Why democracy fails in Pakistan

Democracy doesn't seem to be working, but don't blame politicians - they don't know what to do either.

Rita SkeeterFebruary 10, 2011

Our prime minister stands on the remains[of a crumbled democracy](http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/1232/democracy-in-pakistan-keeping-the-faith/). He has[approved the expansion of parliamentary lodges](http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/4036/is-pakistan-your-heaven-or-hell/) so the government can emulate the grandeur of the Capitol Hill.  
  
Perhaps the government thinks this measure will help alleviate the most serious security crisis that the country has faced. They may be right as once the luxury lodges are built, parliamentarians may actually begin to attend assembly sessions!  
  
So far, the current establishment has[failed to save the day.](https://tribune.com.pk/story/65227/will-democracy-survive/) Pakistan is now graced with the 10th ranking on the Failed States Index. Wide spread terrorism, a slacking judiciary, embezzlement of state resources, non-availability of public services, mass-weaponisation, astronomical debt figures and the food crisis have contributed to this statistic.  
  
Even if Parliament Lodges draw members back to the National Assembly, the problems will still exist. Most politicians have never really been exposed to political culture. He’s seen the military culture, the Kalashnikov culture, the feudal culture- but never a party-based political culture devoid of the army's influence.  
  
The failure of the democratic leadership is based on two principal factors.  
  
**1) Lack of political culture**  
  
Pakistan inherited the British legacy of civil-military relations that entailed the military function in subordination to civil rule. Despite this, it has remained a praetorian state with direct military rule persisting for 33 years of the state’s existence. How and why did the tables turn?  
  
The 1958 coup was a defining event for Pakistan; General Ayub Khan's over-arching domination in state-affairs and the civil-government’s malfunction led President Iskander Mirza to dissolve the constitution and welcome the coup.  
  
But it would be rather unjust to ignore the shortcomings of Mirza’s government that galvanised the military’s intervention in 1958.  
  
In the 1950’s, Pakistan was in the youthful stages of organising its statehood. The challenges faced by Mirza’s government were foreseeable**.** Succumbing to military influence so early, went on stunt the slow and gradual growth of democracy.  
  
A vicious cycle of military coups has resulted in a dysfunctional government. As the military has continued to become involved with state administration it has weakened it.  
  
**2) Exaggerated defense concerns**  
  
It is but true that the security crisis for Pakistan has been dominated by concerns of national defense. Border troubles from India and Afghanistan have merited huge defense budgets for the army and established it as the most preponderant state institution. Party-politics are bound to take a back-seat when national security is a burning issue.  
  
The Indian border concern, though genuine, is also laced with exaggerations. The military has a tendency to Indianise security concerns; be it Afghanistan, Waziristan, Balochistan, Kashmir or even Karachi – India’s behind it. Every problem becomes the army’s problem (this premise is utterly ignorant of the fact that China, and not Pakistan is India’s primary defense threat.)  
  
Domestic unrest is quelled not by paramilitary forces, but the army. Elections are often monitored not by the police, but the army (because RAW officials probably have a habit of lurking behind ballot-boxes.) The domination (and exaggeration) of defense issues widens the military’s sphere of influence cause it to penetrate into every realm of the state’s governance, further incapacitating the non-military regime.

**Other Source**

Weak institutions

Pakistan's political institutions are weak and inefficient. This is due to a number of factors, including the legacy of British colonial rule, the military's interference in politics, and the country's deep divisions along religious and ethnic lines.

One of the key weaknesses of Pakistan's institutions is the judiciary. The judiciary is often seen as being corrupt and beholden to the powerful. This has made it difficult for the judiciary to uphold the rule of law and to protect the rights of citizens.

Another weakness of Pakistan's institutions is the parliament. The parliament is often divided along party lines, and it is difficult to build a consensus on important issues. This has made it difficult for the parliament to pass legislation and to oversee the government effectively.

Corruption

Corruption is widespread in Pakistan, at all levels of government. This is due to a number of factors, including the lack of accountability mechanisms, the weak rule of law, and the culture of impunity.

Corruption undermines public trust in the government and makes it difficult to implement democratic reforms. It also diverts resources away from essential public services and into the pockets of corrupt officials.

Military interference

The military has played a dominant role in Pakistani politics since independence. The military has staged coups d'état on several occasions, and it has ruled the country directly for a significant portion of its history.

The military's interference in politics has limited the ability of elected governments to govern effectively and has undermined the democratic process. It has also created a culture of authoritarianism and militarism in Pakistan.

Sectarian violence

Pakistan is a deeply divided society, with religious and ethnic tensions that often boil over into violence. These tensions are rooted in the country's complex history and its diverse population.

Sectarian violence undermines social cohesion and makes it difficult to build a consensus on important issues. It also creates a climate of fear and insecurity, which is not conducive to democracy.

Economic inequality

Pakistan is one of the most unequal countries in the world. The wealthiest 1% of the population owns nearly half of the country's wealth, while the poorest half of the population owns just over 1% of the wealth.

Economic inequality creates social and political instability. It also makes it difficult for the poor to participate effectively in the political process.

Lack of political education

Many Pakistanis are not well-informed about democracy and their rights as citizens. This is due to a number of factors, including the country's low literacy rate and the lack of civic education in schools.

The lack of political education makes it difficult for Pakistanis to participate effectively in the political process and to hold their elected officials accountable.

Weak civil society

Pakistan's civil society is underdeveloped. This means that there are few strong organizations that can hold the government accountable and promote democratic values.

The weakness of civil society makes it difficult to challenge the status quo and to promote democratic reforms.

Foreign interference

Foreign powers have often interfered in Pakistani politics, which has further undermined the democratic process. The United States and other Western powers have supported authoritarian regimes in Pakistan in order to promote their own strategic interests.

Foreign interference has made it difficult for Pakistan to develop a stable and independent democracy.

Conclusion

The failure of democracy in Pakistan is due to a complex set of factors, including weak institutions, corruption, military interference, sectarian violence, economic inequality, lack of political education, weak civil society, and foreign interference.

Despite these challenges, there is still hope for democracy in Pakistan. In recent years, there have been a number of peaceful transfers of power between elected governments. There is also a growing movement for democratic reform, led by civil society groups and young people.

It is possible that Pakistan will eventually be able to establish a stable and prosperous democracy. However, it will require significant effort and commitment from all Pakistanis.