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CIVICS – Assignment # 03

**Civil Society, Political Participation, and Democracy in Pakistan**

**🡺 Civil Society in Pakistan**

Civil society in Pakistan plays a crucial role in the country’s socio-political landscape. It encompasses a diverse range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations, think tanks, trade unions, and informal citizen groups working across sectors such as education, health, human rights, and environmental protection. Historically, civil society has been a key player in advocating for democratic governance and human rights, particularly during military regimes under General Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharraf. A notable example is the Lawyers’ Movement (2007-2009), where civil society supported the restoration of the judiciary. Despite its contributions, civil society faces challenges, including restrictive government regulations, limited funding, and security threats. The relationship between the state and civil society remains complex, with both cooperation and tension evident.

**🡺 Political Participation in Pakistan**

Political participation in Pakistan is shaped by various social, economic, and cultural factors. The country has experienced fluctuating voter engagement, with the 2018 general elections seeing a 51.7% turnout. Women and youth face particular barriers to participation. In 2018, only 40% of registered female voters participated due to cultural and societal constraints. Similarly, youth political engagement is inconsistent, with only 36% of eligible young voters participating in the 2013 elections. Social media has emerged as a key tool for political mobilization among youth, though its effect on actual voter turnout is mixed. Barriers to participation include poverty, lack of education, bureaucratic hurdles, and political violence. Initiatives by civil society and the Election Commission of Pakistan aim to enhance political participation, but challenges remain.

**🡺 Democracy in Pakistan**

Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan’s democratic journey has been marked by alternating periods of civilian and military rule. Military interventions in 1958, 1969, 1977, and 1999 disrupted democratic processes. However, since 2008, the country has made strides towards democratic governance. The peaceful transition of power between the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in 2013 was a historic milestone. Despite this progress, Pakistan’s democracy faces ongoing challenges, including political instability and the disproportionate influence of the military, which continues to exert control over security and foreign policy matters. Achieving a stable democracy requires addressing political corruption, implementing electoral reforms, and balancing civil-military relations.

***In conclusion***, civil society, political participation, and democracy in Pakistan are deeply intertwined. Despite significant challenges, these sectors continue to evolve, shaping the country’s political and social future.

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