizing established institutions. Leaders employing populist strategies typically challenge the legitimacy of established political frameworks and advocate for simplistic solutions to complex issues. The decline of institutional integrity may facilitate power centralization and undermine the institutions that promote accountability and equilibrium in democratic governance.

For example Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary has slowly taken away checks and balances by limiting the freedom of the courts, controlling the media, and changing the law to give his party more power (Kornai, 2015). President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil has used populist language to attack democratic institutions, weaken political opponents, and call opposing news sources "fake news" (Biazzin et al., 2024).

The main selling point of populism is its assertion that it represents the "real will of the people," rather than an aloof and dishonest elite. As seen in the United States with the rise of Donald Trump, whose administration frequently disregarded institutions and conventions, casting doubt on the legitimacy of election procedures and other democratic practices, this dichotomy has the capacity to polarize nations. Trump's administration served as an example of how populist leaders may subvert democratic norms by misusing their power as president, politicizing the judiciary, and delegitimizing the media..

President Rodrigo Duterte's populist policies in the Philippines have led to serious human rights abuses under the cover of a "war on drugs," raising concerns about the erosion of due process and the rule of law (Curato, 2016). The administration of Duterte is a prime example of how populist governance prioritizes short-term popular policies above long-term democratic stability, frequently at the expense of institutional integrity and civil liberties.

In democracies, the rise of populism is an indication of fundamental problems such as economic inequality, perceived cultural dangers, and mistrust of the political institution. These essential elements allow populist politicians a favorable atmosphere to exploit, proposing prompt and decisive remedies in contrast to the alleged corruption and inefficiency of the status quo.

2.3.2 Political Polarization

A major danger to democratic unity is the current trend toward political polarization. Media fragmentation and social media platforms deepen societal ideological differences, which in turn heighten polarization. Legislative deadlock and diminished cooperation across party boundaries are outcomes of this split, which hinders effective political discourse and governance. This kind of polarization makes people more divided, which makes it harder to reach a compromise and weakens democratic institutions.

The United States has experienced a significant increase in political polarization as a result of the increasing divide between Democrats and Republicans, which has resulted in a highly partisan environment in Congress. This division has resulted in a conspicuous decrease in bipartisan cooperation, frequent government shutdowns, and legislative deadlock. This has also resulted in a decline in public confidence in democratic institutions. High-profile events, such as the contentious Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Brett Kavanaugh, serve as an illustration of how polarization not only intensifies societal rifts but also serves to fuel contentious public debates, thereby further deepening the divisions within the nation..

The Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, in the same way, emphasized the significant polarization of politics and society. The severe division between supporters of "Leave" and "Remain" has not only shattered political parties but also strained relationships within communities and families (Hobolt, 2016). The extended Brexit negotiations and their

consequences illustrate how polarization may undermine political stability and hinder governance.

Social media platforms has also intensify polarization by creating echo chambers that expose individuals to content reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs. This phenomenon, termed the "filter bubble," diminishes exposure to divergent perspectives and fosters ideological extremism (Sunstein, 2018). During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the dissemination of false information and targeted disinformation campaigns through social media intensified political tensions and resulted in a polarized electorate. Polarization adversely affects public trust and societal cohesion. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's polarizing speech in Turkey has intensified social divisions, leading to a declining democratic environment and a rise in political violence(Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). Erdogan's consolidation of authority and the elimination of political adversaries exemplify the exploitation of polarization to reinforce authoritarian inclinations and erode democratic principles..

2.3.3 Democratic Backsliding

The progressive deterioration of democratic systems and norms, known as democratic backsliding, has become a pressing concern. This tendency entails the weakening of essential democratic pillars such as judicial independence, open political competition, and civil rights. Recent incidents of democratic backsliding demonstrate how authoritarian leaders consolidate power, limit election fairness, and erode democracy's essential precepts, eventually eroding democratic governance quality.

Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey has experienced substantial democratic regress. Erdogan's government proclaimed a state of emergency in 2016 after a failed coup attempt. This declaration was used to justify extensive purges of the military, judiciary, and civil service, ostensibly to root out coup plotters but also to eliminate political opponents and critics(Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). This has resulted in an increasingly autocratic regime and has severely compromised the independence of the judiciary and curtailed the freedom of the press.

In a similar way, Poland's ruling Law and Justice Party (PIS) has implemented a number of reforms that erode democratic checks and balances and judicial independence. They government has been accused of controlling the National Council of the Judiciary, filling the Constitutional Tribunal with loyalists, and passing legislation that diminishes the

judiciary's independence.(Sadurski, 2019). Worldwide observers and the European Union have expressed concern regarding these actions, which indicate a deterioration in Poland's democratic integrity.

Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orban, serves as a striking illustration of democratic deterioration. Orban's administration has undermined democratic institutions by reducing judicial independence, restricting media freedoms, and modifying electoral laws to suit the governing party(Kornai, 2015)As a result, Hungary has evolved from a democracy into a "hybrid regime"

This trend is not exclusive to Europe. In Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro's administration has overseen a significant deterioration of democratic standards. Electoral manipulation, political party persecution, and civil rights limitations have converted Venezuela from one of Latin America's more stable democracies to an authoritarian state. Manipulated elections, political arrests, and violent opposition repression have all been hallmarks of Maduro's presidency.

Democratic backsliding frequently begins with subtle violations of institutional balances, which progress to overt dictatorship. This change is frequently driven by populist rhetoric that portrays democratic processes as impediments to good government or unity (Bermeo, 2016). Leaders frequently use crises, whether genuine or manufactured, to increase executive power and limit liberties.

2.3.4 Erosion of Trust in the Institutions

A significant worry facing contemporary democracies is the decline of public trust in democratic institutions. Corruption, ineptitude, and perceived deficiencies within the political system contribute to a decline in faith in these institutions. The erosion of confidence undermines the validity of democratic processes, resulting in public disillusionment and increased susceptibility to anti-democratic ideas. A decline in trust often intensifies prevailing problems, including the rise of populism and the deterioration of democratic standards.

Over the last several decades, Americans' faith in their government has dropped noticeably. Down from 77% in 1964, only 17% of Americans in 2019 expressed faith in the federal government to do the right thing always or most of the time (Pew Research Center, 2019). Trust has been eroding under scandals such as Watergate, the Iran-Contra crisis, and

more recently, the management of the COVID-19 epidemic. This fall has driven populist groups leveraging widespread discontent with conventional political elites.

Brazil exemplifies a significant case, wherein corruption scandals have undermined public confidence in institutions. The Operation Car Wash investigation uncovered pervasive corruption involving prominent politicians and corporate executives, leading to President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. The lack of confidence facilitated the rise of populist politicians like Jair Bolsonaro, who asserted his intention to battle corruption from outside the conventional political framework.

In South Korea, public confidence in institutions significantly declined amid the 2016 corruption scandal involving President Park Geun-hye, culminating in her impeachment. This case demonstrated the ramifications of high-level corruption and underscored the necessity of transparency and accountability in restoring public trust.

In Europe, confidence in democratic institutions is diminishing. The Yellow Vest movement in France, initiated in 2018, was partly driven by the perception that the government was disconnected from ordinary individuals. This movement underscored pervasive discontent with the political system's management of economic inequality and several social issues.

This decline in trust transcends individual nations and has evolved into a global phenomenon. The Edelman Confidence Barometer indicates a global decline in public trust towards institutions like government and media, accompanied by an increasing disparity between informed individuals and the general public. The decline in trust erodes the social contract, consequently heightening political instability and threatening the integrity of democratic governance globally.

2.3.5 Challenges in Pakistan

In Pakistan, these issues are exceedingly grave. Political polarization has intensified, with populist rhetoric and divisive strategies permeating democratic mechanisms. This division suppresses authentic dialogue and cultivates a chaotic political environment. Indicators of democratic regression include the deterioration of judicial autonomy, limitations on political dissent, and curtailments of media liberty. Corruption persists, compromising governance and diminishing public trust. The military's involvement in politics diminishes

civilian authority and distorts the democratic framework. Terrorism and regional conflicts impose additional pressure on democratic institutions and governance.

Political polarization in Pakistan has intensified, with parties employing antagonistic rhetoric and aggressive strategies. The discord between Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has divided the populace and engendered a contentious political climate. This polarization has impeded governance, complicating legislative collaboration, as demonstrated during the PTI government's tenure, when parliamentary sessions were frequently interrupted by opposition demonstrations (Akram, 2023).

Democratic backsliding is apparent in Pakistan's judiciary, which under pressure from both the executive and military branches, undermining its role as an independent check on power. Certain high-profile prosecutions, including as the Supreme Court's removal of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on corruption charges, have been perceived as politically motivated, raising concerns about judicial impartiality (Cheema, 2018)

Media freedom constitutes a significant issue in Pakistan. Journalists and media organizations often encounter harassment, censorship, and threats, especially when covering sensitive topics like as military issues and corruption. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) faces allegations of curtailing media freedoms via capricious penalties and limitations (International Federation of Journalists, 2020). These restrictions hinder public access to information and erode democratic accountability.

Corruption significantly affects the governance and public services in Pakistan. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index consistently categorizes Pakistan among the most corrupt countries globally, underscoring the difficulties in addressing corruption and promoting transparent governance. This corruption erodes public trust and hinders economic advancement and service provision.

The military's participation in Pakistani politics complicates the democratic landscape. Historically, the military has intervened in political matters, both directly and indirectly influencing civilian administrations. This involvement subverts civilian governance and democratic procedures (Abbas, 2015). Recent occurrences, including the military's evident endorsement of certain politicians, underscore the ongoing tension between civilian governance and military authority.

Terrorism and regional conflicts ultimately intensify Pakistan's governance difficulties. The apprehension of terrorism has led to rigorous security protocols that can curtail civil liberties and democratic principles. The persistent violence in Balochistan and tribal regions has challenged the government's ability to provide effective governance and uphold the rule of law .

CHAPTER-3

EVOLUTION OF DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN

3.1 The Early Period of Democratic Rule (1947-1958)

The establishment of Pakistan in 1947 represented a pivotal historical event, as the newly sovereign nation embraced a federal parliamentary democracy. This system was apparently designed after the Westminster parliamentary model, with periodical elections as the basis for representative governance. Nonetheless, despite the implementation of democratic principles, Pakistan's political evolution in the early years was beset by challenges, primarily due to the lack of a formal constitution and the prevailing influence of the civil and military bureaucracy (Waseem, 1983).

Between 1947 and 1954, the Muslim League, Pakistan's founding political party, initially dominated parliament but struggled to maintain its pre-independence influence due to a lack of a clear socio-economic agenda. Its dominance was challenged in the 1954 East Pakistan elections by the United Front, a political alliance that marked the beginning of a trend in Pakistan's politics. These alliances became a key feature, forming during both authoritarian and democratic periods to resist autocracy, counter one-party rule, and strengthen electoral competitiveness. (Mahmood, 2000)

3.1.1 Post-Independence Provincial Elections and the Challenge in East Pakistan (1954)

In the East Pakistan elections, an alliance of four political parties became the largest group, while the Muslim League, which claimed to represent all Pakistanis, faced a significant defeat. The chief minister, Noor ul Amin, along with his entire cabinet, lost their seats, reflecting the party's weak connection with the public and its supporters. Noor ul Amin was defeated by a young candidate from the United Front. Out of 237 seats in the East Pakistan legislative assembly, the United Front secured a vast majority with 223 seats, leaving the Muslim League with only 10.

Following its overwhelming victory in the elections for the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly, the United Front, led by A.K. Fazlul Haq, established its ministry. Once in power, the United Front called for representation in the central government to implement its agenda. To achieve this, they demanded the dissolution of the first Constituent Assembly, as its members had been defeated in the elections. However, this demand was rejected by Prime

Minister Muhammad Ali, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and unrest in East Pakistan (Younis, 1993). Public protests and strikes erupted across the region, culminating in ethnic and racial clashes.

During this period, in May 1954, Pakistan entered into a mutual defense assistance agreement with the United States. The United Front opposed this military pact and declared the day as “Anti-US-Pakistan Military Pact Day” urging the public to observe protests. These events further destabilized the situation in East Pakistan. Eventually, on May 30, 1954, the United Front Ministry was dismissed, and Governor’s Rule was imposed in the province. This political upheaval led to the retirement of A.K. Fazlul Haq, while Abdul Hameed Bhashani and H.S. Suhrawardy went into exile (Afzal, 2001).

Later, on October 24, 1954, Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad dissolved the first Constituent Assembly. In May 1955, a second Constituent Assembly was indirectly elected by provincial assembly members. Comprising 80 members equally representing East and West Pakistan, this assembly, like its predecessor, was dominated by the Muslim League. After six months of deliberation, on March 23, 1956, the assembly passed Pakistan's first constitution. This document declared Pakistan an Islamic Republic with a federal parliamentary system of government (Khan, 2001).

Under the 1956 Constitution, general elections were planned within a few months but were repeatedly delayed. On October 7, 1958, General Ayub Khan imposed martial law, suspended the constitution, and canceled the elections. This marked the end of Pakistan’s first democratic period, characterized by frequent changes in prime ministers and chief ministers, the reorganization of provincial assemblies, and the dissolution of constitutional assemblies. The absence of general elections, weak representative institutions, the collapse of the democratic framework, and the growing influence of military-bureaucratic elites ultimately culminated in a military coup (Kukreja & Singh, 2005).

3.2 Ayub’s Era of Controlled Democracy

To address the absence of robust political institutions and legitimize his rule, General Ayub Khan introduced the Basic Democracies system in 1959 . This initiative aimed to provide a semblance of grassroots representation while consolidating his control. The first local government elections under this system were held on a non-party basis, resulting in the selection of 120,000 Basic Democrats equally representing East and West Pakistan. These

Basic Democrats served as an electoral college, tasked with electing members of the national and provincial assemblies as well as the President. In 1963, they were instrumental in indirectly electing the national legislature and the assemblies for East and West Pakistan. Later, in the 1965 presidential election, Ayub Khan was elected President by this same electoral body, defeating Miss Fatima Jinnah, the candidate backed by the Combined Opposition Parties (COP (Sayeed, 1967)). Ayub Khan's government marked a significant shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system, formalized under the 1962 Constitution. This system symbolized the military regime's strategy of controlled democracy, consolidating power while maintaining an appearance of participatory governance.

3.3 The 1970 General Elections and the Fall of Dhaka

The nationwide protests ultimately led to the collapse of Ayub Khan's military rule. On March 25, 1969, Ayub Khan stepped down and transferred power to General Yahya Khan, the Army Chief at the time, bypassing the Speaker of the National Assembly. After assuming control, Yahya Khan abolished the One Unit system, which restored the provinces in West Pakistan and created a balance between East and West Pakistan. Through the Legal Framework Order (LFO), Yahya Khan set the General Elections for December 1970, introducing a "One Man, One Vote" system based on universal adult suffrage. The LFO also outlined the basic principles for drafting the country's future Constitution. Along with announcing the elections, Yahya Khan lifted the ban on political parties, allowing them to participate in the democratic process once again. In the 1970 general elections, 1,570 candidates from 25 political parties contested across East and West Pakistan. Among them, the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, were the main political contenders. The campaigns of both parties addressed national issues that resonated with voters in both regions. The Awami League, a nationalist party from East Pakistan, gained significant support by focusing on the region's socio-economic needs. It emphasized the Six-Point program, which called for a federal system with a parliamentary form of government, provincial autonomy, the establishment of separate but convertible currencies for East and West Pakistan, distinct foreign exchange systems, and an independent paramilitary force for East Pakistan (Humayun, 1995). Meanwhile, the Pakistan Peoples Party, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, presented a more populist, left-wing agenda in West Pakistan. The PPP's campaign centered on its socialist

goals, focusing on the promise of basic needs through its slogan *Roti, Kapra aur Makkan* (bread, cloth, and shelter) and advocating for more inclusive governance.

In the 1970 elections, the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won 160 out of 300 National Assembly seats, becoming the largest party in East Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) secured 82 seats, taking the lead in West Pakistan. By democratic standards, the Awami League should have been asked to form the government, but the ruling elite was reluctant to give power to the Bengali-majority party. This created a political deadlock (Khan, 2001)

Although General Yahya Khan's government made attempts to bring both parties together for talks, neither side was willing to cooperate. They refused to join the opposition in the National Assembly, which led to the postponement of the scheduled assembly session in March 1971. The failure of these negotiations resulted in violence and eventually civil war. India intervened, and on December 16, 1971, Dhaka fell, leading to the creation of Bangladesh. On December 20, 1971, Yahya Khan resigned, passing power to Z.A. Bhutto, leader of the largest party in East Pakistan (Rizvi, 2014).

From 1971 to 1977, Z.A. Bhutto introduced sweeping reforms. He reshaped Pakistan's foreign policy, strengthened national security, developed nuclear capabilities, and reformed the military. Bhutto also introduced a new constitution based on a parliamentary system, which helped maintain Pakistan's democratic framework. However, in 1979, Bhutto was controversially executed after a trial led by General Zia-ul-Haq.

3.4 The 1977 General Elections: The Collapse of Popular Democracy

At the end of his first term as prime minister, Bhutto, confident of winning a second term, dissolved the assemblies and set the date for new elections in early 1977. In response, the opposition parties, which had previously united under the UDF platform, formed a new alliance called the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA). The PNA was created to challenge Bhutto's PPP and his socialist policies. It included nine political groups, such as the religious parties JJ, JUP, and JUI, the PML, NDP, KT, and PDP, the anti-Bhutto secular Tehrik-i-Istiqlal led by Asghar Khan, and the All-Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. Maulana Mufti Mahmood, leader of JUI, was appointed president, while Rafiq Bajwa of JUP and Nawabzada Nasr Ullah Khan of PDP were made secretary-general and vice president, respectively. The alliance also formed a parliamentary board, led by Pir Sahib of Pagara, to

oversee ticket distribution (Niazi, 1991). The formation of the PNA ahead of the 1977 elections marked a significant moment in Pakistan's political history, one that went against Bhutto's expectations.

Both the PPP and PNA started their election campaigns with strong manifestos that, while different in tone, shared some common themes. Both promised ambitious socio-economic reforms, and both focused heavily on Islamizing Pakistan's politics. The PNA, right from the start, presented the Holy Quran as its manifesto and pushed the slogan of Nizam-e-Mustafa (System of the Prophet) to challenge the political and social impact of Bhutto's policies. They criticized Bhutto's socialist approach, arguing it had negatively affected the country's politics. Meanwhile, the PPP's manifesto began by committing to making the Quran and the Prophet's (PBUH) life a compulsory subject in schools. It also promised to build a fairer society with equal opportunities for everyone, alongside pledges to increase wages and provide housing for workers.(Mahmood, 2000).

Beyond these promises, the election campaigns of both parties included personal attacks and mutual criticism. Their speeches prominently featured blame-game tactics. About 44% of the PPP's speeches focused on harsh criticism of opposition leaders, their past actions, and their future plans. Meanwhile, approximately 74% of the PNA's speeches targeted Bhutto and his allies. In the final phase of the election campaign, both parties held large gatherings, corner meetings, and rallies, which were enthusiastically attended by their supporters and voters (Mahmood, 2000).

The results of the national assembly elections surprised the PNA leadership, as they won only 36 seats out of 200. Meanwhile, Bhutto's PPP secured 155 seats, including 19 where their candidates were elected unopposed. The remaining seats were divided among independent candidates and smaller parties. After the polls, the PNA rejected the national assembly election results, accusing the PPP of large-scale rigging and manipulation. They also decided to boycott the provincial assembly elections. The PNA demanded:

- (i) The prime minister resigned.
- (ii) The chief election commissioner resigned.
- (iii) fresh elections

Bhutto's PPP dismissed the PNA's demands, insisting that the elections were free, fair, and impartial. However, the PNA presented strong evidence to support their claims. On

March 14, 1977, the PNA leadership initiated a nationwide protest movement to push for fresh elections under a neutral election commission. The protests quickly intensified, and from March to July, the country descended into chaos, with daily agitations, anti-government processions, and rallies (Yousaf, 1999).

By April, the situation spiraled out of control, and law enforcement agencies struggled to contain the unrest. Bhutto turned to the armed forces support. According to Kausar Niazi in his book *Aur Line Kut Gayee*, General Zia-ul-Haq assured Bhutto in a meeting, saying, "Sir, we will sort them out." Following this, a semi-martial law was imposed in major cities (Niazi, 1991).

Eventually, the escalating situation forced Bhutto to negotiate with the opposition. After several rounds of talks, there was hope for a peaceful resolution, but before an agreement could be finalized, on July 5, 1977, the armed forces led by General Zia-ul-Haq seized power, imposing martial law across the country. After six years of democracy, the military once again intervened in politics.

Most PNA parties welcomed the martial law, expressing goodwill toward General Zia's regime, hoping it would ensure free, fair, and transparent elections. The PNA leadership also supported the government's accountability drive, considering it necessary for fair elections. However, before elections could take place, several PNA parties, including religio-political groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and the conservative Pakistan Muslim League, joined the military-led government. This significantly weakened the PNA. Further fragmentation occurred as the NDP, JUP, and Tehrik-e-Istiqlal left the alliance, strengthening Zia's martial law regime (Khan, 2001)

3.5 Military Dominance Over Democracy : Zia-ul-Haq's Era (1977-1988)

Upon taking power, Zia assured the public that elections would take place within 90 days, aiming to restore civilian rule after the contested 1977 elections. However, as Zia's regime settled into power, elections were repeatedly postponed, with Zia citing political instability as the reason for delaying the democratic process. His martial law persisted until 1985, reflecting the broader military-bureaucratic hold over Pakistan's politics . During this time, the judiciary, led by Chief Justice Anwarul Haq, invoked the "doctrine of necessity" to justify and legitimize Zia's coup, providing a legal basis for the military's prolonged control (Baxter, 1991).

As Zia consolidated his control, he aimed to enhance the legitimacy of his administration by conducting a countrywide referendum in December 1984. The referendum was designed to link Zia's ongoing administration to the approval of Islamization initiatives. The results demonstrated substantial backing for Zia, affirming his presidency for a further five years. Opposition factions, notably the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), dismissed the referendum outcomes, alleging extensive electoral fraud and counterfeit votes (Khan, 2001).

In his August Declaration, Zia proposed the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which centralized authority in the presidential office. The powers encompassed the authority to dissolve legislatures, appoint the prime minister, and return laws enacted by the National Assembly. Critics contended that this action significantly compromised democratic institutions by integrating authoritarianism into the constitution. The non-party elections set for March 1985 solidified Zia's dominance, as political parties, notably the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), were prohibited from participating, illustrating Zia's persistent apprehension regarding Bhutto's political legacy .

3.5.1 Non-Party Based Elections and the Transition to a Hybrid Parliamentary Government

In January 1985, General Zia proclaimed the timetable for general elections, with National Assembly voting scheduled on 25 February and provincial assembly polling on 28 February. The elections occurred on a non-partisan basis, a decision Zia defended by claiming it would avert political turmoil. The MRD strongly opposed this decision, demanding the quick reinstatement of the 1973 Constitution and the retraction of martial law. The MRD abstained from the elections, deeming them undemocratic.

Notwithstanding the boycott, the elections continued, including over 1,200 candidates running for 200 National Assembly seats and 3,600 candidates competing for provincial assembly . Zia's manipulation of the democratic process via non-party elections resulted in a disjointed legislature that lacked unity, enabling the military to maintain ultimate authority (Yousaf, 1991).

Subsequent to the elections, Zia promulgated the Revival of the Constitution Order in March 1985, amending the 1973 Constitution to reinstate it in a modified format, along with stipulations for the ultimate abrogation of martial law. Within this context, Mohammad Khan Junejo, a politician associated with the military, was designated as Prime Minister. Junejo,

nonetheless, endeavored to implement an operational parliamentary system, announcing the reinstatement of political party activity following the conclusion of martial law in December 1985 (Mahmood, 2000). His administration initiated a program of socio-economic changes designed at garnering political legitimacy for the newly reconstituted Pakistan Muslim League (PML).

3.5.2 Conflicts Between Zia and Junejo: Ojhri Camp Incident and Geneva Accords

Though Junejo appeared committed to restoring democratic governance, tensions between the civilian prime minister and the military president grew. These differences came to a head following the Ojhri Camp incident in 1988, a catastrophic arms depot explosion in Rawalpindi, and the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan. Junejo's independent stance in managing these crises alienated Zia, who viewed the prime minister's assertiveness as a challenge to his authority. As a result, on 29 May 1988, Zia dismissed Junejo's government, dissolved the assemblies, and accused the prime minister of incompetence and mismanagement. This act of dissolving an elected government underlined the fragile nature of the democratic framework Zia had allowed to emerge, revealing that ultimate authority remained with the military (Yousaf, 1991).

3.5.3 Zia's Legacy and Prolonged Military Dominance

Zia's tenure significantly influenced Pakistan's political framework. His authoritarian government, supported by the Eighth Amendment and non-partisan elections, undermined democratic institutions and sustained military supremacy. The hybrid political system, characterized by a civilian government functioning under military influence, established a precedent for subsequent civil-military ties in Pakistan. Moreover, Zia's Islamization programs transformed the political landscape, enhancing the relationship between religion and politics, with enduring implications for Pakistan's social and political structure.

The demise of General Zia in a plane crash in August 1988 signified the conclusion of his authoritarian regime, although also rendered Pakistan's democratic institutions frail and susceptible to ongoing military intervention. The transition to civilian governance after Zia's demise, albeit noteworthy, would continue to be beset by difficulties inherited from his administration.

The era succeeding General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship in 1988 signified a multifaceted transition to democratic governance in Pakistan, marked by the rise of civilian

administrations headed by political entities such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) (Parveen & Bhatti). This period experienced notable political advancements, characterized by shifting administrations, political coalitions, and ongoing obstacles to democratic consolidation.

3.6 The PPP Era (1988-1990)

In the general elections of November 1988, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) emerged as the largest party in the national assembly, despite facing significant resistance from nonpolitical forces. The PPP defeated the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI), a coalition of nine religio-political parties backed by Pakistan's military and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (Khan, 2001).

The IJI, composed of Ziaist and Islamic factions, managed to win 54 seats in the national assembly but suffered significant losses, including the defeat of key leaders. Prominent figures like former Prime Minister and PML president Mohammad Khan Junejo, IJI president Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, spiritual leader Pir Sahib of Pagaro, IJI secretary-general Prof. Ghafoor Ahmad, and Iqbal Ahmad Khan all lost in their constituencies. Most of the IJI's seats were won by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), which, under the alliance's banner, took on the role of the opposition in the national assembly.

In the provincial elections, the IJI secured 108 seats in Punjab, 26 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and 8 in Balochistan (Mahmood, 2000). Meanwhile, the PPP emerged as the leading federal party, securing 93 national assembly seats and 184 provincial seats. In Punjab, the PPP claimed 94 seats, while in Sindh it performed strongly, winning 67. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the party secured 20 seats, and in Balochistan, it won 3.

Despite the PPP's electoral victory, the party faced resistance from the military establishment and biases from the caretaker government. Although the PPP held the largest number of seats, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan hesitated to invite Benazir Bhutto, the party's co-chairperson, to form the government. He only did so after she agreed to avoid interference in sensitive matters, including the nuclear program, Afghanistan policy, and military affairs (Abbas, 2015).

In December 1988, the PPP formed the central government with the support of smaller parties and independent members, making Benazir Bhutto the first female Prime

Minister of Pakistan and the Muslim world. In Punjab, traditionally dominated by the Muslim League, the IJI formed the provincial government after winning the majority. Rather than leading the opposition in the national assembly, Nawaz Sharif was appointed Chief Minister of Punjab, a decision supported by Major Asad Durrani (then DG MI) and General Hameed Gul. Reflecting on this, General Hameed Gul remarked, “Although we could not take Jalalabad, we managed to save Punjab” (Abbas, 2015).

With Benazir Bhutto at the helm in the center and Nawaz Sharif leading Punjab, political observers hoped the young leaders would steer Pakistan toward democratic stability and socio-economic progress. An international observer mission remarked, The November 1988 elections mark a historic event. The pre-election period, election process, and post-election developments hold great significance for establishing a viable political system and democratic stability in Pakistan. At 35 years old, Benazir Bhutto, an Oxford and Harvard alumna, became the first female Prime Minister in the Muslim world, joining a power triangle with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Major Asad Durrani, both continuing Ziaist policies (Mahmood, 2000).

Although Benazir’s government began with optimism, her relationship with the military soon deteriorated. The military resisted her authority as a civilian Prime Minister, and her appointment of S.R. Kallu as ISI Chief further exacerbated tensions. Additionally, escalating ethnic unrest and law-and-order issues in Karachi and Sindh compounded her challenges (Abbas, 2015).

Despite political uncertainty, Benazir Bhutto began her government with high hopes. However, her involvement in military matters quickly strained civil-military relations. The military resisted taking directives from a civilian Prime Minister, and her appointment of S.R. Kallu as ISI Chief worsened the situation, sparking tensions between the two institutions. Additionally, worsening law and order and ethnic unrest in Karachi and Sindh deepened these challenges (Abbas, 2015).

In March 1989, the PPP attempted a no-confidence vote against Nawaz Sharif’s Punjab government, but it failed, further damaging relations between the center and the province . Around the same time, following the Geneva Accord, Soviet troops began withdrawing from Afghanistan, drawing international attention. The PPP government

introduced a new Afghanistan policy that conflicted with military interests, leading the military to view Benazir Bhutto's administration as a threat to its Afghan strategy

In October 1989, under military establishment instructions, the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) introduced a no-confidence motion against Benazir Bhutto in the national assembly. However, it failed as the opposition could not secure the required number of MNAs' support. Rising ethnic violence and a deteriorating law-and-order situation in Karachi and Sindh created a political crisis, pushing the PPP government to the edge of collapse. Ultimately, on August 6, 1990, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, with support from General Mirza Aslam Beg, dismissed Benazir Bhutto's government under Article 58(2)(b), derailing democracy.

3.7 The IJI Era (1990-1993)

Following the overthrow of the PPP administration, the Islamic Democratic Alliance also (II) a coalition of conservative parties, won the 1990 elections, appointing Nawaz Sharif as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif began his government with a smooth start, benefiting from three major advantages that Benazir Bhutto never had. He had a clear majority in parliament, IJI-led governments were in control of most provinces, and he enjoyed the support of both the military establishment and the president. In his first speech after taking office as Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif assured the nation of a government free from conflicts and class divisions. He expressed his willingness to work alongside all political parties, including the PPP, to address both domestic and international issues. He promised to establish a democratic system rooted in consensus and inclusiveness. However, these commitments did not translate into action, and his government gradually turned into a semi-authoritarian system where power was shared between the Prime Minister, the president, and the military chief. This arrangement worked as long as Nawaz Sharif refrained from interfering in military matters or challenging their authority (Hussain, 2013).

Meanwhile, the opposition found an opportunity to criticize Nawaz Sharif's government, calling it a danger to democracy. Various political groups, including nationalist and religious parties like JUI-F led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP) under Nawab Akbar Bugti, Hizb-e-Jihad of Agha Murtaza Poya, and Mazdoor Kissan Party (MKP) led by Fateyab Ali Khan, came together to form a unified opposition under Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan. On October 1, 1991, they launched the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with the sole aim of removing the Nawaz government from power.

The refusal of Maulana Sami-ul-Haq, leader of JUI-S, to cooperate with the IJI government further disrupted the alliance of pro-Zia groups. The opposition skillfully used this situation to their advantage and strongly opposed the government's policies. The NDA mocked the Ziaist forces, describing them as a divided and disorganized group. Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan remarked that with JUI-S's withdrawal, the IJI collapsed and could no longer function. Later, the NDA aligned itself with the PPP-led People's Democratic Alliance, which had been a strong opposition to the IJI since the 1988 election s.

Nawaz Sharif's government faced increasing challenges as tensions grew between him, the president, and the military leadership over policy and governance issues. The main conflict erupted in January 1993 when Nawaz Sharif announced plans to repeal the 8th Amendment and reduce the president's powers. This power struggle continued and eventually led to the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif's government by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan on April 18, 1993, using Article 58(2)(b), with covert support from the military elite.

3.8 The Second PPP Era (1993-1996)

In 1993, Nawaz Sharif's government was dismissed before completing its term, making it the third consecutive civilian government removed under Article 58(2b) since 1985. Prior to Nawaz, Muhammad Khan Junejo in 1985 and Benazir Bhutto in 1990 also faced the same fate. Between 1988 and 1993, the military had considerable influence over political decisions, which made it difficult for elected governments to function and for democracy to grow.

After Nawaz's government fell in October 1993, new elections were announced, and Moen Qureshi was appointed as caretaker prime minister to manage the process. The main political rivals in the 1993 elections were Benazir Bhutto's PPP and Nawaz Sharif's PML. Unlike before, both parties ran separately, without teaming up with others. However, the PPP and PML (Junejo) came to an agreement to support a single candidate and avoid direct competition. After the elections, they agreed to cooperate. In addition to these two main parties, other groups also took part in the elections, including the Pakistan Islamic Front led by Qazi Hussain Ahmad, Isami Jamhoori Mahaz (IJM), a coalition of JUI-F and JUI-N, Muttahida Deni Mahaz, an alliance of right-wing and religious parties, and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which brought together 24 left-wing, regional, and nationalist parties (Rizvi, 2014).

In the elections, the People Party, led by Benazir Bhutto and supported by its ally PML-J, secured 86 seats, becoming the largest party in the national assembly. PML-Junejo secured 6 out of 86 seats. The PML-N obtained 73 seats; IJM got 4 seats, the Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF) secured 3 seats, and the Muttahida Deni Mahaz (MDM) garnered 2 seats in the national assembly. Fifteen independent candidates were elected as members of the National Assembly of Pakistan (ECP report, 1993).

On October 19, 1993, the Pakistan People Party, supported by PML-J led by Nasir Hamid Chatta, independent candidates, and smaller parties, formed a coalition government at the federal level. Benazir Bhutto, as the chairperson of PPP, became the prime minister for the second time. PPP also established its governments in Punjab and Sindh. In Balochistan, PML-N collaborated with Baloch nationalist parties to form a coalition government. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PML-N and ANP initially formed a coalition government, but after six months, PPP dissolved this setup and established its own government in the province. After these elections, the presidential election took place in November 1993. Farooq Ahmad Khan Laghari, who had served as foreign minister during Benazir's earlier tenure, defeated Wasim Sajjad of PML-N to become the president. Analysts initially regarded Farooq Laghari's presidency as a positive move for PPP. However, this perception changed when, on November 6, 1996, he dismissed the PPP-led government of Benazir Bhutto, citing its inability to introduce meaningful reforms, ensure political stability, and provide good governance.

3.9 The 1997 Election and Nawaz Sharif Second Term

A caretaker federal administration was established under former National Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Miraj Khalid to supervise the forthcoming general election, which is scheduled for February 3, 1997, following the dissolution of the PPP-led government in November 1996. A similar arrangement was set up for four provincial assemblies and federally administered tribal areas.

A total of forty-seven political parties participated in the elections, including the PML-N and the prominent PPP. Multiple factions of the PPP, including PPP-SB and PPP-Z, associated with the Bhutto group, participated in these elections. In addition to MQM Haqiqi and the MQM-Altaf Group, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), led by former cricketer Imran Khan, has also begun its electoral journey.

All participating political parties launched vigorous election campaigns filled with high-profile promises aimed at garnering public support. The religio-political parties centered their campaigns around Islamic themes, presenting themselves as champions of Islamic values. The PTI, despite its enthusiasm and positioning as an alternative to the traditional parties, struggled to capture the electorate's attention. Meanwhile, the campaigns of the PPP and PML-N devolved into a cycle of hollow slogans and blame games, failing to resonate with voters.

The February 1997 elections resulted in a resounding victory for the Pakistan Muslim League, which secured 136 seats, emerging as the largest party in the National Assembly. In contrast, the previously ruling PPP suffered a significant defeat, managing only 18 seats. The Awami National Party (ANP) won 9 seats, while the MQM secured 12 seats. Independent candidates won 21 seats in the National Assembly. The PML-N also excelled at the provincial level, sweeping the polls in Punjab with 211 out of 240 seats and performing well in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh as well (ECP Report, 1997).

With a substantial majority, the Pakistan Muslim League took office on February 17, 1997, marking the second term for Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister. The PML-N formed governments in three out of four provinces, with Shahbaz Sharif as Chief Minister in Punjab and a coalition government with the ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In Sindh, the PML-N formed a coalition with the MQM. In his inaugural address to the nation, Nawaz Sharif outlined an ambitious reform agenda intended to revitalize Pakistan's economy and administrative systems. He emphasized a departure from the political victimization that had characterized previous governments, asserting that his administration would prioritize meritocracy. Following the passage of the 13th and 14th amendments to the Constitution, Nawaz Sharif emerged as the most powerful Prime Minister since Pakistan's independence. These constitutional reforms created a stable political environment, allowing him to pursue radical changes without the fear of opposition from within or outside his party.

However, this perceived stability was short-lived. Nawaz Sharif's attempt to replace the incumbent Army Chief, General Pervez Musharraf, with his favored Lt-General Khawaja Zia Uddin, during Musharraf's return from a trip to Sri Lanka, precipitated a crisis. The military's response was swift; on October 12, 1999, General Musharraf executed an extra-constitutional military coup that ousted Nawaz Sharif, marking the end of the third democratic period in Pakistan and ushering in a fourth military rule.

The PML-N era was characterized by significant electoral victories and ambitious reform agendas, reflecting a brief period of political stability and governance. However, the swift dissolution of Nawaz Sharif's government highlighted the persistent influence of the military in Pakistan's political landscape. The military's intervention not only disrupted the democratic process but also underscored the fragility of civilian rule in the face of institutional rivalries. The events of October 1999 served as a poignant reminder of the challenges facing Pakistan's democracy, wherein military authority frequently overshadowed elected governance.

3.10 The Era of General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008)

General Pervez Musharraf removed Nawaz Sharif's government from power and declared a nationwide state of emergency on October 15, 1999. Along with suspending the constitution, he dissolved the Senate, national, and provincial assemblies and assumed the role of chief executive. Just two days later, on October 17, Musharraf presented a seven-point agenda, pledging grassroots democratic reforms. This led to the 2001 devolution plan, which introduced a local government system. Critics, however, saw this as a strategy to legitimize his rule by incorporating non-partisan politicians into the system.

In August 2002, Musharraf announced the Legal Framework Order (LFO) and scheduled elections for October. These elections were set to fill 342 National Assembly seats, including 60 reserved for women and 10 for non-Muslims (Khan, 2009). With mounting criticism over the regime's lack of legitimacy, the elections were perceived as an attempt to gain civilian backing. To reinforce his control, Musharraf formed an alliance with the PML-Q, a pro-military political party. This collaboration gave the impression of democratic governance while effectively allowing Musharraf to retain power from 2002 to 2007.

Musharraf's control was further strengthened on December 26, 2003, when he secured parliamentary approval for the 17th constitutional amendment. This amendment provided legal cover for the LFO, legitimized his regime, and effectively transitioned Pakistan's system of government from a parliamentary to a presidential model. The amendment also had the support of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a religio-political alliance. From that point until 2007, Musharraf, as the uniformed president, exercised unchecked authority, backed by the military, establishment, and a subservient parliament, which served mainly to ratify his decisions. Musharraf's power started to decline in 2007 due to a number of factors, such as

the judiciary's crackdown, the Red Mosque operation (Lal Masjid), and Benazir Bhutto's return from exile (Misra, 2011).

3.11 Democratic Revival : Pakistan's journey from (2008 -2013)

The democratic trajectory of Pakistan has been undermined by both direct and indirect authoritarian pressures; typically, the parliament has been either absent, short-lived, or operated only as a rubber stamp under the control of prevailing powers. Despite the presence of civilian governments, the elected parliament remained fragile and its decisions mostly insignificant severely impeding political and democratic advancement in Pakistan.

The 2008 general elections led to a strengthening of political institutions, and after almost four decades, the 1973 constitution was fully restored, bringing back federal parliamentary democracy in Pakistan. These elections ended General Pervez Musharraf's military rule and allowed the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to form a coalition government at the center. This was a historic moment as, for the first time, a democratic transfer of power occurred, with the PPP-led civilian government completing its full five-year term.

During General Pervez Musharraf's military regime, the two key political parties, PML-N, led by Nawaz Sharif, and PPP, headed by Benazir Bhutto, who was in exile in London, signed the Charter of Democracy (COD) in May 2006. This agreement was aimed at opposing dictatorship and reinstating parliamentary democracy in Pakistan. The charter outlined future strategies for both parties, including resisting military rule, restoring the original 1973 constitution, integrating FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and safeguarding press and media freedoms. It also prioritized equal rights for minorities, women's empowerment, and proposed electoral reforms to ensure free and fair elections. Other key points included the establishment of an independent Election Commission, a neutral caretaker government formed through consensus between opposition and treasury benches, and a transparent voting process to combat corruption and discourage political defection (Memon, 2009).

3.12 Legal and structural reforms(2008-2013)

Between 2008 and 2013, the 13th National Assembly, led by the PPP, focused on legislative reforms to revive parliamentary democracy as outlined in the 2006 Charter of Democracy (COD). The PPP and its former rival, the PML-N, reached an agreement that facilitated the passage of 116 government bills and 18 private members' bills (PMBs), with

94 of these becoming law. Notably, 10 out of the 18 private bills were also enacted (FAFEN, 2013). Moreover, the assembly passed key constitutional amendments, including the 18th, 19th, and 20th amendments, which played a crucial role in restoring Pakistan's democratic structure.

3.13 The Democratic Transformation in Pakistan through the 18th Amendment

Under Mian Raza Rabbani's leadership, the parliamentary committee worked intensively, holding over 80 meetings and proposing 100 amendments that addressed nearly 75 topics in a short amount of time. By March 31, 2010, the committee had unanimously approved the 18th Amendment. The National Assembly passed the bill on April 8, followed by the Senate on April 15, and finally, President Asif Ali Zardari signed it into law on April 19, 2010. This amendment was a major step toward strengthening democracy under the 1973 Constitution and aimed to block future military interference, which had repeatedly destabilized the system in the past. Senator Raza Rabbani, often called the key figure behind this amendment, noted in an interview that it was the first time in the country's history that the President willingly gave up significant powers to the Prime Minister. He described it as "a turning point for democracy, shifting toward parliamentary supremacy" (Geo, 2010).

The following are some of the important aspect of 18th amendment related to democracy.

3.13.1 Strengthening constitutionalism and fundamental rights.

The 18th Amendment, passed by the 13th National Assembly of Pakistan, restored the 1973 Constitution to its original form, removing the influence of military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq. It declared General Pervez Musharraf's military coup of October 12, 1999, as illegal. The Legal Framework Order (LFO) of 2002, the Chief Executive Orders of 2002, and the 17th Amendment, which were enacted under Musharraf's military regime, were all nullified, leaving no space for military rule in the constitution.

A significant change was the revision of Article 6, which deals with high treason. This amendment clarified that any action to suspend, abrogate, or undermine the constitution would be classified as high treason. It also stated that no court, including the Supreme Court, could endorse such actions. This was a direct response to past military coups in 1977 and 1999, when military regimes suspended the constitution and sought judicial approval through

the doctrine of necessity. The revised Article 6 ensures that no such acts will be validated by any court in the future, effectively preventing military rule (Hussain & Ullah, 2012).

In addition to these measures, the 18th Amendment introduced important changes related to citizens' rights. It made free education a fundamental right for children between the ages of 5 and 16. It also included Article 19A, granting the public the right to access information on matters of public importance. The amendment further removed restrictions on the "Right to Association," which had been imposed under Musharraf's Chief Executive Order No. 24 of 2002 (Crisis Group, 2011).

3.13.2 Provincial autonomy and restructuring the Senate.

Provincial autonomy has been a longstanding demand of Pakistan's major political parties since independence. However, the 18th Amendment introduced substantial reforms to address this issue. It removed the concurrent legislative list from the constitution, transferring 40 out of 47 subjects and approximately 20-25 ministries to the provinces. As a result, federalism was effectively implemented in Pakistan for the first time since the 1973 Constitution (Islam, 2016).

The 18th Amendment also brought changes to the structure, role, and authority of the Senate. Previously, the Senate had 100 members, but under the revised Article 59, four additional seats were allocated for minorities, increasing its total membership to 104. Additionally, Article 91 states that the federal cabinet, comprising state ministers, is collectively accountable to both the National Assembly and the Senate. Furthermore, reports on the Principles of Policy, the Council of Common Interest (CCI), the NFC Award, and the Auditor General's findings, which were earlier presented only to the National Assembly, are now also submitted to the Senate.

3.13.3 Empowerment of Election Commission

The Eighteenth Amendment brought a transformative change by dismantling General Musharraf's electoral system and strengthening the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). It established a more transparent process for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner and four permanent members. Under this revised framework, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly must first agree on potential candidates for the Chief Election Commissioner. Once consensus is reached, three names are forwarded to a 12-

member parliamentary committee, formed by the National Assembly Speaker. This committee, which includes members from both houses of parliament and represents both the opposition and ruling coalition, makes the final selection. These reforms significantly enhanced the ECP's independence and effectiveness.

3.14 Civil-Military Relation (2008-2013)

Under the PPP government, the parliament took significant steps to strengthen democracy, including within the military institution itself. The military refrained from opposing the government's reform initiatives, showing the professionalism of its leadership. Even though there were incidents like the Memogate scandal, the Salala checkpoint attack, and the Osama bin Laden raid, which could have led to military intervention, the army chose to stick to its constitutional duties. Civil-military relations during this time entered a new phase, marked by an unprecedented level of cooperation.

3.15 Consensus Politics and Coalition governance

Consensus and joint decision-making are fundamental to any democratic system; without cooperation and mutual agreement, democracy cannot function effectively. The political culture, governmental priorities, and the relationship between the ruling party and the opposition play a critical role in fostering consensual politics. In Pakistan, achieving such political harmony has proven difficult due to the tendency to personalize politics and the opposition's lack of tolerance. Traditionally, the government and opposition preferred conflict over collaboration. However, following the February 2008 elections, the PPP-led government ushered in a new era of consensual politics, where all major national political parties, including PPP, PML-N, ANP, JUI, and MQM, despite their varied agendas and support bases, came together to tackle national issues and push the democratic process forward (Shafqat, 2018). Most of the laws passed during the PPP administration were the result of thoughtful collective decision-making within parliament.

A notable example of this new approach was the passage of the historic 18th Amendment, which was a product of the consensus reached by all major political parties. They also agreed on addressing the political role of the military. In addition, the coalition partners pledged to work towards the country's economic progress through joint policies. In May 2009, after extensive consultations, the government and opposition initiated an operation in the Swat Valley and Malakand to combat terrorist groups, particularly the TTP

and Al-Qaida. They also made a collective resolution not to repeat the confrontational politics that characterized the 1990s.

CHAPTER-4

CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The state of Pakistan's democracy after 2013 is closely connected to key events and agreements from earlier years, especially the 2006 Charter of Democracy (COD). This charter, signed by the two main political parties Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) was a major step toward political unity. It aimed to reduce military interference in civilian affairs, promote democratic practices, and strengthen parliamentary institutions. While the COD was an important milestone for democratic progress, the years after 2013 showed that these goals faced many challenges due to internal divisions and external pressures(Khan & Alam)

The COD also sought to redefine civil-military relations, as previous military interventions had consistently undermined democratic institutions. Following the COD, Pakistan experienced a brief period of political stabilization, with the PPP completing a full term in office from 2008 to 2013. Nevertheless, the democratic system faced renewed challenges from both within and beyond political institutions, as the initial bipartisan solidarity dissipated amid political rivalries. These political dynamics set the stage for the contested electoral environment and political fragmentation that would characterize Pakistan's democratic landscape post-2013.

Moreover, the COD was aimed at fostering judicial independence, a crucial aspect of democratic governance. The judiciary, previously seen as susceptible to influence from both military and political elites, began asserting its role in enforcing accountability a development that would later influence Pakistan's democracy in complex ways .For instance, judicial actions against prominent political figures post-2013, including the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif in 2017, underscored the judiciary's growing influence and raised questions about its impartiality in political matters . Consequently, while the COD envisioned a cooperative political environment bolstered by autonomous institutions, the judiciary's evolving role highlighted both advances in accountability and the potential for judicial overreach.

These foundational agreements and early democratic experiments formed a baseline for expectations of democratic resilience. Yet, as political polarization intensified and institutional alliances shifted, the post-2013 period exposed gaps in the COD's capacity to sustain a stable democratic system. The failure to fully implement the COD's provisions

reflects an ongoing struggle within Pakistan's political institutions to consolidate democracy amid competing interests and periodic crises.

4.1 Key Developments in Pakistan's Political Landscape

The post-2013 period in Pakistan witnessed significant political events that shaped and, in many cases, tested the resilience of democratic institutions. Key developments during this time include mass protests, judicial rulings, and shifting alliances among political entities, each of which impacted democratic governance and public trust in political institutions.

One of the earliest defining events was the 2014 sit-in led by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and its leader, Imran Khan, against the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) government. The 126-day sit-in protested alleged electoral rigging in the 2013 general elections and underscored the rise of populist movements that questioned the legitimacy of elected institutions (Ullah et al., 2022). This marked a shift in Pakistan's political culture, as populism became a powerful tool for mobilizing support and challenging mainstream parties. Analysts argue that these tactics exacerbated political polarization and set a precedent for direct confrontations with the ruling government

In 2017, the disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by the Supreme Court on corruption charges marked another pivotal moment. Based on findings from the Panama Papers and the judicial inquiry that followed, Sharif's ousting underscored the judiciary's growing role in political affairs. Although this decision was framed as a victory for accountability, critics have argued that judicial interventions in Pakistan often blur the lines between accountability and political maneuvering, raising questions about judicial impartiality and the broader impacts on democratic stability (Wolf, 2017).

The 2018 general elections brought the PTI to power, marking a historic shift in Pakistan's political landscape with Imran Khan as Prime Minister. However, accusations of military influence over the electoral process and subsequent governance stirred controversy, further fueling debates over civil-military relations in Pakistan. Scholars and commentators have noted that the perceived backing of the PTI by military elements undermined public perceptions of electoral integrity and led to renewed concerns over the military's influence in politics (Siddiqi, 2020)

In 2022, political instability reached a peak with the vote of no-confidence that led to Khan's removal from office, making him the first Prime Minister in Pakistan's history to be ousted by such a measure. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a coalition of opposition parties, led this unprecedented parliamentary move, sparking nationwide debates on constitutional processes and coalition governance. While proponents of the PDM argued that the motion reflected parliamentary accountability, PTI supporters contended that external interference particularly from military and judicial quarters played a role in Khan's removal.

In 2023 and into early 2024, Pakistan's political landscape continued to be marked by turbulence, with economic crises, political violence, and ongoing tensions between the military and civilian leaders. Notably, the PTI faced crackdowns, with many of its leaders arrested or barred from political activities, following widespread protests in response to Khan's legal battles and disqualification from holding public office. These developments have raised significant concerns about political pluralism and the repression of opposition voices, intensifying scrutiny on Pakistan's democratic environment.

The accumulation of these political events highlights a recurring pattern of instability and institutional strain in Pakistan. Each development since 2013 reflects complex dynamics among political parties, the military, and the judiciary, as well as the growing influence of populism in shaping public opinion and challenging democratic norms. The result is an increasingly polarized political landscape, in which democratic processes and institutions are tested by both internal disputes and external pressures.

4.2 Major Challenges to Democracy in Pakistan (2013-2023)

From 2013 to 2023, Pakistan's democracy encountered numerous obstacles that complicated the consolidation of democratic norms and institutions. These challenges emerged from a complex interplay of political, institutional, and economic factors, each exerting distinct pressures on the democratic system. Political instability, military influence, judicial interventions, and restrictions on media freedom not only tested the resilience of democratic structures but also influenced public perceptions of governance. Additionally, the rise of populism and increasing political polarization contributed to social divisions, while economic instability heightened demands for immediate, often undemocratic, solutions. Together, these factors created an environment where democracy in Pakistan has been marked by persistent vulnerabilities, demonstrating the intricate balance required to sustain democratic governance amidst diverse challenges.

4.2.1 Political Instability and Fragmentation

Political instability and fragmentation have been recurring obstacles to democratic governance in Pakistan from 2013 to 2023. Frequent changes in government, internal divisions within political parties, and the challenges of coalition politics have eroded the stability necessary for effective governance. For instance, the 2014 PTI-led sit-in movement against the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N) administration, which lasted 126 days, was a response to alleged electoral irregularities in the 2013 elections. This prolonged protest not only disrupted governance but also set a precedent for other populist movements that challenged the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021). Such episodes of civil unrest highlighted the difficulty of maintaining political consensus and order within Pakistan's democratic framework.

Coalition politics has further complicated governance. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a coalition of opposition parties that ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote in 2022, faced significant challenges in sustaining a stable government afterward. As the coalition struggled to navigate internal ideological differences and policy priorities, critics argued that coalition governance lacked cohesion and stability, often resulting in policy gridlock and frequent leadership changes. These divisions have fostered a political environment where rivalries often overshadow collaboration, ultimately weakening the democratic process (Nasir & Faqir, 2021)

Moreover, internal divisions within major parties have also contributed to political fragmentation. Power struggles within the PML-N, especially following Nawaz Sharif's disqualification, led to factionalism, affecting the party's cohesion and its ability to present a unified front. Similarly, the PTI, facing pressures from its leadership and from opposition forces, experienced internal conflicts, further fueling fragmentation in Pakistan's political landscape. Political analysts suggest that such divisions undermine the credibility of political parties and reduce their capacity to contribute effectively to democratic consolidation.

This persistent instability has not only delayed essential reforms but has also hindered efforts to address socio-economic challenges that require consistent, long-term policy interventions. Ultimately, Pakistan's struggle with political instability and fragmentation illustrates the need for more cohesive political strategies to strengthen democratic governance amid ongoing institutional and ideological divisions.

4.2.2 Military Influence in Civil Affairs

The influence of Pakistan's military on civil affairs has remained one of the most significant and enduring challenges to democratic governance in the country. Historically, Pakistan's military has played an active role in politics, often stepping in during times of perceived crisis to assert control over national governance. Despite a formal return to civilian rule in 2008, the military's informal power over various state institutions and political processes has continued, influencing civil governance in ways that limit the autonomy of elected leaders.

In the post-2013 period, military involvement became increasingly visible in both direct and indirect forms. The 2018 general elections, which brought the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to power, were marked by widespread allegations of military influence. Reports and independent observers suggested that the military's backing of PTI created an uneven playing field, favoring one political party over others and undermining the transparency of the electoral process (Haleemi & Shah, 2024). Many analysts argue that this involvement deepened public skepticism toward the electoral system and compromised Pakistan's democratic integrity.

Further, the military's influence extended beyond elections and into areas of governance typically reserved for civilian authorities. For instance, in the domains of foreign policy and internal security, civilian leaders frequently deferred to military priorities, often at the expense of democratic decision-making. This dynamic was especially evident in Pakistan's handling of its relationship with neighboring India, where the military's dominance in security policy limited the government's capacity to pursue independent diplomatic initiatives. Such instances illustrate how military influence in civil domains can restrict the democratic agency of elected representatives.

The military's relationship with the judiciary has also raised concerns about the balance of power in Pakistan's democracy. Judicial rulings in high-profile cases, such as the disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2017, have led to speculation about the judiciary's independence and its alignment with military interests (Wolf, 2017). Observers have noted that these interventions contribute to a culture where democratic institutions are often viewed as extensions of military influence, eroding public confidence in the impartiality of state institutions.

Overall, the pervasive influence of the military in Pakistan's civil affairs continues to pose challenges to democratic stability. While military leaders often justify their role as necessary for national security, the impact on democratic processes is profound, as it constrains the ability of civilian governments to operate independently, thereby complicating efforts to establish a resilient democratic framework.

4.2.3 Judicial Interventions and Political Accountability

Judicial interventions have played a contentious role in shaping Pakistan's political landscape, particularly from 2013 to 2023. While the judiciary is constitutionally tasked with ensuring accountability, its involvement in high-profile political cases has sparked debates about the boundaries of judicial authority in a democratic system. The disqualification of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2017 on charges of corruption, based on the Panama Papers investigation, is a prominent example where judicial rulings directly influenced the political leadership of the country. Although the verdict was framed as a move to uphold accountability, critics argue that such judicial decisions have, at times, exceeded traditional checks and balances, shifting political power dynamics and influencing public perception of the judiciary's neutrality (Jatoi et al., 2022).

This trend of judicial activism is often viewed as a double-edged sword in Pakistan's democratic context. On one hand, judicial interventions have been lauded for addressing corruption and promoting transparency. On the other, the judiciary's involvement in political cases has been criticized for contributing to governmental instability and creating an impression of selective accountability. For instance, political observers note that judicial scrutiny tends to focus disproportionately on certain political figures or parties, leading to accusations of bias and eroding confidence in the judiciary as an impartial institution.

Furthermore, the judiciary's active role in governance has, at times, intersected with military influence, raising questions about the independence of judicial decisions in politically sensitive cases. In several instances, particularly in cases that involved national security or civil-military relations, judicial verdicts appeared aligned with military interests, casting doubt on judicial autonomy. Such instances blur the separation of powers between institutions and risk undermining public trust in the judiciary as a safeguard of democratic values.

4.2.4 Media Freedom and Censorship

Media freedom in Pakistan has faced persistent challenges from 2013 to 2023, as restrictions on press autonomy and increased censorship have impacted the role of media in supporting democratic discourse. A free press is a cornerstone of democracy, providing citizens with information, holding power accountable, and fostering public debate. However, in Pakistan, media outlets and journalists have increasingly encountered restrictions and intimidation, especially when reporting on sensitive issues such as military influence, government corruption, or civil-military relations. Media watchdogs have noted that Pakistan's press freedom ranking has declined over the past decade, highlighting the increasing pressures faced by journalists and media organizations.

One significant aspect of media restrictions has been the direct and indirect censorship of television news channels, digital media platforms, and print outlets. Reports indicate that media regulatory bodies, often influenced by state or military authorities, have issued directives to control coverage on controversial topics, such as political protests, accountability cases, or elections. For example, during the PTI sit-ins and other political protests, restrictions on media coverage were implemented to limit public exposure to anti-government sentiments, raising concerns about the state's influence over media narratives. Such restrictions not only infringe on freedom of speech but also shape public opinion by curating the information accessible to citizens (Parveen & Bhatti, 2018).

Digital media and social media platforms have also faced increasing scrutiny, with efforts to regulate and control online content intensifying in recent years. In 2020, the introduction of the Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules gave authorities greater power to monitor and remove online content deemed "harmful" to national security or public order. Critics argue that such laws are often broad and vague, leading to self-censorship among journalists and activists on social media due to fear of reprisal. This trend toward regulating digital spaces further restricts citizens' access to diverse viewpoints, undermining the democratic principle of open debate (Abbas et al., 2023).

The media's role in Pakistan's democracy has also been shaped by economic pressures, as media organizations reliant on advertising revenue from state-controlled entities face pressure to align with government policies. This "soft censorship," where economic incentives and disincentives influence editorial policy, has become a tactic to control media narratives subtly, leading to increased self-censorship among journalists and editors. These

economic pressures weaken the media's ability to function as a check on power, reducing its efficacy in promoting democratic transparency.

4.2.5 Rise of Populism and Political Polarization

The rise of populism and increasing political polarization have become prominent challenges to Pakistan's democratic stability from 2013 to 2023. Populist rhetoric, often championed by charismatic leaders, has contributed to deepening divisions within the political landscape, undermining efforts for national unity and inclusive governance. Populism in Pakistan, particularly in the form of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, has reshaped the political narrative, mobilizing large segments of the population by portraying the elite political establishment as corrupt and disconnected from the common people. This form of politics, which often operates through direct appeals to "the people" against perceived elites, has not only intensified political polarization but also heightened tensions between different political factions and institutions.

Imran Khan's rise to power in 2018 marked a significant moment for populism in Pakistan. His political discourse, emphasizing anti-corruption, accountability, and a "new Pakistan," resonated with many citizens frustrated with the traditional political elite, particularly the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). However, critics argue that Khan's populism also fostered a highly adversarial political environment. His confrontational stance toward political rivals, combined with claims of judicial and military support, led to a climate of political instability and weakened democratic norms (Hassan, 2020). The populist approach, while effective in galvanizing public support, also undermined institutional trust and fostered division, rather than fostering consensus-building in governance.

Political polarization, driven in part by populist movements, has also been exacerbated by the media, which increasingly takes partisan positions, further entrenching ideological divides. Media outlets, often aligned with specific political parties, amplify narratives that cater to particular political audiences, making it difficult to cultivate a shared public discourse. This division is not limited to the political elites but extends to society, where individuals are increasingly aligned with one of the major political camps, often based on identity politics or ideological loyalty. As a result, public dialogue has become more polarized, with less room for bipartisan collaboration and compromise, which is essential for a functional democracy.

Moreover, populist leaders have increasingly resorted to anti-establishment rhetoric, framing state institutions like the judiciary and the military as impediments to progress and democracy. This has created a tension between elected officials and state institutions, particularly the judiciary, which has been accused of aligning with political rivals. The resulting fragmentation has weakened the cohesion of democratic institutions, further destabilizing governance.

4.2.6 Economic Instability and its Democratic Implications

Economic instability has been a persistent challenge to Pakistan's democracy from 2013 to 2023, with significant implications for the country's governance, institutional integrity, and democratic processes. Economic difficulties, including high inflation, external debt, unemployment, and poverty, have not only strained the socio-economic fabric of Pakistan but have also undermined public trust in democratic institutions. Economic instability often results in public disillusionment with elected governments, making it easier for populist narratives and anti-establishment movements to gain traction. Moreover, prolonged economic crises limit the state's ability to address fundamental governance challenges, leaving democratic institutions vulnerable to external pressures, including military influence and judicial activism .

The economic crises under both the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) governments have illustrated the intricate relationship between economic performance and political stability. For instance, the 2018-2020 period under PTI, marked by soaring inflation and a currency devaluation, contributed to a decline in public approval of the government and its handling of economic policies. The government's failure to stabilize the economy led to widespread frustration, particularly among the middle and working classes, who felt the burden of rising prices and stagnant wages. This economic discontent served as fertile ground for opposition parties, who capitalized on public dissatisfaction to mount challenges to the legitimacy of the PTI government.

Economic instability also exacerbates political fragmentation by creating incentives for populist leaders to offer quick fixes and simplistic solutions to complex economic problems. For example, Imran Khan's 2018 election campaign focused heavily on promises of economic reform, though his administration struggled to deliver on these promises, further polarizing the political landscape. The inability of successive governments to address chronic economic challenges has led to a loss of faith in democratic processes, with many citizens

perceiving the political elite as unable or unwilling to tackle the country's most pressing issues(Bari,2020).

Additionally, economic instability has reinforced Pakistan's dependence on international financial institutions, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to stabilize its economy. The conditionalities imposed by the IMF, including austerity measures, tax hikes, and cuts in public spending, have often been perceived as detrimental to the welfare of the Pakistani populace, further fueling public discontent and eroding trust in democratic governance. The economic hardship caused by these measures has also resulted in large-scale protests and public unrest, which, in turn, has destabilized political dynamics and created a more volatile environment for democracy to thrive.

Furthermore, economic crises often exacerbate class divisions and regional disparities, which can lead to greater political polarization and weaken national cohesion. In a society already fragmented along ethnic, linguistic, and provincial lines, economic inequality serves as a potent source of political discontent, amplifying grievances and making it difficult for political leaders to unite the population under common democratic ideals. These disparities complicate efforts to build a cohesive political culture and undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

4.3 Political Parties and Their Role in Democratization

Political parties are central to the functioning of any democracy, acting as intermediaries between the electorate and the government. In Pakistan, political parties have played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of democratization, influencing both the consolidation and the challenges faced by the country's democratic institutions. From the early years following the establishment of Pakistan's democracy, Political parties have been instrumental in representing various ideological, regional, and social interests, but their role has also been marked by internal fragmentation, external pressures, and conflicts with the military and judiciary. This section explores the contributions and limitations of major political parties in Pakistan, analyzing how they have both advanced and hindered the process of democratization, particularly in the post-2013 period. By examining the PML-N, PTI, and the PDM coalition, this analysis highlights how political parties have navigated Pakistan's complex political landscape, contributing to both the stability and instability of democratic governance.

4.4 PML-N Government (2013-2018)

The Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) government, which assumed office in 2013 under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, represented a significant period in Pakistan's democratic development. This era, characterized by efforts to strengthen the economy and infrastructure, was also marked by intense political and institutional challenges, impacting democratic governance in profound ways. The period highlights both the aspirations of civilian rule and the limitations inherent in Pakistan's complex political landscape, influenced by deep-rooted power dynamics between the civil government and military establishment.

4.4.1 Political Landscape and Party Ideology

The 2013 electoral victory of PML-N symbolized a hopeful step toward stabilizing civilian rule, particularly following Pakistan's turbulent history of military takeovers and abbreviated democratic periods. PML-N presented itself as a pro-development party with a strong economic agenda, promising to address Pakistan's critical issues, including economic stagnation, infrastructure deficits, and the energy crisis. The party's vision for economic recovery emphasized large-scale infrastructure projects, notably the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC was projected as a transformative initiative, attracting substantial Chinese investment into Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and transport sectors, aiming to revitalize the national economy and bolster Pakistan's strategic importance in regional trade networks. The party's policy approach extended beyond economic development to include an attempt to establish greater civilian control over key policy domains, traditionally dominated by the military, such as national security and foreign relations. Sharif's initiatives to assert civilian authority in these areas generated tensions with the military establishment, which perceived some of these moves as encroachments on its influence, particularly concerning Pakistan's foreign policy with India and Afghanistan (Wolf, 2017). Sharif's outreach to India, for instance, sparked opposition from the military, leading to a complex interplay between elected officials and military stakeholders, ultimately shaping the party's experience in governance.

Key Policy Initiatives and Electoral Strategies

During its tenure, the PML-N government prioritized economic development and infrastructure, with CPEC as the flagship project. Designed to elevate Pakistan's economic stature, CPEC included substantial investments in roads, ports, and power generation, notably

the Sahiwal Coal Power Project and the Port Qasim Power Plant, aiming to address Pakistan's chronic power shortages and to lay the groundwork for sustained economic growth. Through these initiatives, PML-N positioned itself as a party capable of delivering infrastructure and economic growth, centralizing these achievements in its electoral strategies.

Nevertheless, PML-N faced substantial political opposition, particularly from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, who mobilized a widespread protest movement challenging the credibility of the 2013 election. PTI's persistent calls for accountability and anti-corruption measures resonated with a significant segment of the population. This movement, culminating in a prolonged sit-in (dharna) in Islamabad in 2014, underscored PTI's challenge to PML-N's legitimacy, as PTI alleged electoral rigging and corruption within the ruling government (Mamoon et al., 2017). The heightened political rivalry between PML-N and PTI polarized Pakistan's political landscape, placing additional strain on the government's ability to govern without constant opposition.

4.4.2 Challenges Faced: Institutional and Political Instability

The PML-N government encountered a series of institutional and political challenges, highlighting the fragile nature of civilian rule in Pakistan. Key incidents, such as the Dawn Leaks controversy and the Panama Papers scandal, escalated tensions between PML-N and the military, while also straining relations between the executive and judiciary. The 2016 Dawn Leaks controversy, involving the publication of sensitive civil-military discussions, revealed the military's unease with civilian attempts to manage national security concerns, intensifying suspicions about the government's commitment to national security (Wolf, 2017). This event exacerbated the civil-military rift, constraining the government's authority and adding another layer of complexity to civil-military relations.

The Panama Papers scandal in 2016 posed a significant legal and political challenge for Nawaz Sharif and his family, who were implicated in allegations of undisclosed offshore assets. The scandal initiated a Supreme Court investigation, leading to Sharif's disqualification from office in 2017 under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution, which requires public officeholders to be "sadiq and ameen" (truthful and honest). This judicial intervention raised concerns about the judiciary's growing role as an actor in political affairs, with critics arguing that the judiciary's actions reflected external pressures, particularly from the military and PTI (Mamoon et al., 2017). The disqualification of Sharif disrupted the continuity of

civilian leadership, reinforcing debates around judicial independence and its implications for democracy.

These controversies weakened PML-N's administrative stability and public confidence. The combination of PTI's populist critique, civil-military frictions, and judicial interventions created a politically volatile environment, destabilizing PML-N's governance and its ability to fully implement its agenda. The resignation of Sharif was a defining moment in this period, as it symbolized the difficulties faced by civilian governments in managing powerful institutional interests and navigating political opposition.

4.4.3 Legacy and Impact on Democratic Norms

The legacy of the PML-N government from 2013 to 2018 remains complex, marked by both economic achievements and significant democratic challenges. On the one hand, the peaceful transfer of power in 2018 illustrated Pakistan's ability to uphold electoral processes, marking an incremental step in democratic continuity. PML-N's emphasis on infrastructure and CPEC created a lasting impact on Pakistan's economic and regional connectivity, though it left the country with high levels of debt, raising questions about the long-term viability of such projects.

Conversely, PML-N's tenure underscored the vulnerabilities of Pakistan's democratic institutions, as demonstrated by the recurring civil-military tensions and judicial interventions. The controversies surrounding Dawn Leaks and the Panama Papers highlighted the challenges civilian governments face in maintaining authority within a political framework influenced by the military and judiciary. These events illustrated the unfinished nature of Pakistan's democratic journey, as civilian governments must continuously negotiate their space in a landscape of powerful institutional actors, which impedes the full consolidation of democratic governance .

The PML-N era also provided a backdrop for PTI's rise, as it capitalized on the PML-N's perceived governance failures to campaign for accountability and reform. By the end of PML-N's term, PTI had successfully positioned itself as a formidable opposition force, setting the stage for a new phase in Pakistan's democratic development, albeit one accompanied by its own set of challenges and contradictions.

4.5 PTI Government (2018-2022)

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, led by Imran Khan, assumed power in 2018 after a highly contentious and polarized general election. The PTI's rise marked a significant shift in Pakistan's political landscape, as Khan campaigned on a platform of anti-corruption, economic reform, and "change" in the political system. Despite high public expectations, the PTI government's tenure was marked by challenges in governance, economic difficulties, and increasing political polarization, leading to a fraught relationship between the government, opposition, and state institutions.

4.5.1 Economic Challenges and Governance

Upon assuming office, the PTI government inherited a struggling economy characterized by a widening fiscal deficit, rising public debt, and dwindling foreign exchange reserves. In response, the government sought an emergency bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), securing a \$6 billion loan package in the early months of his of his government. The IMF-imposed conditions included fiscal austerity, a focus on revenue generation, and structural reforms in key sectors such as energy and taxation. However, the austerity measures introduced by the PTI government sparked widespread protests and criticism, as inflation soared, and unemployment increased, leading to public dissatisfaction. While inflation was temporarily reduced, the economy remained fragile, with Pakistan's GDP growth slowing to 3.29% in 2019 compare to 5.8% in the previous year. Critics argue that the PTI's economic policies, which leaned heavily on external loans, failed to address the structural issues in Pakistan's economy, such as low tax collection, inefficient state-owned enterprises, and reliance on remittances (Malik,2019).

The PTI government also promised significant reforms in sectors such as housing, education, and healthcare, but many of these remained unrealized due to bureaucratic delays, budget constraints, and political infighting. For instance, the government's ambitious "Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme" aimed to provide affordable housing to millions of Pakistanis, but the initiative faced numerous implementation hurdles, including land acquisition issues and resistance from the real estate sector. Similarly, the healthcare and education reforms promised by PTI were hampered by limited budget allocations and coordination failures between provincial and federal governments, leading to mixed results.

4.5.2 Populism and Political Polarization

One of the defining features of PTI's governance was its populist approach to politics, which involved Imran Khan positioning himself as the "savior" of Pakistan, frequently framing opposition leaders as corrupt and out of touch with the needs of the people. This populist rhetoric was not just a narrative; it was central to PTI's political identity, where Khan cast himself as a champion of the common man, fighting against the political elite who were perceived to have mismanaged the country's affairs for decades. The PTI's populist discourse painted a stark picture of an elite class, primarily represented by opposition parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), as responsible for the country's deep-rooted issues of corruption, inefficiency, and governance failures (Hussain et al., 2022). This approach was effective in gaining widespread support, particularly among the urban middle class, youth, and those disillusioned with the traditional political establishment. However, it also contributed to significant political polarization within Pakistan, as the populist rhetoric drew clear lines between the PTI's supporters and detractors.

This confrontational style of politics fueled a highly charged political climate in which PTI supporters and opposition groups were often engaged in a battle of narratives, with each side accusing the other of being complicit in the country's mismanagement. PTI's political strategy revolved around creating a sense of "us versus them" with PTI's leadership being portrayed as the legitimate voice of the people and the opposition parties as entrenched, corrupt elites. The use of social media was a critical component in this strategy. Imran Khan, along with his party's leadership, utilized social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to bypass traditional media channels and directly communicate with the masses. This direct engagement helped PTI mobilize public sentiment and shape political discourse in their favor, while also amplifying the divisive rhetoric that characterized much of the party's public communication.

The PTI's frequent attacks on opposition leaders, particularly from PPP and PML-N, played a significant role in stoking political tensions. The accusations of corruption, political dynasticism, and inefficiency were central to the narrative, which Imran Khan used to delegitimize the opposition and justify PTI's position as the alternative to the status quo. However, this strategy of vilifying political rivals not only helped consolidate PTI's base but also led to a toxic political environment where dialogue and compromise became increasingly

difficult. The polarization was amplified by the media, which, under the PTI government, often mirrored the tone of political discourse, either by supporting or criticizing the government in stark terms (Waseem,2020).

As PTI's narrative of change and anti-corruption resonated with a significant portion of the population, it also created friction with Pakistan's traditional political elite, including the military and the judiciary. PTI's populism and confrontational stance led to tensions with the political establishment, particularly as the party sought to exert greater control over state institutions. This led to a series of high-profile clashes, not just with political opponents but also with the judiciary, which Imran Khan often accused of bias and favoring the opposition. These tensions manifested in multiple legal and constitutional confrontations, undermining the democratic process and increasing political instability.

In 2019, opposition parties, feeling increasingly marginalized by PTI's dominance and anti-elite rhetoric, launched the "Pakistan Democratic Movement" (PDM) alliance. The PDM, which included some of Pakistan's most prominent political figures, such as Maulana Fazlur Rehman of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari of PPP, and Shehbaz Sharif of PML-N, aimed to challenge PTI's legitimacy and call for new elections. The PDM held large rallies across Pakistan, accusing the PTI of rigging the 2018 general elections and undermining democratic norms. The protests organized by the PDM, while calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan, were also fueled by widespread discontent over PTI's inability to address the country's economic challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and an increasing fiscal deficit. The government's failure to deliver on its promises, particularly economic reforms, led to growing dissatisfaction, even among PTI's own supporters (Hameed & Majeed, 2023)

At the same time, PTI's governance was increasingly marred by the challenges of managing the economy. The economic issues, particularly rising inflation and unemployment, further polarized the political landscape. While PTI supporters viewed the government's economic challenges as a result of inherited problems from previous administrations, opposition parties seized upon the failures, accusing the government of incompetence and economic mismanagement. These economic difficulties compounded political polarization, as opposing narratives clashed over the causes and solutions to Pakistan's crises.

The ongoing political instability also created fertile ground for PTI's critics to accuse the government of undermining democratic norms. In particular, the PTI's refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue with the opposition and its tendency to frame the opposition as enemies of the state led to an atmosphere where democratic values, such as the protection of dissent and the role of opposition parties, were increasingly undermined. This exacerbated a political environment in which compromise became difficult and the prospects for democratic stability grew more uncertain.

4.5.3 Civil-Military Relations: A Complex Dynamic

The relationship between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and the military establishment during Imran Khan's tenure (2018-2022) was marked by complexity and frequent tension, reflecting the deeply entrenched role of the military in Pakistan's political and governance structures. The military has historically been a central player in the country's decision-making processes, particularly in matters of national security and foreign policy, and its influence often extends to shaping political outcomes. PTI's initial rise to power was heavily facilitated by the military, which was widely believed to have provided crucial support for the party's 2018 electoral success. The military's backing was especially evident in the run-up to the elections, where PTI received favorable treatment in terms of media coverage and political maneuvering, raising questions about the extent to which the military's involvement tilted the political playing field in PTI's favor (Hameed & Majeed, 2023).

However, as PTI settled into power, the dynamics between the civilian government and the military began to shift, revealing cracks in what had initially seemed like a symbiotic relationship. While Imran Khan's government often sought to present itself as independent from the military, the reality was that key policy decisions—especially in areas of national security and foreign policy continued to be influenced by military priorities. This was particularly evident in the early years of PTI's governance, when the military maintained a strong hand in shaping Pakistan's approach to key international issues, including relations with India, Afghanistan, and the United States.

The tension between the civilian government and the military was most apparent in the realm of foreign policy, where Imran Khan's government occasionally diverged from the military's traditional stance. For example, Imran Khan's government initially sought a more independent foreign policy, with a strong emphasis on improving relations with neighboring

countries, particularly India. However, the military's strategic objectives in the region, especially regarding Kashmir and India's increasingly aggressive posture, often collided with Khan's more cautious or conciliatory approach. Imran Khan's remarks about wanting to "teach India a lesson" on the Kashmir issue were met with criticism from opposition parties, but they were also seen as inconsistent with the military's more hardline approach toward India. This highlighted the challenge for a civilian government like PTI to balance its foreign policy ambitions with the military's entrenched position on security matters, particularly in South Asia.

Another point of contention arose in the government's handling of Afghanistan. The PTI government, under Imran Khan's leadership, adopted a more independent stance, particularly after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2021. Khan's vocal criticism of the U.S. and its handling of the Afghan crisis drew significant attention, as it was seen to be at odds with the military's long-standing relations with the United States, especially in the context of defense and security cooperation. Imran Khan's skepticism about the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and his call for a more autonomous foreign policy stance led to tensions with military leaders who had traditionally maintained strong ties with Washington (Wolf, 2023). While Khan's rhetoric was aimed at asserting Pakistan's sovereignty in foreign relations, it also revealed the limits of PTI's autonomy in foreign policy, where the military remained a key player.

Additionally, the military's influence was particularly evident in Pakistan's handling of national security issues, such as insurgency in Balochistan and counterterrorism efforts. Despite Imran Khan's attempts to project himself as a strong, independent leader on these matters, the military's control over national security strategy remained largely unchallenged. The PTI government found itself constrained by the military's operational dominance in regions such as Balochistan, where insurgency and ethnic tensions continued to plague the country. The military's role in managing the insurgency often through heavy-handed tactics was at odds with PTI's attempts to present a more human rights-centered approach. Similarly, the government's responses to terrorist groups and the challenges posed by India's military presence on Pakistan's eastern border were often seen as falling within the military's domain, limiting PTI's ability to implement its own security policies effectively.

The tensions between PTI and the military were further highlighted during the latter years of Imran Khan's tenure, especially as the government struggled with growing domestic

and economic challenges. The military's perceived role in mediating between political factions and its increasing influence over Pakistan's foreign policy became a source of frustration for Khan's administration. These tensions reached a climax when Khan accused the military of undermining his political authority, particularly in light of opposition-led protests and demands for early elections. The military's subtle but significant involvement in the political process led to a growing perception that the civilian government was constrained in its capacity to act independently.

4.5.4 Judicial Tensions and Accountability

The PTI government's approach to judicial accountability during Imran Khan's tenure was marked by growing tensions with the judiciary, particularly as the government sought to project itself as the champion of anti-corruption and transparency. Imran Khan's political narrative was heavily built around the promise of accountability, which he argued was essential to reform Pakistan's political culture and eliminate entrenched corruption. His government initiated several high-profile legal actions against opposition leaders, most notably Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), accusing them of corrupt practices and mismanagement of state resources. These efforts were framed by PTI as necessary steps to cleanse the political system and restore public trust in democratic institutions.(Jatoi et al., 2022)

However, this aggressive stance on accountability was not without controversy. Imran Khan's frequent criticisms of the judiciary, particularly during pivotal cases such as the Panama Papers investigation and Nawaz Sharif's subsequent disqualification from office, raised serious questions about the impartiality and independence of the judiciary. PTI's insistence that the judiciary had a responsibility to act as a check on political corruption often appeared to blend with the party's own political agenda, creating an environment of tension and mistrust between the executive and the judiciary (Rashid et al., 2023). While the government argued that the judiciary's intervention was necessary to hold corrupt politicians accountable, critics contended that PTI was using the legal process to target political opponents under the guise of anti-corruption reforms. The party's attempts to politicize judicial actions undermined the credibility of the judiciary, which is expected to function independently of political influence.

The judicial crisis surrounding the Panama Papers case, in which Nawaz Sharif was implicated in offshore holdings, exemplified the deepening rift between PTI and the

judiciary. Although the case was initially hailed as a victory for transparency and the rule of law, the subsequent disqualification of Nawaz Sharif raised concerns about judicial overreach and the political motivations behind such decisions. PTI's leadership, including Imran Khan, hailed the disqualification as a landmark victory in the fight against corruption. However, critics argued that the judiciary's intervention was politically motivated, particularly because the decision seemed to align with PTI's broader political goals of weakening the opposition and discrediting its leadership. This led to growing concerns that the judiciary, instead of acting as an impartial arbiter, was being drawn into Pakistan's highly polarized political landscape(Jatoi et al., 2022)

Further exacerbating tensions was the role of the military in the judicial process, which had a long history of influencing legal and political decisions in Pakistan. PTI's perceived alignment with the military raised suspicions that the judicial interventions were not solely driven by a desire for justice but were part of a broader political agenda supported by the military establishment. This situation deepened the divide between PTI and opposition parties, who accused the government of using the judiciary to settle political scores rather than focusing on genuine reforms aimed at strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions. The opposition also accused the judiciary of acting in a manner that was increasingly favorable to the PTI government and, by extension, the military, further eroding public confidence in the legal system.

Moreover, the PTI government's heavy reliance on judicial actions for political gain, combined with its public criticisms of judges and judicial processes, led to a situation where the judiciary's reputation was increasingly questioned. The credibility of legal institutions, which are crucial to any functioning democracy, was undermined by the perception that they were being used as tools of political warfare. Imran Khan's narrative of accountability often blurred the line between legitimate legal reforms and political maneuvering, ultimately leading to a situation where the judiciary's independence was compromised. The political polarization surrounding judicial decisions, particularly those involving opposition leaders, also created a climate of fear and mistrust in the legal process, undermining the very democratic values that PTI claimed to champion (Rashid et al., 2023)

The judicial tensions between PTI and the judiciary reached their zenith during the latter part of the government's tenure. As the political climate became increasingly unstable due to economic challenges, opposition protests, and growing public dissatisfaction, the

judiciary continued to play a central role in mediating the conflict. The PTI government's repeated clashes with the judiciary highlighted the extent to which Pakistan's democratic institutions were being politicized. The judiciary's role, while critical in ensuring legal accountability, became entangled in the broader political struggle, raising serious questions about the separation of powers and the long-term health of Pakistan's democratic system.

4.5.5 Media Freedom and Press Censorship

Under the PTI government, media freedom became one of the most contentious and troubling areas of governance. While Imran Khan initially campaigned on a platform of promoting transparency and accountability, his administration quickly became embroiled in allegations of media censorship and press repression. PTI's governance style, characterized by populist rhetoric, sought to consolidate public support through media channels that were often directly or indirectly controlled by the government. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was frequently used as a tool to regulate and suppress media content that was critical of the government. Critics charged that PEMRA's power was wielded to silence dissent, with the regulatory body issuing warnings, fines, or even banning news channels that failed to comply with government narratives. These tactics were particularly evident in the case of independent media outlets that questioned PTI's handling of national issues, economic policies, or its relationship with the military(The News,2020).

The PTI government was particularly sensitive to any media criticism, especially when it came from well-established news networks like Geo News, Dawn, or The News, which had long been critical of both the military establishment and PTI's populist tactics. Journalists working for these outlets reported facing mounting pressure, ranging from subtle intimidation to outright threats. The PTI's media strategy was marked by a concerted effort to portray its critics as enemies of the state, undermining their credibility and accusing them of being agents of foreign interference or anti-national forces. This created an environment where journalists feared for their safety and professional integrity, as they struggled to balance the pressures of free expression with the increasing risks of reprisals. (Siddiq, 2020).

The government's control over the media was not limited to PEMRA's regulation of content but also involved more direct measures, such as the targeting of specific journalists or media houses through harassment campaigns. In some extreme cases, journalists who were critical of PTI were subjected to physical attacks or forced into self-censorship. The harassment extended to both mainstream media and social media influencers, with online

attacks being another tool for silencing opposition voices. Prominent journalists who had once enjoyed significant freedom of expression were now forced to temper their critiques or face consequences. The chilling effect on the media environment was palpable, as many news outlets began to censor themselves, no longer willing to take risks in reporting on sensitive political or military issues .

This systemic undermining of media freedom also reflected broader concerns about the PTI's commitment to democratic values. While Imran Khan's government repeatedly justified its actions as part of a broader effort to combat "fake news" and misinformation, critics saw this as a thinly veiled attempt to suppress dissent and control the national narrative. The PTI's media strategy, by curbing critical reporting, effectively contributed to an environment where alternative viewpoints could not be freely expressed. The failure to protect media pluralism and ensure the independence of the press stood in stark contrast to PTI's original promises of democratic reform and transparency. Journalists and media organizations, which should have functioned as watchdogs of power, were increasingly co-opted into the political machinery of the government.

This tight control over the media also had wider implications for Pakistan's democracy. Free and independent media is essential to holding those in power accountable, but under PTI, the press became a target of manipulation. The government's attempts to control public perception through media censorship stifled important debates, limited citizens' access to diverse information, and undermined democratic discourse. The PTI government's actions reflected an authoritarian tendency that undermined the democratic principles of transparency and accountability, presenting an uncomfortable challenge to Pakistan's political fabric. As the public was fed a heavily curated version of events, the space for legitimate criticism and democratic debate shrank, further polarizing an already divided political landscape.

4.5.6 The Fall of the PTI Government

The PTI government faced increasing challenges in its final years, with mounting opposition, economic strain, and governance issues. In April 2022, Imran Khan was removed from power through a no-confidence motion, marking a significant political shift in Pakistan. The opposition, led by Shehbaz Sharif's PML-N, took control of the government, citing PTI's economic mismanagement and political instability as the primary reasons for the move.

Imran Khan, however, argued that his removal was a result of foreign interference and a conspiracy by the military and the United States (Dawn, 2022).

4.6 PDM Coalition (2022-2023): Fragile Alliances and Governing Challenges

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition was formed in late 2020 as an alliance of opposition parties with the primary objective of challenging the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government led by Imran Khan, whom they accused of corruption, incompetence, and anti-democratic practices. The PDM brought together ideologically diverse political parties, notably the Pakistan Muslim League (Parveen & Bhatti) (PML-N), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl) (JUI-F). This alliance sought to consolidate opposition forces to effectively counter PTI's populist rhetoric and its alignment with the military establishment, which the PDM argued had facilitated Khan's rise to power in the controversial 2018 elections

The PDM's formation marked a significant moment in Pakistan's political landscape, as it underscored a strategic realignment among opposition parties that had historically been adversaries. The coalition's immediate objectives were multifaceted: to mobilize public opinion against PTI, to demand fresh elections, and to advocate for greater democratic transparency and independence of civilian institutions from military influence. The PDM argued that PTI's government had eroded democratic norms by targeting political opponents through judicial and accountability processes that were allegedly biased, such as the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) cases against high-profile opposition leaders. PDM leaders also emphasized the need to protect Pakistan's parliamentary democracy from what they characterized as an encroaching authoritarianism, calling for structural reforms to prevent future military or judicial overreach into political affairs (Mushtaq et al., 2024)

While the PDM's primary unifying goal was to oust the PTI government, underlying motivations differed among its members, reflecting both ideological divides and personal rivalries. The PPP, for instance, focused on securing regional influence, particularly in Sindh, while PML-N sought to regain its traditional power base in Punjab. These divergent interests complicated the coalition's objectives, leading to tensions over strategies and resource allocation, particularly regarding public protests and campaigns against the government. Despite these internal differences, the PDM succeeded in staging large rallies and bringing public attention to issues of governance and alleged human rights abuses under PTI's tenure. However, the coalition's impact was limited by periodic defections and the strategic

withdrawal of PPP from some activities, highlighting the fragile nature of alliances driven more by expediency than by cohesive policy goals.

In essence, the PDM coalition represented a critical, albeit complicated, response to perceived democratic backsliding in Pakistan. By galvanizing public support and leveraging media and political networks, the PDM attempted to counterbalance PTI's populism and its alignment with powerful state institutions, advocating for a return to a more balanced and civilian-led political order. The coalition's efforts underscored broader structural challenges within Pakistan's democratic framework, as political groups rallied for reform yet faced constraints from an entrenched civil-military dynamic that continued to shape governance outcomes (Gul & Ali, 2023)

4.6.1 Internal Divisions and Policy Conflicts

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), while ambitious in its formation as a coalition to challenge the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, faced significant internal divisions and policy conflicts that hindered its unity and effectiveness. The PDM brought together ideologically diverse parties, primarily the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), each with distinct regional interests, ideological foundations, and policy priorities. This diversity led to inherent tensions, as the member parties often diverged on issues of strategy and policy, weakening the coalition's overall impact.

One major source of friction within the PDM was the approach to political protest and confrontation with state institutions. While the PML-N, under the leadership of Maryam Nawaz, adopted a confrontational stance, often directly challenging the military establishment's role in politics, the PPP took a more cautious approach, wary of antagonizing the military and focused instead on consolidating its regional control in Sindh. These conflicting strategies created visible cracks within the coalition, as PML-N's and PPP's differing perspectives on the role of the military in governance reflected deeper ideological divides. The JUI-F, led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leaned towards PML-N's confrontational stance but was primarily driven by its own religious-political objectives, adding complexity to the coalition's decision-making processes.

Policy conflicts also emerged within the PDM over issues such as economic governance, electoral reform, and anti-corruption measures. The PPP, managing Sindh's

provincial government, prioritized policies aligned with regional autonomy and was cautious about endorsing measures that could disrupt its administrative authority. In contrast, the PML-N, with its power base in Punjab, emphasized broader economic reforms and direct accountability measures that appealed to its urban support base. These policy discrepancies not only hampered unified decision-making but also affected the coalition's credibility, as the PDM's public calls for accountability and reform were sometimes undermined by divergent positions on transparency and governance among its member parties (Khan, 2023).

The PDM's internal conflicts eventually led to a partial disintegration of the coalition, with the PPP withdrawing from some of its activities in 2021. This departure underscored the difficulties in sustaining an alliance driven by immediate political interests rather than shared long-term policy goals. While the PDM continued to function as a platform for opposition against PTI, its effectiveness was weakened by these internal rifts, ultimately highlighting the challenges of coalition politics in Pakistan's polarized political landscape. Consequently, the PDM's internal divisions illustrate the broader obstacles facing democratic coalitions in Pakistan, where regional, ideological, and strategic conflicts frequently impede collective action and diminish the coalition's ability to sustain unified opposition.

4.6.2 Civil-Military Relations Under the PDM

Under the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), civil-military relations in Pakistan were brought to the forefront of political discourse, highlighting ongoing tensions between democratic institutions and the military's influence over governance. The PDM coalition, comprising opposition parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), directly challenged what they perceived as the military's excessive involvement in civilian political affairs, particularly its alleged role in the 2018 elections, which they argued had facilitated the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government's rise to power (Gul & Ali, 2023).

The PML-N, under Maryam Nawaz and Shahbaz Sharif, led the charge in questioning the military's influence in political matters, with Maryam Nawaz frequently using public rallies to directly address military leaders and accuse them of undermining democratic norms. This outspoken criticism marked a notable shift in Pakistan's political landscape, as direct allegations against the military had traditionally been avoided by mainstream parties to prevent institutional backlash. The PDM's rhetoric emphasized the need for civilian supremacy and transparency, asserting that democratic governance could not be fully realized

while the military continued to exert considerable influence over national policies and election outcomes (Gul & Ali, 2023)

However, the PDM's approach to civil-military relations was not uniformly confrontational across all member parties. The PPP, led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, adopted a more cautious stance, advocating for democratic accountability but avoiding direct criticism of the military establishment. This approach stemmed from the PPP's regional focus on Sindh, where maintaining working relations with the military was deemed necessary for provincial stability and governance. The contrasting strategies between PML-N and PPP in addressing military influence underscored internal divisions within the PDM, as the coalition grappled with balancing ideological commitments to democracy against the pragmatic need to work within Pakistan's existing power structures.

The PDM's emphasis on civil-military tensions also extended to the judiciary, which the coalition accused of being influenced by the military to disqualify political leaders and influence electoral outcomes. High-profile cases, such as the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif, were cited by the PDM as examples of how military influence had permeated various state institutions, thereby distorting the democratic process and reducing public trust in democratic governance. This critique underscored the PDM's broader objective to dismantle what it viewed as an entrenched "hybrid regime" in which civilian institutions operated under the shadow of military influence (Gul & Ali, 2023)

Despite the PDM's outspoken stance, its effectiveness in challenging civil-military relations was limited by its internal divisions and the inherent constraints on opposition coalitions in Pakistan. Although the PDM succeeded in rallying public support and drawing attention to the issue, the coalition's mixed messaging and varying levels of confrontation diluted its impact on transforming civil-military dynamics. The PDM's civil-military tensions illustrate the broader struggles of democratization in Pakistan, where political parties attempting to assert civilian supremacy face significant challenges in an environment shaped by a historically dominant military establishment

4.6.3 Media and Judicial Relations

Under the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition government (2022–2023), interactions with the media and judiciary revealed complex dynamics, particularly as the coalition struggled to balance democratic ideals with political control. The PDM,

composed of ideologically diverse parties, faced significant scrutiny from both the media and judiciary, two powerful entities that influence public opinion and political legitimacy in Pakistan (Rashid et al., 2023). In managing its relations with these institutions, the coalition often found itself caught between promoting transparency and attempting to mitigate criticism.

Media relations during the PDM's tenure were contentious, marked by claims of censorship and allegations of efforts to suppress dissent. Journalists reported increased intimidation, especially when criticizing the government's policies or exposing intra-coalition tensions. Regulatory bodies like the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) were accused of imposing arbitrary restrictions on broadcasts, including critical coverage of governance issues and high-profile political cases involving coalition members. This approach was perceived by civil society and media watchdogs as undermining media freedom, a critical component of democratic governance. Critics argued that the coalition's restrictive stance echoed similar practices under the previous PTI administration, signaling a broader trend of limited press freedom in Pakistan.

The judiciary's role in political accountability further complicated matters for the PDM coalition. High-profile judicial rulings, especially those involving allegations of corruption against PDM leaders, intensified scrutiny of the coalition's governance and strained relations between the executive and judiciary. These judicial actions, often rooted in the judiciary's commitment to accountability, were perceived by some coalition leaders as efforts to destabilize their government by targeting influential political figures, including those from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Tensions were apparent in public statements by PDM officials, who voiced concerns that judicial interventions were disproportionately aimed at coalition figures while avoiding cases against opposition members (Khan, 2023).

The relationship between media and judiciary also proved challenging for the coalition, as the press closely monitored judicial rulings and high-stakes political trials, amplifying public scrutiny of PDM leaders. Coverage of legal proceedings involving PDM figures, often characterized by sensationalism, led to narratives that reinforced perceptions of internal discord and inefficacy. In response, coalition leaders suggested that some media outlets were selectively focusing on judicial setbacks to undermine the PDM, raising questions about impartiality in both media reporting and judicial decisions. This friction

between the coalition, judiciary, and media contributed to an increasingly polarized political environment.

The PDM's strained relations with both media and judiciary highlight deeper challenges to democratic governance in Pakistan, where political leaders must contend with institutions that uphold democratic accountability but also pose challenges to stability. The coalition's attempts to manage both media criticism and judicial scrutiny underscored the difficulty of maintaining a united front in the face of institutional pressures. Although the PDM positioned itself as a democratic alternative to previous administrations, its interactions with the media and judiciary indicate the persistent struggle to uphold transparency while navigating Pakistan's complex power dynamics.

4.7 Bureaucracy's Role in Democratic Stability Post-2013

Since 2013, Pakistan's bureaucracy has played a critical role in shaping democratic stability, often positioned at the intersection of political power and institutional enforcement. As a permanent administrative structure, the bureaucracy wields significant influence over governance processes, policy implementation, and public accountability. However, its role has frequently sparked debate, with critics arguing that bureaucratic actions can either stabilize or undermine democracy based on their responsiveness to elected officials, judicial mandates, and military interests. Bureaucrats' responses to political crises, their role in selective accountability initiatives, and their alignment with military directives have raised questions about the limits of bureaucratic neutrality and independence in Pakistan's democratic landscape. By examining key instances since 2013, it becomes evident that the bureaucracy's actions have shaped the trajectory of Pakistan's democracy, influencing public trust in state institutions, the credibility of elected governments, and the balance of power across state institutions.

4.7.1 Bureaucratic Involvement in Political Crises and Protest Management

The role of Pakistan's bureaucracy in managing political crises and large-scale protests has been pivotal, particularly in situations that threatened democratic stability. One notable example was the 2014 sit-in led by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT), which posed a significant challenge to the then-PML-N government. During this protest, bureaucratic agencies, including the police and civil administration, were

tasked with maintaining public order and minimizing disruptions, a role that placed them at the center of a politically sensitive situation. The sit-in persisted for 126 days, resulting in a complex balance between allowing the democratic right to protest and protecting the state's stability . Analysts argue that bureaucratic actions, such as the selective enforcement of crowd control measures and the handling of clashes between protesters and law enforcement, influenced public perceptions of the government's stability and effectiveness.

The neutrality of the bureaucracy during such crises has often been called into question. Critics argue that bureaucratic agencies, at times, have demonstrated biases that align with certain political or institutional interests rather than upholding impartiality. For instance, the alleged involvement of bureaucratic actors in allowing logistical support to certain factions or obstructing others during the 2014 protests suggested that the bureaucracy was not entirely free from external influence . This perception of bias undermined trust in bureaucratic neutrality, leading some observers to conclude that the bureaucracy's approach to crisis management reflects broader patterns of selective alignment and inconsistent enforcement, which can erode democratic norms (Pildat, 2018).

Another crucial example emerged in the 2017 protests by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which demanded government attention to specific religious issues. The crisis escalated to such an extent that the military had to step in to mediate, reflecting a failure of bureaucratic and civil administrative mechanisms to independently manage the crisis. Here, the bureaucracy's response or lack thereof—highlighted its limitations in maintaining order without external intervention, particularly from the military. This intervention raised concerns about the potential erosion of civilian authority, as the reliance on military support for bureaucratic crisis management tasks signaled a lack of autonomy in civilian administration

4.7.2 Selective Accountability and Bureaucratic Neutrality in Governance

Selective accountability within Pakistan's bureaucratic system has become a recurring issue post-2013, affecting democratic norms and raising questions regarding bureaucratic neutrality in governance. Bureaucratic institutions, including anti-corruption agencies such as the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), have often been accused of implementing accountability measures selectively, particularly against political opposition figures. During the tenure of both the PML-N and PTI governments, high-profile cases targeted opposition leaders, leading to criticism that these investigations served political motives more than genuine anti-corruption efforts. For instance, under PTI's administration, NAB investigations

disproportionately targeted opposition figures from the PML-N and PPP, a pattern that many analysts argue signaled a politically motivated approach rather than an impartial enforcement of the rule of law (Jillani, 2020).

The perceived lack of neutrality among bureaucratic bodies tasked with accountability has eroded public trust in these institutions. Critics argue that selective accountability has not only undermined the bureaucracy's role as a neutral arbiter in governance but has also deepened political divides, as accusations of bias within the bureaucratic framework become tools in partisan conflicts. Furthermore, these practices have perpetuated a perception of favoritism, where accountability appears to be enforced stringently against certain political factions while more leniently against others, depending on the party in power (Khan, 2022). This selective application of the law has hindered the development of democratic practices, as the bureaucracy's role becomes conflated with political agendas rather than with a consistent application of legal principles.

Moreover, selective accountability within the bureaucracy has exacerbated tensions between civilian administrations and the judiciary. For instance, in cases where accountability institutions appeared to act on behalf of the government's interests, judiciary interventions have challenged bureaucratic decisions, signaling judicial resistance to the political manipulation of accountability mechanisms. However, these judicial interventions have also occasionally reflected their own biases, leading to an overall erosion of trust in democratic institutions. Such complex interactions between the judiciary and bureaucratic entities in cases of selective accountability illustrate the broader challenges facing governance in Pakistan, where neutrality in bureaucratic functions remains difficult to achieve.

4.7.3 Bureaucratic Alignment with Military Interests in Policy Implementation

The alignment of Pakistan's bureaucracy with military interests in policy implementation has become a significant factor affecting democratic governance post-2013. Historically, the military has held substantial sway over Pakistan's bureaucratic institutions, especially in areas related to security, foreign policy, and economic planning. This dynamic has continued in recent years, where the bureaucracy's cooperation with military objectives has frequently influenced the policy agenda, often to the detriment of civilian democratic oversight. Under both the PTI and subsequent governments, key bureaucratic bodies collaborated closely with military leadership in shaping and executing policy directives,

especially in foreign relations and counter-terrorism efforts. For example, bureaucratic support for military-led initiatives, such as the National Action Plan (NAP), underscored the close alignment between these two entities on issues of national security (Zafar, 2020).

In practical terms, bureaucratic alignment with military interests has often bypassed civilian input, particularly in critical policy domains. During the PTI government, the military's role in foreign policy decisions—such as relations with India, the United States, and Afghanistan—was implemented with significant bureaucratic backing, sidelining elected representatives and their policy preferences. This partnership, while contributing to policy continuity in defense and security matters, has undermined democratic processes by concentrating decision-making power among unelected officials and military elites. Bureaucratic adherence to military agendas in such matters not only weakens civilian oversight but also reinforces a dual power structure in governance, where democratic institutions are subordinate to military imperatives .

Furthermore, the military-bureaucratic alignment in policy-making has influenced economic decision-making, particularly in development projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). While CPEC initiatives promise long-term economic benefits, the bureaucratic machinery has implemented these projects in close alignment with military priorities, focusing heavily on infrastructure in strategically significant regions. The expedited bureaucratic compliance with military-led CPEC plans often sidelines public debate and transparency, leading to concerns about the exclusion of civilian stakeholders from the decision-making process (Khan & Abbas, 2022). Such practices reinforce a governance model where bureaucratic alignment with the military allows the latter to exercise significant control over resource allocation and strategic projects, undermining democratic accountability.

This institutional partnership has, at times, placed pressure on elected governments to align their policy positions with military interests to maintain political stability. Bureaucrats tasked with implementing military-backed policies have occasionally faced tensions when reconciling these directives with the civilian administration's priorities. This dissonance complicates the bureaucratic role, particularly when policy initiatives clash with broader democratic goals, as was evident during the PTI administration's struggle to manage divergent priorities between the military and civilian spheres. Ultimately, the bureaucratic alignment with military interests contributes to a governance framework where democratic

oversight is often limited, further entrenching the military's influence in policy implementation and diminishing the autonomy of civilian institutions.

CHAPTER 5

FINDING CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this academic research project are based on the critical analysis of recorded interviews as primary data and data collected from research papers, news columns, articles, and books as secondary data. It targets the 4th civil democratic period that started with the establishment of Parliamentary Democracy after the February 2008 elections where executive powers shifted from the President to the Prime Minister. The study focuses on challenges to democracy during the 10 years from 2013 to 2023.

Following are the findings of this research project;

In the light of reforms and democratic achievements mentioned earlier in this research, the Charter of Democracy had already provided a suitable platform for democracy to flourish. But unfortunately, the democratic process received setbacks from day one as Nawaz Sharif took charge of the PM's office.

The 14th National Assembly (2013)

- The 14th constituent National Assembly was sat up by PML-N, where Nawaz Sharif took oath as Prime Minister of Pakistan for the 3rd time in history.
- The 2013 General Elections witnessed a record turnout of voter participation. According to the ECP report, 53.2% of the total registered voters came out and participated in the electoral process. It was the highest turnout since the 1970 General Elections.
- The historic increase in voter turnout was evident of the public's trust in the democratic process.
- It is important to note that for the first time in history, the transfer of powers occurred peacefully from one civilian government to the other through an electoral process.
- The democratic consolidation could not last long as a series of events one after the other reversed the process of democratic consolidation.

- The military supported democracy and avoided political interference under the PPP government (2008-2013). But in Nawaz Sharif tenure, the early Musharraf trial in high treason case served as an irritant in civil-military relationship.
- Following the Dawn Leaks and Panama Papers, further widened the gap between military establishment and the civilian government.
- The long lasting *dharna* (set in) by Imran Khan, where most of his campaign was based on rigged elections and character assassination of his political rivals, enhanced the distrust of public on the sitting government.
- People were fed up of the traditional politics and this public frustration provided an easy way out for Imran Khan to blackmail the general masses with nonstop hate speech.
- PTI broke the dominance of PPP and PML-N through their strong campaign but struggled to meet public expectations on practical grounds.
- The premature removal of Nawaz Sharif from Prime Minister office on the dictation of Joint Investigation Team (JIT) weakened the democratic progress.
- The judiciary was seen as influenced by non-political forces, especially in Nawaz Sharif's case.
- However, media and press enjoyed full freedom of expression in this era.

15th National Assembly

- The 2018 Elections were declared controversial by the opposition parties as there were allegations of military interference in the electoral process. The failure of the Result Transmission System (RTS) also raised doubts about fairness of these Elections.
- Despite multiple controversies, the voter turnout remained high (51.99%), indicating trust of the public in the democratic process.
- The Imran led PTI won highest number of seats and formed coalition government with the help of some independent candidates and smaller political parties. They

completely denied any talks or negotiations on government formation with the two major parties PPP and PML-N.

- Prime Minister Imran Khan (PTI) failed to deliver on service delivery, reform agenda, and economic independence, relying heavily on IMF policies.
- Unlike the previous government, PTI imposed restrictions on media, limiting freedom of expression.
- However, the increased youth involvement in politics that included a fair number of women as well, was a positive development in Khan's era.
- Democracy couldn't flourish as non-elected institutions played a dominant role in decision-making that sidelined the role of parliament.
- Imran Khan ignored democratic norms and focused more on victimizing the opposition. As a result, it weakened consensus-based politics.
- On the other hand, opposition failed to cooperate with the government, further obstructing the democratic progress.
- The opposition parties established a coalition called Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). Molana Fazlur Rehman of JUI-F played leading role in the formation of this movement.
- The PDM brought No-Confidence motion to the parliament and successfully passed it with 174 vote. As a result, Imran Khan had to step down from the position of Prime Minister despite various efforts to oppose the motion.
- Mian Shehbaz Sharif was elected as Prime Minister by the PDM coalition but controversies arose soon in the coalition due to difference of interests and opinions.
- The PDM government had to cope with major economic crises, uncertainties in foreign policy, pressure of IMF and World Bank, and so on.
- Throughout these 10 years, we saw a decline of democratic processes. A democracy that seemed consolidated until 2013, was in great turmoil towards the end of 2023.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The creation of Pakistan was based on the ideology of Islam. The foundations of the state were set on the principles of Democracy by the founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah. It was decided that the newly born state will follow parliamentary government system. Unfortunately, in the past seven decades, Pakistan could not sustain true democracy. It was mainly due to multiple military interventions rather in the shape of a decade long marshal law or an authoritarian regime. Anyhow, the dangling democracy of Pakistan can be divided into four phases with four phases of military rule in between. It is evident from the history that even the democratic periods were highly influenced by the military establishment in policymaking and decision-making.

The first democratic period begins with the inception of Pakistan from 1947 and lasted in 1958 when the first Martial Law was imposed on the state by dictator Ayub Khan. Democracy could not flourish in this period as seven prime ministers were changed one after the other in various ways including the assassination of Liaqat Ali Khan at Liaqat Bagh, Rawalpindi, in 1951. The irony is that instead of democracy, the civil and military bureaucracy strengthened themselves in the first civil democratic period. In 1958, Ayub Khan imposed martial law and ruled the country for the next 10 years followed by the 2nd martial law of General Yahya Khan that lasted for two years.

The first ever general elections of the country in 1970 proved to be a nightmare for the country. The elections resulted in the fall of Dhaka and East Pakistan was transformed to a new state of Bangladesh. In West Pakistan, the current Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took oath as the first ever civilian martial law administrator. Bhutto achieved the milestone of providing the parliamentary constitution of 1973 to the country. He didn't stop there and brought upon multiple socio-economic reforms. These reforms included his policy of nationalization that resulted in a massive setback for the economy of the state and Bhutto had to knock at the doors of the World Bank and IMF in order to cope with the impending economic crisis of the state. However, Bhutto's continuous intolerance towards the opposition and the controversial elections of 1977 led to law and order situation that resulted in the imposition of another martial law by Zia Ul Haq.

Zia's eleven years regime mainly included the controversial hanging of Bhutto, the imposition of Islamization policy, conduction of nonparty elections, 8th amendment, and monitoring Afghan War. The regime ended in August, 1988 with the mysterious demise of

Zia Ul Haq in a plane crash setting the stage for a new democratic era. The 3rd period of civil democratic rule started with the success of PPP and Benazir Bhutto became the first ever female prime minister in the history of the Muslim world. The 3rd period of civil democratic rule was adversely affected due to the 8th constitutional amendment where the military-backed presidents used their powers under article 58(2) b multiple times and the assemblies were dissolved prematurely at regular intervals from 1988 to 1999. Benazir could only sustain the office for 2 years, Nawaz Sharif for the next three years, Benazir again for the following three years, and then Nawaz Sharif again for the last three years of this civil democratic period. In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf demolished the government of Nawaz Sharif and imprisoned him, this event put an end to the 3rd civil democratic rule in Pakistan.

The fourth democratic period emerges after the decline of General Pervez Musharraf, fresh general elections were held in 2008 where PPP emerged as the leading party with highest number of seats and formed a coalition government. Since 2008, certain parliamentary measures taken by the sitting government served in the revival of democracy in the country. The charter of democracy that was signed between Benazir and Nawaz in 2006 had started bearing fruits in the shape of valiant efforts for safeguarding democracy. The 18th constitutional amendment was a milestone in the history of Pakistani democracy. The amendment provided more powers to the provinces and strengthened the federation of Pakistan. The powers of the president were reduced and were bestowed to the Prime Minister. These powers mainly included dissolution of the assemblies, appointing chief of Army staff, Air Marshal, and Naval chief. Parliamentary committees were formed that had equal participation from both government and opposition. They played a vital role in the appointment of higher designations. Almost 20-25 ministries were transferred to provincial governments. Furthermore, 19th and 20th amendments were passed that ensured the transparency of elections 2013 and further strengthened the democracy. The results of the elections were accepted and the transition of power from PPP to PMLN happened peacefully.

In 2013, Mian Nawaz Sharif took charge of the prime minister's office for the 3rd time in history. The new government was faced with immediate challenges in the shape of unstable civil-military relationship as the PML-N went for an early trial of Pervez Musharraf case which resulted in altering their ties with military establishment. The 120 days long *dharna* (sit in) of PTI's Chairman Imran Khan backed by non-democratic forces served as another setback for the sitting government. As a result of this *dharna*, the visit of the Chinese President was cancelled which was extremely important in the context of China Pakistan

Economic Corridor (CPEC). Imran Khan campaign was based on mudslinging and blame game diplomacy and his campaign was properly broadcasted on all media platforms. The Army Public School massacre on 16th December, 2014 changed the political script followed by a series of events and Imran Khan called off his *dharna*. In the preceding events, despite the opposition of some political parties, 21st constitutional amendment was passed and military courts were formed for the implementation of National Action Plan (NAP). The release of Dawn leaks and Panama Papers in 2016 further damaged the morale of the sitting prime minister and a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) was announced to investigate the cases. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was expelled from the office on July 28, 2017 by the Supreme Court on the basis of the investigation conducted by JIT that had one member each from ISI and MI. Once again, history repeated itself and not even a single prime minister could complete their 5 years tenure in the office. However, the assembly survived and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi of PML-N took charge as the new prime minister of the country. Wolf (2017) argued that the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif from premiership was scripted by the nonpolitical institutions, as he wanted to curtail their influence in CPEC. A democracy that was consolidating since 2008 started eroding due to the influence of some non-democratic forces towards the end of 2018.

In 2018 general election, PTI emerged as the largest successful party with 156 seats in the National Assembly. They formed a coalition government and Imran Khan took charge as the Prime Minister. It was the third consecutive civil rule and 2nd consecutive democratic transition in the history of Pakistan. The PTI government has full support of the state institutions and non-political actors. Instead of using the platform of parliament for collaborative policymaking and reconciliation, Imran Khan took a firm stand against the opposition parties and adopted the “divide and rule” strategy with the support of non-political actors. In Imran Khan era, the whole media was flooded with conspiracy theories and mudslinging remarks against the political opponent but on practical grounds, the performance of Imran Khan’s government was not satisfactory. On economic front, Imran Khan introduced *Health card*, *Raashan card*, and *Insaaf card*. These measures provided temporary relief to the public but he failed to execute long term effective economic policies to cope with the ongoing economic crisis and rising inflation in the country. Secondly, the promise of *Change* that Imran Khan made with the youth of the country throughout his election campaign could not be fulfilled, he could neither create employment opportunities nor other valuable reforms for the massive number of unemployed educated youth. The industrial

sector and business class suffered great losses due to high inflation rate and energy crisis, the average GDP growth dropped and the economy of the state was at the verge of collapse. The \$6 billion loan taken from IMF, followed by the worldwide pandemic of *covid-19* further worsened the overall state affairs and it was extremely difficult for the government of PTI to cope with these challenges. Imran Khan had no answers except “*aap ny ghabrana nahi hay*” means (you should not be afraid).

The opposition parties felt threatened and marginalized by the conduct of Imran Khan and established the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). It was established in 2020 as a coalition of opposition parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), to challenge the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government led by Imran Khan. The coalition accused PTI of corruption, authoritarianism, and military alignment, which they argued facilitated Khan’s controversial victory of 2018 elections.

The PDM’s unity was altered by ideological differences and conflicting strategies among its members. PML-N emphasized direct confrontation with the military, while PPP adopted a cautious approach to preserve its regional governance. Policy conflicts, including economic governance and electoral reforms, further deepened divisions. These internal tensions led to PPP partially withdrawing in 2021, undermining the coalition's effectiveness in challenging PTI and exposing the difficulties of coalition politics in Pakistan. The coalition faced criticism for alleged censorship and regulatory restrictions, which undermined press freedom. Judicial scrutiny of corruption cases involving PDM leaders also strained relations, as coalition members perceived judicial actions as politically motivated. Media coverage amplified these challenges, exposing internal discord and contributing to a polarized political environment.

The PDM coalition sought to address governance issues and democratic backsliding though, its internal divisions and strained relations with state institutions limited its effectiveness. These challenges reflect broader obstacles in Pakistan’s democratic framework. However, the non-stop resistance of PDM resulted in launching a no-confidence vote against Imran Khan, they came out victorious in the parliament with 174 votes in favor of the move and Imran Khan was taken out of the Prime Minister office.

On April 11, 2022, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif succeeded Imran Khan following a no-confidence vote in the National Assembly, and took oath as Prime Minister of

the country. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, assumed power with a series of crises inherited from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. They failed to execute quality policymaking and could not achieve the desired results as the impending economic crisis, the increasing inflation, and the unavoidable pressure from IMF was not easy to cope with.

In conclusion, the PDM government faced significant hurdles arising largely from the economic mismanagement, policy reversals, and political polarization. Despite its efforts to stabilize the economy and repair international relations, it struggled to alleviate the immediate hardships of the population, such as soaring inflation and energy shortages. While its tenure was marked by tough decisions and a focus on recovery, the coalition faced criticism for insufficient progress in delivering tangible relief to citizens.

During the PTI government, Pakistan experienced democratic backsliding marked by the erosion of institutional independence, restrictions on media freedoms, and political victimization of opponents. The judiciary and accountability institutions were often criticized for being weaponized against opposition leaders, while bold voices in the media faced censorship and intimidation. This decline was fueled by a growing populist narrative that undermined democratic norms. When the PDM government took over, it pledged to reverse this trend and consolidate democracy. However, its efforts were largely seen as selective, focusing on judicial and electoral reforms that critics argued were designed to weaken political rivals rather than strengthen democratic institutions.

Analyzing the sequence of events followed one after the other, it can be concluded that after the democratic consolidation that was seen in the shape of 18th amendment, parliamentary committees, the supportive role of opposition, and the peaceful transition of powers from PPP to PML-N in 2013, there was a decline of democratic values. In the preceding years, Pakistan saw a gradual democratic backsliding towards the end of PDM government in 2023.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Electoral Management System

The ECP should introduce Electronic Voting Systems (EVS) and fully implement the Result Transmission System (RTS) to ensure fair, transparent, and quick elections. Internet and cellular services must be available in remote areas for data transfer. Voter registration,

especially in rural areas and for women, should be increased. The election code of conduct should be updated regularly, and the 20th amendment must be implemented to ensure a neutral ECP.

Political Parties

Political parties should promote internal democracy and accountability. They must respect election results and avoid unconstitutional actions. Laws should ban horse trading, misuse of money, dynastic politics, and lineage-based voting. Contesting elections in multiple constituencies and holding dual nationality must be restricted. All parties should have equal opportunities to campaign and present their agendas to the public.

Civil-Military Relations

Civil-military relations must follow the constitution. The military should avoid political interference and focus on its duties. Military budgets and policies should be under the Ministry of Defence, and the National Security Committee (NSC) must be implemented to improve coordination.

Gender Political Participation

Women's participation in politics as voters and candidates must be encouraged. Women's seats in parliament should increase, and marginalized groups, including youth, must be given opportunities in the political process.

Institutionalization

All state institutions must work within their constitutional roles, with a fair balance of power among the legislature, judiciary, and executive.

Constitutionalism

The constitution must be fully implemented in its true spirit to strengthen democracy.

Independence of Judiciary

The judiciary must remain independent and free from interference to ensure fair justice.

Local Government System

Local governments should be established regularly to strengthen grassroots democracy.

Freedom of Press and Media

Freedom of speech and media must be ensured. Journalists and media workers should be protected so they can work safely and freely.

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