**The Future of Democracy in Pakistan**

**Abstract**

The following is the review of the article written by Sohail lnayatullah. This article review will analyze how the writer views the future of democracy in Pakistan and what factors does he considers important in playing a major role in it. This article will review the position of political institutes and how do they compare to the state institutes. It will also compare the structural imbalance in power and from where does this imbalance comes from. The review will also analyze the author’s views on involvement of state in democracy as compared to the different parts of the society. Similarly, the role of religion displayed by the author will also be analyzed as well as the foreign policies affect the democracy in the society.

The author

**Introduction**

The author in this article compares the power imbalance between the state institutions over political institutions. This has caused the lack of maturity in political institutions for the past fifty years. Presidential powers as well as army has hindered the democracy leading to its full potential. The lack of cultural intolerance has also stemmed by the state imposing control over the society. The religious elements have intensified this intolerance and has created a culture of “othering” minorities. On the other hand, internal forces have used foreign affairs as an excuse for to hold their status. He then contrasts how Pakistan’s democracy is at a crossroad between state, political and religious institutes of Pakistan

**Body**

**Democratization of Political Institutions**

The author claims that the military and some other factors have hindered the political institutes to reaching their full potential as well as agreeing on a constitutional framework. He mentions how only two out of five constitutions were able to uphold the democratic spirit. Only the later (1973) has survived with several amendments, weakening its democratic character like the 8th amendment giving president the power to dissolve the national assembly. However, the writer is hopeful as 13th amendment has made an attempt to revive the democracy. Yet, minorities are still ignored in this constitution.

He further blames the lack of maturity in Pakistan as a result of constant changes in the legislature. The presidential power to dissolve the assembly has not only led to political instability in Pakistan, it has also created an apathetic behavior as the turn out keeps declining. Although, PPP and PMLN has both suffered twice from it, they yet could not build the two-third majority to remove these powers. Not only the presidential powers, but the Federal Shariat Court’s power have also cut back the powers of National Assembly. This also shows how Assemblies have been dissolved for invalid reasons.

However, the cultural tolerance for the opposition in the democratic environment of Pakistan has been absent. Religious elements even question the role of opposition in an Islamic constitution, calling their own brand of Islamic rule as the right one and even questioning the patriotism of opposition. Particularly authoritarian leaders have even questioned the legitimacy of opposition. The government victimizes the opposition and the same is seen when the opposition comes into power. The author criticizes the stance of both sides as he mentions the declining turnout in elections. The opposition has tried to accept the elections but overthrow the government later on. Only two out of ten elections are generally accepted as fair while others are seen as rigged.

To conclude, the writer blames the lack of a democratic political culture as the democratic institutions collapses as soon a push comes from the authoritarian state institutions and dominant classes.

**Deep structural imbalances and the future of democracy**

The author has pointed out how the Pakistani society has failed to create a pro-democracy middle class and how the society has failed to dislodge feudals from political power. He then blames how the power of state institutions like military and civil bureaucracy dominates against weak political institutions. He then critically analyzes the history which led this imbalance. The British rule wanted to strengthen the internal security and administrative system to uphold the colonial rule, no interest was put to serve the larger society.

The military and bureaucracy have developed a perception and ideology to justify their intervention in politics. Politics is shown as disorderly and corrupt while the state institutes are shown as efficient and clean. The corrupt way of politics might hinder the capacity of national defence and bureaucracy, and if it threatened the independence of the nation the it was military’s responsibility to overthrow them. Here the writer makes a direct comparison between the British colonial rule and the state institutes of Pakistan. The weak political institutions further strengthen these state institutes into accepting a more colonial rule rather than the subordinate rule which is crucial for a functioning democratic society. There have been certain instances where the army has been involved directly or indirectly in political matters. Although the role of the military is declining, the author does not mention why, they still have high control over foreign and nuclear development policies.

The author again mentions the authority of civil bureaucracy, which is second to that of the army. Recently its power is declining and their involvement is not expected. However, the writer fails to mention any historical facts as to how they were politically involved or how their involvement is declining.

Judiciary on the other hand although have made moves for the betterment of the society even under martial law, their assertiveness has increased outside the martial law. Their increased independence is also appreciated as it may be a positive sign for the democracy in Pakistan.

The author here claims all the state institutes, mainly the army and the bureaucracy to take the blame, however, he only discusses the involvement of the army in the politics and does not mention any historical occurrence of bureaucratic involvement in politics.

**State vis-d-vis civil society: democratization of Pakistani society**

The political community of Pakistan is divided into micro and macro ethnic groups whose division has escalated the cultural intolerance in Pakistan. The ethnic political demands are seen as a lack of patriotism and indication of disloyalty to the country. The author also gives examples of how each ethnic group has been targeted in each decade. He again mentions how the power of state institutions have been inherited from the British and how it has continued to keep these groups weak. Economic disparity also continues to grow as a majority of populations’ basic needs are not being met.

However, the writer is hopeful as three anti-authoritarian movements like Anti-Ayub, Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), and Movement to Restore Democracy (MRD) have continued to increase political awareness. However, increasing poverty is again decreasing the turnout in elections which continues to weaken the future of democracy in Pakistan.

On the contrary, he speculates working middle class as well as people working outside the country are more outspoken demanding greater freedom and democracy. He also claims oppression and atrocities of NGOs going against the state. However, he does not give any factual grounds to his claims making these claims a mere speculation.

**Religion and its impact on democracy**

According to the writer, religion has played an equal role in the future of democracy as military, bureaucracy and economy has. He goes back in history as to how Muslim elites saw Hindus and made themselves politically aware too where the Muslim majority were illiterate and passive in politics in the British rule. However, he then raises the question as to how it caused the involvement of religion in politics and whether Islamic political system is different to that of western democracy.

He continues this question with how certain Muslim politicians took religion as a personal matter, whereas other like Allama Iqbal had different opinions on it. However, Iqbal, Sir Syed and Jinnah all understood that a multi-ethnic society would only lead to a Hindu hegemonic society. Hence, accepting Muslims and Hindus as two separate nations, which is a modification of democracy which was doomed to fail and demand of separate nation is inevitable. Liberal Muslims who had an opposing stance, later gave it an interpretation that this would lead to a more democratic country. However, after the emergence of the country, liberal aspects of Islam were persecuted. He goes by giving examples of Dr. Fazal Rahman expulsion and the era of Zia-ul-Haq. He also relates the Islamization reforms of Zia as a counter to the secularist PPP. He then even questions the relation of democracy and Islam.

The comparison of orthodox ulema and liberal Muslims is well put here. Ulemas interpreted Islamic system as distinct from others. However, the liberal Muslims wanted a cultural federation similar to that in Madinah and Switzerland. The author characterizes these two sides on the opposite end of scale. Ulemas sees liberal democracy as part of atheistic civilization which is against their beliefs. He speculates the beliefs ulemas as opposite to liberal democracy and according to the author he claims that both are incompatible in perspective of the ulemas.

He mentions how ulemas dominated politics under the period of martial law. The successful Afghan jihad added fuel to the fire as well as ulemas’ influence over politics. However, they have failed to gain any votes in elections meaning they do not have a major following. With this weakened following the author claims that these Islamic parties are not necessarily the advocates of the Islamic states and won’t reduce the liberal future of democracy anymore.

Furthermore, the involvement of religion has also been a threat to the position of minorities. Author speculates the formation of Pakistan as Muslims vs Hindus. The non-Muslims who did not leave the country were confused as to what was their nationality, which validates the authors speculation. Author suggests that these minorities are more vulnerable to Indian agents if not implemented into the mainstream politics. He also mentions the problem of Ahmedis’ treatment as well as the behavior with Zikris and Shias in the Era of Zia. He also refers the continuous increase in intra-Muslim riots weakening the democracy more and more.

Moreover, the role of women in politics has also reduced as a result of religion being involved and is seen as improper. He mentions how ulemas questioned the female rule in Pakistan when Benazir became prime minister. The writer evaluates this process of Islamic forms of governance as efforts which do not copy Western institutions, claiming purity for themselves and immorality for others. With these facts presented, author speculates Islamic model of polity as equally problematic.

To conclude this perspective on the involvement of religion, the author sees the country as a state dominating the society which has yet to become tolerant and pluralistic.

**Democratic status in the global power structure**

The author evaluates the foreign affairs of Pakistan as a mixed advancement. He sees these unresolved international problems as hinderance to the democracy in Pakistan. This came as a result of modernization of the military which again tilted the power towards the state institution. He also blames how unrest in Afghanistan is taxing Pakistan’s economy. He closes on the relations of Pakistan in a pessimistic tone as they are used as an excuse by internal forces which has made realization of political, religious and social institutions impossible.

**Conclusion: Pakistan at the crossroads**

To summarize his, article author divides his article into seven factors affecting the future of Pakistan. The first is the army. He mentions that the army is still involved behind the scene but he speculates that they do not intervene in elections any more. Another factor, which is cultural intolerance continues to make distinctions between “others” rather than seeking national similarities. The low turnouts have also been a major outcome of structural corruption which shows how people have lost faith. The economy of Pakistan is also nearing to a collapse as well as the government. The strategies of religious parties need to be deeply studied, even more than indigenous knowledge and ideal Islamic culture according to the author. The structural imbalance between the state and political institutions had been a major problem but the writer is hopeful with the adoption of the thirteenth amendment. He is also hopeful with the independence of judiciary; however, he shows doubt as to how it will prevail in the future. He closes his article with an uncertainty of who will win the final battle, Islamic state of ulema’s vintage, liberal democracy or military bureaucratic authoritarianism. Though he is hopeful that the liberal democracy will prevail.

**Conclusion**

**Literature cited**