

Democratic governance, challenges and opportunities: a case study of Pakistan

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Abstract

Democratic governance is a political system based on democratic principles, including citizen participation, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and influence of public sector reforms. The role of democratic governance extends to the building of resilient institutions, which are capable of effectively addressing the needs and aspirations of citizens. These institutions uphold the rule of law, efficiently deliver services to people, and maintain checks and balances against governmental power. Democratic governance is essential in ensuring participation by citizens in decision-making, protection of individual rights and freedoms, transparency, accountability of the actions by the government, social equity, economic development, and political stability. It builds trust in public institutions and enhances the legitimacy of government actions to make them effective.

The article interrogates the critical challenges and potential opportunities for strengthening democratic governance in Pakistan. Democratic governance is dealing with several challenges in Pakistan including political instability, corrupt practices, weak public institutions, policy discontinuity, judicial inefficiency, the influence of military and bureaucratic interests, electoral fraud and rigging, human rights violations, socio-economic challenges, external and environmental challenges, etc.

Despite these obstacles, there are possible opportunities and recommendations to strengthen democratic governance in Pakistan. The findings underline the need to focus on electoral reforms, judicial independence, decentralization of power and authority, protection of human rights violations, and other institutional mechanisms strengthening processes like civil service reforms, anti-corruption efforts, and broadening gender equality dimensions. It also emphasizes the role of electronic media as well as participation from civil society in fostering transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. The study concludes with practical recommendations for policy and practice, aimed at fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and effective democratic governance system. The research concludes that Pakistan ultimately needs to take crucial steps in promoting democratic governance.

Keywords: Democratic Governance, Political instability, Decentralization, Corruption, Socio-economic challenges

INTRODUCTION

Democratic Governance is a system of government grounded in democratic principles such as citizen participation, rule of law, transparency, and accountability (Mudacumura, 2014). For democratic governance to be fully effective, it requires the fulfillment of basic conditions of dignity and well-being for the people. Merely living in a democracy is insufficient if citizens do not enjoy a quality of life which is ultimately the responsibility of state. Moreover, inequality and chaos will persist, if the justice system serves only the powerful and will resultantly lead to the poor governance. Therefore, social and material progress is essential for nurturing trust in democratic institutions (Máttar, 2021). 12 principles of democratic governance effectively address the needs and aspirations of all citizens, including participation, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, openness and transparency, the rule of law, ethical conduct, competence and capacity, innovation, sustainability and long-term orientation, sound financial management, human rights, cultural diversity, and social cohesion, and accountability ((ELoGE), 2008). The study aims to explore the formidable challenges to democratic governance and opportunities and further provide actionable recommendations for policymakers dedicated to fostering a strong democratic governance system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The welfare of the people is central to democracy, as implied in Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy. Governments exist to serve their citizens, embodying the essence of democratic governance. Pakistan faces numerous challenges in the 21st century, including poverty, infrastructural and institutional deficits, leadership issues, lack of rule of law, corruption, insecurity, terrorism, geographic challenges, human rights violations, and political parties lacking clear ideologies. Democratic governance is widely seen as a solution to these challenges (Odusanya, 2014).

"Democratic Governance" is a concept in public administration derived from "democracy" and "governance." The precise definition and conceptual understanding of "democracy" continue to be elusive. However, numerous scholars have made valiant efforts to understand this phrase. Paula Becker describes democracy as a government derived from the people, exercised by the people, and for the people's interests (Paula Becker, 2008). Adebayo highlights transparency in government operations, anti-corruption efforts, a predictable political system, participatory decision-making, government business auditing, curbing of bureaucratic obstacles, governance decentralization, judicial autonomy, and respect for human rights and the rule of law (Olukoshi, 2001). According to the UNDP, "governance" is "the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels," including systems that allow individuals and communities to express themselves, assert their rights, fulfill their obligations, and resolve differences (Gisselquist, 2012).

Thus, one definition of democratic governance is how the state and civil society work together to establish partnerships, networks, coordination, negotiation, dialogue, consensus, and inclusion in formulating and implementing public policies (Pribadi & Iqbal, 2022). It implies a system where all citizens can vote to elect representatives who govern on the basis of mandate given to them by the people (Haq, 2010).

Democratic governance in Pakistan can be analyzed through several theoretical lenses. One prominent framework is the concept of "hybrid regimes," which refers to political systems that combine elements of democracy and authoritarianism (Diamond, 2002). Pakistan exemplifies a hybrid regime, where democratic institutions exist but are often overshadowed by military influence and undemocratic practices (Nazeer Mahar T. M., 2023). One of the most significant challenges to democratic governance in Pakistan is political instability. The frequent changes in government, political infighting, and a lack of continuity in policies have weakened democratic institutions (Xiang Wu, 2020). The instability often stems from a lack of consensus on critical national issues and a tendency among political leaders to prioritize personal or party interests over national interests (Bukhari, 2024). Another challenge of corruption which has become the order of the day affects various sectors of government and undermines public trust (Khan, Rethi, & Szegedi, 2018). Further, the institutional framework in Pakistan is characterized by weak and fragmented structures that are unable to effectively support democratic governance (Khan H., 2018).

The judiciary, for instance, has often been accused of lacking independence and being subject to political pressure and undemocratic forces (Waseem, 2012). Consistent jurisprudence based on law and efficient resolution procedures are essential for predictability, transparency, and accountability (Hyder, 2018). Without security, democratic governance is unattainable and security without the rule of law is a Hobbesian nightmare. Assuring security and the rule of law demands political will, swift justice, resources, and time to repair and construct institutions and develop democratic community rules that are widely accepted. (Marcella, Democratic Governance and the Rule of Law: Lessons from Colombia, 2009). Similarly, the electoral system has faced criticism for not being fully representative and for allowing fraud and manipulation (Ali, 2024).

Socio-economic disparities also pose a significant challenge to democratic governance. Ayesha Siddiqi notes that large segments of the population remain marginalized and excluded from the political process due to economic inequality and social stratification. This exclusion limits the effectiveness of democratic governance by restricting the participation of all citizens in the decision-making process (Siddiqi, 2017).

Pakistan's democratic governance is influenced by its geopolitical position, its connections with neighboring countries, and global powers. According to

Cameron, external pressures and security concerns, particularly related to hostile neighboring countries, often lead to the prioritization of military interests over democratic governance (MacKenzie, 2002). The dependence on foreign aid and external support has further complicated efforts to establish a stable democratic system (Musharraf, 2006).

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities to strengthen democratic governance in Pakistan. Reforming and strengthening democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, electoral bodies, and legislative assemblies are prerequisites for democratic governance. In this regard, the UNDP's Democratic Governance Programme in Pakistan aims to improve governance at various levels by supporting devolution and decentralization, parliamentary development, electoral reforms, political and fiscal devolution, and enhancing the capacity of state institutions for transparency, accountability, and capability (UNDP, Fast Facts - Democratic Governance, 2014).

E-governance, using information and communication technologies, enhances government efficiency, transparency, and accountability, and promotes citizen engagement. Access to information facilitates the exercise of the right to information and enables communication mechanisms that empower individuals, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, to express their opinions and engage in democratic processes (UNDP, Democratic Governance Reader, 2009).

Initiatives to support civil society engagement and encourage public involvement in policy-making processes can play a vital role in promoting democratic governance by holding the government accountable and advocating for the rights of citizens (Bhargava, 2015). Effective governance and institutions are essential for development, and accountability ensures better service delivery (OECD, 2014). In nations where democratic institutions stand robust and anti-corruption measures are diligently enforced, trust in government becomes a cornerstone, citizens engage more actively in civic affairs, and the fruits of economic prosperity are more widely distributed (Saaida, 2024).

In addition, democratic governance facilitates a growing economy, which in turn enhances the quality of that governance system (Sharma, 2007). Policies that promote inclusive economic growth and reduce socio-economic disparities can help create a more equitable and stable environment for democratic governance (Rashid Amjad, 2015). There is widespread belief that fiscal decentralization can help increase the effectiveness of public spending, which in turn can strengthen the democratic governance system (Martinez-Vazquez & McNab, 1997). Partnerships with international organizations and donor agencies provide resources and expertise for democratic reforms (Adeney, 2007). Engaging with global networks and learning from the experiences of other countries can help Pakistan develop and implement effective strategies for improving democratic governance

(Husain D. I., 2018). However, under its Democratic Governance work, UNDP Pakistan provides support for strengthening government institutions and governance mechanisms, engaging various stakeholders for enhanced service delivery, improving Rule of Law and Access to Justice, and expanding democratic space across the country. All portfolio components are need-based, centered on sustainability, and programmed around key themes such as strengthening electoral processes, Human Rights, governance reforms, and the Rule of Law (UNDP, Democratic Governance, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study employs a qualitative research design with a strong emphasis on a case study approach. This work allows for an in-depth understanding of the complicated factors that influence democratic governance in Pakistan. The primary focus is on secondary data sources including research articles, journals, books, reports, dissertations, projects, websites, and newspaper columns. Academic books offer comprehensive historical and theoretical context, while reports from international organizations (e.g., World Bank, UNDP, and Transparency International), and governmental bodies contribute valuable statistical data and insights into Democratic governance issues.

Critical Challenges of Pakistan's Democratic Governance System

Pakistan is a developing country that has been struggling with governance issues since its inception. There are various and interconnected challenges such as political, economic, social, and security-related issues that have impeded the stability and development of the country.

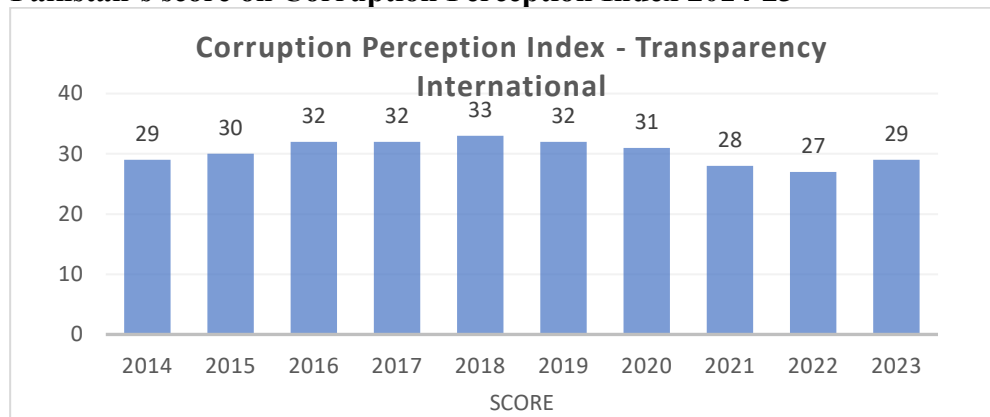
Political challenges

Pakistan is facing numerous significant political challenges, one of which is military intervention. Military interference in the political affairs of the country is a severe challenge not only to democratic governance but also to political stability, the development of stable democratic institutions, and civil supremacy. The history of Pakistan bears witness that the military has governed four times: from 1958 to 1969, from 1969 to 1971, from 1977 to 1988, and from 1999 to 2008 (Nayar, 2207). Further, the political assassinations, and victimizations, Electoral Malpractices, Human Rights Issues, economic challenges, Fragile institutions and lack of strong checks and balances, Terrorism and Security Threats, media restrictions, and sectarian violence caused political turmoil in the country which have hindered the development of a stable and effective governance system (Zia-ur-Rehman, 2023). Opposition parties often attempt to overthrow the government by any means, disrupting policy continuity and timely implementation. Political turmoil is further exploited by corrupt bureaucrats who engage in political engineering instead of focusing on service delivery (Khan, 2020).

Corruption and Accountability Challenges

Corruption is a pervasive issue in Pakistan, impacting every sector and hindering national development. The 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Pakistan as the 133rd least corrupt country out of 180 nations and Pakistan has a score of 29 (Economics, 2023). To combat corruption, democratic governance emphasizes accountability, transparency, and participation (Muhammad Imran, 2018).

Pakistan's score on Corruption Perception Index 2014-23



Source: (International T., 2023)

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Pakistan's primary investigative agency against corruption, recovered Rs. 466 billion between 2000 and 2019 from various sources (Sadiq D. E., 2020). On December 9, 2023, NAB Chairman Lt Gen (retd) Nazir Ahmed emphasized the need for collective efforts from all stakeholders to eradicate corruption, noting that the bureau had recovered Rs. 2.3 trillion and generated over \$10 billion in savings for the national exchequer (APP, 2023). Despite Pakistan's efforts to enact and enforce anti-corruption laws through agencies such as NAB, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), and Provincial Anti-Corruption Establishments (ACEs), there is a need for additional measures. This includes the formation of more institutions like an anticorruption commission, systems for intelligence sharing, and mechanisms for monitoring the use of public funds by the government to effectively implement anti-corruption strategies.

External factors and policy influences

In Pakistan, policymaking is heavily impacted by outside factors like economic and social needs, as well as international pressures. There is a complex policy landscape that is shaped by the country's geopolitical location, international alliances, and economic dependencies. These factors interact with bureaucratic and military processes to give rise to policy choices (Khan, Imam, & Ali, 2023).

Infrastructure issues of Bureaucracy

Frequent postings and transfers of civil servants at both policy-making and district administration levels are often driven by political motives. This

practice has led to the politicization of civil services, undermining the concept of a neutral, upright, and citizen-friendly public servant (Shafqat, Pakistani Bureaucracy: Crisis of Governance and Prospects of Reform, winter 1999). To improve governance, political leaders and parties must agree that the public service must be non-partisan, efficient, professionally competent, and driven by merit. Political support and commitment are essential for democratic governance. A significant challenge to democratic governance is establishing a competent, neutral, and honest bureaucracy, which is essential for sustainable and equitable development. For ordinary citizens, civil servants play a crucial role in their daily lives (Ishrat, 2014).

Geography challenges

Pakistan's geography poses significant challenges to governance. The mountainous regions of Baluchistan, FATA, and NWFP, along with desert areas in southern Punjab and eastern Sindh, complicate transport, communication, and service delivery (Mezzera, 2009). Although the state has historically struggled and may have shown a lack of desire to provide basic amenities to isolated and thinly populated places, it has also extracted substantial resource wealth from these regions. These regions continue to be the most underprivileged and marginalized in the nation, and they also present the biggest obstacles for the state.

Local Governance Issues

Based on British civil law, Pakistan has a comparatively extensive legal system for government. An accountable and efficient local government structure has been attempted to be established. The Local Government Plan, unveiled by the government in August 2001, created three levels of decentralization in local government covering political, financial, and administrative aspects. The plan aimed to enhance service delivery through local management (Rafique, Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2023). Despite constitutional provisions supporting devolution, Pakistan's local governance system faces numerous challenges. Issues such as over-centralization, insufficient financial resources, weak institutional capacities, and limited citizen participation continue to hinder the effectiveness of this level of government (Khalid, 2024).

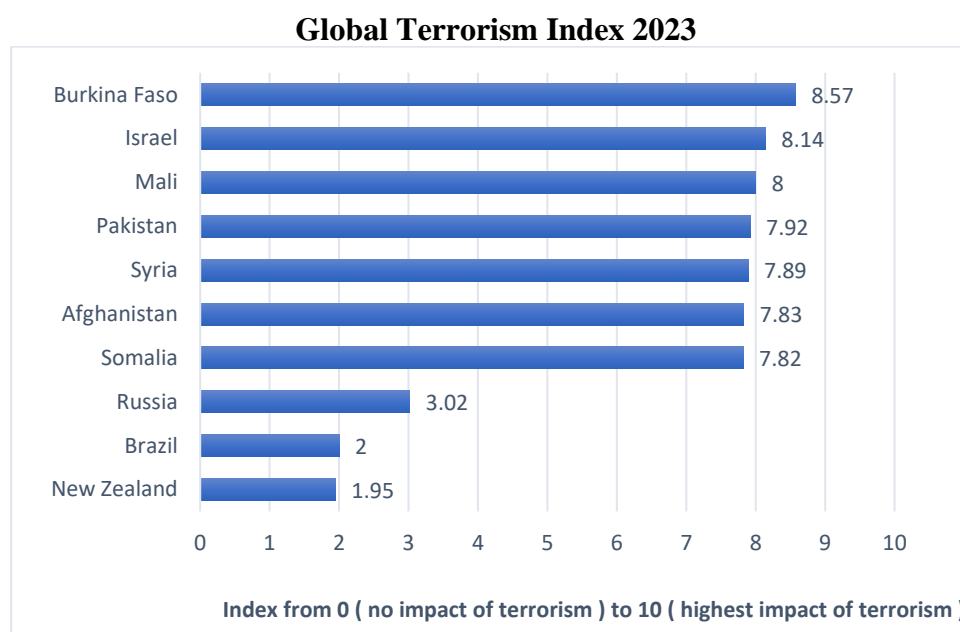
Disrespect of the Rule of Law

Pakistan is grappling with significant challenges in upholding the rule of law within its society, largely due to the courts' inability to deliver swift and efficient justice to its people. Under the rule of law, all entities, whether public or private, are subject to laws that are publicly stated, uniformly applied, and decided upon without favor or bias. These laws should align with international human rights norms and standards. Fundamentally, the rule of law serves as the foundation for effective governance in any state, necessitating adherence to four core principles: accountability, just laws, transparent government, and accessible and impartial dispute resolution

(UNDP, 2017). In short, flaws in governance implementation have led to social, political, and economic degradation.

Security and terrorism challenges

The effects of poor governance in Pakistan are starkly evident in its deteriorating law and order situation, leading to economic crises and political instability. These factors exacerbate issues such as radicalization, extremism, militancy, sectarianism, and religious ethnicity. The economic growth and governance challenges in the country are directly and indirectly influenced by these security concerns. These issues have significantly impacted Pakistan's stability (Shahab, 2021). In 2023, Pakistan was ranked as the 4th most affected country by terrorism according to the Global Terrorism Index given below highlighting the significant obstacle terrorism poses to achieving effective governance in the country (Statista, Global terrorism index 2023, top 50 countries, 2024).



Source: (Statista, Global terrorism index 2023, 2023)

Military Intervention

Pakistan's military holds significant sway over policy and governance, exerting considerable influence on both foreign policy and internal security matters. Amidst ongoing political unrest, the military continues to play a pivotal role in shaping governance, particularly in areas like economic management and foreign policy. According to a Gallup Pakistan poll in August 2022, public sentiment favored the military over the democratic government, with 81.5% viewing the military favorably compared to 51.5%

for the democratic government. This perception extends to governance issues, where the military holds a slight edge (Index, 2024). The following table shows more than three decades of military rule over the country.

Military Regime and Impact on Democratic Governance

Era	Duration	Type of Rule	Impact on Democratic Governance
1947-1958	11 years	Democratic	Establishment of initial democratic institutions, political instability.
1958-1971	13 years	Military (AyubKhan, Yahya Khan)	Suspension of democratic processes, centralization of power, economic reforms.
1971-1977	6 years	Democratic (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto)	Partial restoration of democracy, political repression, and nationalization policies.
1977-1988	11 years	Military (Zia-ul-Haq)	Severe restrictions on political activities, Islamization, and weak institutions.
1988-1999	11 years	Democratic	Restoration of democracy, political instability, corruption, economic issues.
1999-2008	9 years	Military (Pervez Musharraf)	Suppression of political opposition, economic liberalization, and limited democratic reforms.
2008-Present	16 + years	Democratic	Strengthening of democratic institutions, challenges with governance, economic and security issues.

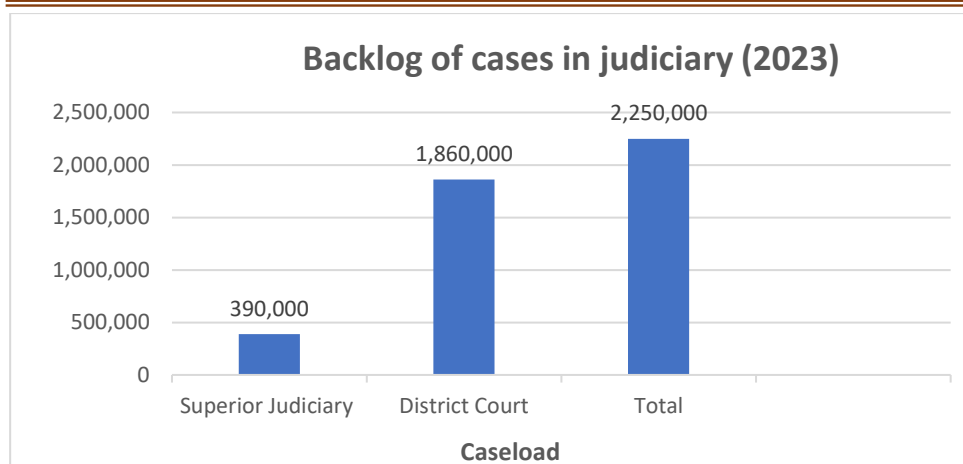
Source: (Altaf, 2019)

Democratic institutions and their challenges

Pakistan's democratic institutions, encompassing the executive, legislature, and elected representatives, frequently contend with asserting their authority amidst bureaucratic and military influences. This ongoing power struggle between institutions poses a significant challenge to effective democratic governance. Politicians elected by the people often confront bureaucratic and military opposition in pursuing policy goals. Policy deadlock, lengthy decision-making, and democratic compromises can result from this dynamic.

Judicial challenges

The judiciary plays a crucial role in governance and upholding the rule of law in Pakistan. However, the effectiveness of the justice system is greatly diminished by systematic delays in providing justice and backlog of cases, which in turn limits its ability to serve as a strong foundation for democratic governance. (Paula R Newberg, 1996). The following statistic graph depicts that the district judiciary handles 82% of the pending cases (1.86 million), with the remaining 18% (0.39 million cases) going to the upper tier, which comprises the Federal Shariat Court, the Supreme Court, and State and local courts.



Source: (PAKISTAN, 2023)

It leads to a decline in public trust in the judiciary, hinders the timely delivery of justice, and undermines the fundamental rights of citizens, thus weakening the entire governance system. These are the causes that rank Pakistan 130th out of 142 countries in the Rule of Law Index as per the report of the World Justice Project (WJP, 2023.).

Opportunities and Recommendations for Strengthening Democratic Governance

Despite numerous challenges to Democratic governance in Pakistan since its inception, the following are the emerging opportunities and recommendations that can be leveraged to strengthen democratic governance.

Electoral Reforms

The first opportunity is to improve the electoral process for ensuring the legitimacy and transparency of elections which in turn strengthens democratic governance (International D. R., 2012). There is an urgent need to implement comprehensive electoral reforms, starting with the redrawing of constituencies based on the latest population census data. Independent and autonomous electoral commissions, along with an empowered Chief Election Commissioner should be granted unrestricted authority to manage elections including assuming direct control over provincial and district administrative operations. Introducing electronic voting machines can minimize manual errors and electoral fraud while ensuring transparent and accountable voter registration processes is crucial. Additionally, the Election Commission should have the authority to disqualify candidates who fail to meet eligibility criteria from contesting elections. These measures are essential to ensure fair and credible electoral processes in Pakistan (Husain I., Democratic Governance, 2015).

Strengthening the Rule of Law

Another potential area is to enhance the judiciary's independence which can guarantee the equitable and uniform application of laws thereby

strengthening democratic institutions. The relationship between the rule of law and democratic governance is closely intertwined, as the presence of the rule of law plays a crucial role in ensuring the voluntary acceptance of a government's authority and thereby its legitimacy (Marcella, Democratic Governance And the Rule of Law, 2009). The administration of the justice system is slow, costly, and complicated and therefore backlog of millions of cases. Case detection, investigation, and prosecution are inefficient, resulting in poor conviction rates and criminals face no consequences for their nefarious actions (Imran, Idrees, & Saeed, 2024).

Decentralization and Local Governance

Decentralization of power and authority can play a crucial role in enhancing democratic governance at the local level by empowering local officials to serve the broader community effectively. Decentralization provides an opportunity for local governance systems to become more democratic, enabling officials to focus on the collective welfare of the community (Bland, 2000). In Pakistan, the 18th Amendment and 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award correctly delegated administrative, legal, and financial authority to province governments. The provinces have not fully devolved these functions and resources to local governments. It is at the local level where most interactions between ordinary citizens and the government occur, particularly concerning crucial services such as law and order, education, healthcare, water supply, and sanitation. Strengthening this local governance framework is essential for ensuring effective service delivery and fostering democratic participation at the grassroots level in Pakistan (UNDP, Devolution of Power: Pathways to Actualization, 2021).

For democratic governance, several actions must be conducted, including the transfer of administrative and financial authority, capacity building through resources and training, promoting community involvement in local governance and development initiatives, as well as transparent and accountable local government elections (PILDAT, 2013-14). Since local governance is essential to attain democratic governance, more effort needs to be made at all levels.

Civil Service Reforms

Currently, Pakistan is facing various crises, including the security of persons and property, poor law and order, delayed justice, energy shortages, and failing social services such as health and education which are all linked to governance issues. The civil services, once a prestigious career, have declined due to politicization and personal gain (Rana, 2022). Immediate reforms are essential to steer the country in the right direction. A roadmap has already been prepared, with detailed recommendations outlined in the Report of the National Commission for Government Reforms (NCGR) (Reforms, 2008). Public service commission reforms, merit-based hiring in the civil service, training, the performance appraisal system, promotions, compensation, and accountability mechanisms are a few suggestions that

could be made (Shafqat, Policy Brief: Pathways to Governance and Civil Service Reform in Pakistan: Federal, Provincial and Local, 2020).

Anti-Corruption Measures

Corruption and democratic governance are opposing forces that operate in both developed and developing countries. The relative strength of corruption versus democratic governance significantly impacts the success or failure of a government in achieving its development objectives within a welfare state (Farida Faisal, 2017). The opportunity to reduce corrupt practices improves public trust in democratic institutions and ensures effective use of public resources for development (Imran, Murtaza, & Akbar, 2023). Immediate steps are required regarding the establishment of more robust independent anti-corruption bodies with authority to investigate and prosecute corruption cases as well as implementing strict anti-corruption laws and ensuring their effective enforcement through NAB, FIA, and Provincial Anti-Corruption Establishments (ACEs) (Sadiq D. E., 2020).

More measures can be implemented for a more transparent, accountable, and efficient system of democratic governance that effectively combats corruption such as policy-making for promoting transparency and enacting and enforce laws that guarantee the public's right to access information held by public authorities (Klaaren, 2013), political accountability through proper mechanisms (Lughmani, Abdullah, & Khan, 2023), e-governance solutions to reduce human discretion in administrative processes (Atique, Htay, & Mumtaz, 2024), international cooperation for assistance and capacity building of law enforcement agencies, etc.

Strengthening Democratic Culture

The strong democratic culture reinforces the well-functioning of governance by encouraging civic participation, promoting tolerance and respect for diverse opinions, and accountability. Using parliament and other legal avenues to resolve political differences between parties is crucial. Parliamentarians must engage in discussions on short and long-term, specific, workable plans to enhance economic growth, address unemployment, and tackle security issues. These efforts will contribute to promoting democratic governance in return (Masood, 2023). There is a need for Pakistan to develop a political culture supportive of democratic institutions and practice and respect for Pakistan's institutions, for each other, and the processes of law and government which alone can maintain the integrity of the entire democratic governance system (Group, 1997).

Continuity of Democratization

In a democracy, the judiciary, civil service, and military represent the state. These institutions allow the ruling party to implement its manifesto. However, demanding that the chief executive be respected while disregarding other governmental institutions is disingenuous. Disharmony between these institutions threatens democracy, democratic institutions, and the state (Iram, 2012).

Separation of power and a balance among the various branches of government are essential for a successful democratic system. In Pakistan, the concept of separation of power appears to be lacking because the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary often do not perform their defined functions. Although the 1973 constitution of Pakistan outlines the principle of the separation of powers for each branch such as the Legislature dealing with articles 50 to 89, the Executive with articles 90 to 100, and the Judiciary with articles 175 to 212, but application of the doctrine of separation of powers remains a challenge. The fundamental nature of democracy is rooted in the governance structure of separation of powers and the concept of checks and balances. Without these principles, where each branch of government operates independently and checks the power of the others, state institutions may encroach upon each other's jurisdictions. This can ultimately weaken the democratic setup in the country (Bazmi & Qureshi, 2021).

Democratic Governance through Effective Information Acts

The Federal Government's Freedom of Information Act is significantly weakened and ineffective. It fails to promote the flow of information to the public. In contrast, India's Right to Information Act has been crucial in holding public servants and political leaders accountable, as their actions can be scrutinized by the public, potentially causing them embarrassment. Civil society organizations and the media have been instrumental in accessing information and data through this Act (Afzal & Yongmei, 2023). Implementing similar robust legislation in Pakistan, along with limiting the scope of the Official Secrets Act, would greatly enhance transparency in governmental operations and bolster democratic governance. While provincial laws in KP and Punjab show progress, necessary institutional frameworks are still lacking. Transparent governments that embrace these laws gain significantly from their effectiveness (Husain I., Democratic Governance, 2015). Finally, comprehensive implementation of the right-to-information mechanism may develop a transparent and responsible government, limit corruption, and avoid power abuse. By ensuring that citizens have access to information and that government actions are transparent and accountable, Pakistan can move towards achieving genuine democratic governance. This will enhance trust in public institutions, promote good governance, and ultimately lead to a more stable and prosperous society (Kamran, 2022).

Protection of Human Rights

Every democratic institution must protect, promote, and realize human rights. The UNDP prefers "democratic governance" over "good governance" because it prioritizes human rights. The international community increasingly understands that democratic governance and the government's capacity to uphold human rights obligations are fundamental to sustainable development and social fairness. This approach ensures that the governance

structures are inclusive, accountable, and responsive to the needs of all citizens (UNDP, Measuring Democratic Governance A framework for selecting pro-poor and gender-sensitive indicators, 2006). Both human rights-specific institutions like national human rights commissions and ombudsmen and democratic governance institutions like parliament, the judiciary, media, and civil society are involved in national systems for promoting and protecting human rights.

On March 11, 2024, Patricia Gossman, Associate Asia Director at Human Rights Watch, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan urging the adoption of an agenda that actively promotes and protects human rights. Due to the severe economic crisis, the democratic governance system must offer appropriate social security to protect Pakistanis' rights to health, food, social security, and a decent standard of living.

Human Rights Watch called on the Pakistani government to implement tangible measures to safeguard essential civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights in nine crucial domains. The following issues are addressed: economic fairness, electoral reforms, digital rights, freedom of expression and protection of civil society, freedom of religion and belief, jail reform, reducing violence against women and girls, enhancing access to education, and preserving rights in counterterrorism operations (Watch, 2024).

Enhancing Gender Equality

Gender equality is an opportunity for the promotion of more inclusive and responsive democratic governance in Pakistan. The importance of implementing progressive policies to enhance women's participation in politics and decision-making cannot be ignored. It is the need of the hour to recognize gender equality as vital for women's empowerment and democratic governance (Khawaja, 2017). Democratic governance and sexual equality can be reconciled by granting women legitimacy and positions of influence in decision-making processes. This can be achieved by ensuring that women actively participate in debates, aligning their gender objectives with the broader goal of democratic governance (Guzmán, 2024). In this regard, Pakistan can make significant strides towards achieving gender equality and strengthening its democratic governance.

Electronic Media and Civil Society Participation

The media should have a more significant role in democratic governance since it can effect beneficial societal change. It is imperative to avoid falling into any form of bias or favoritism and instead assist individuals in achieving democratic governance (Pradhan, 2024). Electronic media plays a pivotal role in enhancing democratic governance by providing a platform for public debate and holding officials accountable through the widespread dissemination of information (Habermas, 2006). In addition, the active participation of civil society is a cornerstone of promoting democratic governance. Supporting and protecting the rights of non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups, creating platforms for public consultation and participation in policymaking, and promoting civic education programs can raise awareness about democratic rights which will promote democratic governance in return (Mavee, 2022).

In short, comprehensive recommendations are easy to express but hard to implement. To execute the above recommendations without bias and point scoring, all major political parties must agree to reach a consensus. Without consensus among political parties, efforts to protect and promote fundamental civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights will likely falter, hindering the progress toward a good democratic governance system.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, democratic governance in Pakistan faces multifaceted persistent challenges, including weak institutional frameworks, lawlessness, corruption, socio-economic disparities, and compromised judiciary. Moreover, owing to political instability and military interventions also undermined the continuity of policy and deteriorated democratic institutions. Despite these challenges, there are numerous ways forward to enhance democratic governance in Pakistan such as electoral reforms, judicial independence, and strengthening the civil service can improve democratic governance. However, comprehensive electoral reforms are central to ensure the legitimacy and transparency of elections and public confidence in democratic processes can be bolstered. Further, the process of decentralization of power and the delegation of authority to local governing bodies can enhance the provision of services and foster greater involvement of citizens. A robust democratic culture necessitates the preservation of human rights, gender parity, and unrestricted media access. It is the need of the hour to establish robust independent bodies as well as the implementation of concerned laws so that the scourge of corruption can be crushed. The role of media and participation of civil society cannot be neglected for transparency and accountability and for fostering democratic governance. In brief, by addressing substantial challenges and implementing reforms in achieving effective democratic governance, Pakistan can work towards establishing a strong governance structure that fosters trust, inclusion, transparency, and efficacy in its various services and effective democratic system.

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