

**Name: Abdul Rehman**

**Roll No: 19L-1135**

**Section: CS-D**

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Democracy of Pakistan: Hopes and Hurdles

Overview:

* Introduction:
* Basic Definition
* Historical context
* Optimal Conditions for development
* Expert Views
* Discussion:
* Hopes for a Democratic State
* Role of Elite Class
* Role of Government
* Role of Political Parties
* Hurdles in Development of Democracy
* Alternative Solutions:
* Adjustments
* Necessary Steps
* Diagnosis of Current State
* Conclusion

**Introduction:**

* **Basic Definition:-**According to **Saeed Shafqat**:   
  “Democracy as a system of governance and interest representation demands respect for dissent and opposition. It recognizes the principle of majority rule and guarantees protection of minorities. Democracy also builds faith in electoral contestation to gain public office and gives legitimacy to political parties as primary instruments for acquisition and transfer of power from one set of individuals to another”.  
  A **Democratic State** is a country in which the people choose their government and rulers by voting for the one that they believe is best suited for the task.  
  **Abraham Lincoln** best described it in his **Gettysburg Address** speech when he said that **“Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, for the people.”** Therefore, in Democracy, all the power of the state is in the hands of the common man and they can exercise the authority of government freely in any way they wish to do so. Who those people are and how the authority of the government is shared among them are the major issues for the democratic state. The most common decision making approach of democracy is the majority rule.
* **Optimal Conditions for Development:-**

As discussed in Democracy in Pakistan: Value Change and Challenges of Institution Building that “constructing and promoting democracy is not an easy task, it requires patience, time and, most importantly, a consensus among the powerful groups and elites in a society on the desirability of rule of law and governance through the consent of the people. Thus, Political leaders and elites through their actions and conduct, influence the formation of democratic norm the ones of responsibility for constructing democracy, promoting democratic norms, and institutionalizing democratic practices and principles is on the elites at the popular level. A large number of people in a society have to accept and demonstrate faith in democratic principles. In societies, where a gap between the elites and representatives of the people on professed principles of democracy and their actual conduct widens, people begin to lose faith in democracy”. So, the most favorable conditions for the development of democracy is when there is a strong understanding between the people and the government, when the gap between the standard of living of the elite class and the lower class, middle class is lessened.

* **Expert Opinion:-**Are there ways in which democracy can be made more effective, egalitarian and plural, while also achieving some immunity from the mechanisms that hinder collective decision-making? Since ancient Greece, political-science thinkers have wrestled with this question. One answer can be found in the idea of deliberative democracy, in which collective decisions are the consequence of authentic deliberation and not merely an aggregation of preferences. Inspired by the contributions of mathematics, psychology and political science, lets investigate this question: Would organizing discussions in small groups help improve collective wisdom? It is the attempt to invert the trend of social networks and to promote collective deliberation on a small scale that better lends itself to effective communication and creation of a bridge between the elite and the people belonging to middle and lower classes, resulting in development of democracy.
* **Historical Context:-**At the time of independence of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam took care of the democracy, but after his passing it fell into the ill hands of the corrupted political parties and the backend foreign powers. Regardless of their roles, the military rulers and dictators slaughtered any chances for revival of democracy in Pakistan. The martial laws of Ayub Khan (1958-62), Yahya Khan (1969–71), Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf (1999-2002) played a crucial role in the destruction of democracy.

**Discussion:**

* **Hopes for a Democratic State:-**

As discussed in Democracy in Pakistan: Problems and Prospects in Making Informed Choices, Pakistan is lacking its true essence due to the unawareness of the people about the form of democracy in Pakistan. Democracy in Pakistan is the mixture of Islamism and Secularism which makes it unique. Pakistan is a country where people are having different ideologies. Some people are secular while others are Islamists. But neither of them is aware of the democracy in Pakistan which has halted the democratic system. So, our hopes for the democracy of Pakistan is to create a class of highly educated people by raising awareness among them about their rights and duties, and their value and role in democratic system. When the people are educated, only then can they look beyond the **borders of ideology, culture, caste and religion** and work together to strength the democratic system and welfare the state.

* **Role of Political Parties:-**The political parties play an essential role in our race to lead Pakistan to democratic stability. They must work together to build a party system with a good degree of internal democracy that is able to repair the damage caused to Pakistan’s democracy by military interventions and martial laws in the past decades. However, Now-a-days, in Pakistan, the political parties are running on the basis of family politics, personalized rule and hybridism. Today, Pakistan is standing on a crucial point in its politics, with a contest between democracy and authoritarianism. There is hope, nevertheless, that counter-authoritarian forces are more powerful than ever before and have obtained enough drive to defeat the old order and the authoritarian party, making Pakistan a strong democratic state. The Political Parties must understand and embrace this changing of government with a positive attitude.
* **Hurdles in Development:-**As said in “What is Democracy? Challenges for Democracy in Pakistan”, while thinking of maneuvers to fortify Pakistan’s democracy, we must first analyze all the obstacles that we face in converting Pakistan into a democratic state. The first challenge is **Just and Fair Elections**. Pakistan has always challenges in conducting elections and keep them free from unfair voting schemes. The parties manipulate election results to come into government as it is hard for a party to get a clear majority due to the multi-party system in Pakistan. The second challenge is **Lack of Democratic Norms**. Every time when Pakistan suffered dictatorships, all political parties strived for the restoration of democracy. Its prevalence, however, was hindered by the incongruous and undemocratic behaviors of political elites. The political elites, after coming into power forget their promises, failing to address the concerns of a common man. The third is **Religious Freedom and Tolerance**. The people must be free to follow the religion of their own choice. They should not be threatened by harassment from the government or any other community or group. While religious freedom is not created by the State, but a democratic country must protect this right of its citizens without any discrimination. It is said that Pakistan’s government guards the rights of all religions but, **do they really?** If so then why are the non-Muslims of Pakistan not allowed in the government sectors? Just like the above discussed issues, Pakistan faced a lot of obstacles on its way to becoming a democratic state.

**Alternative Solutions:**

Pakistan could become democratic state if government bodies and politicians start working for the welfare of the people with honesty and positive thinking. After all, Democracy is recognized because its efforts for their citizens and a real democratic state is a welfare state who works for their people. However, as democracy is by the people so we must take steps to endure our development. We should regulate and reduce the influence and significance of big money donors such as US. We must deal with poverty, terrorism, corruption at the domestic level. We must raise awareness among the general public through education so that may learn about true democratic norms, values, and tolerance, improving their performance and involvement in the issues of the state that would ultimately be benefiting Pakistan  
  
  
  
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**Diagnosis:**

My diagnosis of the democratic situation of Pakistan at the present time is that as we have discussed above, **Pakistan is standing on a crucial point now-a-days**. We are trying to gain democratic stability however it is being delays and worsened due to the preset problems of the past decades and some of the uncooperative factors of the present times such as the corrupt politicians for the security of their personal interests and foreign powers for maintaining their influence in Pakistan. Instead of an improved quality of democracy, Pakistan has been sliding in the opposite direction. It is further dealt a devastating blow by the ignorance of its people towards political education and non-involvement of the capable common man (middle and lower classes) in the issues of the state. The most dangerous point is the **non-involvement of the capable common man** as there is nothing weaker than a group of capable people losing faith and being prepared to be ruled upon. If the people aren’t willing to fight for their rights, welfare and don’t wish to prosper, how can they expect their government to act any better.

**Conclusion:**

Although Pakistan is struggling in the democratic government department and it is super difficult to bring a change in the state, but let us not forget that it is possible. Yes, the Politicians, Political parties and Government play a necessary role in this process of change to benefit Pakistan, however, the most important role for this change to come about is the role of the people. As Obama said, **“We are the change we seek”**. So we must start taking interest in the political matters of the country. Pakistan may be suffering from various challenges however with proper effort, good strategy, good will and a firm believe in hope, the fate of the country can be steered away from disaster and destruction towards a successful, bright future of democratic stability and prosperity of Pakistan.  
Pakistan Zindabad!

**References:**

* Democracy in Pakistan: Problems and Prospects in Making Informed Choices (By: Muhammad Waqas and Muqaddas Khattak)
* What is Democracy? Challenges for Democracy in Pakistan (By: Fozia Bibi, Sumbal Jameel and Syed Umair Jalal)
* Democracy in Pakistan: Value Change and  
  Challenges of Institution Building (By: SAEED SHAFQAT)
* All the Guidence provided by the Instructor.

# THANK YOU 😊

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