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Fragile political landscape in Pakistan: perpetual state of political instability and the consequent failure of democracy in the country

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Abstract

The basic ideals of democracy such as free and fair elections, decree of elected representatives, and constitutional governance have been missing from the political structure in Pakistan. Over the course of its independence the polity in Pakistan has been dominated by the military and the occasional occurrences of quasi democratic governments. The occasional quasi democracies or puppet governments either voluntarily or due to coercion have served the Pakistani military. As a result of the constant military interventions, the basic ideals of democracy such as Free Media, free and fair elections, Constitutional governance, tolerance, freedom of speech have been significantly damaged which has led to failure of democracy in the country. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, religious extremism, domination of certain aristocrats and military interventions have emerged as a consequence which has led to the rotting of the Pakistani state and it being regarded as a 'failed state'.

Keywords: Pakistan, democracy, martial law, puppet regimes, free and fair elections, failed state

Introduction

Upon achieving independence in 1947 the leader of the Muslim league and the first governor general of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah announced that the government structure of Pakistan would be parliamentary in nature based on elections by the citizens of the country. Democracy was the key ideal which Jinnah believed would lead Pakistan to become a successful post-colonial state. However, post Jinnah's demise in 1948, the political ideals of Jinnah were abandoned over the course of time which led to the failure of democracy in Pakistan. Various reasons such as military supremacy over civil leadership; Inexperienced bureaucracy; Dearth of capable successors to Jinnah; Weak government structure; Absence of successful and sustainable Constitution (The first Constitution being formed in 1956, 9 years since independence which was later replaced in 1962 by Ayub Khan which was succeeded by constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1973; 'Sudden' birth of the Pakistani state and; Constant threat from India led to the military asserting dominance over the elected government and failure of democracy.

The basic ideals of democracy such as free and fair elections, decree of elected representatives, and constitutional governance have been missing from the democracy in the country. Over the course of its independence the polity in Pakistan has been dominated by the military and the occasional occurrences of quasi democratic governments. The occasional quasi democracies or puppet governments either voluntarily or due to coercion have served the Pakistani military. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, religious extremism, domination of certain aristocrats and military interventions have led to the rotting of the Pakistani state and it being regarded as a 'failed state' which has failed the basic needs and aspirations of its citizens.

Two notions of Democracy-Minimalist vs Maximalist

The word democracy refers to a system of governance wherein the citizens of a country elect representatives to govern the state for specific tenure. Free and fair elections, equality of citizens, constitutional governance and civilian supremacy. Minimalist and maximalist are two perspectives regarding the essence and purpose of democracy in a state. The minimalist notion of democracy is related to the electoral function of state pertaining only to conduction of elections to elect representatives of the people who are accountable to the people. The maximalist notion goes beyond the mere electoral function of state and focuses on aspects such as equality, liberty which lead to the growth and empowerment of its citizens. The maximalist notion covers more aspects of democracy and is not limited only to the electoral function.

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Jinnah had a maximalist perspective on democracy which can be seen through his ideals and vision of democracy, with Jinnah publically addressing that “You are free, free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan, You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the state ^[1]”. The successors of Jinnah however had different ideals which led to Pakistan being a democracy only in the minimalist sense which has caused large suffering to its citizens as well as the overall development of the state.

Evolution of Democracy in Pakistan

1947-1958

The first decade post independence of Pakistan was marked by constant struggle for power between various inexperienced leaders who wanted complete consolidation of power. This political struggle led to a civil-military imbalance which was significant in setting the tone for politics in the following years. Unlike Congress in India, which comprised of various stalwarts, the Muslim league lacked experienced and charismatic leaders. Jinnah was regarded as the face of the Muslim league and post his death there was no other leader of his stature and vigour who could fill his boots and become the unprecedented leader which could keep the democratic structure in place. The vacuum left by Jinnah was enough for various political leaders to collide amongst themselves which led to instability and uncertainty. Since Jinnah's demise the leadership in Pakistan changed seven times in a span of eleven years as a result assassinations and dismissals. The military in Pakistan originally accepted civilian supremacy and was not involved in politics however in 1953 General Azam Khan was the first military leader to get a taste of politics and since then the active interference of the military in politics significantly increased. The first era of politics in Pakistan also witnessed the formation of the first Constitution of independent Pakistan which was formed in 1956 however was only affective till 1958. In 1958 it was General Ayub Khan who proclaimed complete accession of power and became the leader of the state. During the first era both the military as well as the political leaders ignored the basic tenets of democracy and were focused more on the usurpation and consolidation of power.

1958-1971

In 1958 General Ayub Khan took complete control over the administration of Pakistan and declared himself as the President. General Ayub was extremely vocal about the various self interested political leaders and political parties which he believed had led to failure of democracy in the country. He believed that the concept of democracy did not suit a state like Pakistan and publically proclaimed that the polity in Pakistan was "too uneducated, divided,

impoverished and unsophisticated to form democratic institutions. He was also convinced that Pakistan's politicians were merely self - serving parasites on the body politic ^[2]” However in order to gain political legitimacy, General Ayub announced the formation of a system of ‘basic democracies’. The ‘basic democracy’ system was a system of indirect elections in which Ayub Khan would have an undisputed claim to Presidency. The system was complex in nature and was formed to increase the power of the military however he claimed that the system was formed to guide the citizens regarding the true ethics and foundations of democracy. The second constitution of Democratic Republic of Pakistan was formed under the leadership of Ayub Khan in 1962 which gave extensive executive and legislative powers to the President. The Constitution was considered flawed and unreliable by the Pakistani citizens and was succeeded by the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1973. Ayub Khan unlike his predecessors was an ardent believer of capitalism. His economic policies were suited only for a limited economic established class which led to regional imbalances amongst cities and also the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. As a result of the increasing economic inequality and the flawed democratic system which was more authoritarian in nature there was social unrest in Pakistan due to which Ayub Khan was forced to resign from his office in 1969. Ayub Khan upon his resignation announced Yahya Khan who was then Chief of the Pakistan Army as his successor. Even after his resignation Ayub Khan refused to let the citizens decide their fate in the form of elections.

General Yahya Khan on accession of power removed the Constitution placed by Ayub Khan and enforced Martial law in the country. Yahya Khan unlike any of his predecessors announced that direct elections across the country would be held in 1970 on the basis of ‘one person one vote’ and he let the people decide the leader they wanted. Therefore Yahya Khan unlike a large majority of military leaders in Pakistan actually believed in the concept of democracy or he claimed that he did. As a result of the first national elections Yahya Khan was elected the President of Pakistan. Yahya Khan however did not grant power to Mujib-Ur Rahman of the Awami League who had won the elections in East Pakistan and was not allowed to form a government. This fueled the existing unrest in East Pakistan as they claimed they were being treated as second class citizens in their country and wanted liberation from Pakistan. Yahya Khan imposed Martial law in East Pakistan which led to the 1971 Bangladesh Genocide. This led to the 1971 Liberation of East Pakistan by the Indian forces which defeated the Pakistan army and led to formation of Bangladesh as a separate country. Therefore the liberation of East Pakistan came as an aftermath of over 20 years of inequality and discrimination faced by the Bengalis of East Pakistan.

¹ Nasir, A. (2020). *Opinion | How Pakistan Abandoned Jinnah's Ideals*. Nytimes.com. Retrieved 5 June 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/opinion/pakistan-jinnah-ideals-abandoned.html>.

² Indurthy, R. (2020). *The fragility of democracy in pakistan: the military as the root cause on JSTOR*. Jstor.org. Retrieved 6 June 2020, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41855564>.



https://www.researchgate.net/figure/A-map-of-political-divisions-in-South-Asia-From-1947-until-1971-East-Pakistan-was-part_fig1_267629390

1971-1988

The Liberation of East Pakistan under the leadership of General Yahya Khan led to a great loss of face and humiliation for the military of Pakistan. There was uncertainty within the top army brass and it was the perfect opportunity for civil politicians to take advantage of this uncertainty and humiliation. It was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was elected as Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1971 and was the first elected Prime Minister to complete his term. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was formed under his leadership in 1973. Military intervention in politics was one of the reasons for the failure of democracy and in order to prevent further intervention the Constitution of 1973 codified civilian supremacy over the armed forces. "The constitution also included an article 245, declaring it a "high treason" for any attempt by the military to abrogate or conspire to abrogate and subvert the constitution "by the use of force or show of force or by other unconstitutional means [3]"

General Zia Ul Haq, the Chief of Army Staff removed the Bhutto government in 1977 on the grounds of the PPP (People's Party of Pakistan) rigging the parliamentary elections in 1977. General Zia Ul Haq imposed Martial law across the country and declared the constitution of 1973 as invalid. He changed the government system from parliamentary to semi-presidential. General Zia Ul-Haq's eighth amendment significantly hampered Pakistan's prospects of attaining a successful democracy. The amendment allowed the President to dissolve the government of the Prime Minister on his will which significantly increased the authority of the President. Zia Ul-Haq also envisaged converting Pakistan from an Islamic Republic to an Islamic state. Zia Ul-Haq's policies focused on Islamization of law and wanted to re-establish polity on the fundamentals of Islam. This enforcement of Islamic law caused great conflict and unrest within the Pakistan society. In 1988 Zia-Ul Haq died in a mysterious plane crash which marked a new era in the politics of Pakistan.

1988-2008

The first decades post Zia Ul-Haq's military dictatorship was marked by power sharing between Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif who succeeded by Pervez Musharraf's military rule. Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif were two Pakistani leaders who dared to follow the ideals of Jinnah's fair democracy however were removed under military coupes. Benazir Bhutto who was widely known as the 'daughter of the East' swept the 1988 general elections in Pakistan. However the Bhutto government was dissolved by President Ghulam Khan in 1990 in accordance with the eight amendment introduced by Zia-Ul Haq which gave the President the power to dissolve the government of the Prime Minister. Benazir's hostile relations with the President and the top military brass were the reasons which led to her dismissal. Nawaz Sharif was elected as Prime Minister in the 1990 elections however he too was forced to resign by the army in 1993. Nawaz Sharif's decision of not interfering in the Gulf War was one of the many key issues which made the military leaders think that he was not assertive and aggressive enough to remain the leader of the state. Benazir Bhutto came to power again in 1993 and was replaced by Nawaz Sharif in the 1996 elections. During his second tenure Nawaz Sharif passed the Thirteenth Amendment which reduced the extensive powers given to the President. He then targeted both the military and judiciary and wanted to dismiss the Chief Of Army Parvez Musharraf staff however was unsuccessful which led to a coup and Pakistan again falling under military rule.

Parvez Musharraf's military dictatorship from 1999-2008 was filled with both ups and downs.

Musharraf removed the 13th Amendment passed by the Nawaz Sharif government which reduced the extensive powers of President and brought parity between sharing of power between the Prime Minister and President. Digital Media grew significantly under Musharraf's tenure however it was also one of the main reasons which caused his resignation. The new generation of Pakistan was exposed to Democracy and globalisation because of digital media which led emergence of a modern middle class. This modern middle class opposed Musharraf's regime which led to his resignation in 2008.

2008-2020

The last twelve years in the politics of Pakistan have been more stable as compared to the previous six decades however the governments which have come to power have been mere puppets to the military. There have been no military coupes however the military still continues to pull the strings and control the politics of the country. Nawaz Sharif who was elected as Prime Minister for his third term in 2013 did not view India as imminent threat and wanted to change policies towards the country. He saw India as a partner in development which would mean a reduction in the defence budget and strengthening of other sectors of the government. The army saw Nawaz Sharif as a threat to them and therefore removed his government. The military used the judiciary by accusing of being corrupt and untruthful. "The Court ruled against him under Article 62 of the constitution on corruption charges, stating he was neither *sadiq* (truthful) nor *ameen* (honest) — these remain

³ Indurthy, R. (2020). *The fragility of democracy in pakistan: the military as the root cause on JSTOR*. Jstor.org. Retrieved 6 June 2020, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41855564>.

ambiguous charges undefined in law ^[4]). Even though the military leaders did not stage a coup yet they still managed to remove Nawaz Sharif from power. Similarly in the 2018 elections the military largely helped Imran Khan in his election campaign and there were suggestions that the army was conducting a silent coup against anyone who criticised Imran Khan. “There were widespread abductions of journalists, censorship, and financial ruin of establishments that refused to toe the official line — do not cover or praise the PML-N, focus on the winning image of PTI and Imran Khan ^[5].” Therefore even in today's day and age the military is largely influential in the politics of Pakistan with their involvement being more indirect as compared to previous times.

Reasons for Failure of Democracy

Over the course of Pakistan's Independence, the democratic structure of the country has tremendously failed. Various blunders and narcissistic decisions by leaders across the history of Pakistan have led the country away from the ideals of democracy proposed by Jinnah. Military supremacy, Dearth of capable successors to Jinnah, absence of a strong and successful constitution and the ‘sudden birth’ of the nation were the reasons which have led to failure of the democratic system.

Military supremacy

Over the 73 years of independence for Pakistan, the country has had 18 Prime Ministers with only one of them being able to complete their term as Prime Minister. On the other hand 3 military dictators have ruled the state for almost a decade each without being elected by the people which signifies the domination of the military on the politics of the country. The supremacy of the army began since independence because the military was prioritised over other sectors as Pakistan faced an existential threat from India. During the initial years the military was allocated more than 60% of the annual budget. The Kashmir war further increased the power of the army with government giving complete autonomy to the armed forces. Therefore the first decade was highly significant in the deepening of the civil-military imbalance and setting the precedent for domination of the armed forces with the army emphatically growing as an institution and as compared to the political turmoil. The initial political chaos produced a power vacuum in the country which was filled by the armed forces. The military being superior and more disciplined became entrenched in the politics of the country and therefore till date have continued their domination and authority on the politics of the country.

Dearth of capable successors to Jinnah

Muhammad Jinnah died in 1948 following which the politics of Pakistan was witness to complete turmoil and chaos. Post Jinnah's death there were seven Prime Ministers in a short span of eleven years none of them who had the same stature as Jinnah. Jinnah was both the political and

national leader of the country and the Muslim League lacked leaders who could replace a man of Jinnah's vigour. Moreover Jinnah was an active member of the Independence movement and was secular in nature. His ideas of secularism were abandoned and there was oppression of minorities which gave rise to social unrest in the country. The Indian National Congress on the other hand was an inclusive organization which included leaders of separate ideologies under a single umbrella. There was competition for power even in Congress but the rules of democracy were kept in tact and respected unlike Pakistan. Politicians after Jinnah were highly critical of democracy and focused more on sustaining and consolidating power for themselves. Jinnah also advocated civilian supremacy over military as he said “executive authority flows from the head of the government of Pakistan, who is the governor-general, and therefore, any command or orders that may come to you cannot come without the sanction of the executive head.” Therefore Jinnah's vision for an independent Pakistan was unmatched and there was no other who could replace him.

Weak government structure and the absence of a successful constitution

The government structure of Pakistan has remained significantly weak since the independence of the country and one of the key reasons for that is the civil-military conflict. The national movement in Pakistan did not lead to formation of a national party which could stabilize the government structure. The constant military intervention and authoritarianism has significantly weakened the democratic structure as most military leaders imposed either Martial law or formed laws which them undisputed and extensive control of power. The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan was formed in 1973 which succeeded two other other constitutions. Unlike India which had a constitution at the time of its independence to impose restrictions on the politicians there was no constitution in Pakistan till 1956 which was succeeded by a new constitution in 1962 to limit the use of power of leaders. Constitutions were formed by opportunist leaders to become undisputed law makers of the country. The absence of laws meant there were no restrictions on the leaders and they had extensive powers to themselves.

‘Sudden’ birth of Pakistan and ineffective bureaucracy

The state of Pakistan was carved out of the Indian state therefore the state was artificially created by the British Empire. The people of the country lacked a sense of unity as to how to proceed after gaining independence. There was division of people in the country on the basis of language, ethnicity and region which the state failed to effectively tackle. The domination of the Punjabi's over the Sindhi's, Balochi's, Pashtuns and Bengali's created a sense of division in the country. The Punjabi's who form a major part of the military believed that it was their responsibility and duty to preserve the integrity of the nation and therefore believed that military coupes were the only ways to ensure stability. Unlike India which had bureaucrats with the experience of working under the British crown, the bureaucracy in Pakistan lacked the experience to administer a nation with inefficient resources, political turmoil, economic instability and internal divisions with the country.

⁴ Singh, M. (2020). *The Curious Case of Pakistan's Democracy* | GRI. Global Risk Insights. Retrieved 8 June 2020, from <https://globalriskinsights.com/2018/09/curious-case-pakistans-democracy/>.

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Conclusion

Over the seventy years of existence Pakistan is regarded as a failed state which is suffering from poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, religious extremism and domination by certain aristocrats. The country has delineated from the ideals which were propagated by Jinnah which has led to the collapse of the democratic structure. The military and the civil leadership are equally responsible for the sham of democracy which exists in the country as self interest and personal gain have been prioritized over national interest by majority leaders. The country is an external debt close to 95 billion US dollars and therefore is in dire straits of a democratic revolution to help itself out of the slump it currently is in and become prosperous as imagined by Jinnah. The geographical location, resources, man power provide Pakistan the necessary tools to become a self-sufficient and prosperous country but the country requires efficient leadership to utilize these resources.

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