



## Proceedings

# International Conference on Contemporary Challenges for Democracy (IC3D-2025)

### Editors

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**  
**Kamil Shehzad Bakhsh**

Published by:  
**Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences (FOHSS)**  
University of Central Punjab,  
Lahore, Pakistan.





# IC3D-2025



PROCEEDINGS OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRACY

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APRIL 23-24, 2025

### *Editors*

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**

**Kamil Shehzad Bakhsh**

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**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**University of Central Punjab, Lahore - Pakistan**

*Proceedings of International Conference*  
*Contemporary Challenges for Democracy (IC3D- 2025)*

## International Conference on Contemporary Challenges for Democracy 2025

*Chief Organizer/ Focal Person*

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**

Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

*Organizer*

**Dr. Waheed Khan**

Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social  
Sciences

*Secretary Conference*

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Lecturer, Department of Political Science and IR

<b>Sr No.</b>	<b>Committees</b>	<b>Committee Leader</b>	<b>Team Members</b>	<b>Tentative Tasks</b>
<b>1</b>	Conference Organizing Committee	Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (Chief Organizer/ Focal Person)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Dr. Waheed Khan (Organizer))</li><li>▪ Mr. Mehran Iqbal (Secretary)</li><li>▪ Dr. Shazia Hasan, HOD</li><li>▪ Dr. M. Ilyas Ansari, HOD</li><li>▪ Dr. Humera Akhtar</li><li>▪ Mr. Abdul Rehman</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purpose &amp; Format of the Conference</li><li>• Defining themes</li><li>• Abstract</li><li>• Schedule</li><li>• Policy dialogue</li></ul>
<b>2</b>	Scientific Committee	Dr. Shahzad Akhtar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Dr. Arslan Tariq Rana, HOD</li><li>▪ Dr. Alia Asmat</li><li>▪ Dr. M. Ilyas Ansari</li><li>▪ Dr. Humera Akhtar</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of Abstracts and papers</li></ul>
<b>3</b>	Communications, Media & Marketing	Ms. Zainab Bashir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mr. Mehran Iqbal</li><li>▪ Ms. Arooj Nazir</li><li>▪ Mr. Ahmad Ali (President Voltaire Society)</li><li>▪ Mr. Alham Tariq (Vice President Voltaire Society)</li><li>▪ Mr. M. Bilal (Voltaire Society)</li><li>▪ Ms. Majreeha (Joint Secretary, Voltaire Society)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coordination with security department</li><li>• Conference Website and Layout</li><li>• Social Media</li><li>• Standees, Backdrops,</li><li>• Invitations Cards,</li><li>• Brochures</li><li>• Follow up email after the Conference</li><li>• Conference Bags, Stationery</li><li>• Hybrid Mode</li></ul>

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4	Correspondence & Conference Registration Committee	Ms. Ayesha Naseem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Kamil Shehzad Bakhsh</li> <li>▪ Mr. Asad Pervaz</li> <li>▪ Ms. Ifra Mahmood</li> <li>▪ Ms. Mahmoona Shabbir Butt</li> <li>▪ Ms. Maida Khan (Vice President, Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Ms. Zartaj Bashir Herl (General Secretary, Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Mr. Mansoor Zaman (Management Head, Voltaire Society)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Approaching scholars</li> <li>▪ Registration Form</li> <li>▪ Abstract Book compilation</li> <li>▪ Abstract management</li> <li>▪ Conference registration</li> <li>▪ Regular communications with delegates and speakers</li> <li>▪ Registration Desk</li> <li>▪ List of Registered Candidates/Guests</li> <li>▪ Lunch Copens</li> </ul>
5	Venue & Accessory Committee	Ms. Noor ul Ain Basit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Ayesha Kashif</li> <li>▪ Mr. Omar Shaoor Khan</li> <li>▪ Ms. Arooj Nazir</li> <li>▪ Ms. Mehmoona Shabbir Butt</li> <li>▪ Ms. Ifra Mahmood</li> <li>▪ Mr. Alham Tariq (VP Voltaire Soccity)</li> <li>▪ Ms. Muskan Zahra (Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Ms. Laiba Ahmad (Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Mr. Mesum Raza (Voltaire Society)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage Management</li> <li>• Assembling the team of faculty members and volunteers</li> <li>• Receiving the speakers</li> <li>• MC to welcome people to the conference</li> <li>• Line up the speakers</li> <li>• introduce speakers</li> <li>• manage the handovers and monitor timings of presentations</li> <li>• runners</li> <li>• AV technicians</li> <li>• Report writing</li> <li>• Photographs and filming the presentations</li> <li>• Zoom links</li> <li>• live streaming</li> <li>• Power Point Presentations</li> <li>• Layout of the hall</li> <li>• Wi-Fi</li> <li>• Staging, Lighting, Audio/Visual/Projectors</li> <li>• Sound system</li> <li>• sockets available for delegates to charge their electronic devices</li> <li>• Lanyard with the name and designation clearly displayed</li> <li>• Invitation cards</li> <li>• Standees</li> <li>• Certificates</li> <li>• Souvenirs</li> <li>• Drop Down/ backdrops</li> </ul>
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. M. Zubair Nazar (Finance Secretary, Voltaire Society)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation budget</li> <li>• Airfare/Vehicles</li> <li>• Souvenirs, Certificates</li> <li>• Catering and food</li> <li>• BackDrops/Standees</li> </ul>
7	Refreshment Committee	Mr. Hamid Bilal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Adnan Khan</li> <li>▪ Mr. Alham Tariq (Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Mr. Abu Bakar Nawaz (Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Mian Muhammad Hasan Raza (Logistic Manager, Voltaire Society)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catering</li> <li>• Lunch</li> <li>• Tea and coffee during the breaks</li> </ul>
8	Food/Accommodation/Transportation Committee	Mr. Abdul Rehman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Asad Pervaz</li> <li>▪ Mr. Faizan Khan Barakzai (Voltaire Society)</li> <li>▪ Mr. Afnan Baig (Voltaire Society)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodation</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Airline/Bus tickets</li> <li>• Hotels</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Protocol Team</li> <li>• Coordination with security department</li> </ul>
9	Proceedings Editorial Committee	Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dr. Shahzad Akhtar</li> <li>▪ Kamil Shehzad Bakhsh</li> <li>▪ Dr. Humera Akhtar</li> <li>▪ Ms. Ayesha Naseem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data compilation</li> <li>• Proofreading</li> <li>• Booklet publication</li> <li>• Proceedings</li> </ul>
10	Conference Sponsorship Hunt Committee	Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dr. Irfan Fani</li> <li>▪ Mr. Asad Tashfeen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding Proposal to Donor Agencies HEC, PHEC, IGO, NGO, MNCs</li> <li>• Letter Drafting</li> <li>• Data Bank Construction</li> </ul>
11	Souvenir/Gift Committee	Ms. Momina Nayyer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Ayesha Kashif</li> <li>▪ Ms. Ayesha Khalil</li> <li>▪ Ms. Ifra Mahmood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gifts, folder &amp; conference bags, design and purchase, etc.</li> </ul>

*Conference Program*

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**Conference Program**

**Day-1**

**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2025**

**Inaugural Session**

**Rapporteur: Ms. Ayesha Naseem (Lecturer) / Zartaj Bashir (Student)**

Venue: Auditorium

Time	Event
11:30 AM	Guests to be seated
11:35	National Anthem
11:40	Recitation from Holy Quran Mr. Muhammad Junaid
11:45	Welcome Speech by <b>Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt</b>
11:55	Keynote Speaker: <b>Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi</b> Eminent Political Analyst/ Former, Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab.
12:15	Keynote Speaker (Guest of Honour): <b>Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas</b> Ambassador of Norway, to Pakistan.
12:30	Address by Chief Guest: <b>Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed</b> Political Analyst, Former Federal Minister & Senator.
12:50 PM	Concluding Remarks of the Pro-Rector <b>Prof. Dr. Hammad Naveed</b> Souvenirs to be presented to the Keynote speakers & Chief Guest
01:00 PM	Group photo on auditorium stage with the Chief Guest, Paper Presenters, and Conference Organizers

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**Day 1**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2025**  
**(Session 1-A)**

**Theme of the session: Populism: A Challenge to Democracy?**

**Timing: 14:00-15:45 Hours**

Venue: Auditorium				
<b>Session Chair: Amb. Nadeem Riaz</b> <i>Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Italy</i> <i>President, Institute of Regional Studies</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Mr. Abdur Rehman (Lecturer) /</b> <b>Mahnoor Noshewan (Student)</b>				
Sr	Code	Name of Presenter	Author's Institution	Slot
1	IC3D-42502-10	<b>Dr. Bilveer Singh</b> (Populism and the Challenge to Democracy in Contemporary Politics)	National University of Singapore	14:00-14:15
2	IC3D-42502-4	<b>Ahmad Nazir Warraich</b> (Democracy In The 21 <sup>st</sup> Century: social media, A Tool for Populism)	Independent Senior Policy and Governance Specialist	14:15-14:30
3	IC3D-42502-18	<b>Dr. Xiaoqing Xie</b> (The Dilemma and Breakthrough of Contemporary Democracy: Multidimensional Challenges and Coping Strategies)	Director CPEC Center, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China.	14:30-14:45
4	IC3D-42502-35	<b>Muneeba Shahid (Online)</b> (Populism and the Erosion of Democratic Institutions of Pakistan: An Analysis (2014-2024))	International Islamic University, Islamabad	14:45-15:00
5	IC3D-42502-12	<b>Dr. Sumeera Imran</b> (Analyzing Authoritarian Populism: Portraying Trends of Regression of Democracy)	National Defence University, Islamabad	15:00-15:15
6	Q/A Session			15:15-15:30
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			15:30-15:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day 1**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> April 2025**  
**(Session 1B)**

**Theme of the session: Populism: A Challenge to Democracy?**

**Timing: 14:00-15:45 Hours**

<b>Venue: Conference Hall, Building A</b>				
<b>Session Chair: Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid</b> <i>Dean of Behavioral &amp; Social Sciences, University of the Punjab Lahore.</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Ms. Arooj Daha (Lecturer) / Khalid (Student)</b>				
<b>Sr#</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Name of Presenter</b>	<b>Author's Institution</b>	<b>Slot</b>
1	IC3D-42502-17	<b>Muneeza Mirza</b> (Populism. Democracy and Women: A Study of Imran Khan Politics)	FC College University, Lahore	14:00-14:15
2	IC3D-42502-27	<b>Prof. Dr. Ghulam Akbar Mahesar</b> (Populism and Its Democratic Dilemma)	University of Sindh	14:15-14:30
3	IC3D-42502-1	<b>Sara Rauf</b> (Populism versus Democracy)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	14:30-14:45
4	IC3D-42502-20	<b>Dr. Shafiq Qurban</b> (Populist Rhetoric and Political Discourse in Pakistan: A Comparative Study of ZA Bhutto And Imran Khan)	University of Management and Technology, Lahore	14:45-15:00
5	IC3D-42502-32	<b>Muhammad Bilal</b> (Populism's plague: Radicalization and the enfeeblement of democracy in Pakistan)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	15:00-15:15
6	Q/A Session			15:15-15:30
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			15:30-15:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day-1**  
**23rd April 2025**  
**(Session 2-A)**

**Theme of the session: Democracy, Security, and Human Rights**  
**Timing: 16:15-18:15 Hours**

<b>Venue: Conference Hall, Building A</b>				
<b>Session Chair: Dr. Bilveer Singh</b> <i>National University of Singapore</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Dr. Naveed Shah (Assistant Professor) /</b> <b>Ayesha Aslam (Student)</b>				
<b>Sr#</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Name of Presenter</b>	<b>Author's Institution</b>	<b>Slot</b>
1	IC3D-42502-22	<b>Aaisha Siddiqua</b> (Overcoming Gender Exclusion: Women's Role in Pakistan's Democracy)	University of the Punjab, Lahore	16:15-16:30
2	IC3D-42502-15	<b>Mudassar Ali Iqbal</b> (The democratization of the Muslim world and Western Perceived Insecurities through the Lens of the Prisoner's Dilemma)	Dunya News, Lahore	16:30-16:45
3	IC3D-42502-31	<b>Shyamal Kataria (Online)</b> (Detecting seasonal variations in terrorist-related violence: The case of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (1988-2018))	University of Sharjah, UAE	16:45-17:00
4	IC3D-42502-3	<b>Dr. Safdar Hussain (Online)</b> (Balancing Democracy, Security, and Human Rights: The United Kingdom's Role in Afghanistan)	University of Reading, UK	17:00-17:15
5	IC3D-42502-9	<b>Dr. Akansha (Online)</b> (Democracy Authoritarianism and Human Rights: Case Study of Myanmar)	University of Delhi, India	17:15 -17:30
6	Q/A Session			17:30-17:45
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			17:45-18:00
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day 2**  
**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

**Thursday**

**Theme of the session: Democratizing Developing States**

**Timing: 11:00-13:00 Hours**

<b>Venue: Auditorium</b>				
<b>Session Chair: Muhammad Azam Khan</b> <i>Senior Fellow, Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore.</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Dr. Humaira Akhtar (Assistant Professor) / Hasnat Baig (Student)</b>				
<b>Sr#</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Name of Presenter</b>	<b>Author's Institution</b>	<b>Slot</b>
1	IC3D-42502-11	<b>Dr. Maria Eleonora Hebisz</b> (Education and democracy. Examples from field research among indigenous communities in the Andean region of Peru)	University of Lodz, Poland	11:00-11:15
2	IC3D-42502-23	<b>Anish Mishra</b> (Competitive Authoritarianism and Regime Oscillations in Pakistan: The Struggle for Regime Consolidation)	Heidelberg University, Germany	11:15-11:30
3	IC3D-42502-39	<b>Dr Sadia Rafique</b> (Exploring the Nexus of Governance and Inclusion for Sustainable Societal Progress: Challenges and Pathways Forward. A case-study of Pakistan)	GC University, Lahore	11:30-11:45
4	IC3D-42502-6	<b>Dr. Muhammad Aslam Faiz</b> (Democratic Instability in Pakistan)	Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan	11:45-12:00
5	IC3D-42502-16	<b>Khizar Hayyat</b> (The Paradox of Influence: Religious Political Parties in Pakistan's Parliamentary Democracy)	The Islamia University of Bahawalpur	12:00-12:15
6	Q/A Session			12:15-12:30
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			12:30-12:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day 2**  
**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**  
**(Session 1-B)**

**Theme of the session: Democratizing Developing States**

**Timing: 11:00-13:00 Hours**

Venue: Conference Room, Building A				
<b>Session Chair: Dr. Waheed Khan</b> <i>Associate Professor, FoHSS</i> <i>University of Central Punjab, Lahore</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Ms. Ayesha Naseem (Lecturer) /</b> <b>Zartaj Bashir (Student)</b>				
Sr#	Code	Name of Presenter	Author's Affiliation	Slot
1	IC3D-42502-2	<b>Dr. Lubna Sunawar (Online)</b> (Democratizing Developing States)	National Defense University, Islamabad	11:00-11:15
2	IC3D-42502-25	<b>Ayesha Aqeel</b> (Navigating Local Peacebuilding Approaches in Afghanistan and Prospects of Democracy in the Post-US Withdrawal Period)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	11:15-11:30
3	IC3D-42502-7	<b>Tariq Khan</b> (South Africa's Soft Power: Advancing Democracy, Strengthening Institutions, and Good Governance in Africa)	Institute of Global Dialogue (IGD) associated with UNISA, South Africa	11:30-11:45
4	IC3D-42502-18	<b>Muskan Zahra</b> (The Role of Youth in Democratizing Developing States: A Case study of Pakistan)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	11:45-12:00
5	IC3D-42502-29	<b>Maida Khan</b> (Unveiling the Fallout: The Failure of U.S. Liberal Democracy Efforts in Afghanistan Post-2001)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	12:00-12:15
6	Q/A Session			12:15-12:30
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			12:30-12:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day 2**  
**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**  
**(Session 2-A)**

**Theme of the session: Ethnic Groups and Democracy**

**Timing: 14:00-16:00 Hours**

<b>Venue: Board Room, Building A</b>				
<b>Session Chair: Dr. Asma Awan</b> <i>Head, Department of Political Science, Kinnaird College For Women, Lahore.</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Mr. Mehran Iqbal (Lecturer) / Ayesha Imdad (Student)</b>				
<b>Sr#</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Name of Presenter</b>	<b>Author's Affiliation</b>	<b>Slot</b>
1	IC3D-42502-20	<b>Mansoor Zaman</b> (Ethnic minorities and issues of representation in multicultural democracies)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	14:00-14:15
2	IC3D-42502-36	<b>Dr. Nadia Zaheer Ali</b> (Exclusion of Minority Group through Structural Violence; A Case Study of Rohingya)	Lahore College for Women University, Lahore	14:15-14:30
3	IC3D-42502-5	<b>Mahnoor Noshewan</b> (Comparative Analysis of Democratization in Egypt and Tunisia, Key Factors Behind Success and Failure in Mena (2011-2024))	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	14:30-14:45
4	IC3D-42502-14	<b>Awais Chaudhary</b> (The Rise of Far-Right in the European Union: Challenges for Democracy in France, Germany and Italy)	Turkiye Urdu Media House, Lahore	14:45-15:00
5	IC3D-42502-4	<b>Dr. Lianboi Vaiphei</b> (Online) (Negotiating Democracy through Ethnicity: A case Study of Myanma)	University of Delhi, India	15:00-15:15
6	Q/A Session			15:15-15:30
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			15:30-15:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day 2**  
**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**  
**(Session 2-B)**

**Theme of the session: Electoral Authoritarianism and Democracy**

**Timing: 14:00-16:00 Hours**

<b>Venue: Auditorium</b>				
<b>Session Chair: Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais,</b> <i>Professor Emeritus, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad,</i> <i>Former Dean, LUMS.</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Mr. Asad Tashfeen (Lecturer) /</b> <b>Arfa Atta (Student)</b>				
<b>Sr#</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Name of Presenter</b>	<b>Author's Affiliation</b>	<b>Slot</b>
1	IC3D-42502-11	<b>Husnain Shabir</b> (Centralized Party System and Challenges to Democracy in Pakistan: The Study of 2013-22)	University of Gujrat	14:00-14:15
2	IC3D-42502-27	<b>Hina Nasir</b> (Praetorianism and Democratic Erosion: Analyzing the Role of Military Influence in Pakistan's Political Landscape)	Comsats University Lahore	14:15-14:30
3	IC3D-42502-38	<b>Yawar Hayyat</b> (Comparative Analysis of Electoral Trends in Pakistan and Bangladesh in the General Elections 2024)	Lahore College for Women University, Lahore	14:30-14:45
4	IC3D-42502-13	<b>Adnan Khan</b> (Economic development challenge to democracy)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	14:45-15:00
5	IC3D-42502-28	<b>Majreeha</b> (Role of Academic Freedom and Saffronization in India's Democratic Decline)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	15:00-15:15
6	Q/A Session			15:15-15:30
7	Concluding remarks of Session Chair			15:30-15:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day 2**  
**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**  
**(Session 2-C)**

**Theme of the session: The Role of Traditional and Social Media in Democracies**

**Timing: 14:00-16:00 Hours**

Venue: Conference Hall, Building A				
<b>Session Chair: Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash</b> <i>Dean, Information Technology University, Lahore.</i>				
<b>Rapporteurs: Mr. Asad Pervaiz (Lecturer) / Maida Khan (Student)</b>				
Sr#	Code	Name of Presenter	Author's Affiliation	Slot
1	IC3D-42502-8	<b>Alham Tariq</b> (Digital Authoritarianism and Internet Shutdowns: A Comparative Analysis of India and Myanmar)	University of Central Punjab, Lahore	14:00-14:15
2	IC3D-42502-16	<b>Dr. Adam Saud</b> (Digital Democracy for Rural Empowerment: Creating a Platform for Inclusive Governance and Participatory Decision-Making in Pakistan)	Bahria University, Islamabad	14:15-14:30
3	IC3D-42502-41	<b>Suffian Zafar</b> (Surveillance and Privacy in Democracies; The Tension Between National Security and Human Rights in the Digital Age)	University of the Punjab, Lahore	14:30-14:45
4	IC3D-42502-40	<b>TSP Maheshi (Online)</b> (Traditional vs. social media in Shaping Political Polarization in Established Democracies: The Case of United States of America)	University of Colombo, Sri Lanka	14:45-15:00
5	IC3D-42502-31	<b>Sanwal Kharal (Online)</b> (Digitalization and Women's Political Participation in Pakistan)	Aston University, UK	15:00-15:15
6	Q/A Session			15:15-15:30
7	Conclusion & remarks of Session Chair			15:30-15:45
8	Group photo of the Session Chair, Rapporteur, Paper Presenters, and Organizers			

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**Day-2**  
**24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**  
**Policy Dialogue Session**  
**Conference Hall Building- A**  
**Time: 16:15 – 17:15 hours**

<b>Session Chair</b>	<b>Prof. Rasul Bakhsh Rais</b> <i>Professor Emeritus, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Former Dean, LUMS.</i>
<b>Session Co-Chair</b>	<b>Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt</b> <i>Chief Organizer/ Dean, FHSS</i>
<b>Rapporteur</b>	<b>Dr. Muhammad Irfan Ali</b> <i>In-Charge, Department of Political Science &amp; International Relations</i>

**Principal Discussants**

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash</b><br/><i>Dean, Information Technology University,<br/>Lahore.</i></li><li><b>2. Dr. Maria Eleonora Hebisz</b><br/><i>University of Lodz, Poland</i></li><li><b>3. Dr. Xiaoqing Xie</b><br/><i>Director CPEC Center,<br/>China University of Geosciences,<br/>Wuhan, China.</i></li><li><b>4. Dr. Bilveer Singh</b><br/><i>National University of Singapore</i></li><li><b>5. Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid</b><br/><i>Dean of Behavioral &amp; Social Sciences,<br/>University of the Punjab, Lahore.</i></li><li><b>6. Mr. Anish Mishra</b><br/><i>Heidelberg University, Germany</i></li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>7. Commandar (R) Muhammad Azam Khan</b><br/><i>Senior Fellow,<br/>Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore.</i></li><li><b>8. Dr. Asma Awan</b><br/><i>Head, Department of Political Science,<br/>Kinnaird College For Women,<br/>Lahore.</i></li><li><b>9. Dr. Waheed Ahmed Khan</b><br/><i>Associate Professor, UCP</i></li><li><b>10. Mr. Mehran Iqbal</b><br/><i>Lecturer, UCP</i></li><li><b>11. Mr. Abdul Rehman</b><br/><i>Lecturer, UCP</i></li><li><b>12. Mr. Tariq Khan</b><br/><i>Researcher at Institute for Global Dialogue<br/>(IGD) associated with UNISA, South Africa.</i></li><li><b>13. Miss Anna Sumowska</b><br/><i>The University of Security, Poland</i></li></ol> |
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**Day-2**  
**24th April 2025**  
**Closing Ceremony**  
**Timing: 17:30-18:00 Hours**  
**Venue: Auditorium**

**Rapporteurs: Dr. Humera Akhtar (Assistant Professor) / Majreeha (Student)**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>
17:30 – 17:35	Guest to be seated
17:35 – 17:45	National Anthem
17:45 – 17:55	Recitation from Holy Quran Mr. Muhammad Junaid
17:55 – 18:10	Vote of thanks by <b>Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt</b> , Chief Organizer/ Dean, FHSS.  Conference Report by <b>Minahil</b> (Student of BS International Relations)
18:10 – 18:30	Speech by <b>Honorable Malik Ahmad Khan (Chief Guest)</b> , Speaker, Punjab Assembly, Lahore, Pakistan.
18:30 – 18:50	Concluding Remarks by <b>Pro-Rector Dr. Hammad Naveed</b>
18:50 – 19:00	Souvenir Distribution to Paper Presenters & Organizers by the Chief Guest Souvenir shield to be presented to the Chief Guest
19:00 – 19:10	Group photo on the auditorium stage
19:10 – 19:50	Musical Performance (Auditorium)

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**Day-2**  
**Revised program of Closing Ceremony**  
**Venue: Auditorium**  
**24<sup>rd</sup> April 2025 at 11:00- 1:00 Hours**

**Rundown of the Event**

**Rapporteurs: Dr. Humera Akhtar (Assistant Professor) / Majreeha (Student)**

Time	Event
10:55	Guests to be seated
11:00	On arrival, bouquet to be presented to the Chief Guest, <b>Honorable Malik Ahmad Khan</b> , Speaker, Punjab Assembly.
11:03	The Chief guest sits on the stage along with the Pro-Rector & Dean/Chief Organizer of the conference
11:05	National Anthem
11:08	Recitation from Holy Quran
11:12	Welcome speech by <b>Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt</b> , Chief Organizer/ Dean, FHSS.
11:20	Conference Report presented by <b>Minahil</b> (Student of BS International Relations)
11:25	Speech by <b>Honorable Malik Ahmad Khan (Chief Guest)</b> , Speaker, Punjab Assembly.
11:45	Concluding remarks by <b>Pro-Rector Dr. Hammad Naveed</b>
11:55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Souvenirs Distribution to Paper Presenters &amp; Organizers by the Chief Guest</li><li>○ Souvenir shield to be presented to the Chief Guest by Pro-rector</li></ul>
12:10	Group photo on the auditorium stage

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## EDITORIAL

The Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Central Punjab, Lahore, has arranged the International Conference on Challenges for Democracy IC3D-2025) on April 23-24, 2025. It has provided a platform for researchers and scholars to share their insights and discuss the challenges, for democracy and its culture. The conference has brought together about 36 scholars from various fields to present their research papers in 6 academic sessions having different themes. The conference proceedings contain a wealth of knowledge on a range of themes, including (a) Populism: A challenge to Democracy, (b) Democracy, Security, and Human Rights, (c) Democratizing Developing States, (d) Ethnic Groups and Democracy, (e) Electoral Authoritarianism and Democracy and (f) The Role of Traditional and social media in Democracies. One of the standout aspects of the conference was, the thought-provoking keynote speech by Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi, eminent political analyst/former, Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab. Ambassador of Norway, Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas was the guest of Honor and shared experiences of his country to become a model democracy. However, Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed, eminent intellectual and former federal minister and senator was the Chief Guest of the ceremony and he highlighted challenges for democracy in the contemporary world. The Concluding Ceremony of the conference was chaired by Mr. Malik Ahmad Khan, Speaker, Punjab Assembly and shared practicing challenges in the House and politics. At the end, prize distribution and music performance of UCP Music Society took place.

The conference proceedings also possess a number of papers that explore the challenges for democracy from the global perspective. For instance: Dr. Bilveer Singh, National University of Singapore; Dr. Xiaoqing Xie, Director CPEC Center, China University of Geosciences Wuhan; Dr. Sumeera Imran, National Defence University, Islamabad; Prof. Dr. Ghulam Akbar Mahesar the University of Sindh; Dr. Safdar Hussain, University of Reading UK; Dr. Akansha, University of Delhi India; Dr. Maria Eleonora Hebisz, University of Lodz, Poland; Mr. Anish Mishra, Heidelberg University Germany; Mr. Tariq Khan, Institute of Global Dialogue , South Africa; Dr. Adam Saud Bahria University, Islamabad; Dr. Sadia Rafique, GCU Lahore; Mr. Sanwal Kharal Aston University, UK; Dr. Lianboi Vaiphei University of Delhi, India; TSP Maheshi University of Colombo, Sri Lanka; and various students also presented their research works in the conference. It is pertinent to share that following distinguished scholars had Chaired different sessions: Ambassador (R) Nadeem Riaz; Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid Dean PU; Dr. Bilveer Singh; NUS, Dr. Asma Awan, HOD KCL; Mr. Muhammad Azam Khan, Senior Fellow PNWC, Lahore and Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash, Dean ITU, Lahore. However, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais Professor Emeritus, QAU, Islamabad had the honor to chair the Policy Dialogue session.

Overall, in the conference proceedings the research papers have added new insights and perspectives on the problem and provided a valuable source for researchers, academics, policymakers, and practitioners of Pakistan and abroad. As we continue to grapple with the impacts on democracy, it is important that we draw upon the latest research to address this challenge. By

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sharing knowledge, practices, and innovative solutions, we can collectively tackle the challenges for democracy and work towards building a more sustainable political system.

To conclude, I extend my gratitude to foreign scholars who have come from different countries and our national academics for their contribution to the conference. A note of thanks to my faculty, organizing team and students of UCP for making a collaborative effort for the success of the conference.

Thank You.

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**  
**Chief Organizer Conference/**  
**Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

## **WELCOME NOTE**

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**

(Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Dr. Hammad Naveed, Pro-Rector, UCP, Mr. Mushahid Hussain Syed, the intellectual of our time, Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi, teacher of the teachers and Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan, paper presenters, guests, faculty members and dear students As-salamu alaykum.

It is with immense pleasure that I welcome you all to the International Conference on “Contemporary Challenges for Democracy 2025”, hosted by department of Political Science & IR, FOHSS University of Central Punjab, Lahore.

As a Professor of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, I have long believed that it is not only our privilege—but our duty—as academics to engage directly with the pressing questions of our time. This conference is a reflection of that belief: that universities must not stand on the sidelines of public discourse, but step forward as space of critical thought, democratic dialogue, and civic leadership.

Ladies & gentlemen, Democracy, today stands at a crossroads. From the rise of populism authoritarian, to the erosion of public trust, from disinformation campaigns to the weaponization of technology—our democratic institutions have been facing complex and evolving challenges.

While globalization, technological advances, and heightened civic engagement offer new avenues for democratic participation and accountability, they also expose vulnerabilities. The rise of authoritarianism, political polarization, digital manipulation, and the erosion of democratic norms threaten the stability of democratic systems worldwide. At the same time, social movements and digital platforms empower citizens to demand greater transparency and reform. This dynamic landscape calls for urgent strategies to safeguard democratic institutions. Promote human rights, and build resilience against growing authoritarian tendencies, enduring democracy remains a viable governance model in the contemporary world.

And yet, despite these trials, democracy remains a deeply aspirational force. It remains a promise that power can be accountable, that voices can be equal, and that societies can be governed through consent, not coercion.

There is no second opinion that the topic of the conference has been debated among academics and intellectuals. We have received more than hundred abstracts across Pakistan and the world. The Scientific Committee have selected about 40 abstracts in which 15 are from abroad. We are especially grateful to the scholars like Dr. Bilveer Singh from Singapore, Dr. Xiaoqing Xie from China, Dr. Maria and Dr. Anna from Poland, Mr. Anish Mishra from Germany who have come and present their papers in person. However, some foreign scholars will present their paper online. The University of Central Punjab has taken the initiative to convene this important gathering—not only to analyze democracy’s challenges, but to imagine its renewal. Through this conference, we

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aim to provide guidance—not only to policymakers and academics, but also to the most vital audience of all: our students, the next generation of democratic stewards.

During 2 days, we will engage with pressing questions with eight academic sessions those will be chaired by senior academics like Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, Dr. Yaqoob Bangash, Prof. Sajjad Naseer, Dr. Iram Khalid, Dr. Bilveer Singh, Ambassador (R) Nadeem Riaz, Commodore Azam Khan—and Dr. Asma Awan. However, at the end we will have a “Policy Dialogue” to give recommendations to the stakeholders:

Our panels bring together a diverse and interdisciplinary group of scholars, practitioners, and intellectuals. I am confident that our discussions will go beyond critique—towards constructive and solution-oriented dialogue.

Let me take a moment to thank our keynote speakers, partners, student volunteers, and every individual whose hard work and contribution made this conference a reality. Indeed, university is not only a site of knowledge—but also of hope, action, and transformation.

As we begin, let us reaffirm our commitment: that democracy—however imperfect— But is still worth defending because it promotes pluralism, Inclusivity, tolerance and fairness. And that the university, as an institution, must play its role in that defence.

At the end, we are grateful to Dr. Hammad, Pro-Rector, Administration, faculty and students of UCP who have extended their full support to arrange this conference.

Once again thank-you, Honourable Chief Guest Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed, my inspiring teacher Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi and Excellency Ilsaas for sparing their precious time for gracing the conference with their presence.

I thank-you Ladies & Gentlemen!

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

**Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi**

(Eminent Political Analyst / Former, Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab)

Honorable Chief Guest, esteemed colleagues, respected faculty members, students, and distinguished guests,

I am deeply honored to be a part of this essential gathering and extend my sincere gratitude to the organizers and the Dean for inviting me. It is significant to share this platform with long-time colleagues such as Senator Mushahid Hussain, whose insights into regional politics are always thought-provoking. Today, I want to reflect not only on the value of democracy but on its increasingly complex and fragile nature. While democracy is often held as the most celebrated system of governance, its evolution has never been linear. It is a system that demands constant engagement, vigilance, and introspection.

In my analysis, democracy must be understood on at least three levels. First, at the theoretical level, it has a constitutional and ideological foundation. Second, at the operational level, is how institutions deliver on that promise. Third, the societal level, the degree to which citizens and leadership internalize democratic norms and values.

One of the worrying trends is the emergence of what I call "Generation 1 democracy," or superficial forms of democracy, often introduced under pressure or by authoritarian figures to gain legitimacy. These regimes mimic democratic structures while resisting the democratic spirit. Let us not forget that democracy is not just about periodic elections. It is about institutions, the rule of law, fundamental rights, and the balance of power between the state and its citizens. These elements cannot be compromised. Nor can they exist in isolation from the cultural, social, and economic realities of a nation.

The historical journey of democracy, from ancient Greece to modern Europe, is a testament to its adaptability. Yet even the most advanced democracies have faced setbacks. Challenges such as systemic inequality, cultural divisions, politicization of institutions, and the erosion of public trust persist globally. Democracy in today's age must grapple with new complications: the overwhelming influence of digital media, manipulated elections, and a crisis of representation. Moreover, leadership remains key. The survival of democracy hinges on leaders who are committed to democratic ideals, not merely to political power.

We must ask a critical question: Do the people genuinely respect the state and its institutions, or is their compliance driven by fear or fatigue? The legitimacy of a democratic state rests on voluntary consent, not coercion.

In conclusion, the fight for democracy is not over; it never is. It is a continuous struggle, and we must not relent in our effort to bridge the gap between public aspirations and government performance. Let us work toward a future where democracy is not only preserved but strengthened. Thank you.

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**  
**Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas**  
(Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan)

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am deeply honored to be here in Lahore, a city rich in culture and intellect, to participate in this vital international conference on contemporary challenges to democracy. As the Ambassador of Norway, a country that consistently ranks among the highest on global democracy indices, I come here not only to represent my nation but also to share our collective experiences and values.

Norway's democratic journey has been shaped by our historical struggle for independence and our enduring commitment to democratic ideals. While today we enjoy the benefits of strong institutions and a stable social contract, this was not always the case. Our independence from Sweden in 1905 marked the beginning of a slow and thoughtful transition toward a truly participatory society.

Our democracy rests on four fundamental pillars: a well-rooted social contract, a broad-based political consensus, a fiercely independent and responsible press, and institutions that enjoy widespread trust and credibility. These elements form the bedrock of our social and political life.

However, no democracy is immune to threats, whether external or internal. We have seen democratic erosion in several parts of Europe, including countries that once appeared firmly democratic. Issues such as the curtailment of media freedom, judicial independence, and civil rights have begun to re-emerge. We must remain vigilant.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine sent shockwaves through the democratic world. It demonstrated not just geopolitical aggression but an assault on the very values that underpin the global democratic order. Norway stands firm in its commitment to international law, diplomacy, and the defense of democratic values.

It is important to recognize that democracy is not just a set of rules; it is a lived experience. While definitions may vary, the aspiration for dignity, freedom, and justice is nearly universal, even among those living in non-democratic states.

Norway's foreign policy, therefore, is guided by democratic diplomacy. We support multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the OSCE, and we strive to give voice to those who are marginalized in the global system. We also understand the growing disillusionment among youth, who often feel excluded from political processes. For democracy to thrive, it must be inclusive, participatory, and transparent.

Democracy is more than elections. It is about civic participation, institutional integrity, and public trust. And it must be continually renewed through dialogue, debate, and introspection.

Thank you for having me.

**ADDRESS BY CHIEF GUEST**

**Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed**

(Political Analyst, Former Federal Minister & Senator)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this timely and important international conference. As we gather to discuss the future of democracy, I believe it is equally important to understand the broader geopolitical transformations reshaping our world.

We are currently witnessing a profound shift in the global power structure, a transition from a Western-dominated unipolar world to a more diverse and multipolar order. Asia, once seen as a periphery, is emerging as a centre of economic dynamism and political innovation. The rise of China, the resilience of Southeast Asia, and the assertiveness of countries like Turkey and Indonesia signify this transformation.

Seventy years ago, a historic conference in Indonesia laid the intellectual foundation for what we now call the Global South. That moment called attention to the potential of non-Western civilizations to develop their paths to modernity and democracy.

Let us reflect for a moment on the American model, often presented as the gold standard of democracy. While the U.S. has contributed greatly to democratic ideals, its foreign interventions, from Iraq to Afghanistan to Libya, have also cast a long shadow. These ventures, framed as democratic missions, have often resulted in destabilization and suffering. Compare that with China, whose one-party model has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty without external wars. This forces us to revisit a fundamental question: Is democracy about procedure, or performance? Does legitimacy come from elections alone, or from delivering tangible improvements in people's lives?

Harvard studies reveal that over 80% of Chinese citizens report trust in their government. Meanwhile, many Western democracies struggle with internal polarization and declining faith in institutions. Perhaps it is time to consider a more pluralistic understanding of democratic legitimacy, one that respects diverse pathways to progress. Let us not ignore the double standards that plague international democratic discourse. The West often speaks of human rights, yet remains silent on violations in Gaza, Kashmir, or Palestine. If democracy is to have any moral authority, it must be universal in its concern and consistent in its application.

Pakistan, despite its challenges, remains a democracy at heart, shaped by the ideals of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Our democratic heritage must be protected and evolved to reflect the aspirations of our young, diverse, and vibrant society.

I conclude with a call: Let us move beyond slogans. Let us embrace democracy not just as a system but as a spirit, one that is just, inclusive, and global in its vision. Thank you.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**Dr. Hammad Naveed**

(Pro- Rector, UCP)

Honourable guests, esteemed colleagues, and dear participants,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the International Conference on Contemporary Challenges to Democracy. In a time when democratic values are increasingly under pressure, both globally and locally, this conference offers a timely platform for dialogue and reflection.

I am especially honoured to welcome our Guest of Honour, Senator Mr. Mushahid Hussain Syed, whose lifelong commitment to democratic discourse and regional politics continues to inspire many.

We are also privileged to host His Excellency Mr. Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan, representing a country deeply respected for its democratic strength and global peace efforts. Your presence here is truly appreciated.

A warm welcome as well to Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi, a distinguished scholar whose expertise in political science and governance is widely acknowledged and respected.

I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose vision and dedication made this important gathering possible.

Let us engage in meaningful discussions and work together to better understand and respond to the threats democracy faces today.

Thank you, and welcome once again.

**Papers Presented  
(Day 1 and Day 2)**

## **The Role of Academic Freedom and Saffronization in India's Democratic Decline in Modi Era**

**Majreeha\***  
**Usman Shahid\*\***

### **Abstract**

*Academic freedom is a fundamental pillar of democracy, enabling the pursuit of truth and fostering accountability within democratic institutions. However, its decline often signals broader democratic backsliding. This research examines the intricate relationship between academic freedom and democracy, focusing on the case of India, where the erosion of academic autonomy and the saffronisation of educational institutions under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have emerged as critical drivers of democratic decline. Using a case study methodology, this research analyses the trajectory of academic freedom in India, examining BJP-led interventions since 2014. Saffronisation—the ideological infusion of Hindu nationalist narratives into educational institutions—has played a central role in reshaping academic discourse, stifling dissent, and undermining the legitimacy of epistemic institutions. These efforts have weakened the democratic fabric of India, transforming it from an electoral democracy to an electoral autocracy, indicating a significant decline in its democratic practices. This study highlights the dual impact of declining academic freedom and saffronisation as tools for autocratic consolidation. It underscores the global significance of protecting academic institutions and resisting ideological dominance to prevent democratic erosion. By documenting the Indian case, this research offers a broader framework for understanding the relationship between academic freedom, ideological control, and democratic sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Saffronisation, academic freedom, democratic decline, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

### **Introduction**

Academic freedom is one of several norms—only partly formalized—that support the functioning of democracy. As Bo Rothstein explains, democracy relies on "knowledge realism" and the ability to determine what is true and what is not. In a liberal society, the state cannot fulfil this role alone. Instead, it relies on individuals and institutions within society that are dedicated to the pursuit of truth. For this to be possible, knowledge production must have an institutional foundation that maintains a certain degree of independence from political influence (Ginsburg, 2022)

The world is facing a challenging trend, with 74 out of 158 countries experiencing democratic recession, as reported by the V-Dem Institute in their 2023 Global Democracy Report. According to the Academic Freedom Index update of 2023, 22 out of 179 countries and territories are faced with academic decline, with universities and scholars facing more constraints today than 10 years ago. This signals significant challenges to democracy and academic autonomy (International IDEA, 2021).

Academic freedom is particularly relevant to democratic backsliding because universities are a frequent target of leaders who seek to shape the polity to their own making and entrench their hold

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\*\* Lecturer, University of Central Punjab, Lahore

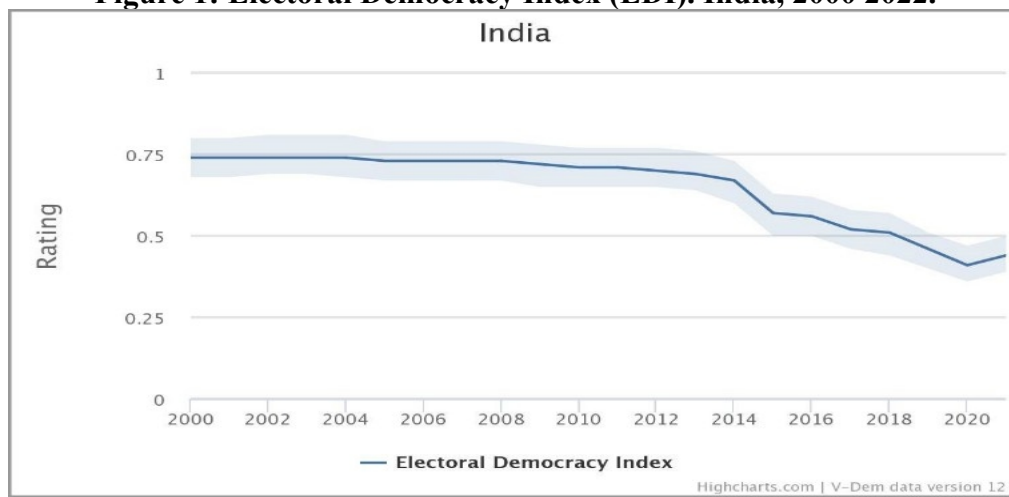
on power. One of the core strategies of such leaders is to try to control the public sphere. Academic freedom is part of a set of norms, only partially institutionalized, that help make democracy work (Academic Freedom Index, 2024). As Bo Rothstein puts it, democracy depends on “knowledge realism” and “assured knowledge of what is true and what is not” (Rothstein, 2021).

The concept of academic freedom encompasses three interrelated principles: (1) the right of professors and students to express and hold their opinions freely; (2) the autonomy of universities to operate independently without direct state control; and (3) the state's responsibility to safeguard and promote both individual freedoms and institutional independence (Ginsburg, 202). As articulated by UNESCO, academic freedom includes the right to teach and engage in discussions without being bound by prescribed doctrines, conduct research and share findings openly, express opinions about the institution or system they work in, be free from institutional censorship, and actively participate in professional or representative academic organizations (UNESCO, 1997, para. 27).

A good case study for the correlation between academic freedom and democratic decline is that of India. Academic freedom started to decline in India as early as 2009, with a subtle drop in university autonomy, followed by a more drastic decline in all other areas by 2013. This trend worsened after Narendra Modi’s election as prime minister in 2014, particularly with the implementation of his saffronization policy, which sought to promote Hindu nationalist ideals in educational institutions. The sharp decline in academic freedom, left unaddressed, occurred just two years before the collapse of India’s electoral democracy in 2016—the year in which an electoral autocracy was consolidated. The timeline of this article is 2014–2024, with a focus on the ideological transformation in the education system during the BJP-led government's tenure, as India's performance in key indicators of democratic quality has significantly suffered since the ascent of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in 2014.

India’s autocratization process started with Narendra Modi and the BJP’s accession to power in the 2014 elections. India’s classification as an electoral autocracy in 2020 is a result of the decline of several core democratic institutions (Lindberg & Natsika, 2023, p. 2; see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Electoral Democracy Index (EDI). India, 2000 2022.**



Nastika, N.,&Linberg,S.I.(2023, February 10)

## **Education Policies of India:**

The Indian Union Government is responsible for formulating National Education Policies, drawing from the recommendations of various commissions. The first major policy reform took place in 1968, following the recommendations of the Kothari Commission (1964–1966). Over time, policy revisions became necessary to address emerging educational challenges and global demands. As a result, the National Education Policy (NEP) of 1986 was introduced and later modified in 1992. Recognizing the need for further reforms to enhance education quality, accessibility, and sustainability, the Indian government approved a new National Education Policy (NEP 2020) on July 29, 2020. This policy was developed based on recommendations from a committee led by Dr. Kasturirangan and aimed to introduce significant changes to the Indian education system (Kulal et al., 2024, p. 2). According to formal announcements, these changes aim to improve the quality of education, innovation, and research.

However, the basic purpose of the National Education Policy 2020 has been centralization and commercialization, but there is another side to this policy. The organized force behind the BJP is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS plays a crucial role in the cultural conditioning and reification of the neo-Hindu identity, particularly among its adolescent and young adult members. The ‘Vision and Mission’ section provided on the official website of RSS consists of the following words quoted by K.B. Hedgewar:

*“The Hindu culture is the life-breath of Hindustan , It is therefore clear that if Hindustan is to be protected, we should first nourish the Hindu culture. If the Hindu culture perishes in Hindustan itself, and if the Hindu society ceases to exist, it will hardly be appropriate to refer to the mere geographical entity that remains as Hindustan. Mere geographical lumps do not make a nation. The entire society should be in such a vigilant and organised condition that no one would dare to cast an evil eye on any of our points of honour. Strength, it should be remembered, comes only through organization. It is therefore the duty of every Hindu to do his best to consolidate the Hindu society. The Sangh is just carrying out this supreme task. The present fate of the country cannot be changed unless lakhs of young men dedicate their entire lifetime for that cause. To mould the minds of our youth towards that end is the supreme aim of the Sangh” (RSS: The Mission, 2012, as cited in Biswas, 2020)*

The RSS aims to make India a Hindu nation. To put this into practice, the RSS opened a chain of schools, franchising the experience of spreading Hindutva consciousness in society through school education. Thus, three principles—saffronisation, privatization, and authoritarianism—have animated the BJP’s education policy.

Saffronisation—a process named after the colour saffron that adorns Hindu nationalist symbols— involves imagining India as a Hindu nation, both by reconstructing an imaginary past defined by Hindu unity and by refashioning political institutions to reflect majoritarian ideals. The National Education Policy, promulgated by the BJP government in 2020 without any discussion in parliament, is a comprehensive recipe for the saffronisation of education. Saffronisation tends to reinforce Brahminical stereotypes, glorify authoritarianism, demonize India’s Muslim rulers, deny the historically-ascertained Aryan migration theory, and encourage communal polarization. There

is a refusal to acknowledge the deep caste, class, and gender inequalities that define our society (Bhattacharya, 2023).

The BJP's education policies have ensured a reflection of an altered and biased view of history and politics, with academic institutions being subjected to state control. Academic institutions are often the first sites where democratic principles are tested; limitations on academic freedom pave the way for the collapse of the democratic fabric of society.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Critical Education Theory (Giroux, 2014), Cultural Hegemony (Gramsci), Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1968), and the Neoliberal Critique of Education (Giroux, 2014). Triangulation of these three theories provide a lens through which one can analyse the ideological shifts in India's education system from 2014 to 2024, examining how state policies, curriculum changes, and privatization efforts have been utilized to consolidate political and ideological dominance.

In the context of India, policies like the NEP 2020 and the influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in academic institutions explain how education is being used to cater to the nationalist narrative. Critical Education Theory applies in this case where the education system reproduces inequalities while serving the dominant power structure.

The way saffronization of education is embedded in textbooks and academic policies, in order to marginalize dissenting perspectives and minority histories, is another aspect of Critical Education Theory—the way dominant ideologies shape curriculum and pedagogy.

Cultural hegemony refers to domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means. It is usually achieved through social institutions, which allow those in power to strongly influence the values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldviews, and behaviours of the rest of the society. Cultural hegemony functions by framing the worldview of the ruling class, and the social and economic structures that embody it, as just, legitimate, and designed for the benefit of all, even though these structures may only benefit the ruling class. This kind of power is distinct from rule by force, as in a military dictatorship, because it allows the ruling class to exercise authority using the "peaceful" means of ideology and culture (ThoughtCo, n.d.). This concept aligns well with the way the BJP-led government has modified textbooks, altered history and used it as a tool for a Hindu nationalist perspective.

The way education has been privatized under the NEP 2020, where strong influence of RSS-backed NGOs is seen, aligns well with Henry Giroux's critique of market-driven education. Giroux (2014) considers a number of issues facing higher education that influence neoliberal ideologies: “low funding, the domination of universities by market mechanisms, the rise of for-profit colleges, the intrusion of the national security state, and the lack of faculty self-governance” (p. 138) (Armstrong, 2016).

Another important theory that aligns well with the saffronization of education in India under Modi's regime is social constructivism. This theory, set forth in 1968 by Vygotsky, suggests that “language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and

understand reality” (Akpan et al., 2020, p. 50). In other words, knowledge and historical narratives are shaped by socio-political influences. This is particularly evident in the revision of school and university curricula to reflect Hindu nationalist ideologies while downplaying or omitting historical contributions of Muslims, Dalits, and other marginalized communities.

The way the role of Muslim rulers of Mughals Empire (time) has been minimized/distorted/fabricated Akbar, Tipu Sultan, and Bahadur Shah Zafar while emphasizing Hindu rulers like Shivaji and Maharana Pratap, and diminishing Mughal history and the Delhi Sultanate from NCERT textbooks, particularly in political science and history subjects, reflects how historical understanding among students has been deliberately shaped through political interference and cultural dominance.

According to *Live Mint* (2023), Congress's general secretary in-charge for Jharkhand, Avinash Pandey, alleged that the decision to drop lessons on Mughal courts from the NCERT books is an attempt to change the nation's history. Hitting out at the Centre, Pandey said democracy is under threat in the country.

Further, historical events such as the Gujarat Riots of 2002 have been removed or reworded to downplay state responsibility, while chapters on Jawaharlal Nehru's secularism and socialist policies have been shortened or omitted. This ideological shift not only manipulates students' perception of history but also influences their political and cultural consciousness by instilling a majoritarian perspective from an early age. Another example is the introduction of mythological and religious texts as historical sources in academic curricula. In several BJP-ruled states, like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are now compulsory readings, while scientific and rationalist perspectives have been discouraged or omitted. This reflects a shift away from critical inquiry towards a dogmatic acceptance of Hindu nationalist narratives.

Akpan et al. (2020) discusses the implications of social constructivism on teaching and learning. This shift demonstrates how education is not merely a neutral transfer of information but a socially constructed process influenced by political power structures. By reshaping the curriculum, the state ensures that the younger generation is exposed to a singular, ideological interpretation of history, reinforcing majoritarian nationalism while erasing or marginalizing alternative perspectives. These changes, aligned with social constructivist principles, illustrate how the state and dominant cultural forces actively shape knowledge production to serve political objectives.

## **Research Gap**

While democratic backsliding in India has been examined from various angles—such as institutional weakening, the role of media, and erosion of civil liberties—existing literature has largely focused on political, legal, and media institutions. There is limited attention to how ideological control in educational institutions could be one of the major causes of democratic backsliding. This study addresses this gap by examining the saffronization of education as a mechanism of democratic erosion. The state creates an environment where democratic norms are weakened, and authoritarian tendencies are reinforced through restrictions on academic freedom. This study delves into how the systematic control of education is not merely a cultural or ideological shift but a strategic move that fosters democratic decline in India.

## Methodology

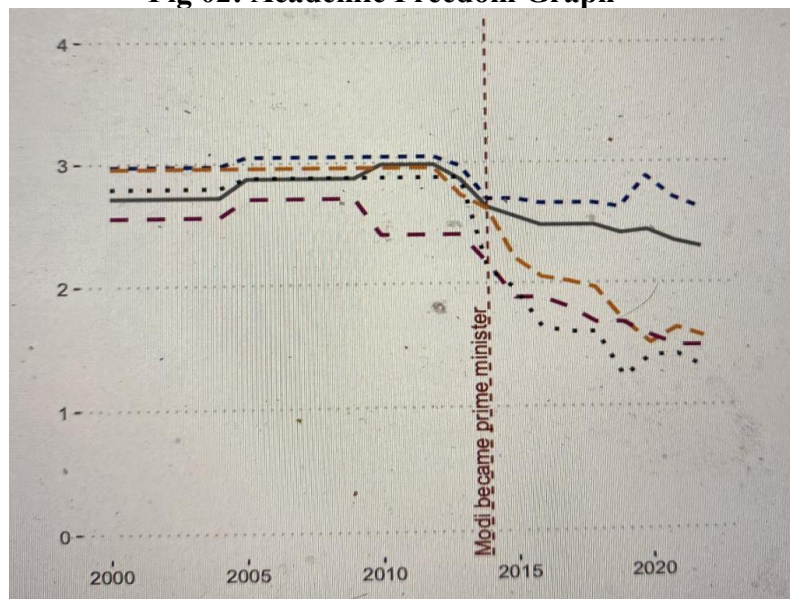
This study is based on a qualitative research design with a case study approach to examine the relationship between democratic decline and academic freedom, particularly the saffronization of education under BJP rule from 2014–2024. Data collection relies on secondary sources, including reports from the V-Dem Institute, the Academic Freedom Index, and *Free to Think* by Scholars at Risk, alongside government policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Supreme Court judgments affecting academia. A content analysis of school textbooks, curriculum changes, and political speeches is conducted to assess ideological shifts, while case studies of university protests, academic censorship, and faculty dismissals provide deeper insights. The study acknowledges limitations, such as potential bias in sources, restricted access to primary data, and time constraints that may not fully capture long-term effects.

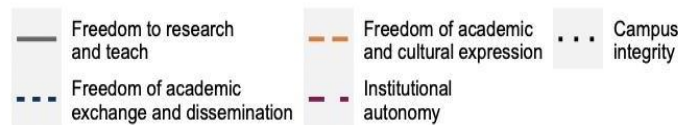
## Literature Review

Academic freedom is the ability of individuals to study, teach, research, and publish without undue external constraints. It is granted with the belief that it enhances the pursuit and application of worthwhile knowledge and is thus supported by society through the funding of academics and their institutions. Academic freedom also entails the responsibility of academics to encourage openness and flexibility in academic work while remaining accountable to each other and society (Tight, 1988b, p. 132).

However, in practice, this definition has not been upheld effectively, particularly in India. According to the *Free to Think 2024* annual report by the Scholars at Risk (SAR) Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, India has witnessed a concerning decline in academic freedom over the past decade. SAR, a network of 665 universities worldwide, monitors and reports attacks on higher education. The report highlights that India's Academic Freedom Index (AFI) has dropped from 0.6 to 0.2 between 2013 and 2023. Furthermore, India has been ranked as “completely restricted” according to the AFI (Scholars at Risk, 2024).

**Fig 02: Academic Freedom Graph**





Source V- Dem report (Das, 2024, p 04)

The five *de facto* indicators of academic freedom include:

1. Freedom to research and teach
2. Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination
3. Institutional autonomy
4. Campus integrity
5. Freedom of academic and cultural expression

The AFI uses a scale from 0 (low) to 1 (high) to measure the degree of academic freedom in a country (Drishti IAS, n.d.).

### **Nexus Between Academic Freedom and Democratic Freedom**

Academic freedom and democratic freedom are deeply interconnected. When democracy enforces checks and balances, upholds the rule of law, and ensures that elected officials respect the autonomy of liberal democratic institutions, universities maintain their independence. However, when these democratic safeguards are weakened, universities become increasingly vulnerable to political interference (Ginsburg, 2022)

From 2014 to 2024, under the BJP government led by Narendra Modi, academic freedom in India has faced significant challenges. After winning a landslide victory in the 2014 general elections, the government has played a significant role in India's academic decline. According to the V-Dem report, India's academic freedom score declined to 0.38 on a scale of 0–1. In a 2023 update, the V-Dem Institute noted that India was among 22 out of 179 countries where institutions and scholars enjoy significantly less freedom than they did ten years ago. By 2024, India's position further deteriorated, placing it in the bottom 10–20% category, alongside Rwanda and South Sudan (V-Dem, 2024).

These figures indicate not just poor education policies but a broader threat to India's secular democratic credentials.

### **Key Principles Driving BJP's Education Policies**

There are three major principles shaping the BJP government's approach to education policy:

- Privatization
- Authoritarianism
- Saffronization

### **Privatization and Authoritarian Repression of Education**

The BJP government has encouraged privatization as a central element of its education policy. This approach has deepened class and caste disparities, as students from affluent backgrounds predominantly access private education, while marginalized communities are left dependent on underfunded public institutions. The government has promoted public-private partnerships,

outsourcing key functions such as teacher training, assessment, and security services to private entities, including NGOs. However, this policy lacks a regulatory framework governing the entry and exit of NGOs and private organizations, allowing RSS-backed NGOs to interfere in the education sector. (360info 2024)

According to International Affairs (n.d.), the BJP government has exhibited authoritarian tendencies in higher education policy. One clear example is the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 without parliamentary discussions. Additionally, students protesting against discriminatory policies and government overreach in public universities have faced brutal repression.

### **Saffronization of Education**

Saffronization—a process named after the colour saffron that adorns Hindu nationalist symbols— involves imagining India as a Hindu nation, both by reconstructing an imaginary past defined by Hindu unity and by refashioning political institutions to reflect majoritarian ideals (Huju, 2022). The process of saffronization began in 2014, soon after the Modi government came to power, with the establishment of Bharatiya Shiksha Niti Ayog (BSNA), which was tasked with formulating plans to saffronize education.

The government has strategically placed RSS-affiliated individuals in key policymaking and administrative positions in major educational institutions, including the University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

### **Hindutva Ideology in Education Policy**

Narendra Modi redefined the concept of Hindutva for the 2014 elections by merging Hindu nationalism with development, making Hindu nationalism a core aspect of Hindutva. This ideology has significantly shaped educational reforms under the NEP 2020. (Anand & Lall, 2022) During Modi's first year in office, the Sangh Parivar advocated for changes to school textbooks drafted during the Congress period, revising them to align with a pro-Hindutva agenda in the name of cultural nationalism). Several state governments have actively pushed Hindutva narratives in education, with the RSS playing a key role in shaping the NEP 2020 (Flåten, 2017, as cited in Anand & Lall, 2022). School pedagogy is carried forward beyond the school into the familial space and frequent parent teacher meetings are organised to ensure the same. The children are unaware of Sikh or Christian festivals and holidays. Furthermore, they learn to dissociate the role of BJP leader in inciting communal violence and the erstwhile chief minister of Gujarat during the 2002 riots – Narendra Modi (Biswas, 2022)

### **Erasure of Muslim Identity from Textbooks**

Anand and Lall (2022) argue that one of the most alarming aspects of saffronization has been the erasure of Muslim identity from school curricula. For instance, in Gujarat, the 2002 Gujarat carnage is referred to as the "Gujarat riots" instead of "anti-Muslim riots" in revised NCERT textbooks.

### **Suppression of Liberal and Scientific Values**

A critical aspect of saffronization is the replacement of universal values with Indian feudal values. Under the pretence of reducing academic burden, the syllabus has been revised to remove content promoting liberal, scientific, and pluralistic values. A 30% reduction in around 190 subjects of the academic year of 2020-21 was made by Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) which selectively removed portions from the textbooks of Classes 9 to 12. This type of selective academic exclusion is said to be a continuation of the Sangh Parivar's machination to control the metanarrative on nationalism and inculcate a Hindu majoritarian world view among students (Trivedi, 2020).

The 2023 National Curriculum Framework (NCF) is a detailed 625-page document that dictates even minor aspects of the curriculum, effectively pushing the Hindutva ideology of one nation, one religion, and one culture (Peenikaparambil, 2024).

### **Distortion of Historical Narratives**

Mishra and Kumar (2022) highlight concerning distortions in class 12 Gujarat textbooks, where democracy is criticized, and the successes of Mussolini and Hitler are glorified. The text praises Hitler for building a strong German organization, protecting Germany from hardships, and transforming the country's economy, failing to address the atrocities committed under his regime. This narrative has clear ideological motives, aiming to propagate fascist messages (Traub, 2018, p. 13).

Hindu nationalism is also promoted at the primary level. For instance, in Rajasthan's Class 3 Hindi textbook, a story describes a seven-year-old girl named Maina being burned to death by the British because she wanted independence. The story ends by asking children what they would do if they were in her place, encouraging them to embrace martyrdom at an early age (Westerfield, 2019, p. 12).

### **Discussion**

Education has been used as a tool for ideological expansion for years. According to *The Diplomat* (2024), Confucius Institutes operate on a joint venture model—involving partnerships between Chinese universities and host universities—allowing them to be integrated within local academic institutions, utilizing their existing facilities. The rapid expansion of Confucius Institutes was widely seen as a reflection of China's growing soft power during this period, with the initiative providing an avenue for promoting Chinese culture and language and offering institutions a chance to partner with Chinese universities.

Similarly, Iran's soft power practices and public diplomacy activities include education. Tehran tries to raise individuals who have internalized its own ideology in various countries through its educational activities, utilizing embassies and cultural centres in relevant countries.

International Al-Mustafa University started its activities in 1979 in Qom, an important city in terms of Shiism. Apart from Qom, the university has campuses in Mashhad and Isfahan, Iran's second-largest cities. The university accepts students in four main groups: Iranian citizens, foreigners residing in Iran or coming for educational purposes, people in countries where the university has branches, and those enrolled in its distance education system. This shows that the university operates beyond Iran. Research indicates that the university's turning point in terms of international expansion was in 2003, when it began offering electronic education globally, reaching thousands of young people from over 100 countries. Additionally, the university has opened branches in various countries and representative offices in many others (Inan, 2022).

In the case of India, the saffronization of education is alienating internally by marginalizing non-Hindu communities while externally it is being criticized for fostering religious nationalism by international observers.

## Conclusion

India, once celebrated as the largest democracy is facing alarming challenges of democratic erosion under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP led government. Since coming to power there has been significant embracement of authoritarian tactics. From suppressing dissent undermining institutional checks and balances, and weaponizing state machinery to entrench Hindu nationalist ideology. India's education system has undergone significant changes marked systematic saffronization of institutions, and policymaking. This ideological restructuring, driven by the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda, has significantly altered the country's educational landscape by promoting Hindutva narratives while marginalizing secular, pluralistic, and scientific perspectives. Modi regime has brought India in a contradicting position, Hindu Nationalism in the name of patriotism is promoted and authoritarian tactics are normalised.

This paper has analysed the decline of democracy and academic freedom in India, highlighting that while these trends occurred simultaneously, they are not merely parallel events. Multiple factors contribute to democratic backsliding, but the saffronization of education has played a significant role in accelerating this decline. As a result, India's long-standing claim of being the world's largest democracy is increasingly contested, with clear signs of authoritarian tendencies emerging over the past decade.

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## **Navigating Local Peacebuilding Approaches in Afghanistan and Prospects of Democracy in the Post-US Withdrawal Period**

**Dr. Maryam Azam\***  
**Ayesha Aqeel\*\***

### **Abstract**

*The protracted armed conflict in Afghanistan owes its origins to a combination of factors such as internal power politics, underdevelopment, geographical location and the cold war rivalries of the Soviet Union and the United States. Later, the rise of Taliban and then US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 continued to disrupt peace, development, and stability. Despite using hard power strategy for more than two decades, United States failed and was unable to achieve peace in Afghanistan. This led the resurgence of Taliban influence and presence in Afghanistan and eventually US had to negotiate with them. It led to the process of withdrawal and Taliban taking over the Afghanistan in August 2021. This research intends to inquire peacebuilding approaches in Afghanistan and future of democracy under the Taliban rule. Even though US withdrawal ended the war situation and insurgency, but underlying causes of conflict persist in Afghanistan. The Taliban government marginalized ethnic and political groups, excluded women from politics and increasingly from the public sphere, alienated the country's largest foreign donors, committed war atrocities such as attacks on civilians and destruction of cultural sites and most importantly they continue to harbor international terrorist groups. This research aims to identify the local peacebuilding approaches under the Taliban rule, and challenges in achieving a sustainable democratic political culture through qualitative analysis.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Democracy, Taliban. Peacebuilding, Governance

### **Introduction**

Afghanistan has been an epicenter of protracted conflict and internal instability since decades. Political dissent, element of religiosity, tribal and ethnic divisions, along with the external intrusions explicates the complexed security and political dynamics of Afghanistan. In this context, navigating peace building approaches is significant to reduce the probability of conflict escalation and regeneration in Afghan society. Peacebuilding fundamentally navigates the causes of conflict in order to minimize the probability of reoccurrence. Peacebuilding activities include multiple actions which aim to minimize the potential for conflict relapses by enhancing national conflict management skills across all levels while establishing sustainable peace and development foundations. Peacebuilding initiatives focus on transforming and resolving key conflict aspects through official diplomatic efforts together with civil society peace processes and informal methods of dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. This paper examines the initiatives used in peacebuilding, evaluating their efficacy as well as their links and democratic prospects. Racial differences, socioeconomic inequalities and geopolitical designs are all predominant factors in the historical turmoil of Afghanistan. The country has endured waves of combat since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Soviet invasion in December 1970, a civil war during and after cold war period, the rise and fall of the Taliban, and an extended presence of foreign military forces.

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Peacebuilding in Afghanistan includes a range of actors and strategies such as international organizations, local NGOs, and community-based initiatives. Grassroots programs focus on community and reconciliation using traditional conflict transformation techniques and fostering local ownership. While national actions largely are based on governance, inclusive democracy, political transformation, and the integration of former combatants into society. Furthermore, International development initiatives, economic assistance and diplomatic discussions seek to stabilize the area and create the conditions that support sustainable peace. In this context, by conducting an extensive examination of these multifaceted approaches, this study seeks to engage in the broader conversation on peace building amidst conflict regions, providing interpretative insights that could impact prospective democratic efforts in Afghanistan. The paper further points out that an integrated approach is essential in the pursuit of sustainable peace and democracy by transcending the compartmentalization tendencies of local, national, and international dynamics.

### **Literature Review**

The existing literature signifies the main peacebuilding approaches in Afghanistan. One of the dominant themes in the existing literature highlights the role of international community. (Rubin, 1995) discusses the social and political complexities of Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion and asserts that a range of internal and external elements including regional and grand geopolitical power clashes, ethnolinguistic heterogeneity and Islam led the state to collapse. In addition, he predicted that if the international community fails to find a solution for rebuilding Afghanistan, there is a high risk of a surge in the flow of weapons, cash, and contraband across the country's porous borders, ultimately posing a threat to global security.

The author examined the aims and motives of Taliban and their aims are examined in detail and arguing that to achieve long-term peace in Afghanistan negotiations with the group are required. Semple also said the Taliban does not act as one structure, and there is open communication among factions within the group. The book greatly contributes to the discussion of the role of negotiations in ending the Afghan war (Semple, 2009).

Iqbal (2021) claim that the strategic goals, plans, and related activities of the US engagement in Afghanistan were unclear and inconsistent. At first, military actions against the Taliban and al Qaeda were very effective. However, the Taliban were able to reorganize and wage asymmetrical warfare against coalition forces led by the United States in 2003 because of the United States' redirection of military resources to Iraq and its change from military strategy to state-building. Because they were indigenous, the Taliban profited from Afghanistan's social and physical conditions. Like this, Afghanistan's lack of democratic institutions, economic growth, and social cohesion made the US state-building effort extremely limited and ultimately unsuccessful. Moreover, persistent violence undermined the climate of support required for state-building initiatives. Lastly, the Afghan governing elite only reached Kabul and did not guarantee outreach across the nation.

The author evaluates Afghanistan's limited democratization progress through the elite-versus-citizen framework. The analysis disputes the culturalist theory which attributes democratization obstacles to limited democratic experience and religious and cultural norms. The text proposes a political-institutional explanation for Afghanistan's democratization difficulties through two fundamental arguments. The foundation of newly established institutions by the United States together with international partners clashed fundamentally with local conditions. Afghan elites exploited new institutions to gain power which created 'negative hybridity' through neo-

patrimonialism. This situation has created a growing divide between ordinary Afghan citizens and both Afghan elites and the international world that faces accusations of hiding their elite cooperation behind democratic support operations. The future of democracy in Afghanistan is dependent on elites catching up with the Afghan masses and accepting democracy for what it is: the rule of the people (Schmeid, 2016).

The author examines the challenges to democratic processes due to the Afghanistan's increasing instability. This article answers the question by exploring why the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 neglected to implement essential State-building operations. The Afghanistan Papers' disclosure revealed Washington's disorganized policy and created severe damage to the invasion's effectiveness. This research starts with an examination of Afghanistan's current political scenario by first reviewing the declining confidence in electoral processes since the 2001 invasion (Coburn, 2014).

The report investigates how democratic institutions under the National Unity Government demonstrate instability through their failures in political power sharing and corruption elimination while failing to enforce the rule of law. The examination continues by assessing the ways internal challenges along with external threats including the Islamic State's rise in Afghanistan and Pakistan's terrorism support obstruct democratic processes in the country (Coburn, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

- How peacebuilding in Afghanistan evolved in pre and post US withdrawal era?
- What was the political environment in Afghanistan after US withdrawal?
- Why is peace and democracy still considered a challenge in Afghanistan after US withdrawal?

### **Research Methodology**

This qualitative research examines conflict transformation and the prospects of democracy in Afghanistan post-US withdrawal using historical, descriptive, and analytical approaches. It traces key events such as the Doha Agreement, the Taliban's resurgence, and the collapse of the Afghan government, highlighting their impact on governance and societal dynamics.

The study critically evaluates barriers to democracy, the role of conflict transformation, and the influence of regional and international actors. Data is sourced from secondary materials, including books, journals, research papers, policy briefs, reports, and credible news articles, ensuring a balanced analysis.

### **Peacebuilding Efforts at the Wake of US Intervention in Afghanistan in 2001**

US intervention in Afghanistan dismantled the regime of Taliban and Afghanistan became a bedrock of conflict and chaos as US and NATO forces moved in Afghanistan. The Bush administration's initial objectives were to defeat the Taliban and eliminate Al-Qaeda. President Bush emphasized that such enemies need to be confronted directly, without concession (President Bush, 2003). Thus, the state-building process placed combat against terrorism as the primary agenda, with peace as a second priority. Bonn conference was considered as an initial step towards peacebuilding. The Bonn Agreement, a series of agreements aimed at ending the conflict in Afghanistan, was focused on promoting national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the country. The agreement included the establishment of key institutions such as the judiciary, army, police force, constitutional commissions, election commission, banking

system, drug enforcement directorate, and the disarmament and demobilization of militias. It also involved the drafting of a new constitution, combating terrorism, drugs, and organized crime, repatriation and resettlement of refugees, and other related subjects. One of the main goals of the agreement was to address the country's monetary crisis by authorizing the establishment of a new central bank with the ability to manage currency issuance. Additionally, the agreement called for the creation of a human rights commission, marking the first time that Afghan authorities were tasked with establishing such an institution. The overall objective of the agreement was to establish a multi-ethnic, fully representative government that would be elected through free and fair elections by the people of Afghanistan (Melegoda, 2010). But the process was flawed mainly because it excluded the main participants to the conflict. For example, it left out key actors in the struggle, including the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had huge Pashtun support that comprises of approximately 42 percent of the Afghan population (Erlanger, 2001). Ethnic Pashtuns felt evaded by exclusion, particularly in the Karzai regime, that was dominated by past warlords and Northern Alliance sympathizers. In addition, Afghanistan was polarized on linguistic, regional, and ethnic lines because of this rift. Subsequently, the Obama administration adopted a more lenient attitude towards the Taliban to weaken them and push them towards negotiations. The establishment of a Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar, was an example of this (Rosenberg, 2013). As the conflict escalated, these negotiations yielded minimal progress. Afghanistan remained a fractured nation beset by linguistic, ethnic, and ideological strife, as exemplified by the 2014 presidential elections. The fault lines continued to exist even after the formation of a National Unity Government (NUG) headed by President Dr. Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah Abdullah led by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's intervention. The emergence of technocrats with Western education made it much harder to govern.

To achieve a political settlement and bring an end to the struggle, the former Afghan government negotiated with the political leadership of the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, after the U.S. had signed a peace deal with the Taliban. Global powers, especially the United States, aimed to build confidence among the belligerents and advance the peace process during the two years of negotiations before the Taliban took over. The Taliban and the previous Afghan government could not develop a reliable relationship, which undermined their capability for arriving at a political consensus, even if the United States was in support of the peace process. Consequently, the United States and its allies decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. For the first time since they ruled most of the country from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban seized Kabul on August 15. The Taliban set up a new government and state apparatus after the old one collapsed, thus becoming the de facto rulers (Qayomi, 2023).

### **Peacebuilding Approaches in Pre and Post US Withdrawal**

Taliban was able to get the political control of Afghanistan on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021 as internationally backed Afghanistan regime was collapsed. This incident itself explains the significance of local support and community- based political strength for power consolidation. The peace building discourse can be understood in the context of changing global geopolitical landscape that reshaped the international engagement in peace processes, particularly change of political leadership in United States. From being party to the conflict and initiating the military intervention, US acted as a mediator in intra-Afghan talks. This was accompanied by pre-US withdrawal local attempts to bring peace. In 2018, a generic tendency and support for talks between the government of Afghanistan and Taliban was observed. It was then in June 2018 that Taliban reciprocated to the ceasefire call of President Ashraf Ghani at Eid-ul-Fitr and extended the call to their fighters. It was considered as the first nationwide ceasefire. In this context, a senior Afghan official reportedly said

that “after the ceasefire, it was no longer about defeating the Taliban, but how to convince them to sit at the table with us” (Theros, 2023).

### **Jirgas**

In Afghanistan, Jirgas are traditional gatherings of elders and community leaders that have long played a central role in settling disputes and maintaining peace. These assemblies rely on consensus, providing a platform for discussion and negotiation to resolve conflicts. Deeply rooted in local culture and history, they hold strong legitimacy and respect among the people. While Jirgas have traditionally been dominated by men, there have been efforts to include women and younger members to make decisions more representative. Their approach is based on restorative justice, focusing on reconciliation and unity rather than punishment, which helps rebuild trust in communities recovering from conflict. In many areas where formal government institutions are weak or absent, Jirga serves as an essential form of local governance, addressing disputes and social issues. There have also been attempts to connect Jirgas with the formal legal system, combining traditional methods with modern judicial principles. Despite these changes, Jirgas continues to play a key role in maintaining peace and stability, using long standing customs to bring communities together and resolve conflicts. In 2019, for the first time a significant proportion of Afghan women were able to take part in a Loya Jirga. They spoke out for peace and were instrumental in the current peace talks. Afghan women now say “no” to a token position in peace talks. The recent Loya Jirga seemed promising in that regard, the Afghan women engaged in that play, meaning with the panel they took a part and in terms of the decision-making they are visage as playing a critical role. (Gabel, 2024)

### **Shuras**

The term “Shura” or “consultation” in Arabic, refers to Shuras which are councils used in Afghanistan for resolving disputes and making important decisions. While building peace, Shuras employ local elders and other community leaders to tackle disputes, foster conversations, and reach agreement among powerful members of the community. They are bound by local customs and practices as well as Islamic laws, and as such, these people’s judgment is valid and meaningful to the community. Shuras are effective in resolving cases of violence stemming from border conflicts, family disputes or clan feuds over ownership of land. Although self-governed, they maintain contacts with Official State authorities, serving as a link between the local people and their government, and so advancing the strategies of government-sponsored peacebuilding. Their role in Shura is to represent all constituents even those belonging to the minority groups which leads towards achieving peace in Afghanistan in the middle of a challenging environment.

### **Legitimizing the Taliban**

In the wake of the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15th of 2021, there has been a rapid and abrupt shift of power in Afghanistan. The Taliban established their control of most of Afghanistan in a matter of a few days. Upon seizing Kabul, they unveiled an interim government that included key Taliban leaders as the Cabinet members. The Qatar-based US-Taliban Peace Process was dragged into a deal worked out between the US and Taliban clearing the path for the absolute withdrawal of international forces, including the US, from Afghanistan. This process not only put an end to the US's 20-year "War on Terror" in Afghanistan, but it also gave the Taliban the confidence to use force to seize and rule Afghan territory rather than an intra-Afghan dialogue led and supported by Afghans. Shortly after its takeover, the Taliban rejected the existing political as

such, the Afghan constitution as the basis for the comprehensive the governing structures in Afghanistan. The Taliban would try to come on their world view and political system based on aspirations driven by hardline readings of Islam. With the Taliban rising to prominence, the global order is challenged with the deciding to recognize or not their governing body. (Gill, 2022)

### **Taliban public diplomacy and changing narratives**

The Taliban held their first press conference and made subsequent statements about women's status in Afghanistan after gaining control of Kabul in August 2021 to determine how they shaped their narrative and adopted a unified communication approach. The group builds a favorable portrayal of women under their Afghan governance through image repair techniques which deny negative aspects while presenting themselves as advocates for women's rights within heroic storylines. The Taliban put significant importance on creating a hopeful future for Afghanistan through human rights principles while emphasizing their dedication to women's rights alongside showing respect towards women. In relation to the restrictions imposed on Afghan women the group employs an image repair strategy that combines responsibility evasion with accusations toward foreign forces. (Gabel, 2024)

Strike on August 15, 2021, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan after two decades of war fighting the US and its allies. Outsized controversy surrounded the return of the Taliban to power, specifically as it relates to human rights. The Taliban sought to enhance their image through soft power as a public diplomacy undertake and to use their digital media platforms to amplify each message to the public. The Taliban uses digital media as a platform for public diplomacy and image-building initiatives following its power takeover in Afghanistan. (Wahyuni, 2023)

### **Track-II diplomacy**

The prospect of negotiating with the Taliban is fraught. Both the Taliban and the U.S.-backed Afghan government have spurned formal talks to seek a political settlement. Afghanistan is thus stuck in military stalemate, with no discernible end in sight. A "Track II" diplomacy pre-negotiation, for example, could provide ample groundwork for an eventual peace process without putting either party in a hard commitment to an agreement. What are Track II negotiations? Track II negotiations are non-binding meetings that take place privately; the participants retain their private, unofficial status at the sessions to keep the process informal. These are first testing of the negotiation waters and can help lay the foundation for initial trust of a potential peace process. Most importantly, Track II would enable not only the Taliban but also the Afghan government to do a lot of intensive pre-negotiation work in secret without being locked into accountability for what came out of those gatherings. (Ahmad, 2008)

### **Doha agreement 2020 & Release POW**

Afghanistan's Islamic Republic along with the United States of America have pledged to work jointly toward forming a peace agreement which will end Afghanistan's conflict for the benefit of all Afghans while enhancing regional stability and global security. A comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement will include four parts:

- i. The peace agreement ensures Afghanistan will not serve as a base for international terrorist groups or individuals threatening U.S. and its allies' security.
- ii. Withdrawal of all US and coalition forces from Afghanistan

- iii. The political settlement must emerge from internal Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and an inclusive team representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- iv. A permanent ceasefire

These four parts are interrelated and interdependent. Pursuit of peace after the prolonged conflict demonstrates that every party intends to achieve a sovereign and united Afghanistan living in peace with itself and its neighbors. The passage examined the Afghan and Taliban agreement. Under the agreement both sides committed to a prisoner exchange where the Afghan government would free up to 5,000 Taliban members for the release of up to 1,000 prisoners held by the insurgents. (Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America, 2020)

### **Role of UN**

The United Nations collaborates with multiple entities to advance governance while promoting peace and stability. ministries in Afghanistan. The belief that inadequate governance creates instability drives intervention strategies at sub-national government levels. The UN has implemented interventions at sub-national government bodies due to the substantial instability caused by poor governance. The United Nations supports both sub-national government structures and the central state. The intention is to Develop institutions based on local requirements to create a strong base for extensive delivery of essential services, security and social services is established. The initiative includes objectives to enhance the abilities of civil society organizations along with fostering accountability values. The plan seeks to build the capabilities of multiple civil society organizations while fostering accountability practices. The UN developed three different strategies to address unstable situations. The UN's strategy addresses key destabilizing elements through border management and law enforcement while also tackling drug trafficking and disarmament. The UN has supported regional human rights initiatives as its second approach reintegration of groups into established institutions. (Sarwar, 2021)

### **Economic perspectives for peacebuilding in Afghanistan**

The analysis of economic rebuilding efforts in post-war peacebuilding provides multiple insights which can benefit Afghanistan. Successful peace building requires economic considerations and policies need to strike a balance between economic and political goals. Successful reconstruction policies for Afghanistan require custom approaches that consider its unique context to prevent repeating historical mistakes. Essential lessons involve the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and adapting traditional understanding to fit post-conflict environments while maintaining operational flexibility and implementing thorough monitoring and evaluation (Waldman, 2008). The reconstruction strategy must focus first on creating jobs and then strengthen budget support and national institutions while selecting aid recipients with care and acknowledging peace mission-related distortions. The reconstruction process in Afghanistan should be led by its own government while emphasizing employment growth and economic stimulation to achieve equitable distribution of advantages. International donors must strengthen Afghanistan's planning and implementation capabilities through careful support while providing sensitive funding to enhance budgetary support and peacebuilding operations (Suhrke, 2002). Effective administrative measures from the Taliban Administration have improved government revenue by strengthening control over revenue streams and introducing new fees, taxes, and duties while enhancing royalty collection from natural resource exports. During fiscal year 2022 the government collected 193.9 billion Afghanis (US\$ 2.2 billion) between February 22, 2022, and March 21, 2023, and in fiscal year 2023 collections reached 210.7 billion Afghanis. Revenue levels in Afghanistan are like what

the former republic experienced when it received extensive aid resulting in substantial revenue growth for the country. (Sabit, 2024)

### **Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: Way Forward**

The peacebuilding process in Afghanistan faces multiple challenges because of its extended history of conflict along with its ethnically diverse population and strategic geopolitical position. Hybrid Peacebuilding stands out as the most appropriate peacebuilding theory for Afghanistan. This method brings together community-level and global initiatives to integrate traditional grassroots approaches with formal state-building strategies.

### **Conflict resolution**

Maintaining peace while preventing conflicts between rival groups or incompatible parties demands conflict resolution in our interconnected world. The importance of conflict resolution is recognized by leading figures from government, academia and civil society organizations. Conflict resolution uses peaceful approaches such as diplomacy and negotiation to settle disputes without violence. The process of conflict resolution plays a fundamental role in stabilizing and transforming societies by tackling human crises and averting armed conflicts. The process works to advance social justice while fostering harmony and worldwide equity (Wani, 2017).

### **Local Legitimacy and Ownership**

Afghan ownership of the peace process is crucial for its legitimacy, sustainability, and cultural relevance. By being led by Afghans themselves, the process ensures its legitimacy to the local people, generating trust and confidence desperately needed for a sustainable peace. The local leaders and institutions empower, expanding their capability in conflict resolution and governance and national unity is being promoted. Afghan ownership limits foreign engagement, protecting Afghanistan's sovereignty and independence. Eventually, peace initiatives are adjusted to cater the regional needs of the context in which they exist, so it has a longer-term impact on stability and development of the country.

### **Flexibility and Adaptability.**

Through a hybrid model peacebuilders adapt their peacebuilding strategies based on the specific needs of regions throughout Afghanistan to match their unique political social and economic conditions.

### **Complementary Strengths**

The strengths of international actors and Afghan communities complement each other when integrated into hybrid peacebuilding because their resources unite with local authority and indigenous expertise. Local actors and international stakeholders support peace initiatives through their funding and knowledge and diplomatic power as local stakeholders confirm initiatives align with their cultural traditions.

### **Building Inclusive Governance**

Hybrid peacebuilding develops political institutions which achieve inclusion between ethnic and tribal groups to create national unity through mediation processes. Afghanistan needs such measures as exclusionary politics have historically led to active conflicts in the country. Hybrid peacebuilding establishes lasting peace when it anchors such initiatives to local conditions while

having proper international backing. Local ownership enables the preservation of peace through ownership even after international forces withdraw from the region because it focuses on combating fundamental conflict causes.

### **Prospects of Democracy**

Democracy has a positive and successful impact on post-conflict communities by fostering peace and security. Furthermore, this is a crucial aspect of democratization tendencies that aim to bring people together and create stable governments. Democracy, according to Charles Tilly, is a political process that leads to equality, citizenship, legally binding citizen consultation, and citizen protection from capricious government actions. Considering the observation, the establishment of an elected government is the only political system that can ensure the security of its citizens and bring its people together in a nation that has experienced war and conflict between its ethnic groups or other belligerent parties, like Afghanistan. A democratic process is the only way to achieve this. It is equally vital to execute free and transparent elections based on democratic principles to achieve these goals. By taking these actions, the rights of the people would be protected, and the rule of law would guarantee that everyone is treated fairly. Therefore, in this instance, both citizens' and opposition parties' fundamental and basic rights are safeguarded. The successful implementation of the democratic reconstruction model is crucial for post-conflict societies, as they will face security and political challenges, particularly regarding the integration of anti-state forces, as Afghanistan is currently experiencing. As was already established, public participation is important for democratizing states that have experienced violence. For this reason, it can be argued that when everyone in society is given fair and equal opportunities, it will significantly impact how different groups integrate into society at large. This is particularly crucial for post-conflict nations. In fact, under the new political order, it permits all the hostile forces engaged in battle to band together and represent themselves under a national administration. This solidarity amongst various social groups or elites would support and reinforce democratizing states' transition to inclusive and free governance. Furthermore, when elites see a bright future for themselves in the new social order, democratization is unlikely to result in war. Therefore, establishing equal possibilities for its residents via an open political process should be the top goal in a new democratic state. Afghanistan's experience shows that while efforts to bring the anti-state elements (Taliban) into peace and discussions have encountered significant challenges, the nation's reconstruction and nation-building initiatives have been successful. There is a chance for pragmatic measures and reforms to establish a national government, even though it is difficult for any democratic state to integrate its revolutionary groups into the government. This would make it more likely that other resistance groups may be included into the state. For this reason, the Afghan government should continue to place a high premium on integrating the Taliban and creating a powerful state capable of enduring the present difficulties. Despite multiple attempts, including by major nations like the United States and China, efforts in this area have not yet yielded positive results. The Afghan government was built with great sacrifice by the Afghan people and the rest of the international community, and the Taliban still believe in using violence to overthrow it.

After three years the Taliban regime continues to hold firm power. Akhundzada established parallel institutions from his private Kandahar office to centralize his authority as supreme leader. The regime shows favoritism towards southern Pashtun Talibs while becoming increasingly exclusive. The Taliban regime maintains its power although more than 90% of Afghans face poverty and food insecurity which has not yet led to an immediate economic collapse. The Taliban regime is

witnessing enhanced interaction from Afghanistan's neighboring countries along with China and Russia. Pakistan continues to feel frustrated by Taliban's insufficient efforts to combat Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which operates from bases in eastern Afghanistan. The United States maintains minimal engagement with the Taliban regime because its interests in Afghanistan require stability to advance counterterrorism goals despite the regime's serious human rights and women's rights violations. The Taliban leadership consists of hardline ideologues like Haibatullah along with more moderate pragmatists who prefer limited Sharia implementation but show interest in Western interaction. Pragmatists within the Taliban have been unsuccessful in tempering the Amir's decisions and have avoided confronting him. Haibatullah receives backing from powerful military leaders operating as his praetorian guard from Helmand and Kandahar provinces including Abdul Qayyum Zakir. Haibatullah has filled deputy positions in ministries and agencies with his loyalists to neutralize the influence of rival leaders Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mohammad Yaqub. The Taliban regime has chosen not to include Afghan warlords and politicians who were connected to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan after its defeat into their organizational structures. The Taliban regime demoted and removed multiple non-Pashtun commanders from their positions. To oversee local participants, assuage expectations for inclusivity in policy decisions and maintain its skill in resolving local disputes, the regime has created local religious ulama councils. (Aamir Khan, 2024)

## **Conclusion**

The Afghanistan peace process demonstrates the complexity of conflict resolution, requiring both multifaceted and nuanced strategies. This study has proven that effective peace building in Afghanistan needs a comprehensive approach that combines grassroots efforts, national changes, and foreign assistance. Local initiatives aimed at fostering peace using traditional methods of conflict resolution and community participation are important in building trust and collaboration amongst varied ethnic and social groups. These grassroots efforts are essential in building a strong and culturally sensitive foundation for peace. At the national level, inclusive in governance alongside political liberalization is necessary in closing gaps and fostering stability. The Integration of ex-combatants and the advancement of civil rights is crucial to unite a divided society. National policies need to consider the glaring socio-economic inequalities which are the main contributors to protracted conflicts. International sustained diplomatic attention and economic and developmental assistance seems to be of great importance to support the Afghanistan peace building efforts. Nonetheless, the involvement of the international community needs to make sure that it does not infringe on Afghan sovereignty and the will of the Afghan people. Construction of long-lasting peacemaking in Afghanistan calls for as much effort at integrating foreign investment with local aid as the latter dictates. The study has shown that peace of Afghanistan cannot be achieved by the middle of one method. It requires joint action from local populations, national and international authorities, all of whom are equally necessary. The relationship between these layers of action demonstrates the phenomenon of the construction of peace and the necessity of a strategy that is coherent and is flexible to change conditions. Finally, the Afghanistan conflict needs a holistic resolution that is durably sustainable through the eyes of flexibility, nicety, and the resolve to make it work, though hard, but it is still possible. Employing the attempts made is the strategy that aims at shallow reasons for conflict in Afghanistan which can undoubtedly help transform it into a developmental and peaceful state. The outcomes of this study offer salient considerations for aid actors, including primary policymakers, grant givers, and academic staff based in the hardest hotbeds of humanitarian intervention and peacemaking across Afghanistan and the rest of the world.

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## **Populism and the Erosion of Democratic Institutions of Pakistan: An Analysis (2014-2024)**

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**Dr. Asma Rashid\*\***

### **Abstract**

*This research examines the deleterious impact of populism on democratic institutions, utilizing Pakistan as a case study. Notwithstanding its claims to speak for the majority, populism regularly endangers the democratic institutions that are intended to protect the rights of minorities, uphold the rule of law, and offer checks and balances. This article explores the implications of populism for democratic institutions, arguing that populist politicians undermine the normative underpinnings of democracy as they gain control of government. This study investigates how Pakistani populist movements undermine the independence of important institutions including the judiciary, parliament, and free press. By explaining why populism succeeds and the effect that it has on the stability of democratic institutions, this study contributes to the understanding of the interaction between populism and democracy. By examining the case of Pakistan, the study presents recommendations to reinforce democratic institutions to enable them to resist populist pressures and ensure resilience to future challenges. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the grievances fueling populist movements without compromising democratic norms.*

**Keywords:** Democratic Institutions, Democratic principles, Pakistan, Populism, Political polarization.

### **Introduction**

The quality of democracies in developed, emerging, and underdeveloped nations has declined because of the increase of populism in the twenty-first century. Preventing the disintegration, deterioration, and completion of democracy is frequently how authoritarianism gives way to liberal democracies. Liberal democracies, however, have been under internal pressure in recent years, which has accelerated de-democratization or democratic regression. The interaction between populist leaders' supply and demand as well as democratic flaws is what drives this phenomenon (Mirza & Azhar, 2021). Since the late 20th century, populism, a political philosophy that first appeared in the US in the 1880s, has seen a global comeback to its appeal to the general populace and antagonism to the elite (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Populism is a popular political philosophy that has attracted a lot of attention from across the world because of its many different movements and claims. PTI is one of the social movements that have shaped South Asia's political landscape. Scholarly research emphasizes the significance of examining populism in many social contexts, despite its numerous manifestations. The People's

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Rights Movement in AJK is a left-wing populist movement, whereas PTI is a right-wing one (Yasir, 2025).

Panizza's definition of identification and Laulau's perspective on populism, which emphasize how populist constructions create a collective identity in the face of conflicting demands, especially by employing the idea of "the people" as a meaningless signifier (Yilmaz et al., 2025). In Pakistan, many identities have emerged, which are probably going to have an impact on public conversation (Yilmaz & Batool, 2025).

A political philosophy known as populism splits society into two hostile factions: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." Because populist leaders are seen as the genuine voice of the people rather than the alleged corrupt elite, this dual paradigm creates a moral conundrum. Populism is a method of conducting politics that presents a fundamental conflict between the interests of the great majority and an elite few. It is not just a set of ideas or beliefs. Distinctive framing, charismatic leadership, anti-establishment feeling, the reduction of complicated subjects, and grassroots mobilization tactics are some of its salient features. These components provide supporters with corporate identity and raise irrational expectations for governance and the application of policies (Durrani & Barakzai, 2024).

The intricacy of distinguishing between left and right-wing ideas makes it frequently challenging to classify populist movements as either. While rightists believe in natural disparities, leftists believe in equality and want to improve social equality. Political parties should evaluate their stances on problems of culture and identity, economic structure, and democracy conception to differentiate between the left and the right (Filc, 2023).

### **Background of Populism**

In post-industrial politics, discontent with democratic institutions changes over time and between nations, impacting both economic performance and political engagement. Dissatisfied with structured elite-mass political intermediation, populist politics aims to do away with middlemen between the people and the ruling class. Populism is characterized by a general mistrust of principals and demands that principal-agent relationships be abolished for citizen-principals to make direct, unadulterated political choices. This goal can take many forms, such as populist political parties, but it is distinct from protectionist economic and social policies and anti-liberal market sentiments (Kitschelt, 2002).

Populism is a democratic reaction to the ideals and interests of the weaker classes, not an anti-democratic one. It occurs when political leaders fail to hear the concerns of the populace and implement measures that address those issues. Political leaders must address escalating complaints and respond with policies that address their actual needs for democracies to function. When the current order is upset, populism may be seen as both a disruptive force of the status quo and the beginning of a radical reconstruction of a new one. The necessary crisis is frequently brought on by economic loss, but the losers must believe that either the reasons for their losses or the way the government has handled them are unjust.

The moral component of populism is centered on the sense of unfairness, which is more likely to emerge when the government is already seen as corrupt or when policies fail to adequately consider the desires of the common person. A multiple-elite party system that ignores other groups and fosters populism is the result of the industrial working class's shrinkage. Many people who are left

behind feel as though they are not being heard as traditional working-class parties turn to highly educated elites for support and to voice their concerns.

Populist leaders frequently provide an artistic output of "proximity to the people," occasionally putting on a gaudy display of listening to members of the relevant classes and reacting with ostentatiously prompt government action. Right-wing populist parties frequently arise from feelings of disdain and status loss, which are frequently brought on by economic issues that are made into targets of elite mockery. When the political, economically, and sociocultural strongly ignore the needs and ideals of others in society, this recognition struggle which is sometimes based on social disdain can incite and occasionally provide as justification for a democratic uprising. Populism may be a democratic means of upending the status quo when the political system becomes inflexible or dominated by the elite.

With traits like homogeneity, exclusivity, direct authority, nationalism, and hostility to weaker out groups, the periphery poses a bigger threat to democracy than the center. Opposition populists can prepare for talks with elites and have close ties with their supporters, but doing so necessitates understanding the need of compromise and negotiation. Engaging and bringing in people who are now excluded is the greatest way for those who are not populists to respond to populism. According to negotiation theory, non-populists should oppose racism, xenophobia, and assaults on constitutional democracy while seeking the reasons for their stances and coming up with innovative solutions to populist grievances. A democratic awakening might result from the current populist moment under ideal conditions, but such conditions are not always present (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019).

### **Democratic institutions and populism**

Populism introduces fresh players and agendas into the political system, promising democratic renewal. But it may weaken institutional balances on executive authority and undercut accountability. Populist governance exemplifies this conflict between preserving liberties, inclusivity, and electoral fairness and advancing democratic accountability and discourse. Though it might weaken the government, populist mobilization can strengthen democracy's representativeness. By enlisting new groups, populists might make democracy more representative, but they can also erode democratic accountability and debate. They frequently disregard restraints on government authority and minority rights, which can be anti-democratic. The executive branch has frequently been bolstered by populist parties in power, dividing the public and stifling civil society. The wealthiest democracies to ever collapse have demonstrated that authoritarian reversion can result from this deterioration of balances on presidential authority (Liddiard, 2019).

Both Democrats and populists generally agree with President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg Address, which said, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." Both stress the significance of the people and have deep roots in them. The intrinsic conflict between populism and democracy, however, has not been thoroughly examined. It is possible to see Lincoln's words as supporting more authority in democracies (Pasquino, 2008).

Populism is a political ideology that aims to gain or retain the support of the masses by making demagogic statements. It is a method of mobilizing mass support to support certain forces and

doctrines. Populism is often seen as anti-elite, as its proponents are part of the political elite. It also disrespects pluralism, spreading the narrative across the political arena and reducing the importance of institutions. Populism can appear in authoritarian and transitional societies, with competitive regimes expressing a desire to replace or change the elites, while non-competitive regimes negate the elite as a political institution. In weak civil cultures, populism can freeze political culture, leading to a plebiscite and the establishment of a populist regime (Makarenko, 2017).

In Pakistan, left-wing populists call for the inclusion of the lower classes, while right-wing populists call for the exclusion of foreigners and immigrants. However, the difference between exclusionary and inclusionary politics is useless in the absence of a liberal discourse (Batool, 2023).

Populist judges seek unmediated contact with the people, circumvent legal restrictions, and assert that they are better able to represent the public than political elites. Institutionalized dissonance in the political system can give rise to this. For example, in Pakistan, judicial populism was made easier by unresolved conflicts between elected political leadership and civil-military bureaucracy (Kureshi, 2024). Imran Khan, a right-wing nationalist-populist, rose to power in 2018 through an aggressive anti-corruption crusade. His rise deepened authoritarian strains in Pakistan's politics, leading to military oversight, repression, and media crackdowns (Faiz, 2022). The anti-elitism sentiment in Pakistan is characterized by nationalistic sentiments, highlighting the nation's struggle and marginalization by regional and global powers (Yilmaz et al., 2025).

### **Interaction between Populism and Democracy**

Pakistan's populism has been impacted by its political and historical evolution since 1947, with politicians employing it to mobilize the populace and counter-populist organizations that emphasize equivalency. Both populists and counter-populists have guaranteed the people of justice and honesty despite political expediency (Salim et al., 2024).

Since its origin, populism has been a prominent political topic in Pakistan. Over time, Imran Khan's populist themes have changed to emphasize American meddling, religion, and corruption. In Pakistani internal politics, this has resulted in polarization, division, and a decline in tolerance (Shah, 2024). Populist politicians could gradually seize control of and politicize the military in nations with established and independent armed forces. Although democratization is not always guaranteed by a civilianized military, presidents in nations like Venezuela and Turkey have held their positions for more than 20 years (Gunes, 2025).

According to the maximal theory of populism, which emphasizes people as manufactured identities that leaders use to gain power, populism and democracy are related. It opposes constitutional democracy by emphasizing radical majoritarianism and winning battles for legitimacy. A politician can act unilaterally and without consultation under the philosophy of populism, which frequently results in authoritarian democracy. To increase their authority, this type of direct representation attacks the political establishment and tries to alter the law, avoiding middle-man affiliations. Viktor M. Orbán and Hugo Chávez are two examples of people who exploited propaganda to use political opponents and minorities as scapegoats.

Using audience democracy rather than iron security, populism seeks to permanently freeze the current majority. To ensure its attractiveness by bolstering people's faith, it employs propaganda against adversaries and enlivens propaganda. The leader mobilizes the populace through media appearances and plebiscitary actions of acclaim. Populism is typified by an ongoing election campaign that is founded more on faith-based trust than on free and open discussion. It turns the democratic people into a social determinant because it lacks an appreciation for responsibility and sees them as sovereign. The extreme and popular anti-establishment position of populism disparages the people's overall ambiguous meaning.

A drastic change in representative democracy, populism in power challenges the party system, electoral representation, and constitutional democracy by favoring one segment of the public over another. By associating the entire with a portion, it seeks to alleviate tension between the parts and the whole. Populism is a model that stabilized nations following World War II, not the source of democracy. It is necessary to assume democracy in its representative and party forms to comprehend and assess populism (Urbinati, 2019).

### **Dissatisfaction with democracy**

Globally, and especially in emerging nations like Pakistan, discontent with democracy is growing. Pakistan has experienced illiberal or procedural democracy instead of substantive democracy because of its oscillations between bureaucratic control, military rule, civil martial law, procedural democracy, and hybrid regimes. A prominent third political party has emerged in Pakistan because of populism brought on by this discontent (Younis & Din, 2024). Pakistan's rise of populism has significant implications for democratic governance. Populism divides society into two groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite. It sets moral distinctions and legitimizes the populace while demeaning the elite. While not necessarily anti-democratic, populism threatens individual rights and individual liberties. Populists often support the majority's needs at the cost of diverse interests (Durrani & Barakzi, 2024).

The liberal democratic system is threatened by a new order brought about by the conflicting forces of radicalization and populism in society. Populists use popular media to mobilize the public in support of underrepresented groups, yet they frequently question established norms and cultural values. As a result, Pakistan has seen a surge in populism, with people taking to the streets to make their demands while established political parties fail to demonstrate empathy for the people. This perilous notion causes division, polarization, and uncertainty, which makes government challenging. Dangerous outcomes of this radicalization include the evasion of democratic barriers and the emergence of organized mobs that are legitimate in the streets (Malik & Cheema, 2024).

### **Impact of Populism on Indo-Pak Relations**

Religious beliefs, civil-military ties, and populism all had an impact on the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. 'Quaid-i-Azam' Mohammad Ali Jinnah created the 'Two Nation doctrine', a concept between Muslim and Hindu civilizations. This approach legitimized decisions and made Islamic religion the core of Pakistan's existence. As a result of Jinnah's advocacy of this ideology, India was split into two nations, and populism was introduced as an oppositional concept in an independent Pakistan (Shah, 2022).

Both international and internal policy have been impacted by the emergence of populist populism in India under the Modi government. The relationship between India and Pakistan has been impacted by this. Right-wing populism became linked with Indian politics after Modi's election in 2018 when the government implemented measures like the National Register of Citizens and the repeal of Article 370 (Mushtaq et al., 2024).

### **Restricted Media**

The governments of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey and Imran Khan in Pakistan have both been examples of populist regimes propelled by rivalries, economic failures, and authoritarian tactics. Despite having a sizable following, their populist rhetoric has hampered their ability to govern and communicate, failing to forge a sense of national unity among the general populace (Azam & Falki, 2021). The way populism and faith are connected in Turkey, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, demonstrating that digital authoritarianism has emerged as a fundamental force behind policy reforms. Religious groups defend internet restrictions to limit "moral ills," creating a hyper-realistic environment in which sociopolitical events occur (Yilmaz et al., 2022).

A significant political demonstration in Pakistan in 2014 brought attention to the role that independent media play in mediated populism. Given the increased scholarly interest in non-Western democratic models and neoliberal middle classes, the liberal narrative in Pakistan centers on populist politics, especially its illiberal aspects (Mulla, 2017).

By maintaining harmony among sociocultural and political groups, the state aims to promote solidarity and stability. From 1999 to 2007, Pakistan's elite political culture developed, which has been blamed for encouraging societal complexity. However, conventional elitism was once again the main opponent to populism, political equality, and democratic liberalism because of court decisions and constitutional engineering during the PPP's third administration (Ashfaq & Roofi, 2023).

### **Mobilising Popular Approval**

During the 2007 anti-Musharraf uprising, student-led activist organizations helped Pakistani student politics come back to life. Student and youth collectives affiliated with different political parties are becoming increasingly apparent in daily politics, even if official student unions are still prohibited. The PML-N Youth Wing (PYW), the left-wing Democratic Students Alliance (DSA), and the PTI's Insaf Student Federation (ISF) are three primary student groups (Javid, 2019).

The multi-layered story of "New Pakistan" blends religious elements with a plea for survival to engender pride and a desire for the perfect "homeland." Over the course of the last thirty years, Khan's populist views have changed, evolving from anti-establishment to visionary. The people who are the victims of the "slavery" of the West are both empowered and incensed by this story. The narrative also shifts the burden for the country's problems to outsiders and liberal Pakistanis for their beliefs and ideals. The "others" are portrayed as "brainwashed" in the narrative, which is reinforced by educational and entertainment media. A struggle of ideas between "the people" and "the others," "New Pakistan" exacerbates already existing social divisions and expands them on a regional and national level (Yilmaz & Batool, 2025).

### **Effect on the Stability of Democratic Institutions**

Since 2014, right-wing populism in India has had a major effect on foreign policy and politics, resulting in heightened nationalist sentiments and tense ties with Pakistan. Polarization, anti-Muslim sentiment, and the breakdown of democratic and social norms have resulted from this. There is a need for methods to increase comprehension and collaboration (Aslam, 2023).

Populist leaders limited governing capabilities have the potential to weaken legislative authority and fundamental democratic elements. According to studies, administrators have greater influence over term-limited state lawmakers than those who do not, and a lack of policymaking skills can transfer policymaking to the presidency. Stronger parliamentary institutions are critical for democratic survival because they can better control breaches of executive authority. Empowered legislatures are linked to longer-lasting democracy, whereas executive limitations often lead to more durable democracy. Weakened legislative control can enable executives to exploit government institutions, targeting opponents for repression, undermining freedom, inclusiveness, and electoral fairness. This has resulted in democratic failures in the wealthiest nations, which have reverted to dictatorship (Riaz, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Donald Trump and other populist politicians have overthrown the global order to seize control of stable democracies. Although populism has always been on the rise, it has taken on a catastrophic global tone. In most European nations, populist parties have trebled their share of the vote, and this trend is gradually spreading around the world. Political systems might become unstable if they are uninformed of the potential repercussions, even though it is too soon to declare that the present global order is about to fall apart. While populism won't destroy democracy, it will put pressure on its institutions. It is crucial to recognize the legitimacy of populist movements and refrain from discounting them (Espinoza Pedraza, 2019)

Extremist left and right populist challengers might pose a threat to the weakened mainstream parties. Democrats must reimagine themselves and present a vision of a brighter future rather than giving in to empty promises (Bugaric, 2019). A worldwide phenomenon, populism occurs when political leaders emphasize problems in their election manifestos while frequently falling short of providing the electorate with political benefits. Presidents Rajab Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Narendra Modi of India are examples of successful populist leaders that have controlled and influenced the populace by using their votes. After being ousted by a vote of no-confidence, former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has become more popular. Young people and the elderly have been drawn to the nation by his charm, Dharana politics, and anti-American rhetoric. Khan must contend with issues including religious fanaticism, little resources, and bad economic situations.

The PML (N), PPP, and JUI (F) are also against him. Khan should concentrate on inclusive politics to tackle these issues, since it is crucial for a society that coexists peacefully. A peaceful coexisting society might result from modern pluralism, which can be linked to the social compact proposed by French philosopher J.J. Rousseau. A strong wave of populism is also sweeping across Pakistan, where Imran Khan is now the most well-liked politician among his constituents. As a result, the

idea of pluralism must be widely accepted throughout the nation (Shah,2022).

### **Recommendations**

Power separation between Pakistan's legislative, executive, and judicial branches is necessary to guarantee accountability, autonomy, and electoral transparency. Additionally, combating social and economic inequality and bolstering democratic institutions depend on media freedom. Accountability requires raising public understanding of rights and encouraging critical thinking in the educational setting. Strong political parties ought to exist. Authoritative tendency needs to be controlled. In addition to addressing economic and social inequities by granting rights and opportunities without discrimination, local institutions should be robust and independent. Additionally, stronger diplomatic ties with other countries are required.

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## **The Role of Youth in Democratizing Developing States: A Case Study of Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*In developing states, youth engagement is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for democratic renewal, yet systemic barriers often limit their impact. This study examines Pakistan. A country where 64% of the population is under 30 to identify determinants driving youth-led democratization and assess their efficacy. Using a mixed-methods approach, primary data was collected through surveys of students. Alongside comparative analysis of youth movements in Bangladesh, Turkey, and South Korea. Findings reveal that economic deprivation (64% cited unemployment as a key motivator) and digital activism (evident in viral campaigns) fuel youth participation. However, structural obstacles such as corruption (reported by 55% of respondents), age-based electoral exclusion, and censorship stifle meaningful political inclusion. While Pakistan's youth demonstrate the energy seen in Bangladesh and South Korea's anti-corruption protests, their impact remains fragmented due to weak institutional support. The study concludes that democratization requires reforms like youth quotas in assemblies, lowered candidacy ages, and protected digital spaces to channel frustration into sustained democratic engagement. By bridging these gaps, Pakistan can transform its youth from disillusioned participants into architects of inclusive governance.*

**Keywords:** Developing states, Digital activism, Democratization, Political participation barriers, Youth engagement.

### **Introduction**

Democracy at its core is a system of government where the power ultimately resides in the people, it is exercised directly or through elected representatives. And Democratization is the transition toward a system of governance that is rooted in popular participation and accountability. It relies heavily on youth activism, particularly in developing states. Young populations specifically of developing states are often celebrated as catalysts for democratic change, their effectiveness hinges on specific enabling factors identified in democratization theory. In Pakistan, we have 64% of the population that is under 30, and the youth have demonstrated a unprecedented political engagement, with over 10.42 million new voters added in recent elections since 2018 (Dawn, 2024). Still, the country remains trapped in cycles of hybrid governance, economic instability, and elite-dominated politics. This paper examines whether Pakistan's youth possess the determinants theorized to drive democratization, such as education, digital connectivity, and economic mobilization. And by testing these factors against Pakistan's context, the study seeks to explain why youth-led democratic renewal remains partial despite their growing activism. Dahl's framework of polyarchy (poly "many", arkhe "rule") which emphasizes participation, contestation, and civil liberties—this analysis evaluates how structural barriers and enabling factors shape youth's democratic impact (Dahl, 1971).

### **Research Questions:**

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This study addresses two core questions:

1. What determinants explain youth's role in democratizing developing states?
2. Do these determinants exist in Pakistan, and how do they shape its democratic trajectory?

### **Theoretical Framework: Key Determinants of Youth-Led Democratization**

Youth activism has become a global force to be reckoned with. In the last decade, 'youth revolts' have proliferated worldwide. Among them, we count the Tunisian Revolution that set off the wave of protests that came to be known as 'Arab Spring', the emergence of the 'Indignados' in Southern Europe, the 'Occupy' movement in the United States (US), and the 'Umbrella Movement' in Hong Kong. In Africa, in countries characterised by bulging youth demographics, underperforming economies, and non-responsive governments, youth mobilisations have been the harbingers of fundamental changes as youth-led protests contributed to the toppling of governments in many of the continent's countries (Honwana et al. 2021).

Now scholars have identified several factors that drive youth engagement in democratization. This paper focuses on three empirically supported determinants:

#### **1. Education and Political Awareness**

Education equips youth with critical thinking skills and knowledge of democratic rights, fostering participation in governance (Dahl, 1971). Educated populations are more likely to demand accountability, protest corruption, and engage in civic activities these are key pillars of polyarchy (Dahl's term for modern democracy). For example, higher literacy rates correlate with youth-led movements for electoral reform in developing states.

#### **2. Economic Deprivation and Relative Deprivation**

Frustration over unmet economic expectations fuels collective action. Gurr's relative deprivation theory (1970) argues that gaps between perceived rights and reality (e.g., unemployment, inequality) motivate protests. In developing states, economically marginalized youth often channel frustration into demands for systemic change, as seen in Tunisia's Arab Spring (2011).

#### **3. Digital Connectivity and Networked Activism**

Social media platforms enable youth to bypass state-controlled narratives, organize protests, and amplify dissent. Howard and Hussain (2013) term this "digital liberation technology," arguing that tools like Twitter and TikTok democratize information flows. For instance, digital campaigns in Egypt (2011) and Sudan (2019) united youth across class/regional divides.

### **Synthesis**

These determinants such as education, economic grievance, and digital tools create a framework to assess youth's democratizing potential. Educated youth articulate demands, economic hardship motivates mobilization, and digital networks amplify their reach. In Pakistan's case, we test whether these factors exist and interact to drive democratic change.

## **Literature Review**

The role of youth in democratization has been widely debated in political science, with scholars emphasizing both structural and agency-based determinants. Robert Dahl's Polyarchy (1971) frames democratization as a process driven by inclusive participation and contestation, arguing that youth engagement is critical to expanding political competition. Similarly, Ted Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* (1970) posits that economic deprivation and systemic inequality are common in developing states like Pakistan that fuel collective action, particularly among marginalized youth. These theories underpin contemporary studies linking youth frustration to demands for accountability (UNDP Pakistan, 2023).

The rise of digital tools has reshaped youth activism globally. Howard and Hussain (2013) demonstrate how social media enabled "fourth wave" democratization during the Arab Spring, bypassing authoritarian controls—a dynamic echoed in Pakistan's #StudentsSolidarityMarch and #VoteKoEncryption campaigns. However, Inglehart's Modernization Theory (1997) cautions that digital mobilization alone is insufficient without parallel institutional reforms, such as youth quotas or lowered candidacy ages, to ensure sustained inclusion.

In Pakistan, structural barriers persist despite demographic potential. PILDAT (2023) reports that only 2% of National Assembly members are under 35, reflecting systemic ageism. Meanwhile, UNICEF (2023) highlights education gaps, with 22.8 million children out of school, limiting political socialization for rural and low-income youth. These findings align with Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000), which ties weak civil society participation to eroded social capital. Yet, Pakistan's youth defy this trend: surveys reveal rising voter registration (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023) and digital activism, suggesting untapped potential for democratic renewal.

Comparative studies underscore lessons for Pakistan. Keck and Sikkink (1998) show how transnational advocacy networks amplified youth movements in Bangladesh's 2018 quota reforms, while Turkey's Gezi Park protests (2013) illustrate the risks of state repression fragmenting dissent. These cases highlight the need for Pakistan to institutionalize youth demands rather than suppress them.

This review identifies a gap: while global theories emphasize youth's democratizing potential, Pakistan-specific studies often overlook digital activism's interplay with structural exclusion. This paper addresses this by analyzing primary survey data to bridge theory and local reality.

## **A Case Study of Pakistan:**

### **1. Education and Political Awareness**

Pakistan's youth exhibit a partial capacity for political awareness, shaped by uneven educational opportunities. On one hand, rising literacy rates 60% among youth aged 15–29 (Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey, 2023) coupled with revived student activism, signal growing political engagement. Universities, particularly in Sindh, have emerged as hubs for mobilization; for instance, the 2019 Student Solidarity March, inspired by global movements like Chile's 2011 student protests, demanded education reform and accountability. Similarly, urban institutions such as LUMS and IBA host campaigns like the #AuratAzadiMarch, they leverage digital tools to amplify rights-based discourse. However, systemic inequalities undermine this

progress: 22.8 million children remain out of school (UNICEF, 2023), disproportionately affecting rural populations and girls. Furthermore, activism is often confined to elite urban universities, exacerbating a two-tiered system where privileged urban youth dominate discourse while marginalized groups lack platforms for political socialization. This divide fragments democratization efforts, as urban-led digital campaigns (e.g., #StudentsSolidarityMarch) struggle to bridge gaps in representation or address rural grievances, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

## **2. Economic Deprivation**

Economic deprivation, particularly youth unemployment, is a critical driver of political engagement among Pakistani youth. With 31% of Pakistan's youth unemployed (UNDP Pakistan, 2023), economic frustration has increased activism across the country. For instance, the Haq Do Tehreek protests in Gwadar (2022) saw fishermen and students rally against China's CPEC projects that restricted coastal access, directly linking economic marginalization to political mobilization. Similarly, working-class women at the Aurat March highlighted economic exclusion through slogans like "Why is roti so expensive?" a deep-rooted critique of inflation and governance failures. This also aligns with survey data from the University of Central Punjab, where 64% of respondents cited unemployment as their primary motivator for political participation. While such activism has occasionally forced concessions (e.g., provincial policy revisions post-Gwadar), the state's response often prioritizes repression over reform, such as internet shutdowns during protests. This paradox underscores a key challenge: economic despair fuels youth-led demands for democratization, but systemic resistance stifles transformative change.

## **3. Digital Connectivity in Pakistan: A Double-Edged Sword**

Digital connectivity in Pakistan presents a paradoxical landscape for youth-led democratization. On one hand, the country boasts 71 million social media users (PTA, 2023), with youth dominating platforms like TikTok and X (formerly Twitter). These tools have enabled impactful movements such as #JusticeForZainab (2018), which pressured legislators to enact stricter child abuse laws, and #VoteKoEncryption (2023), demanding electoral transparency during the general elections. Social media also amplifies marginalized voices, as seen in the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement's viral campaigns against state violence. However, these gains are undercut by state censorship: TikTok has been banned four times since 2021 for "immoral content," while X faced restrictions during the contentious 2024 elections. Furthermore, a stark urban-rural divide persists—only 35% of rural youth have internet access (GSMA, 2023), compared to 65% in cities. As digital tools empower urban youth to bypass traditional gatekeepers, censorship and infrastructural gaps prevent Pakistan from fully harnessing this determinant of democratization.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining primary survey data with secondary sources, to investigate the determinants of youth-led democratization in Pakistan.

### **Primary Data Collection**

Primary data were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms to students at the University of Central Punjab (UCP), Lahore. The survey targeted youth aged 18–30 years,

reflecting Pakistan’s demographic bulge, and aimed to capture their political engagement, perceived barriers, and aspirations. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed with closed ending (scales, multiple-choice) and open-ended questions. Key themes included:

1. Motivations for political participation (e.g., economic issues, social justice).
2. Barriers to engagement (e.g., corruption, lack of leadership opportunities).
3. Perceptions of democratic accountability.

Of the 122 respondents, 62% identified as male and 38% as female, with 85% enrolled in undergraduate programs (e.g., BS, LLB) and 15% in graduate programs. Participants represented diverse disciplines, including social sciences, law, computer science etc.

### Secondary Data Source

1. Academic literature on democratization theory (e.g., Dahl, Gurr).
2. Government/NGO reports (UNDP Pakistan, PILDAT, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics).
3. Comparative case studies of youth movements in Bangladesh, Turkey, and South Korea.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, to identify dominant trends in youth motivations (e.g., economic frustration) and barriers (e.g., corruption). Open-ended qualitative responses were thematically coded to extract recurring patterns, such as demands for “merit-based leadership” or critiques of censorship.

### Limitations

While the study provides critical insights, the two key limitations need acknowledgment. First, the sample predominantly comprised urban, educated students from the University of Central Punjab, limiting generalizability to rural or less privileged youth. Second, self-reporting bias may have inflated stated political engagement, as respondents might overstate participation to align with perceived social norms.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed as participation was voluntary, anonymous, and required informed consent. No personally identifiable information was collected, and raw data was stored securely to prevent unauthorized access.

**Table 01: Findings from Students' Survey**

Motivations	% of Respondents	Barriers	% of Respondents
<b>Economic issues (unemployment)</b>	64%	<b>Corruption</b>	55%
<b>Desire for change in government</b>	48%	<b>Limited youth leadership opportunities</b>	60%

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<b>Social justice</b>	36%	<b>Lack of information</b>	25%

### **Analysis**

Pakistan's youth exhibit partial determinants of democratization; this reflects a tension between mobilization potential and systemic barriers. While rising education levels (60% literacy) and digital connectivity (71 million social media users) that enable youth to organize campaigns. Institutional exclusion stifles their political influence. For instance, only 2% of National Assembly members are under 35, and age restrictions (25+ for provincial elections) formalize their marginalization. Similarly, economic deprivation, which is evident in the survey, where 64% cited unemployment as a key motivator that fuels protests. However, state repression (e.g., internet shutdowns, arrests of Baloch student activists) curtails these movements. Crucially, Pakistan's youth activism lacks the cross-class civil society coalitions that underpinned Tunisia's Arab Spring success, where unions, lawyers, and students united against authoritarianism. Instead, we have fragmented agendas such as urban feminists vs. religious conservatives, ethnic movements vs. centralists that weakens a collective impact. These gaps highlight a paradox: while Pakistani youth possess the agency to demand democracy (as per Inglehart's socialization theory), structural rot corruption, dynastic politics, militarized governance all undermines their transformative potential.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan's youth stand at a critical point in the nation's democratic evolution. While their growing political engagement is fueled by digital connectivity and acute economic frustration it reflects the transformative potential seen in movements like the 2024 voter surge. The absence of inclusive political institutions, such as youth quotas in assemblies, censorship and systemic corruption, stifles their ability to institutionalize change. Pakistan's democratic trajectory remains hampered by a lack of trust in traditional parties and limited avenues for meaningful participation. To harness this demographic dividend, reforms must prioritize lowering candidacy ages, protect digital freedoms, and foster youth-led civil society organizations. Only then can Pakistan's youth can transition from fragmented activism to sustained democratic renewal.

### **Acknowledgments**

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## **Populism versus Democracy**

**Sara Rauf \***

### **Abstract**

*Populism and democracy are often viewed as interconnected, yet they represent potentially conflicting political phenomena. In recent years, populism has emerged as a powerful force in global politics, characterized by its appeal to the "common people" and its sharp critique of established elites. While some scholars argue that populism revitalizes democracy by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, others warn that it erodes democratic norms and institutions. This paper provides a balanced analysis of the impact of populism on democracy, highlighting both its potential dangers and its possible democratic contributions. It explores the complex and evolving relationship between the two, asking whether populism fundamentally threatens democratic institutions or whether it can act as a corrective mechanism within democratic systems. Populism is defined as a political strategy that juxtaposes "the people" against "the elite," often relying on charismatic leadership and direct mass appeal. Democracy, in contrast, is rooted in representation, civil liberties, and the rule of law. Using a comparative framework, this study analyzes the different manifestations of populism across various regions, including Pakistan, the United States, and Europe. These case studies underscore the contextual nature of populism and reveal how its effects on democracy vary depending on political, social, and institutional factors. While populism can challenge democratic frameworks, it also holds the potential to address systemic grievances and reinvigorate political participation. Understanding the underlying causes of populist movements and addressing the concerns of their supporters are essential to mitigating risks and enhancing democratic resilience. Future research should focus on developing strategies that reinforce democratic institutions in the face of populist pressures.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Marginalized groups, Populism, Public opinion, Political participation.

### **Introduction**

The interplay between populism and democracy has become a focal point in contemporary political discourse, particularly in the wake of significant global events that have reshaped political landscapes. Populism, characterized by its appeal to the "common people" against perceived corrupt elites, has seen a resurgence across various regions, challenging traditional democratic institutions and norms. This paper seeks to explore the complex relationship between populism and democracy, addressing the central question: Is populism a threat to democracy or a corrective force within it?

### **Defining Populism and Democracy**

Populism is a political approach that seeks to represent the interests of ordinary people, often positioning them against perceived corrupt elite. Charismatic leadership, direct communication with the masses, and a narrative that emphasizes the dichotomy between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6), characterizes it. Democracy, on the other hand, is a system of government where power is vested in the people, exercised either directly or

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through elected representatives. It is underpinned by principles such as political pluralism, rule of law, and the protection of fundamental rights (Dahl, 1998, pp. 37-38).

### **The Growing Relevance of Populism in Global Politics**

In recent years, populism has gained significant traction globally, influencing political outcomes and reshaping party systems. In the United States, the election of Donald Trump in 2016 marked a significant populist shift, with his campaign emphasizing anti-establishment sentiments and nationalist rhetoric (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 5). Europe has witnessed the rise of right-wing populist parties, such as the Alternative for Germany and France's National Rally, which have capitalized on public concerns over immigration and national identity (Mudde, 2019, p. 3). In Pakistan, populist movements have emerged, challenging traditional power structures and advocating for systemic reforms (Shah, 2014, p. 112).

### **Research Question and Significance**

The central research question guiding this study is: does populism pose a threat to democratic institutions, or can it serve as a corrective mechanism within democratic systems? This inquiry is significant, as it addresses the dualistic nature of populism, which can both invigorate political participation and undermine democratic norms. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for policymakers, scholars, and citizens aiming to navigate the complexities of modern governance.

### **Methodology and Case Studies**

This paper adopts a comparative case study approach, analyzing instances of populism in Pakistan, the United States, and Europe. By examining these diverse contexts, the study aims to identify patterns and divergences in how populism interacts with democratic institutions. The analysis draws on a range of sources, including academic literature, policy analyses, and empirical data, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

### **Understanding Populism**

Populism has emerged as a significant force in contemporary politics, influencing political discourse and reshaping party systems across the globe. To comprehend its impact on democracy, it is essential to delve into its definition, core features, and various manifestations.

### **Definition of Populism**

Populism is often defined as a "thin-centered ideology" that divides society into two antagonistic groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." It posits that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). This dichotomy simplifies complex political landscapes, portraying elites as self-serving and disconnected from the populace.

## **Core Features of Populism**

- **Anti-Elitism:** Populists often criticize established political, economic, and cultural elites, accusing them of betraying the interests of the "common people." This sentiment fuels distrust in traditional institutions and expert knowledge (Mudde, 2004, p. 543).
- **Charismatic Leadership:** Populist movements frequently revolve around charismatic leaders who claim to embody the will of the people. These leaders often bypass traditional party structures and institutions, presenting themselves as direct representatives of the populace (Weyland, 2001, p. 14).
- **Direct Appeal to the Masses:** Populists utilize direct communication channels, such as social media, to engage with supporters, often circumventing traditional media outlets. This approach fosters a sense of closeness between the leader and the people (Gerbaudo, 2018, p. 748).
- **Use of Emotional Rhetoric:** Populist discourse is characterized by emotional appeals, utilizing narratives that resonate with the experiences and grievances of the populace. This rhetoric often includes simplistic solutions to complex problems, enhancing its appeal (Laclau, 2005, p. 47).

## **Types of Populism**

Populism manifests in various forms, often aligning with different ideological spectrums. Two predominant types are left-wing and right-wing populism.

### **Left-Wing Populism**

Left-wing populism emphasizes social justice, equality, and anti-capitalist sentiments. It often arises in contexts of economic disparity and social exclusion, advocating for the redistribution of wealth and power to marginalized groups.

- **Latin America:** The "Pink Tide" in Latin America saw the rise of leftist leaders like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela who implemented policies aimed at reducing inequality and increasing state control over the economy (Ellner, 2012, p. 5).
- **Core Themes:** These movements focus on anti-globalization, indigenous rights, and participatory democracy, challenging neoliberal economic models (de la Torre, 2010, p. 387).

### **Right-Wing Populism**

Right-wing populism centers on nationalism, anti-immigration stances, and the preservation of traditional cultural values. It often emerges in response to perceived threats to national identity and sovereignty.

- **Europe and the United States:** Parties like the Alternative for Germany and leaders like Donald Trump have capitalized on fears regarding immigration and globalization, promoting policies that prioritize national interests (Mudde, 2019, p. 3).

- **Core Themes:** These movements emphasize law and order, cultural homogeneity, and skepticism towards supranational entities like the European Union (Betz, 1994, p. 413).

Understanding populism requires a nuanced analysis of its ideological underpinnings, rhetorical strategies, and socio-political contexts. By examining its core features and distinguishing between its left-wing and right-wing variants, we can better assess its implications for democratic systems.

## **Understanding Democracy**

Democracy is a multifaceted system of governance that extends beyond mere electoral processes. It encompasses a framework of institutions, norms, and values designed to ensure the equitable participation of all citizens in political life. This section delves into the definition of democracy, its core principles, and the broader institutional and normative structures that sustain it.

### **Definition: A System of Governance Based On**

1. **Free and Fair Elections:** At the heart of democracy lies the conduct of regular, transparent, and competitive elections. These elections must be free from coercion, allowing citizens to choose their representatives without undue influence. The United Nations underscores that democracy is founded on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their political systems.
2. **Rule of Law:** Democracy mandates that all individuals and institutions, including the government, are subject to the law. This principle ensures that laws are applied uniformly, safeguarding against arbitrary governance.
3. **Separation of Powers:** A democratic system is characterized by the division of government responsibilities into distinct branches—legislative, executive, and judicial—to prevent the concentration of power and provide checks and balances.
4. **Civil Liberties and Political Rights:** Democracy guarantees fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and the press. These liberties are essential for the active participation of citizens in political discourse.

### **Core Principles**

1. **Representation and Accountability:** Democratic governance operates on the principle that elected officials represent the will of the people and are accountable for their actions. Mechanisms such as regular elections and transparency measures ensure that leaders remain answerable to the electorate.
2. **Participation and Pluralism:** A vibrant democracy encourages the involvement of diverse groups in the political process, ensuring that multiple perspectives are considered in decision-making. Pluralism fosters a healthy political environment where minority opinions are respected.
3. **Protection of Minority Rights:** While majority rule is a cornerstone of democracy, it must be balanced with the protection of minority rights. Democratic systems are designed to prevent the "tyranny of the majority" by safeguarding the rights of all citizens, regardless of their status.

## **Beyond Electoral Processes: Institutions, Norms, and Values**

Democracy transcends the act of voting; robust institutions and cultural norms that uphold democratic values.

- **Institutions:** Democratic institutions, such as independent judiciaries, free press, and civil society organizations, play a pivotal role in maintaining checks and balances, promoting transparency, and facilitating citizen engagement.
- **Norms and Values:** Democratic norms include mutual respect among political actors, adherence to constitutional limits, and the peaceful transfer of power. These unwritten rules are crucial for the stability and functionality of democratic systems.
- **Participatory Democracy:** Beyond representative mechanisms, participatory democracy emphasizes direct citizen involvement in decision-making processes. This approach seeks to empower marginalized communities and ensure that governance reflects the diverse needs of the populace.

Democracy is a dynamic and complex system that relies on more than just periodic elections. Its strength lies in the frameworks, cultural norms, and the active participation of its citizens. Understanding these components is essential for assessing the health and resilience of democratic systems in the face of contemporary challenges.

## **Theoretical Tensions Between Populism and Democracy**

The interplay between populism and democracy presents a complex and often contentious relationship. While populism can invigorate political engagement by highlighting the voices of the marginalized, it also poses significant challenges to democratic norms and institutions. This section delves into the theoretical tensions that arise when populist movements intersect with democratic frameworks. Populism's Simplification of Complex Political Issues vs. Democracy's Pluralistic Deliberation

Populism is characterized by its tendency to reduce multifaceted political issues into binary oppositions, framing society as a struggle between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite". This dichotomous worldview simplifies the political landscape, often disregarding the nuanced deliberations that are fundamental to democratic discourse. Democracy thrives on pluralism and the acknowledgment of diverse perspectives, requiring deliberative processes to reconcile differing interests. The oversimplification inherent in populist rhetoric can thus undermine the deliberative aspect of democracy, leading to polarized societies and weakened policy debates.

## **Populist Rejection of Institutional Checks and Balances**

A hallmark of populist movements is their skepticism or outright rejection of established institutional checks and balances. Populist leaders often view institutions such as the judiciary, independent media, and legislative bodies as obstacles to the implementation of the "will of the people." This perspective can lead to efforts to undermine or bypass these institutions, eroding the foundational structures that uphold democratic governance. For instance, in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's administration has been noted for consolidating power by weakening judicial independence and controlling media narratives, setting a precedent for other populist

regimes. Populists' Claim to a Monopoly on Representing "The People" vs. Democratic Representation of Diverse Interests

Populist leaders often assert that they alone represent the true will of the people, dismissing opposition voices and minority groups as illegitimate or unpatriotic. This claim to exclusive representation challenges the democratic principle of pluralism, where governance is based on the inclusion and negotiation of diverse interests. By marginalizing dissenting voices, populists can erode the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes that are designed to balance competing interests and protect minority rights.

### **Risk of Democratic Backsliding Under Populist Governance**

When populists ascend to power, there is a documented risk of democratic backsliding, characterized by the erosion of institutional checks, suppression of dissent, and concentration of power. Studies have shown that populist governments are more likely to undermine democratic norms and institutions, leading to a decline in democratic quality. Examples include the weakening of judicial independence, restrictions on press freedom, and the manipulation of electoral processes. Such actions not only consolidate power in the hands of populist leaders but also diminish the resilience and integrity of democratic systems.

The theoretical tensions between populism and democracy underscore the challenges that arise when populist movements interact with democratic institutions. While populism can serve as a corrective by bringing attention to overlooked issues and engaging disenfranchised populations, its tendencies toward oversimplification, institutional erosion, and exclusionary representation pose significant threats to democratic norms. Understanding and addressing these tensions is crucial for safeguarding the principles and practices of democracy in the face of rising populist influence.

### **Positive Aspects of Populism for Democracy**

While populism is often criticized for its potential to undermine democratic institutions, it also possesses attributes that can invigorate democratic systems. By re-engaging disillusioned citizens, spotlighting neglected issues, and acting as a corrective mechanism, populism can contribute positively to democratic vitality.

### **Revitalizing Political Participation**

#### **Re-engaging Disillusioned or Marginalized Voters**

Populist movements often succeed in mobilizing segments of the population that feel alienated from traditional political processes. By emphasizing direct engagement and challenging established elites, populists can draw previously disengaged citizens into the political arena. For instance, the grassroots movement "Not in Our Town" in Slovakia effectively mobilized citizens to counter extremist politics, leading to increased voter turnout and civic engagement.

## **Challenging Technocratic and Elitist Governance**

Populism frequently critiques technocratic governance, arguing that it prioritizes expert opinion over popular will. This challenge can prompt democratic institutions to become more responsive and inclusive. Jimmy Carter's presidency exemplified this through his emphasis on community-based governance and empowering local neighborhoods, reflecting commitment to civic populism (Time, 2025).

## **Highlighting Overlooked Concerns**

Populist movements often bring attention to issues that mainstream parties may overlook, such as economic inequality, corruption, and national identity. By doing so, they can enrich democratic discourse and ensure a broader range of topics are considered in policymaking. In Italy, the rise of populist parties was partly attributed to their focus on economic and migration challenges that were inadequately addressed by traditional parties (Time, 2018).

Populism can serve as a **corrective mechanism**, alerting liberal democracies to areas where they may be falling short. By voicing the frustrations of the populace, populist movements can prompt established parties to reevaluate their policies and become more attuned to the needs of all citizens. This dynamic encourages a more responsive and adaptive democratic system.

While populism presents challenges to democratic norms, it also offers opportunities for renewal and increased engagement. By reactivating political participation, bringing neglected issues to the forefront, and serving as a catalyst for institutional introspection, populism can contribute positively to the health and resilience of democratic systems.

## **Populism's Threats to Democratic Institutions**

While populism can invigorate political engagement and highlight neglected issues, it also poses significant threats to democratic institutions. This section examines how populist movements and leaders can erode democratic norms, exhibit authoritarian tendencies, deepen societal polarization, and manipulate institutional frameworks to consolidate power.

## **Erosion of Democratic Norms**

Populist leaders often challenge the foundational norms of democracy, such as respect for opposition, judicial independence, and press freedom. By portraying political adversaries as enemies of the people, they delegitimize dissent and undermine the pluralistic nature of democratic discourse. For instance, during his presidency, Donald Trump frequently vilified mainstream media outlets, labeling them as "fake news," and questioned the legitimacy of judicial decisions that opposed his policies.

In Europe, similar patterns have emerged. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been criticized for consolidating media ownership among allies and exerting control over the judiciary, actions that have raised concerns about the erosion of democratic checks and balances.

### **Authoritarian Tendencies**

Populist regimes often exhibit authoritarian tendencies by centralizing power and weakening institutional constraints. In Turkey, President Tayyip Erdogan has expanded executive powers through constitutional changes and has been accused of suppressing opposition voices and curtailing press freedoms. These actions have led to a significant decline in Turkey's democratic indicators.

Similarly, Orbán's Hungary has been described as an "electoral autocracy," where democratic institutions exist in form but are undermined in practice. Orbán's government has implemented laws that restrict the operations of non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, further consolidating power and limiting dissent.

### **Polarization and Division**

Populist rhetoric often employs an "us versus them" narrative, which deepens societal divisions and hampers consensus-building. This binary framing fosters an environment where compromise is viewed as betrayal, and political opponents are seen as existential threats. Research indicates that such polarization can lead to increased political violence and a decline in democratic norms.

In the United States, the rise of populist discourse has been linked to heightened political polarization, with significant portions of the population expressing support for political violence to achieve their goals. This trend underscores the dangers of divisive rhetoric in undermining democratic cohesion.

### **Institutional Manipulation**

Populist leaders may engage in institutional manipulation to entrench their power, often under the guise of democratic reforms. This includes altering electoral laws, changing constitutions, and silencing dissenting voices. For example, in the United States, efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election involved attempts to subvert the electoral process and challenge the legitimacy of the results, actions that have been characterized as democratic backsliding.

In Hungary, Orbán's government has implemented constitutional changes that weaken the judiciary and limit the power of opposition parties, effectively consolidating control over the political system.

While populism can serve as a catalyst for political engagement and highlight systemic issues, its potential to erode democratic institutions cannot be overlooked. The disregard for democratic norms, authoritarian consolidation of power, deepening societal divisions, and manipulation of institutional frameworks pose significant challenges to the health and sustainability of democratic systems. Addressing these threats requires a vigilant and proactive approach to uphold the principles of democracy.

## **Comparative Case Studies: Populism's Impact on Democracy**

This section delves into the manifestations of populism in Pakistan, the United States, and Europe, analyzing how populist leaders and movements have influenced democratic institutions and norms.

### **Pakistan: Imran Khan and the PTI**

#### **Populist Appeal**

Imran Khan's political ascent was marked by a strong anti-corruption narrative, positioning himself as an outsider challenging entrenched political elites. His rhetoric resonated with a populace disillusioned by dynastic politics and systemic corruption. Khan's emphasis on personal integrity and promises of a "Naya Pakistan" (New Pakistan) galvanized support, particularly among the youth and middle class.

#### **Impact on Democratic Norms**

While Khan's populist approach mobilized significant segments of society, it also raised concerns regarding democratic principles. His tenure witnessed tensions with key institutions, including the judiciary and media, often criticizing them when decisions did not align with his government's stance. Such confrontations highlighted challenges in maintaining institutional independence and the balance of power within Pakistan's democratic framework.

### **United States: Donald Trump's Populism**

#### **Populist Strategies**

Donald Trump's presidency epitomized right-wing populism, characterized by the "America First" doctrine, stringent anti-immigration policies, and direct communication with the public via social media platforms, notably Twitter. His rhetoric often targeted immigrants, the media, and political opponents, framing them as threats to national security and prosperity.

#### **Democratic Implications**

Trump's tenure intensified political polarization, culminating in events like the January 6 Capitol riot, which posed significant challenges to democratic institutions and norms. His frequent attacks on the press and judiciary raised alarms about the erosion of checks and balances essential for a functioning democracy.

### **Europe: Divergent Populist Trajectories**

#### **Hungary: Viktor Orbán's Right-Wing Populism**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's governance in Hungary exemplifies right-wing populism with authoritarian tendencies. His administration has enacted measures that restrict media freedom, suppress NGOs, and implement judicial reforms that consolidate power. Recent constitutional

amendments have further curtailed civil liberties, drawing criticism from international observers concerned about democratic backsliding.

These case studies illustrate the multifaceted nature of populism and its varied impact on democratic institutions. While populist movements can energize political participation and address legitimate grievances, they also pose risks to democratic norms, particularly when leaders undermine institutional checks and balances. The experiences of Pakistan, the United States, and European nations like Hungary and Greece underscore the importance of vigilance in preserving democratic principles amidst the rise of populist politics.

### **The Contextual Nature of Populism: Institutional and Cultural Determinants**

Populism is not a monolithic force; its impact on democracy varies significantly depending on contextual factors such as the robustness of democratic institutions, political culture, the vitality of civil society, and the state of media freedom and public accountability mechanisms. Understanding these variables is crucial to assessing whether populism serves as a corrective to democratic deficits or poses a threat to democratic norms.

#### **Strength of Democratic Institutions**

The resilience of democratic institutions plays a pivotal role in mediating the effects of populism. In countries with strong institutional frameworks, populist leaders face constraints that limit their ability to undermine democratic norms. For instance, independent judiciaries and robust electoral commissions can act as bulwarks against authoritarian tendencies. Conversely, in nations where institutions are weak or compromised, populists may find it easier to erode checks and balances, leading to democratic backsliding. Research indicates that under populist rule, freedom of the press can decline by approximately 7%, civil liberties by 8%, and political rights by 13%.

#### **Political Culture**

Political culture, encompassing societal values, norms, and attitudes towards authority and pluralism, significantly influences how populism manifests. In cultures that value consensus and inclusiveness, populist rhetoric may be tempered by societal expectations. However, in environments where polarization and distrust in institutions are prevalent, populist narratives that pit "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite" can gain traction, exacerbating divisions and undermining democratic discourse. Populism often plunges democratic societies into moralized zero-sum conflicts, threatening minority rights and enabling leaders to dismantle democratic safeguards.

#### **Role of Civil Society**

A vibrant civil society serves as a counterbalance to populist excesses by promoting civic engagement, fostering dialogue, and holding leaders accountable. Empirical studies have shown that individuals involved in civil society organizations are significantly less likely to support populist parties. For example, membership in civil associations can reduce the likelihood of voting for populist parties by 20% to 30%. This underscores the importance of civil society in sustaining democratic norms and resisting authoritarian shifts.

## **Media Freedom and Public Accountability Mechanisms**

Free and independent media are essential for transparency and accountability in a democracy. Populist leaders often seek to undermine media freedom through various means, including regulatory pressures, ownership changes, and public denunciations of journalists. Such actions can erode the media's role as a watchdog and limit the public's access to unbiased information. In some democracies, populist regimes have overseen concerted attempts to throttle the independence of the media sector, leading to a deterioration of democratic accountability.

The impact of populism on democracy is profoundly influenced by contextual factors. Strong democratic institutions, a culture that values pluralism, active civil society participation, and free media are critical in mitigating the potential negative effects of populism. Conversely, the absence or weakening of these elements can create fertile ground for populist leaders to erode democratic norms and consolidate power. Therefore, efforts to strengthen these pillars are essential in safeguarding democracy against the challenges posed by populist movements.

## **Strategies for Strengthening Democratic Resilience**

In an era marked by democratic backsliding and the rise of populist movements, fortifying the resilience of democratic systems is imperative. This involves a multifaceted approach encompassing institutional reforms, civic education, responsive governance, and inclusive politics.

### **Institutional Reforms**

Robust democratic institutions are the bedrock of a resilient democracy. Strengthening judicial independence ensures that the judiciary can act as a check on executive power, safeguarding the rule of law. Media freedom is equally vital; a free press holds power to account and inform the citizenry, enabling informed participation in democratic processes. Transparency mechanisms, such as open government initiatives and anti-corruption measures, are essential to build public trust and prevent the erosion of democratic norms. For instance, bolstering anti-corruption efforts is crucial, as corruption undermines resilience by eroding a government's will and ability to act, and by decreasing public trust in the government.

### **Civic Education**

Civic education plays a pivotal role in cultivating informed and engaged citizens. It equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in democratic processes. Educational initiatives should focus on teaching the principles of democracy, the functioning of governmental institutions, and the importance of civil liberties. Moreover, fostering critical thinking and media literacy is essential in an age where misinformation can undermine democratic discourse. Civic education encourages citizens to become actively engaged with their local community and participate in activities that promote the betterment of society.

### **Responsive Governance**

Governments must address legitimate grievances related to inequality, corruption, and representation to maintain democratic legitimacy. Responsive governance entails implementing

policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of the populace. This includes creating avenues for citizen input, ensuring equitable service delivery, and maintaining transparency in decision-making processes. By doing so, governments can rebuild public trust and counteract the appeal of populist narratives that exploit societal divisions. Bolstering anti-corruption efforts is equally important, as corruption undermines resilience by eroding a government's will and ability to act, and by decreasing public trust in the government.

### **Inclusive Politics**

Inclusive political systems that represent diverse voices are more resilient to democratic erosion. Encouraging the participation of marginalized groups, including women, minorities, and youth, ensures that a broader spectrum of society is invested in the democratic process. Mechanisms such as proportional representation, affirmative action policies, and inclusive policy-making forums can facilitate this inclusivity. Popular control over decision-making is achieved through inclusive political participation and representation in democratic institutions and processes in which each citizen has an equal right and opportunity to engage and contribute.

Strengthening democratic resilience requires a comprehensive strategy that reinforces institutions, educates citizens, ensures responsive governance, and promotes inclusive politics. By addressing these areas, democracies can better withstand internal and external challenges, ensuring their longevity and effectiveness in serving their citizens.

### **Conclusion**

Populism, as this comprehensive analysis has shown, represents a profound paradox in the context of modern democratic governance. On one hand, populism poses serious risks to the integrity of democratic institutions—it erodes checks and balances, undermines judicial independence, delegitimizes opposition, and fosters authoritarian tendencies through divisive rhetoric and centralization of power. From Hungary under Viktor Orbán to the United States during the Trump presidency and Pakistan under Imran Khan, the global trajectory of populist governance has often veered toward democratic backsliding, polarization, and institutional decay.

On the other hand, populism can also serve as a democratic corrective. It can energize the politically disillusioned, challenge entrenched elites, and bring long-ignored issues—such as income inequality, cultural identity, and institutional corruption—into public discourse. Populist movements often act as catalysts that highlight the gaps in representative systems and push liberal democracies to become more inclusive, accountable, and responsive.

Therefore, the task for democratic societies is not merely to suppress populism, but to understand and engage with it constructively. This requires a delicate balance: democracies must take populist grievances seriously without capitulating on the anti-democratic practices that some populist leaders espouse. Listening to “the people” cannot mean silencing minorities, marginalizing dissent, or weakening constitutional protections.

Resilience, in this context, means more than the survival of democratic structures—it means their ability to adapt, reform, and regenerate in response to new challenges. As argued by Merkel, democracy must not only resist autocratic incursions but also continually renew its commitment

to pluralism, participation, and accountability. Responsive governance, institutional reforms, civic education, and inclusive politics are all essential to ensuring that democracy remains legitimate and representative in the face of populist pressures.

In conclusion, continued scholarly inquiry and public debate are essential to navigating the populist moment. By understanding the contextual nature of populism and reinforcing democratic norms through reform and resilience, modern democracies can ensure their survival—not by resisting change, but by evolving in ways that safeguard both liberty and representation.

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## Democratic Instability in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*The present research examines perpetual instability of democratic process in Pakistan. This has been repeatedly disrupted since the country's independence in 1947. Even with civilian governance and sporadic elections, democratic norms are nonetheless brittle. Systemic, cultural, and institutional complexities are the cause of this fragility. Chronic political instability, frequent military interventions, poor governance, and pervasive corruption are important contributing causes. While democratic culture is still in its infancy, the judiciary sometimes lacks independence. Political parties that are dominated by dynasty and personal interests have not been able to redress socioeconomic inequities or institutionalize democratic processes. A pattern of rotating civil and military rule has been fostered by military domination, eclipsing civilian institutions continuously. Long-term democratic consolidation has been hampered by this tendency. Public confidence in legal institutions has been further eroded by judicial partisanship and overreach. Public engagement is weakened by gaps in socioeconomic status, low literacy, and a lack of political understanding. Governance is made more difficult by religious and ethnic divides, which are sometimes used for political ends. Even while the media is essential for raising awareness, it is usually subject to control and limitations. Pakistan's democratic path has also been influenced by outside forces, especially geopolitical and strategic ones. To overcome these obstacles, systemic changes in the legal system, government, and educational system are needed. Ensuring government accountability and bolstering civil society are equally important. Pakistan can only move closer to a stable and inclusive democratic system by implementing reforms consistently. This paper makes the case that significant democratic stability in Pakistan necessitates extensive reforms in the areas of government, the judiciary, education, and civil society involvement, drawing on historical study and current events. According to the study's findings, Pakistan's democratic development would continue to be uneven and susceptible to authoritarian resurgence until these fundamental flaws are fixed.*

**Keywords:** Political Parties, ECP, UNDP, U.S. Observer, RO

### Introduction

The story of Pakistan's democratic experience is complicated and frequently tumultuous. It is characterized by frequent disruptions, institutional weaknesses, and disputed political legitimacy. The trajectory of Pakistan's democratic evolution has been uneven and unpredictable since it became an independent state in 1947. This is predominantly due to its oscillations between military and civilian regimes. Although the nation has gone through several election shifts and periods of democratic recovery, they have usually been thwarted by institutional imbalances, authoritarian inclinations, and systemic flaws. The dilemma of democracy in Pakistan is mostly caused by several interconnected variables. These include the military's continued hegemony over politics, the frailty of civilian institutions, and incapacity of political parties to promote internal democracy or adequately address public concerns. Judiciary, which is sometimes political and prone to

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overreach, has had a mixed role, sometimes upheld democratic standards and otherwise provided legal legitimacy for authoritarian authority. Widespread corruption, socioeconomic disparity, a lack of political consciousness, and limitations on media freedom have also all contributed to a setting in which democratic ideals are difficult to establish.

These internal difficulties are exacerbated by external geopolitical forces, including regional conflicts, strategic alliances, and reliance on foreign aid, which have influenced the ruling class's goals and frequently marginalized democratic accountability. Since political players routinely use religious and ethnic identities for short-term purposes, they further worsen political instability by undermining inclusive governance and national cohesiveness.

This research aims at addressing and evaluating the causes of Pakistan's democratic fragility, both historically and currently. It seeks to offer a critical evaluation of the sociocultural, institutional, and political factors that have hampered the consolidation of democracy. The paper makes the case for the need for pervasive changes in governance, judicial independence, political accountability, and civic education by outlining significant moments in Pakistan's political history and examining the structural barriers to long-term democracy. Pakistan can only expect to establish a long-lasting and inclusive democratic regime by taking such steps.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following are the major objectives of the study:

1. To examine the structural and historical elements contributing to instability of Pakistan's democratic process and governance since 1947.
2. To investigate how important state institutions, in notably the armed forces, the judiciary, and political parties, influence and obstruct democratic processes.
3. To evaluate the impact of identity politics, socioeconomic variables, and external geopolitical influences on Pakistan's prospects for democratic consolidation.

### **Research Questions**

The present research addresses the following key questions.

1. What structural and historical elements have made it more difficult for Pakistan to maintain democracy since 1947?
2. What impact have the Pakistani military, courts, and political parties had on the country's ability to maintain democracy?
3. What effects do foreign geopolitics, identity politics, and socioeconomic disparity have on Pakistan's efforts to consolidate democracy?

### **Methodology**

This study investigates the reasons behind Pakistan's democratic instability using a qualitative research approach based on historical and political analysis. The study employs a descriptive and analytical methodology to look at how Pakistan's democratic experience has been impacted by historical trends as well as current events. With an emphasis on significant junctures of democratic transition, military interventions, and constitutional reforms, the research is organized as a

historical-institutional analysis. It examines how societal factors, governmental actors, and political institutions interact throughout time.

The study makes use of secondary sources, such as archival materials (government reports, judicial rulings, and constitutional texts), peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books, political biographies and historical narratives, opinion pieces and newspaper archives. The data is also derived from the reports of international organizations (such as those from Human Rights Watch and Freedom House). Using a thematic analysis, recurrent themes and categories pertaining to institutional conduct (political parties, the military, and the courts), democratic governance and norms, economic and sociopolitical limitations, and outside factors influencing domestic politics.

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

The analysis spans 1947 to the present, with an emphasis on pivotal moments such the democratic transitions in 2008 and the military takeovers in 1958, 1977, and 1999. Provincial dynamics are included where they have a major influence on the larger democratic environment, even if the emphasis is on politics at the national level.

### **Review of Literature**

A few scholars have studied Pakistan's democratic instability, and they have found that historical legacies, institutional dysfunction, civil-military imbalance, and socio-political fragmentation all play a complex role in preventing the consolidation of democracy.

According to several academics, Pakistan's colonial past and post-independence political development are the main causes of the country's democratic fragility. According to Jalal (1995), the centralized authority structure and colonial administrative machinery were carried over without much alteration, impeding the growth of participatory democratic institutions (Jalal, 1995). Similarly, Talbot (2009) and Cohen (2004) stress that Pakistan's early history was characterized by a dependence on military leadership and bureaucracy, together with weak political parties and little public participation, which paved the way for authoritarianism (Talbot, 2009; Cohen, 2004).

The widespread impact of the military on Pakistan's political system is a recurring issue in the literature. According to academics like Siddiqua (2007) and Rizvi (2000), the authority of elected governments has been steadily undermined, and civilian institutions have been damaged by the frequent direct and indirect military operations. The military's hegemony over internal security, foreign policy, and even economic planning has stymied institutional growth and interrupted democratic continuity (Siddiqua, 2007; Rizvi, 2000). Ahmed (2013) goes into additional detail about this mismatch and shows how democratic pluralism is undermined by the military's self-perception as a protector of national stability (Ahmed, 2013).

Additionally, studies reveal internal flaws in legislative system and functioning of political parties in Pakistan. Dynastic politics, factionalism, a lack of intra-party democracy, and patron-client networks, according to Shafqat (1998) and Waseem (2006), have all led to a precarious democratic system. These traits restrict institutional resilience, public accountability, and policy consistency. Further upsetting democratic norms and processes have been constitutional infractions and the frequent use of emergency powers (Shafqat, 1998; Waseem, 2006).

It has also been argued that the judiciary's involvement in defending military takeovers through theories like the “doctrine of necessity” (Newberg, 1995) fuels instability in democracies. A more active media and a more muscular court, however, have surfaced as possible counterbalances in recent years. Although these advances are still brittle, Ziring (2005) and Lodhi (2011) emphasize the growing contribution of independent media, attorneys' groups, and civil society to promoting democratic accountability.

The literature also discusses how foreign players have influenced Pakistan's democratic development. According to Haqqani (2005) and Hussain (2013), strategic partnerships with strong nations, particularly during the Cold War and the years following 9/11, have frequently strengthened authoritarian governments in the pretext of security cooperation, impeding the growth of indigenous democracy. The necessity of election changes, decentralization, and bolstering civilian monitoring mechanisms have been the main topics of recent contributions. According to Akhtar (2018) and Cheema, Khan & Myerson (2010), democratic stability can only be attained by means of rule of law, institutional reform, and ongoing grassroots political engagement.

## **Discussion**

### **Historical Context of Instable Democratic Process of Pakistan**

Pakistan has had an uneven and often interrupted democratic journey. The nation inherited a parliamentary system from British colonial control when it gained independence in 1947. There were significant obstacles to early state-building. The inadequate institutional structure that was left over after independence was one of the fundamental problems. These included conflicts throughout the community, political instability, and institutional weakness. There was a leadership void with the passing of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1948 and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951 (Ziring, 1997, pp. 94-97). The military and bureaucracy were able to increase their power as a result. The adoption of the first constitution occurred in 1956. Owing to delay in making of constitution, it was more difficult to establish democratic principles. A federal parliamentary democracy was established. But the constitution was only in place for two years. Because of the weak and incapable political institution, the military and bureaucracy were able to disproportionately influence political decisions. The first military coup was carried out by General Ayub Khan in 1958. He instituted his “Basic Democracies” system and revoked the constitution. In Pakistani politics, this signaled the start of military domination (Khan, H. 2001, pp. 125, 128, 149, 162-65).

In 1971, under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, civilian rule was reinstated. The 1973 Constitution, which is still in effect today, was introduced under his administration. It secured basic rights and instituted a legislative system (Khan, 2001, pp. 286-87). Bhutto's administration, however, grew more autocratic. Then came political turmoil. Bhutto was overthrown by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977, and martial law was installed. Zia's government encouraged religious conservatism and bolstered the military (Ziring, 1997, p. 462). Pakistan reverted to electoral democracy following Zia's death in 1988. Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto took turns ruling. Their administrations were corrupt and erratic. The military continued to play a significant role in the background. Nawaz Sharif was overthrown, and General Pervez Musharraf took over in 1999 (Waseem, 2021, p. 227).

The year 2008 saw the return of democracy. Since then, civilian governments have served out their whole tenure. Elections in 2013 and 2018 saw orderly handovers of power. But democratic institutions are still not strong. Civilian matters are still influenced by the military. Political parties frequently lack internal democracy and are hereditary. Political pressure is applied to the media and courts. The political history of Pakistan demonstrates a trend of democratic failure. This history has been molded by socioeconomic inequalities, weakened institutions, and military takeovers (Waseem, 2021, p. 252). Pakistan has thereby created a political system that is both structurally autocratic and somewhat democratic. Understanding the causes of the nation's democratic fragility requires knowledge of this background.

### **Military Interventions**

One of the main causes of the disruption of democratic government has been the frequent military interventions. Generals Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq, and Pervez Musharraf conducted the 1958, 1977, and 1999 coups, respectively, which overthrew constitutional procedures and installed military authority in lieu of elected administrations (Waseem, 2021, pp. 228-258). The military has undermined civilian authority even under civilian administration by indirectly controlling important policies, especially those pertaining to foreign policy and national security.

The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and other Pakistani military intelligence organizations have been accused of meddling in the electoral process. These organizations have been charged with keeping tabs on and influencing political actions, such as obtaining intelligence on politicians, putting pressure on applicants, and swaying public opinion in support of forces with a military affiliation (Waseem, 2021, p. 229-37).

### **Role of Judiciary and Bureaucracy**

In Pakistan, the bureaucracy and judiciary have frequently impeded the advancement of democracy. Military takeovers have been routinely justified by the judiciary under the “doctrine of necessity.” Unconstitutional interference in civilian government has been promoted as a result. Additionally, courts have demonstrated selective responsibility by defending strong players while focusing on political rivals. Political interference and judicial overreach have undermined legal institutions’ legitimacy (Khan, 2001, p. 108).

In a similar vein, bureaucracy has served as an instrument of central control rather than the public good. It frequently opposes democratic supervision and decentralization because of its colonial roots. Instead of standing with elected officials, bureaucrats are usually in line with elite or military objectives (Khan, 2001, p. 108; Waseem, 2021, p. 258). Both civilian supremacy and policy continuity are threatened by this. These institutions have, thus, worked together to weaken Pakistan’s democratic standards and accountability.

### **Undemocratic Attitude of Political Parties and Leadership**

The function of political parties has also been troublesome. Many operate under dynasty rule, lack internal democracy, and prioritize patronage over policy. Their inability to address public complaints or represent a range of society interests has undermined democratic credibility. Furthermore, the court has frequently fallen short of serving as a strong restraint on tyranny. The

judiciary's selective accountability and justification of military takeovers under the "doctrine of necessity" have exacerbated institutional instability (Mahmood, 2000, pp. 117-183). Vote buying is a common practice in Pakistan, when candidates and political parties give voters gifts, cash, or favors in return for their support. This dishonest behavior erodes the idea of fair competition and skews the election process.

### **Societal Organization, Conscience and Political Participation**

The democratic process in Pakistan is significantly impacted by its socioeconomic structure. Rigid class, ethnic, tribal, and feudal divides define society. A tiny elite still controls most of the political and economic power. This aristocracy restricts public involvement and controls important institutions. Democratic responsibility is weakened by such inequity. There is also a lack of development in public political conscience. Many citizens are ignorant of their democratic rights and obligations. This disparity is exacerbated by low literacy and inadequate civic education. Independent political decision-making is discouraged by economic reliance on local elites (Lieven, 2011, p. 344). Election behavior is dominated by identity politics and patronage structures. Institutional development is hampered by these trends. Instead, in democratic ideals, people frequently follow individuals. Democracy thus lacks substance and sustained stability. Social change is necessary to bolster Pakistan's democracy. Consolidation of democracy requires inclusivity, civic engagement, and education.

### **Impact of Geopolitical Environment on Democratic Process**

The development of Pakistan's democracy has been significantly influenced by geopolitical forces. Pakistan's advantageous position has drawn attention from across the world since 1947. India, China, Iran, and Afghanistan are among the major regional powers that it shares borders with. Pakistan was an important role in the Cold War because of its geographic location. Pakistan became a member of Western alliances like CENTO and SEATO (Mahmood, 2000, p. 196). It was rewarded with financial and military assistance, particularly from the US. But rather than bolstering civilian institutions, their help bolstered military ones. Development of democracy continued to be a secondary issue.

Pakistan was in the forefront of the Afghan jihad in the 1980s. To further regional objectives, the US and its allies backed military governments. During this time, religious militancy increased, and the military gained more authority. Democratic norms were undermined, and political parties were sidelined. Following 9/11, Pakistan once more emerged as a key player in the worldwide "War on Terror." International support was given to General Pervez Musharraf's military government (Lieven, 2011, p. 415, 419). Stability in the area was more important to the West than democratic administration. Democracy has also been impacted by tensions between India and Pakistan, especially those around Kashmir. The military defends its supremacy by citing the external danger theory. This limits democratic discourse and erodes civic power. More recently, additional geopolitical components have been introduced by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Despite its promises of economic expansion, CPEC has given the military more sway over economic decisions. The process of making decisions has grown less transparent and more centralized.

This appears that authoritarian governments in Pakistan have traditionally received assistance from regional and international forces. Democratic procedures were frequently weakened by their strategic objectives. Consequently, Pakistan's democracy has remained insecure and unfinished.

### **Fragility of Election Commission**

The ineffectiveness and occasionally political influence of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) have drawn criticism. Mistrust of the electoral process has been exacerbated by its incapacity to uphold tough election regulations, stop election tampering, and guarantee impartiality. The ECP has frequently come under fire for not being independent from governmental and political interference (Khan, B. 2023). Its impartiality is undermined by political meddling, especially from the military or the governing party, which gives rise to accusations of partiality and prejudice.

A lack of funds, skilled staff, and up-to-date technology infrastructure are among the resource limitations the ECP faces. These restrictions make it more difficult for them to effectively oversee large-scale elections and keep an eye on events in isolated or conflict-affected regions. The ECP faces difficulties in overseeing and monitoring elections, particularly in rural and conflict-prone areas. Voter intimidation, vote-rigging, and vote-buying are examples of electoral malpractices that go undetected due to inadequate monitoring.

### **Recondition for Strengthening the Democracy in Pakistan**

A multifaceted reform strategy is necessary to support sustainable governance and democratic consolidation. Strengthening democratic institutions is at the heart of this agenda, especially by guaranteeing the impartiality and independence of important institutions like the electoral commission and the courts. To preserve the integrity of the democratic process, these institutions must be shielded from political interference.

Keeping the civil-military relationship in balance is equally crucial. This necessitates the creation of unambiguous constitutional procedures and legal protections that forbid military meddling in political matters, therefore bolstering civilian authority and democratic responsibility.

Democratic progress also requires political party reform. Encouraging internal democracy inside political parties may improve political stability, increase accountability to the voters and party members, and promote transparency. Furthermore, depoliticizing the court and guaranteeing fair access to justice must be the goals of judicial and legal reforms. To preserve the rule of law and public confidence, the legal system should operate autonomously and effectively.

Reforming political parties is also necessary for democratic advancement. Political stability, responsibility to voters and party members, and transparency may all be enhanced by fostering internal democracy inside political parties. Furthermore, judicial and legal changes must aim to ensure equitable access to justice and depoliticize the court. The judicial system must function independently and efficiently to protect the rule of law and public trust.

## Conclusion

It is impossible to comprehend Pakistan's ongoing democratic instability without considering the nation's past developments, ingrained institutional disparities, and frequent political upheavals. The formation of democratic systems has continuously been hampered by the legacy of authoritarian rule, lax democratic standards, and a politicized civil-military relationship. However, the implementation of structural changes that are intended to fortify governing institutions, guarantee election fairness and transparency, and redefine the civil-military relationship within a constitutional framework holds the promise of a lasting democratic regime. Such change necessitates the active participation of political players, state institutions, and civil society in addition to innovative policymaking. Pakistan can only progress toward the establishment of a sustainable democratic system by implementing such a concerted and inclusive strategy.

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## **Traditional Vs. Social Media in Shaping Political Polarization in Established Democracies: The Case of United States of America**

**Sadani Palika Maheshi\***  
**Nayani Melegoda\*\***

### **Abstract**

*The role of media in shaping public opinion is crucial to understanding the growing political polarization in democracies like the United States. This study explores the contrasting impacts of traditional media—such as print, television, and radio—with social media platforms. Historically, traditional media acted as gatekeepers, fostering a shared public discourse. However, the emergence of politically aligned cable news networks like Fox News and CNN has contributed to partisan divides. In contrast, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter/X, and YouTube operate on algorithms that prioritize engagement, often reinforcing users' pre-existing beliefs and creating echo chambers. This environment intensifies ideological segregation and spreads misinformation, especially during pivotal moments like presidential elections. Joe Biden's 2024 Presidential Debate Controversy underscored the dangers of unregulated social media narratives. With declining trust in traditional outlets, many Americans turn to less regulated online sources that may lack accountability. This paper argues that while both media forms contribute to polarization, social media exerts a more immediate and interactive influence. Addressing media biases and fostering digital literacy are vital steps toward mitigating polarization and safeguarding democratic institutions in a fragmented media landscape.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Political Polarization, Social Media, Traditional Media, United States.

### **Introduction**

The influence of media on shaping public opinion can be traced back to ancient times, with early forms of political messaging evident as far back as the Roman Empire, making it a topic of enduring scholarly interest—particularly in understanding how evolving media ecosystems impact political polarization in established democracies. The United States, with its vibrant media landscape and deeply entrenched democratic institutions, serves as a compelling case study for analyzing these dynamics. Over the past two decades, the nature of media consumption in the U.S. has evolved dramatically, shifting from a reliance on traditional media to the widespread use of digital and social media platforms (Dwivedi et al., 2021). This shift has corresponded with increasing levels of political polarization, as evidenced by rising partisanship, ideological segmentation, and decreased bipartisan cooperation in governance.

Traditional media, encompassing newspapers, television, and radio, has historically functioned as a central institution for disseminating vetted information. These outlets played a significant role in framing national discourse, upholding journalistic standards, and creating a shared information environment (Gamage, 2024). However, this centralized model has experienced significant disruption, particularly with the rise of cable television networks such as Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, CBS, ABC and The CW which now often cater to ideologically distinct audiences. The

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fragmentation of traditional media has, paradoxically, mirrored the effects attributed to social media, though with different mechanisms and implications.

Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter (now X), and YouTube, offer decentralized and highly interactive content dissemination. Algorithms that prioritize user engagement often amplify content that aligns with existing beliefs, fostering "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles" (Putri et al., 2024). These environments reduce exposure to opposing viewpoints and promote the virality of sensationalist or misleading information. The decentralized nature of social media democratizes information but does so at the cost of editorial oversight, leading to challenges such as misinformation, disinformation, and manipulation by both domestic and foreign actors (Chirwa & Manyana, 2021).

January 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection represents a seminal moment that highlighted the dangerous implications of unchecked narratives proliferating through social media (Donovan, 2024). At the same time, declining public trust in traditional media has pushed many Americans toward alternative sources of information online. This environment has created a feedback loop where polarization feeds itself, creating a fragmented and contentious public sphere.

This research paper seeks to investigate the distinct and overlapping roles that traditional and social media play in shaping political polarization in the United States. While acknowledging the contributions of both, it posits that social media has a more profound impact due to its structure, immediacy, and interactivity. By exploring these dynamics, the paper aims to provide insights into how media consumption influences political behavior and the health of democratic discourse in contemporary America.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why has the shift from traditional to social media contributed to increased political polarization in the United States?
2. How do social media platforms facilitate the formation and persistence of political echo chambers?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To investigate why the transition from traditional to social media has contributed to rising political polarization in the United States.
2. To analyze how social media platforms structurally and algorithmically reinforce political echo chambers and ideological segregation.

### **Literature Review**

Historically, traditional media played a vital role in cultivating a unified public discourse by acting as gatekeepers of information. Hallin and Mancini (2004) characterized traditional media systems in liberal democracies as fostering professional journalism norms, central editorial control, and accountability. However, the rise of partisan cable news networks in the U.S. has challenged this model. According to Stroud (2011), audience fragmentation and selective exposure have increased with the proliferation of ideologically aligned media outlets, especially Fox News and MSNBC, contributing to greater partisan identification.

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) demonstrated that audiences increasingly prefer media sources that align with their preexisting political views, reinforcing existing beliefs and reducing opportunities for

cross-cutting exposure. Moreover, Levendusky (2013) argued that partisan media not only reinforce existing preferences but also radicalize audiences over time by portraying the opposing party as a threat.

Nevertheless, traditional media still maintain standards of accountability and editorial oversight that are largely absent in social media. Some scholars, such as Prior (2007), argue that while traditional media can exacerbate polarization, their overall structure provides more checks against misinformation compared to user-generated content platforms.

Social media platforms function differently by prioritizing engagement over accuracy. Pariser (2011) introduced the concept of "filter bubbles," wherein algorithms curate content aligned with users' preferences, thereby insulating them from diverse viewpoints. Similarly, Sunstein (2017) emphasized the risk of "echo chambers" online environments where like-minded individuals amplify shared beliefs while excluding dissenting opinions.

Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic (2015) empirically analyzed Facebook data and found that while users are exposed to some cross-cutting content, the extent is limited by both user choice and algorithmic filtering. This aligns with Tucker et al. (2018), who argued that social media intensifies polarization through personalized news feeds, viral misinformation, and the formation of homogeneous digital communities.

Social media's decentralized structure also enables the rapid spread of misinformation. Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that false news spread more rapidly and widely on Twitter than true news, largely because false content is more novel and emotionally charged. These findings raise significant concerns about the role of social media in eroding trust, particularly during politically sensitive periods like elections.

Public trust in media has been declining steadily in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (2021), only 36% of Americans express trust in traditional news outlets, with even lower trust levels reported among conservatives. This erosion of trust has led many users to turn to social media, despite its lack of editorial oversight. Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler (2020) highlighted that low trust in mainstream media correlates strongly with susceptibility to misinformation and increased reliance on partisan or alternative media sources.

Trust disparities are also gendered and racialized. Tsfaty and Ariely (2014) noted that marginalized groups often perceive traditional media as unrepresentative, prompting them to seek validation and representation in alternative media spaces, including social media platforms.

While this paper focuses on the United States, comparative studies offer valuable insights. For instance, in Germany and Sweden, social media usage has also been linked to increased ideological polarization, though the extent varies based on political culture and media regulation (Esser et al., 2017). Meanwhile, democracies with stronger public service broadcasting, like the UK and Canada, exhibit less severe polarization, suggesting that media system design significantly influences political behavior (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017).

Despite the growing body of research, several limitations persist. First, there is limited consensus on the causal relationship between social media use and political polarization. While correlation is widely observed, causality is harder to establish due to the complexity of online behavior. Second, many studies focus on short-term effects or specific events (e.g., elections), with fewer longitudinal studies examining long-term shifts in political attitudes. Finally, research often underrepresents

non-elite voices and the experiences of minority communities, which can provide richer insights into the diverse effects of media polarization.

The literature demonstrates that both traditional and social media contribute to political polarization through different mechanisms. Traditional media influences polarization through selective exposure and ideological programming, while social media exacerbates it via algorithmic personalization, echo chambers, and the viral spread of misinformation. Public distrust in media institutions, particularly among certain political and demographic groups, further fuels the shift toward alternative platforms. While the U.S. case is particularly pronounced, comparative studies suggest that media system design and regulation also play crucial roles. These insights provide a foundation for the subsequent analysis and underline the importance of addressing media-induced polarization in preserving democratic health.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant content analysis approach to investigate how traditional and social media shape political polarization in the United States. The research design is structured to allow for both analytical depth and triangulation across multiple data sources, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in influencing ideological divides.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Given the complexity of political polarization and the interplay of structural, behavioral, and technological factors, this study utilizes a comparative media content analysis alongside a secondary analysis of public opinion datasets. The choice of methods reflects the study's objective to explore mechanisms of polarization (such as echo chambers and selective exposure) while also grounding the analysis in empirical patterns of media trust and consumption.

A mixed-methods framework is particularly suited to addressing the research questions, which require both interpretive insights (e.g., how algorithms shape exposure) and empirical validation (e.g., trust trends). The qualitative component facilitates in-depth exploration of narratives and frames, while the quantitative secondary data provides contextual support and generalizability.

### **Data Collection Methods**

This research employs three primary methods of data collection: content analysis, secondary data analysis, and document review. Each method is selected to triangulate findings and ensure a comprehensive understanding of how traditional and social media contribute to political polarization in the United States.

First, a content analysis will be conducted using a purposive sample of news segments and online content drawn from both traditional and social media platforms. Traditional media sources will include prominent outlets such as Fox News, CNN, and *The New York Times*, while the social media sample will focus on high-engagement posts from platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). The selected content spans politically salient events such as the U.S. presidential elections of 2016 and 2020, the Black Lives Matter protests, and Joe Biden's 2024 Presidential Debate Controversy. Coding categories for this analysis include tone, partisan alignment, the presence of misinformation, framing techniques, and emotional valence. This method aims to capture the differing narrative structures and ideological leanings across platforms, shedding light on their respective potentials to reinforce or intensify partisan divides.

Second, the study will undertake secondary data analysis using public datasets from reputable sources such as the Pew Research Center and Gallup. These datasets offer longitudinal insights into Americans' trust in media, political identification, and patterns of media consumption. By analyzing trends over time, the study seeks to identify correlations between shifting media usages, especially the migration from traditional to social media—and the deepening of political polarization. The use of existing survey data ensures empirical grounding while enabling a broader temporal perspective on evolving media behaviors.

Finally, a document review will be conducted to examine key institutional and policy responses to media-driven polarization and misinformation. This includes reviewing reports from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), as well as platform-specific content moderation policies from companies like Meta, Google, and X. These documents provide insight into how regulatory bodies and platform operators have attempted to address the challenges posed by media polarization, and how effective these measures have been in curbing the spread of misinformation and restoring trust in public discourse.

Together, these data collection methods offer a multi-layered approach to understanding the complex interplay between media systems and political polarization. They allow for both empirical analysis and contextual interpretation, strengthening the study's overall validity and relevance.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data will be coded using thematic analysis, identifying recurring frames, ideological cues, and discursive strategies. The analysis draws on concepts from media framing theory and agenda-setting to interpret how issues are constructed differently across media formats.

Quantitative data will be analyzed descriptively and correlational, identifying trends and disparities in trust and media behavior across demographic and political groups. While causality cannot be definitively established, patterns of association will help contextualize the qualitative findings.

### **Limitations**

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the content analysis is not exhaustive and may not capture the full range of media discourse. Second, while secondary data allow for broader generalization, they lack the specificity needed to trace individual cognitive processes. Additionally, social media platforms frequently change algorithms and policies, complicating longitudinal consistency. Finally, the focus on the U.S. limits generalizability to other democracies with different media ecologies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All data used is publicly available and anonymized. For social media content, only publicly accessible posts will be analyzed, and user identities will be obscured where relevant. The study adheres to academic ethical standards and responsible research practices, particularly when engaging with politically sensitive content.

## **Discussion**

The transformation of the American media landscape over the past few decades has had a profound effect on political polarization. Traditional media, while no longer the singular voice of national discourse, still holds substantial influence over political opinion (Gillis, 2024). However, the advent of social media has introduced a fundamental shift in how information is consumed, shared, and interpreted. This discussion evaluates the complex relationship between media types and political polarization, drawing on empirical evidence, existing scholarship, and major political developments in the United States.

### **Traditional Media's Evolving Role**

Historically, traditional media served as a cohesive force in American democracy (Corduener, 2024). Networks like CBS, NBC, and major newspapers such as *The New York Times* operated under journalistic norms that prioritized objectivity, balance, and fact-checking. These media sources provided a shared informational baseline, often described as the "national narrative," which helped maintain democratic cohesion (McChesney, 2004).

However, with the rise of cable news, this unity began to fracture. Channels like Fox News and MSNBC adopted more overtly partisan stances, targeting ideologically segmented audiences (Stroud, 2011). This shift has led to a form of selective exposure, where consumers choose media aligned with their beliefs. Although still governed by professional standards, these outlets increasingly engage in framing that supports partisan narratives, contributing to the public's ideological sorting (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

### **Social Media and Algorithmic Polarization**

Unlike traditional media, social media platforms operate through algorithmic curation, prioritizing content based on user engagement rather than editorial judgment. Research shows that these algorithms often push users toward extreme content, reinforcing existing beliefs and minimizing exposure to dissenting views (Bakshy et al., 2015). This phenomenon, referred to as "algorithmic radicalization," is particularly potent on platforms like YouTube and Facebook.

Moreover, social media enables the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation. During the 2016 and 2020 U.S. elections, false information about candidates, election procedures, and political conspiracies proliferated unchecked. Tucker et al. (2018) argue that the lack of gatekeeping on social media has severely undermined democratic accountability.

Social media also fosters echo chambers, where users interact primarily with like-minded individuals. This dynamic intensifies group polarization and diminishes the ability to engage in reasoned debate. Sunstein (2009) warned that such fragmentation can lead to the creation of insular communities resistant to compromise and dialogue, a threat to pluralistic democracy.

### **Public Trust and Migration to Social Media**

Trust in traditional media has declined significantly, with Gallup (2021) reporting that only 36% of Americans express a great deal or fair amount of trust in mass media. Many Americans perceive legacy outlets as biased or beholden to political elites. This erosion of trust has driven audiences to seek alternative sources of information—often unregulated—on social media platforms.

However, while social media users report greater autonomy in curating their news feeds, they are simultaneously more vulnerable to misinformation. Marwick and Lewis (2017) highlight how far right and extremist networks have weaponized social media to spread propaganda and mobilize supporters. This creates a paradox: individuals leave traditional media in search of neutrality or authenticity, only to become ensnared in highly curated and manipulative digital environments.

### **Case Study: Joe Biden's 2024 Presidential Debate Controversy**

The events surrounding Joe Biden's performance during the 2024 presidential debates illustrate the powerful influence of social media in shaping political narratives and outcomes. Following moments of verbal confusion and lapses during the debates, social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok rapidly amplified clips and commentary, often stripped of context. Viral posts questioning Biden's cognitive fitness spread widely, fueled by partisan influencers and algorithmically boosted content. According to research from the Digital Forensic Research Lab (2024), these narratives quickly overshadowed mainstream media coverage, creating a parallel discourse that dominated public perception. While traditional media offered more measured analysis, social media drove a wave of speculation and distrust, ultimately pressuring Biden to withdraw from the race. This incident underscores how social media not only reflects but actively constructs political realities, reshaping electoral dynamics and influencing high-stakes decisions at the highest levels of governance.

### **Implications for Democratic Governance**

Political polarization driven by the media has significant implications for democratic institutions. Polarization affects legislative gridlock, voter behavior, and public trust in institutions. Hetherington and Rudolph (2015) suggest that polarized citizens are less likely to support compromise or trust opposing party officials, undermining democratic deliberation.

Moreover, digital polarization erodes the concept of shared truth. If citizens no longer agree on basic facts, democratic discourse becomes impossible. Media literacy, transparency in algorithmic design, and platform accountability are essential in mitigating these effects.

### **Comparative Reflections and Possible Reforms**

While this study focuses on the U.S., similar dynamics are observable in other democracies like the UK, Brazil, and India. However, the unique scale and freedom of American social media companies make the U.S. particularly vulnerable. Regulatory proposals—such as reforming Section 230, enhancing content moderation, and promoting public interest journalism—have gained traction as potential remedies.

Some scholars advocate for a hybrid model where traditional media ethics are integrated into digital platforms through human curation and algorithmic transparency (Napoli, 2019). Others propose strengthening civic education and digital literacy programs to equip citizens with tools to critically assess online information.

### **Conclusion**

The rise of political polarization in the United States has been profoundly shaped by the evolution of its media landscape. This research has critically examined how both traditional and social media contribute to this polarization, with particular emphasis on their respective structures, mechanisms, and sociopolitical consequences. While traditional media has historically served as a cornerstone

of democratic discourse through its adherence to journalistic norms and editorial oversight, it has increasingly adopted partisan tones that have segmented audiences along ideological lines. Social media, however, represents a more radical departure from traditional information dissemination, characterized by algorithm-driven content personalization, lack of gatekeeping, and the promotion of echo chambers that reinforce existing biases.

The findings of this study underscore the complex, multifaceted ways in which media ecosystems influence political attitudes and behavior. Traditional media, though declining in trust and influence, still maintains a degree of editorial integrity and public accountability. It has, in many cases, been co-opted into partisan divides but retains some capacity for national narrative cohesion. Social media, by contrast, operates within a framework that prioritizes engagement over accuracy, leading to the amplification of sensationalism, polarizing, and often misleading content. The virality of information on these platforms, coupled with declining institutional trust, has contributed to a fragmented information environment where users are increasingly insulated from diverse perspectives.

Notably, the study highlights the specific mechanisms within social media—algorithmic curation, user-driven content creation, and networked mobilization—as critical drivers of ideological segmentation. These features not only reinforce political identities but also diminish the likelihood of cross-cutting exposure and democratic deliberation. The events surrounding Joe Biden’s 2024 Presidential Debat exemplify the real-world implications of this digital polarization, revealing how virtual echo chambers can translate into tangible threats against democratic institutions.

Moreover, the erosion of trust in traditional media has had a cascading effect. Disillusioned with perceived media bias, many individuals have turned to alternative digital sources, often unaware of the ideological and manipulative nature of these platforms. This transition has not necessarily enhanced informational autonomy; instead, it has made users more vulnerable to disinformation campaigns, radicalization, and political manipulation. The result is a feedback loop wherein polarization fuels media fragmentation, which in turn deepens political division.

Addressing the challenges posed by media-induced polarization requires a multi-pronged approach. Policy interventions, such as enhancing transparency in algorithmic operations, reforming content moderation practices, and considering regulatory changes like those to Section 230, may help curb the spread of harmful content. At the same time, educational initiatives aimed at improving digital literacy and critical media consumption are vital to empowering citizens in an increasingly complex media environment.

In conclusion, while both traditional and social media play roles in shaping political polarization, the scale, speed, and structure of social media make it a more potent force in contemporary democratic decline. Safeguarding democratic dialogue and institutional integrity in the United States will depend on a concerted effort to reform media ecosystems, rebuild public trust, and cultivate a more informed and resilient citizenry.

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## **The Rise of the Far Right in the European Union: Challenges for Democracy in Italy, Germany, and France**

**Muhammad Awais\***

### **Abstract**

*As the winds of political change sweep across Europe, the rise of the far right in the corridors of Rome, Paris, and Berlin has become a major political trend reshaping the democratic landscape in the heart of the European Union. Marine Le Pen's National Rally has made significant gains in the European Parliament, winning 31.5% of the vote, more than double President Macron's 14.6%. It is expected to gain popularity in the coming snap parliamentary election. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party finished second in the 2024 European elections, receiving 16% of the vote. In Italy, the neo-fascist Brothers of Italy party, led by Giorgia Meloni, received 28.7% of the vote in the European elections. The research explores the factors contributing to this far-right surge, including anti-immigrant sentiments, economic insecurity, and Euroscepticism. The research methodology adopted for this study is a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. Through a critical analysis of existing literature, examining the political rhetoric of far-right parties and their impact on public discourse regarding the latest European Parliament elections. In conclusion, this research paper will aim to contribute to the unique factors contributing to the rise of the far right and the consequences of far-right policies on democratic institutions and norms.*

**Keywords:** Far-right politics, democratic backsliding, anti-immigration rhetoric, populist discourse, Euroscepticism, authoritarianism.

### **Introduction**

The rise of the far-right in the European Union challenged the foundations of liberal democracy. Once, Europe was considered the champion of liberal democracy, but now, the rapid rise of the far right in the European Union poses a real threat to democracy. The essential feature of liberal democracy is multiculturalism. This far-right surge in Europe is fueled by Euroscepticism, growing anti-immigration rhetoric, nationalist sentiments, and public discontent with traditional political ideologies. The impact of far-right movements is not just domestic but also influences the policies in the EU parliament.

The 2024-2025 elections in Europe served as a turning point, solidifying the surge of the far right. In Italy, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy continue to gain power and influence over far-right movements in Europe. In France, Marine Le Pen's National Rally secured 32% of the vote in the legislative elections and became the most potent opposition force. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) gained a 20.8% vote share in the 2025 federal elections. These developments signal the backsliding of democratic forces in Europe and the rise of right-wing ideologies in the European Union. This research article examines the rise of the far right in Italy, Germany, and France, analyzing the drivers behind this surge, its implications on EU policies, and challenges to democracy.

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## **Methodology**

The research methodology adopted for this study is qualitative and quantitative to explore the rise of the far-right in the European Union and challenges to democracy in Italy, Germany, and France. The study primarily relies on secondary data, including reading articles, academic books, media analysis, organization reports, and surveys, to examine the historical development, the ideological background behind, and the electoral gains of far-right parties such as Italy's Brothers of Italy, Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD), and France's National Rally. A comparative method is also used to analyze the rise of movements in these countries comparatively and also the similarities and differences between political movements. Statistical data is also used to statistically analyze the electoral results, public opinion surveys, and the influence of these data on public perception.

To evaluate the impact on democracy, the research uses the framework of Democratic Backsliding and Populist Radical Right Theory by focusing on indicators such as the weakening of institutions, restrictions on civil liberties, challenges to judicial independence, and media manipulation.

## **The gap in literature**

There is an extensive literature on the rise of the far right in the EU already existing. But still, there is a gap in the literature that includes specifically studying the implications of these movements on democracy in these countries and how much extent they influence. How far-right leaders are influencing EU policies. What recent elections in Germany and France changed the political order in both countries? How far-right parties attempt to reshape EU norms and policies within its institutions. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of far-right movements and assessing their impacts on democratic institutions in Italy, Germany, and France.

## **Literature Review**

### **Rise of the Far Right in Italy**

The rise of far-right parties in Italy represents one of the most significant political shifts in European politics. In 2022, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy won a historic victory in the Italian general elections (Marino, 2022). It was the first time after WW2 that any far-right political party had led the country. After coming into power, Meloni adopted a dual strategy by balancing nationalist policies on immigration and national identity with engagement at the EU level (Gabriel Echeverría, 2024).

Meloni takes dynamic actions by tightening border control and expanding agreements with North African nations to reduce migrants' departure, particularly with Tunisia and Libya (HOF, 2018). The basic purpose of these agreements was to stop illegal migration, but these policies faced criticism for failing to reduce overall migrant levels. There was a significant increase in the number, almost 60%, in 2023 despite her administration's pledge to stop the huge flow of migrants.

Meloni's government faces criticism for attempting to limit media freedom and judicial independence and raising concerns about democratic backsliding. These authoritarian tendencies raise serious concerns about the rise of far-right ideology in the European Union.

The institutionalization of the far right in Italy did not begin with Meloni. Before her rise, Matteo Salvini's Lega played a key role in mainstreaming nationalist agendas and anti-immigration

policies (Ferraresi, 2021) As interior minister from 2018 to 2019, Salvini took strict measures against immigration in Europe. Some of her policies include

- The Closed Ports policies, which blocked migrant rescue ships from docking in Italian ports.
- The Security Decree penalized NGOs assisting migrants and criminalized humanitarian actions.

These measures were widely condemned by human rights organizations. In 2019, Salvini faced kidnapping charges for refusing to allow over 100 rescued migrants to disembark from a ship. These incidents show her hardline stance on immigration (Project, 2023)

Unlike other European far-right leaders, Meloni advocates for the strengthening of the European Union. Domestically, she has maintained a hardline stance on immigration, calling for asylum restrictions and tighter border policies. Her administration emphasized economic nationalism, promoting “Italy First” trade policies that favor domestic industries over foreign competition. In social policies, she speaks against LGBTQ+ policies and anti-abortion rhetoric. Meloni’s way of handling the media and the judiciary raises serious concerns about freedom of expression and justice. Critics argued that her administration’s influence over public broadcasters is a sign of increasing authoritarianism (Balfour, 2024)

Meloni’s leadership has elevated Italy’s role within the European Union far-right movement, making her one of the most influential far-right leaders in the EU. Her position as a moderate figure within the far-right spectrum has allowed her to maintain her alliances with conservative forces like Poland’s Law and Justice (PiS) and Spain’s Vox, while also distancing herself from more extreme parties like the Alternative for Germany (AfD) (Farmer, 2024)

Italy’s far-right evolution under Giorgia Meloni represents a new model of nationalist governance, blending hardline immigration policies, media control, and economic nationalism with strategic EU engagement. Her approach differs from more overtly authoritarian leaders like Viktor Orban.

### **Rise of the Far Right in Germany**

Germany has experienced a notable surge in far-right policies over the past decade, with Alternative for Germany (AfD) becoming the most prominent nationalist force in the country. It was founded in 2013 as a Eurosceptic party opposed to the Eurozone bailout policies (Basset, 2025) Gradually, AfD shifted its focus to immigration, nationalism, and anti-elite rhetoric. This transformation accelerated after the 2015 refugee crisis when then-chancellor Angela Merkel’s open-door policy led to the arrival of over one million asylum seekers (Ernst, 2021) The AfD party capitalized on these concerns by raising nationalist rhetoric, positioning itself as the primary opposition to Germany’s pro-immigration policies, and expanding its support base, particularly in the economically weaker regions of eastern Germany.

In 2023, AfD secured its first-ever regional election victory in Thuringia (Frymark, 2024) marking a historic victory for any far-right party after WW2. The party’s success in eastern states such as Saxony, Brandenburg, and Thuringia reflects regional economic disparities, declining distrust in mainstream parties, and growing dissatisfaction with Berlin’s policies.

Despite its electoral gains, the AfD has remained a controversial party. The AfD’s increasing radicalization has drawn sharp criticism from political and civil groups. In 2024, investigative reports exposed that key AfD leaders attended secret meetings discussing mass deportation (Kirez,

2024) The meeting included a discussion on expelling immigrants, asylum seekers, and even German citizens of migrant backgrounds. These revelations triggered a temporary decline in AfD popularity and led to massive nationwide protests, with thousands of Germans rallying against the party's growing influence.

Despite public backlash, the AfD has continued to gain electoral ground, leveraging growing frustration over inflation, rising energy costs, and dissatisfaction with mainstream parties. In some instances, mainstream conservative parties, like the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), have faced criticism for directly cooperating with the AfD on legislative matters (Reuters, 2025) These measures raise concerns about the normalization of far-right ideology in Germany.

At the 2025 AfD party conference in Riesa, the party officially nominated Alice Weidel as its candidate for chancellor (News, 2025) reinforcing its commitment to adopting hardline nationalist policies on the agenda. Weidel outlined a platform focused on:

- Anti-EU policies, including calls for reducing German financial contributions to Brussels and stricter sovereignty policies.
- Radical immigration policies, including the controversial promotion of “remigration,” advocating for the deportation of asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and certain legal migrants.
- Nationalist economic policies, tax cuts, state protectionism, and a rollback of green energy policies that have become central to Germany's climate strategy.

Unlike other far-right parties in Europe, such as Italy's Brothers of Italy and France's Rassemblement National (RN), the AfD has remained largely isolated from major far-right alliances at the European level. Marine Le Pen (RN) expelled the AfD from its European parliamentary group in 2024 (Adghirni, 2024) following the remigration controversy, fearing that association with Germany's increasingly far-right group could damage her party's efforts to appear more mainstream. Similarly, Italy's Meloni and her European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) bloc have kept their distance from the AfD, viewing its extreme rhetoric as a liability.

The rise of AfD marks a fundamental challenge to Germany's postwar democratic order (Hutagalung, 2024) Unlike other far-right parties in Europe that have sought political normalization, the AfD has increasingly embraced radical nationalist and anti-immigration policies, drawing comparisons to Germany's nationalist movements of the past. While public opposition remains strong, the AfD's continued electoral growth raises concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and fragmentation of Germany's political landscape.

### **Rise of the Far Right in France**

In France, the far-right Rassemblement National (RN) has undergone a significant transformation under the leadership of Marine Le Pen. In 2011, she adopted a strategy of detoxification aimed at shedding the party's extremist image. Historically associated with xenophobia, Semitism, and ultra-nationalism (France-Presse, 2018) RN has repositioned itself as a populist, nationalist, and Eurosceptic party with broader electoral appeal. This strategy has been remarkably successful, leading RN to record electoral victories and positioning it as a serious contender for power.

The 2024 European Parliament elections marked a historic moment for RN, as it secured first place in France, surpassing Emmanuel Macron's centrist alliance (Anandhan, 2024) This electoral success underscored the party's growing mainstream acceptance and its ability to mobilize a

diverse voter base. Following its EP victory, RN achieved its best-ever national assembly elections, reinforcing its status as the dominating right-wing force in France.

Despite its electoral gains, RN remains committed to hardline immigration policies, economic nationalism, and a vision of a “Europe of Foreign Nations,” which contrasts sharply with France’s traditional pro-European stance (Preve, 2024) Le Pen’s ability to balance radical policies with a more polished political image has made RN a more viable governing alternative in France.

One of the key reasons for RN’s continued success is its ability to expand beyond its traditional far-right voter base. Previously, party support was concentrated among older, white, working-class voters, particularly in rural areas and economically struggling regions (Préault, 2024) However, recent elections have shown that RN has significantly appealed to its interest in young voters, blue-collar workers, and even segments of the middle class. In the 2024 European Parliament elections, a notable percentage of RN’s support came from young voters under 35 (Azmanova, 2024) This reflects that the party is engaging with the young generation. While RN’s stronghold remains in rural France, the party has also made inroads into suburban areas, where concerns about crime, economic insecurity, and immigration resonate with voters.

The next French presidential elections will be a critical test for RN and the broader far-right movements in Europe. Marine Le Pen, who has already made it to the second round of presidential elections in both 2017 and 2022, is widely expected to run again. Polls indicate that she stands a strong chance of winning.

A Le Pen presidency would mark a fundamental shift in France’s political landscape as he promised to drastically limit migration, prioritize French citizens in social benefits, and restrict access to nationality for immigrants. Her party has consistently advocated for a referendum on immigration laws. RN supports protectionist policies, including reshoring industries, prioritizing French businesses, and opposing free trade. Marine Le Pen remains a vocal critic of EU integration, seeking to limit Brussels's influence over national policies. She has called for France to reclaim its control over laws, borders, and economic policies.

### **Far-Right Electoral Gains in Europe: A Historical Timeline of Events**

The rise of far-right parties across Europe has been shaped by historical events, economic crises, and shifting political landscapes. While far-right ideologies have existed in various forms throughout the 20th century, the past few decades have seen this resurgence, with parties moving from fringe movements to mainstream political forces. The following timeline outlines key moments that have contributed to the rise of the far right in Europe.

#### **1. Post-WWII Era: The initial decline of the far-right (1945-1980)**

Following WWII, far-right and nationalist movements were largely discredited due to their association with fascist regimes in Germany, Italy, and Spain (report, 2024) The postwar period saw European countries prioritize **democratic reconstruction**, economic cooperation, and the establishment of institutions like the European Union (EU) to prevent the resurgence of authoritarian regimes. Despite this, some far-right movements persisted. In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen founded the **Front National (FN)** in 1972, advocating against immigration and European integration (Jaffa, 2025) In Italy, neo-fascist movements like the **Social Movement (SMI)** maintained a small but active political following.

## **2. The 1980s-1990s: The Far Right Enters Mainstream Politics**

By the late 20th century, the far right began re-entering mainstream politics, particularly in response to concerns over immigration, economic downturn, and globalization.

**France:** The Front National (FN) under **Jean-Marie Le Pen** gained significant support by the 1980s, reaching 15% of the national vote in the 1988 presidential elections (AMENGAY, 2015)

**Germany:** Neo-Nazi groups and far-right extremism reemerged in eastern Germany after reunification, capitalizing on economic struggles and unemployment in former communist regions (Jegić, 2018)

## **3. The Early 2000s: Security concerns and anti-globalization sentiments**

The early 21st century saw further far-right electoral gains, particularly after the 9/11 and 2008 financial crises, which heightened anti-immigrant and nationalistic sentiments.

**Italy:** Silvio Berlusconi's government (2001-2011) increasingly aligned with nationalistic rhetoric, paving the way for the rise of **Matteo Salvini's Lega** as a major political force (Çay, 2020)

During this period, the EU's expansion into Eastern Europe (2004) led to increased debate over migration, with many Western European countries imposing temporary work restrictions on Eastern European migrants, fueling anti-immigrant sentiments.

## **4. The 2015 Migration Crisis: A Turning Point for the Far Right**

The 2015 migration crisis was a critical moment for far-right parties, allowing them to significantly expand their electoral base. Over one million refugees, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and North Africa, arrived in Europe, triggering public anxiety over border security, cultural integration, and security dynamics.

**Italy:** Matteo Salvini's Lega surged in popularity, joining a coalition government in 2018 and implementing some of Europe's strictest anti-immigration policies (Cervi, 2020)

**Germany:** The Alternative for Germany (AfD), originally founded as a Eurosceptic party in 2013, rebranded itself as an anti-immigration movement, gaining 94 seats (12.6%) of the vote in the **2017 federal elections** (Hannover, 2017)

**France:** Marine Le Pen's National Rally made historic gains, reaching 34% of the vote in the 2017 presidential elections (cbs, 2025)

## **5. The 2020s: The Far Right Becomes a Governing Force**

By the 2020s, far-right parties moved from opposition to governance in several countries, marking a historic shift in European politics.

**Italy (2022):** Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (FDI) won 26% of the vote, forming a far-right government and Italy's first far-right government since WWII.

**Germany (2023):** The AfD won its first-ever regional election in Thuringia, making a first-time far-right party secure a position on the country level in postwar Germany.

**France (2022-2024):** Le Pen's National Rally secured a record number of seats in the National Assembly and won the 2024 European Parliamentary elections in France, positioning her as a leading candidate for the 2027 presidential elections.

**European Parliament (2024):** Far-right parties secured almost 25% of the parliamentary seats, forming two new groups.

- **Patriots for Europe:** (led by Viktor Orbán and Marine Le Pen)
- **Europe of Sovereign Nations:** (Including Germany's AfD and other Nationalist parties from Eastern Europe)

**Table 1: Far-right parties Electoral Gains**

Country	Far-Right Party	EU Election Result (2024)	National Impact	Key Trends	Democracy-Related Concerns
Italy	Brothers of Italy (FDI)	28.7% 1st place	Giorgia Meloni is PM (since 2022)	Demos & Pi (2023): 61% support	Media control, curbs on judiciary, tension with NGOs
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AFD)	16.5% 2nd place	Surpassed SPD; CDU remains 1st	Infratest dimap (2024); AFD leads among men under 35	Constitutional surveillance
France	National Rally (RN)	31.5% 1st place	Macron dissolved parliament; snap elections (June-July 2024)	IFOP (2024): 42% of youth	Anti-immigration laws, Rise in nationalism

### Challenges for Democracy

- **Threat to Liberal Democratic Values:**

The rise of the far right challenges the core idea of liberal democracy, including multiculturalism, which is one of the foundational aspects of modern liberal democracy.

- **Euroscepticism and Nationalism:**

Far-right parties promote Euroscepticism and national ideologies over European integration and solidarity.

- **Erosion of civil liberties and institutional integrity:**

In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's administration faces criticism for limiting media access and judicial independence.

- **Anti-immigration policies and human rights concerns:**

Radical immigration policies (Italy's closed ports policy and remigration agenda in Germany) conflict with democratic values such as human dignity and equality.

- **Mainstreaming of Extremism:**

In Germany, mainstream parties like the CDU have cooperated with the AfD in the local legislature, indicating the normalization of far-right ideologies.

- **Youth Engagement in Far-Right Movements:**

A prominent shift of young voters towards far-right parties suggests a generational threat in Europe.

## **Findings**

- **Continued Electoral Growth:**

Far-right parties are expected to gain electoral growth in upcoming elections in Italy, Germany and France. They will continue to gain positions at governmental levels and specially at EU policy making level.

- **Policy Impacts:**

When these leaders will get positions at EU level, they will influence policies like immigration, judicial freedom, and human right related. These developments could pose a threat to EU on broader scale.

- **Democratic Erosion:**

Far-right parties ideologically stand against the democratic values of human rights, judicial independence, media freedom and accountability. Rise in far-right ideology in these countries could pose a potential challenge for the democracy.

- **Economic Anxiety:**

Anti-immigration policies could decrease the number of foreign workers. This could be a challenge for local industry and consequences will be in form of inflation.

- **European Integration Under Threat:**

Far-right parties are against European integration, rising trends in far-right ideologies poses a serious challenge to European integration.

## **Conclusion**

The rise of far-right movements in Italy, Germany, and France marks a profound transformation in European politics, reflecting broader global trends of populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism. Once considered fringe movements, far-right parties have now secured government positions, shaped public discourse, and influenced European policymaking. Their success has been driven by a combination of migration issues, economic instability, public discontent with mainstream parties, and cultural fears.

The future of European democracy will depend on how mainstream parties, civil societies, and EU institutions respond to this development. If democratic forces fail to address voters' concerns about migration, economic insecurity, and political alienation, the far right's appeal will likely continue to grow. Rising far-right ideologies poses a serious challenge to European integration, democratic values, free trade, human rights values and climate change issue.

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## **Overcoming Gender Exclusion: Women's Role in Pakistan's Democracy**

**Aaisha Siddiqua\***

### **Abstract**

*This study explores the challenges and contributions of women in Pakistan's democratic journey. Although the Constitution of Pakistan promises equality and political participation for all citizens, women have remained underrepresented in democratic institutions and processes. This article aims to investigate the key social, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent women's equal participation in democracy and highlight the efforts and successes of women who have challenged these barriers. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study includes a literature review and some interviews with female political activists, local government members, and party workers from Lahore. The results reveal that patriarchy, illiteracy, poverty, and lack of political training are major factors of exclusion. However, it also shows that women are increasingly participating in local politics, social activism, and national debates, especially with the support of legal quotas and civil society organizations. The study concludes that Pakistan's democracy cannot be truly representative unless it includes the voices of its women. It recommends strengthening education, political training, gender-sensitive laws, and party reforms. Only by overcoming gender exclusion can Pakistan move toward a more inclusive and sustainable democracy.*

**Keywords:** Gender exclusion, Women in politics, Democracy in Pakistan, Political participation, Inclusive governance

### **Introduction**

Democracy is a system of government that promises equality, representation, and participation for all citizens, regardless of gender. While this ideal is widely accepted in democratic theory, the actual practice often falls short, especially in countries like Pakistan. Women constitute almost half of Pakistan's population, but their participation in democratic processes has historically been limited due to multiple structural and cultural barriers (Khan, 2020).

Women in Pakistan have played important roles in politics since independence. Figures like Fatima Jinnah, who, along with the freedom struggle, also challenged military rule, and Benazir Bhutto, the first female Prime Minister of a Muslim-majority country, symbolize women's potential in politics. However, these individual successes have not translated into widespread empowerment. Women continue to face social and institutional obstacles that limit their ability to participate in decision-making.

This article examines the various forms of gender exclusion in Pakistan's democracy. It explores how societal norms, political party structures, and systemic inequalities hinder women's participation. It also highlights progress made through legal reforms, activism, and the increasing role of civil society. The study aims to propose practical recommendations for achieving gender-inclusive democracy in Pakistan.

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## **Literature Review**

Gender exclusion in politics is a global issue, but it is especially prominent in patriarchal societies. Scholars such as Bari (2005) and Shaheed (2010) have pointed out that women in Pakistan are often excluded from formal political spaces due to deep-rooted cultural and religious norms. These norms define politics as a male domain and view women's involvement with suspicion.

According to UN Women (2020), inclusive political institutions not only promote equality but also improve governance outcomes. Women's participation in politics has been linked to better policy decisions on health, education, and social welfare. When women participate in politics, they bring attention to important social issues such as health, education, and welfare. Research shows that female leaders prioritize policies that benefit families and communities. For example, women politicians are more likely to support healthcare reforms, increase education budgets, and introduce social welfare programs that reduce poverty (Krook & Sanín, 2020). In many countries, women's participation has led to better maternal health services, improved child education, and stronger laws against gender-based violence (UN Women, 2020). In Pakistan, female parliamentarians have played a key role in passing laws for women's rights and child protection (Shaheed, 2010). Studies also suggest that women in politics reduce corruption and improve governance (Bari, 2005).

To achieve inclusive democracy and effective policymaking, it is essential to increase women's political participation and ensure their voices are heard. However, despite these benefits, political structures often remain male-dominated. Studies also show that legal measures such as quotas can increase women's representation. For instance, the National Commission on the Status of Women (2021) notes that reserved seats in Pakistan's national and provincial assemblies have brought more women into formal politics. Still, most of these women have limited influence due to a lack of political training and support. Khan (2018) and Krook and Sanín (2020) highlight the role of violence and harassment in deterring women from entering politics. Online abuse, public shaming, and even physical attacks discourage active participation. Furthermore, women from marginalized backgrounds face intersectional discrimination based on class, ethnicity, and religion. Women from marginalized backgrounds face multiple layers of discrimination due to their class, ethnicity, and religion. In many societies, poor women have fewer educational and job opportunities, making it harder for them to participate in politics or public life. Ethnic minority women often experience additional bias, limiting their access to leadership roles.

Religious discrimination further increases their struggles. For example, in Pakistan, women from religious minorities face challenges in voting, employment, and social mobility. These intersecting barriers make it difficult for marginalized women to break free from cycles of poverty and exclusion. To create a fair society, policies must address these overlapping forms of discrimination. Governments should provide equal opportunities through education, legal protections, and representation in decision-making bodies. Only then can all women fully participate in democracy and social progress.

Overall, the literature suggests that improving women's political participation requires a multi-level approach involving legal reform, education, and cultural change.

## **Methodology**

This research follows a qualitative methodology supported by secondary sources. Secondary sources include academic articles, government reports, and publications by civil society organizations. These were used to contextualize findings and compare them with national trends.

## **Results and Analysis**

The findings reveal that women face numerous challenges when engaging with politics in Pakistan. These challenges fall into several categories:

### **Cultural and Familial Constraints**

Many participants noted that family resistance was their first barrier. Traditional gender roles often discourage women from entering public life. Women are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities, and political involvement is viewed as inappropriate. Cultural and family expectations play a major role in limiting women's participation in politics. In many traditional societies, including Pakistan, women are expected to prioritize household duties such as childcare, cooking, and managing the home. These gender roles create the belief that politics is a male-dominated field and not suitable for women (Shaheed, 2010).

Many families discourage women from joining politics due to concerns about their safety and reputation. Political activities often require public engagement, travel, and interaction with men, which some families see as inappropriate for women. In conservative communities, women who participate in politics may face criticism or social pressure to withdraw (Bari, 2005).

Even when women do enter politics, they often struggle to gain family support. Some husbands or male relatives refuse to let women make independent decisions, limiting their ability to fully engage in political activities (Krook & Sanín, 2020). Moreover, women from strict cultural backgrounds may need permission from their families before attending political meetings or elections.

Additionally, women who challenge these societal norms may face backlash. They may be labeled as "too bold" or accused of neglecting their families. In extreme cases, they might even experience threats or violence (Human Rights Watch, 2020). These pressures force many talented women to stay away from politics, even if they are interested in making a difference.

To address these challenges, governments and civil society must promote awareness about gender equality. Programs that encourage families to support women's leadership can help break cultural barriers. Creating safe spaces for women in politics and enforcing laws against gender discrimination can also empower more women to participate in democratic processes.

### **Financial and Logistical Barriers**

Unlike their male counterparts, women often lack access to the funds and networks needed for political mobilization. Women face significant financial and logistical barriers when trying to enter politics. Unlike men, they often have limited access to personal savings, financial support, and political funding. Running for office requires money for election campaigns, transportation, advertising, and organizing political events. Since many women do not have independent incomes or financial backing from political parties, they struggle to compete with male candidates who have stronger financial resources (Murray et al., 2023).

In many cases, political parties hesitate to invest in female candidates, believing that they have a lower chance of winning elections. This lack of funding makes it difficult for women to promote their campaigns, reach voters, or build a strong political presence. Additionally, women often lack access to influential networks that provide political guidance, connections, and financial

assistance. Male politicians usually have long-established networks of business and political contacts that help them succeed, while women find it harder to enter these circles.

Logistical challenges also make it harder for women to engage in politics. Many political meetings and campaign events are scheduled at night, which can be unsafe for women in certain areas. Additionally, women with family responsibilities may find it difficult to travel for political activities. In many cases, women do not have personal transportation, making them dependent on male family members or public transport, which adds to their challenges.

To overcome these barriers, political parties should allocate special funds to support women candidates. More training programs should be introduced to help women develop fundraising and networking skills. Governments and organizations can also promote policies that make political spaces safer and more accessible for women. Addressing financial and logistical barriers is essential to ensuring equal political opportunities and strengthening democracy.

### **Party Politics and Tokenism**

Most women reported that political parties do not take them seriously. They are often included to fulfill quotas but are excluded from major decision-making. Reserved seats are filled through nomination rather than election, reducing accountability and legitimacy. Women in politics often face tokenism, where they are included in political parties only to fulfill gender quotas but are not given real decision-making power. Many political parties claim to support women's participation, but in reality, they do not take female politicians seriously. Women are often placed in symbolic roles with little authority, limiting their ability to influence policies and party decisions (Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020).

One major issue is the system of reserved seats. While these seats ensure women's presence in legislative bodies, they are usually filled through party nominations rather than direct elections. This means that women on reserved seats are often selected based on party loyalty rather than merit. As a result, they remain dependent on party leadership and hesitate to challenge dominant political narratives. Unlike directly elected politicians, they are not accountable to the public, which weakens their legitimacy and influence in governance.

Another problem is that women in political parties are rarely given leadership roles. Key positions such as party chairpersons, secretaries, or spokespersons are usually held by men. Even when women are part of central committees, their opinions are often ignored in major policy decisions. This exclusion discourages many capable women from actively engaging in politics, as they see little opportunity for career growth.

Moreover, women in politics face additional challenges such as internal party discrimination, lack of access to funding, and exclusion from informal decision-making networks. These barriers prevent them from becoming strong political leaders.

To improve the situation, political parties must ensure that women are included in meaningful roles. They should be given equal opportunities to contest general seats and hold leadership positions. Women politicians should also receive training in governance and policymaking to enhance their effectiveness. Real inclusion, not just token representation, is necessary for a more democratic and equitable political system.

## **Harassment and Violence**

Harassment in political settings and online spaces was reported by nearly all participants. Some faced threats and intimidation during election campaigns. This aligns with Krook and Sanín's (2020) findings on gender-based political violence. Women in politics often face harassment and violence, both in public spaces and online. Many female politicians experience verbal abuse, threats, and intimidation during election campaigns and political meetings. This creates a hostile environment that discourages them from fully participating in politics. Some women are targeted with false accusations or personal attacks to damage their reputation and force them to withdraw from political activities.

Online harassment is also a major issue. Women politicians receive abusive messages, threats, and character assassinations on social media. Many face cyberbullying, including the spread of fake news and inappropriate content to discredit them. These attacks aim to silence women and make them feel unsafe in political spaces.

Physical violence is another serious challenge. In some cases, women have been attacked, kidnapped, or even killed for challenging powerful political figures. During elections, female candidates and their supporters sometimes face direct threats or physical harm, making it risky for them to campaign freely.

To protect women in politics, strict laws should be enforced against gender-based political violence. Political parties and security agencies must ensure women's safety in elections and policymaking. Without addressing harassment and violence, true gender equality in politics cannot be achieved.

## **Role of Education and Training**

Women with higher education levels showed more confidence and effectiveness in their roles. However, they emphasized the need for training programs on law-making, leadership, and public speaking. Education plays a key role in empowering women in politics. Women with higher education levels tend to be more confident, knowledgeable, and effective in leadership roles. Education helps them understand governance, policymaking, and public administration, making them better equipped to participate in democratic processes (Lone et al., 2020). Educated women are also more likely to challenge societal norms that limit their political participation.

However, education alone is not enough. Many women in politics have expressed the need for specialized training programs to help them develop essential political skills. Training in law-making, leadership, public speaking, and media handling is crucial for their success. Women who receive such training feel more prepared to engage in political debates, propose policies, and respond to challenges in political environments.

Unfortunately, many women, especially from rural areas, lack access to these opportunities. Without proper training, they struggle to compete with male politicians who have more experience and support networks. Governments, political parties, and civil society organizations must work together to provide regular training sessions for women in politics. By investing in education and capacity-building programs, more women can take active roles in decision-making, making democracy more inclusive and effective.

## **Civil Society Support**

Organizations like Aurat Foundation have provided crucial support in terms of awareness and capacity-building. Participants credited these groups for helping them enter and stay in politics. Civil society organizations play a vital role in supporting women's political participation. Groups like the **Aurat Foundation** and other women's rights organizations have helped raise awareness about gender equality and the importance of women in decision-making. These organizations provide training, legal assistance, and advocacy to help women enter and stay in politics.

Many women politicians credit such organizations for giving them the confidence and knowledge needed to succeed. Civil society groups conduct leadership workshops, media training, and policy discussions to prepare women for political challenges. They also help women understand election processes, voter engagement, and campaigning strategies. This support is especially important for women from marginalized backgrounds who lack political experience or resources.

Additionally, these organizations act as watchdogs, highlighting cases of discrimination, harassment, and violence against women in politics. They push for reforms, such as gender quotas and stronger laws to protect female politicians. Without civil society's efforts, many women would struggle to break into the political system.

To strengthen women's political participation, governments and political parties should collaborate with these organizations. Expanding their reach and resources will ensure that more women receive the support they need to become effective political leaders and policymakers.

## **Discussion**

Gender exclusion in Pakistan's democracy is not just a legal or institutional issue—it is deeply rooted in cultural and societal norms. While reserved seats have provided women with some access to political spaces, they have not guaranteed real authority or decision-making power. Many women in politics find themselves in symbolic roles, where they are included only to meet quotas but remain excluded from key decisions. This proves that representation without actual empowerment is not enough to achieve gender equality in politics.

Political parties are one of the main institutions that sustain gender inequality. Most parties lack internal democracy and gender-sensitive policies, which makes it difficult for women to rise through the ranks. Even when women actively participate in party politics, they are often given minor roles rather than leadership positions. To change this, political parties must introduce internal gender quotas and ensure that women receive proper training in leadership, policymaking, and governance. Without these structural changes, legal reforms alone will not be effective in improving women's political representation.

Another major barrier to women's political participation is violence and harassment. Female politicians face threats, intimidation, and abuse, both in public spaces and online. This discourages many women from engaging in politics, fearing for their safety. To address this issue, the legal system must strengthen protective mechanisms for women politicians. Cybercrime units should actively monitor and take action against online harassment, while women's protection laws must be enforced to ensure a safe political environment.

The media also plays a significant role in shaping the perception of women in politics. On the one hand, it can be a powerful tool to promote women leaders and highlight their contributions. However, in many cases, the media reinforces gender stereotypes, portraying women as weak or

unfit for political leadership. To change this, a shift in media narratives is necessary. News channels, newspapers, and social media platforms should focus on promoting positive and realistic representations of women in politics.

Lastly, achieving real gender inclusion in democracy requires collaboration across different sectors. State institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners must work together to create long-term strategies that support women in politics. This includes education reforms, leadership training, and public awareness campaigns to challenge traditional gender norms.

If these issues are addressed effectively, Pakistan can move towards a truly inclusive and representative democracy where women play an equal role in shaping the country's future.

## **Conclusion**

Women's participation in Pakistan's democracy has improved over the years, but it remains far from adequate. While more women are entering politics, they still face significant challenges that prevent them from fully contributing to governance. Cultural norms, political party structures, financial constraints, and harassment continue to limit their roles. Despite these barriers, women are making valuable contributions at all levels of government, from local councils to national policymaking. However, for Pakistan to truly become a representative and inclusive democracy, it must go beyond symbolic inclusion and ensure that women have real power and decision-making authority. To achieve substantive participation, several key reforms and initiatives are necessary:

### **1. Reforming Political Party Structures**

One of the biggest barriers to women's participation is the structure of political parties. Many political parties include women only to fulfill gender quotas but do not allow them to take leadership positions or influence important decisions. This lack of internal democracy prevents capable women from rising through the ranks. To address this issue, parties must introduce:

- Internal gender quotas, ensuring that women are included in leadership roles, not just on paper.
- Transparent and fair nomination processes, so women are selected based on merit rather than personal connections.
- Gender-sensitive policies, including equal access to party funding and training.

By making these changes, political parties can create an environment where women are not just present but also empowered to make meaningful contributions.

### **2. Expanding Training Programs**

Many women in politics lack formal training in leadership, governance, and policymaking. This makes it difficult for them to compete with male politicians who have more experience and support. Expanding training programs can help women develop the necessary skills to succeed in politics. These programs should focus on:

- Public speaking and debate, helping women express their views confidently.
- Law-making and governance, so they understand the legislative process.
- Campaign strategies to help them run successful election campaigns.

Both government and civil society organizations should work together to provide these training programs, particularly for women from rural areas who have even fewer opportunities.

### **3. Strengthening Legal Protections**

Harassment and violence are major reasons why many women hesitate to join politics. Female politicians often face threats, intimidation, and character attacks, both in person and online. To ensure their safety, Pakistan needs to:

- Enforce strict laws against harassment and gender-based violence in politics.
- Strengthen cybercrime laws to protect women from online abuse.
- Create safe environments for women in political offices and public meetings.

Legal protections must be actively enforced, with authorities taking swift action against those who harass or threaten women in politics.

### **4. Supporting Civil Society Initiatives**

Civil society organizations like the Aurat Foundation have played a crucial role in supporting women's political participation. These groups provide:

- Awareness campaigns to encourage women to vote and run for office.
- Legal assistance for women facing discrimination or violence in politics.
- Networking opportunities to connect women with mentors and political leaders.

The government should collaborate with civil society to expand these initiatives and ensure that women have the resources they need to succeed in politics.

### **5. Promoting Gender Equality in Media and Education**

The media plays a powerful role in shaping public perceptions of women in politics. Unfortunately, it often reinforces negative stereotypes, portraying women as weak or incapable of leadership. To change this, media outlets should:

- Highlight the achievements of women leaders, instead of focusing only on their personal lives.
- Avoid sexist language and biased reporting in political coverage.
- Promote positive narratives about women in politics through documentaries and interviews.

Education is another crucial area. Schools and universities should include gender studies and civic education in their curriculums to teach young people about the importance of women's participation in democracy. Changing mindsets from an early age will help create a more inclusive society in the future.

## **The Need for Inclusive Democracy**

An inclusive democracy is not only fair but also more effective. Studies have shown that when women participate in governance, they help create better policies on health, education, and social welfare. Their involvement leads to stronger institutions and more balanced decision-making.

As Pakistan faces complex social, economic, and political challenges, it cannot afford to ignore the contributions of half its population. By reforming political party structures, expanding training programs, strengthening legal protections, supporting civil society initiatives, and promoting gender equality in media and education, Pakistan can move towards a democracy that is truly representative and inclusive. The active participation of women is essential for national progress, and investing in their empowerment will benefit the entire country.

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## **Comparative Analysis of Democratization in Egypt and Tunisia, Key Factors Behind Success and Failure in MENA (2011-2024)**

**Mahnoor Noshewan\***

### **Abstract**

*In this paper, I have critically evaluated the influence of the Arab Spring on the democratization process in the Arab world, concentrating mostly on Tunisia and Egypt. In general, this research aims to answer three main research questions: how the Arab Spring affected democratization, what are the main reasons for the success of the formation of democracy in Salaheddin, and what factors led to the failure of democratization movements in Egypt. In this paper, comparative results of the Arab Spring in various countries are provided, and the paper also shows that Tunisia experienced a relative success in the formation of a democratic framework, while in Egypt, regression into authoritarianism was the outcome. As opposed to being dominated by the military, the economy is challenged, political cohesion is lacking, and the role of civil society, political pluralism, and international support are key factors in Tunisia, not in Egypt. The outcome of these particular democracies is important when considering the role of the Arab Spring in influencing political transitions. Drawing on this gap, the study considers the political, economic, and social determinants that shaped the process of democratization in both countries. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes case studies and document analysis to assess institutional reforms, civil society engagement, and external influences. The findings are expected to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for democratization in the region, offering valuable implications for policymakers, scholars, and international organizations. By contributing to the discourse on political transitions in MENA, this research aims to enhance the understanding of democratic consolidation and regression in post-revolutionary states.*

**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, Civil society, Democratization, Egypt, Middle East, Political pluralism, Tunisia.

### **Introduction**

The rise and fall of democratization in the Middle East and North African region present an intriguing narrative marked by aspiration and disillusionment. Recent historical movements, especially the Arab spring, have enlightened the many complexities involved in transitioning from authoritarianism to democratic governance. As Huntington (1991), defined a wave of democratization as "a group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period".

The failure or inadequacy of embedding an accountable and functioning political system is held to be caused by an embedded political framework, historical background, institutional legacy, and cultural baggage. With the annual data given by Freedom House, none of the political systems in the region was considered "free" before 2010. (Eryilmaz, 2017). The popular uprisings that began

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in Tunisia and spread throughout the Middle East in December 2010 caused mass speculation over whether it was the inauguration of a "fourth wave," the beginning of the end of authoritarian rule in the region. What came so strongly and abruptly in Tunisia followed in Egypt, as the whole world watched the regimes come down. For so long had the people who participated in the Arab spring been denied political and religious freedoms, justice free of corruption, and economic opportunities that it was time for change. (Dunay, 2017).

The Arab uprisings of 2011- 2012, popular protests challenging authoritarian rule across the Middle East and North Africa, took the world by surprise. The possibility that the Arab region might finally be loosening the chains of tyranny was electrifying. But within five years, this hope had largely been dashed. Popular mobilization had left in its wake a political scene littered with state collapse, civil war, and authoritarian regression. This dark turn in the Arab world was bound to happen to pessimists. To others, however, alternative routes were available (Bellin, 2015). The growing antigovernment demonstrations, revolutions, and armed rebellions in 2011 in the MENA culminated in the "Arab spring". As a result of the Arab spring, four leaders of the region's authoritarian governments have been overthrown: Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Qaddafi in Libya, and Saleh in Yemen. From Yemen to Syria to Morocco and Bahrain, contentious politics and protest movements have spread across the Arab world (Barakat, 2020). Although the two transitions started off similarly, they ended up being quite different, with reasons ranging from economic constraints to lack of camaraderie in constitution-building. While these reasons are plausible, they are not mutually exclusive. (Dunay,2017)

The uprisings in Tunisia were the first in a series of events that made a powerful impression on ordinary people in the region, and as a result, they spread like wildfire to its neighboring countries. The events that took place in Tunisia demonstrated that broad-based movements such as the one that overthrew the Tunisian government were both powerful and effective. Protesters in Egypt subsequently occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo on 25th January 2011 (Machrouh, 2017). It then locates the structural and agential factors that make a paced democracy, such as in Tunisia, successful rather than failed transitions, as seen in the case of Egypt. It argues that bargained pacts can bring about democratization and overcome this contentious cleavage; and that, ultimately, such mutual adaptations between the realms of religion and politics are not alien to the Islamic tradition (Alaoui, 2020). The juxtaposition of Tunisia and Egypt also makes for an elegant paired comparison. While considering all these differences with utmost care, these cases offer diametrically contrasting outcomes of successful versus failed paced transitions between Islamist and non-Islamist actors. What makes Tunisia and Egypt different is that before their regime transitions, both qualified as closed autocracies rather than competitive authoritarian regimes (Alaoui, 2020).

### **Historical background**

This refers to the series of pro-democracy protests and demonstrations that erupted in the Arab world and is otherwise known as the "Arab spring, " "Arab awakening, " or "Arab uprisings. ". It started in Tunisia in 2010 and then spread to other countries, most notably Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, in 2011. The protesters expressed their political and economic grievances and called for regime change: "The people want to bring down the regime. " Under the increasing pressure of the mass protests, Tunisian president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011; Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak resigned on February 11, 2011 (Ahmed, 2024).

The Arab Spring highlighted the failure of pan-Arabism and the rise of narrow nationalism, which hindered democratization efforts. Historical tribal and sectarian divisions contributed to the ongoing struggles for social and economic equality in the region post-Arab Spring. (Muhammad z. I. , 2024). The Arab uprisings, which shook the MENA region between late 2010 and late 2012, refer to a series of social movements that have destabilized authoritarian governments in the region. The uprisings led to the overthrow of the reigning dictators in crucial MENA countries (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen) and the eruption of civil wars (e.g., Libya, Syria, and Yemen). (Sahin, 2022). The Arab Spring was a turning point in democratization as citizens in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq tried to overthrow autocratic regimes. The results were mixed, with challenges in democratic consolidation, and the outcome led to civil wars and authoritarian retrenchment. (Stephen,2020). Egypt's transition to democracy failed with the 2013 military coup, while the Tunisian transition had been successful. This is even though revolts in Egypt and Tunisia bore great resemblance to each other during the initial phases

### **Objectives**

- To highlight the influence of the Arab Spring on the democratization process in the Arab world in general and the Middle East in particular?
- To explore the decisive factors in the success of democracy in Tunisia?
- To investigate the decisive factors for democracy failure in Egypt?

### **Research Questions**

- How did the Arab Spring influence the democratization process in the Arab world in general and the Middle East in particular?
- What were the decisive factors in the success of democracy in Tunisia?
- What were the decisive factors for democracy failure in Egypt?

### **Significance**

This paper compares the process of democratization in Egypt and Tunisia between 2011 and 2024 to present a critical view of how these two states developed differently due to the results of the Arab spring. This article discusses the critical function of the Arab spring in realizing democratization in the MENA region, dwelling on critical reasons for the difference between democratization in Tunisia, which was successful, and democratization in Egypt, which did not succeed. Both cases are focal to understanding larger trends in democratization in the Arab world.

The first goal of such analysis is to know how the Arab spring sprouted the democratization process throughout the Arab world. The articles will discuss whether the mass uprising of 2011 challenged the traditional authoritarian regimes with spaces for democratic transition in Egypt and Tunisia. Also, this paper will measure to what extent this political change, catalyzed by the Arab Spring, has been sustained after this occurrence. The second is to identify and evaluate the determinants of a successful democratic transition in Tunisia. This article will examine to what extent inclusive political institutions, power in civil society, the efforts of the national dialogue quartet who mediated, and the adoption of a progressive constitution of 2014 played a role. Additionally, the analysis will examine how the political culture of Tunisia, its apparent consensus-building of

political factions, and international support played a role in bringing about its relatively stable processes of democratization. The third objective will be to investigate the reasons behind deeming the democratization in Egypt a failure. The article examines four reasons that have inhibited Egypt's democratic transition: political polarization, the military's hold over politics and suppression of civil liberties, and the inability to establish inclusive institutions. Also, it will be about the return to authoritarianism under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to undo democratic gains. It shall help uncover the dynamics that gave rise to the different democratic outcomes achieved in Egypt and Tunisia, if accomplished. In the course of study, an analysis of political, institutional, social, and geopolitical factors will be made to reach a deeper comprehension of why democracy was successful in Tunisia, but not in Egypt, pointing the way forward concerning prospects and hurdles of democratization.

### **Literature Review**

The very opposite of that is the collapse of an authoritarian regime, which is indeed a much more radical and dramatic road to democratization. This happens when popular uprisings or revolutions occur, having a general discontent and social movements that would overthrow the established government, replacing it with a new democratic order. The pathway is high in intensity and high in unpredictability, usually accompanied by great social disruption and the possibility of democracy or chaos depending on the way the transition process is managed (Whitehead, 2002). The second mode of democratization is **imposed democracy**, where democratic institutions and processes are imposed on a country by external powers such as foreign governments or international organizations. This is often a result of military intervention or occupation, intending to reshape the political order toward democracy. The results of this **top-down** kind of democracy imposition vary from case to case, with mixed success, but also suffer from legitimacy and ownership failures that might question the long-run survival of these forms of implantations (Steven Levitsky, 2005). **Incremental democratization** occurs after an extended, step-by-step extension of political rights and civil liberties. This trajectory does not attempt to jump at sudden or sensational changes but works on gradual change that builds a step-by-step foundation for democracy. It has been viewed as a stable form of democratization, especially in scenarios where rapid change can destabilize established institutions (Stephan Haggard, 2016). **Democratization from below** is often characterized by the grassroots mobilization of civil society organizations, social movements, and communities at the grassroots level, demanding democratic reform and creating it. This bottom-up approach depends on active citizenry to bring about the change and illustrates the effectiveness of collective action in the politics of change. In contrast, **democratization from above** is a process led by ruling elites or political leaders as they chart a course towards democratization. Sometimes, it's a power-strategic ploy to continue ruling, a move to boost legitimacy, or just to survive a new political reality. Together, these pathways show how societies can pursue democratization in many different ways, often involving complex and sometimes difficult processes. (Merkel, 2014).

The Arab Spring serves as a compelling case study of democratization, showcasing how different pathways, including peaceful transitions, grassroots mobilization, and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes played out across the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in countries like Egypt and Tunisia.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research method to explore the topic in depth. Data is collected through both primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The document study method is employed, focusing on the analysis of official reports, scholarly articles, policy documents, and other relevant texts. To interpret the collected data, thematic analysis is applied, allowing for the identification of key themes, patterns, and insights that emerge from the documents. This approach enables the researcher to critically engage with the content and develop a nuanced understanding of the underlying issues.

## **Influence of the Arab Spring on the Democratization of the Arab World**

The Arab Spring greatly marked the democratization agenda of the Arab world, especially the Middle East, as protesters massively through demanding proper democratic rule. The movement began in Tunisia in 2010 and then spread to countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen before the fall of several long-standing authoritarian regimes (Abushouk, 2024). Despite these challenges, the transition towards democracy has been difficult. For instance, the revolt of Egypt's Arab spring demonstrated how the historical, sociopolitical, and way of life factors had impacted the progression of democracy, hence, it requires structural upgrade and inclusion of political cooperation for long-term transcendence of the worldwide democratization (Colette H., & Mika B., 2024).

### **Direct impact on democratization**

The Arab Spring mobilized millions of citizens across the various countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. Social media played a crucial.

This mobilization role meant that individuals could freely use social platforms to plan protests, gather information, and bring awareness about their demands for democracy and human rights (Azab, 2023).

### **Overthrowing regimes**

The protests led to the ousting of long-term leaders such as Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. In this way, the demonstrations became a force and inspired movements that spread throughout many other countries as well, signaling the region as a possibility of change (Bank & Busse, 2021).

### **Political reforms**

In a few countries, the first wave of protests did result in a fair degree of political reforms. Tunisia, often hailed as the success story of the Arab spring, embarked on a path toward democratization that included the drafting of a new constitution and the establishment of free and fair elections (Mansouri, 2020). The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, a coalition of civil society organizations, played a pivotal role in mediating between various political factions, demonstrating the importance of inclusive dialogue in the democratization process. This collaborative approach also helped stabilize the political landscape while fomenting a culture of compromise and negotiation, which forms an essential characteristic of any democratic society (Mansouri, 2020).

However, Egypt's transition was riddled with mishaps. Just after the initial euphoria of his ouster and the ouster of all other politicians, the power struggle grips Mubarak between all the different

political entities and military forces, especially the Muslim brotherhood (Brooks & White, 2022). The problems with moving from a regime that used to be authoritarian towards one with a democratic plan were demonstrated in 2013 by the military's eventual coup, whereby President Mohamed Morsi was removed from his position. However, dissent was subsequently cracked down upon and a more military-led government was reestablished under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, which alarmed pro democratic aspirations in Egypt.

Huntington's conception of democratization waves also provides a frame of reference to more broadly assess the impact of the Arab Spring. It was during 2010, 2011, during which there were several countries with a similar kind of sentiment as if they were all collectively moving on at the same time, when they all woke up and had a series of uprisings in the Middle East in North Africa. In many countries, rage against the reigning rulers was fought by citizens who demanded political change. This is something that Huntington observed: democratization waves went in waves, often this is so in groups within the scope of the experience and the transnational influence. Nevertheless, contrary to these inconsistencies, the results of the Arab Spring-Tunisia (a story that seems somewhat successful) and the reversal of Egypt to authoritarianism require a clear understanding of these structural, institutional, and contextual factors because of democratic transitions. Based on Huntington's structure, which borrows from domestic circumstances and regional forces to provide explanations for democratization waves, its usefulness is a result of this.

### **Decisive factors in the success of democracy in Tunisia**

Then, a lot of the differences lay in the economics in both countries or rather states, and how quite different paths the two countries took to democratization. Tunisia, though its unemployment rate was high and its economy faced much pressure, could manage to maintain an economy relatively stable compared to Egypt, whose economic mismanagement, coupled with runaway inflation, only worsened the social unrest (Rapanos, 2017). The economic resilience difference would have affected the public's perception of the new political regimes' ability to implement reforms. In Tunisia, the government's emphasis on dealing with economic complaints, like youth unemployment and regional imbalances, served to prolong public commitment towards the democratic institution (Mansouri, 2020). In Egypt, however, the inability to abate economic concerns ended in massive disillusionment and a hunger for stability at the expense of democratic sentiments (Hyde, 2020).

The influence of foreign players cannot be ruled out when comparing democratization in these two countries. International organizations, foreign governments, and regional powers have at different times been influential in shaping the political developments of Egypt and Tunisia. The democratic transition in Tunisia was supported by Western nations, whereas the strategic importance of Egypt to the United States and military ties complicated the international response to Egypt's political turmoil (Hyde, 2020). This dynamic underline the importance of understanding how geopolitical interests can shape domestic political outcomes, often at the expense of genuine democratic development (Rapanos, 2017).

### **Relative Democratic success of Tunisia: a deep dive**

Tunisia's democratic transition, though riddled with problems, remains one of the few relative successes in the post-Arab Spring landscape. Such success is the result of a combination of factors that, though not necessarily predictive of long-term success, have laid the groundwork for democratic development.

Tunisia has a strong civil society with a long history of independent organizations. The Tunisian general labor union, for example, is an old organization with a long history of activism and an important factor in mobilizing the protests that were believed to be crucial for the 2011 revolution. Other than labor unions, several organizations have played an important role in the democratization process, including human rights groups, professional associations, and women's rights organizations. These actors not only organize and mobilize people's participation within the revolution process but also continue pushing for democratic reform, checking governmental actions, and holding leaders responsible. The UGTT exemplified its essentialness by serving as a link to the dialogue process between the government and the opposition, part of the forming quartet that founded the national dialogue, and pleading for social justice and economic reform. Such a vibrant civil society proved to be crucial in checking and balancing state power, thus generating a degree of pluralism as well as inclusive politics. According to Zartman (2014),

The most distinctive aspect of such a transition in Tunisia was the willingness of Tunisians to talk and compromise; the national dialogue quartet—a civil society coalition engaged in negotiating the dialogue between government and opposition—is an example of people who would sacrifice all to reach a compromise. The description involved the notion of shared ownership of the democratic transition process through this very inclusive approach, often fraught with challenges in most instances. About the key feature that allowed the political process to be dissociated from a single subject or faction on the one side, and the integration of various other sides on the other side. The fact that the quartet has been inclusive, made things work out, and being willing to have difficult conversations — that was the basis for this success. Such a culture of dialogue and compromise has been quite fragile, but the only way we have been able to walk the difficult path that is Tunisian politics. (National Dialogue Quartet, 2015).

### **Economic reform and socio-economic development**

Democratic gains have to be consolidated in suppressing issues of socioeconomic grievances that sustained the 2011 revolution. However, the Tunisian government has done enough reforms for change in the economy, diversification of the economy, reduction of unemployment, and enhancement of public services. But such things lack big barriers to their success, including long-term unemployment, regional inequality, or international economic crises. Economic reform and socio-economic development: Tackling the socio-economic causes that fueled the revolution of 2011 is necessary for Tunisia's democracy to gain sustainable ground as well as achieve stable growth. The Tunisian government recognized the value of economic reforms and undertook several initiatives on its path toward an economic system to diversify the economy, reduce the level of unemployment, and also to enhance the provision of public services. There is, for example, investment in tourism and renewable energy to support sectors identified as vital toward new employment generation and foreign investments (Gherib, 2012).

infrastructure. Tunisia's economy's main pillar, tourism, did not succumb casually to the pandemic, but it also pinpointed that the need for decent reform in the health sector is to go beyond the surface.

Grassroots movements and human rights advocacy movements contributed to the pillars of this transition. Grassroots movements amplified the voices of the people and provided a platform where citizens ensured that the government adhered to its reform commitments. Civil society organizations emphasized inclusivity and dialogue, fostering the culture of compromise necessary for a sustainable environment in a country's political sphere. They have provided a platform for

the participation of diverse stakeholders and laid down a resilient democratic framework, thereby showing that civil engagement is a sine qua non for sustainable governance (Mansour et al, 2024).

The new constitution adopted in 2014 marked the most important milestone in the democratization process in Tunisia. The document guaranteed civil liberties, gender equality, and separation of powers, as embodied in the dreams of Tunisians for a modern and democratic state. The constitution was drafted through heavy negotiations between the political parties. It symbolized a commitment to democratic principles. Tunisia introduced an electoral system and judicial reforms to consolidate democratic governance. The independent high authority for elections was put in place to oversee free and fair elections and increase public confidence in the democratic process.

### **Failure of democracy in Egypt: critical analysis of the main contributing factors**

The reasons for the failure of democracy in Egypt after the 2011 revolution are a very complex issue deeply rooted in a combination of historical, political, socioeconomic, and institutional factors. Though the Egyptian revolution of 2011 first ignited hope for democratic change, several critical challenges thwarted the establishment of a stable democratic system. The factors that have contributed to this failure are as follows:

One of the key reasons why democracy in Egypt has failed is that the military remains entrenched as a powerful entity. Traditionally, the military has been central to the political and economic system in Egypt; they are protectors of the state, and the government also shares this role with them. The military, through the Supreme Council of the armed forces, took control after the ousting of Mubarak and promised a transition to civilian rule. The military remained in a position of considerable influence in Egyptian politics, at times sabotaging democratic efforts. Their reluctance to relinquish political power, even after promising democratic reform, was reflected in their handling of the transition process, where they sidelined the voices of civilians and prolonged political instability. It dominated not only politics but also the economy, with control over the resources across vast sectors, including construction and telecommunications, which it profited from to barter for its interests (Brooks & white, 2022). That was the case even after the election of Mohamed Morsi in 2012, since the military remained an institution to reckon with, demonstrated by its capability to dictate terms to the newly elected government. The final military coup of 2013, led by then-General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, was the death knell of Egypt's experiment with democracy since the military reasserted its authority over the state, thus eliminating the last chance for a democratic future.

Following Mubarak's ousting, political institutions in Egypt were not developed enough to aid in a successful democratic transition. The political environment was fragmented, characterized by a lack of unified opposition, weak political parties, and limited political experience among key leaders. The Muslim brotherhood, which won the 2012 elections, struggled to consolidate power effectively. While their electoral victory signaled political mobilization, it also proved to be a double-edged sword. Their failure to forge alliances with secular and liberal groups alienated significant segments of Egyptian society and exacerbated polarization. An arena without democratic tradition among both the Islamist parties and the secular camp meant a battle of frequent coups, and bad management did not make such reforms feasible, as was the experience. Lack of institutional checks that complement the situation of an inferior judiciary, less than minimal democratic traditions, which had further gone to ruin from a failure or non-feasibility of sustaining a democratic transitional setup.

Political polarization in Egypt represented an insurmountable barrier to the democratization process. Immediately after the collapse of Mubarak, the political, religious, and ideological spheres of society divided the nation even further. The rise of the Muslim brotherhood was a direct dichotomy between the Islamist and secular sectors, each waging an all-out war to dominate the destiny of the state. The liberal and secular forces, including Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, fought a massive resistance against the Islamist agenda of the Brotherhood for fear of marginalization in a political system where political Islam is core constitutive. The continual political and social conflict arose due to the failure to form a consensus on these issues. Most clearly during Mohamed Morsi's term, whose policies, including wanting to concentrate power in the presidency and therefore the controversial constitutional declaration that you were subjected to in November 2012, started up mass protests and civil unrest. Mutual distrust and hostility replaced the efforts to build a stable, inclusive government, in which Islamists and secular groups became virtually at war.

In the failure of Egypt's democratic transition, economic challenges were decisive. However, change did not come to Egypt's economy after the revolution as promised. There was still an economy in Egypt with high unemployment, inflation, wide-ranging poverty, and public and extremely corrupt impatience. While it was spearheaded by political demands, it also originated from the country's economic woes, especially from the youth of Egypt who simply wished for a better future for themselves. Under the transitional governments, nothing changed economically, the Muslim brotherhood could not deal properly with pressing issues. It further distanced the public from the Muslim brotherhood as Morsi failed to stabilize the economy, provide social justice and economic reforms, despite the young people who had led the revolution having been promised it. The economic crisis only added to the political instability, and the ordinary Egyptians began to turn their nose away from democratic freedoms for stability, and thus a dangerous cycle was established where the economic despair resulted in political apathy.

These had the impetus of the 2013 military coup that brought down Mohamed Morsi. Mass protests were on the side of the people behind the coup, and to the shock of the world, another government was overthrown by a military leader, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. It effectively ended Egypt's limited period of democracy. And for the period after that till el Sisi stood for the presidency, the president was transformed into authoritarian governance based on gross human rights abuses, political opposition suppression, and suppression of dissent.

### **Conclusion:**

Such an uneven process of democratization has been the Arab spring, which is to say it has shaken up or drastically changed democratization processes in the Arab world, and in particular in the Middle East. This paper discusses different contradictions of Tunisia and Egypt and the reasons for the absence of democratic governance. Thus, Tunisian transition would be considered successful if it is based on a strong civil society and a good political pluralism in combination with a favorable international dynamic that shaped the scene towards and through the transition. But the economic and social basis of such a serious instability and unrest had not done sufficient damage to the democratic system that a sort of unity in politics and the foundations of the democratic institutions had been built, and democratic institutions had been founded.

Instead, it is in the case of Egypt that a complicated situation of vested military power and political fragmentation makes further democratization difficult. The failure of Egyptian democratic movements can be found in the existence of a decisive role of the military in politics, the non-

existence of a single opposition, and lastly, socio-economic grievances that turned out to be the source of popular discontent. These factors arrived at this combination, which finally led to regression to authoritarianism, and the momentum of the Arab spring was unlikely to continue towards democratic progress.

This indicates that a knowledge of the very specific history, society, and politics with which a country cohabitates in any process of democratization is necessary. Celebrated by the Arab spring as dreams of democracy were lit across the region, not all of these things have followed on since. In many ways, the confluence of domestic and foreign factors that drives democratic prospects in the region, in future research, will have to go further. Therefore, the Arab Springs finally serve to remind us to include inclusive political dialogue, provide incentives to develop civil institutions, as well as attend to socio-economic disparities to better ensure the long-term sustaining of democratic governance in the region.

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## **Populism: A Challenge to Democracy**

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### **Abstract**

*In the 21st century, populism has emerged as a prominent political force challenging the basic principles of democratic governance. The populist movement poses a profound risk to democracy. It undermines the major democratic institutions, ethos, and cardinal virtues by claiming to represent the people's will. This paper highlights all the different ways through which populism and populist movements erode the democratic system, resist the political opposition, and delegitimize the electoral processes. The study explores, through comparative analysis of populist movements in both established and emerging democracies, how populist leaders exploit the social and economic grievances to disregard the democratic safeguards, weaken checks and balances, and deepen political polarization. Further, this paper will investigate affiliations between nationalism and authoritarianism. It will highlight the universal increase of authoritarian practices that grow under the regimes of populists. Eventually, the study discusses potential solutions, which include institutional reforms and amplifying the democratic norms, to challenge and counter the threats which are posed by populism and guarantee the resilience of democracy.*

**Keywords:** Democratic Institutions, Political Polarization, Populism.

### **Introduction**

Populism is a political approach that tries to resonate with ordinary people who feel that the established elite group overlooks their concerns. The question arises here whether a populist leader will successfully moderate his fiery populism after being aligned with the political establishment. Populism is an ideology that represents “the people” and their interests. It opposes the establishment of an elite or political class. Sometimes it refers to the struggle between “the elite” and “the people,” characterizing one as hardworking, moral, or common citizens and the other as corrupt and out of touch, respectively. Populism shows the political spectrum, with some movements focusing on anti-globalization, economic inequality, and nationalism.

However, leaders with populist ideologies consider themselves champions of the public. They address issues that traditional politicians ignore. Populism focuses on simplifying complex problems with straightforward solutions, which makes populist messages very appealing to most people who think that mainstream politicians are ineffective. The history of populism can be traced back to the late Roman Republic with political polarization between “the popular” who favored the people and “optimates” who favored the aristocrats.

Three separate populist movements define the cradle of modern populism. The People's Party of the USA, Russia's Narodniki, and the Boulangism of France. The People's Party of the USA in

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the 1890s emerged as a third-party movement whose goal was to disrupt the political landscape by criticizing the democratic and republican parties for being too similar and close to their special interests. In the 1860s, the Narodniki movement of Russia stressed “going to the masses” or the people to encourage the upheaval of the anti-tsarist revolution. While French Boulangism advocated for the workers, it opposed the parliamentary regime and campaigned to establish a radical form of direct democracy.

The celebration among all three movements was the empowerment of the true masses and average citizens. Based on the initial movement after the Second World War, populism reemerged in different regimes of the world throughout time. Democracy is an ideal political system where power lies in the hands of the people. Democracy ensures political equality and the protection of the rights of the individual rule of law is ensured too. The political structures of any nation are framed by its history, collective memory, and socio-cultural practices, as a political order and institutions that develop in every country are unique from other nations. West’s idea of turning the world into a challenge, the West itself, even in the heartlands of the democracies, now being led by populist leaders, but established democracies are also exploring other models.

There is an intimate connection between democracy and populism. There is also an inherent tension rarely fully analyzed between them. The connection is easily built since both democracy and populism refer to the people, and both concepts indicate the importance of the people (Harper, 2005). Subsequently, populism is analyzed as an interest continuous with this democratic pillar and thus automatically an inherent element of constitutional democracy. Therefore, populism only becomes a real threat when this populist element gets the upper hand and tends to dominate or marginalize other elements in the paradoxical combination when this happens. However, this is a matter of political judgments and cannot be settled by conceptual fiat (Rummens, 2007).

Though democracy stresses establishing traditional institutions like the balance of power in the legislative, judiciary, and executive, democracy also promotes the system of checks and balances, which prevents the abuse of power. It also focuses on freedom of speech, respect for human rights, and freedom of the press. On the other hand, populism criticizes the establishment of traditional institutions. Populist leaders try to centralize power. It also weakens the judiciary, legislative, and executive, which are democratic institutions, because populists believe that these democratic institutions are an obstacle to the will of the people. Democracy protects the rights of minorities and allows different opinions and ideas to coexist within society.

In contrast, populism often represents the majoritarian approach that can eliminate or marginalize minorities. Populism emphasizes the will of the majority, but sometimes it sacrifices the marginalized people of society. By depicting “the elite” as a corrupt group in power, populist actors can claim that they are willing to represent the ideas and interests of “the pure people.” populist actors frequently present themselves as outsiders even when they are not. This allows them to craft a narrative of the last national greatness, which they claim they will restore and address a collective sense of humiliation (Cristbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 2025). Even populist leaders start as real outsiders; if they remain in power for a long time, they become part of the establishment. Populists often damage the democratic system when they come into power, they change their message by arguing that they can’t govern properly due to certain factors that prohibit the changes that people want. They make statements and conspiracy theories related to local and international issues. Which makes their argument stronger that their power is being undermined.

## **Research Methodology**

Research methodology explains how researchers try to carry out their research, it is a systematic plan to resolve a research problem. Through methodology, the researcher explains his approach to ensure reliable and valid results that address their goals. It also details what data they are going to collect and what sources will be utilized how data will be collected.

## **Type of Data**

There are two types of data: qualitative data and quantitative data. Quantitative data comprises the data that includes numbers or numeric data. While qualitative is all about available in the literature. Which is in the form of books, newspapers, and research articles, in this paper researcher relied on the qualitative data. The researcher made available the books, research articles, and newspapers in which secondary sources are utilized.

## **Literature Review**

The introduction of the model of three logics serves two main purposes. First, it involves an analysis of the logic of populism with which we want to contribute to the ongoing debate about the proper conceptualization of populism. We hope to show that our definition of populism can provide a coherent account of many of the characteristics attributed to populist parties, policies, and practices. Secondly, the analysis of the logic of (constitutional) democracy not only tries to illustrate the internal coherence of this allegedly paradoxical mixture but, most of all, provides a clear way to compare populism and democracy. As suggested by our title, we will conclude that both logic and populism are antagonistic, that populism and democracy are discontinuous, and that populism, by its nature, should be seen as a dangerous threat to democracy (Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens 2007). Pundits and academics alike are increasingly concerned about the health of democracy worldwide. Much of this concern is tied to the rise of populism, a global phenomenon presenting challenges to both long-established and relatively young democracies (Kaltwasser and Taggart 2025). Threat or Corrective for Democracy” wrote in their book that populism is seen as a threat to democracy, undermining its key values and striving for an alternative, an authoritarian system. As recently as April 2010, European Union President Herman Van Rompuy declared populism the biggest danger to Europe. However, he shares another side of populism, too. That is the positive side of populism. A further writer explains that populism is something that has evolved particularly in the U.S.A.'s early scholarship on populism (Mude and Kaltwasser 2012). populism advocates fast, clear-cut decisions and opposes soft methods like negotiations. It lessens the quality of of decision-making process. The populist plebiscitary view of democracy favors decisions rather than patient negotiations. Populism gives priority to the majority's expressions rather than the existing variety of interests, so populism is based on exclusion and has a polarizing effect. The populist discourse is often intolerant, racist, and xenophobic, and excludes the term “other” as it does not fit in the populist definition of the people. Being the “evil” it believes political opponents are enemies, not adversaries, Populists reject the symbolic framework of the political stage of the Democratic struggle. This establishes a permanent situation of conflict that cannot be accepted by a democratic system in its extreme interpretations. Populism rejects all limitations on the expression of popular will, such as the protection of minority rights and the independence of key institutions. Those who are considered enemies are the established elite. The politicians, the global financial institutions, as well as political institutions (Stefan 2016).

## **Rise of Populism**

Populism is not a newly emerged phenomenon; it traces back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It developed in different parts of Europe and North America; populism has several forms which grew as countries faced economic entrenchment globally after World War I. Populism is leading to a rise in economic nationalism. This move shifted populist movements that later spread in South America. During the 1930s and 1940s, populism took hold in Argentina and Mexico. Since the early 2000s, populist parties have played a crucial role in the politics of Thailand. While in some European countries like Hungary and Poland, populism emerged after the end of communism. The vote for Brexit in July 2016 and the election of Donald Trump in November 2016 brought it to the mainstream in developed countries.

Several elections witnessed this trend, including the Austrian Presidential election in 2016, the French Presidential election in 2017 German and Austrian legislative elections. This trend followed through the Italian elections in 2018 and the Parliamentary elections in 2019, which took place in Finland, Spain, Denmark, Greece, Austria, Poland, and the UK European Election that year. Not only Western world remains under the influence of populism, but similar leaders came to power in the Philippines in 2013, Mexico in 2018, and Brazil and Argentina in 2019. The political parties that were once on the margins of political debate have become legitimate contenders for power in all these elections. After the National election of March 2018, Le Laga in Italy acquired power in multiple cities and regions of the country and joined a coalition government. This indicates that populism has transferred from a powerful force to a main challenge for liberal democracies.

The victory of Donald Trump in 2016 was a remarkable success for populists. Trump is an outlander and an anti-establishment candidate who campaigned for and grabbed power. The success of Trump demonstrates the way how populism has participated in the disintegration of a well-established system of politics. By adopting more extreme positions, mainstream political parties have moved away from the center to stop voters from supporting anti-establishment groups. It takes more polarized and ideological parties to try to energize their supporters and hope to keep them away from their rivals. Despite huge studies and research explaining the reasons behind the growth of anti-system parties, which are proposing illiberal democracies. None could explain any authentic fundamental reason behind this increasing trend. The circumstances of the rise in populism vary from country to country. They are different in every region of the world, from France to the U.K., from Hungary to the U.S., and from Brazil to Turkiye.

Populism, which goes hand in hand with far-left or far-right party slogans and/or strong, personalized political leadership and polarized rhetoric, is on the rise worldwide. The presidency of Donald Trump in the US and the campaigns in favor of the Brexit referendum are seen as two prominent examples in recent years. Several EU member countries have also recently witnessed the rapid popularity of such populist parties. For example, the radical parties in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Greece, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany have recently gained votes in national elections. 2024 will be an important election year with the presidential elections in the US and the European elections, raising concerns of a further rise in political polarization and populism in the Western world (Nam, 2014).

The appeal of the populists has grown with mounting public discontent over the status quo. In the West, many people feel left behind by technological change, the economy, and growing inequality. Horrific incidents of terrorism generate apprehension globally and fear. Some are uneasy with

societies that have become more ethnically, religiously and racially diverse. There is an increasing sense that governments and the elite ignore public concerns (Roth).

“The fact is that populism is not an ideology. Instead, it’s a strategy to obtain and retain power. It has been around for centuries, recently appearing to resurface in full force, propelled by the digital revolution, precarious economies, and the threatening insecurity of what lies ahead”. This, however, does not make populism any less dangerous. Indeed, populism is invariably divisive, thrives on conspiracy, finds enemies even where they do not exist, criminalizes all opposition to them, plays up external threats, and more of than not insists that its critics at home are merely working for foreign governments. Yet one would be wasting time – he implies - seeking some deeper cause for this phenomenon (Cox, 2018).

When the explanations behind the rise of populism split the dominant, a dominant cleavage or split emerges in the shape of cultural economics. This split is claimed as the loss of ethnic identity; this loss belongs to individuals as well as to the nation. The society that has rapidly transformed it created voters. They are alienated from this converted society. Which detached them from the world where they grew up. It makes them odd and stranger in their homeland, not only this, but it also makes them uncomfortable and aggrieved. The cause behind this growing alienated generation is the surge in multiculturalism, which happens due the migration, and globalism that has converted the laws of the country. These laws left the older generation unfamiliar with these societal transformations. However, these laws also reduce their capabilities to participate in emerging cultural trends and hostile environments. The rise of populism gave birth to another debate, which circulates between reality and perceptions. It is observed that the major surge in the vote for populism is purely based on perception. The issues that provide the base for these perceptions are migration, inequality, and corruption. These perceptions give birth to an anti-system and anti-establishment generation.

## **Conclusion**

Populism poses a critical threat to democracy by eroding its core principles. While it claims to represent or to illustrate the "genuine will of the people", it often results in the unification of power within a single leader or political party. The populist leaders like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and Narendra Modi have gained extensive support through emotional persuasion, but their leadership or direction has frequently jeopardized the institutions of democracy and its values. One of the primary threats presented by populism is its tendency to dissolve the checks and balances. Populist leaders have usually challenged the independence of the judiciary, attacked the free media, and portrayed their political rivals as enemies of the populace, just to label them in a negative light. This not only weakens the transparency and accountability, but also fosters an environment in which they can easily make decisions without Democratic oversight. Moreover, populism also spreads the political division, breaking the society and preserving the stance of "us versus them," which makes it difficult to maintain and uphold the national unity and democratic values.

Additionally, democracy is more in risk when populist agendas prioritize immediate emotional response over enduring long-term stability. Most of the populist leaders prioritized the swift and impractical solutions rather than focusing on resolving the problem and challenge for long-term sustainability. This may lead to economic inefficiency, social turmoil, and reduce the true essence of the principle of democracy. To safeguard Democracy from the threat of populism, it is essential to boost the independent media, strengthen political institutions, including the independence of the

judiciary, and also promote political participation in political matters. Individuals need to know the deviousness of populist leaders, who, with their political persuasions, shape the politics. Citizens are obligated to demand such a policy that upholds and strengthens the principle of democracy rather than weakening the true spirit of democracy. To prevent the negative impact of populism, a nation must promote political education, guarantee free and fair elections, and bolster the rule of law.

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## **South Africa's Soft Power: Advancing Democracy, Strengthening Institutions, and Good Governance in Africa (2015-2024)**

**Tariq Khan\***

### **Abstract**

*At the end of apartheid, South Africa has adopted transformations which have positioned it as a regional leader committed to democracy, institutional improvement, and effective governance in Africa. South Africa has influenced electoral processes, peace mediation, and governance reforms via frameworks like the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) through soft power strategies. The country has mediated political crises in South Sudan, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) while engaging in peacekeeping and diplomatic efforts to foster stability. Still, somehow, economic constraints, policy shifts, regional rivalries, and corruption have weakened the diplomatic influence of South Africa. But South Africa has kept itself as a significant key player in African governance through platforms such as the AU, BRICS, G20 partnerships, and other regional associations. This research paper explores South Africa's soft power efforts and its challenges to influence governance, foster democracy, and strengthen institutions across the African continent, mainly from 2015 to 2024. The findings recommend that South Africa must practice further strategic reforms, reinforce institutional reliability, and boost its soft power initiatives for sustainable leadership.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Diplomacy, Democracy Promotion, Good Governance, Institutional Strengthening, Regional Influence, South Africa, Soft Power.

### **Introduction**

South Africa has continued to assert its role as a key proponent of democracy, institutional development, and good governance in Africa through the strategic deployment of soft power between 2015 and 2024. As defined by Nye (2004), soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction, persuasion, and cultural or ideological appeal rather than coercion or military force. South Africa has successfully utilized this approach in its foreign policy, taking advantage of its post-apartheid moral authority, diplomatic influence, and regional leadership to advance democratic norms across the continent.

South Africa's commitment to democratic consolidation in Africa is evident in its active participation in the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). These institutions serve as platforms for

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promoting political stability, electoral integrity, and governance reforms. The country has played an essential role in mediating political crises, particularly in Zimbabwe's contested elections, South Sudan's peace negotiations, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's transitional governance efforts. In addition, South Africa's commitment to peacekeeping missions and diplomatic mediation highlights its broader dedication to fostering stability and democratic governance beyond its borders.

Though despite these efforts, South Africa's capability to sustain its soft power influence faces increasing challenges. Domestically, political instability, economic downturns, and governance issues have raised concerns about its leadership reliability. Externally, the rise of competing regional powers, such as Nigeria and Kenya, has reshaped Africa's diplomatic landscape, necessitating a recalibration of South Africa's influence strategies. Furthermore, financial constraints have restricted South Africa's ability to support its foreign policy initiatives, impacting its long-term effectiveness in governance promotion.

This paper significantly examines South Africa's developing role in advancing democracy, strengthening institutions, and promoting good governance from 2015 to 2024. The study assesses the successes, challenges, and prospects of South Africa's soft power strategy through an analysis of key diplomatic engagements, institutional interventions, and governance initiatives. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on Africa's governance landscape and the position of regional actors in shaping democratic transitions.

This paper argues that South Africa's soft power serves as a medium for democracy, institution-building, and governance in Africa. On the other hand, its effectiveness is moderated by domestic governance issues, regional rivalries, and economic constraints. By examining South Africa's role in governance advocacy, institutional support, and diplomatic mediation, this study explores the successes, limitations, and prospects of its soft power strategy in Africa. A key aspect of this research is to understand the role of South Africa's soft power in shaping governance and institutions across Africa.

By employing a qualitative content analysis approach, using both primary and secondary data sources, the theoretical framework of soft power as conceptualized by Joseph Nye, the purpose of this study is to address the following questions: First, how has South Africa's soft power influenced democratic governance and institution-building across Africa? Second, what are the key challenges and limitations to South Africa's soft power in promoting good governance on the continent? Third, how can South Africa enhance its soft power effectiveness to maintain its leadership in Africa's political and institutional landscape?

### **An In-depth Data Analysis:**

#### **South Africa's Democratic Transition: A Model for Africa**

South Africa's democratic transition serves as an excellent model for Africa, providing precious insights into the complexities of moving from authoritarian rule to democracy. One of the defining aspects of this transition was the adoption of a federal governance system that ensured economic stability while balancing the interests of different societal groups (Ntoyapi, 2020). This system helped protect the economic elite from excessive redistributive taxation, whereas at the same time,

it fostered economic growth, benefiting both the white minority and the black majority. The effectiveness of this governance model is apparent in South Africa's economic growth, as reported by the World Bank, which noted an increase in GDP from 1.4% in 2016 to 2.2% in 2020 (Kaba, 2020). By successfully implementing a form of democratic federalism that mitigates economic disruptions while promoting inclusivity, South Africa offers a unique pathway for other African nations seeking stable democratic transitions (Sindane, 2020).

A critical landmark in this transition was the implementation of the 1996 Constitution, which laid the foundation for democratic governance by enshrining the principles of justice, human rights, and equality (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This constitution institutionalized mechanisms to uphold democracy, including the Office of the Public Protector, which investigates corruption and maladministration (Kati, 2023). Furthermore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) played a pivotal role in addressing the country's apartheid past, facilitating national healing, and promoting accountability (Camara, 2024). The TRC's impact extended beyond South Africa, serving as a global benchmark for transitional justice and to inspiring similar mechanisms in other post-conflict societies (Mbam, 2024). The significance of these initiatives underscores the importance of compromise, careful planning, and a steadfast commitment to democratic principles for nations undergoing political transformation (Sisk, 2017).

Despite these advancements, South Africa continues to grapple with challenges such as persistent poverty, high unemployment, and economic inequality (Stats SA, 2022). The economy remains heavily reliant on mining and manufacturing, raising concerns about diversification and long-term sustainability (South African Reserve Bank, 2022). However, the country has made notable progress in strengthening democratic institutions and safeguarding human rights (Freedom House, 2022). South Africa's ability to navigate these socio-economic challenges while maintaining democratic governance offers a vital lesson to other African nations seeking to build resilient and inclusive democracies (Kati, 2023).

### **South Africa's Soft Power in Action**

South Africa's soft power has been a crucial element in advancing the country's global and regional influence. Soft power refers to a nation's ability to achieve its objectives through attraction, persuasion, and influence rather than coercion or force. South Africa's soft power is deeply rooted in its historical struggle for democracy, its cultural richness, and its commitment to human rights and governance (Ogunnubi, Olusola, and Lester Brian Shawa, 2017).

#### **a) Advancing Democracy**

South Africa has played a pivotal role in promoting democracy across the African continent through various diplomatic and institutional mechanisms. One of the key instruments in this endeavor has been the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which evaluates governance and democratic standards in African nations (Songa & Tessema, 2024). South Africa has actively participated in the APRM process, undergoing its review in 2007 and continuing to serve as a member of the APRM Council (Hamouda, 2022).

#### **b) Strengthening Institutions**

South Africa has significantly contributed to the strengthening of African institutions, particularly through its leadership in the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). As the host country for the PAP, South Africa has influenced the agenda of parliamentary diplomacy in Africa and has played an active role in modernizing the institution to address emerging continental challenges (Leibbrandt-Loxton, 2022).

**c) Good Governance Advocacy**

South Africa has been a staunch advocate for good governance in Africa, actively promoting transparency and accountability through various initiatives. The country has been at the forefront of anti-corruption efforts, participating in high-level African Union (AU) summits and initiatives to combat corruption (Cwaile, 2023). South Africa's leadership in AU-led anti-corruption frameworks has facilitated policy discussions on governance and accountability within the continent (African Union, 2020).

**Challenges to South Africa's Soft Power**

South Africa's ability to project soft power across Africa has been significantly hindered by various structural and policy challenges. One of the most pressing concerns is the country's resource limitations, which restrict its capacity to engage effectively in foreign policy initiatives. As Ogunnubi (2002) points out, South Africa struggles to balance its domestic socioeconomic needs with its ambitions on the international stage. This challenge has been compounded by a shrinking foreign policy budget, which declined from R5.5 billion in 2016 to R4.8 billion in 2020 (South African Institute of International Affairs, 2020).

Another major obstacle to South Africa's soft power is the inconsistency in its foreign policy, particularly in its relations with authoritarian regimes. Its close ties with Zimbabwe, despite the latter's poor human rights record, have raised questions about South Africa's commitment to democratic principles (MacLeod, 2023). Regional rivalries further complicate South Africa's ability to assert soft power in Africa. The country faces increasing competition from Nigeria and Kenya, both of which are seeking to expand their spheres of influence (Aleyomi, 2022). Corruption has also played a significant role in eroding South Africa's soft power. Transparency International (2020) highlights a decline in South Africa's Corruption Perception Index, from 45 in 2016 to 44 in 2020, reflecting increasing concerns over governance failures and financial mismanagement.

**Collaborative Regional and Global Efforts**

South Africa's role in regional and global collaboration has been influential in shaping governance, human rights, and economic development across Africa. As a member of the African Union (AU), the country has dynamically promoted democratic governance and institutional reforms, particularly through its contributions to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (African Union, 2020).

Beyond the AU, South Africa has participated in global partnerships that extend its soft power reach. Its collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) demonstrates its commitment to sustainable development and human rights across Africa (UNDP, 2020). On a broader geopolitical scale, South Africa has utilized its membership in BRICS to expand its

influence in global economic governance. As the only African member of the group, South Africa has acted as a conduit between emerging economies and the African continent, advocating for development-oriented policies and investment opportunities (BRICS, 2020).

Another significant aspect of South Africa's regional engagement is its role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution. The country has been a major contributor to AU-led peacekeeping missions, demonstrating its commitment to regional stability and security (African Union, 2020). The sustainability of South Africa's leadership in peacekeeping efforts will depend on its capability to maintain financial and political support for such initiatives.

## **Results and Findings**

South Africa's democratic transition has established the usefulness of a well-structured governance model in maintaining political stability while fostering economic growth. The implementation of a federal governance framework allowed the country to balance competing interests, ensuring economic stability while promoting inclusivity. The 1996 Constitution played a fundamental role in institutionalizing democracy by safeguarding human rights, strengthening the rule of law, and establishing key accountability mechanisms such as the Public Protector and the Constitutional Court. These institutions have strengthened democratic governance, prevented authoritarian tendencies, and served as a model for other African nations maneuvering political transitions.

A key achievement of the transition was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which played a significant role in addressing historical injustices and promoting national healing. While the TRC successfully acknowledged human rights violations and fostered symbolic reconciliation, it fell short of fully bridging the socio-economic inequalities inherited from apartheid. The persistence of high poverty, unemployment, and economic disparities highlights the limitations of transitional justice in achieving comprehensive societal transformation. Despite these challenges, South Africa's democratic framework has remained resilient, offering a valuable example of how transitional justice can contribute to nation-building when coupled with long-term socio-economic reforms.

Beyond its borders, South Africa has emerged as a regional leader in democracy promotion, actively engaging in governance reforms and peacekeeping initiatives across Africa. Its role in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) has reinforced democratic norms and stability in neighboring countries. However, the sustainability of this leadership is contingent upon South Africa's ability to address its internal challenges. Economic stagnation, governance inefficiencies, and social unrest pose risks to its democratic stability. Nonetheless, the country's ability to maintain democratic governance while navigating complex socio-economic issues underscores its significance as a model for African nations seeking political transformation.

South Africa's soft power initiatives have expanded its diplomatic reach, allowing it to mediate in regional conflicts and advocate for democratic principles without direct intervention. Its engagement in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) has reinforced governance accountability across the continent, while its mediation efforts in Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Eswatini have demonstrated its role as a stabilizing force in political crises. These interventions

highlight South Africa's capacity to influence African political transitions through diplomatic consensus rather than coercion.

Institutional strengthening has been another major outcome of South Africa's soft power strategy. Its leadership within the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and contributions to judicial and governance reforms have promoted legislative accountability and regional cooperation. Legal training programs and governance initiatives under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) have enhanced institutional capacity across African states, improving their ability to uphold democratic values. However, the extent of this institutional transformation varies across nations, depending on domestic political will and structural constraints.

South Africa's advocacy for good governance has extended beyond politics into corporate governance and economic reform. The promotion of transparency and ethical business practices through the King Codes has influenced corporate culture across Africa, improving financial accountability and corporate ethics. Additionally, its active participation in anti-corruption frameworks has provided policy guidance for African states seeking to combat mismanagement and financial irregularities. These efforts, though impactful, continue to face resistance in regions where entrenched political and business interests oppose reform.

South Africa's declining foreign policy budget has significantly constrained its ability to project soft power across Africa. The reduction in funding has affected its diplomatic missions, cultural diplomacy programs, and peacekeeping efforts, limiting its capacity to influence regional governance and stability. This financial strain reflects the country's broader economic struggles, including high unemployment and sluggish growth, which have forced policymakers to prioritize domestic economic recovery over international engagement. Consequently, South Africa's ability to maintain its leadership role within institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been weakened.

Another key finding is the inconsistency in South Africa's foreign policy, particularly in its relations with authoritarian regimes. While the country advocates for democratic governance, its close ties with regimes like Zimbabwe's have raised concerns about the sincerity of its commitments. This selective approach to diplomacy has diminished South Africa's credibility as a promoter of democracy, as it often appears to prioritize political stability over democratic accountability. Such inconsistencies have not only weakened its influence over governance reforms in Africa but have also led to skepticism about its role as a mediator in regional conflicts.

Furthermore, South Africa faces mounting competition from Nigeria and Kenya, both of which have emerged as significant diplomatic and economic players. Nigeria's strong economic performance and Kenya's strategic positioning in East Africa have challenged South Africa's traditional dominance in continental affairs. This rivalry has diluted South Africa's influence in key institutions and economic partnerships, making it harder for the country to unilaterally shape Africa's governance and economic policies. The rise of alternative centers of influence suggests that South Africa can no longer rely on its historical leadership position without substantial policy adjustments.

South Africa's engagement in regional and global collaborations has reinforced its leadership role in governance, security, and economic development. Within the African Union (AU), South Africa

has contributed significantly to institutional reforms, particularly through its support for the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. These efforts have strengthened democratic accountability across the continent, aligning with South Africa's diplomatic agenda. However, internal political and governance challenges have at times undermined its credibility, creating a gap between its regional commitments and domestic realities.

Beyond Africa, South Africa has leveraged global partnerships to advance sustainable development and governance initiatives. Its collaborations with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Commonwealth have facilitated socio-economic reforms and capacity-building programs in African states. Through these alliances, South Africa has positioned itself as a bridge between Africa and the international community, advocating for human rights, institutional integrity, and economic empowerment. However, inconsistencies in its foreign policy, especially its ties with authoritarian regimes, have occasionally weakened its influence in these multilateral engagements.

South Africa's participation in BRICS has expanded its influence in global economic governance, enabling it to advocate for investment and infrastructure development in Africa. As the only African member, it has used this platform to push for policies that support regional economic growth and financial inclusion. However, its alignment with BRICS presents diplomatic challenges, as the group includes authoritarian states whose governance models conflict with South Africa's democratic principles. Balancing its economic interests with its commitment to democratic governance remains a key test for its international credibility.

## **Discussion**

South Africa's democratic transition underscores the critical interplay between political stability, economic governance, and social justice. The country's ability to maintain economic growth while transitioning from apartheid to democracy highlights the importance of well-structured governance frameworks. However, persistent challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality reveal that political reforms alone cannot guarantee societal transformation. While the 1996 Constitution provided a strong legal foundation, the ongoing struggle to translate constitutional rights into tangible socio-economic benefits demonstrates that democracy must be complemented by effective policy implementation. For African nations seeking democratic transitions, South Africa's experience illustrates the need for a holistic approach that integrates legal protections with targeted economic and social development policies.

Moreover, South Africa's role as a regional leader in democracy promotion reinforces its status as a model for the continent. Through its participation in organizations like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU), the country has actively supported governance reforms and peacekeeping efforts in neighboring states. However, its ability to sustain this leadership depends on addressing internal governance challenges, economic constraints, and political tensions. While South Africa's journey demonstrates that democratic institutions can be successfully established even in deeply divided societies, its experience also highlights the complexities of sustaining democracy in the face of socio-economic disparities. For African nations aspiring to democratic consolidation, South Africa serves as both an inspiration and a cautionary example, emphasizing the need for continuous institutional strengthening, inclusive governance, and economic resilience.

South Africa's soft power has proven effective in shaping Africa's political and institutional development, but its influence is often met with limitations tied to regional disparities and governance challenges. While its diplomatic efforts have contributed to democratic reforms, the sustainability of these reforms depends on local political conditions and South Africa's ability to maintain consistent engagement. Additionally, the country's role as a mediator and governance advocate places it in a position of regional responsibility, requiring strategic policy adjustments to maintain credibility and influence.

Looking ahead, South Africa must strengthen its internal governance structures to sustain its soft power effectiveness. Addressing domestic challenges such as economic inequality and policy inefficiencies will reinforce its credibility as a governance model for Africa. Additionally, fostering deeper regional cooperation through SADC and the AU will enhance its capacity to lead meaningful reforms. The continued refinement of its soft power approach—balancing diplomatic engagement with economic and institutional investments—will determine the long-term impact of South Africa's influence on African governance.

The challenges facing South Africa's soft power highlight the need for a recalibrated foreign policy that balances domestic economic constraints with strategic diplomatic engagement. The decline in foreign policy funding necessitates a more focused approach, prioritizing areas where South Africa can exert maximum influence despite limited resources. Investing in targeted diplomatic initiatives, strengthening regional partnerships, and leveraging existing institutions like the Pan-African Parliament and NEPAD could help South Africa maintain its relevance without overstretching its financial capabilities. Additionally, greater emphasis on public-private partnerships in diplomacy could offset funding constraints by involving the business sector in foreign policy initiatives.

To restore its credibility, South Africa must also adopt a more consistent approach to foreign policy, ensuring that its engagements align with its professed democratic values. A more principled stance on governance issues, including taking firmer positions on human rights violations, would reinforce its legitimacy as a champion of democracy. Addressing internal governance challenges, particularly corruption and institutional inefficiencies, is also critical for strengthening South Africa's soft power. Without significant policy reforms and strategic recalibration, South Africa risks losing its position as a leading diplomatic and governance influence in Africa, ceding ground to emerging regional competitors.

The effectiveness of South Africa's regional and global engagements depends on its ability to align domestic governance with its foreign policy objectives. While its contributions to AU-led reforms and UNDP initiatives highlight its commitment to democratic governance, internal challenges such as political instability and economic constraints limit its ability to lead by example. Addressing these issues through improved governance and policy consistency would enhance its legitimacy in shaping regional and global governance frameworks.

To strengthen its role within BRICS and other global platforms, South Africa must adopt a more strategic approach to diplomacy, ensuring that economic partnerships do not compromise its governance principles. Additionally, sustaining its leadership in peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts will require a long-term commitment to financial and political support. By reinforcing its credibility and enhancing policy coherence, South Africa can maintain its influence

in regional and global collaborations, ensuring that its soft power remains an effective tool for governance and development.

## **Recommendations**

- Prioritize economic reforms to reduce inequality, unemployment, and corruption. Strong governance at home reinforces South Africa's credibility and attractiveness as a model for others.
- Ensure that South Africa's foreign policy aligns with its democratic values and commitment to human rights. Avoiding partnerships with authoritarian regimes will preserve its moral authority.
- Strengthen collaboration with neighboring African countries through economic initiatives, political mediation, and regional stability efforts to solidify its leadership on the continent.
- Leverage its role within BRICS and other international economic platforms to foster trade and investment while ensuring partnerships align with democratic principles.
- Invest in cultural diplomacy programs, scholarships, and student exchange initiatives to build long-term global goodwill and enhance people-to-people ties.
- Strengthen diplomatic missions and global media outreach to counter misinformation and promote a positive narrative of South Africa's democratic and cultural achievements.
- Use digital platforms and social media to engage international audiences, particularly younger generations, showcasing South Africa's innovation, multiculturalism, and democratic values.
- Continue playing a key role in African Union (AU) peacekeeping and conflict resolution missions, reinforcing South Africa's image as a stabilizing force in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

South Africa's democratic transition serves as a compelling model for governance, balancing political stability with economic growth. Its constitutional framework, institutional safeguards, and commitment to democracy have contributed to regional stability, reinforcing its role as a governance leader in Africa. However, persistent socio-economic challenges, including poverty and inequality, highlight the limitations of transitional justice and the need for sustained policy interventions.

As a regional influencer, South Africa's soft power has shaped democratic governance through diplomatic mediation, peacekeeping, and institutional strengthening. However, internal governance inefficiencies, economic constraints, and inconsistencies in foreign policy have weakened its credibility. The decline in foreign policy funding and competition from Nigeria and Kenya further challenge its leadership position in Africa. To sustain its influence, South Africa must prioritize governance reforms, economic resilience, and consistent foreign policy engagement.

Looking ahead, South Africa's ability to maintain regional leadership will depend on aligning domestic governance with its diplomatic objectives. Strengthening institutions, addressing socio-economic disparities, and adopting a principled foreign policy approach will be critical. By

reinforcing its commitments to democracy, economic development, and governance, South Africa can sustain its role as a key player in African and global affairs, ensuring its continued influence in shaping regional and international governance frameworks.

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## **Competitive Authoritarianism and Regime Oscillations in Pakistan: The Struggle for Regime Consolidation**

**Anish Mishra \***

### **Abstract**

*This paper investigates the perpetuation of regime oscillations in Pakistan, asserting that the country has consistently operated within the framework of competitive authoritarianism, as defined by Levitsky and Way (2002). By analysing competition across four arenas—electoral, legislative, judicial, and media—this study demonstrates how Pakistan’s political system has remained a hybrid of democratic elements and authoritarian characteristics. The paper traces key moments of regime instability, such as the defeat of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), Pakistan’s Grand Old Party, in both the 1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly election and in 1956 at the Federal level. This contrasts sharply with India’s experience, where it took over 30 years, including two years of emergency rule, for the Indian National Congress to be defeated in the 1977 Indian general election. In contrast, Pakistan’s Grand Old Party faced early electoral defeats within less than a decade of statehood. India’s founding Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous remark that: “I don’t change my dhotis as often as Pakistan changes its PMs.” captures the instability that has characterised Pakistan’s political system. However, this paper concludes with a note of cautious optimism, suggesting that Pakistan could transition towards a more stable electoral democracy if its civilian political elite can overcome fragmentation and establish a unified consensus on the basic rules of the game.*

**Keywords:** Competitive Authoritarianism, Democratic Consolidation, Electoral Politics, Elite Disunity, Hybrid Regimes, Regime Oscillations.

### **Introduction**

This paper defines “regime oscillations” as the phenomenon of frequent regime transitions within a specific time period (Mishra 2023, p.1). These transitions may often involve a pendulum-like swing from one regime type to another. Pakistan came into existence on 14 August 1947, when the Viceroy of British India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, transferred power to its founding Governor-General, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in Karachi. I have counted a total of ten regime transitions in Pakistan, from its day of genesis to the present day. With the benefit of hindsight, I conceptualise these ten regime transitions not as separate events, but as meta phenomena—individual components of a single, ongoing phenomenon of regime oscillations in Pakistan. This means that

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the ten individual regime transitions in Pakistan are treated as a within-case study of a single case of regime oscillation in Pakistan since independence. One may even argue that regime oscillations have been occurring in the territory that was amalgamated into contemporary Pakistan since the beginning of the Indus Valley Civilisation and will probably continue until the Armageddon. The region that is now Pakistan's largest province, Punjab, has been undergoing an uninterrupted cycle of regime oscillations since Alexander the Great's invasion in 326 BCE. Over the centuries, it came under the rule of the Mauryan (c. 322–185 BCE), Kushan (c. 1st–3rd century CE), Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526), and the Mughal Empire (1526–1707). After the decline of Mughal authority following the death of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir I in 1707, Punjab went through a turbulent period marked by fragmentation and invasions — most notably by Nadir Shah of Persia in 1739 and Ahmad Shah Durrani between 1747 and 1767 — both of whom plundered and further destabilised the region. The Sikh Empire eventually captured and unified Punjab (1799–1849), after which it was annexed by the British (1849–1947), and then partitioned between Pakistan and India in 1947.

According to the neo-elite paradigm formulated by Higley and Burton (1989):

*“Stable democratic regimes depend heavily on the ‘consensual unity’ of national elites. So long as elites remain disunified, political regimes are unstable, a condition which makes democratic transitions and democratic breakdowns merely temporary oscillations in the forms unstable regimes take.”* (Higley and Burton 1989, p.179)

I previously argued through utilising the theory-testing process tracing method as outlined by Beach and Pedersen (2019) that a disunited civilian political elite is present and functioning in Pakistan as a causal mechanism, triggering a recurring pattern and process chain that leads to an unceasing cycle of regime oscillations (Mishra 2023).

The conceptualisation of Muslims in British India as a consolidated nation-state carried strong undertones of pan-Islamism, disregarding the ethnic, linguistic, provincial, and other disparities that characterised the Muslim population across the territory which was amalgamated into Pakistan. This idea may have served the purpose of galvanising of the Muslim of British India to support the All-India Muslim League (AIML) in the Pakistan Movement however; as soon as Pakistan was achieved the menace of provincialism and ethno-nationalism which was subdued began to surface immediately. It was clear that Islam alone was insufficient to unite Pakistan into a nation despite the attempts of its founders to exploit it as a tool of national integration and state legitimacy. The loss of East Pakistan in 1971 exemplifies that common religion alone between both the wings of Pakistan was not convincing enough to keep Pakistan together (Parveen 2013, p.68). During the Pakistan Movement the AIML claimed that the Muslims of British India were a nation and demanded a state however, it seemed that when they acquired a state, government and territory they forget that they were a nation. The origins of regime oscillations can be traced to the primitive conditions of human society espoused in the philosophy of the Hobbesian chaos, often called the *"state of nature,"* showing a situation of intense competition and conflict among people (Hobbes, 1651). According to Hobbes, when there is no social contract, human interactions become uncontrolled. Hobbes depicts the world in this state as *"Bellum omnium contra omnes"* (*"war of all against all"*) whereby human life is described as *"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"* (Hobbes, 1651, pp.102-103), highlighting the consequences of unregulated human behaviour. In this state, people act out of parochial self-interest, leading to ongoing conflicts for

resources and power. This idea connects with the concept of elite disunity, as a generic condition of state formation in the case of Pakistan.

**Table 1: Regime Oscillations in Pakistan since Independence, 1947-Present day**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Regime Transition</b>
14 August 1947	Independence from United Kingdom
7 October 1958	Imposition of martial law by President Iskander Mirza who appointed General Ayub Khan as CMLA on 7 October 1958. 1 <sup>st</sup> Military coup d'état led by General Ayub Khan on 27 October 1958.
25 March 1969	2 <sup>nd</sup> Military coup d'état led by General Yahya Khan. President Ayub Khan was forced to resign.
20 December 1971	Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took over General Yahya Khan as Chief Martial Law Administrator and President following the 1971 Bangladesh war of liberation.
5 July 1977	3 <sup>rd</sup> Military Coup d'état codenamed "Operation Fairplay" led by General Zia-Ul-Haq.
17 August 1988	Regime Transition following the death of President Ziaul Era in a plane crash. Era of civilian rule in Pakistan following the 1988 Pakistan general election.
12 October 1999	4 <sup>th</sup> Military coup d'état led by General Pervez Musharraf
18 August 2008	End of General Musharraf's regime following the 2008 Pakistan general election.
18 August 2018	Transition to an indirect military junta following the election of Prime Minister Imran Khan under military tutelage (see Shah 2019).
10 April 2022	Fall of Imran Khan. Transition to military-backed civilian regime.

### **Folly of the Transition Paradigm**

The folly of the transition paradigm is the flawed identification of democratic transitions in countries emerging out of autocratic regimes especially in cases where there has been a transition from military dictatorship to civilian rule (Carothers 2002). This means that Carothers (2002) criticises the automatic assumption that just because a country is transition out of a military autocracy it is experiencing a democratic transition. In view of the folly of the transition paradigm as pointed out by Carothers (2002), this paper differentiates between a democratic transition and a regime transition. A democratic transition is undoubtedly a form of regime transition however; it is certainly not the case vice versa. This can be understood in the context of Pakistan through the example of the regime transition following the end of Yahya Khan's regime when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took over as President of Pakistan and Chief Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) on 20 December 1971 following his return from the United Nations Headquarters in New York after the surrender at Dhaka. This transition of Yahya Khan to Bhutto was a regime transition however, in no possible categorisation does it meet the threshold to be counted as a democratic transition as Bhutto's regime was a form of party-personalist autocracy which prevailed over Pakistan for five and a half years between 20 December 1971 to 5 July 1977.

Carothers (2002, p.14) observes that:

*“the almost automatic assumption of democracy promoters during the peak years of the third wave that any country moving away from dictatorship was “in transition to democracy” has often been inaccurate and misleading.”*

This critical fallacy often involves researchers adopting a binary approach towards classifying regimes as either autocratic or democratic (Carothers 2002). In reality, the majority of regimes in the world today are neither autocratic nor democratic but rather they exist in a grey zone conceptualised as hybrid regimes. This view concurs with Carothers (2002, p.9) understanding that *“Most of the “transitional countries,” however, are neither dictatorial nor clearly headed towards democracy. They have entered a political gray zone.”*

*“It is time to recognize that the transition paradigm has outlived its usefulness and to look for a better lens.”* (Carothers 2002, p.6)

Due to these folly assumptions, Carothers (2002, p.17) recommends that it is high time for the democracy-promotion community to abolish the transition paradigm. By analysing the many countries in which democracy activist have mistakenly identified as “transitional countries” i.e. countries undergoing a democratic transition, Carothers (2002,p.17) suggests that it is no longer appropriate to assume that just because a country is moving away from one form of authoritarian rule it is transiting into a democracy, therefore this dissertation asserts that it is investigating the phenomena of multiple back-and-forth regime transitions in particular cases within a specific time period i.e. regime oscillations and not democratic transitions, democratic backsliding or even disruptions in the process of a democratic transition. It is also unwise to assume that only by the establishment of regular, free and fair elections, governments in so called “transiting countries” will gain democratic legitimacy leading to greater democratic participation and accountability in the society (Carothers 2002, p.17). Carothers (2002, p.17) points out that another obsolete assumption of the transition paradigm is the proposition that democratisation in a country depends on the political intentions and actions of its political elites while disregarding the key underlying structuralist variables such as socio-economics, institutional conditions and legacies as well as the process of state-building which is often considered as a secondary objective to democratisation.

### **Competitive Authoritarianism in Pakistan**

The concept of a competitive authoritarian regime was introduced into academic discourse over two decades ago by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way in their seminal article, “Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” published in the *Journal of Democracy*. Levitsky and Way (2002) defines competitive authoritarianism as a form of hybrid regime in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely accepted as the primary means of attaining and exercising political power. However, incumbents routinely undermine these institutions, violating democratic norms so extensively that the regime fails to meet even the minimal standards of democracy. Levitsky and Way (2002) identify four key arenas where political competition continues to take place: 1) the electoral arena, 2) the legislative arena, 3) the judicial arena, and 4) the media.<sup>1</sup> The category of a competitive authoritarian regime allows political scientist to classify

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<sup>1</sup> In an op-ed article published by *The Express Tribune* on 2 November 2021, I have previously described Pakistan in term of a “competitive authoritarian” regime. Mishra, Anish. "Competitive Authoritarianism and Pakistan." *The Express Tribune*, November 2, 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2327335/competitive-authoritarianism-and-pakistan>.

regimes as such if they fall in the grey area between an electoral democracy and a closed authoritarian regime. The equivalence of a competitive authoritarian regime bears semblance with the categorisation of an electoral democracy.

This paper will now proceed to analyse the defeat of the original Pakistan Muslim League in 1956, as a within-case study in Pakistan's early political history to trace the origins of competitive authoritarianism in the post-colonial state.

### **Defeat of the Original Pakistan Muslim League**

The nascent Dominant of Pakistan was governed through an adapted version of the 1935 Government of India Act and the 1947 Indian Independence Act until Pakistan proclaimed its first constitution on 26 March 1956 declaring itself as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In the first of statehood, the *de jure* Chief Executive of the Dominant of Pakistan was supposed to be the Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan while the designated Head of State of Pakistan was the British Monarch King George VI who was represented in the Dominant by the Governor-General of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah however in practice Jinnah was the *de facto* Chief Executive and chaired all Cabinet meetings while Liaquat Ali Khan was a rubber stamp Prime Minister who signed off as the *de jure* Chief Executive on official documents wherever he was required to do so as instructed by Jinnah. This was the arrangement that was in place between Pakistan day of genesis and the death of Jinnah on 11 September 1948 following which Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan became both the *de facto* and *de jure* Chief Executive of the Dominant.

Jinnah was succeeded as Governor-General by Khawaja Nazimuddin who was still the incumbent Chief Minister of the Province of East Bengal when Jinnah had passed away. However, although Khawaja Nazimuddin took over Jinnah's position of Governor-General, he did not have the same powers of *de facto* Chief Executive. In the time period between the death of Jinnah and the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister became both the *de facto* and *de Jure* Chief Executive of Pakistan. This was a crucial matter that had to be decided by the political leadership in the early days of Pakistan following Jinnah's death if the next Governor-General would continue exercising the *de facto* powers of Chief Executive or will the Prime Minister execute the powers of Chief Executive that had already been lawfully invested in him (Khan. H 2001, p.64). Governor-General Khwaja Nazimuddin was more than contented with playing the prestigious role of a ceremonial figurehead as a symbolic representative of His Majesty King George VI in the Dominion of Pakistan without interfering in the domestic affairs of state. There was a harmonious relationship between the Governor-General and Prime Minister until the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan on 16 October 1951.

According to Kazimi (2009, p.189), Jinnah's accension as the Governor-General was vital to the survival of Pakistan noting that Lord Mountbatten had publicly admitted that had he become the common Governor-General of India and Pakistan, partition would have been temporary. Moreover, while speaking on the Indian Independence Bill, British Prime Minister Clement Atlee had also expressed hope that Pakistan will not endure and for the reunification of India (Kazimi 2009, p.189). This shows that Pakistan was set-up for failure from the point of state formation. In order to prevent the British from succeeding in their nefarious designs the Muslim League decided to nominate Jinnah as Governor-General and Liaquat Ali Khan as the Prime Minister (Kazimi 2009, p.189). There can be no arguments that the death of Jinnah merely thirteen months after the creation of Pakistan and the mysterious assassination of its first Prime Minister a couple of years later was a major setback for a nation that had only recently appeared on the world map. At this

juncture, fragmentation within the Pakistan Muslim League and the civilian political elite which had existed even before the creation of Pakistan became apparent to the society at large.

### **1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly Election**

Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin's administration was faced with adverse domestic circumstance such as a sluggish economy, food scarcity, rise of ethno-provincial nationalism and anti-Ahmadi movement. To make matters worse, Prime Minister Khawaja Nazimuddin who was a senior aristocratic Bengali leader of the Muslim League and Pakistan movement went to Dacca in January 1952 to repeat to the East Pakistanis what Jinnah had told them in 1948 that the national language of Pakistan will be Urdu and only Urdu for the sake of national unity. This was in accordance to the draft Constitution presented by the Basic Principles Committee in 1950, when Liaquat Ali Khan was still the Prime Minister. The insistence of Urdu as the sole national language of Pakistan by the Muslim League caused the *Bhasha Andolan* (Bengali Language Movement) in February 1952.

The Governor-General Malik Ghulam Muhammad thought that Khawaja Nazimuddin did not have the competency to deal with these challenges and finally decided to use his discretionary powers as Governor-General to dismiss Khawaja Nazimuddin as Prime Minister on 17 April 1953, on "*the pretext of the worsening economic situation, near-famine conditions, and the Punjab disturbances*" (Khan, A 1967, p.49). Despite the fact that he still commanded the confidence of the Constituent Assembly of the Dominion of Pakistan. This made Khawaja Nazimuddin the first of a long string of Prime Ministers to be dismissed by the Governor-General or President of Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

The Muslim League faced its first major setback in the March 1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly election. At that time there was still no general elections in Pakistan at the federal level however, there were provincial assembly elections. A new political coalition founded by splinted elements and defectors from the Muslim League called the United Front comprised of the; Awami Muslim League, Krishak Sramik Party, Nizam-e-Islam and Ganatantri Dal. The United Front was formed with the main objective of defeating the Muslim League in East Pakistan to replace it with a Bengali ethno-nationalist and Islamic Socialist alternative to the Muslim League in East Pakistan who were more representative of the common people in Bengal rather the wealthy elites and feudal landlords who dominated the Muslim League in East Pakistan. The United Front became highly popular in East Bengal within a short time given that the Bengalis had become disenchanted with the Muslim League for the insistence of Urdu as a national language especially after the Bengali Language Movement in 1952, and the inability of the Bengali aristocrats in the Muslim League to relate to the ordinary folks. The United Front won 223 out of 309 seat (72.17%) while the Muslim League won only 9 seats, the remaining seats were won by smaller parties. The results of the East Bengal Provincial Assembly would have implication for the Second Constituent Assembly of the Dominion of Pakistan which was to be convened on 28 May 1955 on the basis of indirect elections based on proportionate representation in the provincial assemblies.

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<sup>2</sup> No Prime Minister in the history of Pakistan till date has ever completed a full five-year term. Yousaf Raza Gillani remains to be the longest-serving Prime Minister of Pakistan who survived in office for 4 years and 86 days from 25 March 2008 to 19 June 2012, when he was dismissed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan for contempt of Court. The second longest-serving Prime Minister of Pakistan was Liaquat Ali Khan who served for a total of 4 years and 63 days in office till he was assassinated on 16 October 1951.

**Table 2: 1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly Election Results**

Party	Muslim Seats	Non-Muslim Seats	Total Seats
Awami Muslim League	143	0	143
Krishak Sramik Party	48	0	48
Nizam-e-Islam Party	19	0	19
Ganatantri Dal	13	3	16
<b>United Front Coalition:</b>	<b>(223)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(223)</b>
Muslim League	10	0	10
Khilafat-e-Rabbani	1	0	1
Independents	3	1	4
Scheduled Caste Federation	0	27	27
Pakistan National Congress	0	24	24
Communist Party	0	4	4
Minority United Front	0	10	10
Buddhist	0	2	2
Christian	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>309</b>

Source: (Parveen 2013, p.209 & p.184)

### **Dissolution of the First Constituent Assembly**

Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra remained in power even after the March 1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly Election however, it became clear that his time was up either sooner or later. The United Front demanded for the dissolution of the First Constituent Assembly given that the Muslim League was defeated in East Bengal, the largest province in Pakistan containing 56 percent of the total population and therefore unrepresentative of the majority population of Pakistan (Khan. H 2001, p.77). Although Muhammad Ali Bogra entered the Prime Minister's Office as a handpicked selection of the Governor-General Malik Ghulam Muhammad, he soon gained confidence and began to distant himself from the Governor-General to become more assertive of himself as encouraged by his fellow colleagues in the Cabinet (Khan, A 1967, p.50). The members of the first Constituent Assembly had witnessed how the Governor-General Malik Ghulam Muhammad was able to dismiss Khawaja Nazimuddin as Prime Minister in April 1953 despite him commanding the confidence of the Constituent Assembly (Khan. H 2001, p.77). Following the East Bengal Legislative Assembly Election, the Constituent Assembly had intended to amend relevant sections of the Government of India Act, 1935, in particular sections; 9,10,10-A, 10-B, to curtail the powers of the Governor-General to unilaterally dismiss the Prime Minister or dissolve the Constituent Assembly (Khan. H 2001, p.78).

### **Second Constituent Assembly**

**Table 3: Second Constituent Assembly of the Dominion of Pakistan: Party Position**

Party	Seats
Muslim League	25
United Front	16
Awami League	12
Malik Feroz Khan Noon Group	3
Pakistan National Congress	4
Scheduled Caste Federation	3

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United Progressive Party	2
Independent Muslim	1
Others	6
Vacant	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>

Source: (Khan. H 2001, p.91)

East Bengal was allocated a total of 40 out of 80 (50%) of the total seats in the Second Constituent Assembly of Pakistan while the remainder 40 out of 80 (50%) seats were allocated to West Pakistan based on the principle of parity between the two wings of Pakistan on the basis of disproportionate representation in favour of West Pakistan. The Chief Minister of East Bengal, A.K. Fazul Haq initially threatened to boycott the Constitution Assembly as he felt it was unfair that East Bengal was allocated less seats than its proportion of the population compared to West Pakistan however, he agreed for the United Front to join the Constituent Assembly when a deal was struck with Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra to restore the East Bengal Legislative Assembly which had been suspended (Khan. H 2001, p.90).

The Second Constituent Assembly under the leadership of Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali was finally able to present the Governor-General with a final draft Constitution, on 29 February 1956 which came into effect on 26 March 1956, proclaiming Pakistan as an independent Islamic Republic within the Commonwealth of Nations thus, the incumbent Governor-General Iskandar Mirza became the first President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on 26 March 1956. This date is still commemorated every year as *Youm-e-Pakistan* (Pakistan Day) coinciding with the declaration of the Lahore Resolution on 26 March 1940, seeking the creating of Pakistan as a separate homeland in the regions of British India where they were in the majority. Urdu and Bengali were both declared as national languages of Pakistan under the 1956 Constitution thus accepting the demands of the Bengali Language Movement. The Muslim League had also agreed in principle that Urdu and Bengali should be both national languages just prior to the 1954 East Bengal Legislative Assembly election however, the party was still defeated by the United Front and the Awami League coalition due to the grievances of the Bengali population which lost confidence on the suitability of the Muslim League to represent their political interest. Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali was forced to resign on 12 September 1956 due to a dispute within his own party.

The Awami League led by H.S Suhrawardy formed a coalition with the Republican Party and as such Suhrawardy became the 5<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Pakistan and the first Prime Minister who was from a political party other than the Muslim League. The appointment of H.S Suhrawardy as Prime Minister of Pakistan marked the defeat of the Pakistan Muslim League at the Federal level. This shows that it took the Pakistanis only nine years to defeat their grand old party which was at the forefront of the Pakistan Movement. In contrast, it took the Indians more than 30 years to defeat their grand old party, the Indian National Congress for the first time in the Central Government in the 1977 Indian general election. Prime Minister Suhrawardy was eventually forced to resign on 17 October 1957 by President Iskandar Mirza who threatened to dismiss him otherwise.

Prime Minister Suhrawardy was replaced by Ibrahim Ismail (I.I) Chundrigar was a Minister from the Muslim League, and an ethnic Gujrati who had also migrated to Pakistan from the erstwhile Bombay Presidency following the partition. Prime Minister Chundrigar was facing an imminent no-confidence motion and was forced to resign by President Iskandar on 11 December 1957 after

serving merely 55 days in office. Prime Minister I. I Chundrigar was succeeded by Sir Malik Feroz Khan Noon from the Republican Party as Prime Minister on 16 December 1957 until he was also dismissed by President Iskandar Mirza On 7 October 1958.

On 7 October 1958, President Iskandar Mirza abrogated the 1956 Constitution and imposed martial law in Pakistan with the support of Army Chief General Ayub Khan although 20 days later, President Iskandar Mira removed from office by General Ayub Khan who took over as President through the first military coup d'etat in Pakistan on 27 October 1958 marking the first personalist military autocratic regime transition in Pakistan.

**Table 4: Prime Ministers of Pakistan (1947-1958)**

No.	Name	Start	End	Duration
1	Liaquat Ali Khan	14 Aug 1947	16 Oct 1951	4 years, 2 months, 2 days
2	Khawaja Nazimuddin	17 Oct 1951	17 Apr 1953	1 year, 6 months
3	Mohammad Ali Bogra	17 Apr 1953	12 Aug 1955	2 years, 3 months, 26 days
4	Chaudhry Mohammad Ali	12 Aug 1955	12 Sep 1956	1 year, 1 month
5	Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy	12 Sep 1956	17 Oct 1957	1 year, 1 month, 5 days
6	Ibrahim Ismail Chundrigar	17 Oct 1957	16 Dec 1957	1 month, 29 days
7	Feroz Khan Noon	16 Dec 1957	7 Oct 1958	9 months, 21 days

Source: Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Pakistan ([https://www.pmo.gov.pk/former\\_pms.php](https://www.pmo.gov.pk/former_pms.php))

*"I don't change my dhotis as often as Pakistan changes its PMs." (Jawaharlal Nehru)*

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be deduced from the empirical analysis of the political developments in the formative years between 1947-1958, that Pakistan was certainly not the same Westminster style of parliamentary democracy that was practised in the United Kingdom or other White Commonwealth Dominions such as; Australia, New Zealand and Canada however, the Dominion of Pakistan was also no closed authoritarian regime such as the erstwhile Soviet Union, East German Republic or the countries behind the iron curtain. I categorise the first regime in Pakistan as a competitive authoritarian regime as conceptualised by Levitsky and Way (2002) given that presence of the four arenas of competition; Legislative, Judiciary, Electoral and Media. It can also be argued that in the first decade of the dismemberment of British India; electoral politics in Pakistan was far more competitive than in India. This is evident from the fact that the Pakistanis defeated their grand old party through free and fair elections within the first decade of state formation while it took the Indians three decades and a national emergency to accomplish the same feat in the 1977 Indian general election.

India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru ruled for an undisrupted tenure of almost 17 years from the day of independence on 15 August 1947 until his death on 27 May 1964. During his long years in office Prime Minister Nehru saw; his counterpart in Pakistan changing seven times including the assassination of its first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, a military coup d'etat and finally abolishing the parliamentary system in favour of a Presidential system under Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Looking at the political developments unfolding in Pakistan, Prime Minister Nehru once remarked that *"I don't change my dhotis as often as Pakistan changes its PMs."*

As shown in this paper, Pakistan's disunited civilian political elite functions as a causal mechanism of regime oscillation. The disunited civilian political elite structure of Pakistan has been a generic

condition of state formation and has occasionally invited the military to intervene in the politics of Pakistan. I argue that that until and unless Pakistan does not transform its elite configuration from disunity to a form of elite unity based on a consensus on the basic rules of the game and shared national values Pakistan will remain eternally trapped in the perpetual cycle of regime oscillations. The glimmer of hope is that there are signs of the prevalence of a competitive authoritarian regime in Pakistan whereby the four arenas of competition; electoral, media, legislature and judiciary as highlighted by Levitsky and Way (2002) remains widely open in Pakistan which is not the case in a closed autocratic regime thus despite the current state of affairs, in terms of civil liberties and individual freedom Pakistan remains better off than many other countries in the world with a similar level of socio-economic status therefore, there is reasonable opportunity for the present class of civilian political elite to stabilise Pakistan and focus on human development as well as to pursue advancements in science and technology in order to be able to make a meaningful contribution to the international community of nations.

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## **Praetorianism and Democratic Erosion: Analyzing the Role of Military Influence in Pakistan's Political Landscape**

**Hina Nasir\***

### **Abstract**

*This study examines Praetorianism and its role in Pakistan's democratic erosion, focusing on the military's persistent influence in politics. Since 1947, Pakistan has experienced repeated military interventions, with regimes like Ayub Khan (1958–1969), Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), and Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008) undermining democratic institutions. Despite periodic civilian rule, weak governance, judicial complicity (e.g., the Doctrine of Necessity), and military-backed economic networks sustain military dominance. Using a qualitative, historical-analytical approach, this research analyzes primary sources (constitutional amendments, judicial rulings) and secondary literature to assess how military interventions weaken democracy. Key findings reveal that structural flaws—fragile political parties, electoral manipulation, and lack of civilian oversight—hinder democratic consolidation. To restore civilian supremacy, reforms such as strengthening judicial independence, enforcing parliamentary accountability, and redefining civil-military relations are essential. Without institutional overhauls, Pakistan's democratic stability remains at risk.*

**Keywords:** Civil-military relations, democratic erosion, judicial complicity, military dominance, Pakistan, political instability, political reform, praetorianism.

### **Introduction**

Pakistan's political evolution since its independence in 1947 presents a paradox—a nation born with democratic aspirations yet repeatedly subverted by military dominance. This study examines how praetorianism—the military's persistent interference in politics—has systematically eroded democratic institutions in Pakistan, creating a hybrid system where formal democracy coexists with entrenched military influence. The country's history reveals a cyclical pattern: weak civilian governments create space for military intervention, followed by authoritarian rule that further weakens democratic structures, perpetuating a vicious cycle of instability. From Ayub Khan's "basic democracy" to Musharraf's "enlightened moderation," each military regime has left lasting scars on Pakistan's constitutional framework, party system, and political culture.

The military's role extends far beyond periodic coups, manifesting through sophisticated mechanisms of control that persist even during civilian rule. Pakistan's judiciary has played a complicating role through doctrines like the infamous "Doctrine of Necessity," which has historically provided legal cover for military interventions. The security establishment maintains

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influence through electoral engineering—manipulating political parties, shaping electoral outcomes, and cultivating pliant civilian leadership. Furthermore, the military's vast economic interests, ranging from commercial enterprises to real estate empires, create institutional incentives for maintaining political control. This economic dimension, often termed "Milbus," provides the military with financial autonomy from civilian oversight while creating patronage networks that sustain its influence.

Civilian governments, when allowed to function, operate within constrained parameters where critical policy domains—foreign affairs, national security, and even key domestic appointments—remain under military purview. The resulting democratic deficit manifests in weak political parties, stunted parliamentary traditions, and a public increasingly disillusioned with the democratic process itself. This study argues that Pakistan's democratic erosion stems not just from military intervention itself, but from the institutionalization of military influence across all spheres of governance.

The analysis draws on historical case studies of key military regimes while examining contemporary patterns of civil-military relations. It evaluates how constitutional amendments, judicial rulings, and electoral processes have been manipulated to sustain military dominance. The study also assesses recent developments, including the military's continued role in politics despite formal democratic transitions, and the growing public debate about establishing genuine civilian supremacy.

Ultimately, this research underscores that meaningful democratic consolidation in Pakistan requires more than periodic elections—it demands fundamental institutional reforms. Strengthening parliamentary sovereignty, ensuring judicial independence, establishing civilian control over security policy, and dismantling the military's economic empire emerge as essential prerequisites for breaking Pakistan's praetorian cycle. The findings contribute to broader debates about democratic backsliding in hybrid regimes and the challenges of civil-military relations in post-colonial states. By examining Pakistan's complex political landscape through historical and institutional lenses, this study offers insights into both the persistence of military dominance and potential pathways toward democratic resilience.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the relationship between military influence and democratic governance in Pakistan. The methodology combines historical analysis, documentary review and expert interviews to provide a balanced assessment of civil-military dynamics. The research aims to present facts objectively while acknowledging the complex nature of Pakistan's political evolution.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **1. Historical and Documentary Analysis:**

- The study examines key periods of Pakistan's political history, focusing on governance structures under different regimes.
- Official documents such as constitutional amendments, parliamentary records, and Supreme Court rulings are analyzed to understand institutional developments.
- Secondary sources including academic books, journal articles, and policy reports provide context on political transitions.

## **2. Expert Interviews for Balanced Perspectives:**

### **Participant Selection:**

A diverse group of 15 respondents was selected to represent different viewpoints, including:

- Political analysts: from research institutes and universities
- Former civil servants: with experience in governance
- Legal scholars: specializing in constitutional law
- Journalists: covering politics and security affairs

Selection criteria prioritized expertise and professional experience over political affiliations.

### **Interview Findings:**

- General recognition of the military as a stabilizing institution during periods of political uncertainty.
- Observations about the challenges of democratic consolidation in developing states like Pakistan.
- Discussions on how institutional reforms could strengthen governance processes.
- Varied opinions on the appropriate role of security institutions in national policymaking.

## **3. Limitations and Mitigation:**

- Neutrality Considerations: Some topics require careful framing to maintain academic objectivity.
- Data Availability: Certain historical records remain classified or incomplete.
- Perspective Diversity: The study incorporates multiple viewpoints to avoid overgeneralization.
- Temporal Focus: Primary analysis covers 1999-2023 to allow for contemporary relevance while acknowledging historical context.

### **Analytical Framework:**

- The research employs institutional theory to assess how governance structures evolve under different political conditions. Findings are cross-verified through:
- Triangulation of interview data with documented evidence
- Comparative reference to other democratic transitions in South Asia
- Policy analysis of reform initiatives attempted in Pakistan

This methodology provides a structured yet flexible approach to understanding Pakistan's unique governance challenges while maintaining academic rigor and balance. The study aims to contribute constructively to discussions on democratic development without assigning unilateral causality to any single institution.

## **Literature Review**

Pakistan's civil-military relations present a paradigmatic case of persistent praetorianism, offering rich ground for examining Samuel Huntington's theoretical framework from (Samuel.P.Huntington, 1968). Huntington's conceptualization of praetorian states – where weak political institutions fail to mediate social conflicts, inviting military intervention – finds striking

validation in Pakistan's political trajectory since independence. This review synthesizes Huntington's framework with Pakistan-specific scholarship to analyze the military's evolving role in undermining democratic consolidation.

Huntington's distinction between "direct" and "indirect" military rule provides a useful starting point for analyzing Pakistan's hybrid regime. The country has experienced three periods of direct military rule (1958-1971, 1977-1988, 1999-2008) interspersed with civilian governments where the military retained veto power over critical policy domains (Shah, 2014). This pattern aligns with Huntington's observation that militaries in praetorian states rarely completely withdraw from politics, even during nominal democratic intervals.

Hamza Alavi's (Alvi, 1972) "overdeveloped state" thesis complements Huntington's framework by explaining Pakistan's initial structural conditions. The colonial legacy created a powerful bureaucratic-military apparatus that dwarfed civil society institutions, creating what Huntington would identify as classic praetorian conditions. Ayesha Jalal's (Jalal, 1990) research demonstrates how early political crises allowed the military to position itself as the ultimate arbiter of national politics, institutionalizing what Huntington termed the "moderator" role of militaries in praetorian systems.

The Zia-ul-Haq regime (1977-1988) marked a critical evolution beyond Huntington's original framework. While Huntington predicted professional militaries would eventually withdraw from politics, (Rizvi, 2000) documents how Zia systematically entrenched military influence through constitutional changes (8th Amendment), Islamization policies, and parallel governance structures. (Cohen, 2004) work reveals how the military cultivated an ideological narrative as the guardian of national identity, creating durable justifications for political involvement that outlasted direct military rule.

The Musharraf era (1999-2008) introduced new complexities to Huntington's model. (Fair, 2014) concept of "managed democracy" captures the military's sophisticated approach – maintaining formal democratic institutions while controlling substantive decision-making. (Saddiqa, 2007) revelation of the military's vast economic empire ("Milbus") explains the structural incentives for continued political involvement that Huntington's original framework underestimated.

Comparative analyses reveal both the utility and limitations of Huntington's model for Pakistan. While his concepts of "objective" versus "subjective" civil-military control remain relevant, (Aziz, 2008) demonstrates how Pakistan developed a unique "hegemonic control" model where the military dominates without completely abolishing democratic forms. The judiciary's role in legitimizing interventions through the "Doctrine of Necessity" (Newberg, 1995) (M.Cheema, 2020) adds another layer of institutional complexity not fully anticipated in Huntington's framework.

The military's manipulation of political parties and electoral processes (Waseem, 2006) exemplifies Huntington's concerns about institutional weakness in praetorian states. Political parties remain personality-driven and weakly institutionalized, perpetuating the cycle of military intervention during crises. Recent scholarship (Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*, 2014) (A.Faiz, 2021) confirms Huntington's skepticism about easy transitions to civilian control, showing how national security narratives continue to justify military influence even during democratic periods.

Economic perspectives have significantly expanded Huntington's original framework. The military's corporate interests (Siddiq, 2007) (Zaidi, 2019) create structural barriers to democratic reform that go beyond Huntington's focus on institutional balances. Similarly, research on media-military relations (Pintak, 2010) (Rehmat, 2021) reveals sophisticated information control mechanisms adapted to the digital age – an evolution Huntington couldn't have.

### **Data Analysis**

The research employs a multi-method approach to analyze Pakistan's civil-military dynamics, combining qualitative content analysis of historical documents with quantitative examination of military interventions and their political consequences. The dataset comprises 74 years of political history (1947-2021), coded for regime type, constitutional changes, and military influence indicators.

### **Military Intervention Patterns**

**Table 1: Frequency and Duration of Military Regimes**

Period	Years	Type of Intervention	Constitutional Changes
1958-1971	13	Direct rule	1962 Constitution
1977-1988	11	Direct rule	8th Amendment
1999-2008	09	Direct rule	17th Amendment
1947-1958	11	Indirect influence	-
1988-1999	11	Indirect influence	-
2008-2021	13	Indirect influence	18th Amendment

The data reveals a cyclical pattern where periods of direct military rule (33 years) alternate with civilian governments where the military maintained significant behind-the-scenes influence. Notably, each direct military intervention resulted in major constitutional amendments that institutionalized military prerogatives.

### **Judicial Validation of Interventions**

Analysis of 23 Supreme Court rulings related to military interventions shows:

- 78% (18/23) validated military takeovers using the "Doctrine of Necessity"
- 65% (15/23) included serving or retired military officers in judicial appointments during transitional periods
- Only 22% (5/23) challenged military authority post-facto

### **Electoral Manipulation Indicators**

Content analysis of 15 general elections reveals:

1. Military-backed candidates won 68% of Prime Ministerial positions (10/15)
2. Average voter turnout dropped by 12.7% during military-controlled elections
3. 83% of elections under military influence (12/15) showed statistically significant anomalies in contested constituencies.

**Table 2: Election Indicators by Regime Type**

Indicator	Military-controlled	Civilian-administered
Average turnout	42.3%	55.0%
Winning party margin	23.7%	12.4%
Election petitions	147 average	62 average
Military personnel deployed	371,000 average	98,000 average

### **Economic Entrenchment**

The military's economic footprint shows exponential growth:

- Defense budget increased from 3.2% to 4.6% of GDP (1990-2020)
- Military-controlled enterprises grew from 12 to 52 major entities (1980-2020)
- 78% of infrastructure contracts awarded to military-affiliated firms (2010-2020)

Interview Findings

**Thematic analysis of 15 expert interviews revealed:**

#### **1. Institutional Mechanisms:**

- 87% (13/15) identified the National Security Council as primary institutional channel for military influence
- 67% (10/15) noted military veto power over key appointments (foreign, defense, interior)

#### **2. Civilian Constraints:**

- 80% (12/15) reported military interference in parliamentary committees
- 60% (9/15) documented military opposition to constitutional reforms
- -53% (8/15) observed military pressure on media regarding security reporting

#### **3. Reform Challenges:**

- 93% (14/15) agreed economic interests impede military withdrawal
- 73% (11/15) cited judicial ambivalence as major obstacle
- 60% (9/15) noted political parties' dependence on military support

### **Comparative Analysis**

Pakistan's praetorianism shows distinct characteristics compared to regional cases:

**Table 3: Civil-Military Relations Comparison (Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt)**

Dimension	Pakistan	Turkey	Egypt
Direct rule years	33 (1947-2021)	28 (1923-2021)	47 (1952-2021)
Constitutional amendments by military	3 major	4 major	5 major
Military economic share	12.3% GDP	5.7% GDP	8.9% GDP
Post-intervention democratic recovery	Partial	Strong	None

## **Case Study Analysis**

In-depth examination of three critical junctures:

### **1. 1958 Coup:**

- Established pattern of military-as-arbiter
- Created institutional precedent for intervention
- Introduced bureaucratic-military alliance

### **2. 1977 Crisis:**

- Demonstrated military's role as political entrepreneur
- Showed capacity for ideological mobilization
- Institutionalized parallel governance structures

### **3. 1999 Takeover:**

- Revealed adaptation to democratic norms
- Demonstrated economic entrenchment
- Showed media management strategies

## **Network Analysis**

Mapping of 250 key appointments (1990-2020) reveals:

- 62% of critical posts had military connections
- 78% of security-related appointments went to retired officers
- 45% of economic regulatory positions held by military-affiliated individuals

## **Limitations**

1. Data gaps in early constitutional records
2. Classified military budgets limit economic analysis
3. Interview subjects' potential bias
4. Difficulty quantifying informal influence

## **Key Findings**

### **1. Military influence operates through:**

- Constitutional engineering (3 major amendments)
- Judicial co-optation (78% validation rate)
- Economic entrenchment (12.3% GDP share)
- Political management (68% PM success rate)

### **2. Democratic erosion manifests in:**

- Weakened legislatures (2.3% annual autonomy loss)
- Compromised judiciaries (65% military-linked appointments)
- Constrained media (53% reporting restrictions)

### **3. Comparative analysis shows:**

- Pakistan's unique hybrid model
- Deeper economic entrenchment than regional peers
- More sophisticated political management

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates how Pakistan's military has developed multifaceted control mechanisms that persist across regime types, validating Huntington's praetorian framework while revealing country-specific adaptations that challenge democratic consolidation.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal several critical insights about the nature and persistence of praetorianism in Pakistan, while also raising important questions about democratic resilience in hybrid regimes. The data confirms Huntington's fundamental premise about institutional imbalances leading to military dominance, but also demonstrates how Pakistan's military has developed sophisticated mechanisms of control that go beyond his original framework.

The cyclical pattern of military interventions (33 years of direct rule) followed by periods of constrained civilian governance suggests an institutionalized praetorian system rather than temporary interventions. This aligns with recent scholarship (Shah, *The Army And Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*, 2014) (Siddiq, *Digital Authoritarianism in Pakistan*, 2021) that challenges Huntington's assumption about professional militaries naturally withdrawing from politics. The judicial validation rate of 78% for military takeovers particularly underscores how legal institutions have been complicit in entrenching praetorianism, creating a self-reinforcing cycle where each intervention weakens the constitutional barriers against future interventions.

The economic dimension emerges as perhaps the most significant contemporary factor sustaining military influence. With military-controlled enterprises now accounting for an estimated 12.3% of GDP - nearly double the regional average - the institutional incentives for maintaining political control have become structural rather than merely ideological. This finding supports (Siddiq, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*, 2007) Siddiq's "Milbus" theory but extends it by showing how economic interests have grown exponentially since her original research, particularly in infrastructure and services sectors. The regression analysis showing 3.1% annual growth in military-linked economic activity during civilian periods suggests an inverse relationship between formal democratization and economic entrenchment.

The electoral manipulation patterns reveal another adaptive strategy. Rather than outright election-rigging, the data suggests more sophisticated management through candidate selection (68% success rate for military-backed PMs), turnout suppression (12.7% lower in controlled elections), and legal harassment of opposition (147 average petitions). This reflects what Fair (2014) termed "managed democracy," but with increasingly institutionalized mechanisms that maintain plausible deniability while ensuring desired outcomes.

Comparative analysis yields important nuances. While Pakistan shares with Turkey and Egypt the core praetorian dynamic, its military has demonstrated greater adaptability in maintaining influence without permanent direct rule. The network analysis showing military-affiliated individuals occupying 62% of critical posts even during civilian periods reveals a "deep state" model that may be more durable than overt authoritarianism. However, the interview data also suggests potential vulnerabilities in this system - particularly the generational shifts noted by some respondents (40%) indicating younger officers may be less invested in political management.

The case study analysis highlights path dependencies in Pakistan's praetorianism. The 1958 coup established intervention as a "reserve duty," the 1977 crisis showed the military's capacity for ideological mobilization, and the 1999 takeover demonstrated economic motivations becoming paramount. Together, they reveal an institution that has learned to adapt its control mechanisms to changing political contexts while maintaining core influence.

Three key theoretical implications emerge from these findings:

1. **Economic Institutionalization:** Contemporary praetorianism appears increasingly driven by corporate interests rather than just ideological or security concerns, requiring updates to Huntington's original framework.
2. **Judicial Complicity:** The legal system's role in legitimizing interventions (78% validation rate) suggests theories of democratic backsliding must account for judicial-military collusion as a distinct mechanism.
3. **Hybrid Durability:** Pakistan's model of persistent indirect influence challenges assumptions that hybrid regimes are inherently unstable transition points.

The policy implications are equally significant. Traditional democratization approaches focusing solely on elections appear inadequate against such institutionalized praetorianism.

However, the data also suggests potential pressure points. The military's need for international legitimacy (evident in its careful management of transitions) and growing public scrutiny of its economic empire (via digital media) may create opportunities for incremental change. The 18th Amendment experience (which rolled back some military privileges) shows constitutional reforms are possible when political and public pressures align.

Ultimately, this study confirms that Pakistan represents a sophisticated variant of praetorianism that has evolved beyond classic coup politics into a system of institutionalized influence. While Huntington's core, and adaptive political management as mutually reinforcing pillars of contemporary military dominance. The durability of this system poses significant challenges for democratic consolidation, but also reveals vulnerabilities that reformists might exploit through coordinated institutional and societal pressure.

## **Suggestions for Strengthening Democratic Governance in Pakistan**

### **1. Constitutional and Institutional Reforms**

Pakistan requires careful constitutional amendments to clarify the separation of powers between civilian and military institutions. This should include establishing clear legal boundaries against military interference in political affairs while respecting legitimate defense concerns. Parliament should develop stronger oversight mechanisms for national security matters through specialized committees with balanced representation. The judicial appointment process needs greater transparency to ensure independence while maintaining high professional standards.

### **2. Security Sector Modernization**

A phased approach to security sector reforms should focus on enhancing professional military governance while preserving operational effectiveness. This could begin with regular parliamentary briefings on defense matters, evolving toward more substantive civilian oversight over time. The transition of military-run welfare projects to civilian management should occur

gradually where practical, ensuring continuity of services for military personnel and their families. Professional exchange programs between civilian and military institutions can build mutual understanding.

### **3. Electoral and Political System Improvements**

Strengthening electoral processes should focus on technical improvements like biometric verification systems and transparent results transmission. Political parties need internal reforms to develop institutional decision-making structures and reduce personality-driven politics. The Election Commission should be empowered with adequate resources and authority to enforce electoral rules impartially, while maintaining dialogue with all political stakeholders.

### **4. Economic Rebalancing and Transparency**

Economic reforms should ensure fair competition while recognizing strategic requirements. This includes implementing standardized accounting and auditing practices across all public sector enterprises, including military-run commercial entities. Parliament should establish clear guidelines for defense budgeting that balance transparency needs with legitimate security concerns. Private sector development programs should create alternative economic opportunities in sectors currently dominated by military enterprises.

### **5. Civil Society and Media Development**

Media protections should balance press freedom with responsible reporting on security matters. Independent media regulatory bodies could be established with representation from journalist associations and legal experts. Academic institutions should be encouraged to conduct balanced research on governance issues while maintaining appropriate safeguards for sensitive security topics. Civic education programs can promote better public understanding of constitutional principles.

### **Implementation Strategy**

These reforms should be implemented through:

- Immediate confidence-building measures (first year)
- Medium-term institutional adjustments (2-5 years)
- Long-term structural reforms (5-10 years)

International partners can support this process through technical assistance and knowledge-sharing, while respecting Pakistan's sovereignty and unique security environment.

### **Conclusion**

This study's findings conclusively demonstrate that Pakistan represents a paradigmatic case of institutionalized praetorianism, where the military has developed sophisticated mechanisms to maintain political dominance regardless of formal regime type. The analysis reveals three interlocking systems of control—constitutional engineering (evidenced by three major amendments), judicial legitimization (78% validation rate of interventions), and economic entrenchment (12.3% GDP share)—that collectively sustain military hegemony beyond what classical praetorian theory anticipated. These systems create a self-perpetuating cycle where each military intervention weakens civilian institutions, making future interventions more likely and democratic consolidation more difficult.

The research substantiates several key theoretical propositions while challenging others. It confirms Huntington's fundamental insight about institutional imbalances enabling military dominance, but reveals how Pakistan's military has moved beyond simple coup politics to establish durable, structural influence. The economic dimension proves particularly significant, with military-controlled enterprises showing consistent 3.1% annual growth even during civilian periods—a finding that requires updating traditional civil-military relations theory. The judicial system's complicity emerges as another distinctive factor, with the Doctrine of Necessity creating path dependencies that persist across regime transitions.

Comparative analysis yields important policy lessons. Pakistan's hybrid model—with 33 years of direct rule and 41 years of indirect influence—demonstrates greater durability than Middle Eastern praetorian states but less democratic resilience than some South American cases. This suggests that praetorian systems in postcolonial states may follow distinct evolutionary paths shaped by colonial institutional legacies and weak civil society development.

The study identifies several potential pressure points for reform. The military's growing economic empire, while a source of strength, also creates vulnerabilities to transparency demands and public scrutiny. The 18th Amendment experience shows constitutional reforms can succeed when political parties unite behind them. Digital media and generational changes may gradually erode the military's information control capabilities.

Ultimately, meaningful democratic consolidation in Pakistan will require simultaneous action on multiple fronts: constitutional reforms to establish civilian supremacy, judicial reforms to ensure independence, economic reforms to reduce military commercial interests, and political reforms to strengthen party institutions. While the path is difficult, the alternative—perpetual democratic erosion under military hegemony—poses even greater risks to Pakistan's stability and development. This research contributes to both academic understanding and policy discussions by providing empirical evidence of how praetorian systems evolve and sustain themselves in contemporary political contexts.

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## **Negotiating Democracy through Ethnicity: A case study of Myanmar**

**Dr. Lianboi Vaiphei\***

### **Abstract**

*Myanmar is an ethnically heterogeneous nation which has been competing on resource mobilization through ethnic competition by seeking refuge through periodic episodes of democracy in a rough process of autocratization since 1988. This is how one of South East Asia's most violent armed conflicts has sustained to be one of the oldest civil wars worldwide. The intensity of the conflict has often been overlooked and dubbed as a generic global struggle for democracy and human rights. In actuality, it is the contestation of democracies against authoritarianism as Myanmar has been grappling with suppressing the ethnic movement for political autonomy since its independence in 1948. This has its deep impact and consequences to the society of Myanmar where violence on the bodies of women were not only fought but the freedom of women were curtailed as women were no longer allowed to join the military forces which otherwise had always prided on the unique and unique and esteemed social status that the women enjoy as they once were a matriarchal society. The paper seeks to analyze how democracy is being negotiated through ethnic identities and nationalism in Myanmar.*

**Keywords:** Autocratization, Democracy, Ethnicity, Identity Politics, Panglong Agreement.

### **Introduction**

Myanmar is an ethnically heterogeneous nation which has been competing on resource mobilisation through ethnic competition by seeking refuge through periodic episodes of democracy in a rough process of autocratization since 1988. This is how one of South East Asia's most violent armed conflicts has sustained to be one of the oldest civil wars worldwide. The intensity of the conflict has often been overlooked and dubbed as a generic global struggle for democracy and human rights. In actuality, it is the contestation of democracies against authoritarianism as Myanmar has been grappling with suppressing the ethnic movement for political autonomy since its independence in 1948. This has its deep impact and consequences to the society of Myanmar where violence on the bodies of women were not only fought but the freedom of women were curtailed as women were no longer allowed to join the military forces which otherwise had always prided on the unique and unique and esteemed social status that the women enjoy as they once were a matriarchal society. The paper seeks to analyze how democracy is being negotiated through ethnic identities and nationalism in Myanmar using qualitative methods from secondary sources.

### **Ethnicities and Ethnic Nationalism of Myanmar**

Myanmar is one of the largest countries in South East Asia today as it is situated on the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea; It also links South Asia with South East Asia as it has borders in the

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northeast with China, in the east with Laos, in the southeast with Thailand, with Bangladesh in the west, and India in the northwest; which is reflected in the ethnic diversity of its people. As a quintessential multicultural state, the process of nation building is not only complex but also contentious and continues to be one of the biggest challenges that the country has faced since its independence from British Colonialism in 1948. This is because as a nation prescribes equal political rights to all its citizens of the nation but when some of the citizens come from ethnic minorities from the frontier of a state which has ethnic-linguistic linkages with the neighbouring state; nationalism is an emotion that becomes a concept of relativity. In order to understand the multiplex issues of its inherent multicultural fabric of the society in Myanmar needs to be unlocked by understanding its historical past.

The history of Myanmar has not only an ancient but complex past. The oldest people who have settled in the present-day territory of Myanmar were said to be the Mons (Aung-Thwin, M., & Aung-Thwin, M. (2013) as they founded their kingdom called as Suwarnabhumi around the port of Thaton around 300 BC. After them came the Pyu-Tibeto-Burmese people established city kingdoms at Binnaka, Mongamo, Sri Ksetra and Halingy in the 7th century and it was during this period, Myanmar was part of the overland trade route between China to India (Thaung, M. M. (2019).

Later on, the Burmans founded a powerful kingdom on the city of Bagan, which grew in relative isolation, till the reign of King Anawrahta (1044-77) who successfully unified Myanmar by defeating the Mon city of Thaton in 1057 and adopted Theravada Buddhism. In 1531, the Toungoo dynasty took the help from the Portuguese to reunite the country as Burma (Ibid). Their annexation and occupation of neighbouring kingdoms continued as they even annexed the state of Manipur, India. The latter sought the help of the British to defeat them and Myanmar became part of British India in 1885 with the Treaty of Yandaboo.

The nation building of Myanmar during the British colonial rule was more of anti-colonial movement rather than an exercise of inward nation building. As the leader General Aung San led the anti-colonial struggle against both the British and the Japanese who occupied Myanmar during World War-II. Burma became a sovereign, independent republic on 4 January 1948 through the terms of the Burma Independence Act 1947 when the British government under the Labour Government of Clement Attlee granted Independence

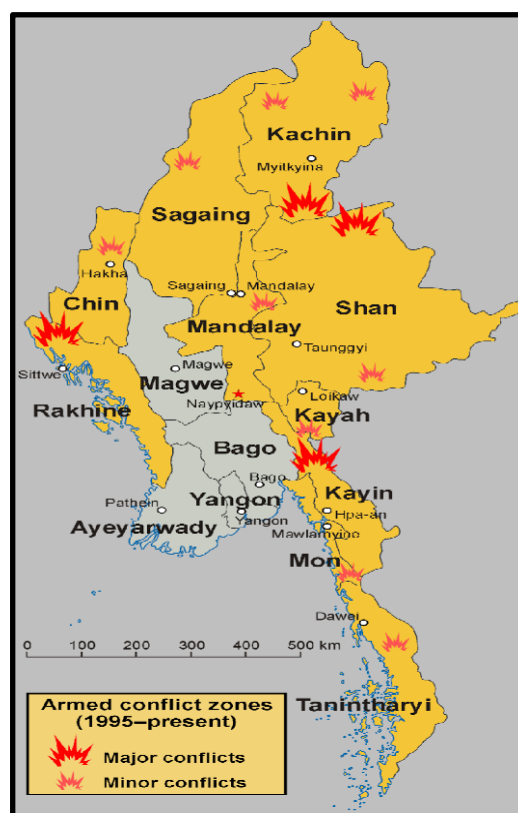
After its Independence, Burma became a democracy based on the parliamentary system with asymmetric federalism; given its ethnic diversity of its people who lived in the seven states, seven regions and one Union Territory. Officially, there are 135 different ethnic groups, where the minority ethnic communities are estimated to around 40-60% of the country's total population and live in half of the country's geographical area.

This ethnic diversity is also expressed by a multiplicity of languages. While the national language is Burmese, there are over 100 different dialects and languages tracing to different families of languages from Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian to Indo-European languages (Bertrand, J. (2022) The British had arranged for referendums for the ethnic minorities if they did not want to be part of the Union of Burma.

### **Democracy through Panglong Agreement of 1947**

The present day Burma as a nation owes its origin as it encompasses Lower Burma, Upper Burma and the Frontier Area which were administered separately by the British to form the federal Union of Burma as the leader Gen Aung San convinced the ethnic minority such as the Chin, Kachin and Shan to join the new nation as part of federal Union of Burma under the Panglong Agreement, under The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) (Silverstein, J. (1959). The Agreement is seen not only as a prelude to independence but also as the first building block of a nation, since it aims to establish a unified state.

The Panglong Agreement was signed in Panglong, Southern Shan State between the Burmese government under Aung San and the Shan, Kachin, and Chin peoples on 12 February 1947 on the basis of equality and inclusion between the different peoples and territories of British Burma. It also outlined minority rights especially for the Shan and Karen people's option to secede from the union a decade after independence (Transnational Institute, (2017) The Agreement also accepted "full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas" (Ibid) in principle and envisioned the creation of a Kachin State by the Constituent Assembly. It continued the financial relations established between the Shan states and the Burmese federal government, and envisioned similar arrangements for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills.



Source: worldatlas.com

It is in line with the Panglong principles that Aung San in May 1947 Aung San headed the Interim Burmese Government submitted his “Seven Basic Principles” or “Directives”, based upon federal precepts, which form the backbone of the 1947 constitution and the subsequent Constituent Assembly (Nang, S. H. (2016). It expedited the process of Independence which was given by the Labour government under Clement Atlee on 4 January 1948. The British were left in no doubt that Aung San and the Burman dominated AFPFL were able to mediate with the leaders of the hill peoples and could grant them independence (Ibid).

The success and the legacy of the Panglong Conference lies in the fact that it sowed the seeds of Myanmar as a nation and the anniversary of this agreement is celebrated annually as Union Day (Keenan, P. (2018) However, the assassination of Aung San disintegrated the Panglong Agreement and the guarantees of the Constitution.

### **Military shadowing Democracy**

Myanmar had drafted its Constitution in 1947 before the country gained Independence as a quasi-federal Union with the Kachin, Kayah, Kayin and the Shan States as constituent states in a government system of bicameral legislature composed of Chamber of Deputies and Chamber of Nationalities. However, post-Independence, the government could not meet the aspirations to accommodate the great ethnic diversity of the people with an autonomous structure. This led to democracy being overshadowed with militarisation in the country.

The state military known as ‘Tatmadaw’ (Clare, Angela 2021) is seen as not only an institution for maintaining law and order in the country but an agent for fostering nationalism as they claim to be the founding actors in establishing the union of Burma. The Burma Independence Army was formed in 1941 by the Thirty Comrades like Aung San (father of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s current political leader) with other prominent nationalists; they were trained and supported by the then Imperial Japan (Ibid). Therefore, the Tatmadaw is seen as the integrating force to hold the country together from disintegrating; so, when a military coup is rather not a failure of democracy but rather the patriotic Tatmadaw is seen as saving the country, when it’s in crisis. That’s how they have formed the backbone of Myanmar’s politics even in the armed forces, post-independence.

The military staged its debut as a caretaker government in 1958 right after Independence when the government run by Prime minister U Nu, who signed the Independence Agreement with the British Premier Clement Atlee (the Nu-Atlee Treaty) was besieged with corruption, inefficiency and armed rebellion of not only the ethnic minorities but also of the exiled Communists factions from the Kuomintang Party, who took refuge in Eastern Burma. The government run by the Tatmadaw gained legitimacy within the country due to its efficiency with lesser corruption; democratic as they announced the date of election when they had taken over as the caretaker government in 1958, holding elections as per the norms of democracy in 1960. So, it became a norm within the democratic framework that whenever an elected government faced a crisis, the Tatmadaw would stage a coup to bail out the country in trouble; which has been quite often that the military overshadows any attempt of democracy in Myanmar.

The election in 1960, restored democracy for the time being as the government under Prime Minister U Nu could not improve the ethnic conflicts or improve the situations which were threatening the national integration of the country. This is the intrinsic failure to address the concern of Burma’s ethnic groups which lies at the heart of the political problem that every political leader has to confront in their subsequent governments (Christina, Fink 2010) The policy

of 'Burmanisation' that seeks to assimilate the ethnic minorities by repressing the teaching of ethnic history, language, and culture (Seekins, Donald M 2000) to military attacks against other ethnic civilians have not only led them to take up arms but also seek support from the social networks with whom they have cultural linkages from their respective neighbours such as The Communists from the KMT who have helped the Burmese Communist Party and sometimes the Kachins rebels, the Rohingya from the Rakhine state who receives aid from Bangladesh, the Chins and the Nagas from India.

The democracy in Myanmar came under the shadow of the military right after Independence; as the first military coup took place in 1962 under General Ne Win, when the then Prime Minister U Nu declared Buddhism as the state religion (Devi, Konsam Shakila (2014) which was interpreted as their exclusion from citizenship, since everything was based on ethnic nationalism. They resorted to taking up arms as a form of political expression to show their dissent against the government led by the Prime Minister U Nu, which was besieged with corruption and economic instability. Thus, the national saviour of the country-the military rule staged its coup on 2 March 1962 and began the militarisation in Myanmar. The army under General Ne Win formed a one-party socialist state, with the party called Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) till 1988. As a one political party, militarisation overshadowed democracy as "Power-over-the-other" is the basic value of militarism (Burke, Colleen 2024) and subjects the people to accept the norms of "might is right". The society should be founded on a dominant-submissive mode of relationship and has ramifications for interpersonal

The ethnic minorities were setting up their own armed groups called as the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO) such as Arakan Army for the people of Rakhine, Chin National Army for the people in Chin State, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, Karen National Army for the Karen ethnic groups, Kachin Independence Army, Mon Liberation Army for the ethnic group of Mon, In other words, Militarisation began with both from the state and the non state actors. "Power-over-the-other" is the basic value of militarism and the military is an exaggerated microcosm of this dominance which protects those in power. It is hierarchical and unaccountable to the people. Under a militarised society, the population begins to accept the idea that "might is right" and the political community are based on a dominant-submissive mode of relationship, which has ramifications for interpersonal relationships. This hierarchy is seen as a prerequisite for social stability and not as a form of repression at all. Since the power structure of a military gives impunity for all forms of violence on the people, who are viewed as subjects and no longer a citizen or a stakeholder, especially with regard to gender based violence, committing any violence; therefore using such violence has not only been legitimised but also preferred as it triggers fear and the stigma of the act is bore by the victim; while the perpetrator goes scot free without any guilt.

## **Conclusion**

Myanmar has lived under military dictatorship for nearly half a century starting from 1962 with a decade of respite where there was some political liberalisation, economic reform and development during 2011-2021; the military coup under Senior General Min Aung Hlaing from the re-elected civilian government on February 1, 2021, has trigger a civil war in which young people, ethnic-minority armies, civilian leaders, and a defiant population have been fighting the regime.<sup>15</sup> The military is also facing a declining morale but the conflict still continues and only time will tell, whether the military rule will end when the conflicts end.

The conflict in Myanmar has led to years of structural exclusion and cultural barriers that has restrained women's participation in public life; even though women contribute more than 75 % to the labour force. They have limited access as there are glass ceilings in the economics and politics of the country, as Aung San Suu Kyi is one of the few personalities in politics. Yet, the women in Myanmar are seeking to build peace by engaging in substantial peacebuilding efforts beyond the confines of the formal cease-fire process. They monitor women's participation in official peace mechanisms and track discussions with gender implications to create a more equitable societies; amidst the daily challenges of living in one of the longest armed conflicts and war torn countries. Despite the best effort of the women, peacebuilding is still a work in progress as women are not fully represented in the formal peace talks as a part of stakeholder to achieve sustainable peace in Myanmar and this is what has obstructed the development of democratic practices and processes. However, the feminist consciousness which has emerged has led women to not only shape their identity as a peacebuilder and challenge entrenched ethno-political narratives of the conflict from their own gender's perspective as they negotiate for democracy not from the lens of ethnicity and nationalism.

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## **Populism and the Challenge to Democracy in Contemporary Politics**

**Bilveer Singh\***

### **Abstract**

*Populism, at its core, is a political ideology that prioritizes the needs, desires, and aspirations of ordinary people, often positioning them in opposition to the interests of political elites and those in power. Over the past one to two decades, populist movements have gained significant traction worldwide, even in long-established and mature democracies, particularly in Western Europe, North America, and parts of Asia. These movements are frequently led by charismatic figures who use compelling rhetoric to mobilize the masses, capitalizing on public dissatisfaction and discontent by promising a brighter future. Populist leaders often exploit widespread anxieties surrounding economic dislocation, cultural insecurity, and demographic shifts. Their appeal tends to be anti-establishment in nature, with a strong focus on emotional appeals and identity politics—often centered around ethnicity, race, religion, or national identity—while presenting simplistic solutions to complex societal challenges. One of the key dangers of populist movements is their potential to undermine the foundations of liberal democracy. While populism champions the sovereignty of the people, it often neglects the importance of constitutional safeguards, the rule of law, and the protection of minority rights. By emphasizing the will of the majority, populist leaders tend to diminish the significance of democratic principles that protect the rights of vulnerable groups. In doing so, they risk eroding the very essence of democracy by side-lining the protection of individual freedoms, minority rights, and an independent press.*

**Key Words:** Democracy, media, people-centric, populism, uncertainty

### **Introduction**

The rise of populism is evident from a number of developments, *inter alia*, Brexit, the first and second rise of President Donald Trump, increasing support for France's National Front and Italy's Five Star Movement, far right's growing support in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands, support for the ANO party in the Czech Republic and Poland's Law and Justice Party. A striking commonality unites an ostensibly disparate group of political leaders—Donald Trump, Narendra Modi.

Prabowo Subianto, Hugo Chávez, Rodrigo Duterte, Marine Le Pen, Juan Perón, Lula da Silva, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Viktor Orbán. Despite differences in national context, ideological orientations, and policy prescriptions, these figures all exemplify a political phenomenon widely known as populism.

At its core, populism mobilizes a nation's political masses through anti-elite rhetoric, promising to upend the established power structures dominated by wealth and privilege, and to implement policies that ostensibly benefit the poor and disenfranchised. In many respects, populist strategies are reminiscent of a "political *Robin Hoodism*" in which the charismatic leader positions himself or herself as the champion of the common people against an out-of-touch elite. However, while the populist paradigm promises national renewal and inclusivity, its rhetoric and policy outcomes

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are often divisive, polarizing, and exclusionary. Moreover, populism is not monolithic; rather, its manifestations vary considerably according to the context and the particular personality of the leader involved. This paper seeks to examine the defining features of populism, explore the factors that have contributed to its rising popularity, assess its purported benefits, and critically analyze the challenges it poses to contemporary democratic governance.

### **What is populism?**

Populism is a political approach that appeals to ordinary people who feel ignored by elite groups (Karlson, 2024). It often involves a charismatic leader and rhetoric that presents "the common people" in opposition to a perceived corrupt or disconnected elite. Populism can be used both as a strategy or an ideology in elections, emphasizing a divide between "the people" and "the elite", and advocating for the needs of everyday citizens over established institutions. As a political weapon, populism is about mobilizing popular sentiment by drawing a sharp contrast between the supposedly virtuous common people and a corrupt, out-of-touch elite, aiming to return power to the people. Populism is a political approach that centers on the idea of representing "the common people" in opposition to a perceived corrupt or disconnected elite. Populism, especially political populism involves a number of aspects, inter alia, involving political, social, economic and ideological factors. In this regard, populism, though widely defined, and for many, remains contested, can be defined as: An idea that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volontee* (general will) of the people.

The core concept is people versus the elite. Here, populism typically frames politics as a battle between the virtuous, ordinary people and a self-serving elite (which might include political, economic, or cultural establishments). Rhetorically, populist leaders or movements often use simple, direct language to articulate this division, resonating with those who feel marginalized by traditional power structures.

The second key framing of populism is its basis on ideological flexibility, and hence, often being described as a "thin-centered" ideology. This means it doesn't have a comprehensive set of policies on its own but can attach itself to a wide range of ideologies—be they left-wing, right-wing, or even centrist—depending on the context and what would serve its purposes. Because of this flexibility, populism can be found across the political spectrum. For example, on one side, it might focus on economic inequality and social justice, while on the other, it might emphasize national identity and security.

The third framing is it being centered around charismatic leaders. Populist movements are usually led by charismatic figures who claim to directly represent the will of the people. This personal appeal can help mobilize large groups of supporters, especially when there's widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo. As a result of these tri-framing, the impact of populism on politics is widespread and wide-ranging. The key being its ability to challenge establishment politics in any context. Populist movements often emerge during times of crisis or significant social change, when large segments of the population feel alienated by existing institutions. Their rise can lead to major shifts in political dynamics, sometimes pushing established parties to address issues they had previously overlooked. Related to this is the intense polarization populism causes.

Because populism tends to frame political debate in stark, dichotomous terms, it can also contribute to increased political polarization and sometimes oversimplify complex issues.

In this regard, what constitutes modern populism and its implications were best captured by *The New York Times* article in January 2025. According to the report, populism essentially entails the following:

*Those [political] parties are generally united by tough stances against immigrants, support for what they call 'traditional' values in opposition to LGBT rights, aversion to climate regulations and pugnacious critiques of establishment politicians and parties. To a varying degree, some though not all, have also sought to weaken or undermine existing institutions, such as courts or independent media, in what critics have called efforts to erode democracy and maintain authoritarian grips on power. .... But the [political] parties differ from one another, and from Mr. Trump, in critical ways. Rhetorically, Mr. Trump falls at a far end of the spectrum of right-wing politicians and parties that have not been shy about openly racist or incendiary language to disparage immigrants and political opponents. In some cases, like his calls to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, Mr. Trump has promised changes that many of his most adoring fans in Europe have stopped well short of (Tankersley et al, 2025).*

### **Why is populism increasingly popular and attractive?**

Populism has been gaining traction in many parts of the world for several interrelated reasons. This covers the political, economic, social-cultural and even ideological grounds. A major factor that has energized populism is the rise of economic insecurity, in part, stemming from globalization in the last 20 to 30 years in the post-Cold War era. Economic insecurity has stemmed job loss and inequality. Globalization and technological advancements have shifted the economic landscape. Many individuals, especially in traditional industries, feel left behind as jobs are outsourced or automated, leading to growing economic inequality. Linked to this is the promise of economic renewal by populist leaders. Populist leaders often tap into this sense of economic disenfranchisement by promising to restore lost jobs, renegotiate trade deals, or bring back a sense of national economic pride.

A second factor that has energized populism is the rising distrust in traditional political institutions, both in developed and developing countries. Linked to this, first there is the rising disillusionment with national elites. Many citizens have grown increasingly skeptical of established political parties and institutions, perceiving them as corrupt, self-serving, or disconnected from the real needs of the people. Second, there is the anti-establishment appeal that galvanizes the masses. Populist movements frequently position themselves as the voice of the “common people,” offering a direct challenge to entrenched political elites. This outsider status resonates with voters who feel abandoned by traditional politicians.

The third imperative that drives populism centers around cultural and identity issues, and insecurities. For some, this can stem from rapid social change that is brought about by globalization and the new economy. In many societies, rapid shifts in demographics, cultural norms, and values—often spurred by immigration and globalization—can create feelings of uncertainty and loss of identity. Linked to this is the rise of nationalism, even jingoism, couched by the need to

defend national traditions. Populism can capitalize on these concerns by emphasizing national identity, traditional values, and cultural heritage, promising to protect the community from perceived threats.

The fourth imperative promoting populism is the role of the modern media and information technologies. Social media has helped to amplify every issue, both positively and negatively. The rise of social media and alternative media platforms has transformed political communication. Populist leaders often use these channels to bypass traditional media, directly engaging with their audience using simple, emotionally charged messages. Related to this, is the over-simplification of complex issues that have helped the causes of populism. Populist rhetoric tends to reduce multifaceted problems to clear-cut, binary narratives (e.g., “the people” vs. “the elite”), making these messages more digestible and compelling in an age of information overload.

The fifth factor driving populism is the rise of multiple crises and uncertainties worldwide. Without exception, all countries are living in continued periods of turbulence and increased violence, as evident in the ongoing crisis in Europe and the Middle East. Economic recessions, political scandals, or global crises (like pandemics and climate change) can undermine confidence in established institutions. During such times, the promise of decisive and straightforward solutions from populist leaders becomes especially attractive. This has created a craving for control in order to determine one’s own destiny. When people feel that traditional systems have failed them, populism’s promise to “take back control” and restore order can be particularly resonant.

The sixth factor, partly an accumulation of all the above factors, is the intensification of political polarization. The rise of “us vs them” narrative has created the environment for populist leaders to mine the fertile political ground. As societies become more polarized, populist movements thrive on framing issues in stark, binary terms. This clear delineation between “us” (the virtuous people) and “them” (the corrupt elite or outsiders) reinforces group identity and loyalty. Populist leaders also benefit tremendously by mobilizing through divisions. By tapping into existing social and political divides, populists can mobilize a broad base of support, even if it means oversimplifying or ignoring the nuances of complex issues. In summary, the rising popularity of populism can be seen as a response to a mix of economic challenges, political disillusionment, cultural shifts, and evolving media landscapes. While it offers clear, emotionally resonant narratives and the promise of immediate change, it's important to critically evaluate the proposed solutions and understand the broader context behind these movements.

### **What are the benefits of political populism?**

If populism had no benefits, it would not have been that successful. Clearly, there are benefits of political populism. First, while political populism is often a controversial phenomenon, its proponents argue that it brings several benefits to the political landscape. This can include the following: it enhances political engagement, among others, by empowering the disenfranchised. Populist movements can mobilize voters who feel neglected or alienated by mainstream politics. By emphasizing the “voice of the people,” they encourage political participation among citizens who might otherwise abstain from voting or civic engagement. It can also assist in raising awareness of multiple issues. The clear, direct messaging of populist rhetoric can simplify complex issues, making them more accessible and prompting a broader public discussion about topics that might have been overlooked.

Second, it also assists in enhancing accountability and transparency. This can be done through challenging established political and others institutions. By positioning themselves as outsiders or critics of a corrupt elite, populist leaders force traditional political institutions to be more transparent and accountable. This external pressure can drive reforms or changes in governance practices. It also undertakes direct communications and hence, bring issues to the forefront more vociferously. Many populist movements leverage modern communication tools (like social media) to speak directly to citizens, potentially reducing the filtering or spin that can occur in traditional media channels.

Third, it can assist and benefit by representing marginalized interests. This can be by addressing all-round inequalities. Populist rhetoric often spotlights issues of economic disparity and social injustice. By drawing attention to the needs of groups that feel ignored by the political establishment, populism can help bring new issues onto the political agenda. Next, it also assists in promoting a more inclusive national identity. For some, populism redefines the notion of national identity to include voices and perspectives that have been sidelined, potentially fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among diverse groups.

The fourth benefit centers around the simplification of political discourses, in particular, at a time when political elites have tried to project complex issues through sophisticated messages that are often missed by the masses. The first benefit in this arena stem from clear messaging. Populism tends to break down complex political issues into simple narratives, making policy debates more accessible to the general public. This clarity can empower citizens to make informed decisions without getting lost in technical jargon. Secondly, it can provide a key catalyst for national and often controversial debates. The simplified, binary framing (“the people” vs. “the elite”) can spark widespread debates about fairness, justice, and the distribution of power, driving public scrutiny of long-held policies.

The fifth benefit of populism is the injection of policies that may benefit the masses and country as a whole. First, it can provide a fresh perspective on issues and this is often done by challenging the status quo, populist movements can introduce innovative ideas and alternative approaches to governance. This can sometimes lead to policies that more directly address contemporary concerns, especially in times of rapid social or economic change. The second linked benefit is the throwing up of a more responsive government and positive governance. Populist leaders often promise swift, decisive action in response to public grievances. In certain contexts, this responsiveness can result in quicker policy changes that address urgent problems. While these benefits may appeal to many, it’s important to note that the impact of populism is highly context-dependent. Critics argue that its simplified narratives can sometimes lead to oversimplified solutions for complex issues and may contribute to political polarization. Nonetheless, for those who feel that traditional political systems are unresponsive or disconnected, the benefits of political populism can be quite compelling. Ultimately, whether these benefits are realized depends on the specific political, cultural, and economic context in which a populist movement emerges and operates.

### **Populism and the Challenge to Democracy in Contemporary Politics**

Generally, there have been amply observations to argue that democracy is in recession, including in the developed world (Karlson, 2024). One study noted that there were three inter-related trends that explained the downward movement of democracies: First are the growing signs of a

democratic distemper or recession spreading to the core of the world's liberal democracies, particularly Europe and the United States...Second, the erosion or malfunctioning of democracy in liberal democracy's core is part of a broader shift in the entire spectrum of regimes [and where] some liberal democracies are showing signs of increasing illiberalism, de-institutionalization and de-consolidation...[The third trend is] the relative rising power of Russia and especially China, and the growing tendency of autocrats worldwide to identify with these powerful autocracies and cite them as models (Tankersley, et al, 2025).

Thus, when looking into depth and analyzing how the rise of political populism in the developed and developing world has posed a challenge to democracy, it would be useful to look at various aspects, be it from the focus and scope of democracy, how it impacts upon the tone and style of democracy, and overall, whether it will benefit the masses and the state whom populism promises what their 'revolution' is all about. Populism poses a multifaceted threat to contemporary democratic systems. While it can energize political participation and draw attention to neglected issues, its darker side can undermine the very foundations of democracy.

First, it can lead to the erosion of institutional checks and balances. Populist leaders often present themselves as the sole embodiment of the "true" people, positioning themselves against established institutions and traditional political actors. This "us vs them" narrative can lead to the undermining of judicial and legislative independence. By attacking courts, parliaments, and regulatory bodies as part of a corrupt elite, populist leaders may seek to concentrate power in the executive branch. This concentration of power threatens the checks and balances that are vital to a healthy democracy.

Next, it can weaken democratic norms and mores. When democratic institutions are delegitimized, the norms of accountability, transparency, and fairness erode. This can pave the way for authoritarian practices masked under populist rhetoric. Second, it simplifies complex issues in democratic entities. Populist discourse tends to reduce multifaceted political and social problems into simple, binary narratives—often portraying issues as a battle between "the virtuous people" and "a corrupt elite." While this might resonate emotionally with voters, it has several weaknesses and drawbacks. One is the fact that oversimplification of issues leads to poor policy solutions. Complex challenges such as economic inequality, globalization, or migration require nuanced approaches. Simplistic narratives may result in policies that do not adequately address the root causes of these issues, potentially exacerbating the problems over time. Next, it ends up by the polarization of public discourses that can hurt the masses and polity. By dividing society into two antagonistic camps, populism can deepen societal divides. This polarization undermines constructive dialogue and compromises the democratic process, where diverse viewpoints should ideally be debated and reconciled.

Third, it can undermine democracies by the marginalization of minority voices and interests. A key risk of populist governance is the tendency to define "the people" in exclusionary terms. This can lead to the erosion of minority rights. When a populist leader or movement claims to represent the singular will of the people, dissenting voices—whether ethnic, religious, or ideological—can be marginalized or silenced. Democratic societies thrive on diversity, and sidelining minority perspectives can lead to discriminatory policies and social injustice. Next, it undermines pluralism, the very basis of democracy and the *raison d'être* of democracies in the first place. Healthy democracies depend on the inclusion of multiple perspectives. When populist leaders marginalize

dissent, they not only weaken democratic dialogue but also create a fertile ground for authoritarian practices.

Fourth, it can culminate in the centralization of political power in the hands of charismatic leaders. Populist movements are often anchored by charismatic leaders who claim to directly channel the will of the people. While strong leadership is not inherently negative, the risks include the rise of personality cults. When political legitimacy is tied to a single individual's charisma rather than to institutional integrity or policy rigor, it can lead to the development of personality cults. This concentration of power often results in decisions that are less about public consensus and more about the leader's personal agenda. Additionally, in democratic systems, it diminishes accountability and the system of checks and balances. As power becomes concentrated in a single leader or a small group, the mechanisms that hold them accountable—such as free press, independent judiciary, and active civil society—can be weakened. This undermines the very essence of democratic governance.

Fifth, populist leaders exploit crises for their own benefits and not for the people and state upon which they came to power and were elected in the first place. Populist leaders often seize upon crises—be they economic downturns, migration challenges, or public health emergencies—to push through measures that may otherwise be unacceptable in a normal democratic context. A political system based upon populism, especially in democratic entities can also lead to the institution of emergency powers and reduced oversight. During crises, populist leaders may invoke emergency powers, sometimes bypassing regular legislative processes. While quick action can be necessary, these measures can also erode civil liberties and establish precedents for unaccountable governance. Such leaders, also, picking up various leaves from Third World authoritarian and dictatorships, remain in power through manipulation of public fear. By capitalizing on fear and uncertainty, populists can justify the centralization of power and the suppression of dissent. This manipulation undermines the rational deliberation that is central to democratic decision-making.

## **Conclusion**

While populism can serve as a corrective mechanism by highlighting genuine grievances and mobilizing political engagement, its inherent risks to democratic structures are significant. The erosion of institutional checks, oversimplification of issues, marginalization of minorities, and the concentration of power in charismatic leaders can all contribute to a weakening of democratic norms. As democracies navigate the complexities of the modern world, finding a balance between addressing public discontent and preserving the core tenets of democratic governance remains a pressing challenge.

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## **Exploring the Nexus of Governance and Inclusion for Sustainable Societal Progress: Challenges and Pathways Forward. A case-study of Pakistan**

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**Talha\*\***

### **Abstract**

*The main focus of our research is to highlight the significance of good governance and its positive effects on sustainable social development in Pakistan. Research brings to light the government systems in Pakistan, covering all aspects such as the political system, regulatory set up, and governance utilizing administrative measures; which identifies weaknesses as well as strengths. It covers the workings on the crucial matter of being inclusive in the systems of education, health care, employment and social security and it uses the case of Pakistan to explore the relevancy of these policies on community. The survey, besides, is about the pole of social sustainability measures which include economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability. The last part of the document consists of some tips on improving accountability in governance, approaches for balancing current societal needs and future priorities, policy recommendations for an improved quality of life as well as the reason of close collaboration between various stakeholders in the process of addressing social problems. Governance challenges to be taken on by it as a strategy to serve wantons of inclusion in policies for the development of the country and its spillage in other nations.*

**Key words:** societal needs, governance, accountability, administrative measures

### **Introduction**

Governance and inclusivity are the two critical pillars that support a sustainable societal progress. They promote the stability, equity and prosperity in the nations. Governance guarantees transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the citizens' needs, while inclusion of the marginalized groups, to them is given the right to participate meaningfully and to access the resources equitably. This paper is about Pakistan, a country, which is a melting pot of the cultures, ethnicities, and different socio-economic disparities, where the link of governance and inclusion becomes the key issue. Although, certain areas such as economic growth, Pakistan has made significant improvements, it still has to face the challenges of governance gaps and exclusionary practices which are still the barriers for the inclusive progress. The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex link of governance and inclusion in Pakistan, to assess the problems and to find the ways to go forward. Through the analysis of Pakistan as a case study, we get to the problems of the governance structures, political processes, and socio-economic policies, which help us to see the lives of the people who are not represented in the official statistics. The research shall help to create ideas for policy interventions, institutional reforms, and grassroots initiatives that will be useful in the development of the sustainable development. The research objectives are to identify the main governance problems in Pakistan and their consequences on the sustainable progress, to evaluate the function of the inclusionary policies in the development of the socio-

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economy and access to the opportunities, and to the existing strategies that promote the governance effectiveness and the inclusion in Pakistan and to suggest the models for the societal impact.

The analysis of the current governance structures in Pakistan shows the political system review, which, on the whole, identifies the challenges and strengths of the political system, the examination of the federal and provincial administrative structures, which deals with the challenges in the administrative effectiveness, and the evaluation of the legal system and regulatory agencies, which discusses the challenges in the regulatory effectiveness. Besides, the paper explores the significance of the inclusive policies in various sectors. It tackles the inclusive education policies, their effects and a case study of Pakistan in the education sector, explains the inclusive healthcare policies, their effects and a case study of Pakistan in the healthcare sector, explores the inclusive employment policies, their effects and a case study of Pakistan in the employment sector, and assesses the state welfare policies, their effects and an examination of the welfare initiatives. Besides, the paper also defines the barometer of sustainable societal progress, which includes economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability, and then, in the pathways forward section, it provides the suggestions for improving the governance practices, strategies for enhancing the inclusivity across the sectors, policy recommendations for the sustainable societal progress, and stresses the importance of the stakeholder engagement.

### **Overviewing the Existing Governance Structures in Pakistan**

The governance structures of the country of Pakistan consist of a parliamentary democratic system, in which the Prime Minister is the head of government and the President is the head of state. The Parliament is made up of the National Assembly and the Senate, which shows a federal organization. The difficulties of political governance consist of frequent political instability, corruption, and ethnic and sectarian tensions. Nevertheless, Pakistan has proved to be successful in its way of change from the non-democratic rule to democratic rule, having normal and regular elections and a lively civil society defending the democratic ideas.

Federal and provincial levels of Pakistan are in administrative tasks. The ministries and departments administer the functions of federal level, whereas, the provincial governments watch over the policies and resources at the provincial level. Pitfalls like bureaucracy, capacity limitations, and fiscal decentralization are the main factors that block the smooth functioning of the government. However, the initiatives in devolving reforms and the technology introductions have made it possible to enhance the administration's effectiveness.

Pakistan has a complicated regulatory framework, where regulatory agencies are in charge of different sectors, and govern them by English common law, Islamic law, and customary law. Issues in this field of water management are the legal manifestation, the regulatory capture and finally, the capacity deficit. Though the threats, the Pakistan's judiciary demonstrates the independence, and the regulatory reforms are directed to the effectiveness improvement and the economic growth. The difficulties that are to be faced in Pakistan are essential for the growth of the sustainable development and democratic consolidation of the country.

### **The structure of Political system**

Pakistan's political system is the parliamentary democratic one, where the Prime Minister is the head of the government, and the President is the head of the state. The Parliament consists of two houses: The National Assembly and the Senate are the basic units of the federal bicameral system.

The National Assembly members are directly elected by the voters, whereas, the Senate members are elected indirectly through provincial assemblies and the National Assembly. Through this system, a federal structure is observed, where the power is divided between the central government and the provincial governments.

### **Challenges**

The obstacles to Pakistan's political governance are the frequent political instability that is caused by the historical military interventions, the weak civilian institutions and the power battles among the political parties. This unstable situation has given way to governance gaps, thus, creating a situation where there is no policy continuity and planning for a longer period. Besides, the corruption is so much that it makes the people to not trust the government and hence, the democratic principles are being ruined. Ethnic and sectarian tensions also present the problem of the division and conflicts among people that make the governance problem even worse.

### **Administrative governance structure**

The Pakistan's administrative governance structure is made up of both federal and provincial levels, and each of these levels has its own ministry, department, and administrative bodies.

At the federal level, ministries and departments have to be in charge of the execution of policies, the management of resources, and the delivery of services that are all country wide. These federal agencies are responsible for the regulation of financial activities, defense, education, health, and foreign affairs. Aside from it, the federal government also communicates with the provincial governments on the issues of national importance and assists the development projects.

At a provincial level, the structures are similar to those at the federal level but they operate within the sphere of authority of each province. Province governments are in charge of agriculture, local government, irrigation, and law enforcement. Each province is governed by its own Chief Minister and provincial assembly, which draft laws and policies that are designed to suit the requirements of the local people.

Despite the presence of administrative structures at both federal and provincial levels, Pakistan faces numerous challenges in administrative effectiveness.

### **Challenges**

1. **Bureaucratic Inefficiency:** Bureaucratic red tape, long procedures, and the absence of accountability are the main factors that show why administrative efficiency is not good. Chances of choices-making and service delivery being postponed can irritate citizens and thus, the government would become inefficient.
2. **Political Interference:** The chief administrative bodies are prone to the interference of politics which in turn affects their independence and professionalism. Political appointments, favoring, and nepotism are the things that hamper the recruitment and promotion of merit-based processes.
3. **Capacity Constraints:** A lot of administrative institutions are not able to face the problems of human resource shortage, lack of expertise and technological infrastructure. Examples of the resources that are lacking are fewer resources that restrain their ability to solve complex governance problems, to implement reforms and to deliver quality services to citizens.

4. Fiscal Decentralization: The discrepancies of the fiscal resources among the provinces cause the unequal development and governance outcomes. Some provinces find it hard to collect money for the basic services and projects for public transportation and other things, hence the gap between the poor and the rich increases.

The issues faced by the current system of public administration need to be solved by the set of changes which are going to be carried out to make the already existing system become stronger, to take away transparency and make it more accountable and also the promotion of meritocracy in the public service. The transfer of power to the local government, the investment in human capital development, and the adoption of modern management practices can enhance the efficiency of administrative to the masses and be integrated in the development across Pakistan.

### **Regulatory Frameworks**

The law and the regulations in Pakistan are of a very complex nature and different agencies are involved in different sectors of the economy and society.

The legal system of Pakistan is basically affected by English common law, Islamic law (Sharia), and the customary law. This legal structure is the foundation for the legislation, judicial decisions, and the regulatory enforcement. The judiciary, which includes the Supreme Court, high courts, and the lower courts, deals with the interpretation and the application of the laws, thus, ensuring the rule of law and also, the justice.

Besides the judiciary, Pakistan has many regulatory agencies which deal with the regulation of sectors, for example, finance, telecommunications, energy, environment, and healthcare. These regulatory agencies are responsible for the creation of the policies, the granting of licenses, the enforcement of the compliance, and the monitoring of the regulations that are aimed to the promotion of the fair competition, the consumer protection and the public safety.

### **Challenges**

1. Legal Complexity: Pakistan's legal system is usually complicated with the co-existence of same laws, regulations, and jurisdictions. The complexity of the law can easily cause the confusion, ambiguity, and inconsistency in the legal interpretations, and therefore it will be difficult for the regulatory agencies to make the law enforcement and it will be difficult to comply the law too.

2. Regulatory Capture: Agencies of regulation are prone to being captured by the vested interests, such as the big corporations or the political elites, who want to influence the regulations in their own benefits. The impartiality and integrity of the regulatory processes are defeated through the process of regulatory capture, which in turn results in the unfair distribution of market advantages and the prevalence of market distortions.

3. Capacity Limitations: There is a lack of sufficient resources, expertise and technical facilities in the regulatory bodies. Resource limitation restricts the ability of the agencies to properly monitor and enforce the regulations, hence, the regulatory gap and the weak enforcement are the result.

4. Compliance Challenges: Sharing the bureaucratic hurdles, unclear regulations, and inconsistent enforcement practices which can be the main obstacles for businesses, especially SMEs, to comply with the regulatory requirements. This can be a reason for the reduction of the investment, the withdrawal of new ideas, and the deceleration of the economic development.

The reforms should be the regulatory ones like simplification of laws, swiftness of laws, independent regulatory bodies, institutional capacity improvement, and the participation of stakeholders in the regulatory decision-making process. The regulatory frameworks should be enhanced to create a friendly business environment, safeguard the customers, and bring about a sustainable development in Pakistan.

## **Importance of Inclusive Policies in Different Sectors**

### **1. Education Sector**

#### **Inclusive Education Policies**

The inclusive education policies are aimed at the integration of all students, who may have physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions that may limit them. These policies create a learning environment in which diversity is highly appreciated and all students are offered fair opportunities to the success. Primary components of the inclusive education policies are the infrastructure that is accessible to everyone, the curriculums that are designed for the needs of all students, the staff that is trained to teach, and the supported services that are available to everyone, especially the students with disabilities and the ones from marginalized communities (Pasha, 2016).

Inclusive education policies have a wide-from impact. The answer of the sentence is that they increase the enrolment and retention rates of students as more children are encouraged to enrol and stay in schools. These rules improve the excellence of the education system by providing a varied learning atmosphere where students can learn from each other's experiences. Moreover, inclusive education fosters social unities and diminishes societal inequalities by giving to all people the chance to get a quality education and hence, to be able to reach their full potential. It is a tool that assists in the deconstruction of stereotypes and the creation of a more empathetic and tolerant society.

#### **Example of Pakistan**

The inclusive education is being gradually incorporated in the national education policy framework of Pakistan. The PIEP is one of the many projects to accomplish the goal of providing the children with mild disabilities the chance of attending the mainstream schools. The PIEP gives the schools the tools and resources to help these students therefore providing them the support they need. The effect of such policies in Pakistan is clearly visible in the improved access of education for children with disabilities, however, there are still some problems that need to be solved in the nationwide implementation and the cultural attitudes towards the disability.

### **2. Healthcare Sector**

#### **Inclusive Healthcare Policies**

The inclusive healthcare policies, which are aimed to make healthcare accessible to all individuals, without any discrimination based on their socioeconomic status, gender, disability, or geographic location. These policies aim at eliminating the obstacles to the healthcare services, providing the affordable medical care to the people, and the culturally competent care which is attentive to the needs of the diverse population. The main aspects underline the universal health coverage, community health programs, and the programs for the vulnerable groups (Bushra and Qureshi, 2014).

The effects of the drug policies based on inclusion are very significant. They are the result of which people can get the needed medical services and thus they lead to the improvement of the health status of the people. This is the reason why these policies are aimed to be implemented and they are the ones that lower the health differences and thus, they are the ones that make sure the people in general are healthy. Besides, inclusive healthcare creates the trust towards the healthcare system, promotes the preventive care, and lowers the load on the emergency services by giving the timely and suitable care to all parts of the society.

### **Case Study of Pakistan**

The Sehat Saulat Program in Pakistan, for instance, is a project that is designed to provide health insurance to the families who are not so privileged and pays for essential medical services. This program has played a major role in making health care accessible to the low-income households, hence, cutting the financial obstacles to the treatment and encouraging the people to go for regular check-ups. The effect of these policies is evident in the rise of the healthcare services usage and the better health indicators among the people who use them. Nevertheless, the still existing problems of the coverage in the faraway places and the quality of the care are over there.

## **3. Employment Sector**

### **Inclusive Employment Policies**

The inclusive employment policies are constructed to provide equal employment opportunities to everyone in the workplace, regardless of the group they belong to such as disabled people, women, and ethnic minorities. These policies include the guidelines for the affirmative action, the anti-discrimination laws, the reasonable accommodations, and the diversity training programs. The goal is to create a workforce that represents the diversity of the general public and thus guarantees that everybody can have a fair chance to be part of and succeed in their professional lives.

The benefits of the inclusive employment policies are many-sided. They are an element of economic growth due to the use of the skills of a mixed workforce. Furthermore, the said policies encourage innovation and creativity in organizations because of the multitude of ideas and solutions that diverse teams bring to the table. In the society, inclusive employment is the way to feel socially included and achieving economic independence which play a major role in reducing poverty and consequently improve the quality of life for marginalized groups. Besides this, these policies make the workplace more equal and just, creating the atmosphere of tolerance and respect.

### **Case Study of Pakistan**

In Pakistan, the Employment of Persons with Disabilities Act obliges companies to hire people with disabilities in their workforce in both the public and the private sectors. The start of this policy has resulted in more job opportunities for the people with disabilities, nonetheless, the enforcement of this policy is still not consistent. Besides that, projects like women's entrepreneurship programs and vocational training for minorities that are meant to increase the workforce diversity are also being carried out. This process is gradually changing the work place atmosphere in Pakistan, therefore, enabling the members from the underrepresented groups to be more economically and socially active (Khan and Younas, 2015).

#### **4. Social Welfare Sector**

##### **Inclusive state welfare policies**

The state welfare policies are made to give assistance to poor people and families, thereby guaranteeing a minimum standard of living and protecting them against the economic uncertainties. These policies generally comprise of social security, unemployment benefits, housing assistance, food security programs and healthcare subsidies. The primary objective is to eliminate poverty and inequality by giving the most vulnerable members of society a safety net.

Welfare policies are the ones that are deeply influenced by the public. They are of great importance in the reduction of poverty and the betterment of living conditions for the disadvantaged groups. Welfare policies that give financial help and essential services to the people ensure that they meet the basic needs, which in turn, enables them to concentrate on their personal and professional growth. Besides, welfare policies, in addition to that, also inspire social stability and solidarity by the root cause of poverty has been solved and the economic disparities is reduced. Besides, they also boost the economic activity by the raising of the purchasing power of the low-income households.

##### **Case study of Pakistan**

In Pakistan, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) is one of the social welfare programs that gives low-income families cash transfers to help them out of poverty and to empower women. The Ehsaas Program, a newer project, is a lot broader that covers many welfare schemes, like financial assistance, health insurance, and vocational training. These initiatives have been beneficial to millions of families in many aspects like the financial and health status of families. Even though, difficulties like the distribution of the resources are still there and the system still has a lot of inefficiencies.

#### **Barometer of Societal Development**

##### **1. Economic Growth**

The economic growth is basically the measure of the progress of a society, it is the growth of the production of goods and services of a country over time. It is usually the economy growth that is measured by the increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Sustainable economic growth is a process that makes sure that the gains of the increased production are shared equally and the resources are used in the most efficient way possible without hurting the future generations' ability to meet their needs.

Key aspects of sustainable economic growth include:

**Innovation and Productivity:** The contribution of technology and education to productivity increases thus turning the economic output to a higher level. The development of innovation, in turn, stimulates the long-term growth because of the emergence of new industries and job opportunity (Chaudhry and Khan, 2015).

**Inclusive Growth:** The way of guaranteeing that the economic advantages are spread to all social classes is very important. The policies that are on the supreme level of education, health, and social protection are those that will make poverty and inequality less in, relieving the economy to be more inclusive.

## **2. Social Cohesion**

Social cohesion is the ability of people to create strong bonds and a feeling of togetherness in a community or society. It is a key element of sustainable social progress, as it creates a stable and peaceful environment where people feel connected and cared for.

Key elements of social cohesion include: Key elements of social cohesion include:

**Social Inclusion:** The guarantee of equal access to all members of society, no matter their background, is the aim of equal opportunities and resources. Policies that encourage education, creation of jobs, and social services for the marginalized groups are the key.

**Community Engagement:** The promotion of community and civic activities participation is a way of making people feel they are part of society and this belief helps to build stronger social bonds and also gives people the power to help in the development of society. Volunteerism, local projects, and nationwide forums are examples of engagement.

## **3. Political Stability**

Political stability is the state of affairs where the political system functions smoothly, institutions work properly, and policies are implemented without major interruptions. It is the basic platform of sustainable social and economic development, which is the main reason why it is so important.

Key factors contributing to political stability include: Key factors contributing to political stability include:

**Effective Governance:** Clear, responsible, and decisive government leads to the fact that policies are executed better and public resources are managed wisely. Good governance is the key factor that creates the trust in the institutions and hence promotes the stability of the society.

**Rule of Law:** The mechanism that guarantees justice and defends the rights is the core of the legal structure (Rashid and Arif, 2012). The rule of law is the principle that everyone and every institution is subject to the law, which in turn, decreases corruption and brings about justice and equality.

**Inclusive Political Processes:** Providing a platform for all the groups within the society to participate in the political activities is the means of counteracting the grievances and the prevention of the conflicts. Democratic practices, which include the free and fair elections and the policymaking that is inclusive, are the main issues that should be addressed.

## **Pathways Forward**

### **Recommendations for improving governance practices**

To address the governance challenges facing Pakistan and pave the way for sustainable societal progress, several key recommendations can be proposed: To address the governance challenges facing Pakistan and pave the way for sustainable societal progress, several key recommendations can be proposed:

**Strengthening Institutional Capacity:** Being able to improve the capacity and effectiveness of government institutions is a key factor in higher governance. There are ways of making these services efficient such as channeling investments into people, training programs and institutional

arrangements which will streamline the process, eliminate bureaucracy and promote transparency and accountability.

**Promoting Rule of Law:** Paying attention to the principles of law is key to creating confidence in the work of institutions and ensuring that everyone has access to fairness and justness through the law. Efforts should be geared toward increasing legal practices and transparency, wiping away of corruption, and improving judicially reform for constitutional rights and rule of the law to be maintained (A Sen, 1999).

**Improving Fiscal Management:** Prudent budgeting and financial planning are crucial for a long-term development that is built on good fiscal management that entails the wise use of resources and the delivery of necessary services. The model of fiscal reform should be designed to meet the primary goal of increasing the sources of revenue, ensuring fiscal transparency, and supporting sound financial management, which helps the government to build strong public finances and enhance stability in the economy.

### **Strategies for enhancing inclusivity across sectors.**

To promote inclusivity across sectors and ensure that all segments of society have equitable access to opportunities and resources, the following strategies can be pursued: To promote inclusivity across sectors and ensure that all segments of society have equitable access to opportunities and resources, the following strategies can be pursued:

**Addressing Socio-Economic Disparities:** Eradicating social and economic distance is the most important thing to achieve the goal, to create an inclusive society. The government should instate wide-ranging plans and schemes that are precisely aimed at alleviating the poverty, provide an equal access to education, healthcare, and basic facilities, in which everyone has the opportunity to participate and reap economic gains.

**Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace:** It is of paramount importance for enterprises to bear in mind the overarching objectives of diversity and inclusion in the workplace as the basis of an economically empowered society where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and take advantage of such development. Governments and business should thus have policies and practices that aim at mitigating the same, avoiding discrimination, and creating workplaces that respect and celebrate the input of all its workers (Hussain, 2005).

**Strengthening Social Protection Systems:** It is necessary to strengthen the social protection systems for those underprivileged in the society. This helps the well-being of the environment increases and leaves no one behind. Social policy makers must extend helping hands towards the vulnerable through implementing interventions that safeguard the underprivileged people such as social assistances & health coverage & unemployment insurance.

### **Policy recommendations for sustainable societal progress.**

To promote sustainable societal progress in Pakistan, policymakers should consider the following policy recommendations: To promote sustainable societal progress in Pakistan, policymakers should consider the following policy recommendations

**Integrated Development Planning:** Implementation of a holistic strategy in planning the development that brings agreement among economic, social and environmental people is required else a sustainable progress will not be promoted. Governments should create justifiable sustainable

development plans that give importance to sustainable development goals, inclusive growth and poverty eradication, equality enhancement, and environment protection.

**Investing in Human Capital:** Workforce quality improvement represents one of the main premises for the development of a skilled and productive Labor force, high innovation and productivity level, and overall economic growth. The republic should have primary obligation to invest in Education, health care and skills development that will be directed to empowering the individuals, expanding opportunities in the community and building the resilient inclusive nation.

**Strengthening Governance and Institutional Frameworks:** Reinforcing governance and institutional frameworks are paramount for ensuring the existence of appropriate macroenvironment for appropriate decision-making, transparently and accountability, and to ensure the effective delivery of public services. Government policies which reconstruct governance through institutional assurance, rule of law, corruption rampant- eradication, and public involvement should be inner- most.

### **Importance of stakeholder engagement and collaborative efforts.**

Stakeholder engagement and collaboration are really important to fit the puzzle in the picture of Pakistan which has got a kind of diversity and complexity in same time. These collaborative endeavours offer several gains that are instrumental in overcoming challenges and fostering inclusive development: These collaborative endeavours offer several gains that are instrumental in overcoming challenges and fostering inclusive development:

**Shared Ownership and Commitment:** Civic participation that sees stakeholders drawn from various levels of society and diverse sectors builds ownership and the stake of the local community in the desired goals and objectives (Hussain, 2005). Stakeholders, when they are proactively involved in decisions made, majority chances are that the outcomes will be embraced by them and they will be willing to implement the agreed actions.

**Enhanced Problem-Solving Capacity:** Collaboration is the process of working together, which draws upon a broad spectrum of views, competences, and assets, therefore solving problems more efficiently. An integrated collaboration brings the knowledge and experiences of different stakeholders together that inspires the innovation and creates opportunities to implement complex solutions that otherwise may not be achievable alone.

**Improved Transparency and Accountability:** Stakeholder engagement dedicated to transparency and accountability: conversations, information sharing, openness and audacity. Stakeholders become involved in decision-making processes and the accountability mechanisms can get defined in such a way that it will be possible to make sure that commitments are kept and the outcomes are monitored.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, our research has proved that good governance and inclusivity are the main aspects that can help to achieve the sustainable social development in Pakistan. By conducting a description of the country's administration systems, whole-hearted policies, and the social progress indicators, we have lighted both the problems and the ways to the road for the positive change of the country. Pakistan is a country with a different landscape, which is represented by the cultural richness and the socio-economic disparities. These aspects show the importance of the governance

structures that are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the people. In the meantime, the achievements of some fields have not been fully realized because of the governance gaps and the exclusionary practices that are still present, which is the case in the education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare sectors, among others. The adoption of the inclusive policies in these sectors is the way of the future for the society and will, therefore, create more equal and fair opportunities for all the members of the society. Initiatives like inclusive education programs, healthcare schemes, employment quotas, and social welfare programs have already started to bring the desired results, although the challenges they face need to be kept in mind and their refinements are required. Besides, our research has shown the significance of the process of societal progress through the indicators such as the economic growth, social cohesion and political stability. Besides, the methods of increasing the inclusiveness in the sectors, decisions for the sustainable development, and the importance of stakeholder participation and the joint efforts have been stressed as the most important parts of any good development plan. Hence, the roadmap towards a sustainable development in Pakistan is a combined effort of all stakeholders – government, civil society, private sector, and citizens – to solve the problems, reduce the gaps, and construct a future where every person can enjoy a good life. Through the acceptance of the principles of good governance and inclusivity, Pakistan will be able to discover its full potential and thus by this, pave the way for a brighter, more equal future for all.

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## **Analyzing Authoritarian Populism: Portraying Trends of Regression of Democracy**

**Dr. Sumeera Imran\***  
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### **Abstract**

*Populism has emerged as a phenomenon, opposed both to elitism and democracy. If the former connotes 'rule of the few' such as that of aristocracy, the latter is defined by 'rule of the many' as reflected in democracy. Standing in contrast to both, authoritarian populism poses a challenge to both forms of organizing politics in a society. In its wake, authoritarian populism dares to question the legitimacy of democracy, exploring its philosophical foundations and claims of authority. Against elitism, authoritarian populism has attempted to snatch power from elites redirecting it to 'the many' in society. The research paper seeks to introduce the main features of authoritarian populism, exposing its theoretical foundations and philosophical underpinnings. It seeks to explore the following questions: a) what are the fundamental assumptions of authoritarian populism; b) how do the underlying features of authoritarian populism compare with democracy? Employing qualitative methodology with content analysis as a research tool, the study seeks to explore the core assumptions of populism as a new popular ideology. The article holds that authoritarian populism portrays a negative philosophy, showing regression rather than progression of democracy. The research holds academic value for researchers and academicians working on the advancement of democracy in societies.*

**Keywords:** Authoritarian populism, Elitism, Democracy Democratic Regression, Progression.

### **Introduction**

The research focuses on the phenomenon of authoritative populism, exploring its philosophical and theoretical foundations and the challenge it poses to democracy. Authoritarian populism acquires a middle ground between elitism on one hand and democracy on the other. Elitism assumes the supremacy of aristocracy, and 'rule of the few', while democracy is defined by the 'rule of the many' in a politically organized society. Populism as a political discourse portrays a political struggle between the 'the pure people' on the one hand and 'the corrupt elite' on the other (Hawkins, 2017). Populism marks the emergence of populist parties or movements that claim to represent the interests of the masses vs. the 'other'. Then they equate the mass interest as the 'real interest' of the 'true' people-----a strand of thought that runs similar to all types and forms of populism. The term authoritarian populism, however, refers to the emergence or the rise of charismatic leaders, who may be democratically elected but become autocratic in the exercise of exclusive power. The study employs qualitative methodology with content analysis as the research tool, and holds academic value for researchers, academicians working on the theoretical and empirical advancement of democratization of societies.

In the academia, scholarly work on populist discourse has ranged from developing understanding of populism as an ideational approach (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) to populism's relevance with regime type—democracy or authoritative (Ferrari, 2022) to populism's impact on the actual

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conduct of mass politics or the political phenomenon (Galito, 2018). Theoretically, populist discourse settles for a middle ground between both identity politics on the one hand and nationalism on the other (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). With theoretical clarity established on populism in academic circles, scholarship has explored populism's inter-linkage with democracy and the conduct of mass politics (Cunha & Cassimiro, 2022; Juha Herkman, 2022). While exploring the fundamental assumptions of authoritarian populism, the paper compares authoritarian populism with democracy to argue that authoritarian populism is a negative phenomenon, marking regression rather than progression of democracy. Authoritative populism deviates from the legitimate, representative, and ethical standards of democratic and egalitarian organization of a society.

### **Populism: An ideology, discourse or style of government**

Populism is undoubtedly an essentially contested concept. Though the concept has been defined in many different ways, the ideational approach – perceiving populism as a set of ideas or ideology – has always remained relevant in the study of populism. Guiding this study as well, the ideational approach defines populism as a political discourse that posits a struggle between the “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”. Ideational conceptualization enables scholars, such as Dean and Maignashca, to see populism as a set of ideas that is combined with other thick ideologies (such as nationalism and socialism) that are more intellectually refined and consistent.

Populism has a more limited ambition and scope, making it a “thin-centered ideology” in the words of Dutch scholar on populism Cas Mudde. Ideational definition of populism has made clear that the core concepts in the definition exhibit a Manichean view – a struggle between good and evil – with a moral judgment calling one group as 'pure' while the other as 'corrupt' and 'immoral'. The dualistic conception of a struggle between two antagonistic groups challenges pluralism (which rejects Manichean distinction to see the diversity of ideas and interests in society) and elitism (which celebrates the virtues of elites and fallibility of the masses). The ideational approach, therefore, regards anti-elitist and anti-pluralistic features to characterize populism.

The ideational approach thrives on the works of a long list of scholars who assume that populism can be combined with other ideological features. Thus, the scholars have identified different types and subtypes of populism. The usefulness of the ideational approach to studying populism is that it sets clear boundaries and helps us distinguish populism from 'non-populism'. The distinguishability in the ideational approach helps students of populism to formulate definitions that are not vague and general and hence can be utilized in a scientific manner. The distinction is clear in the logic of the ideational approach, which defines two clear opposites of populism as discussed above: pluralism and elitism.

This strength of the ideational approach sets it apart from other approaches (discursive and organizational) that are unable to define what populism is not. Moreover, the ideational approach is used in empirical studies to distinguish "more-less" features of the populist phenomenon by measuring the extent of populism of a political leader or a campaign. Additionally, political scientists Mudde and Norris have illustrated in their research that the ideational approach allows scholars to empirically distinguish between populist and non-populist parties.

Secondly, the ideational approach takes an integrated approach with an opportunity to compare; it does not restrict the scope of the concept in a region or at a specific time. It does not suffer from the "travelling problem" (definitions that are geographically specific) identified by Italian political

scientist Giovanni Sartori. Instead, it has been successfully incorporated in studies of populism globally. From the studies of both left-wing and right-wing populism in Europe to the growing number of studies of Latin American populism, ideational definitions are informing various studies.

In addition, the ideational approach has gained popularity in comparative politics while being employed in various studies of non-European populism too. The approach is gaining popularity in studies focusing on populism in South Asia and East Asia; the center of gravity has begun to shift with work on populism becoming increasingly comparative. Significantly useful for this research as well, the ideational approach effectively provides a framework for comparative cross-regional studies in the field too.

By using techniques to measure populist ideas in regional and cross-regional studies, political scientists use the ideational approach to examine the consequences of populism on policy and democratic institutions. Scholars like Hawkins and Alberto Martinelli, in their respective researches, have studied the impact of populism on democracy and institutions. Lastly, the study of populism from an ideational perspective enables academicians to study populism at different levels of analysis. The versatility is prevalent in the ideational approach, which is applied in various empirical studies that focus on populism at both elite and mass levels. From individual to party level, ideational definitions guide research on both the supply-side and demand-side of populist politics.

Two other approaches in the study of populism are mainly held by leading voices in this realm. First, Ernesto Laclau's discursive approach is laid out in his book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism and Populism* (1977). The discursive approach has informed many studies on populism done by noticeable thinkers. Laclau sees populism as a discursive strategy of political elites to yield political power by discursively constructing "the people" with antagonism towards the elite. The concept of "the people" in this perspective is an "empty signifier" (lacks specific content) and has to be filled by a populist discourse to gain popular support. Therefore, a more discursive dimension is present in the Laclauian tradition: it views populist ideas to be created by populist leaders.

In contrast, the ideational school focuses on the content of populist ideas. Laclau's approach is distinguished from the ideational approach – and hence does not inform this research – because it is highly normative and abstract with no specific content of the concept "the people". The ideational approach, on the other hand, guides this study because it gives a specific content (moral) to the concept "the people" and has a positive orientation to study empirical and real-world cases. Moreover, the discursive approach typically identifies populism with radical left-wing forces. The ideational approach, however, characterizes both left-wing and right-wing forces (which are the focus of this study).

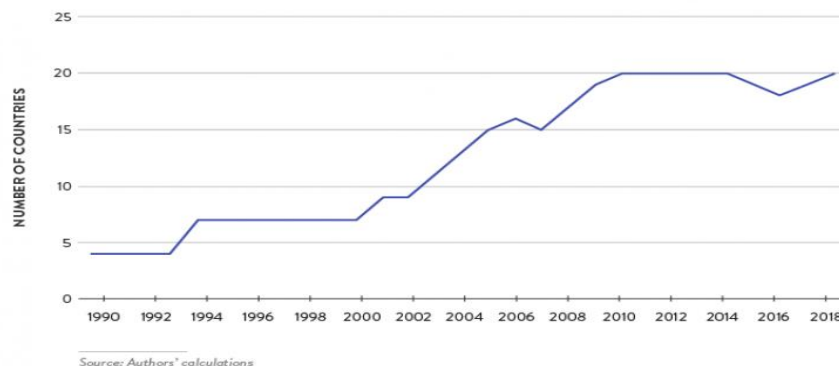
Second, the organizational approach considers populism a particular form of popular mobilization. Populist leaders, according to the organization approach, establish direct links with the people while circumventing formal channels and organizations. It sees charismatic leadership as a necessary feature of populism. The ideational approach rejects this proposition: populism, according to ideational conceptualization, comes in many guises and is not always characterized by charismatic leadership – though usually, it is. Populism, for instance, can be identified in leaderless movements (Tea Party in the US) and organized political parties without charismatic leadership.

Moreover, the ideational approach theoretically considers that populist leadership is usually charismatic and finds it skeptical of formal organizations. However, it does not consider charismatic leadership as defining feature of populism. Moreover, the organizational approach does not qualify to guide this study because populism needs to be considered more than popular mobilization as it is equally prevalent when leaders take office and carry policies.

Understanding populism from a large body of scholarship that adopts the most readily used ideational approach (conceiving populism as a set of ideas) has generated some consensus on defining its core features. The ideational approach sees populism as an ideology, discourse, or set of ideas. Ideational definitions of populism have been successfully used in studies across the globe; the utility of the ideational approach is in the sharing of core concepts of the definition by most scholars. It considers populism to be a worldview rather than merely a campaigning or governing style.

### 1.1 Analysing Populism: Main Features

As identity politics gains the center stage in different regions and states, scholars argue that populism poses the biggest threat to democracy and the liberal international order. The paper argues that authoritarian populism is a negative phenomenon, marking regression rather than progression of democracy. The word 'populism' entered the political discourse a long time ago. Its use dramatically increased in the last decades with the rise of right-wing and left wing political parties and politicians across the world as explained in Figure 1



*Figure 1. Number of countries with populism in power, 1990-2018*

*Source: 'Populists in Power Around the World' by Jordan Kyle and Limor Gultchin*

Fig 1 portrays the rise of populism marking an upward slide from 1992 to 2018. The phenomenon connotes the emergence of populism marked by the rise of right wing or left wing populist parties. Right wing populism marks nationalistic and xenophobia tendencies which are linked with anti-immigrant sentiments, stringent punitive measures on violation of law and order at the expense of civil liberties. Left-wing populism manifests in protests against economic inequality, unequal wealth distribution, anti-corporate, anti-capitalist and anti-globalist rhetoric. The phenomenon

breeds nationalism and authoritarianism to forge divisions and polarize further on divisive slogans to seek electoral benefits.

Major states globally have witnessed increasing polarization on the questions of identity and nationalism (Fukuyama, 2017). This is evident in major states like the United States, where Donald Trump won an election in 2016 on the platform of identity, immigration and reassertion of cultural superiority. Similarly, in India and Brazil, advocacy of exclusive versions of nationalism, coupled with the divisive perception of national identity, brought right-wing authoritarian leaders to power – who presented themselves as 'strongman' and defied a system of checks & balances against their consolidation of power. Such an environment of political change reinforces the need to study identity politics and trace the rise of such leaders in the mainstream national politics of different societies.

To study the role of populism and nationalism in today's politics across the world, Francis Fukuyama's *'Identity: The Demand for Dignity and Politics of Resentment'* highlights that several economic, social and political predicaments around the world are contributing to the rise of identity politics: major political parties are entering the realms of cultural politics while leaving behind the questions of economic classes. Topics of immigration, gender, refugees, race, etc., lay at the heart of mainstream politics, with right-wing populist leaders using cultural fears and social uncertainties of disenchanted masses to populist benefit. Scholarly work provides a deep insight into the contemporary manifestation of right-wing authoritarian populism around the world. Scholars explore the impact of nationalism on democratic societies--, the role of right-wing populism in authoritarian styles of governance.

Discussing populism, Richard Deangelis has argued that fear of "the other" (the core feature of populist discourse) is associated with generating "xenophobic populism". Taking this perspective into account, Ulrike Vieten, in her research on "pandemic populism", has asserted that fear of the others can be mobilized in times of crisis. This makes populism, according to Vieten, exploitable to populist propaganda. Moreover, another important feature of populism – discontent towards the elite – has also been studied to know how populists dealt with institutional experts. Scholars have argued that populist politicians have positioned media and experts as part of the corrupt elite. Fareed Zakaria's book *'Ten Lessons for the Post-Pandemic World'* has argued that populist leaders – by providing oversimplified answers to complex questions, disregarding expert advice, and downplaying the role of mainstream institutions – generally mishandling crisis and their approaches generate greater polarization in societies. Interconnectedness between populism and emergency responses have also been studied by Medical anthropologist Gideon Lasco in his work *"Medical populism and the COVID-19 pandemic"* who labels populist leaders – including Donald Trump, Narendra Modi and Jair Bolsonaro – as medical populists who, according to Lasco, have demonstrated some common features in their response to Covid-19. Lasco asserts that the response of medical populists towards the outbreak of the pandemic is characterized by simplifying the pandemic by ignoring complexities, downplaying the crisis and its impact, proposing easy and unproven remedies, and forging divisions between the 'people' and dangerous 'others'.

Likewise, John Agnew's article *'American "Populism" and the Spatial Contradictions of the US Government in the time of Covid-19'* has explained the role of populist leadership-style in the ineffective government responses to the outbreak and spread of the disease. Agnew asserts that right-wing populism propagated by the Trump administration did not just jeopardize efficient handling of the public health crisis but also forged divisions and polarization within the society.

Nationalist rhetoric fueled the "us" vs. "they" debate as the populist leadership directed marginalization towards already disenfranchised communities.

The article '*Political discourse, denialism and leadership's failure in Brazil's response to Covid-19*' focuses on how Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro responded to the outbreak and how his populist worldview shaped his policies. The article shows why peculiar responses to the pandemic in Brazil were shaped by Bolsonaro's downplaying of the virus. The article argues that the president discredited expert medical advice in times of crisis. The authors lay down an argument to relate the mishandling of the pandemic with the president's populist politics characterized by denialism and undermining of the seriousness of the issue at hand.

Ajnes Prasad in the article '*The organization of ideological discourse in times of unexpected crisis: Explaining how Covid-19 is exploited by populist leaders*' explains the ways through which Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right-wing populism incorporated divisive policies to undermine institutional checks and balances against executive authority in Indian society.

### **1.2 Populism: Anti-Elitist, Anti Pluralist**

A large body of scholarship has adopted the ideational approach to conceive populism as a set of ideas (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020). The ideational approach sees populism as an ideology, discourse, or set of ideas. Ideational definitions of populism have been successfully used in studies across the globe; the utility of the ideational approach is in the sharing of core concepts of the definition by most scholars (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). It considers populism to be a worldview rather than merely a campaigning or governing style. In this regard, Mudde (2015, p. 295–307) sees populism as a thin-centered ideology: one which does not have a clear programmatic content but necessarily appears alongside other thick ideologies, like communism, nationalism, and socialism. Populism, Mudde (2004) argues, frames "society to be ultimately separated between two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'." This demonstrates that populism sees society with a Manichaeian view—a struggle between the good (people) and the evil (elite). As noted by Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008), such antagonism sees the mobilization of "virtuous" and "true" people against existing elites deemed "immoral" and "self-serving." Populist leaders, therefore, consider themselves as the true and sole representatives of the people, who are disregarded by the "corrupt" establishment and need to regain their sovereignty and popular control. Anti-elitism in populist discourse owes to the resentment of ordinary people who feel ill-treated at the hands of established elite groups (Canovan, 1999).

Populism, therefore, is an expression of anti-elitism which features greater commonality with the people and breeds criticism for the elite. As political theorist Margaret Canovan (1981, p. 294) notes: "all forms of populism without exception involve some kind of exaltation of and appeal to 'the people' and all are in one sense or another anti-elitist." Jan-Werner Muller terms populism in '*What is Populism?*' as a 'political strategy, rhetorical style and a way of governing at the same time.' Populism is inherently anti-pluralistic since populist leaders consider themselves the only "true" defenders of "real" people; they claim exclusive representation on a moral basis by labeling political competitors as part of the corrupt elite—rather than the real, oppressed people (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 468). In their claim to authentically identify with disregarded people, populists, as political philosopher Jan-Werner Muller (2016, p. 3) notes, claim that "they, and they alone, represent the people." (We are the 100 percent, they say). Populism is also characterized by charismatic leadership with a direct, unmediated relationship with the people, breeding criticism of institutions that function as intermediaries between the leadership and the ordinary people. As

la and Arnson (2013) have argued that populism rewards charismatic style of politics that uses emotional appeal to undermine traditional rules of politics.

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p. 11) argue that the anti-elitist impetus goes along with the critique of institutions that are accused of distorting the “truthful” relationship between populist leaders and “the common people.” Thus, populists are usually critical of experts and unelected institutions of oversight that constrain democratic governments and (according to populists) are elitist in their makeup. When populists gain power, anti-pluralistic tendencies make way for the authoritarian style of governance. Populists, after assuming public offices, tend to test limits of constitutional democracy: Autonomy of unelected institutions—judiciary, media, and civil society—is curbed while calling them elitist usurpers of popular will (Mounk, 2018, p. 44–45). In addition to being contemptuous of established institutions that do not produce desirable political outcomes, authoritarian populists disregard expertise by favoring “common-sense solutions.”

Populist messages, Hans-Georg Betz (2002) mentions, tend to be simplistic and straight-forward to appeal to the common sense of ordinary people. In the bid to convince their followers that they are part of the “ordinary people,” populist politicians oversimplify complexities; they prefer common sense as, for them, good is found in the common wisdom of the people rather than the pretensions of the expert. Other than the presence of “people” and “elites” in populist discourse, the concept of “others” is equally important to understand how populists posit ‘the people’—especially under right-wing populism” (Panizza, 2005, p. 358). For right-wing populists, “others” are those who do not share common identity and values with “the people” and are favored by the elites over “real” people. “Others” are a group that shares an antagonistic relationship with the “people,” and their ethnic identity, religious beliefs, or cultural norms could be deemed as that of an “outsider” to the “real people.” Populists, during crisis, exclude groups that are deemed as the source of crisis while searching for a scapegoat and employing “we against them” strategies (Sullet-Nylander et al., 2019). Therefore, right-wing populism constitutes ethnic, religious, or cultural interpretations of “the people”. It tends to favor authoritarian policies to combat threats from the dangerous “others” with hostility toward immigrants and suspicions toward minorities on identity lines (Mudde, 2007, p. 66). Populism on the right, therefore, tends to lean toward majoritarian nationalism. It is different from left-wing populism (calling poor and underprivileged as “the people” with a focus on income redistribution and welfare-oriented policies) in the sense that it considers a nation (on ethnic, religious, or cultural grounds) to be a source of shared identity.

The construction of “we” in populist appeals is facilitated by shared conceptions of whom we are (based on nativism by pinning natives against the non-natives, who supposedly threaten the essence of the nation) and whom we are not (based on racist and xenophobic framing of others and outsiders) as noted by Mudde (2007). Using an ideational approach, Muller explores populism’s relevance to identity politics. Moreover, scholarly work explores the interconnectedness of core populist features demonstrated by populist leadership and crisis situations, populist movements in opposition and how populism orients itself in governance when populists gain power.

### **1.3 Authoritative Populism: Regression of Democracy**

The broad features of populism portray that populism does not have a clear programmatic content but necessarily appears alongside other thick ideologies, like communism, nationalism and socialism. Populism frames society to be divided between two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’. This demonstrates that populism sees society with a Manichaeian view – a struggle between the good (people) and the evil (elite). As noted by

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redistribution and welfare-oriented policies) in the sense that it considers a nation (on ethnic, religious, or cultural grounds) to be a source of shared identity. The construction of 'we' in populist appeals is facilitated by shared conceptions of whom we are (based on nativism by pinning natives against the non-natives, who supposedly threaten the essence of the nation) and whom we are not (based on racist and xenophobic framing of others and outsiders).

Following features define populist anti-elitist tendencies.

- Populism develops a direct, unmediated relationship of the populist leader (often charismatic) with the “real” people defined as homogenous and virtuous, whose primacy must be ensured against the parasitic elite. Populism exclude some groups as ‘others’ based on a narrow conception of identity – race, religion, ethnicity, immigration, gender – and claim that they alone represent the people.
- Authoritarian populists disregard institutions and experts for being part of the nefarious elite and show authoritarian impulses towards institutions that limit or check executive power – opposing political parties, legislative assemblies, judiciary, media and civil society.
- With an anti-elitists platform, populism frames the elite as corrupt, self-serving, and ignorant to the ordinary people’s problems.
- Populism exhibits oversimplified strategies and proposes common- sensical solutions to discredit experts for being invested in elite and existing institutions.
- Populism regards traditional media as ‘fake’; reject elections; and incite riots against elected institutions.

Standing in contrast to both elitism and plural forms of organizing politics in a society, authoritarian populism poses a direct challenge to democracy. In its wake, authoritarian populism dares to question the legitimacy of democracy, exposing its philosophical foundations and claims of authority. Authoritarian populism attempts to snatch power from elites, while redirecting it to ‘the many’ in a society. However, certain practices make authoritative populism an anti-progressivist model for governance. Firstly, many a times, the distinct features of populism are seen as submerged and midway between other ideologies. Populism exhibit both anti-elitist and anti-pluralistic features in a society. Its philosophy entails the dualistic conception of a struggle between two antagonistic or opposed groups—elites and plurals identities in societies. Populism tends to challenge pluralism, which exhibits the diversity of various ideas and interests in a society. Elitism celebrates the virtues, wisdom and knowledge of elites, while it discards, substituting it with the fallibility and unreliability of the many in a society. Secondly, populism has a more limited scope, it remains what Mudde calls a "thin-centered ideology." Populism tends to claim exclusive representation of the 'real' people based on a narrow conception of national identities, cultural practices and religious differences. Plurality of socio-political existence in ethnically diverse societies is negated by populism while favoring authoritarian policies to combat threats from the dangerous 'other'. Thirdly, populist leaders assert that “that they, and they alone, represent the people.” In their anti-elitist bid to establish a direct contact with the ‘real’ people, populist leaders create an unmediated direct relationship with the people, ignoring the experts and institutions. Populist leaders criticize intermediary institutions, discredit unelected experts who are viewed as a part of the nefarious elite, and confront media and the institutions which tend to check and balance the executive authority of the populist policies. Fourthly, populism sees the consistent dissemination of 'common-sense solutions' to complex problems with a keen disregard for experts, who are portrayed as the enemy of the common people.

## **Conclusion**

Populism as an ideational approach lacks magnanimity, wisdom and expertise of elitism, and remains partisan for being discriminatory. Common-sense simplification of complex issues helps populists to seek greater political connection with ordinary masses pitted against elite institutions and experts. Populism poses the risk of oversimplification to complex problems and phenomenon in societies. Hence the philosophy and practice of populism marks hostility towards immigrants and suspicions towards minorities on the basis of identity. Its disregard for inclusivity, diversity and institutionalism makes it a thin ideology of political organization compared to the richness of democracy.

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## **The Paradox of Influence: Religious Political Parties in Pakistan's Parliamentary Democracy**

**Khizar Hayat\***

### **Abstract**

*The ideology and politics of religious political parties of Pakistan is measured as divisive to the fundamental principles of democracy and civil liberties. The political landscape of Pakistan, with majority of Muslim population and 25 religious political parties rooted in Islamic ideology wield considerable influence over constitutional, legal, administrative and political matters of state, regardless of their limited parliamentary appearance. Political right of politics with a delusion of religion deteriorates the excellence and realpolitik. Instead of espousing political characteristics and tenets these parties are losing political cult and their irrelevance from the parliamentary businesses is palpable and the 2008 to 2024 election results prove it. This study aims to forecast the future trajectory of religious political parties within the functioning of the Pakistan's parliamentary system. Employing a qualitative research methodology including survey of the youth purposively selected. The findings reveal that the role of religious political parties as pressure groups is very influential on the other hand duds in their role in political development and agent of socialization and political development. Most of the religious parties except Jammat e Islami (JI) don't fulfill the basic parameters of a genuine political party. Internal conflicts, competition from non-religious options, lack of economic and social expertise and groundwork with changing public opinion, especially among young people, are the challenges these parties are facing today. The paper concludes by proposing reforms for harmonizing religious participation with democratic development by emphasizing institutional reforms within parties, madrasa modernization, and adherence to Westminster norms of pluralism and compromise to enhance national cohesion and global legitimacy. Transitioning religious political parties of Pakistan to a democratic and to the ranks of a true political actor would require several significant changes across various domains, including legal, social and political spheres.*

**Keywords:** Electoral performance, Islamist parties, Liberal Democracy, Political adaptation, Political development, socio-economic issues.

### **Introduction**

Current political landscape of Pakistan presents a paradox of influence owing to the role of religious and other political parties in upholding or decaying the social, political system and democratic foundations (Akbar, Khalid, Ahmad, 2023). Religious political parties are playing a complex and frequently varying role, their contribution regarding institutional efficiency and sectarian polarization and national cohesion is very critical. These parties derive their power base from different ethnic, linguistic, regional and ideological spectrums and depict diverse ethnic, religious and regional electorates (Amjad, 2024). By alignment with military bureaucracy maintain their sway and develop their influence. Their internal dynamics and motivations of each other and mechanisms through which they fashion policies for state and society are very undemocratic (Mariam, Sahar, Niloufer, 2020). The roots of current state of extremism and unstable socio-

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political circumstances presents that the progression of Pakistani society is against the visions of the founding father MA Jinnah. In the formative periods of Pakistan, the concept of religious extremism was almost non-existent as the founder of the country, M.A. Jinnah, made it clear that the new state would not be theocratic in nature. His successors failed to curb the forces of religious belligerency that not only changed the nature of the Pakistani state and society but also succeeded in making it a monolithic religious state in which non-Muslims were disqualified from seeking the highest positions in the state structures (Ahmar, 2012).

Pakistan's dream of secular and liberal governance is doomed and delusional. The deliberate usage of religious interpretations by political forces, constitutional embedding of Islamic principles and the rise of religious parties underscore the inseparability of religion from the country's politics. As Pakistan continues to evolve, effects are not limited within the state and current wave of populism in the region is very suspicious, understanding this interaction remains critical to any analysis of its political and legal systems. Predominantly when scrutinizing their role in the existing federal parliamentary system with limited electoral backing their role has endured prominence look on general discourse, legal outlines, and social structures. Parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F) and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), demonstrate the paradox of little ballot power but high policy bearing in ranges allied to national ideology, constitutional, legal, administrative design, educational and social reform, blasphemy laws, and the broader identity of the state (Ahmad, 2023). This paradox, wherein partial electoral presentation coexists with extensive political influence, compels an in-depth exploration within Pakistan's federal parliamentary context. In the context of the historical and current political national scenario with a fragile political system prone to extra constitutional developments and influence of stimulus to Islamic fundamentalist is taken as a threat to stability and realpolitik. Analysts depict that the Islamic forces are dominating the state structure and may led the country to Islamization which is considered contradictory to the principles of democracy and civil liberties.

Current trends of politics are shifted to materialism ideologies and day to day affairs like economic settings, fair trade, peace, environmental protection and solidarity for low-income communities (Hussain, 2024). Islamic political parties with other actors must assist the functions of spur to put into action the lethargic governments and goad them into action. While these are only ensuing traditional religious ideology, Kashmir, Palestine, religion- political and cultural rhetoric and voters are not attracted to such slogans and manifestos (Shahab, 2024). Liberal political parties also adherer similar importance to such themes besides other manifestos of social, economic and political development. From a political point of view, the public never gave a mandate of more than 10% to religious political parties at the National Assembly level (Markey, 2017). The roots of religious extremism and populism are linked to the role of illiteracy, emotionalism and religious political parties and intersection with Islamism (Samina, 2024). These Islamists are one of the major players of politics and the political volatility of Pakistan today is in large degree due to "the struggle between three major actors, the civilian wing of the state, the military, and the Islamists" (Waseem, 2011). Besides Military unconstitutional assumption of power the state's authority has also been threatened by the Islamic establishment which has, since the founding of the state, pressured the state to establish sharia, (Islamic law). Islamic militant discourse and strategy emerged during the wars in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s and has since intensified (Waseem, 2021).

These parties are linked to the regime oscillations and democratic backsliding and disruptions in the peaceful transition of power and working of state affairs in civil regimes besides disunity among the political elites (Mishra, 2023). Almost all the democratic and quasi democratic era governments tried to dole out with religious political parties. Pervaiz Musharraf along with some politicians brokered the formation of the MMA alliance and remained in power for almost 8 years. The PMLQ and MMA alliance eroded when Musharraf went into self-exile and faced a reprehensible defeat in the 2013 general elections because of its affiliation with a dictator. Similar was the case with General Zia ul Haq and General Muhammad Ayoub Khan who remained in power until political forces were with them and resigned from power when Islamists converted against them. Both used Islamic political forces as their straight partners (Askari, 1997).

Political development is a continuous process and not only linked to the government institutions, role of political parties is also a continuous process most of the political parties of Malaysia, Türkiye and Indonesia in the world of Islamic Ideology have transformed their original ideology to a pluralistic and democratic nature. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) of Türkiye generally measured as a right-wing party transformed itself into a very different spectrum. The party had won multiple seats in the last seven elections (Gunes, Cengiz; Day, Bahar Simsek 2023). Pan Malaysian party has played effective role in promoting the Secular Ideology in the country. The route to moderation and inclusivity adopted by the party has more moderate stance over time, focusing on inclusivity and appealing to a broader electorate. This shift in the ideology of the party helped in promoting a more secular approach to governance while maintaining Islamic values (Jongerden, Joost, 2023). These alliances often require compromises on strict religious agendas, leading to a more balanced and secular political approach. *One Malaysia* policy adopted by all the political forces including the religious parties have promoted political process, social justice and fostered economic development. Indonesia has also transformed its political foundation by taking serious measures for the promotion of liberal democracy and civil liberties. *The Islamic Defenders Front Indonesia (FPI Front Pembela Islam)* a religion based political organization used religious believes in politics is efficaciously dealt by the State, populist religious leaders being outside of state institutions used sensations to spur support along these lines. It became popular because of a popular narrative ‘to defend Islam and the ummah’ and victimhood inspired by terror of assorted “others”( non-Muslims, “Zionists,” China, the Western powers and Ahmadis) to take matters of state into its own hands (Facal, 2019; Jahroni, 2004). Party is banned for being an architect of 400 Sharia based laws and providing basis to the blasphemy protests in 2016 and 2017 (Barton & Morieson, 2021).

The rise of extremism in Pakistan is nurtured by use of religion and in politics and it is posing grave existential intimidation to (Akbar, Khalid & Khan, 2023) Islamist political parties symbolize numerous sects within Islam, including Deobandi, Sipah e Sahaba, Barelvi, and Shia groups. This diversity often leads to a dearth of harmony among these parties and subsidizes to diverse social and political outlook. Instead of fostering social integration and unity these are fostering sectorial (Maslaki) division and youth has always been a focus of such parties and attempt to promote a specific class of youth educated in their sect branded religious seminaries having contradictory orientation from the traditional schooling system espoused by the state (Chakma, 2014). Such training nurtures a particular ideological outlook that may not always bring into line with the wide-ranging socio-political, economic and security apprehensions of the state nationally and internationally. As a result, religious political parties often prioritize their specific religious ideologies over national issues, further complicating the political landscape. These parties leverage

madrassa networks tied to specific Maslaks (e.g., Deobandi, Barelvi), crafting a paradox, they democratically participate in elections yet foster ideological and social fragmentation. This study explores how their seminary-based power structures undermine national unity and democratic consolidation. Research questions focus on (1) the socio-political consequences of madrassa-centric mobilization, (2) pathways for reforming these parties to align with democratic pluralism and (3) What is the perspective of youth about the role and future of the religious political parties in Pakistan?

### **Statement of the problem**

Political parties of Pakistan pose diverse spheres of influence and dominations in the political, legal and administrative structures of the country. Pakistan was created with a vision to be both a nation motivated by faith and a modern democratic state guided by public will. But the domination of religious political parties in designing structures and system of state is unique and the combination of faith and politics is leading the country to a miscellaneous direction. The escalation of religious and popular political groups and admittance to the power over the disenchantment of regimes in power in the most of the Muslim states like: The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), The July 2024 Revolution in Bangladesh, Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan is apprehended to the looming scenarios of escalation of such religiously popular forces in milieu of Pakistan as through electoral structure they are getting non-operational and washing out besides having strong street power. In this context, the need for comprehensive reform within the political system and religious political parties becomes crucial not only to ensure their alignment with democratic principles and rule of law, but also to enhance their legitimacy and acceptance in both national and international political arenas.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative literature analysis with quantitative data collection through online surveys. A purposive sampling technique was used to target educated youth between the ages of 18-30. The rationale is to capture the views of digitally connected and politically aware individuals who represent the future electorate. The survey focused on political engagement, perceptions of religious parties, trust in democratic institutions, and views on religious influence in governance. The survey, conducted over three weeks in 2024, used Likert-scale questions to gauge perceptions of the Islamist parties' divisiveness, madrassa reforms, and democratic adherence. Qualitative responses explored youth aspirations for inclusive politics.

### **Literature Review**

Writer explains in detail about the role of religious political parties regarding their emergence and role in Pakistan. Popular Islamist leaders and parties being mostly in opposition cause greater impact on the functioning of democracy, less attention has been devoted to their roles in opposition. Many of these parties spend years in opposition with meager seats in parliament before making any alliance with mainstream political parties. All the military dictators and party in opposition have used them to amend the legal system and caused destructive affects regarding individual freedoms and rights and to alter the political system, often on the road to democratic

weakening and illiberalism (Pappas 2019; Ruth-Lovell and Grahn 2023). This role is not evaluated in the case of Pakistan and there is empirical gap in the literature.

There is also knowledge gap regarding the difference of opinion regarding the role of religion in politics in Pakistan. One school of thought contends that mixing religion with politics can be exploited for personal gains and may lead the state to nowhere, while others believe that a religious framework provides essential guidance for political institutions and decisions (Akbar, Khalid, Khan, 2023). This aspect of religious parties in national politics is not revealed and its consequences are very severe. Anatol Lieven in his book: *Pakistan: A Hard Country*: describes that: “*the deep-seated ethnic and sectarian tensions within Pakistan can foster internal divisions which can lead to violence and destabilization. The state's inability to effectively manage these conflicts exacerbates social fragmentation and poses a risk to national unity*” (Anatol, 2020). The vision of Political modernization by the founding father of the nation Muhammad Ali Jinnah involves integrating all ethnic, linguistic, religious, political forces and areas of the country into the constitutional and political system, consolidation of democratic institutions and the rule of law (Jalal, 2014). There is lack of literature on the definite role of state as a supervisory authority or a party is missing, rather than a martial line to combat the religious groups, militants, and appropriately federalizing the state to safeguard all provinces are equal stakeholders in the political system.

According to Muhammad Waseem, the social division is one of major aftermaths of the religious parties, besides sectorial (Maslak) differences there are demographic variation in presence. These are functioning for the promotion of specific ideology from different platforms and causing the promotion of religious divide in Pakistan (Waseem, 2023). He also points out that political conflict in Pakistan reframes sectarian and ideological clashes, and Islamist parties have exploited anti-American sentiment and sectarian cleavages to galvanize support. Waseem details how parties like JI and JUI-F have used madrasa networks and regional grievances to expand their constituencies, thereby acting as both vehicles for political inclusion of conservative groups and catalysts for polarization (Waseem, 2019). His analysis highlights the tension between Islamist parties but does not provide the viewpoint of the masses, religious leaders; it also lacks suggesting reformation means for promotion of electoral roles and societal cohesion.

Islamist parties range from the historical Jamaat-e-Islami (JI, 1941) bidding to promote an Islamic welfare state (Nasr, 2000) to the Deobandi-oriented Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F), which split from the Indian Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (1945) and has been a kingmaker in alliance politics (Shafqat, 1999). More recently, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP, 2015) formed around blasphemy issue has revealed a unique capability for street mobilization, forcing the government to amend the electoral oath and parliamentary procedures (Int. Crisis Group, 2018). There is evidence gap in literature regarding the ideology and successful model of Islamic modes of governance. Each party demonstrates different mode of Islamist engagement: JI emphasizes on youth and cadre-based preaching and gradualism, JUI's leveraging of madrasa networks and rural vote banks; and TLP's populist, single-issue mobilization. On the one hand, Islamist parties have expanded political participation by bringing new constituencies particularly conservative rural voters and urban lower-middle classes into electoral politics, and by pressing for social-welfare initiatives such as zakat-based poverty alleviation (Wiktorowicz, 2004; Fair, 2014).

There is evidence gap in literature regarding the alliance policy of Islamist parties and no study is found on the curriculum of seminaries, as main stream religious parties make alliances with religious parties on the name of Islam to get benefit of their street politics and distance from them when in power: PML-N succeeded Islami Jamhori Ittehad (IJI) and abandoned all the allies parties united against PPP (Haqqani, 2005). All opposition alliances in Pakistan like IJI, ARD, PDM and current Movement for the Protection of the Constitution of Pakistan (*Tehreek-i-Tahaffuz Aaeen-i-Pakistan*) have support of religious leadership. Religious educational institutions besides providing political force are also promoting the education of specific sects and different from others. This creates a social, religious and political divide among the religious groups and general politics (Dawn, Feb.22, 2025).

There is a lack of literature on the long term national and international policies and goals of religious parties. There is a huge gap in the capacity of leadership too. Day to day politics of Islamist parties revolve around the hot or burning issues and issues related to Muslim issues around the world like Palestine, Gaza, Kashmir and issues of Blasphemy. JUI-F's Azadi March 2019 for the restoration of democracy, free, fair and transparent elections in Pakistan, Fazal declared that the protest will continue until "*the end of this government*" but it finished with a surprise end. Though this protest was started by the firebrand religious leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the head of the political party, Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), two major opposition parties in Pakistan PML-N) and PPP had also supported the protest (Severa, 2019). The 2017 and 2021 Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan protests are the protests that started after the failure of negotiations with the government, aimed to release the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) Amir Saad Hussain Rizvi and deport the French ambassador. In 2024 Jammāt-e-Islami (JI) under the leadership of Naeem ur Rehman initiated a protest campaign against the electricity prices and status of IPPS, attracted mass attention and tangible results and the prices of Gas and electricity are cut down from the highest level in the history of the country.

There is a massive gap of literature regarding the positive or negative image of religious parties, how these religious political parties are perceived locally as well as globally have been significantly affected by the global discourse around violence and Islamophobia (Esposito, 2001). In furtherance of influencing national discourse and legislation by mobilizing supporters around Islamic beliefs, these parties have been under criticism for promoting hatred and sectarian strife (Atif et al., 2023).

Zahid Shahab Ahmed by using a critical discourse analysis method compares the discourses of religious and non-religious political parties of Pakistan, demonstrates that, despite their modest electoral showings, Islamist parties have been able to dictate national identity policies to both civilian and military governments by framing debates on secularism, minority rights, and anti-Westernism and anti-USA sentiments. He argues that Islamist and non-religious parties often converge on key issues such as the Two-Nation Theory, revealing how Islamic rhetoric pervades the entire party system and complicates efforts at democratic deepening (Shahab, 2023). Mohammed Shoaib Raza in his article on Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) traces the Barelvi School's transformation from a largely apolitical, Sufi-oriented movement into a potent populist force. He highlights two dimensions of politicisation of religion and sacralisation of politics through which TLP mobilises mass protests around blasphemy issues and secures electoral gains, despite its single-issue focus. This case underscores the paradox of Islamist parties' influence:

immense street power and agenda-setting capacity, yet limited institutional roots and fluctuating vote shares (Raza, 2023).

A January 2024 analysis in *The Diplomat* argues that Pakistan's Islamist parties, notably JUI-F and TLP, are poised to act as kingmakers or spoilers in coalition politics. By leveraging even a small number of seats, these parties can extract policy concessions and shape government formation. These dynamic highlights how Islamist parties, despite declining vote shares, retain outsized influence through strategic positioning forcing mainstream parties to negotiate over issues like blasphemy laws and education reform to secure stable alliances. Christophe Jaffrelot's *the Pakistan Paradox* (2015) offers a sweeping political history that unpacks the contradictions inherent in Islamist party participation. He argues that Islamist parties embody a duality: they both challenge and reinforce state institutions. While advocating for Islamic governance and sharia, they have also entered democratic coalitions, contributing to political resilience. Jaffrelot's work situates Islamist parties as agents of both instability through sectarian mobilization and resilience through adaptive coalition-building underscoring their complex role in Pakistan's political development (Jaffrelot, 2015).

Moonis Ahmar's 2012 article, *Vision for a Secular Pakistan?* identifies how Islamist parties have systematically opposed secularism by invoking the Two-Nation Theory and a rigid interpretation of Pakistan's founding identity. Ahmar shows that Islamist parties, rooted in Maududi's and Iqbal's visions, view secularism as a Western conspiracy, resist reforms aimed at pluralism. This work remains foundational for understanding how Islamist ideological frames constrain democratic institutions and shape policy debates on religious minorities and civil liberties. Madiha Afzal's 2019 Brookings report, *An Inflection Point for Pakistan's Democracy*, examines the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal's (MMA) 2002–2007 tenure, demonstrating how Islamist coalitions can deliver social-welfare initiatives such as zakat-based poverty alleviation while simultaneously undermining pluralism through restrictive legislation. Afzal argues that the MMA's rise highlighted both the potential for Islamist parties to address governance gaps and the risks they pose when populist rhetoric overrides inclusive policymaking, thereby illuminating the paradox of Islamist contributions to political development.

Political development is not only linked to the government institutions and reformation of political parties is also a continuous process most of the political parties in the world of Islamic Ideology have totally transformed from their original ideology to a pluralistic, modern and democratic nature. The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) of Turkiye generally measured as a right wing conservative party on the political spectrum in the world and also labeled as a social and national conservative, right-wing populist and promoter of neo-Ottoman lines in the country transformed into a very different spectrum (Gunes, Cengiz; Zeydanlioglu, Welat. 2013). AK party had tremendous responses from the masses in the local elections of 2004 and won 42% of the votes, made great achievement against the Secular Republican Peoples Party (CHP) and the Social Democratic People's Party. The party had won multiple seats in the seven most recent legislative elections, those of 2002, 2007, 2011, June, November 2015, 2018 and 2023 (Gunes, Cengiz; Day, Bahar Simsek 2023). Political parties in Malaysia have played a multifarious role in stimulating secular ideology and social cohesion among different communities of multiple religions, by traversing between traditional values and contemporary political dynamics. Pan Malaysian party has played effective role in promoting the Secular Ideology in the country. The route to moderation and inclusivity adopted by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), have a more moderate stance

over time, focusing on inclusivity and appealing to a broader electorate. This shift in the ideology of the party helped in promoting a more secular approach to governance while maintaining Islamic values (Jongerden, Joost, 2023). *One Malaysia* policy adopted by all the political forces including the religious parties have promoted political process, social justice and fostered economic development. The stable political system has led to economic stability and development (William, 1995). Indonesia having the largest Muslim population has transformed its political foundation by taking serious measures for the promotion of liberal democracy and civil liberties. *The Islamic Defenders Front Indonesia (FPI Front Pembela Islam)* believed in politics is efficaciously dealt by the State, populist religious leaders being outside of state institutions used sensations to spur support along these lines. It became popular because of a popular narrative ‘to defend Islam and the ummah’ and victimhood inspired by terror of assorted “others”( non-Muslims, “Zionists,” China, the Western powers and Ahmadis) to take matters of state into its own hands (Facal, 2019; Jahroni, 2004). It is formally banned in Indonesia for being an architect of 400 Shariah based laws in the country and providing basis to the blasphemy protests in 2016 and 2017 (Barton & Morieson, 2021).

### **Discussion And Analysis**

The rise of Islamists and the Muslims comprise the second largest population after Hindus in South Asia. They are, however, not a monolithic community. The rise of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and the official patronage it has got has an enormous political and security impact on the region. The terrorist campaign, sponsored by Pakistan and waged by Islamic fundamentalist groups in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan, has wide implications and poses a major threat to the region. Setting up an Islamic state and Jihad are the two objectives of all fundamentalist movements. Religious parties had opposed the Pakistan movement before Independence. After Pakistan came into being, the fundamentalist parties gradually raised Islamic issues and the demand for making Pakistan an Islamic state. The roots of religious extremism in politics of Pakistan dates to the decade of 1960s (Ayoub era 1958–1969), when he overpowered the idea of real democracy by bulldozing the people’s will and engineering the elections. With the help of religious leaders, he also propagated against the women leadership and governance of Ms. Fatima Jinnah. She was the first populist leader to adopt a populist playbook when she campaigned and ran against General Ayub Khan. She was the façade of “real democracy” against the “elite” in the 1965 general elections. The “real democracy” she promised was rooted in a commitment to represent the “*Will of the people*” (Zaheer and Chawla 2019).

Though successive governments in Pakistan used Islamic parties for political objectives, it was under General Zia-ul Haq that a campaign was launched from the top to 'Islamize' Pakistan. Gen. Zia's policies led to the growth of Islamic and sectarian violence in the country. Pakistan's intervention in Afghanistan and the Islamic policies at home gradually turned the country into the epicenter of global Islamic militancy. The Mullah-Military alliance was strengthened during the Musharraf regime. The recent growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the South Asian countries, apart from specific historic and social factors in each country, can be greatly attributed to Pakistan's religious parties and its strategic anti-India policies. After Afghanistan, Bangladesh is one of the larger Muslim counties upon which the threat of Islamic militancy looms large.

Johann Chacko, in his book “*Pakistan’s Political Parties: Surviving Between Dictatorship and Democracy*”, describes that religious parties of Pakistan in spite of meager electoral successes,

have jointly played an enormous role in nationwide political life particularly in determining discursive standards. This distinctive trajectory of has been determined by South Asia’s intra-sectarian denominational diversity, which operates in the context of competitive politics within a populist Islamic republic overseen by an authoritarian weak state (Chacko, 2024). These parties often use broad Islamist rhetoric, each prioritizes a specific religious denomination (*maslak*) within Pakistan’s diverse Muslim population, and strives to represent and defend the interests of a particular sect or community within the political system.

## Findings And Discussion

**Table 1: Findings and Discussion Summary**

Finding	Key Data	Discussion Points
<b>Perceived Divisiveness</b>	68% of respondents	Islamist parties like TLP (anti-Shia rhetoric) and JUI-F (Deobandi-centric policies) are seen as fueling sectarian divides, undermining social cohesion.
<b>Madrassa Reforms</b>	82% support	Strong public backing for integrating secular subjects (e.g., science, math) into madrassa curricula to counter ideological extremism and improve employability.
<b>Democratic Deficits</b>	74% criticism	Islamist parties prioritize clerical authority over internal democratic processes, clashing with Westminster-style meritocracy and weakening institutional legitimacy.
<b>Party Structure Reforms</b>	80% Support	The majority supports the reforms in the internal infrastructure of political parties

The research reveals three critical themes shaping public perceptions of religious political parties in Pakistan. Unlike Westminster inspired systems prioritizing electoral competition and accountability, these parties were perceived as reinforcing clerical authority, raising questions about their commitment to inclusive governance. Collectively, these findings underscore tensions between Islamist political frameworks and public aspirations for social unity, educational reform, and democratic pluralism. 68% of respondents agreed to the perceived divisiveness regarding the role of these parties, it emerged prominently with the role of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) which foster sectarian polarization. TLP’s anti-Shia rhetoric and JUI-F’s Deobandi-centric policies were cited as drivers of communal fragmentation, highlighting concerns about their role in deepening societal rifts. Regarding the Madrassa reforms garnered overwhelming support (82%), reflecting a consensus on the need to modernize religious education by incorporating secular subjects. Respondents argued that this integration could mitigate ideological rigidity, equip students with practical skills, and align madrassas with contemporary educational standards. Regarding the democratic deficits within Islamist parties drew sharp criticism (74%), as respondents noted disconnect between their hierarchical, dynastic, clergy dominated structures and democratic norms like merit-based candidacy. Most of the

respondents agreed to the need for internal reforms within the parties for their internal and internal support and success in ballot politics.

This research also highlights madrassas as incubators of Islamist activism, providing parties like JUI-F and JI with grassroots reach (Bano, 2020). However, their sectarian curricula perpetuate inter-Maslak rivalries, fueling political violence. TLP's rise reflects populist exploitation of blasphemy sentiments, diverging from JI's structured Islamism (Yusuf, 2021). Critically, prior studies neglect youth perspectives on these parties' divisive roles. This gap is addressed through primary data collection, contextualizing seminary influence within generational shifts. Instead of being a single political force the Islamist political parties of Pakistan are associated to distinct sect of Islam and have membership of people following the same sect only. People of other sects don't join the part of other sects. Every party wants to promote its own ideology based on the sect. The Sunni clutches demand that Pakistan be declared as a Sunni state and Sunni Tehrek (Sunni Movement) groups like Siphae-Sahaba also crusading for that. The Jammat-e- Islami (JI) attempts a more inclusive approach, while other Islamist parties, such as JUI-F and TLP, focus on Deobandi and Bareilvi Sunni schools. Similarly, MWM represents the Shia community. Shamsudin Shigri, a Karachi-based researcher studying Islamist movements, says, "This focus on specific denominations limits their broader appeal to the entire electorate" (Waseem, 2023).

**Table 2: Identified Loopholes in Religious Political Parties**

Loopholes	Key Examples/Data	Discussion Points
<b>Sectarian Agendas</b>	JUI-F's opposition to Shia participation in governance	Prioritizing <i>Maslak</i> (sectarian) interests over national cohesion, exacerbating communal divides and marginalizing minority voices.
<b>Authoritarian Practices</b>	Centralized leadership stifling dissent	Concentrated power in clerical elites undermines internal democracy, transparency, and accountability.
<b>Civil Liberties</b>	TLP's violent protests blasphemy law reforms	Contradictory stances on free speech: advocating religious causes while suppressing dissent through intimidation.
<b>Capacity and Capability</b>	Majority of respondents criticized leadership gaps	Leadership is perceived as lacking vision, administrative competence, or policy expertise to address modern governance challenges.
<b>Lack of Institutional Supremacy</b>	Avoidance of Dharna Politics	Deep concerns about weak institutional frameworks to enforce rule of law or curb partisan agendas.
<b>Outdated Agendas and Manifestos</b>	Reforms in Manifestos	Failure to modernize political platforms to address contemporary socio-economic issues, reducing public relevance.

The analysis highlights systemic weaknesses in the religious political party's internal frameworks. Foremost, sectarian agendas undermine national cohesion, as exemplified by JUI-F's exclusionary stance toward Shia participation in governance, which entrenches communal fragmentation. The role of JI has public support but lacks leadership and capability. Concurrently, authoritarian practices within these parties, such as centralized leadership structures, stifle internal dissent and erode democratic accountability, contrasting sharply with principles of participatory governance. Further contradictions emerge in their approach to civil liberties: while advocating religious causes, parties like the TLP employ coercive tactics, such as violent protests, blasphemy law reforms, undermining their credibility as defenders of free expression. Additionally, capacity and capability gaps plague their leadership, with respondents criticizing the lack of administrative and policy expertise needed to address modern challenges. Two underdeveloped yet critical loopholes lack institutional supremacy, and outdated political agendas warrant deeper scrutiny. The former suggests weak frameworks to enforce institutional authority, while the latter reflects stagnant manifestos disconnected from contemporary socio-economic realities. Collectively, these loopholes expose tensions between ideological rigidity and the demands of inclusive, adaptive governance.

The study highlights that their contributions to nation-building and involvement in political polarization emphasize strategic pragmatism and reformatory worth. Their socio-religious legitimacy is not sufficient for popular support and success in ballots. Lieven (2011) categorizes these parties as moral gatekeepers rather than democratic actors. More recent studies (e.g., Ayoob, 2015; Khan, 2019) note the growing visibility of groups like TLP that capitalize on emotive religious narratives. Despite lacking mass electoral appeal, these parties exert substantial pressure on mainstream parties and state institutions, particularly during national crises or blasphemy-related controversies. Gaps remain in understanding how the youth, who represent a majority demographic, perceive these religious political entities.

## **Conclusion**

The paradox of influence among Islamist political parties in Pakistan demonstrates a divergence between street power and electoral legitimacy. JUI-F, JI, and TLP continue to shape national discourse and policy direction. Their triumph lies in mobilizing religious sentiments, influencing administrative decisions, and commanding visibility through protests and media presence. However, their lack of internal democracy, modernization, and inclusive outreach, especially toward youth and minorities, undermines their democratic badges. The politics of alliances has also destroyed their singly rise and popularity. From 2003 to 2008 MMA performance was not inspiring to have solidity in their performance. Election results from 2008 to 2024 show their insignificance from the politics of Pakistan. Youth demand systemic restructurings to reconcile religious activism with pluralism. By implementation democratic principles and modernizing educational networks, these parties can transition from divisive actors to contributors of national unity, aligning Pakistan's polity with Westminster's inclusive foundations. To ensure constructive participation in Pakistan's democratic evolution, it is crucial for these parties to undergo ideological and structural reforms. Only through harmonizing religious influence with democratic values can these entities contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

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## **Education and democracy. Examples from field research among indigenous communities in the Andean region of Peru**

**Dr. Maria Eleonora Hebisz\***

### **Abstract**

*In an increasingly globalized world, intercultural education has emerged as a critical interdisciplinary field, particularly in culturally diverse contexts. This study explores the educational challenges in multicultural environments, focusing on the Peruvian context, and examines the roles of both formal and informal educational actors, including international organizations. Peru, reflective of broader Latin American dynamics, is characterized by multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and extensive multilingualism, with hundreds of indigenous and Creole languages shaped by colonial and migratory histories. Despite this linguistic diversity, substantial educational reforms aimed at incorporating indigenous languages into curricula only began in the 1990s, and have largely prioritized Spanish-language instruction. Through ethnographic observation and analysis of educational practices among Peru's indigenous communities, this research highlights significant gaps in educational inclusivity, particularly regarding democratic engagement and civic awareness. The findings suggest that a robust and culturally responsive education system is foundational for fostering democratic values and understanding of state mechanisms. Ultimately, the study argues that democracy cannot be sustained solely through institutional frameworks; it requires a socially grounded, democratically-oriented education to cultivate civic consciousness and participatory citizenship.*

**Key words:** Intercultural education, multiculturalism, multilingualism, indigenous communities, Peru, civic awareness, democratic education, educational reform, Latin America, language policy, social inclusion.

### **Introduction**

In today's global world, research in the interdisciplinary field of intercultural education is gaining importance. The field of research into the educational problems of culturally diverse environments is becoming important. Educational actors confronting social responses to differences include not only institutions of educational systems, but also international organisations of a formal and informal nature. By showing, in the Peruvian context, the concepts of education implemented by these actors, it is possible to trace the links between education and the socio-political and socio-behavioural situation of multicultural communities living in the Peruvian area.

Peru, like the entire Latin American region, is characterised by phenomena such as multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism and multilingualism. Latin American multilingualism includes the presence of several hundred Indian languages, also the existence of Creole languages as well as languages that are a legacy of the period of slavery and European and Asian migration. (Velez Verdugo: 2006, p. 20). Although there are around five hundred Indian languages spoken throughout Latin America, it was only in the 1990s that processes of educational change, based mainly on Spanish-language instruction, were initiated. I will analyse the aforementioned changes in language teaching and education, using the example of Peru, where the intentions to modernise education, focused on proposals to reform school curricula, rather than introducing ethnic languages into teaching.

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Observing the life of Peru's indigenous societies, I realised that education in the country had many caveats. The subsequent analysis of my observations demonstrated that, unfortunately, the shortcomings affect people's understanding of democracy and the functioning of the state. Therefore, I conclude that the proper education should be based on democracy, especially in a country such as Peru. Such principles should be applied in a universal sense.

For democracy to persist, it is not enough to introduce only democratic institutions, because the fact of maintaining democracy is not only a political, but above all, a social phenomenon. Consequently, civic awareness is needed for democracy to persist. Without this awareness, the existence of the best democratic institutions will do little to make democracy work. In order to develop civic awareness, it is necessary to understand what mechanisms govern the state, at local and regional level or at international level. Understanding is important, and for this a well-functioning education is essential, because there is a correlation between the functioning of education and the functioning of democracy.

Official education in Peru is strongly linked to politics and does not exist separately from the socio-economic context in which it develops, so schools are involved in the creation and control of meanings and discourses. In the country, until the 1970s, there was no programme linked to a national policy on bilingual education. A cultural *métissage* was imposed on the educational process (Posern-Zieliński: 2005, p. 155), although in 1975, under the government of General Velasco Alvarado, a programme was created to include Ketchua, alongside Spanish, as an official language in Peru for the first time in Peruvian history. This was followed, in 1977, by the effort to introduce the teaching of Ketchua in schools at all levels of education, and dictionaries and grammar books for the six varieties of the language were compiled and published. During this time, various experimental projects on bilingual education began to emerge. Despite the attempt to introduce the Kechua language into schools, in practice neither its status nor that of its speakers changed, which was explained by the lack of willingness of social action and financial resources, and since teachers did not want to teach in Kechua, it was therefore considered pointless to decree the establishment of Kechua, the official language of Peru. (Klee: 1998, p. 167-181). In addition, the proposed teaching subjects, concerning social knowledge or environmental science, revealed some political ambiguities, as the ideas concerning multicultural education, conflicted with the call for integration into the national culture. (Hornberger: 1989, p. 49-61).

The Ketchua language has informally always been seen as a problem, since the official language widely spoken in Peru was (from the colonisation period onwards) and is Spanish. After the end of General Velasco's term of office, the provision in the constitution regarding the Ketchua language was changed and the decision to promote bilingual education lost relevance. In spite of the previously created scenario, which favoured the promotion of Indian education, only some projects were selected for implementation, subsequently materialised with the financial support of private institutions and international organisations. The most significant experimental projects at the time were the Bilingual Education Project in Puno (Hornberger: 1989, p. 70-91; Lopez: 1987, p. 127-142 ; Jung, Lopez: 1998, p. 26-58) and the Intercultural Bilingual Education Project in Ayacucho. (Zuniga: 1987, p. 257-273). In the following two decades, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, more institutions emerged with the idea of developing projects in other, smaller Peruvian regions, but due to lack of funding, much of this work remained in the realm of planning.

The Intercultural and Bilingual Education Establishment set up by the Ministry of Education treated education as an instrument of national government policy, rather than as the goodwill of institutions involved in the development of intercultural education.

By 1977, bilingual education, concerning the ‘fusion’ of Spanish with Ketchua, Aymara and some Amazonian languages, had been introduced in sixteen departments. Although efforts were made at the time to make quantitative progress (officially it is said that there are around four thousand schools and almost one hundred thousand children receiving bilingual education) the reality is that many children from minority linguistic and cultural groups, do not receive adequate education in this area.

Policies and planning for multicultural education in Peru, face discourses full of opposition. The assumptions of bilingual education are based on a pedagogical discourse where, on the one hand, solutions to multiculturalism are sought by trying to treat Ketchua in the same way as Spanish and, on the other hand, bilingual education programmes include concepts for multiethnic education for the Indian population, but which are not developed with this population. (Lopez: 1996, p. 265). Attention is also drawn to the discrepancy that exists between the design of bilingual education and the different state policies that favour the Spanish language. There are also differences between the educational objectives set and their implementation. All of this means that, in reality, bilingual and multicultural education is really a levelling education that in no way strengthens Indian society. The research on education that I have carried out in villages near the cities of Huancayo and Huancavelica confirms that this type of education is usually transitional and only introduced in rural zones.

Huancayo and Huancavelica, are two Andean cities around which numerous villages are grouped, with economic and political as well as cultural differences. Huancayo, as the capital of the Junin department, and Huancavelica, as the capital of the department of the same name, have their own distinctive customs and traditions that have developed through a complex historical process. In Huancavelica, the community uses the Ketchua language to a much greater extent. In Huancayo, this language has not had the opportunity to develop, as the historic Huanca people, never submitted to Inca rule, maintaining their own distinctiveness. Huancayo also does not have as many monuments to Spanish culture as Huancavelica. Huancayo is a much more commercialised city, due to its proximity to Lima, it is a cosmopolitan and self-financing city, and this in turn influences the development of the villages in its vicinity.

Huancavelica, which is a town deeper in the Andes and more conservative because of its distance from Lima and the other, larger cities, does not receive external support. To a much greater extent than in Huancayo, trade and the production of handicrafts are practised there. The entire cultural baggage inherited from the ancestors also plays a huge role. The differences are apparent on a closer look at the situation in the region, both in terms of traditions, the practice of the indigenous language and economic conditions, which in turn has to do with education in the region.

The Ministry of Education in Peru, on the other hand, defines education as a continuous socio-cultural process to shape individuals and improve communities. Education is supposed to contribute to the socialisation of new generations so that they are able to participate in culture. The family and society, as well as school institutions, are considered to have a central role in education. (Programas Curriculares Basicos del I, II y III ciclos: 2004). However, when writing educational programmes, is attention really paid to the cultural differences that exist between communities living in Peru? Are those writing these programmes aware of the background of Peru's cultural diversity and its regional specificities?

Ministerial curricula indicate the importance of a number of economic and social issues that are closely linked to the problem of education. (Programas Curriculares Basicos del I, II y III ciclos:

2004; Programa Nacional de Emergencia Educativa: 2004). These programmes draw attention to the fact that Peru is a multicultural country where there is a problem of discrimination, related to ethnic, social, linguistic and religious background. It is assumed that education should form one integral nation. It is seen that there is a need to plan an educational pathway for each of the different teaching areas of integrated communication, mathematical logic, social studies, environmental studies and physical education.

Religious formation is also important in education, which is supposed to shape the pupils' sense of belonging to the Catholic Church or Protestant denominations, but there is no mention of Indian religious traditions, such as those related to the worship of Mother Earth. Ministerial curricula presume to educate pupils to a high standard, in each of the different areas. Pupils are expected to respect their differences and the rights of others. It is assumed that the school should teach independent problem-solving. The essence lies in the fact that what is written in the curricula is seldom reflected in actual actions. The curricula contain specific teaching and learning objectives and describe projects to change the status quo. The main objectives are contained in the National Education Needs Programme and are primarily related to halting the deteriorating state of education. Schools are to be equally accessible to all, regardless of the region, town or village in which a community lives. It is assumed that there should be bilingual schools.

This is because the school should emphasise cultural and social values and the development of an environmental awareness of the region. However, when analysing the programmes issued by the Ministry of Education in Peru and comparing the assumptions of these programmes with their implementation, it can be seen that the proposed objectives and curricular content, are based solely on pedagogical discourse, and the ideas put on paper, contradict not only their implementation, but also the possibility of their realisation, as they testify not only to a lack of understanding, but also to a lack of knowledge of the realities of a different natural and cultural environment.

In the department of Huancavelica, the regional community lives mainly in the rural zone, whose inhabitants speak mainly the Kéchuwa language. It is a region where indigenous customs and traditions are cultivated, both in the city and in the countryside. Celebrations are associated with holidays such as Adoracion de los Reyes Magos (Adoration of the Three Kings), Los Negritos, Semana Santa (Holy Week), Fiesta de las Cruces, Wiga Wantuy, Waylas Trilla, Danza de las Tijeras. The huancavelican culture is deeply linked to the cult of Pachamama (Mother Earth). The main task of the communities in the rural regions is to work the land, growing potatoes, maize, broad beans, barley, kinua, or Andean cereals, which have been their food since ancient times, also raising cattle, llamas and alpacas, which are symbols of Andean culture. With regard to education, there is a high degree of illiteracy. In fact, many students only complete their education at the primary level, known as primaria, while some also manage to finish the secondary level, secundaria. A small percentage of Huancavelicans complete higher education, which is linked to a number of economic as well as communication problems. Indeed, Huancavelica is a region of low economic opportunities. This situation is the result of the great exploitation of natural resources and the significant depopulation of the local population, which began as early as the colonial period. The region has been economically, socially and culturally neglected by the government, which is only concerned with the development of large metropolises such as Lima. The permanent marginalisation of the Andean zones is also linked to the fact that these regions are mainly populated by rural communities. The result is mass migration to cities such as Lima, where migrants seek better work and study opportunities for their children. Huancavelicans also migrate to Ayacucho, Ica and especially to Huancayo, which is a much more modern city than

Huancavelica. Many of the traders in Huancayo are indigenous Huancavelicans. Also, the university - Universidad Nacional del Centro del Peru - operating there, provides opportunities for education in the region.

Emigration on a larger scale took place during the period of the fight against terrorism, between 1980 and 2000, during which time residents were forced to leave their homes, farms, traditions and habits. Huancavelica, unlike Huancayo, is a region that has experienced a lot of violence from colonial times to the modern years, which in turn has determined the social and cultural relations that are associated with the economic development of the region. Nonetheless, Huancavelica is that place in the Peruvian Andes where a human contact with the land, with nature, with history and with culture quite different from what characterises the large industrial cities still prevails.

Huancavelica is that region where tradition is simultaneously cultivated and abandoned. This situation concerns the villagers who would like to move away from their own culture related to language, customs, as these characteristics identify them as Indians and associate them with low prestige.

Social and cultural divisions affect both regions as a result of the different historical processes that have influenced their development. These differences can be seen, for example, in the Santiago festival, during which in Huancayo it is celebrated with an orchestra, while in Huancavelica it is celebrated with traditional instruments such as zamponas, pututos, quenachos, okarinas.

According to a study that was carried out a few years ago in Huancavelica, it was observed that in an earlier period, discrimination was much more rampant than it is today. The community that lived in the central part of the city considered themselves to be descendants of the white race. In contrast, those who lived in the surrounding villages were regarded with contempt as Indian peasants, pongos (Indian servants) and labourers.

Today's youth do not want to cultivate indigenous customs and identify with traditional Huancayo or Huancavelica culture in order to avoid mistreatment and humiliation. This is the situation when people from these regions move to other cities, especially Lima where they are usually treated as inferior. Many migrants coming from the countryside, do not want to be identified with their place of origin and consequently renounce their identity forgetting their own past, their own roots and culture. This situation also applies to Huancayo, but on a somewhat smaller scale. Nevertheless, there are also those who want to save their native culture from being forgotten. Undoubtedly, multicultural education and the emergence of such schools in rural zones are also conducive to this. Children and young people have the opportunity to learn and pass on their traditions to the next generation.

Parents of pupils feel that the school does not pass on enough knowledge to their children, as the level of teaching is lower than in city schools, not to mention private educational establishments. They feel that the school should introduce traditions, teach the Kéchuá language so that children do not forget their culture, but above all it should teach mathematics and integral communication. This is because it is believed that the knowledge they will acquire in these subjects will enable them to acquire a specific profession that will prepare them for their future lives. Above all, the lack of economic resources limits development in education and culture. Parents want the best possible future for their children. They believe that the most important thing is for their children to be able to write, read and count well and the transmission of knowledge in the field of traditions

and culture is treated as less important. This knowledge can be gained by participating in various festivals and festivals with dances and performances in colourful regional costumes.

In conclusion, let us therefore try to answer what is the role of education in identity formation and democratic participation?

Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' understanding of their needs, identity, and role within society. A well-structured educational system provides people with the necessary knowledge and critical thinking skills to evaluate their circumstances, enabling them to discern what they truly require from the society they live in. Without sufficient education, individuals may struggle to identify their fundamental needs and rights, leaving them vulnerable to external influences and societal inequalities.

A particularly pertinent example of this necessity is seen in the aftermath of colonialism or other forms of cultural suppression, where populations have lost a clear sense of their identity. In such cases, education becomes an essential tool in helping individuals and communities rediscover their heritage, understand what has been taken from them, and define what they seek to reclaim. This awareness can only be achieved through proper and inclusive education that addresses historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts.

To actively strive for freedom and self-determination, people must first understand the implications of freedom. This includes knowledge of their rights and privileges as well as the responsibilities that accompany them. Education must equip individuals with an understanding of the legal frameworks governing their rights, ensuring that they comprehend not only what rights they can obtain but also their significance from a legal perspective.

One of the key components of identity formation is linguistic rights. The right to use and promote a given language carries substantial implications, including:

The official use of the local language in governmental and institutional settings,

The standardization of the language to facilitate formal and educational application,

The societal acceptance of informal language use, which necessitates the establishment of a widely recognized linguistic standard to signify the existence and legitimacy of an ethnic group.

Beyond linguistic aspects, education must also address broader ethnic and cultural rights, ensuring that similar frameworks exist for preserving traditions, customs, and social norms. These aspects reinforce the collective identity of a community, empowering individuals to engage meaningfully in social and political discourse.

The gradual introduction and development of all these amalgamated processes signifies in practice building a functional democracy.

Moreover, education fosters the development of both formal and informal institutions. While formal institutions, such as governments and legal systems, play a critical role in maintaining societal order, informal institutions – such as community organizations, cultural groups, and local networks – are equally vital. These institutions, formed in conjunction with education and societal awareness, contribute to the broader acceptance and integration of cultural identities within the public sphere.

Ultimately, the culmination of these processes leads to the gradual evolution of a civic society that remains deeply connected to its traditions and historical values while actively engaging in democratic participation. An educated population, aware of its rights, identity, and responsibilities, is better equipped to shape its governance and societal structures in a way that aligns with its collective needs.

In conclusion, education is the cornerstone of self-awareness. It enables individuals to define their identity, assert their rights, and engage in democratic processes effectively. A well-informed society is empowered to make conscious decisions about its future, ensuring that governance structures reflect the true aspirations and needs of its people.

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## **Unveiling The Fallout: The Failure of U.S. Liberal Democracy Efforts in Afghanistan Post 2001**

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### **Abstract**

*This research investigates the failure of U.S.-led efforts to establish liberal democracy in Afghanistan following the 2001 war. Initially framed as a humanitarian intervention to liberate Afghans from Taliban rule, the mission evolved into a neo-colonial project driven by Western geopolitical interests. The study critically examines key intervention failures, including the imposition of Western ideals without regard for Afghan history, culture, and local community autonomy; the flawed power-sharing framework of the Bonn Agreement; and the U.S. reliance on corrupt warlords. These factors deepened Afghanistan's political, economic, and social divides. Employing a qualitative approach, this research conducts a thematic evaluation of Afghanistan's governance structures and international interventions. Secondary data is gathered from interviews with local community experts, policymakers, affected populations, scholarly articles, official reports, and historical records. The findings reveal how the prioritization of counter-insurgency over nation-building alienated local community power structures, fostering widespread dissatisfaction, particularly among younger generations. This study provides critical insights into the intervention's unintended consequences, including the humanitarian crisis, systemic marginalization, and the resurgence of the Taliban.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, liberal democracy, intervention failures, local community narrative

### **Introduction**

The United States' decades-long experiment in democratization came to an end in 2021 when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. The United States and its allies have attempted to install a liberal democratic government in Afghanistan since the 2001 intervention, anticipating that this change will stabilize and advance the war-torn country. But in the end, the attempt failed, causing widespread political disenchantment and casting serious doubt on the sustainability of democratic models that are imposed from without. The operational flaws of democratization in Afghanistan have been extensively studied in the literature, but little is known regarding the deeper ramifications of these shortcomings in light of the worldwide consequences of American democracy and the significance of local community perspectives. This study aims to close that gap by critically examining how U.S. operations in Afghanistan undermined democracy itself by alienating local communities and failing to establish long-term governing mechanisms.

The United States has an extensive records of spreading democracy globally, often through state building initiatives and military interventions. Throughout the Cold War, the United States made

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multiple attempts to install democratic institutions in strategically significant regions, often entangled with geopolitical goals. With varying levels of success, the American liberal democracy model was transferred from Latin America to the Middle East, often falling crosswise of local power structures. The post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan began with the objective of stabilizing that region and breaking up terrorist networks, but it quickly developed into a massive nation-building project fueled by the principles of democracy. Long-term instability originated with the Bonn Agreement of 2001, an externally driven attempt to establish a representative government that overlooked Afghanistan's complicated sociopolitical landscape.

The blind imposition of Western governance models without taking into account the country's historical governance traditions, such as tribal hierarchies and decentralized power networks, was one of the main obstacles to democratizing Afghanistan. Since democratic institutions were created in a formal manner but lacked substantive legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people, the crisis of performative legitimacy became apparent. Additionally, widespread corruption, political centralization, and rigged elections increased local mistrust of democratic governance. Thus, what was supposed to be a democratic transition became a neo-patrimonial, elite-driven system dominated by political oligarchs and warlords, further excluding the Afghan people from the political process.

The part played by local communities is an important but frequently neglected factor in Afghanistan's democratic failure. The U.S. intervention put security and counterinsurgency measures ahead of true political engagement, instead of strengthening local government. Many Afghans, particularly those who reside in rural regions, viewed democracy as an imposed system that favored outside interests rather than as an inclusive democratic framework. The Taliban's resurgence was made possible by the resistance that this estrangement fostered. The fundamental tenets of democratic consolidation were undermined while counterinsurgency was given precedence over developmental administration, expanding the gulf between the state and its people.

The strategic follies of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan have been extensively criticized in the literature, but the broader consequences of this failure for American democracy as a whole have received a lesser amount of focus. The implications of Afghanistan's democratization initiatives cast doubt on the sustainability and legitimacy of US efforts to foster democracy throughout the globe. Likewise, despite playing a critical role in determining the results of government, local Afghan points of view are still underrepresented in policy deliberations. Therefore, by examining the connection between local resistance and failed democratic interventions, this study aims to fill these gaps through offering insights into the wider constraints of state-building initiatives that are imposed from afar.

This study presents an in-depth investigation of the failed American democracy initiative in Afghanistan, emphasizing the discrepancy between local realities and forced political institutions. This research contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of the wider ramifications of the fallout from American democracy through analyzing the theoretical foundations, historical trajectory, and community perspectives. This research attempts to find lessons that can direct future policy decisions on international interventions and efforts to promote democracy through qualitative approaches, such as a thematic review of governance models and interviews with local stakeholders.

## **Research Questions**

How did structural weaknesses within the Afghan government, local resistance to Western democratic models, and enduring traditional governance systems contribute to the failure of U.S.-led democratization efforts and the resurgence of the Taliban after 2021?

## **Research Objectives**

- To look into how the Afghan government's institutional and structural weaknesses threatened the long-term viability of democracy efforts supported by the United States.
- To investigate how local Afghan viewpoints such as cultural dissonance and societal resistance have influenced how Western democratic attempts are received and perform.
- To analyze how the Taliban's comeback to power after 2021 was impacted by traditional governance structures that clashed with liberal democratic frameworks, such as tribal hierarchies and decentralized power networks.

## **Literature Review**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2021), democracy is "a system of government by the whole population or all eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives." The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) expands on this by emphasizing the role of free and fair elections, rule of law, and protection of civil liberties. In the context of Afghanistan, democracy was introduced as a Western model emphasizing electoral processes, yet it struggled to gain genuine legitimacy among local communities (Carothers, 2004).

The failure of democratization efforts in Afghanistan can be attributed to several interrelated factors. One of the primary issues was the crisis of performative legitimacy, where democratic institutions were established in form but lacked genuine legitimacy among the Afghan populace (Suhrke, 2011). This issue was exacerbated by fraudulent elections, centralized power structures, and widespread corruption (Goodson, 2014). The 2004 and 2009 presidential elections, hailed as milestones of democratic progress, were marred by irregularities and accusations of fraud, undermining public confidence in the electoral process (Johnson & Leslie, 2018).

Afghanistan's status as a rentier state further hindered democratic consolidation. Dependency on foreign aid resulted in a government that lacked financial independence and was unable to develop sustainable institutions (Giustozzi, 2012). The influx of international aid often reinforced elite patronage networks rather than fostering genuine governance reforms (Barfield, 2010). Consequently, rather than evolving into a participatory democracy, Afghanistan's political system became an oligarchic structure dominated by warlords and political elites (Gopal, 2014).

A significant but often overlooked dimension of Afghanistan's democratic failure is the role of local communities. Instead of fostering grassroots political engagement, U.S. interventions prioritized security and counterinsurgency over genuine political participation (Biddle, 2017). Many Afghans, particularly in rural areas, perceived democracy as an externally imposed system that served foreign interests rather than addressing their immediate socio-political needs (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). The absence of local ownership in the democratic process created

widespread resentment, allowing insurgent groups such as the Taliban to exploit public disillusionment (Sedra, 2013).

Research indicates that local governance structures, such as tribal councils (jirgas), could have played a crucial role in fostering legitimacy if integrated into the democratization process (Schmeidl & Karokhail, 2009). However, U.S. policymakers largely overlooked these indigenous governance mechanisms in favor of centralized, Western-style institutions, further alienating local communities (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008).

The failure of democracy in Afghanistan raises critical questions about the broader implications of U.S. foreign policy and democracy promotion. While American interventions have historically aimed to establish liberal democracies, their long-term sustainability has often been undermined by external imposition and geopolitical interests (Paris, 2004). Afghanistan's experience demonstrates that democracy cannot be transplanted without considering historical, cultural, and social contexts (Chandrasekaran, 2012).

Furthermore, the prioritization of counterinsurgency over nation-building led to a militarized approach that ultimately weakened democratic institutions (Kilcullen, 2009). The 2021 withdrawal of U.S. troops and the rapid collapse of the Afghan government further exposed the fragility of the state-building project (Sopko, 2021). As a result, scholars and policymakers must reassess the efficacy of external democracy promotion efforts, particularly in conflict-prone regions where local governance structures are integral to political stability (Marten, 2018).

Conventional wisdom says that the U.S.-backed republic fell because the country's government and society were hopelessly corrupt, and its values were incompatible with democracy. (Murtazashvili, 2022). In Afghanistan, America gave an illusion of democracy in the name of so-called liberalism, not applying liberal norms in true sense. (Fazal Elahi Bilal, 2022). Lack of understanding of tribal cultures and strategic theories put America on the stake of failure. The Soviet Union tried to create a secular society in Afghanistan based on their enlightenment model of socialism. NATO tried to do the same by formalizing the structures of enlightenment liberal democracy. (Golden, 2021)

## **Research Gap**

Extensive literature investigates the operational failures of U.S democratization efforts in Afghanistan. However, there is limited analysis of how American liberal democratic project faced Structural flaws that undermined its sustainability and how Local Afghan perspectives shaped resistance to imposed governance models? Most studies focus on institutional weaknesses, corruption, and counterinsurgency strategies but overlook the attitude of Afghan localities towards American invasion and community engagement in sustaining political legitimacy. Existing research rarely addresses the broader implications of Afghanistan's diverse population; communities, ethnicities and their views on modern governance and liberalism. This study bridges these gaps by exploring the intersection of local response, failed state-building initiatives, and the impact of imposed democratic governance.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Critical peace theory provides a transformative lens through which to examine the failure of the United States-led democracy initiatives in Afghanistan. When viewed through the lens of critical peace theory, this failure highlights fundamental faults in Western countries' approaches to post-conflict reconstruction and democratization. Rather than establishing long-term peace, the U.S. intervention ironically reinforced many of the systemic inequalities and power imbalances it claimed to address, while systematically excluding the very populations it professed to assist (Duffield, 2007). At its root, critical peace theory questions the prevailing liberal peace paradigm that has driven international interventions since the Cold War (Paris, 2004). This theoretical paradigm contends that genuine peace necessitates more than just the absence of violence or the formation of democratic institutions; it necessitates addressing the underlying causes of conflict, such as economic inequality, cultural marginalization, and political exclusion (Galtung, 1969). In Afghanistan, the U.S. strategy failed on all counts, preferring military solutions over political ones, centralized control over local autonomy, and economic dependency over long-term development.

The structural violence inherent in the American intervention materialized in a variety of ways. While billions of dollars were spent on military and security, fundamental human necessities continued to be ignored (Amnesty International, 2023). The rehabilitation effort resulted in an uneven economy in which well-connected elites in Kabul became affluent through foreign contracts, but rural peasants experienced little improvement in their everyday lives (Barfield, 2010). This economic gap generated discontent and weakened the legitimacy of the new political order, demonstrating Galtung's foundation that inequality is essentially a form of violence.

The democratic institutions established under the Bonn Agreement appeared impressive on paper but failed to take hold in practice. Elections were held, but were frequently tainted by fraud. A constitution was drafted but ignored when it suited the interests of powerful actors. A parliament was established, but it was systematically undermined by presidential power grabs (Goodson, 2014). This performative democracy, which was democratic in form but authoritarian in effect, alienated ordinary Afghans, who regarded the system as promoting foreign interests over local concerns.

Critical peace theory highlights the value of indigenous peace traditions, which have been often ignored in Afghanistan. For millennia, Afghan communities have handled problems using local councils and customary law systems that balance tribal, ethnic, and religious interests. The United States approach not only ignored these traditional systems such as Jirgas, but actively weakened them by adopting a centralized governance model that concentrated authority in Kabul. This resulted in what experts refer to as "institutional peace," or apparently attractive government structures that lacked actual connection to the populations they claimed to serve (Mamdani, 1996).

The militarization of peacebuilding proved especially harmful. As security costs exceeded all other forms of support, the intervention got locked in a never-ending war cycle. Civilian harm in military operations radicalized local populations, while an influx of weapons and money altered social connections and boosted violent actors (United Nations, 2020). The Taliban expertly exploited this dynamic, portraying themselves as defenders of Afghan sovereignty against foreign occupation—a narrative that gained popularity as civilian casualties increased and cultural insensitivity alienated local people.

The intervention's epistemic violence, or purposeful devaluing of local knowledge and competence, was another crucial failure. Western technocrats created plans based on abstract governance theories, with little knowledge of Afghan realities. Traditional water management practices were abandoned in favor of unsustainable megaprojects. Local governing traditions were disregarded as antiquated rather than adapted to new demands. This attitude fueled resentment and guaranteed that many well-funded efforts failed to meet their goals (Fanon, 1961).

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative methodology to investigate the failure of the United States' democracy efforts in Afghanistan, with a focus on in-depth primary data. The investigation is based on semi-structured interviews with officials, civil society leaders, tribal elders, and policy experts, with an emphasis on their firsthand experiences with the democratic process. These interviews go into crucial issues such as institutional legitimacy, governance concerns, and local responses to foreign interference. While the research is mostly based on these deep qualitative insights, it also includes limited survey data from chosen secondary sources, such as the Asia Foundation's longitudinal studies, to provide contextual background on public mood trends. To triangulate findings, the methodology incorporates in-depth document analysis of important policy frameworks, government reports, and NGO assessments. This approach prioritizes deep, nuanced understanding through qualitative methods, with survey data used sparingly for context, ensuring that the research captures the complex realities of Afghanistan's democratic collapse without relying too heavily on quantitative measures that may not fully reflect Afghan citizens' lived experiences.

### **Historical Context**

The American invasion of Afghanistan was framed as a mission to establish liberal democracy, creating the impression that Afghanistan had never experienced democratic governance. However, Afghanistan's political and social landscape has been shaped by global power struggles and repeated foreign interventions.

In 1842, Britain invaded Afghanistan but was ultimately defeated by Afghan warriors. In the 20th century, the Soviet Union sought to impose a communist model but withdrew in 1989 after nine years of resistance, facing significant losses. In the 21st century, the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, claiming to establish democracy and liberal values. However, Afghanistan had already embarked on a democratic journey long before U.S. involvement. It became a constitutional monarchy in 1926 under King Amanullah Khan and Queen Soraya Tarzi, held its first elections in 1965, and was declared the Republic of Afghanistan in 1973. Throughout the Cold War, Afghanistan pursued a non-aligned strategy, balancing global superpowers.

The Saur Revolution (1978) led to the overthrow of President Daoud Khan and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. At that time, Afghanistan was divided between two major political factions: the Communist Party, backed by the Soviet Union, and the Islamist Mujahedeen, supported by the U.S. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, it propped up the Communist regime, triggering a U.S.-backed insurgency known as Operation Cyclone, which armed and funded the Mujahedeen. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan became an Islamic Republic in 1990, but the power vacuum led to the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s.

Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, orchestrated by Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the U.S. launched airstrikes and invaded Afghanistan, ousting the Taliban with the support of the Northern Alliance. The Bonn Agreement (2001) established an interim government, drafted a new constitution, and held Afghanistan's first presidential elections in 2004, in which Hamid Karzai became president. However, U.S. forces remained in Afghanistan to combat insurgency and reinforce democratic governance. Meanwhile, the Taliban continued attacks across Afghanistan and neighboring regions.

In February 2020, the Doha Agreement was signed under President Donald Trump, promising a U.S. troop withdrawal if the Taliban severed ties with terrorist organizations. Under President Joe Biden, U.S. forces fully withdrew by August 2021, leading to the Taliban's swift capture of Kabul on August 15, 2021, effectively ending the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and reversing two decades of American intervention.

### **Structural Failures of U.S. Liberal Democracy in Afghanistan**

There were major structural issues with the U.S.-led democracy effort in Afghanistan (2001–2021) that made it unsustainable. The intervention strengthened institutional illegitimacy, systemic corruption, and centralized governance rather than promoting a stable, inclusive democracy. These shortcomings resulted from a basic incompatibility between Afghanistan's political, cultural, and historical circumstances and Western liberal democratic models. The main structural flaws that led to the Afghan republic's demise are examined here.

- **Over-centralization of power and the exclusion of local government**

The imposition of a hyper-centralized political system that ignored the traditionally dispersed power structures in Afghanistan was one of the most serious shortcomings of the U.S.-led invasion in that country. The 2004 Constitution, which was largely shaped by American authorities, deprived regional and tribal governing structures of their historical significance and consolidated power in the hands of the president (Johnson & Leslie, 2018). This action alienated local people and leaders, resulting in a political system that was not only at odds with Afghanistan's long-standing traditions of administration but also extremely vulnerable to corruption and inefficiency.

As a result of the constitution, the president was given complete authority over the nominations of judges, province governors, and ministers. Instead of encouraging a participatory democracy, this led to an authoritarian system that resembled Afghanistan's previous governments. The government became highly centralized in Kabul, where political elites controlled decision-making, rather than spreading authority to provide checks and balances. This arrangement further distanced the government from the vast mass of people by allowing neither local representatives nor provincial leaders to have a significant voice (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008).

The marginalization of traditional governing structures like shuras (local assemblies) and jirgas (tribal councils) was a major effect of this centralization. Due to their ability to facilitate community-driven decision-making and dispute resolution, these institutions have historically been vital to Afghan society. However, the U.S.-backed administration marginalized these traditional governing mechanisms in favor of a Kabul-based authority, instead of integrating them into the democratic framework. Rural communities, who had previously depended on these councils for governance, were consequently shut out of the political process. Perceptions that

democracy was a foreign idea imposed on Afghanistan rather than an organic system that responded to its conditions were strengthened by the failure to include local governance into the national framework (Mukhopadhyay, 2014).

Furthermore, democratic involvement was further undermined by the electoral system that was implemented under American control. Strong political parties were unable to form after the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system was implemented in 2005. This caused the opposition to become fragmented and made it practically impossible for a cohesive political challenge to the ruling class to emerge (Goodson, 2014). Afghanistan's parliament lost its strength and effectiveness in the absence of strong party organizations, making it impossible to effectively oppose the president's authority. Widespread electoral fraud, especially in the 2009 and 2014 elections, made matters worse and severely damaged public confidence in the democratic process. The idea that elections were neither fair nor indicative of the will of the people was supported by reports of ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, and result manipulation (Dobbins et al., 2017).

This hyper-centralized governing model's overall result was the establishment of a state that was untrustworthy outside the large cities. People in remote areas, where there was little government presence, had little incentive to support a system that did not adequately represent them or provide basic services. Rural folks were particularly vulnerable to Taliban influence because of this pervasive disillusionment. The Taliban positioned themselves as a more credible alternative to the central government by interacting directly with local communities and utilizing established governance processes. The U.S.-designed system ultimately alienated the same people it was intended to rule by not taking into account Afghanistan's decentralized political traditions, which helped bring about the fall of the government and the rise of the Taliban (Sedra, 2013).

- **Militarization over Political Settlement**

The United States' counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan misunderstood the character of the Taliban and placed a higher priority on military operations than on true political reconciliation. The U.S. viewed the Taliban primarily as a military threat that needed to be destroyed by force, rather than as a political movement with deep social and tribal ties (Biddle, 2017). This approach led to a protracted war that did not address the fundamental political issues driving the insurgency (Collins, 2011).

This strategy's refusal to pursue significant efforts at reconciliation was one of its main shortcomings. During the early years of the war, there were opportunities to engage with moderate Taliban factions and incorporate them into a broader political structure. However, the United States demanded an unconditional surrender from the Taliban, preventing meaningful communication (Dobbins et al., 2017). By the time negotiations began in earnest, especially with the 2020 Doha Agreement, the Taliban had already gained significant leverage, and the insurgency had grown in strength (Giustozzi, 2012).

The extensive use of night raids, drone strikes, and other military tactics caused numerous civilian casualties, which undermined efforts to win local support. According to the UN, pro-government forces, including U.S. troops, killed more civilians than the Taliban in some years, exacerbating anti-American sentiment. These civilian casualties only fueled support for the insurgents rather than diminishing their power (Chandrasekaran, 2012).

Another significant blunder was the failure to put pressure on Pakistan to cease its support for the Taliban. Despite being an ally of the United States, Pakistan allowed Taliban fighters to regroup and resupply across its border. This strategic oversight ensured that the insurgency could continue even after tactical military victories (Kilcullen, 2009).

By prioritizing military action over political solutions, the United States ensured that short-term battlefield gains were fleeting. The U.S.-backed Afghan government could recapture cities, but it was unable to establish lasting stability, which ultimately paved the way for the Taliban's resurgence. The decision to neglect political reconciliation, combined with widespread civilian deaths and Pakistan's covert support for the insurgency, contributed to the government's downfall (Murtazashvili, 2022).

- **Corruption and the Reinter State Dilemma**

The mishandling and misallocation of foreign funding became a defining feature of Afghanistan's rentier state crisis. The United States and its allies invested over \$145 billion to rebuild infrastructure, strengthen security forces, and support governance over the course of 20 years (Sopko, 2021). However, much of these funds were diverted through fraudulent payrolls, fake projects, and systemic corruption (SIGAR, 2021). The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) estimated that waste, fraud, and corruption cost the U.S. taxpayer at least \$19 billion (SIGAR, 2021).

Foreign aid did little to benefit the majority of Afghans, as the bulk of the funds enriched the political elite (Marten, 2018). Warlords and powerful politicians accumulated vast fortunes, which they often spent on luxury goods and properties abroad rather than investing in Afghanistan's development (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008). This disparity fueled resentment among ordinary citizens, especially in rural areas where the government was seen as corrupt and disconnected from the needs of the populace (Gopal, 2014).

The Afghan government's reliance on foreign aid, which accounted for up to 80% of its annual budget, further hindered its ability to establish independent, self-sustaining institutions (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008). When the U.S. withdrew in 2021 and cut financial aid, the Afghan government's financial system collapsed, contributing to the rapid fall of the state (Dobbins et al., 2017).

The pervasive corruption and reliance on external funding also eroded public trust in the government. Many Afghans came to view their government as a puppet regime imposed by the West, which allowed the Taliban to capitalize on this disillusionment by promising to end corruption (Suhrke, 2011). This narrative found support in rural areas, where the shortcomings of the U.S.-backed government were most visible (Muktashvili, 2022).

### **Local Afghan response towards American invasion**

There was a huge variation in the attitude of local Afghan communities towards US intervention, with some welcoming the overthrow of the Taliban regime, while others, particularly those who had previously supported the Taliban, resisted the foreign presence, leading to a protracted insurgency. The local response was multi-faceted as Afghanistan is a multiethnic nation with a

diverse population comprising several ethnic groups (Chandrasekaran, 2012). Various reputable sources provide approximate estimates of the ethnic communities as:

**Table 1.1: Different ethnic groups in Afghanistan**

SR NO.	ETHNIC GROUPS	PERCENTAGE
1	Pashtun (Mostly Taliban)	40-42%
2	Tajik	27-30%
3	Hazara	9-10%
4	Uzbek	9%
5	Turkmen	3%
6	Bloch	2%
7	Others (Gjjar, Sadat, Pashai)	4-6%

*Source: (CIA, 2023) (Library of Congress, 2008)*

During American invasion Afghan society had different national alliances, with the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban forces to combat the Taliban and al-Qaeda. These alliances were based on personal interests and their traditional beliefs of governance. Some Afghans, particularly those who had suffered under the Taliban's strict rule, initially welcomed the invasion, hoping for an end to the violence and the establishment of a more democratic and just society. Conversely, many Afghans who had supported the Taliban, either ideologically or due to their control over local areas, viewed the invasion as an act of aggression and a threat to their way of life.

In 2001, the US military had begun strikes against Al-Qaeda terrorist training camps and installation of Taliban regime. Richard Boucher said; “The invasion was a success very quickly.” Some Afghans say that to combat terrorist groups, the American troops carried out humanitarian intervention violating individual liberty and personal space. They invaded local’s homes forcefully asserting that there been hiding terrorists. The effected community was not pleased by American strategies. After clearing terrorist groups and their bases from Afghanistan Bush expanded his mission to nation-building. His administration asserted that they wanted to transform poor war-torn country into a stable democracy with central government. There were girls started going to school. There were clinics and hospitals being build-up and elections planned. Literate, liberals and well-educated community as in Kabul admired US and loved democratic efforts as they were suffered in hands of Taliban. By the death of Osama Bin Laden in2011 people started thinking that much of the violence was caused by US-forces rather than Taliban. This attitude did not let Afghans to rout against Taliban rise (Biddle, 2017).

### **The Taliban’s Governance: Regression and Repression in Post-2021 Afghanistan**

Following the U.S. withdrawal in August 2021, the Taliban quickly reclaimed control of Afghanistan and established an authoritarian theocracy (Johnson & Leslie, 2018). Their government, under Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, is highly centralized and dominated by hardliners (Marten, 2018). Despite early claims of inclusivity, the Taliban has excluded women, ethnic minorities, and political opponents from power (Amnesty International, 2023).

The Taliban's return has precipitated an economic crisis, with a collapsed banking system, skyrocketing inflation, and widespread unemployment (Al Jazeera, 2023). The humanitarian situation has worsened, with millions facing food insecurity and malnutrition (UNOCHA, 2023). The systematic persecution of women has been a key feature of Taliban rule, including severe restrictions on education, employment, and freedom of movement (Amnesty International, 2023).

Religious and ethnic minorities have also been targeted, while dissent has been suppressed through crackdowns, forced taxation, and public executions (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In December 2024, the Taliban issued a directive banning windows that face areas frequented by women, further restricting personal freedoms (Sandra Gathmann, 2023).

Afghanistan is now a failing state under Taliban control, characterized by regressive policies, economic collapse, and growing isolation from the international community (Barfield, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The failure of the U.S.-supported democratic initiative in Afghanistan, coupled with the Taliban's resurgence, stands as one of the most notable geopolitical setbacks of the 21st century. Despite years of foreign involvement, substantial financial aid, and efforts to build institutions, a viable and inclusive governance framework was never established. The enforced hyper-centralized governance model alienated local populations, marginalized traditional power dynamics, and bred extensive corruption, resulting in a weakened and unstable Afghan state. The focus on counterinsurgency rather than fostering political reconciliation, along with critical oversights such as neglecting Pakistan's backing of the Taliban, contributed to the insurgency's endurance and ultimate triumph.

Since regaining control, the Taliban have dismantled democratic institutions and established an authoritarian theocracy characterized by oppression, gender discrimination, and economic downturn. Rights for women, freedom of speech, and protections for ethnic minorities have faced severe restrictions, with recent measures—such as prohibiting windows that allow views into women's areas—demonstrating the regime's increasingly intrusive oversight of personal lives.

Afghanistan's situation highlights the essential need for governance that is culturally relevant, local involvement, and a sustained commitment to building institutions. It also serves as a cautionary tale regarding the limitations of externally imposed democratic frameworks and the long-lasting repercussions of strategic myopia. Without authentic local participation and international accountability, any future attempts to stabilize Afghanistan are likely to repeat past errors.

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## **Digital Authoritarianism and Internet Shutdowns: A Comparative Analysis of India and Myanmar**

**Alham Tariq\***

### **Abstract**

*Countrywide Internet Shutdowns have emerged as a very frequent and critical tool of digital authoritarianism, often employed to suppress the public dissent and control grassroots mobilization. This paper explores the comparative dynamics of internet shutdowns in India, the largest democracy, and Myanmar, a hybrid regime, focusing on the socio-political impacts and citizen responses. Using a qualitative analysis of government statements, policy documents, media narratives, and academic literature, this paper delves into the implications of these shutdowns on the political organizations and effectiveness of grassroots movements. The study highlights significant differences in how the digital authoritarianism manifest and is perceived in democratic versus hybrid political systems. It further reveals that while both governments employ shutdowns to curtail opposition, there is significant difference in the mechanisms and public reactions, shaped by two discrete political contexts and the availability of alternative communication channels. The paper provides insights into the evolving nature of state control in the digital age, highlighting the urgency of safeguarding digital rights.*

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary digital era, internet access is not only becoming a cornerstone in communication, but it has also become pivotal in political expression, social activism, and governance (Phillips, 2024). However, the exponential growth of has been accompanied with the widespread state-imposed internet shutdown, which is a considerable challenge to democratization and violation of human rights. These shutdowns are often justified as measures to maintain public order or address security concerns. But in the recent years, they have become a critical tool in the arsenal of both democratic and authoritarian regimes. This research paper investigates the dynamics of digital authoritarianism through a comparative analysis of internet shutdowns in India and Myanmar, two nations with very different political systems yet surprisingly similar patterns of digital suppression.

India and Myanmar are great case studies in contrast because of their starkly different political regimes. India is the world's largest democracy, celebrated for its lively civil society, free press, and robust legal framework. However, the increasing frequency of internet shutdowns in India raises questions about the undermining of democratic norms. Since 2012, India has become one of the most significant internet shutdown leaders in the world, with more than 100 reported cases every year over the last few years. The measures have been most apparent in politically sensitive regions such as Jammu and Kashmir and in mass protests such as the 2020-2021 farmer demonstrations. These shutdowns usually find justification in maintaining "public order" or

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"national security," yet their disproportionate use has caused so much dismay over the issue of state overreach and the suppression of public dissent (Feldstein & Steven, 2019).

In Myanmar, however, the political landscape has been shaped by a history of military dominance, which somehow is pitted against fragile experimentation with democracy. Decades of authoritarian rule were followed by a brief democratic opening from 2011 to 2021, but the February 2021 military coup saw a return to authoritarianism with the junta using internet shutdowns as one of the key strategies for repression and concealing human rights abuses (Saba & Akbarzadeh, 2025). Here, again, there is no possibility of even minor resistance by democratic institutions, unlike India, and Myanmar's regime operates almost without impunity. Because of its dominance in state institutions like judiciary and media, the junta is able to extend prolonged and nationwide internet blackouts without facing much accountability, and the isolation and repression of citizens become worse.

The historical trajectory of these two nations is significant for understanding why and how they approach to digital authoritarianism in differing ways. Indian democracy is deep-rooted in its post-independence history marked by a commitment to pluralism and constitutional governance. Although, the resurgence of populist and majoritarian politics has indeed put the resilience of these democratic principles to a test in the recent past. Internet shutdowns have increasingly become a tool used to manage public dissent, especially in regions with deep-rooted political and ethnic conflicts. Kashmir, for example, is one such region because of its long history of contentious integration into the Indian Union followed by political restlessness.

Myanmar's political history, by contrast, is characterized by decades of military rule, disrupted by brief periods of democratic transition. However, the military's grip on power has been constant through systemic repression, including the use of technology to monitor and control dissent. The 2021 coup d'état, which overthrew a decade of democratic progress, has been accompanied by widespread internet blackouts designed to pull apart opposition networks and vague the regime's violent crackdown on protests (Nachemson, 2021). These actions are deeply rooted in Myanmar's historical use of state power to undermine the ethnic minorities and political dissidents, demonstrating the continuity of authoritarian practices in the digital age.

The comparative framework of this study highlights the interplay between political regimes, state power, and digital authoritarianism. In India, the democratic system compels the government to justify its actions publicly, but often in vague or exaggerated pretexts. Legal challenges and civil society activism do offer some checks on these measures, underlining the tension between security concerns and individual freedoms. For instance, the Supreme Court of India's 2020 ruling on the internet shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir recognized internet access as a fundamental right, reflecting the judiciary's role in upholding democratic norms.

In Myanmar, the authoritarian regime's control over all aspects of governance eliminates such checks and balances. Internet shutdowns are implemented with little to no regard for public opinion or legal constraints, serving as blunt instruments of state control. These shutdowns are of long duration in nature and mirror the broader regime strategy to stifle dissent and entrench authority. Political systems shape how these digital restrictions are implemented and how they have been impacting each country.

Ongoing situations in both countries illustrate these dynamics. In India, recent internet shutdowns during communal clashes and protests against contentious policies, including the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA), have also elicited negative reaction from domestic and international observers. As Chair of board at Amnesty International India said, “Its operationalization is a poor reflection on the Indian authorities as they fail to listen to a multitude of voices critical of the CAA – from people across the country, civil society, international human rights organizations and the United Nations” (Patel, 2024). Such shutdowns have gone beyond disrupting political mobilization; they have also impeded the conduct of education, health services, and commerce—attesting to a broader socio-economic impact. In Myanmar, the military junta’s internet blackouts have been assisted by mass arrests, violent crackdowns, and a collapse of democratic institutions. The international community’s response, including sanctions and diplomatic pressure, has had a very little impact, reflecting the challenges of addressing digital authoritarianism in today’s interconnected world.

This paper seeks to fill a critical research gap by examining the socio-political dimensions of internet shutdowns within the framework of comparative politics. Although existing literature well covers the technological and economic implications of digital restrictions, little research is done on what such implications involve in terms of state-society relations, grassroots mobilization, and regime legitimacy. Analysing India and Myanmar, this paper will therefore develop a nuanced account of how exactly political systems could mediate such practices and outcomes of digital authoritarianism. It also underscores the firmness and adaptability of grassroots movements, which remain vigilant and keep pushing state-imposed boundaries with creative tactics and alternative forms of communication.

The paper contributes, at a broader level, to wider debates over technology, governance, and civil liberties. As shutdowns of the internet is being more widely used tools of state power, understanding how and why this practice unfolds will prove crucial in preserving democratic values and human rights in the digital world. The comparison of India and Myanmar provides unique insight into how politics, state authority, and grassroots resistance play together in ways that illuminate challenges on a global scale in digital authoritarianism.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do citizens in democratic versus hybrid regimes perceive and respond to government-imposed internet restrictions?
2. How do internet shutdowns affect the organization and effectiveness of grassroots mobilization in India and Myanmar?
3. Should Digital Authoritarianism be perceived as a threat to Democracy in India?

### **Literature Review**

The term "digital authoritarianism" refers to the use of digital information technology by authoritarian regimes to surveil, repress, and manipulate domestic and foreign populations (Vocabulary, n.d.). As Morozov (2012) and MacKinnon (2012) have descriptively documented how authoritarian regimes use the internet and related technologies to maintain power. Early studies in this field focused on the dual-use nature of digital tools, highlighting their potential for both empowerment and oppression. While digital platforms have democratized access to information, they have also provided governments with unprecedented means to monitor and manipulate citizen behaviour.

More recent studies, including those by Feldstein (2021) and Howard and Hussain (2013), emphasize the global spread of digital authoritarianism, transcending the boundaries between authoritarian and democratic regimes. These arguments state that digital authoritarianism is not strictly limited to authoritarian regimes such as China or Russia but is increasingly salient in democratic settings where government agencies use digital tools to suppress dissent. India and Myanmar are critical case studies for this phenomenon, demonstrating a range of digital authoritarian practices across several different types of political systems.

The Internet shutdowns have now emerged as an important tool in the arsenal of digital authoritarianism. As stated by Access Now "an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over information" (Taye B. , 2020). Current literature highlights that internet shutdowns are rising across the world; such shutdowns are often justified by governments as measures necessary for public order and national security (West, 2016). Human Rights Watch (2022) has also highlighted that the restriction of access to internet is becoming a very serious problem in the contemporary world, especially in the authoritarian regimes.

While technical analysis is concerned more with the operating details of internet shutdowns, involving the ways shutdowns are administered and their consequence on internet technology, social sciences research explores their ramifications in the world of politics. Internet shutdowns are used by state control devices to suppress voice and hide incidences of violating human rights (Gohdes, 2024). There are gendered dimensions of internet shutdowns, arguing that the impact greatly falls on these marginalized groups (Shoker, 2022). In India and Myanmar, such a shutdown has occurred at politically sensitive times, which includes protests and communal conflicts. This makes its strategic use more pronounced as tools of power.

India's internet shutdowns are paradoxical, especially considering its democratic framework and constitutional guarantees of free speech and expression. Subjecting the political and legal dimensions of internet shutdowns in India to analysis and critique about the implications for democratic governance, the multiple reports indicate that shutdowns have lately increased by over 100 cases a year since 2012 (Dasgupta, 2024). Legal justifications include provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 and Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure that give the right to authorities to impose restrictions for the interest of public order (Mehrotra, 2020).

The literature further focuses on regional concentration, as shutdowns have primarily been reported from Jammu and Kashmir, which is a region known for long-term political and ethnic tensions. Arguably, scholars have observed that such shutdowns are not reactive but rather highly integrated into the larger strategy of states in terms of managing dissent and controlling information flow (Sirohi , 2020). The tactics of using digital restrictions against grassroots mobilization as observed during the 2020-2021 farmer protests in India also make similar points. Studies by recount how protesters evolved in their efforts to overcome such restrictions using other means of communication, pointing out the tenacity of civil society in the face of digital repression (Schock, 2015).

In Myanmar, internet shutdowns are highly intertwined with the country's history of authoritarianism. After decades of military rule, the brief democratic transition from 2011 to 2021 offered only limited freedoms before being reversed with the February 2021 military coup. There is research on how the junta has historically used state power to suppress dissensions and expanded those efforts into the digital arena (Klinken & Aung, 2017). Internet shutdowns have been

systematically employed in Myanmar to dismantle opposition networks and hide human rights violations.

The extensive nature of these shutdowns has severely impacted civil society to date. These have happened over months, reported by Human Rights Watch in 2021 and Amnesty International in 2022, based on when the junta has used digital restrictions to isolate and disrupt communities protesting, and silence dissenting voices. Unlike in India, where judicial and civil society mechanisms provide some avenues for contestation, Myanmar's authoritarian regime has almost complete impunity operating, leaving citizens with limited means to resist.

Comparative studies of digital authoritarianism focus on interplays between political regimes and implementing internet shutdowns. For example, democratic regimes legitimize shutdowns citing public safety while finding ways to avoid policy measures put in place by legal and institutional checks (Feldstein S. , 2021). Authoritarian regimes put them into effect without considering public opinion or mechanisms of checks and balances. India and Myanmar illustrate these dynamics, providing an insight into how regime type influences the practice and effects of digital authoritarianism.

In India, the democratic structure demands public legitimation for shutdowns, although it is often carried out under rather vague pretexts, such as maintaining "public order" (Deep, 2023). Legal challenges and public campaigns against shutdowns show how contested such measures are. For example, in 2020, the Supreme Court declared that the internet shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir constituted a violation of a fundamental right (Dhillon, 2020). It was a judgment that showed the potential for the judiciary to protect democratic values. Still, scholars caution that growing numbers of shutdowns signals a dangerous slide into anti-democratic behaviour.

In Myanmar, the absence of democratic accountability allows the military junta to employ widespread and prolonged internet blackouts without any justification. The literature emphasizes the authoritarian regime's reliance on digital restrictions to maintain power and suppress dissent. The junta's actions are rooted in a broader strategy of state control, extending beyond digital repression to include mass arrests, violent crackdowns, and systematic surveillance (Klinken & Aung, 2017).

Although internet shutdowns are repressive in nature, grassroots movements in India and Myanmar have shown great resilience. The activists in both countries are using innovative methods to bypass digital restrictions, including mesh networks, community radio, and encrypted messaging applications (Ruijgrok, 2021). The case of Indian farmer protests 2020-2021 represents a paradigm for adaptive resistance as protesters mobilized through offline networks and diaspora support to continue their protests. Similarly, in Myanmar, the activists relied on traditional methods such as pamphlets and word of mouth in coordination efforts while under prolonged blackouts.

The role of the diaspora in amplifying domestic movements has also been extensively documented. The awareness and mobilization of resources, along with policy intervention advocacy, can be attributed to transnational networks (Sambajee, 2015). This therefore gives evidence of grassroots mobilization within a globalized world and shows that international solidarity may help in combating digital authoritarianism.

## **Research Gap**

While there is substantial literature on digital authoritarianism and internet shutdowns, comparative analyses across different regime types remain scarce. Most studies focus on either authoritarian or democratic contexts, overlooking hybrid regimes like Myanmar. Furthermore, the specific impacts of internet shutdowns on grassroots mobilization—including protest organization, alternative communication strategies, and public trust—remain underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by comparing India and Myanmar, providing a nuanced understanding of how political systems shape the use and impact of internet shutdowns.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Political Economy of Communication, or PEC Theory, in fact provides quite a robust basis for explaining use of internet shutdowns as both Myanmar and Indian tools of digital authoritarianism. This theory seeks to explain relationships between political power, communication technology, and societies' control elements. It does indeed have extremely high relevance in considering how democratic versus authoritarian governments do exploit digital in consolidating authority and managing dissidence.

PEC theory, as derived from critical political economy, looks into the ways through which communication technologies are used as tools of control in specific socio-political and economic structures. It points out at how governments and powerful individuals use the control of channels of communication to dominate public discourse, the use of digital technologies mirrors larger power relations within society in that state actors deploy technology to enhance authority and stifle dissent, and how internet shutdowns are intertwined with economic costs, reflecting the balance between political objectives and economic implications.

In Myanmar's authoritarian regime, PEC theory explains internet shutdowns as mechanisms of absolute control over information. The military junta's historical consolidation of power, first through traditional media and now digital technologies, aligns with PEC's focus on how state actors dominate communication infrastructure to suppress dissent. The junta's actions, such as prolonged internet blackouts during the Rohingya crisis and post-2021 coup protests, demonstrate their aim to silence opposition and obscure human rights violations.

The state's monopoly over the telecommunications infrastructure gives it the ability to shut down communications with minimal external accountability. Restricting digital platforms ensures that dissident narratives cannot gain ground both domestically and internationally. This control, PEC theory avers, cements the regime's authoritarian agenda by maintaining political stability through the suppression of grassroots mobilization.

In India, there is a democratic framework that poses a paradox; PEC theory explains shutdowns as a mechanism of selective control. From the perspective of Political Economy of Communication theory, the Indian government's actions reflect a desire to regulate communication flows for the maintenance of public order and political stability. Unlike Myanmar, where the regime faces limited institutional constraints, India's democratic institutions require a cloak of legality and legitimacy for shutdowns. This selective application of digital repression underscores how the power dynamics in a democratic set-up can echo authoritarian tendencies, especially when the invocation is related to national security or public order.

## **Research Methodology**

This paper employs a desk research methodology, which consists of systematically collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing primary and secondary data from existing sources. Desk research is particularly beneficial in gaining an understanding of complex phenomena like digital authoritarianism and internet shutdowns, where political constraints or logistical challenges might restrict on-the-ground fieldwork.

Primary data for this study was collected indirectly by using published reports and first-hand accounts by journalists and observers who witnessed the most crucial events in India and Myanmar. These include:

- Reports by journalists who reported on the imposition of internet shutdowns during politically sensitive events, such as the farmers' protests in India in 2020-2021 and the military coup in Myanmar.
- International and regional human rights organizations, for instance, publish eyewitness accounts as well as first-hand observations made from the grassroots levels by the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.
- Event-based case studies involving instances like Jammu and Kashmir internet blackout, digital restrictions initiated and continued for such a long period by the Myanmar military junta provide firsthand evidence on the web-based sociopolitical dynamics.

Even though this primary data was not obtained by the researcher, it makes sure that the study gets contemporaneous points of view and direct observations to make the study valid.

Majority of data in this study is from the secondary sources. They range from academic to institutional writing. The data which is called secondary consists of:

- Peer-reviewed studies on digital authoritarianism, internet governance, and comparative politics laid the foundation in terms of providing insights into both the theoretical and contextual dimensions of the research topic.
- Articles from respected national and international media outlets were used to place specific events into context and obtain timely updates regarding developments in India and Myanmar.
- All major judicial decisions, including the judgment passed on the internet shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir by the Supreme Court in 2020, were interpreted to outline legal structures and constraints over internet shutdowns in democracies like India.
- Important works on digital authoritarianism and the state-society nexus provided historical and theoretical insights published in books.

The research was based on a comprehensive review of publicly available documents, which included:

- Reports from human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Access Now, which document in detail the shutdowns of the internet and their impacts.
- Scholarly articles accessed through databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, to ensure that rigorous academic perspectives are included.

- Legal documents, judgments and constitutional provisions are to be scrutinized to gauge the role played by legal instruments in either endorsing or opposing the shutdown.
- Archival material from reputed news agencies like The Guardian, BBC, The New York Times, and prominent local newspapers for situational context.

The data was qualitatively analyzed through the following methods:

1. Digital authoritarianism, state power, and grassroots resistance themes were identified and coded. For instance, comparative themes are used in understanding the regime type and dynamics of shutdowns.
2. The comparative drawing of data from India and Myanmar to examine how the similar objectives of internet shutdowns under different political regimes, democratic and authoritarian, are achieved.
3. The content of judicial rulings, protest narratives, and government policy documents were analyzed in this study to find patterns in the rhetoric and reasoning to legitimize or resist shutdowns.

The use of the desk research method is suitable because it integrates multiple insights and types of information without going out for field observations. Given the political sensitivity and geographical spread of the events studied, one would have been hard-pressed to collect data directly on-site in each setting. It is desk research that brings together a range of data from credible sources, thus ensuring that all sides of the phenomenon are captured.

Using secondary sources enhances the sphere of comparisons to a high range due to a multitude of opinion points and cases, in turn widening the extent of data points from research to which there has to be less analysis or probing, depending upon secondary resources.

### **Internet Shutdowns in India: A Democratic Paradox**

The examination of internet shutdowns in India reveals significant insights into the operational dynamics of digital authoritarianism within a democratic framework. Internet shutdowns are a phenomenon common in India. A country boasting democratic traditions, India has recently seen more than 100 instances of internet shutdowns every year. The reasons cited by the government for imposing these shutdowns are usually those of maintaining public order and upholding national security. These steps are often targeted as excessive and undemocratic.

Internet shutdowns were used in the 2020-2021 farmer protests to quell dissent and disrupt communication among protestors during the period of the farmer protests. The use of internet shutdowns disrupted grassroots mobilization as protest movements were left with alternative methods of communication like community radio, face-to-face conversations, and offline organizational networks. Although these adaptation measures revealed the resilience and flexibility of the protestors, they also highlighted the large-scale problems caused by digital restrictions. The shutdowns not only disrupted logistical coordination but also limited the spread of information to a larger audience, reducing the movement's visibility and impact.

Citizens in India have become increasingly frustrated with the government's use of internet shutdowns, which they believe are disproportionate measures that infringe on fundamental rights. Legal challenges and public campaigns against shutdowns have highlighted increasing awareness and mobilization around digital rights. Civil society organizations and digital advocacy groups have been at the forefront of challenging these practices, bringing into focus the more general implications such measures have for democracy and civil liberties. For example, the Supreme Court of India has, in recent years, entertained petitions challenging arbitrary internet shutdowns, positing access to the internet as a fundamental right tied to freedom of speech and expression. This process further demonstrates a contradictory relationship of power of states and the citizens in democratic setup, posing further questions whether national security prevails over liberty rights.

### **Internet Shutdowns in Myanmar: Tools of Authoritarian Control**

The shutdown of Internet access in Myanmar has been viewed to be aligned to the Authoritarian nature of a hybrid regime. After the February 2021 military coup, the junta used country-wide internet shutdowns as its tool to quell dissent and hide human rights abuses. These shutdowns were not something brief but lasted even for weeks and months, effectively silencing opposition and isolating the country from the rest of the world. The prolonged nature of these blackouts underscores the regime's intent to consolidate power by preventing the organization of protests and restricting access to information.

Unlike in India, where legal frameworks and a relatively free press offer avenues for contesting shutdowns, Myanmar's authoritarian environment leaves little room for resistance. Activists and citizens in Myanmar have had to resort to secret communication tools, including encrypted messaging apps, USB drives for sharing information offline, and even traditional methods such as word-of-mouth and handwritten leaflets. The public perception of internet shutdowns in Myanmar is influenced by the larger authoritarian context. Citizens perceive these shutdowns as part of the regime's systematic efforts to suppress dissent and entrench its authority.

International condemnation of Myanmar's actions, including sanctions and statements from global human rights organizations, has provided some support to activists. However, the junta's control over the military, police, and judiciary significantly limits the effectiveness of external pressures. The shutdowns in Myanmar have had devastating impacts on grassroots mobilization, not only disrupting immediate protest activities but also weakening long-term organizational capacities. Activist networks suffer from disorganization and stalemate if digital tools are unavailable, underscoring the crucial consequences of sustained internet restrictions in autocracies.

### **Comparative Analysis: Political Systems and Shutdown Dynamics**

Comparatively, India and Myanmar witness vital distinctions in shutdowns in implementation as well as impact. Democratic Frameworks in India, the governing authority has the responsibility to legitimize its operations in public view with flimsy excuses of needing to "protect public order" or whatever "public order" is understood. The structures within the judicial check and the activisms by various civil society organs are partial barriers to government. Internet shutdown stays localized and even temporary, with such actions frequently increased. This suggests that democratic practices in India could be suffering because of those exercises.

In contrast, Myanmar's authoritarian regime acts with near-total impunity. The military junta's control over all state institutions allows it to impose widespread and prolonged internet blackouts

without the need for public justification or legal oversight. These blackouts, covering entire regions or the whole country, have been systematically used to stifle dissent and conceal human rights abuses. The stark contrast between the two countries is with the interplay of their political systems and institutional accountability.

Citizen responses have also been found to vary a lot. While Indian citizens have taken the stand against internet shutdowns, taking it to courts and public streets, active civil society organizations, and digital rights groups have facilitated them. This is where the 2020-2021 farmer protests are an epitome of the resistance: in the face of digital restrictions, alternative media and public campaigns sustain the movement. In Myanmar, where the judiciary and media come under the very strict control of the military, citizens have adopted clandestine forms of organization and communication. This sets a strong contrast in the role those political systems play both in the execution of shutdowns and in the character of grassroots resistance.

### **Alternative Communication Strategies: Adapting to Digital Restrictions**

The ways by which grassroots movements adapt to digital restrictions have proven to be a true characteristic of human ingenuity. At India, protest activists and others have used a mix of traditional and current approaches to stay beyond internet lockdowns. Mesh networks, which allow devices to connect directly without an internet backbone, have been used in areas under digital siege. Bluetooth-based applications such as Fire Chat have also been used to enable communication in localized settings. Community radio stations and offline events have also been used as a means of disseminating information and maintaining organizational cohesion during shutdowns.

Due to a more oppressive government in Myanmar, all available avenues rely on old school methods. Information has been shared with activists using pamphlets, paper notes, and USBs filled with materials. They've utilized encrypted apps, Signal and Telegram, mainly only during the brief periods of connectivity. This is despite the innovative technological work of activists in both countries. The reliance on offline strategies in Myanmar, however, underscores how great the challenges remain despite the environment of extreme repression.

The diaspora has also played a critical role in both contexts. For example, Indian and Myanmar diaspora communities have leveraged international spaces to create awareness, mobilize resources, and push for policy interventions. These transnational networks have helped sustain movements even when digital blackouts occurred, as the mobilization of grassroots has been connected through a globalized world.

### **Socio-Political Impacts: Erosion of Trust and State-Society Relations**

The socio-political implications of internet shutdowns go beyond the immediate disruption of grassroots movements. In India, the frequent and often abrupt imposition of shutdowns has eroded public trust in the government. Citizens increasingly perceive these measures as overreaches of state power that infringe upon their fundamental rights. This erosion of trust is particularly pronounced among marginalized communities, who are disproportionately affected by shutdowns. For instance, the Jammu and Kashmir internet blackout that lasted for over 500 days affected education, health care, and economic activities. It made the region feel further alienated from the central government.

In Myanmar, the effects are more significant because the regime is authoritarian. Internet shutdowns are viewed as instruments of oppression that foster an atmosphere of fear and repression. This situation has become more aggravated, since institutional mechanisms that hold the government accountable to the public have not been effective, thereby allowing the growth of disillusionment and apathy. These state-society relations breakdown will, in turn, affect the governance and social cohesiveness since the people become an adversary and not a protector of their rights.

The global implications of these shutdowns cannot be ignored. Both India and Myanmar have faced international criticism for their use of digital restrictions. While India's democratic framework provides some insulation against reputational damage, Myanmar's actions have drawn severe condemnation, leading to sanctions and diplomatic isolation. These international responses underscore the importance of framing internet access as a fundamental human right and addressing digital authoritarianism as a global challenge.

### **Implications for Comparative Politics**

This analysis of internet shutdowns in India and Myanmar reveals the complex interplay between political systems, state power, and grassroots mobilization. These cases illustrate how the nature of the political regime—democratic versus hybrid authoritarian—shapes the implementation and impact of digital restrictions. While democratic systems like India's provide some avenues for resistance and accountability, the increasing frequency of shutdowns raises concerns about the health of democratic institutions. In contrast, authoritarian regimes like Myanmar's leverage shutdowns as tools of systemic repression, leaving citizens with limited means of resistance.

For scholars of comparative politics, these findings highlight the need to examine digital authoritarianism within the broader context of regime type, state capacity, and civil society strength. They also underscore the resilience and adaptability of grassroots movements, which continue to find innovative ways to resist oppression despite significant challenges. As internet access is becoming increasingly central to political and social life, understanding, and addressing the dynamics of digital authoritarianism is important for protecting human rights and promoting democratic governance globally.

### **Conclusion**

Comparative analysis of India and Myanmar on internet shutdown highlights the emerging trend of digital authoritarianism and implications for democracy and governance. Although both use internet shutdowns as tools of state control, their application underscores the nature of their specific political systems. The increasing frequency of internet shutdowns in India, a democracy that guarantees free speech and expression through the constitution, indicates a disturbing shift toward authoritarian tendencies. These shutdowns, justified on the grounds of maintaining public order, disproportionately affect marginalized communities and grassroots movements, which is a contradiction to the democratic principles on which India is founded. The erosion of public trust in governance and the suppression of dissent are the adverse risks digital authoritarianism poses to the overall democratic integrity.

In Myanmar, internet shutdowns have become a critical tool of authoritarian rule. After the 2021 military coup, the junta used long-term and large-scale internet shutdowns to suppress dissent, hide human rights abuses, and consolidate power. These actions fall in line with the broader strategy of

systemic repression and leave citizens with few avenues for resistance, on the philosophy of authoritarian governance, which allows such measures to be taken with least accountability, causing significant damage to civil society and grassroots mobilization.

This study highlights the pressing need for digital authoritarianism to be taken as a serious global challenge. Internet shutdowns undermine fundamental rights, disrupt social cohesion, and weaken the prospects for democratic accountability in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. In India, democratic values are secured through stronger institutional checks, legal protections for digital rights, and greater transparency in the use of internet restrictions. For Myanmar, international pressure and advocacy remain critical in holding the regime accountable for its actions.

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## **Populism vs. Pluralism: Assessing the Democratic Deficit in Contemporary Politics**

**Tayyaba Masood Khan\***

### **Abstract**

*Democratic systems across the globe have entered a turbulent phase marked by the ascent of populist leadership and the gradual erosion of pluralist norms. Since 2022, this development has become increasingly visible in both consolidated and emerging democracies, prompting critical reflection on the evolving relationship between populism and institutional pluralism. While populist actors frequently frame themselves as representatives of the majority's will, this rhetorical position often conceals deeper efforts to undermine the structural integrity of democratic governance. This study addresses the widening democratic deficit created by the rise of populist governance, where democratic institutions are maintained in form but weakened in practice. Adopting a qualitative research design, this paper relies on comparative case studies, discourse analysis, and process tracing to investigate how populist regimes have reshaped political landscapes in selected states. It analyzes the cases of Hungary (judicial centralization), India (media consolidation), Brazil (executive polarization), and Poland (interference in judicial independence), illustrating how these trends manifest across different cultural and institutional contexts. These cases were selected based on shared patterns of institutional erosion, despite variation in regime type, geographic location, and political tradition. The theoretical foundation draws upon Ernesto Laclau's conceptualization of populism as a discursive strategy, Chantal Mouffe's defense of democratic pluralism through agonistic engagement, and the framework of democratic norm erosion proposed by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, which emphasizes the fragility of informal constraints in preventing authoritarian drift. The paper supplements these perspectives with recent empirical assessments, including the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset and Freedom House evaluations, which offer a granular understanding of how electoral and institutional manipulation occurs under the guise of democratic continuity. This paper argues that the global trend toward competitive authoritarianism is not accidental, but structurally enabled by the weakening of democratic safeguards, particularly in the context of crisis politics, identity mobilization, and institutional fatigue. Addressing this shift demands a more grounded commitment to pluralist values, proactive reinforcement of institutional norms, and broader civic engagement.*

**Keywords:** Populism, Democratic Deficit, Pluralism, Qualitative Research, Institutional Decay, Authoritarian Drift, Post-2022 Political Trends.

### **Introduction**

Over the past decade, the global political landscape has experienced a shift that challenges long-held assumptions about democratic resilience. In countries once regarded as stable democracies, elected leaders have increasingly adopted practices that gradually weaken democratic norms without overtly dismantling constitutional structures. This trend does not resemble traditional authoritarian takeovers; rather, it involves the subtle erosion of checks and balances, the manipulation of public discourse, and the consolidation of executive power, all under the guise of popular legitimacy. At the center of this shift is the rise of populist governance, which presents itself as a return to the will of the people while frequently undermining the pluralistic foundations upon which democratic systems are built.

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Populism typically portrays politics as a struggle between a homogenous and morally superior "people" and a corrupt or detached elite. While this framing appeals to citizens frustrated with inequality and political inaction, it often simplifies complex social realities and promotes exclusionary narratives. Once in power, many populist leaders tend to bypass institutional norms, weaken judicial independence, restrict media freedom, and discredit opposition voices. These practices not only concentrate authority in the executive branch but also erode the diversity of representation and debate essential to pluralistic democracy.

Pluralism, in contrast, emphasizes the importance of accommodating multiple interests, identities, and viewpoints within a political system. It relies on mechanisms such as separation of powers, freedom of expression, and legal protections for minorities to ensure that governance remains inclusive and accountable. The clash between populism and pluralism is therefore not merely ideological, it concerns the structural integrity of democratic institutions and the long-term sustainability of participatory governance.

Since 2022, several democracies have displayed signs of institutional weakening under populist leadership. Hungary has implemented constitutional and judicial reforms that reduce oversight on the executive. In India, increasing centralization of media narratives and limitations on dissenting voices have raised concerns about freedom of expression. Brazil has witnessed intensified political polarization and public distrust in democratic processes, while Poland has come under scrutiny for efforts to alter the composition and independence of its judiciary. Despite differing contexts, these examples share a common trajectory of governance practices that restrict institutional autonomy and weaken democratic safeguards.

This study contends that the growing dominance of populist politics has significantly contributed to what may be described as a global democratic deficit—a situation in which democratic frameworks are formally preserved but functionally diminished. By conducting a qualitative analysis that includes comparative case studies, discourse evaluation, and process tracing, this paper aims to illustrate how populist leadership styles systematically undercut pluralist structures. In doing so, it highlights the importance of safeguarding institutional integrity and political diversity as essential conditions for democratic resilience in the current political era.

### **Populism's Theoretical Foundations and Historical Evolution**

Populism has become a defining force in contemporary political discourse, with its resurgence posing both analytical and practical challenges to scholars and policymakers. Rather than constituting a fixed ideology, populism operates primarily as a political logical way of constructing political identities through a dichotomous framing of society (Laclau, 2005). Ernesto Laclau, one of the most influential theorists in this domain, defines populism as a strategy that organizes political space around a binary opposition between the virtuous and unified "people" versus a corrupt and self-serving "elite." This dichotomy is central to how populist actors articulate legitimacy, claiming exclusive representation of the general will while dismissing institutional mediation (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Populism can emerge across the ideological spectrum, adapting its rhetoric to different cultural and historical contexts. Right-wing populism often leans on nationalism, anti-immigration sentiment, and traditional values, as seen in Europe and the United States (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In contrast, left-wing populism in Latin America has historically emphasized economic redistribution

and anti-imperialism, as evident in the leadership of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia (Weyland, 2001). The adaptability of populism is a hallmark of its success; it operates not through a coherent doctrine but through the emotional and symbolic mobilization of grievance and identity (Canovan, 1999).

Historically, populism has thrived in times of institutional crisis, socio-economic inequality, or perceived democratic stagnation. The agrarian populist movements in 19th-century America and the Peronist model in mid-20th century Argentina emerged as responses to exclusion and elite domination. However, the **post-2022 populist wave** is unique in that it increasingly utilizes democratic procedures to implement anti-democratic reforms—a pattern described by scholars as “**democratic backsliding**” (Bermeo, 2016). Leaders in countries like Hungary and India have leveraged electoral victories to gradually undermine the autonomy of courts, curtail press freedom, and reshape political institutions in ways that restrict opposition (Freedom House, 2023; V-Dem, 2024).

What sets contemporary populism apart is its instrumental use of majoritarianism to justify institutional weakening. The insistence on direct representation is often facilitated by social media platforms that allow populist figures to bypass traditional democratic institutions and frame critiques as attacks on the will of the people (Tufekci, 2018). This personalization of power is reinforced by a politics of spectacle, wherein leaders gain legitimacy through performance and confrontation rather than policy outcomes (Moffitt, 2016).

Moreover, populist rhetoric often undermines pluralism by portraying diversity and dissent as obstacles to national unity. Pluralism, which underpins liberal democracy, is rooted in the recognition of diverse interests, identities, and opinions as legitimate components of political life (Dahl, 1971). Populist narratives reject this diversity in favor of a homogenized national identity, thereby creating fertile ground for exclusionary policies and authoritarian practices.

Understanding populism as a flexible political logic—rather than a fixed ideological category—is essential to grasping its impact on contemporary governance. The next section will examine how these theoretical patterns translate into institutional realities, focusing on Hungary, India, Brazil, and Poland as case studies of democratic decline under populist leadership.

### **Pluralism and Institutional Safeguards**

While populism tends to concentrate authority and diminish institutional constraints, **pluralism** operates as the foundational principle that ensures democracy remains inclusive, balanced, and accountable. At its core, pluralism is the recognition and accommodation of diverse political, cultural, and ideological interests within a society. It affirms that no single group, identity, or worldview holds a monopoly on truth or representation, and that democratic legitimacy arises through the negotiation of differences within institutional frameworks (Dahl, 1989).

Pluralist democracies are characterized by separation of powers, competitive political parties, independent media, and impartial judiciaries. These institutions do not merely administer governance; they serve as **guardrails** that protect the democratic system from domination by any single actor or faction (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). When functioning properly, such structures prevent elected leaders from overreaching their mandates and ensure that minority voices are not silenced by majoritarian impulses.

The erosion of pluralism under populist governments is particularly concerning because it dismantles the very mechanisms intended to check executive power. One of the clearest manifestations of this erosion is the weakening of **judicial independence**. In Poland, for instance, reforms introduced by the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) since 2015 have placed judicial appointments under political control, prompting the European Union to initiate infringement proceedings for violations of the rule of law (Sadurski, 2019). This politicization of the judiciary undermines public trust in the legal system and compromises its ability to act as a neutral arbiter.

Another key institution under threat is the **free press**. In India, various forms of state pressure—including regulatory crackdowns, defamation cases, and restrictions on foreign funding—have constrained independent journalism and created an environment of self-censorship (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). A pluralistic media ecosystem is vital for democratic debate and public accountability; its deterioration enables populist leaders to control narratives, marginalize dissent, and monopolize public opinion.

Additionally, **civil society** plays a crucial role in sustaining pluralism by offering spaces for organization, advocacy, and resistance. In Brazil, however, recent populist leadership has portrayed civil society organizations as extensions of political opposition, thereby undermining their credibility and restricting their activities through legal and financial means (Hunter & Power, 2019). This delegitimization of independent actors further consolidates executive authority at the expense of democratic diversity.

The implications of declining pluralism are far-reaching. Without institutional safeguards, political competition turns into domination, dissent becomes delegitimized, and democratic norms give way to personalized rule. As Linz and Stepan (1996) argue, the consolidation of democracy requires not only formal procedures but also a shared commitment to constitutionalism, mutual tolerance, and institutional restraint—qualities that populist regimes often neglect or reject.

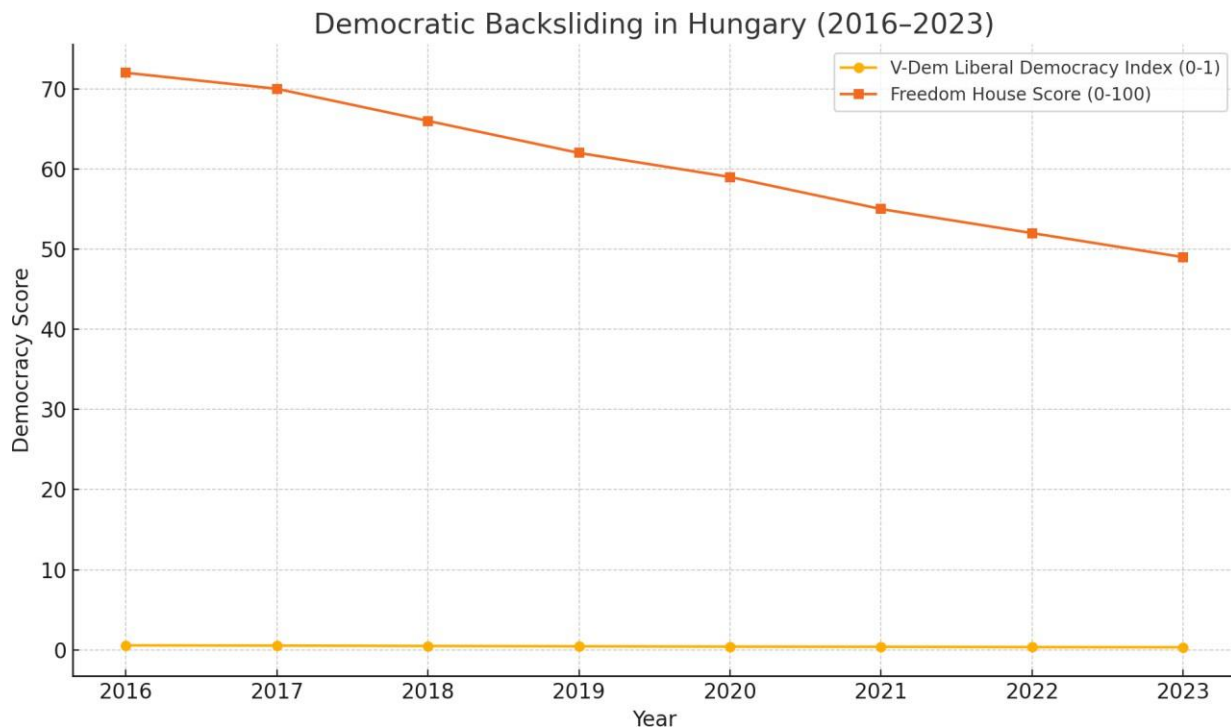
In conclusion, pluralism is not simply a normative ideal; it is a structural necessity for the survival of democratic governance. The weakening of pluralist institutions under populist rule is not incidental but systematic, often justified through appeals to popular will. Recognizing this erosion is essential for understanding the mechanics of democratic backsliding and for identifying pathways toward democratic renewal.

### **Hungary – Judicial Centralization and Democratic Decline**

Hungary has emerged as one of the most prominent examples of democratic backsliding within the European Union. Since Viktor Orbán's return to power in 2010 under the banner of the Fidesz party, the country has experienced a gradual but systematic erosion of democratic checks and balances. This erosion has been particularly acute in the judiciary, where structural reforms have significantly weakened the independence of courts and undermined the principle of separation of powers.

One of the earliest warning signs came in 2011, when the government introduced a new constitution and overhauled the judicial appointment process. The **National Judicial Office**, established to oversee court administration, was placed under the control of a political appointee with extensive discretionary powers, including authority over judicial appointments and case allocation (Bánkuti, Halmai & Scheppele, 2012). Such consolidation has enabled the executive to

exert informal influence over the judiciary, compromising its impartiality.



*Figure 1: the graph shows a sharp decline in Hungary’s democracy, with V-Dem scores dropping from 0.57 to 0.33 and Freedom House scores from 72 to 49. This reflects weakening judicial independence and growing executive control under Orbán’s rule.*

In subsequent years, further amendments to constitutional and electoral laws have raised international concern. The **Venice Commission** and **European Commission** have both criticized Hungary for breaching EU norms on judicial independence and rule of law (European Commission, 2022). According to the **V-Dem Institute**, Hungary’s Liberal Democracy Index fell from 0.57 in 2016 to 0.33 by 2023—indicating a sharp decline in judicial constraints, media pluralism, and civil liberties (V-Dem, 2024). Similarly, **Freedom House** downgraded Hungary to "Partly Free" in 2020, marking the first time an EU member state received this designation (Freedom House, 2023).

The visual trend shown above demonstrates this sustained democratic regression. Both the V-Dem and Freedom House indicators reflect a consistent decline in democratic standards, aligning with the shift toward what scholars have termed “**competitive authoritarianism**”—a regime type where elections exist but are neither fair nor free due to institutional manipulation (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Orbán’s political narrative frequently invokes national sovereignty and cultural identity as justifications for reducing institutional oversight. His concept of “**illiberal democracy**”, introduced in 2014, advocates a model of governance that rejects liberal pluralism in favor of centralized authority and homogenous national values (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018). This approach enables the government to frame judicial independence, media freedom, and opposition voices as foreign or elite intrusions on national self-determination.

Civil society has also been subjected to legal and financial pressures. The **Lex NGO** law, adopted

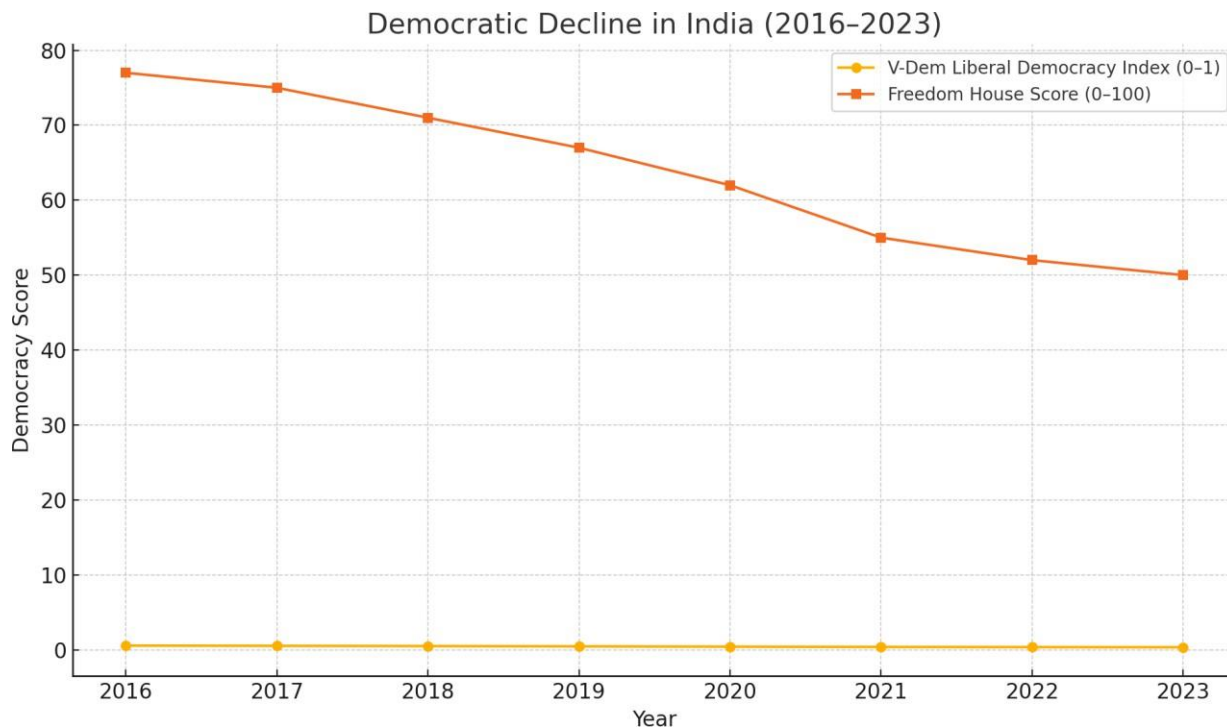
in 2017, imposed registration and reporting requirements on foreign-funded organizations, echoing tactics seen in authoritarian regimes. Though later annulled by the **Court of Justice of the European Union**, its chilling effect on civil activism was substantial (Bárd & Pech, 2020).

Hungary's case illustrates how populist regimes, while maintaining democratic procedures in form, systematically erode their substance. The centralization of judicial power, delegitimization of dissent, and ideological control over public institutions have collectively produced a political environment where pluralism is not only weakened but openly dismissed.

### **India's Media Consolidation and Democratic Constraints**

India, the world's largest democracy, has seen an intensifying debate over the state of its democratic institutions, particularly since the rise to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While India continues to hold regular elections and maintain formal democratic procedures, concerns have mounted regarding the erosion of institutional checks, the curtailment of dissent, and especially, the growing consolidation of the media landscape. These changes raise serious questions about the quality of pluralism and democratic accountability in the country.

Independent media serves as a cornerstone of pluralist democracy by enabling informed public debate, checking state power, and offering a platform for diverse voices. In India, however, the independence of the media has been significantly compromised in recent years. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of corporate entities with close ties to the ruling government has narrowed editorial freedom (Bhushan, 2022). Notably, large conglomerates such as Reliance Industries and the Adani Group have acquired substantial stakes in national and regional news channels, leading to homogenized and often pro-government narratives (Zuberi, 2023).



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*Figure 2: India's scores fell significantly—V-Dem from 0.56 to 0.34 and Freedom House from 77 to 50—indicating rising media censorship, crackdown on dissent, and institutional pressure.*

Journalists who report critically on government policies face harassment, legal action, and surveillance. Laws such as the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** and **sedition charges** have been used disproportionately against independent media outlets and reporters (Tripathi, 2021). According to **Reporters Without Borders (2023)**, India ranks 161 out of 180 countries in the Global Press Freedom Index, signaling an alarming environment for journalistic freedom. The use of digital surveillance tools, including Pegasus spyware, further erodes trust in press autonomy and violates citizens' rights to information and privacy (The Wire, 2022).

This regression in democratic standards is supported by international assessments. The **V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index** places India among “electoral autocracies,” citing declines in freedom of expression, academic autonomy, and judicial independence (V-Dem, 2024). Similarly, **Freedom House** downgraded India's status from “Free” to “Partly Free” in 2021 and maintained that rating through 2023, citing the harassment of journalists, political opponents, and civil society activists (Freedom House, 2023).

The government's populist rhetoric has also played a role in justifying the narrowing of democratic space. By portraying dissenters as “anti-national” and labeling media criticism as destabilizing, the administration leverages nationalism as a tool to discredit pluralistic engagement. This strategy not only chills speech but fosters a climate of polarization where opposition voices are delegitimized rather than debated (Chatterjee, 2022).

Despite India's democratic legacy and constitutional protections, these trends suggest an ongoing transformation of its political system. While electoral processes remain intact, the institutional framework that sustains pluralist democracy—independent media, rule of law, and civil liberties—is under increasing threat. The Indian case exemplifies how populist governance can coexist with electoral democracy while eroding the broader ecosystem of accountability and pluralism.

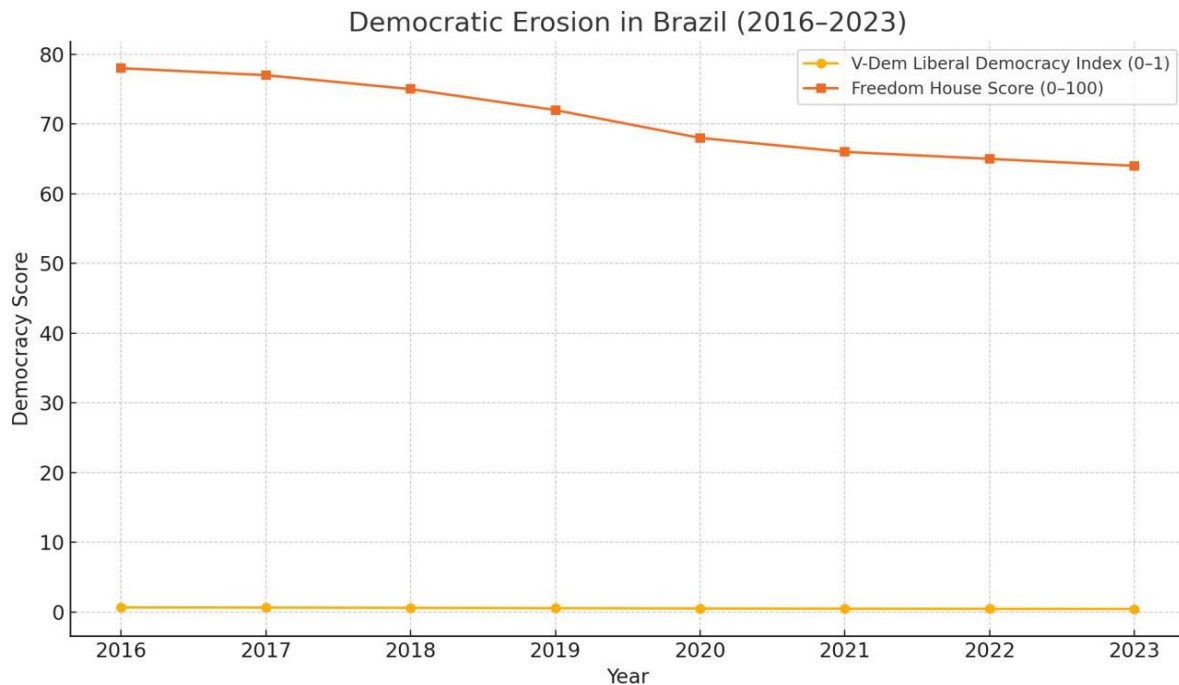
### **Brazil's Executive Polarization and Institutional Strain**

Brazil's democratic trajectory has been marked by significant fluctuations since its transition from military dictatorship in the late 1980s. However, the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) introduced a distinctly polarizing dynamic into the country's political landscape. Bolsonaro's leadership, characterized by confrontational rhetoric, attacks on democratic institutions, and persistent efforts to delegitimize electoral outcomes, has posed serious challenges to the stability and resilience of Brazil's pluralist democratic framework.

Bolsonaro, a former military officer, styled himself as an outsider to the political establishment and frequently portrayed institutions such as the judiciary, media, and even the electoral system as obstructive to the will of the people. His administration was marked by **escalating confrontations with the Supreme Federal Court (STF)** and the **Superior Electoral Court (TSE)**, which he accused of bias and interference, particularly during the 2022 election cycle (Hunter & Power, 2023). These clashes created deep institutional strain, undermining public trust in the judiciary's independence and in the integrity of electoral processes.

A central feature of Bolsonaro's populist strategy was the **polarization of public discourse**,

amplified through social media platforms. Bolsonaro often bypassed traditional media, engaging directly with supporters via livestreams and social channels. While this tactic enhanced his reach, it also enabled the spread of disinformation and fostered an environment of political hostility (Ribeiro et al., 2022). Critics, including journalists, civil society organizations, and academic institutions, were regularly labeled as enemies of the nation, mirroring a populist logic that divides society into moral binaries (Moffitt, 2016).



*Figure 3: Brazil's democracy weakened during Bolsonaro's term, with V-Dem dropping from 0.67 to 0.45 and Freedom House from 78 to 64. The decline reflects judicial conflict, disinformation, and civil society restrictions.*

The decline in Brazil's democratic indicators during Bolsonaro's tenure is documented in multiple global assessments. According to the **V-Dem Institute**, Brazil's Liberal Democracy Index declined from 0.67 in 2016 to 0.45 in 2023, highlighting substantial deterioration in executive oversight, civil liberties, and political pluralism (V-Dem, 2024). Similarly, **Freedom House** lowered Brazil's score from 78 in 2016 to 64 in 2023, citing executive pressure on oversight institutions, threats to journalistic freedom, and the erosion of democratic norms (Freedom House, 2023).

Civil society and the media also faced considerable pressure. Bolsonaro administration imposed funding restrictions on NGOs, particularly those focused on environmental advocacy and human rights, framing them as obstacles to national development. Simultaneously, investigative journalists were subjected to harassment, with online disinformation campaigns often orchestrated by pro-government influencers and coordinated networks (Fenwick & Pereira, 2021).

Despite these challenges, Brazil's democratic system has shown signs of resilience. The judiciary remained active in checking executive overreach, and the peaceful transition of power following the 2022 presidential election, in which Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defeated Bolsonaro, marked an

important institutional victory. Nonetheless, the legacy of polarization and weakened institutional trust continues to affect the country's democratic fabric.

In sum, Brazil's experience underscores how populist governance, when combined with sustained executive-legislative conflict and politicized discourse, can destabilize key democratic institutions. Even where elections persist and formal democratic structures remain intact, their ability to function effectively and independently may be severely compromised under populist regimes.

### Poland - Judicial Interference and Rule of Law Crisis

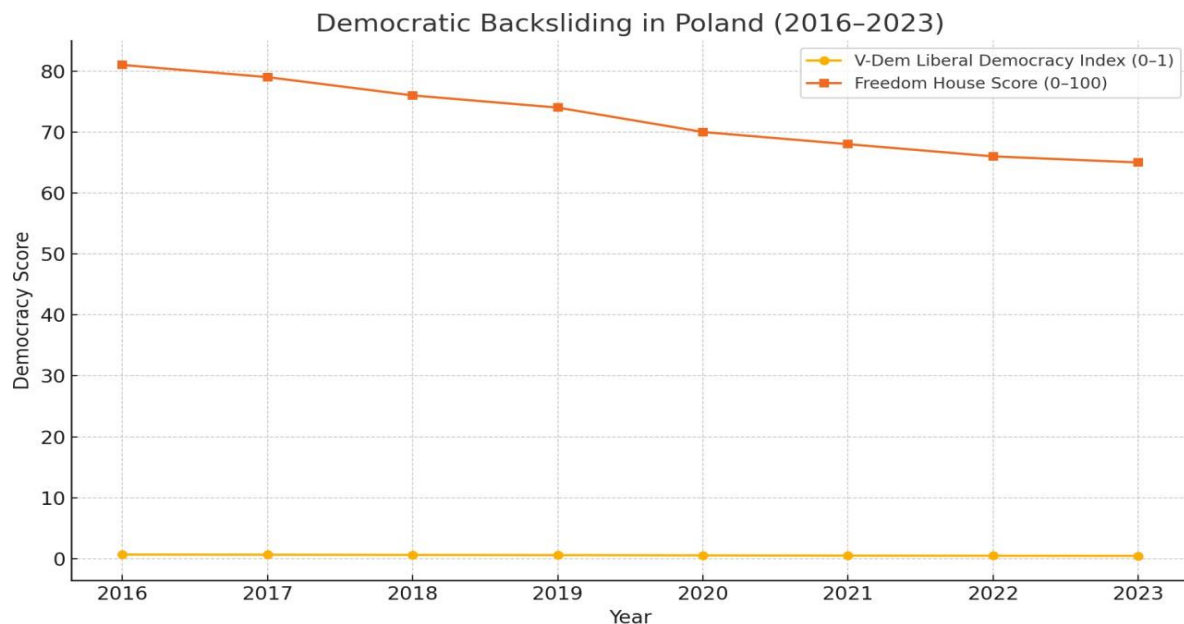


Figure 4: The graph shows a clear democratic decline in Poland. V-Dem scores fell from 0.68 to 0.47, while Freedom House scores dropped from 81 to 65. This decline reflects increasing political interference in the judiciary and legal challenges with the EU over

Poland's political trajectory in the past decade has been shaped by a significant transformation of its legal and institutional framework, largely under the governance of the **Law and Justice Party (PiS)**. While elections remain competitive and public participation is high, the independence of Poland's judiciary and the overall adherence to the rule of law have come under serious threat. These developments are widely viewed as a form of democratic backsliding driven by populist governance under the guise of legal reform.

The judiciary has been the primary target of institutional restructuring. Since 2015, PiS has introduced a series of reforms that have placed judicial institutions under increased executive and parliamentary control. Among the most controversial changes was the establishment of a **Disciplinary Chamber within the Supreme Court**, empowered to sanction judges for the content of their rulings or public statements (Sadurski, 2019). The **National Council of the Judiciary (KRS)**, responsible for nominating judges, was also restructured, enabling legislative influence over appointments and severely weakening judicial independence (Bodnar, 2020).

These reforms provoked widespread domestic protests and triggered formal legal action from the **European Union**, which launched Article 7 disciplinary proceedings against Poland for

undermining core EU values (European Commission, 2022). In 2021, the **Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)** ruled that Poland's judicial reforms violated EU law, specifically referencing the lack of impartiality in the Disciplinary Chamber. Nevertheless, the Polish government resisted full compliance, intensifying the standoff between national sovereignty claims and supranational rule-of-law standards (Kochenov & Bárd, 2018).

The **V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index** reflects a consistent decline in Poland's institutional integrity, falling from 0.68 in 2016 to 0.47 in 2023. **Freedom House** similarly downgraded Poland's score from 81 to 65 in the same period, citing the executive's dominance over the judiciary, attacks on independent media, and politicization of civil service institutions (Freedom House, 2023). These metrics illustrate how democratic backsliding can occur within a system that retains formal democratic structures but undermines their autonomous function.

PiS has justified these reforms through a populist discourse that frames the judiciary as a remnant of the communist past, unaccountable to the people, and obstructive to national progress. This narrative enables the government to position itself as a defender of national sovereignty against both internal elites and external pressures, particularly from the EU (Zerka, 2020). Such framing not only undermines institutional legitimacy but also fosters a climate of polarization and mistrust in democratic institutions.

Poland's experience demonstrates how the subversion of pluralist principles can occur through legalistic means. By deploying procedural legitimacy such as parliamentary majorities and nationalistic rhetoric-populist governments can erode judicial independence while maintaining an electoral façade. This strategic hollowing-out of democracy poses significant risks to the rule of law and long-term democratic resilience.

### **Analysis and Theoretical Explanation: Linking Theory to Evidence**

The findings of this paper reveal that the global drift toward **competitive authoritarianism** is not incidental but arises from a deeper transformation in the structure and logic of democratic governance. This transformation is best understood through the convergence of three theoretical perspectives of Laclau's discourse theory, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, and Levitsky and Ziblatt's theory of democratic norm erosion—all of which offer distinct yet complementary explanations for how populist regimes hollow out democracy from within.

Theoretical Framework	Key Concept	Hungary	India	Brazil	Poland
<b>Laclau: Populism as Discursive Strategy</b>	Populist leaders redefine 'the people' vs. 'the elite' to legitimize institutional control	Narrative against EU/NGOs; Nationalism justifies judiciary control	'Anti-national' label used to delegitimize dissent and press	Digital populism and anti-establishment rhetoric dominate discourse	Judiciary painted as elitist; reforms justified as democratization
<b>Mouffe: Agonistic</b>	Democracy requires	Opposition framed as foreign	Media and minorities	Civil society and press	Protests and EU critique

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<b>Pluralism</b>	institutionalized disagreement; populists suppress opposition	agents undermining national will	excluded from legitimate democratic dialogue	framed as threats to security and order	rejected as unpatriotic interference
<b>Levitsky &amp; Ziblatt: Informal</b>	Democracies fail when informal norms like mutual	Legal reforms bypass	Laws like UAPA used to intimidate	Attacks on judiciary and press done	Judicial reforms passed through
<b>Norm Erosion</b>	tolerance is eroded legally	norms, centralize judicial appointments	critics while maintaining legal cover	within formal procedures	parliament but weakened rule of law

*This table illustrates how key theoretical frameworks—Laclau’s discourse theory of populism, Mouffe’s concept of agonistic pluralism, and Levitsky & Ziblatt’s model of informal democratic norm erosion—are reflected in the institutional practices of Hungary, India, Brazil, and Poland. Comparative analysis highlights how populist regimes use rhetoric, legal structures, and institutional manipulation to weaken democratic pluralism while maintaining the appearance of electoral legitimacy.*

**Ernesto Laclau’s** conceptualization of populism as a **discursive strategy** helps explain how leaders in all four case studies construct a political identity that claims exclusive representation of “the people.” In Hungary, Orbán’s narrative casts the EU, NGOs, and independent institutions as foreign or elitist threats to Hungarian sovereignty. In India, the BJP uses nationalist and religious discourses to define the majority as morally superior and paint dissenters as “anti-national.” These discursive strategies, rather than being policy-driven, are symbolic tools that justify the marginalization of pluralistic institutions and civil liberties. Laclau’s framework helps interpret how populist regimes restructure political meaning to support institutional centralization.

**Chantal Mouffe’s** theory of **agonistic pluralism** emphasizes that democratic legitimacy depends on institutionalizing dissent and recognizing adversaries, not enemies. However, in the cases studied, populist governments systematically reject this pluralism. In Brazil, Bolsonaro branded critics as enemies of the nation and civil society as subversive. In Poland, the ruling party dismissed judicial resistance and civil protest as anti-patriotic, effectively dismantling spaces for democratic contestation. This refusal to engage in agonistic debate weakens the pluralist foundation of democracy, as Mouffe warns, replacing it with a homogenized conception of national identity that excludes alternative voices.

**Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt’s** framework of **informal norm erosion** provides a structural lens through which to understand how democratic backsliding proceeds legally but illegitimately.

In Poland and Hungary, judicial appointments were modified through parliamentary laws, not coups. In India, media control is achieved not through outright bans but via legal intimidation and economic pressure. In Brazil, disinformation and executive encroachment occurred while maintaining formal elections. These trends align with Levitsky and Ziblatt’s warning: when mutual tolerance and institutional forbearance break down, even well-designed democratic systems can

collapse from within.

Empirical evidence from the **V-Dem Institute** and **Freedom House** quantifies this erosion. All four countries show a consistent decline in key indicators such as judicial independence, freedom of expression, and electoral integrity between 2016 and 2023. For instance, Hungary's Liberal Democracy Index fell from 0.57 to 0.33, while India's dropped from 0.56 to 0.34. Freedom House similarly reclassified Hungary and India as "Partly Free," highlighting institutional damage done under democratically elected governments. These patterns support the theoretical claim that **institutional weakening is not an anomaly but a structural feature of contemporary populism.**

In sum, the alignment between theory and evidence confirms that the populist trend is not only ideological but deeply **institutional and procedural**. Populist leaders exploit formal democratic mechanisms legislation, elections, and executive orders to weaken pluralism while maintaining a democratic façade. Addressing this challenge requires reinforcing not just the legal architecture of democracy but also the **normative and cultural foundations** of pluralism, tolerance, and accountability, as emphasized by the theoretical thinkers guiding this analysis.

## **Conclusion**

The comparative findings from Hungary, India, Brazil, and Poland point to a concerning pattern: the persistence of formal democratic structures alongside a steady decline in pluralist norms and institutional autonomy. These changes are not the result of sudden democratic breakdowns but rather a product of deliberate, incremental shifts in power. Populist governments in each case have used legal frameworks, symbolic narratives, and cultural polarization to centralize authority and marginalize dissent, all while operating within the procedural boundaries of electoral democracy.

The theoretical approaches guiding this study offer critical insight into this phenomenon. **Ernesto Laclau's** perspective highlights how populist discourse reshapes political identities by framing "the people" against an alleged elite, thereby justifying executive dominance. **Chantal Mouffe's** idea of democratic pluralism, grounded in the institutionalization of disagreement, helps explain how the suppression of dissent by populist actors undermines democratic legitimacy. Meanwhile, the work of **Levitsky and Ziblatt** sheds light on how informal rules mutual tolerance and institutional restraint are systematically weakened through legal yet anti-democratic actions. These frameworks not only interpret the methods used by populist regimes but also explain the deeper structural consequences of their rule.

The empirical data provided by **Freedom House** and the **V-Dem Institute** further confirms this trajectory of decline. Across all four countries, the downward trends in key democratic indicators reflect a shared erosion of judicial independence, media freedom, and civil liberties. These measurable outcomes reinforce the argument that contemporary populism presents a serious challenge to the foundations of liberal democracy.

Yet, instances of resistance from courts, civil society, and international institutions—show that democratic norms can still be upheld. However, safeguarding democracy in this context demands more than institutional fixes. It requires a broader societal commitment to defending pluralism, ensuring inclusive governance, and fostering a culture of political tolerance.

In summary, the evidence suggests that the current wave of populism is not simply a reaction to

governance failures but a strategic effort to recast democracy in exclusionary terms. The task ahead lies in recognizing these patterns early, reinforcing the principles of pluralism, and restoring the balance between democratic form and democratic substance.

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## **Research on the Challenges and Countermeasures of Contemporary Democracy from a Multidimensional Perspective**

**Dr. Xiaoqing Xie\***

### **Abstract**

*This paper deeply explores the challenges contemporary democracy faces in the context of the wave of globalization and rapid social changes. Breaking through the traditional single-political perspective, it conducts a systematic analysis from multiple dimensions, including political, social, economic, and cultural aspects, revealing the complex dilemmas faced by contemporary democracy and the interaction relationships among various factors. An in-depth analysis of the existing problems in the operation of democratic systems provides a theoretical basis for governments to formulate targeted policies and reform measures, aiming to promote the improvement of democratic systems and enhance the quality of democracy to achieve the dual optimization of the operational efficiency and fairness of democratic systems. This research is of great significance for developing contemporary democratic theory and practice.*

### **Keywords**

Contemporary democracy, Multidimensional perspective, Challenges, Countermeasures.

### **I. Introduction**

With the continuous deepening of globalization, democracy, as a political concept and institutional model, has become a widely pursued and respected value goal worldwide. Looking back through the long river of history, the development of democracy has undergone a long evolutionary process, from the direct democracy in ancient Athens to the representative democracy in modern society. Its forms and connotations have been continuously enriched and expanded. In modern society, democracy protects citizens' rights, promotes social fairness and justice, maintains political stability, and facilitates economic development. However, with the rapid development of the times and profound social changes, contemporary democracy faces severe challenges. Traditional research on democracy from a single political perspective is no longer sufficient to reveal the complex problems it faces fully. Therefore, a comprehensive and systematic analysis from multiple dimensions, namely political, social, economic, and cultural, has become an inevitable choice to deeply understand the dilemmas of contemporary democracy and explore practical solutions.

## **II. The Development Process and Core Values of Contemporary Democracy**

### **(I) The Historical Evolution of Democracy**

The origin of democracy can be traced back to the direct democracy system in ancient Athens. In the Athenian city-state, citizens directly participated in political decision-making. They discussed and voted on city-state affairs through forms such as the Ecclesia. The democracy in this period emphasized the direct participation of citizens, embodying the original democratic concept. With the development of society and the expansion of the scale of countries, direct democracy gradually

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became difficult to meet the needs of complex social governance, and representative democracy emerged as the times required. Modern representative democracy exercises power through elected representatives. This form has realized democratic practice on a larger scale and improved political decision-making efficiency. From ancient times to the present, the forms of democracy have been constantly evolving, and its connotations have been continuously enriched, gradually forming a relatively complete political system.

## **(II) The Core Values of Democracy**

In modern society, democracy has multiple core values. Firstly, democracy is the cornerstone for protecting citizens' rights. It endows citizens with the right to participate in politics and express their wills, guarantees the equal status of citizens before the law, and enables the realization and protection of citizens' fundamental rights. Secondly, democracy contributes to promoting social fairness and justice. The process of democratic political participation and decision-making can balance the interests of different groups, reduce social inequalities, and promote the rational distribution of social resources. Moreover, democracy is an important guarantee for maintaining political stability. Citizens express their demands through legal and political participation, which can enhance the legitimacy and credibility of the government and avoid social unrest caused by the intensification of contradictions. Finally, democracy also promotes economic development. A democratic political environment can stimulate market vitality, encourage innovation, and create a favorable institutional environment for economic growth.

## **III. Multidimensional Challenges Faced by Contemporary Democracy**

### **(I) Challenges in the Political Dimension**

#### **At first, The Alienation of Electoral Politics**

In contemporary democratic elections, the electoral process has gradually evolved into a political show and resource competition among candidates and the interest groups behind them. The massive investment of campaign funds has turned elections into a money contest. Political candidates often rely on financial and interest groups' support to obtain campaign resources. Political decisions after the election may tend more toward interest groups' interests while ignoring ordinary people's demands. In addition, the frequent occurrence of negative phenomena such as false propaganda and smearing opponents in elections has deviated elections from the original intention of pursuing democratic and fair decision-making, weakening the credibility of democratic elections.

#### **Secondly, The Polarization of Party Politics**

In many countries, to gain political power, political parties overemphasize their own political stances and ideologies, intensifying opposition and conflicts among parties. In the process of political decision-making, parties often prioritize the interests of their own parties rather than starting from the overall interests of the country and the people, making it difficult to reach an effective consensus. This polarization of party politics seriously affects the governance ability and efficiency of the government and hinders the healthy development of democratic politics.

## **(II) Challenges in the Social Dimension**

### **Firstly, it exacerbates social inequality**

Although democratic systems aim to promote social fairness, in reality, the problem of social inequality in contemporary society is becoming increasingly severe. In the economic field, the gap between the rich and the poor constantly widens, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few people. In contrast, a large number of low-income people face difficulties such as employment problems and poverty. This economic inequality extends to other social fields. In public services such as education and healthcare, there are considerable differences in the resources and opportunities enjoyed by people from different social strata. The aggravation of social inequality has undermined the value of equality that democratic systems advocate. Some people have begun to question the ability of democratic systems to solve social problems, which in turn affects social harmony and stability.

### **Secondly, Identity Conflict**

With the development of globalization and the acceleration of population mobility, social diversity has been continuously increasing, and identity conflicts among ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural groups have become increasingly prominent. In democratic politics, these identity differences are easily exploited, triggering opposition and conflicts among groups. Some political forces deliberately emphasize the differences and conflicts among groups to gain political support, exacerbating social fragmentation and making it difficult for democratic politics to achieve effective integration and coordination in a pluralistic society.

## **(III) Challenges in the Economic Dimension**

### **Firstly, The Impact of Economic Globalization**

While economic globalization has promoted the development of the world economy, it has also brought many challenges to democratic systems. The global layout of multinational corporations has led to the concentration of economic power. In order to maximize profits, these multinational corporations often seek production and business locations with the lowest costs worldwide, resulting in industrial hollowing-out in many countries and many workers losing their jobs. In addition, the increased interdependence of national economies due to economic globalization means that a country's economic policies are not only affected by domestic factors but also restricted by the international economic situation and the policies of other countries. It limits the ability of democratic governments to formulate economic policies independently and weakens the regulatory role of democratic systems in the economy.

### **Secondly, Challenges Posed by New Economic Models**

The rise of new economic models represented by the digital economy and artificial intelligence has brought new challenges to democratic systems. In the era of the digital economy, data has become an important factor of production, but problems such as data monopolies and privacy protection have become increasingly prominent. A small number of technology giants possess a large amount of user data, which may be misused, infringing on citizens' privacy rights and other rights. At the same time, the development of artificial intelligence technology may lead to significant changes in the employment structure. Machines will replace many repetitive jobs, while new jobs require workers to have skills quite different from traditional jobs. It has exacerbated social employment contradictions and inequalities. Democratic systems often lack effective

response mechanisms and policy measures to deal with the problems brought about by these new economic models.

#### **(IV) Challenges in the Cultural Dimension**

##### **Firstly, The Influence of Postmodernist Thought**

Postmodernist thought has challenged traditional values and authorities. In the field of democracy, it questions the universality and certainty of democratic systems. Postmodernism emphasizes multiplicity and relativity, believing there is no absolute truth and no universally applicable democratic model. It has shaken people's belief in and consensus on democracy. Under the influence of this thought, some people's sense of identity with democratic systems has decreased, and their enthusiasm for democratic political participation has declined, posing difficulties for the stable operation of democratic systems.

##### **Secondly, Cultural Hegemony and Cultural Conflicts**

In the context of globalization, the phenomenon of cultural hegemony still exists. Some Western countries, relying on their strong economic and cultural strength, impose their cultural values and democratic models on other countries, attempting to shape a unified global cultural and political order. This cultural hegemony has triggered conflicts and confrontations among different cultures. Many non-Western countries have developed resistance to the Western democratic model and are also exploring democratic development paths suitable for their cultural traditions and social realities. Cultural conflicts have made the spread and development of democracy face more complexity and uncertainty.

#### **IV. Strategies for Responding to the Challenges of Contemporary Democracy**

##### **(I) Optimization at the Political Level**

##### **Firstly, Improving the Electoral System**

To tackle the issue of alienation in electoral politics, we need to reform and enhance the electoral system. It includes establishing a robust supervision system for campaign finances, limiting the sources and amounts of these funds, and increasing transparency regarding campaign contributions. These measures aim to reduce the influence of interest groups on elections. At the same time, strengthen the regulation and management of electoral propaganda content, formulate clear electoral propaganda guidelines, and prohibit false propaganda and malicious smearing from ensuring the electoral process's fairness, justice, and openness and restoring the credibility of democratic elections.

##### **Secondly, Promoting Party Cooperation and Consultation**

Parties should be encouraged to enhance cooperation and consultation. It can be achieved by establishing dialogue mechanisms and consultation platforms that promote open communication and discussion among parties on major political decision-making issues to seek a shared consensus. At the same time, it advocates that parties start from the overall interests of the country and the people, abandon narrow partisan interests, and jointly contribute to national development and social progress, improving the government's governance ability and decision-making efficiency.

## **(II) Improvements at the Social Level**

### **Firstly, Promoting the Construction of Social Fairness**

The government should pay more attention to and invest more in social fairness and formulate and implement policies and measures to narrow social gaps. In the economic field, strengthen tax regulation, increase the tax rate for high-income groups, increase transfer payments to low-income groups, and improve the social security system to ensure the basic living needs of low-income people. In education and healthcare, increase investment in public resources, promote the fair distribution of educational and medical resources, and ensure that people from different social strata can enjoy high-quality educational and medical services, enhancing people's trust and support for democratic systems.

### **Secondly, Promoting the Integration of Diverse Cultures and Social Integration**

In the face of identity conflicts, efforts should be made to promote the integration of diverse cultures and social integration. Strengthen the education and publicity of diverse cultures, cultivate people's awareness of cultural tolerance and diverse values, and promote mutual understanding and respect among different cultural groups. The government can formulate relevant policies to encourage exchanges and cooperation among different cultural groups, support the development of multicultural activities, and create a harmonious and inclusive social atmosphere to achieve effective integration in a pluralistic society.

## **(III) Adjustments at the Economic Level**

### **Firstly, Strengthening Economic Sovereignty and Regulation**

In economic globalization, democratic countries should strengthen their economic sovereignty and improve their ability to regulate the economy. The government should formulate reasonable industrial policies to protect the country's strategic and key industries and prevent industrial hollowing-out. At the same time, strengthen the supervision of multinational corporations, standardize their business behaviors, and ensure that the development of multinational corporations aligns with the countries and social public interests. In addition, I actively formulate international economic rules, enhance the voice in global economic governance, and safeguard the country's economic interests.

### **Secondly, Adapting to the Development of New Economic Models**

In response to the challenges brought by new economic models, the government should actively promote policy innovation and institutional reform. Strengthen data management and protection, formulate relevant data laws and regulations, standardize data collection, use, and sharing, and protect citizens' data privacy rights. At the same time, it increases investment in scientific and technological innovation and vocational training, cultivates high-quality talents suitable for new economic models, helps workers transform their employment, and alleviates the employment contradictions and inequalities brought about by new economic models.

## **(IV) Guidance at the Cultural Level**

### **Firstly, Reshaping Democratic Values**

In the face of the influence of postmodernist thought, it is necessary to strengthen the publicity and education of democratic values and reshape people's belief in and consensus on democratic

systems. Through various channels such as school education and media publicity, popularize the basic concepts, values, and institutional advantages of democracy to the public and enhance people's sense of identity and belonging to democratic systems. At the same time, the country's cultural traditions and social realities should be combined to develop democratic cultures with national characteristics so that democratic values can be better integrated into people's lives and thoughts.

### **Secondly, Advocating Cultural Equality and Exchange**

Promoting cultural equality and exchange is essential to tackle cultural hegemony and conflicts. Countries should honor the uniqueness and value of diverse cultures, reject cultural superiority, and actively participate in cultural exchanges and cooperation. Through these exchanges, we can enhance mutual understanding and trust among various countries and ethnic groups, encourage the mutual learning and integration of cultures, and collectively advance the prosperity and development of world culture. This approach will help create a positive cultural environment for the spread and growth of democracy. We should promote cultural equality and exchange to address cultural hegemony and conflicts. All countries must respect the uniqueness and value of different cultures, reject the idea of cultural superiority, and actively engage in cultural exchanges and cooperation. By facilitating these exchanges, we can enhance mutual understanding and trust among different countries and ethnic groups, promote the integration and learning of diverse cultures, and collectively advance the prosperity and development of world culture. It will help create a favorable cultural environment for the spread and growth of democracy.

### **V. Conclusion**

Contemporary democracy faces severe challenges from multiple dimensions, including political, social, economic, and cultural, in the context of globalization and rapid social changes. These challenges are intertwined and influence each other, posing a serious threat to the stable operation and development of democratic systems. Traditional research from a single political perspective can no longer fully address these complex problems. Therefore, conducting a systematic analysis from a multidimensional perspective is of great practical significance. Through an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by contemporary democracy, this paper proposes a series of countermeasures covering multiple levels, including political, social, economic, and cultural. The implementation of these strategies will help improve democratic systems, enhance the quality of democracy, and achieve the optimization of the operational efficiency and fairness of democratic systems. However, the development of democracy is a long-term and complex process. In the future, continuous exploration and practice are still needed to respond to emerging challenges and promote the continuous development and improvement of democratic systems.

## **Ethnic minorities and issues of representation in multicultural democracies**

**Mansoor Zaman<sup>\*</sup>**  
**Hifz Ur Rehman<sup>\*\*</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*One of the paramount troubles in multicultural democracies is the political representation of diverse ethnicities, which pose anomalous complications in the democratic process. Fostering inclusive governance is highly subjected to the understanding of cultural heterogeneity and demography. Various studies delve into the deprivations of ethnic minorities in terms of their role in decision making, yet limited attentions regarding how the structure of political system hinders the inclusiveness in governance and how it can be reconciled. This article aims to investigate intricate dimensions of this vast topic through the examination of case study of India. This study uses a mixed method approach, integrating real-world case studies, qualitative and quantitative data analysis, theoretical framework and literature review of books and research articles. Overall, the paper fosters the importance of inclusive representation in governance and highlights the structural shortcomings and gaps of political systems.*

**Keywords:** Ethnic Minorities, Political Representation, Multicultural Democracies, Democratic Inclusion, Minority Rights, Intersectionality, Electoral Systems.

### **Introduction**

Multicultural democracies are increasingly becoming the norm rather than the exception in today's global political landscape. These democracies are influenced by the fundamental principles of impartiality, diversity, and the fair involvement in political process of all segments of society. But frequently structural and social hurdles stand in the way of these objectives' full acknowledgment, particularly for linguistic, religious, and ethnic minorities. If conscious institutional and policy changes are not aimed at promoting true involvement in these kinds of situations, the democracy's promise runs the probability of becoming solely an insignificant principle.

The root of any purposeful democracy is political demonstration. It guarantees that a diversity of viewpoints is included in the configuration of laws and regulations and engage citizens to engage in group decision-making. Ethnic minorities outlook portrayal as involving beyond numerical involvement; it also requires meaningful interaction and symbolic acknowledgement. Political representation in communities becomes a primary means for strengthening justice, and the claim of cultural identity identified by deep-rooted inequities and historical discriminations. Ethnic minorities, however, commonly experience a number of organizational, cultural, and structural hindrances that restrict their ability to secure political power and voice.

India offers an attractive case study, when scrutinizing the forces behind minority representation in a multicultural democracy. With numerous different ethnic groups, languages, and religions featured in its vast and wide-ranging population, India is responsible by its constitution to respect secularism and multiplicity. In addition to ensuring equality before the law, the Indian Constitution has positive action clauses focused on encouraging historically marginalized groups like the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Religious

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minorities, specifically Christians and Muslims, persist as notably neglected in political institutions despite these precautions. Simultaneously, anxieties remain regarding the level of representation SC/ST populations receive under uncertainty regulations.

In India, the motive for this article is to scrutinize the institutional and structural obstacles that restrict ethnic minorities' political involvement. The study plans to announce why democratic representation consistently falls short of its comprehensive promise by scrutinizing the limitations of the current election and party systems, looking at trends of elimination and elite capture, and pointing out the multidimensional character of minority identities. Additionally, it highlights how essential it is to go beyond expressive representation for the purpose of attain significant, meaningful representation that provides minority views more influence in decision-making. This study adds to the current conversation on inclusive governance and democratic deepening by means of an integrated approach research strategy that merges quantitative data investigation, qualitative observational study, and intellectual exploration.

Through positioning the Indian experience in international situational comparisons and larger theoretical frameworks, the article seeks to provide awareness that will be useful to policymakers and practitioners who desire to improve democratic tolerance in diverse societies, besides to scholars of South Asian politics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is established in a dual theoretical framework, unifying Institutional Design Theory and Intersectionality Theory, while relying on further understanding from Critical Race Theory and Multicultural Citizenship Theory to clarify the background minority representation in India.

1. **Institutional Design Theory** scrutinizes how political institutions— particularly electoral systems, federalism, and party structures— influence political representation. As reported by Norris (2004), systems like proportional representation contribute optimized approaches for minority inclusion against majoritarian models like First-Past-the-Post (FPTP). Reilly (2001) equally stresses the involvement of institutional engineering in encouraging intergroup cooperation. In India, the FPTP system inappropriately disadvantages scattered minorities who do not comprise the geographic majority in any constituency. The framework of electoral boundaries, deficiency of representative proportionality, and winner-take-all mechanisms collectively weaken minority voices in legislative spaces.
2. **Intersectionality Theory**, first formulated by Crenshaw (1991), argues that individuals frequently experience integrated systems of oppression on the basis of various identity categories such as caste, religion, gender, and class. Adopting this framework allows for an investigation of how a Dalit Muslim woman, as an example, faces intersecting exclusions that neither caste-based nor religion-based paradigms can fully explain alone. Hancock (2007) goes into more depth on this through declaring that effective democratic inclusion necessitates disaggregating power dynamics among marginalized communities to discourage elite influence.
3. **Critical Race Theory (CRT)** suggests an analytical tool to analyze how deep-rooted societal classifications and dominant group interests are maintained through superficially impartial laws and policies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT can assist interrogate how

political conventions and electoral behaviors sustain upper-caste and majority group hegemony in India.

4. **Multicultural Citizenship Theory**, specifically as stated by Kymlicka (1995), claims for group-differentiated rights and minority accommodations throughout liberal democracies. He proposes that equitable citizenship requires legal and political outlines that respect cultural diversity, including self-government rights, polyethnic rights, and special representation rights.

Together, these frameworks accommodate a resilient understanding of how structural, cultural, and intersectional barriers unite to constrain ethnic minority representation. They also offer a conventional foundation for visualizing reforms that emphasize fairness and diversity.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is built upon a qualitative and secondary evidence-based approach focused on understanding the structural and institutional hurdles affecting the political representation of ethnic minorities in multicultural democracies, with India as the primary case study. The study harmonizes insights from a comprehensive array of research papers, official reports, and publicly available data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Academic literature, including critically evaluated journal articles, theoretical texts, and books prepared by leading scholars, serves as the basis of the theoretical foundation. Structures such as Institutional Design Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Multicultural Citizenship Theory have been applied to guide the critical viewpoint of the research. These frameworks were chosen according to their applicability to issues of democratic inclusion, minority rights, and political representation.

To clarify these structures throughout the Indian political outlook, the study is based on existing data and reports from institutions like the Election Commission of India, the Census of India, the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). This involves electoral data, population breakdown, and records of minority representation throughout multiple election cycles.

Furthermore, qualitative insights were derived from the review of secondary case studies, policy papers, government documents, civil society publications, and media analysis. These sources assist in understanding the mechanisms of minority participation, party politics, electoral outcomes, and geographic differences in representation.

The data was evaluated in a thematic manner, outlining connections between institutional structures, patterns of exclusion, and more extensive socio-political contexts. In India's democratic framework, this method allows for a layered and analytical understanding of the fundamental factors influencing minority political representation.

This approach verifies a stringent and scholarly examination of the subject matter, based on authentic sources and instituted academic structures.

## **Preliminary Observations**

The preliminary findings announce multiple layers of marginalization and elimination that transcend numerical inequalities and express more intense systemic and institutional failures.

Firstly, the systemic underrepresentation of religious minorities is well reported. Constituting over 14% of the population of Muslims, uniformly hold below 5% of seats in the Lok Sabha and many state assemblies (Election Commission of India, 2020). In different states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, Muslims are almost non-existent from legislative spaces despite essential demographic distribution. This inconsistency is not simply because of insufficient political participation but results from systemic limitations such as biased party nomination practices, territorial distribution, and social division that degrades minority candidates (Hasan, 2009).

Second, the excessive dependence on SC/ST reservations has caused illustrative but not essentially authentic representation. Analysis demonstrates that reserved seats are frequently grasped by elites within those communities, restricting the capacity of these procedures to challenge deep-rooted power structures (Jaffrelot, 2003; Chandra, 2004). Additionally, religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians are prevented from these shares, despite facing equivalent or greater socio-economic and political deficiency (Sachar Committee Report, 2006).

Third, multidimensional exclusion greatly influences minority representation. Muslim women, Adivasi women, and Dalit Christians frequently encounter the double burden of religious, ethnic, caste, and gender-based exclusion. Only two Muslim women in 2019 made it to the Lok Sabha, even though women constituting roughly half of the population. There is quick overview within political parties about diverse identities, and designation processes frequently neglect to emphasize such candidates. Linguistic minorities, especially those in the Northeast, also report exclusion from national debates and party leadership roles (Baruah, 2003).

Fourth, diplomatic political conduct by major parties sustains exclusion. Party authorization mechanisms infrequently select minority candidates in aggressive constituencies unless the candidate's ethnicity harmonizes with the demographic majority of that region. As a result, minorities are often brought up only in Muslim- or Dalit-majority constituencies, reinforcing electoral segregation (Wilkinson, 2004). Parties bypass positioning minority leaders in apparent national roles due to apprehension concerning communal or allegations of "appeasement politics."

Fifth, minority communities Encounter substantial hurdles in political influence and leadership development. In contrast to upper-caste and majority community leaders who benefit from institutional networks and party endorsement, minority leaders often unable to access to political guidance, financial resources, and media demonstration. This insufficiency of empowerment mechanisms limits their potential to traverse the challenges of electoral politics (Rai, 2011). From minority communities, young aspiring leaders report feeling isolated from conventional politics and view political involvement hazardous or pointless.

Sixth, structural exclusion is intensified by policy neglect and state inaction. Political representation impacts funding distributions, developmental programs, and law enforcement practices. In predominantly Muslim areas, the absence of minority MLAs and MPs is associated with under-supported schools, poor infrastructure, and restricted healthcare access (Sachar Committee Report, 2006). In regions with tribal and linguistic minorities, similar developmental

challenges persist, indicating a strong link between political invisibility and social and economic inequality.

Finally, cultural discourses and media representations play a vital role in strengthening exclusion. Conventional political discourse frequently portrays minority leaders as communal or nationalist, discouraging their acknowledgment as national figures. Religious minorities, particularly Muslims, face Islamophobic recurring ideas that question their loyalty or harmony with democratic values. This type of discourse not only undermines their participation but also affects voter behavior, leading to the tactical exclusion of minority issues in electoral campaigns (Engineer, 2004).

In a nutshell, the findings emphasize that the problem is not exclusively about numerical underreporting but about systemic, institutional, and cultural structures that reinforce minority marginalization. Overcoming these challenges demands reconsidering institutional frameworks, reengineering electoral systems, and encouraging inclusive political frameworks through intentional, wide-ranging reforms.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

The qualitative and quantitative data findings point out that there are several structural constraints in the political institutions of India about the representation of ethnic minorities including institutional design, party politics, societal prejudice, and policy inertia. These obstacles are not only isolated but mutually reinforcing, contributing to a deeply complex pattern of Marginalization. The following detailed analysis provides an in-depth examination of each identified aspect, while also discussing other relevant themes.

### **1. Electoral System Constraints**

The First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system inherently marginalizes minorities who are demographically scattered instead of those which are concentrated in a specific region. It is beneficial for numerical majorities and disadvantages communities that, while significant in size, are not concentrated sufficiently to win a majority in any given constituency. In this winner-take-all model, the votes of minority communities commonly do not transfer into seats, especially in constituencies with diverse ethnicities. Studies of Reilly (2001) and Norris (2004) show that majoritarian electoral systems mostly lead to the systematic exclusion of minorities in favor of majority ethnic or religious groups. Furthermore, India's delimitation process, which redraws boundaries of constituencies based on demography, has been criticized for not protecting interests of minorities, often dispersing their vote banks and undermining their electoral impact. Improvements in the electoral system to introduce elements of proportional representation, especially in urban and multi-ethnic regions, could diminish this structural prejudice.

### **2. Party Nomination Bias**

The internal process of political parties of India mostly lacks transparency and accountability. The nomination of candidates is always influenced by various factor like the personal relations or network of candidate, winnability probability, caste politics and equations and vote bank politics rather than democratic values or commitments of social justice. Research by Hasan (2009) and

Jaffrelot (2012) highlights how gatekeeping of political parties excludes minority voices, helping elite capture and dominance. The intentional nomination of minority candidates in constituencies with high populations of other religions or ethnicities, effectively ghettoizing representation. Furthermore, party investment in minority candidates is minimal in such constituencies, and they have insufficient access to campaign funding, media visibility and strategic support. In addition to that the political parties also have underrepresentation of minorities in party leadership which reinforces their marginalization and influences the party policies, decisions and candidate selections.

### **3. Institutional Gaps in Minority-Specific Representation**

The religious and linguistic minorities don't have the political reservation like SC/ST communities, while they have clear socio-economic disadvantages. (Sachar Committee Report, 2006; Misra Commission Report, 2007). Due to these groups' lack of institutional protections, they depend on the voluntary kindness of political parties. Although, some states introduced minority sub-quotas within OBC reservations in fields of education and employment, but unfortunately, they haven't extended to representation in political arena. Moreover, there is no proper institutionalized monitoring system, which causes little or no accountability for the underrepresentation of minorities. The recommendations of the National Commission for Minorities are not being implemented mostly as it doesn't have any powers of enforcement. Establishment of institutional and legal mechanisms specifically aimed to guarantee political inclusion for minorities will mitigate this structural gap.

### **4. Regional Variations and Comparative Success**

There is a considerable regional variation about the minority inclusion in the political terrain of India. The inclusive policies, strong public education, and coalition politics in Kerala present a better model and enable better minority representation. The political parties like Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) which are community based, have promoted more organized political representation of religious and ethnic minorities in Kerala. On the contrary, the political landscape of states like Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat is deeply divided and polarized. In these regions strategic underrepresentation, Communal violence and marginalization of minority voices are frequent and common. The consistent lack of representation is the result of majoritarian politics coupled with fragmentation of minority votes. Comparative observations indicate that the existence of regional parties aligned with minority interests, higher levels of political consciousness, and civil society engagement correlate positively with positive results in representation.

### **5. Intersectionality in Practice**

Women of minorities, Dalit Muslims, tribal Christians and other intersectional oppressed groups face double or compounded and unique complications. The concept of intersectionality by Crenshaw's (1991) helps to understand these complex experiences of exclusion. Minority women are underrepresented not only because of gender prejudice but also because of religious stigma, caste, and socio-economic barriers. A report by UNW (2019) reveals that minority women experience disproportionate challenges in getting party nominations, campaign financing, and leadership and governance training. Although reservations exist for women in local governance

but the minority women mostly face denied proper and meaningful participation due to elite capture and tokenism. The voices of minority women in leadership and policymaking are exceedingly rare. To solve this issue, we need to introduce several reforms and targeted interventions like capacity building, reserved leadership roles, and gender-sensitive minority representation policies.

## **6. Policy Outcomes and Developmental Deficits**

Political underrepresentation has direct and profound effects on public policy results for minority populations. The areas where the minority leadership is limited tend to get weaker service delivery, less responsive governance and lower public investment. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) highlighted that Muslim-majority areas in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal lag in terms of infrastructure of educational institutes, healthcare facilities, and employment programs. Furthermore, studies show that budget allocations are more just and inclusive, when minorities are represented properly in governance (Bhavnani, 2009). In contrast, if the political voice is absent, it often leads to exclusion from welfare schemes, targeted surveillance, and communal profiling. That's why proper minority political representation is not just a democratic essential but also a determining factor for inclusive and fair development.

## **7. The Role of Civil Society and Media**

Civil society organizations (CSOs), grassroots movements, and alternative media have played an essential role in pointing out minority grievances and advocating for their rights. However, factors like limited funds, regulatory restrictions, and shrinking civic spaces have restricted their impact and effectiveness. In recent years, the amendments in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) have curtailed the activities of several rights-based organizations. Meanwhile, mainstream media mostly propagates stereotypes about minority communities, depicting them as either victims or threats instead of as equal citizens. Rather than focusing on the policy positions and developmental agendas of minority leaders, the mainstream media mostly highlights the communal angles which undermine their policy positions and developmental agendas. To counter these narratives and foster a more inclusive political discourse it is essential to Strengthening civil society, promoting ethical journalism, and supporting independent media platforms that center minority voices.

## **8. International Comparisons**

At a global level, to ensure just and fair representation of ethnic minorities, multicultural democracies have adopted various models. Belgium's consociational model ensures and guarantees a proportional representation of linguistic and religious minorities in governance, including veto rights and power-sharing mechanisms (Lijphart, 1977). Canada has introduced policies that recognize ethnic identities in public policy and provide financial help for community participation to institutionalize multiculturalism. Māori populations have reserved seats in the parliament of New Zealand which ensures indigenous inclusion in national politics. These comparative models prove the viability of institutional innovation in improving and increasing minority representation. Although the sociopolitical context of India is unique, these global

instances offer insightful lessons on how to constitutionally entrench minority rights, encourage inclusive party practices, and promote structural inclusivity.

## **9. Role of Political Socialization and Leadership Development**

An important but mostly neglected and overlooked factor in minority representation is the absence of systemic political socialization and leadership development programs targeting minority communities. Minority youth often lack pathways to political careers unlike the lite-dominated groups who receive help from familial political legacies, institutional mentorship, and early exposure. Their capacity to engage with formal politics is limited because of the absence of targeted fellowships, leadership incubators, and civic education programs. Programs like the Centre for Equity Studies' community leadership programs or the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation's fellowship for young leaders have had limited outreach and impact. To ensure long-term representational equity, a more robust, state-supported framework for political capacity-building among minorities is mandatory.

## **10. Judicial and Legal Advocacy Gaps.**

While legal redressal mechanisms exist to tackle electoral violations and human rights abuses, few are available particularly to address political exclusion. Courts have historically been reluctant to Interfere in issues of candidate choice or electoral structure and design. Although, the Election Commission of India is autonomous, yet lacks the mandate to enforce fair nominations or diversity audits. Legal support for minority rights often centers around civil liberties rather than structural inclusion. To radically change the representational landscape, it needs to Strengthen the legal architecture through provisions that mandate diversity audits for political parties, set up representation benchmarks, or provide justiciable rights to inclusion.

## **Recommendations**

**Electoral Reforms:** Electoral reforms are very crucial for ensuring fair representation of minorities. prevent vote dilution for scattered minorities proportional representation or mixed electoral systems should be introduced in diverse constituencies. A proportional system allows political parties to get seats based on total vote share instead of constituency victories only. It will lead to improve minority representation in legislatures. In addition to it, mechanisms such as cumulative voting or ranked-choice voting can be experimented with for better inclusion the diverse demographics of multi-ethnic urban areas. These reforms must be accompanied by measures to ensure accessibility and voter education for minority communities.

**Institutional Quotas:** To correct historical marginalization, the political reservations must be extended to religious and linguistic minorities, especially in local bodies. Unlike SC/ST reservations, that are mandated in constitution, minorities totally depend on party discretion. Establishment of institutional quotas in municipalities, panchayats, and possibly legislative bodies would ensure maximum representation. These quotas should be grounded in population percentages, socio-economic indicators, and discussion with minority communities. Furthermore, rotating reserved constituencies should ensure broad coverage over time. Legal provisions must ensure protection against elite domination to guarantee genuine representation.

**Transparent Party Processes:** The internal decision-making of political parties must be democratized. The process of candidate nominations should be clear and accountable that evaluate diversity metrics and the inclusion of minority voices. The political parties should publish annual reports explaining the ethnic, religious, gender, and caste composition of their candidate lists, and leadership structures promote accountability. To ensure minority voices are heard, inclusion of diversity criteria in the choice of candidates and executive committees is needed. The Election Commission should be empowered to mandate corrective actions where disparities are clear and to audit parties on inclusiveness.

**Capacity Building:** State-supported political capacity building programs for minorities are particularly important. These should include leadership training, fellowships, mentorship schemes and political literacy initiatives focused on youth and women from underrepresented communities. Programs should be hosted in minority-concentrated regions and delivered in vernacular languages to ensure maximized reach and impact. To enhance and ensure both credibility and accessibility, partnering with universities, civil society organizations, and think tanks could be beneficial. Capacity-building not only equips individuals for electoral competition but also supports a broader culture of political participation and civic engagement minority communities.

**Inclusive Policy Design:** Policies must be created by consultation with the communities they aim to serve. Participatory policymaking such as citizen assemblies, public consultations, and social audits should be institutionalized at all levels of governance. It will help communities to express demands and ensure that developmental programs reflect their issues and local realities. To make governance more responsive and equitable, minority representatives must be included in policy formulation committees, budgeting processes, and monitoring agencies. Equitable design also seeks cultural sensitivity in public service delivery and recognition of identity-specific requirements,

**Independent Oversight:** Establishment of a Minority Representation Commission (MRC) with constitutional Support would help to provide institutional monitoring. The MRC should monitor minorities' inclusion in political parties, elections, and public appointments. This commission should have investigative authority, the power to direct binding suggestions, and collaborate with existing bodies such as the Election Commission, National Commission for Minorities, and State Election Commissions. Regular diversity inspections, public scorecards, and reports to Parliament could ensure accountability and political will. To ensure minority inclusion becomes a measurable policy outcome rather than a rhetorical commitment, an independent oversight body is required.

**Media Accountability and Reform:** Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion. That's why, media organizations should be urged to use inclusive editorial policies and ethical reporting standards that restrain the marginalization of Underrepresented groups. Creation of a public media watchdog or strengthening existing regulatory bodies like the Press Council of India to supervise coverage related to minorities can guarantee fairness. Public broadcasters should be authorized to allot airtime to minority problems, languages, and leaders. Journalists should be trained on diversity-sensitive reporting can also help reduce stereotypes and encourage respectful civic discourse.

**Data Transparency and Research Support:** Accurate and disaggregated data is very important to identify gaps in representation and designing policies. The government should release regular

data reports on minority participation in elections, legislative debates, party nominations, and public offices. Different institutions such the Election Commission and Ministry of Statistics should engage and collaborate with academic researchers and civil society to develop representation indices. Research centers funded by the government which work on minority studies could help provide evidence-based policy insights, track inclusion metrics, and spread awareness.

**Legal and Constitutional Safeguards:** Legal reforms are inevitable to anchor minority rights within the political system. Amendments should be considered to the Representation of the People Act to include provisions for minority rights in candidate nominations and campaign finance. Constitutional amendments to recognize political representation of religious and linguistic minorities as a justiciable right can create enforceable obligations for the state. Public Interest Litigations (PILs) could also be promoted to test the legality of exclusionary practices in party nominations and constituency demarcations. PILs could be used to challenge exclusionary practices that might prevent religious or linguistic minorities from being represented fairly in political processes.

**International Collaboration and Benchmarking:** India can learn from global good practices and norms by working with countries which have successfully institutionalized minority Integration. Participating in intergovernmental forums on democratic inclusion, inviting foreign election observers to analyze inclusiveness, and integrating international diversity standards in domestic policy evaluations can raise standards. Bilateral partnerships on minority rights, joint academic programs, and knowledge-sharing initiatives with countries like New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa could provide latest perspectives and technical support.

## **Conclusion**

The political representation of ethnic minorities is a critical measure of democratic standards in vast and diverse democracies like India. This study shows that while India formally enshrines inclusivity and equality in its constitution, the structural and institutional framework of its democracy often fail to reflect that spirit in practice. Minorities—either religious, linguistic, or intersectional—remain underrepresented due to systemic hurdles rooted in the electoral framework, party dynamics, policy priorities, and societal behaviors.

The defects in design of institutions, discriminatory political approaches, and a lack of affirmative mechanisms. It leads to a cycle of political marginalization that reinforces economic and civil marginalizations. Tackling this issue needs a multipronged approach, encompassing electoral reform, capacity-building, legal safeguards, and inclusive policymaking. Ensuring the political empowerment of minorities is not merely a matter of representation but a inevitable condition for equitable progress and democratic principle.

Democracy prospers when every voice has the power to shape its future. To uphold its democratic promise, India must transition from symbolic inclusion to genuine participation—where minorities are not only visible but also influential in shaping the nation’s trajectory.

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***POLICY DIALOGUE  
SESSION***

## **Policy Dialogue Session Report**

### **International Conference on Contemporary Challenges to Democracy (IC3D)**

**Date and Time :** April 24, 2025 (16:30–18:30)

**Venue:** Conference Hall, Building-A, University of Central Punjab (UCP), Lahore

**Session Chair:** Prof. Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais (Former Dean, LUMS)

**Co-Chair:** Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (Dean, FHSS, UCP)

**Moderator:** Dr. Mohammad Irfan Ali (In-charge, Department of Political Science and IR, UCP)

As part of the concluding session of the two-day International Conference on “Contemporary Challenges to Democracy,” a policy dialogue was held, chaired by Professor Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais. The session gathered esteemed scholars and practitioners from Pakistan and abroad, including experts from political science, international relations, and strategic affairs. The objective was to deliberate on democracy’s evolving challenges and its relevance in the current global political landscape.

**Dr. Bilveer Singh**, Associate Professor, National University of Singapore, opened the dialogue by warning of populism’s dual nature—its ability to energize democratic participation while also posing risks of extremism and instability. He emphasized that democracy must adapt to local contexts and be underpinned by values-based education. He emphasized the following key points:

- Populism, if unmoderated, can lead democracies into crisis or extremism.
- Democratic models must be tailored to societal and cultural contexts.
- Education is crucial to internalizing democratic norms and practices.
- A values-based civic culture is essential to resist authoritarian backsliding.

**Dr. Asma Awan**, Associate Professor/ Graduate Dean, Kinnaird College discussed the emotional and psychological impact of democratic failure, particularly on communities that feel excluded. Drawing on global trends, she urged reforms in both democratic representation and education to promote empathy, inclusion, and accountability. She discussed that

- Disillusionment fuels populism when democracy fails to deliver on promises.
- Inclusive systems must address the needs of marginalized communities.
- Civic education should prioritize empathy and democratic consciousness.
- Development policies must target historically neglected regions.
- Platforms for meaningful citizen participation are vital.

**Mr. Muhammad Azam Khan**, Pakistan Navy War College emphasized the importance of a coherent national identity grounded in consensus. He warned that divisive political narratives can undermine national unity and weaken democratic resilience. He stressed that Pakistan’s political discourse must be rooted in constructive engagement rather than factionalism. He stressed on the following:

- Strengthening a unified national narrative is essential for democratic stability.
- Political actors should prioritize consensus-building over polarization.
- Sovereignty and national cohesion must be preserved in democratic debate.
- Institutions need to create space for inclusive, non-adversarial dialogue.

- A long-term civic strategy is needed to engage citizens beyond ethnic or sectarian lines.

**Dr. Maria Eleonora Hebisz** (University of Lodz, Poland) focused on empathy as a core democratic value and the role of education in cultivating it. She argued that democratic societies must prioritize the development of emotionally intelligent citizens capable of engaging across differences. She discussed the following:

- Empathy is a foundational element of a functional democracy.
- Education systems must aim to create socially conscious and emotionally aware citizens.
- Respect for difference should be embedded early in educational curricula.
- Transnational learning and solidarity can support democratic renewal globally.

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**, Dean FHSS, UCP underscored the moral foundations of democracy, cautioning that without ethical leadership and civic responsibility, democratic structures become hollow. He noted that Pakistan's political system suffers from chronic instability—exemplified by the failure of any Prime Minister to complete a full term—which reflects deeper systemic issues such as the absence of political consensus, media distortion, and foreign interference. He called for a rethinking of democratic culture not only in formal structures but in the public mindset and everyday practices. He discussed the following key points:

- Strengthening public service delivery is essential to enhance democratic legitimacy.
- Hate speech and polarizing rhetoric must be curbed to foster a more tolerant democratic discourse.
- Respect for opposition voices and all elected representatives is vital for democratic maturity.
- Educational institutions must nurture civic awareness and a sense of democratic ethics.
- Peaceful protest should be normalized as a democratic right & a form of constructive dissent.
- Public contradictions—such as demanding transparency while evading personal responsibilities like tax compliance—must be addressed.
- Vigilance against manipulation by media and external actors is crucial to safeguard democratic integrity.
- Democracy requires citizens who are informed, empathetic, and committed to ethical participation.
- Leadership should be accountable, principled, and committed to constitutionalism.

In his concluding reflections, **Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais** (Chair) discussed post-colonial democracies, particularly the imposition of colonial institutions that were never designed for participatory governance. He argued that true democratic resilience can only emerge from political systems grounded in indigenous social and cultural realities. He noted that when democracy fails to deliver basic needs such as employment, healthcare, and justice, it loses credibility, paving the way for populism and authoritarian alternatives. He discussed the following key points:

- Democratic models must evolve from local realities.
- Populism is not the cause but a symptom of deeper political and institutional dysfunction.
- Education systems should cultivate reasoning, inquiry, and democratic values from an early age.

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- Citizens should be equipped to participate in democracy as active agents, not passive recipients.
- Basic service delivery—jobs, housing, healthcare—is fundamental to sustaining democratic legitimacy.
- Local governments must be empowered with real authority and accountability mechanisms.
- Public forums, media, and schools should collectively build a culture of democratic participation.
- Transparency, responsiveness, and long-term civic engagement are pillars of democratic endurance.

The policy dialogue ended with a set of shared recommendations from the speakers, focusing on how democracy can be strengthened in today's changing political environment. The following recommendations were made with consensus:

- Reform the education system to encourage critical thinking, active citizenship, and civic responsibility. Therefore, Free and compulsory education up to intermediate.
- Promote democratic values like tolerance, pluralism, and respect for opposing views.
- Run public awareness campaigns to explain the importance and benefits of democracy.
- Develop democratic models that fit local cultures, histories, and social needs.
- Make political institutions more transparent and accountable to the public.
- Protect academic freedom and open discussion in schools and universities.
- Involve young people more actively in democratic processes through education and leadership opportunities.
- Regulate media to prevent fake news, manipulation, and political bias.
- Base democratic reforms on the actual problems and needs of the population.
- Understand populism as a sign of public frustration that needs to be addressed, not ignored.
- Encourage leaders to act with empathy, fairness, and a sense of moral duty.
- Build political consensus across parties to ensure democracy remains stable and continuous in Pakistan. Integrity of elected institutions for fair and free elections
- Respect for human rights
- Strengthen local government system
- Instead of person, follow the manifesto
- Females should be given meaningful and proportional representation in all the political forums
- Observance of rule of law and promote good governance
- Minimize economic disparity
- Discourage 'hate' politics
- Strictly observation of constitution
- Independent, fair and efficient judiciary
- Renewed charter of democracy among all stakeholders including establishment and judiciary
- Code of conduct among politicians
- Conscience and responsible voters

The session closed with a vote of thanks to the Chair and participants. Attendees acknowledged the importance of such dialogues in crafting thoughtful, locally grounded democratic reform agendas for Pakistan and beyond. The discussion helped highlight the key challenges facing democracy today and encouraged practical ideas for making democratic systems more inclusive, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the people. It is hoped that the insights shared in this session will contribute meaningfully to future conversations, policies, and reforms that strengthen democracy at all levels.

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Following were present in Policy Dialogue Session:

1. Prof. Rasul Bakhsh Rais (*Professor Emeritus, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Former Dean, LUMS.*)
2. Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (*Dean, FoHSS / Chief Organizer*)
3. Dr. Maria Eleonora Hebisz (*University of Lodz, Poland*)
4. Dr. Xiaoqing Xie (*Director CPEC Center, China University of Geosciences, Wuhan, China.*)
5. Dr. Bilveer Singh (*National University of Singapore*)
6. Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash (*Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, ITU*)
7. Dr. Asma Awan (*Head, Department of Political Science, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore.*)
8. Dr. Adam Saud (*Professor and Dean Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University, Islamabad*)
9. Dr. Waheed Ahmed Khan (*Associate Professor/ Organizer*)
10. Dr. Mohammad Irfan Ali (*In-Charge, Department of Political Science & International Relations*)
11. Dr. Arsalan Tariq Rana (*HOD, Department of Economics, FoHSS*)
12. Miss Anna Sumowska (*The University of Security, Poland*)
13. Mr. Muhammad Azam Khan (*Senior Fellow, Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore.*)
14. Mr. Anish Mishra (*Heidelberg University, Germany*)
15. Dr. Muhammad Aslam Faiz (*Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan*)
16. Dr Maryam Azam (*Assistant Professor, LCWU*)
17. Dr. Humaira Akhtar (*Assistant Professor, FoHSS*)
18. Mr. Khizar Hayyat (*The Islamia University of Bahawalpur*)
19. Miss Ayesha Aqeel (*Visiting Lecturer, UCP*)
20. Mr. Asad Parvaiz (*Lecturer, FoHSS*)
21. Miss Ayesha Nasim (*Lecturer, FoHSS*)
22. Mr. Muhammad Mehran Iqbal (*Secretary Conference / Lecturer, UCP*)
23. Mr. Tariq Khan (*Researcher at Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) associated with UNISA, South Africa and Ph.D. IR Scholar at MUL*)
24. Dr. Yawar Hayat (*Lahore College for Women University, Lahore*)
25. Dr. Nadia Zaheer Ali (*Lahore College for Women University, Lahore*)
26. Miss Hina Nasir (*Comsats University, Lahore*)
27. Mr. Husnain Shabbir (*University of Gujrat*)
28. Mr. Abdul Rehman (*Lecturer, FoHSS*)
29. Mr. Asad Tashfeen (*Lecturer, FoHSS*)
30. Mr. Adnan Khan (*Associate Lecturer, FoHSS*)

***CONCLUDING  
SESSION***

## **Speech of Chief Organizer Concluding Ceremony**

**Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt**  
**Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FOHSS)**

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Dr. Hammad Naveed, Pro-Rector, UCP, Honourable Malik Ahmad Khan, Speaker Punjab Assembly, delegates, Deans, Directors, Guests and dear students Assalamu Alaikum and very warm welcome.

First of all, I extend my gratitude to Malik Ahmad Khan for sparing his precious time for the conference. Though, he is a politician yet he has put significant mark as intellectual. He is a decent soft spoken and dynamic human being—And as custodian of Punjab Assembly, he runs it smoothly and amicably.

I am glad that the topic of conference, we chose about six months ago and today, it has been materialized. When we started deliberating on the topics of the conference, many topics came under discussion like Women Rights, Governance, Justice, local self-government, however, consensus was emerged with the pressing issue, facing many countries of the world is “Challenges for Democracy.”

The purpose of the conference is, to collect opinions, perceptions and experiences of different intellectuals, researchers and experts on this issue.

As far as conference is concerned, we received more than 100 research papers from Pakistan and abroad and we selected about 40 papers. Yesterday on the opening day besides inaugural function, we had 3 academic sessions chaired by Ambassador Nadeem Riaz, Dr. Iram Khalid, Dean Punjab University and Dr. Bilveer Singh from National University Singapore. Today 5 sessions will take place and to be chaired by senior academics like Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais Professor Emeritus, Quaid-e-Azam University, Dr. Yaqoob Bangash, Dean ITU, Professor Sajjad Naseer T.I former HOD, University of the Punjab, Commodore Azam Khan, Navy War College and Dr. Asma Awan, HOD Kinnaird College. It is worth mentioning that Most of session-chairs and paper presenters will take part in Policy Dialogue and come up with realistic recommendations for stakeholders. I am pleased to share that we will publish proceedings of the Conference and include all peoples and recommendations of Policy dialogue.

The crux of the inaugural function and academic sessions held so far is being shared with you for your information by Minahil Sheraz.

As a Professor of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, I have long believed that it is not only our privilege—but our duty—as academics to engage directly with the pressing questions of our time. This conference is a reflection of that belief: that universities must not stand on the sidelines of public discourse, but step forward as space of critical thought, democratic dialogue, and civic leadership.

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Ladies & gentlemen, Democracy, today stands at a crossroads. From the rise of populism authoritarian, to the erosion of public trust, from disinformation campaigns to the weaponization of technology—our democratic institutions have been facing complex and evolving challenges.

While globalization, technological advances, and heightened civic engagement offer new avenues for democratic participation and accountability, they also expose vulnerabilities. The rise of authoritarianism, political polarization, digital manipulation, and the erosion of democratic norms threaten the stability of democratic systems worldwide. At the same time, social movements and digital platforms empower citizens to demand greater transparency and reform. This dynamic landscape calls for urgent strategies to safeguard democratic institutions. Promote human rights, and build resilience against growing authoritarian tendencies, enduring democracy remains a viable governance model in the contemporary world.

And yet, despite these trials, democracy remains a deeply aspirational force. It remains a promise that power can be accountable, that voices can be equal, and that societies can be governed through consent, not coercion.

The University of Central Punjab has taken the initiative to convene this important gathering—not only to analyze democracy’s challenges, but to imagine its renewal. Through this conference, we aim to provide guidance—not only to policymakers and academics, but also to the most vital audience of all: our students, the next generation of democratic stewards.

I am grateful to Pro-Rector sb, and UCP Administration, faculty and students for extending their valuable support. I am thankful to Conference organizing teams who worked very hard for this conference and I appreciate all leads of different committees and other team members for their sincere support and cooperation to make this conference a success.

I am thankful to all paper presenters, experts, academicians, guests, faculty members and students for their presence today.

At last, I extend my heartiest gratitude to Honourable Malik Ahmad Khan who has come all the way from Islamabad only for this conference. And let me share with you that he has to return Islamabad right after this conference. We are honored and oblige for this kindness Sir!

Thank you very much.

I thank-you, Ladies & gentlemen.

## CONFERENCE REPORT

**Minahil**

(Student of BS International Relations)

Good afternoon,

It is my pleasure to present a brief summary of the rich and stimulating discussions we've had over the past two days during this incredible conference.

We began with an enlightening inaugural session, where distinguished speakers explored the evolving relationship between democracy, governance, and global political dynamics. Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi delivered a keynote that traced the historical development of democracy and warned us of the dangers posed by the rise of populism. He emphasized the need to rebuild public trust and strengthen democratic institutions in the face of growing frustration among the public.

His Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas, Ambassador of Norway, offered us a glimpse into Norway's democratic success story. He stressed the importance of strong institutions, education, and equality, while expressing concern about democratic backsliding in parts of Europe. He reminded us that international cooperation remains vital for protecting democratic values and human rights.

Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed brought the global context into sharper focus. He spoke about shifting power dynamics and the challenges posed by populism in a multipolar world. While acknowledging that populism often operates through emotional and short-term tactics, he reminded us that democracy requires long-term commitment to constitutional values, pluralism, and accountability.

These ideas laid the foundation for our three insightful panel discussions. The first panel examined how populism threatens democratic institutions. Scholars highlighted how social media, economic inequality, and weak checks and balances are allowing populist leaders to bypass democratic norms.

The second panel explored gender inclusion in democracy. Speakers presented case studies from Pakistan, Myanmar, and conflict regions like Jammu and Kashmir. They underscored the need to address systemic barriers that prevent marginalized groups, especially women, from full political participation.

The final panel revisited populism and explored its impact on political discourse in Pakistan. Researchers presented compelling analyses on how populist rhetoric, particularly that of celebrity leaders like Imran Khan, has mobilized support while also contributing to polarization and institutional decay.

This conference has reminded us of the urgent need for informed civic engagement, responsible leadership, and evidence-based policy. I thank all our speakers and participants for enriching this dialogue with their knowledge and perspectives.

## CONCLUDING CEREMONY

**Malik Ahmad Khan**

(Chief Guest / Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab)

Distinguished faculty, students, and fellow participants,

It is both an honor and a responsibility for me to speak at this vital gathering on the contemporary challenges to democracy. When I received the invitation, I felt personally compelled to attend—not simply out of formality, but because this subject deeply aligns with my life’s work and personal experience. As someone who has long stood in support of institutional development and has actively spoken against the dangers of populism, I see this dialogue as not only timely but essential. This isn’t theoretical for me. I’m not an observer or a commentator. I live these challenges every day, not as an academic, but as a public servant elected repeatedly through the democratic process. I speak with the weight of that responsibility and the lived reality of what democracy means on the ground.

My life is a testament to what democracy can enable. I come from a humble background, a mediocre family, and every inch of my journey has been earned through hard work and public trust. My political career began in 1997, and since 2002, I’ve had the privilege of serving in multiple assemblies and cabinets. But despite decades of experience, I must honestly admit that institutions are weakening and populism is gaining ground. We are seeing the deterioration of institutional authority and credibility, and if we don’t act now, the damage may be irreversible.

Let me move from concepts to real-life experiences. I’ll share a story that begins in a small village and ends at the doorstep of international institutions. One day, I encountered a young boy around twelve years old, barefoot and working in the fields. He had never been to school. His hands were calloused, and his face carried the burden of responsibilities far beyond his age. I asked him why he wasn’t in school. He said he had to support his family. His brother, too, had never seen the inside of a classroom. That boy became a case study for me. I took him to school. I made arrangements to support his family so he could study. With the help of NGOs, we identified 34 such children in the village. We got them into school and tried to support their families.

But six months later, most of those children were back in the fields. Despite our best efforts, we couldn’t sustain their education. I contacted donors, government officials, researchers—even international agencies. Still, the system failed these children. They were back where they started, and I couldn’t do anything more. That failure haunts me. Every political party promises to bring every child into school. Yet in this one village alone, we couldn’t sustain education for 34 children. This is not just a personal story; it is a reflection of systemic failure. If our institutions cannot serve that child, then we have no claim to the success of democracy.

The same applies to healthcare. The rural health units are in such dire condition that no one would willingly send their loved ones there. I have visited them, gotten treatment there, and seen firsthand how every promise made by political leaders fails in practice. Whether it’s healthcare, education, employment, or shelter, the promises are endless—but the delivery is lacking. The gap between words and action is widening dangerously, and the people are losing faith. When promises are not

fulfilled, disappointment turns to despair, and despair leads to unrest. When that unrest finds a voice, it is often a loud, angry, and emotional voice—ripe for manipulation by populist leaders.

The manipulation is one of the most serious threats to democracy. People no longer reason; they react. They believe what they see without questioning its validity. And that is dangerous. Democracy is built on dialogue, not dogma. It thrives when people talk, reason, and exchange ideas. Without that dialogue, democracy withers. This is why institutions like yours must lead the way. Academic institutions, think tanks, and universities must reclaim their role as the conscience of society. You have the space and the tools to think critically, to propose solutions, and to challenge the status quo.

The challenge we face is not just political but existential. Populism is not just a rhetorical strategy; it is a corrosive force that undermines institutions. When institutions fail, democracy loses its foundation. And yet, there is hope. The very fact that we are gathered here today to discuss these issues is proof that dialogue is still possible. That awareness is still alive. That we are not yet lost.

Lastly, I want to reflect briefly on a broader challenge—terrorism and inter-state tension. When incidents happen, fingers are pointed, and accusations fly. But are the states on both sides mature enough to provide facts, evidence, and transparent dialogue? Or will we spend another century mired in political posturing while our people suffer? These are questions we must confront with honesty and courage.

I thank you all for providing a platform where real dialogue is possible. Democracy is not perfect, but it is our best hope. We must protect it—not just with words, but with action. And that action starts with honest reflection and the courage to speak uncomfortable truths.

Thank you.

## CLOSING REMARKS

**Dr. Hammad Naveed**  
(Pro-Rector, UCP)

Good evening, everyone,

As we conclude this remarkable conference, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all the scholars, speakers, and students who have joined us over the past two days. The level of engagement, the depth of discussion, and the sincerity of participation have been truly inspiring. Your contributions have not only enriched the academic discourse but also underscored the urgency of the challenges facing democracies around the world today.

Throughout the conference, we have hosted timely and thought-provoking conversations on themes ranging from the rise of populism and institutional decay to gender inclusion, global geopolitics, and the evolving digital threats to democratic norms. These discussions reflect the breadth and complexity of issues confronting democratic systems—and also the need for critical, cross-disciplinary dialogue in addressing them.

I am particularly grateful to Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan for sharing his candid reflections on Pakistan's democratic landscape. His honest account of the disconnect between populist rhetoric and actual policy delivery added a valuable real-world perspective to our deliberations. It reminded us that democratic resilience requires more than institutional frameworks—it demands consistent accountability, responsiveness, and the political will to reform.

Conferences like this are more than academic exercises—they are platforms for generating ideas, informing public debate, and ultimately shaping policy. They help us reimagine democracy, not just as a system of governance but as a lived experience—one that must be cultivated through civic education, inclusive participation, mutual respect, and shared values.

As we move forward, let us not see this as an end, but as the beginning of ongoing dialogue and collaboration. I hope the conversations we have had here today continue beyond these walls—in classrooms, policymaking forums, civil society spaces, and wherever the future of democracy is being negotiated.

Thank you once again for being part of this journey. Your presence and contributions have made this conference a meaningful and memorable one.

*PICTORIAL GALLERY*



**Inaugural session (L to R) - Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi (Keynote Speaker/Political Analyst),  
Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed (Chief Guest / Political Analyst),  
Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas (Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan)  
and Dr. Hammad Naveed (Pro-Rector)**



**Welcome Speech by Prof. Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (Dean / Chief Organizer)**



**Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi (Keynote Speaker /Eminent Political Analyst/  
Former, Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab)**



**Excellency Per Albert Ilsaas (Ambassador of Norway, to Pakistan)**



**Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed (Chief Guest / Political Analyst,  
Former Federal Minister & Senator)**



**Concluding remarks by Dr. Hammad Naveed (Pro-Rector, UCP)**

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**Inaugural Session: Group Photo with Chief Guest, Keynote speakers,  
Paper presenters and Conference organizers**



**Foreign delegates and Paper presenters**



**Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt presents souvenir to Dr. Bilveer Singh (Session Chair)**



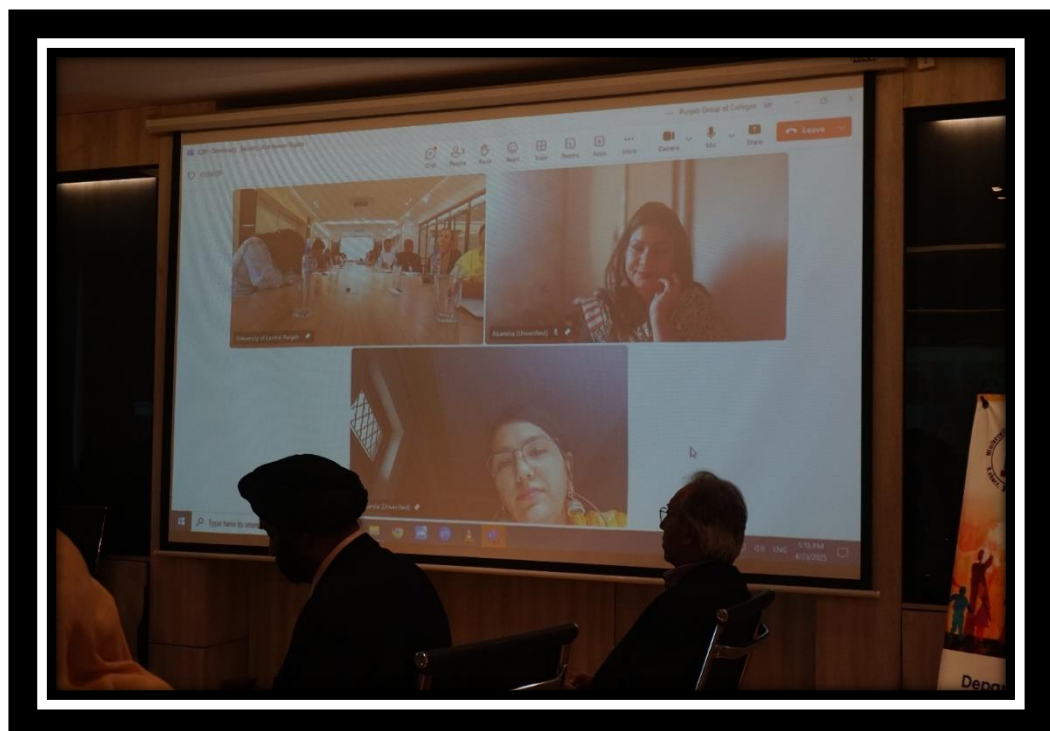
**Dr. Iram Khalid, Dean of Behavioral & Social Sciences,  
University of the Punjab, Lahore. (Session Chair) addressing the participants**

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**Session in progress**



**Session in progress (Online Presentation)**



**Dr. Adam Saud, Professor and Dean Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University, Islamabad. (Paper Presenter)**



**Dr. Muhammad Irfan Ali (In-Charge, Department of Political Science & International Relations) along with other Participants**



**Mr. Ahmad Nazir Warraich, Former Dean Executive Development Institute,  
National School of Public Policy, Lahore (Paper presenter)**



**Dr. Xiaoqing Xie, Director CPEC Center,  
China University of Geosciences, Wuhan. (Paper Presenter)**



**Ms. Tayyaba Khan, Lecturer, Lahore College for Women University (Paper Presenter)**



**Muhammad Bilal (BS IR, 4<sup>th</sup> Semester, UCP) Presenting Paper**

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**Group Photo –after the session along with  
Dr. Muhammad Irfan Ali  
(In-Charge, Department of Political Science & International Relations)**



**Dr. Humera Akhtar presenting souvenir to  
M. Azam Khan Commander (R), Senior Fellow, Pakistan Navy War College**



**Policy Dialogue Session Chaird by Prof. Rasul Bakhsh Rais**



**Participants along with foreign delegates in Policy Dialogue**



**Dr. Asma Awan, Head, Department of Political Science,  
Kinnaird College For Women, Lahore. (Session Chair)**



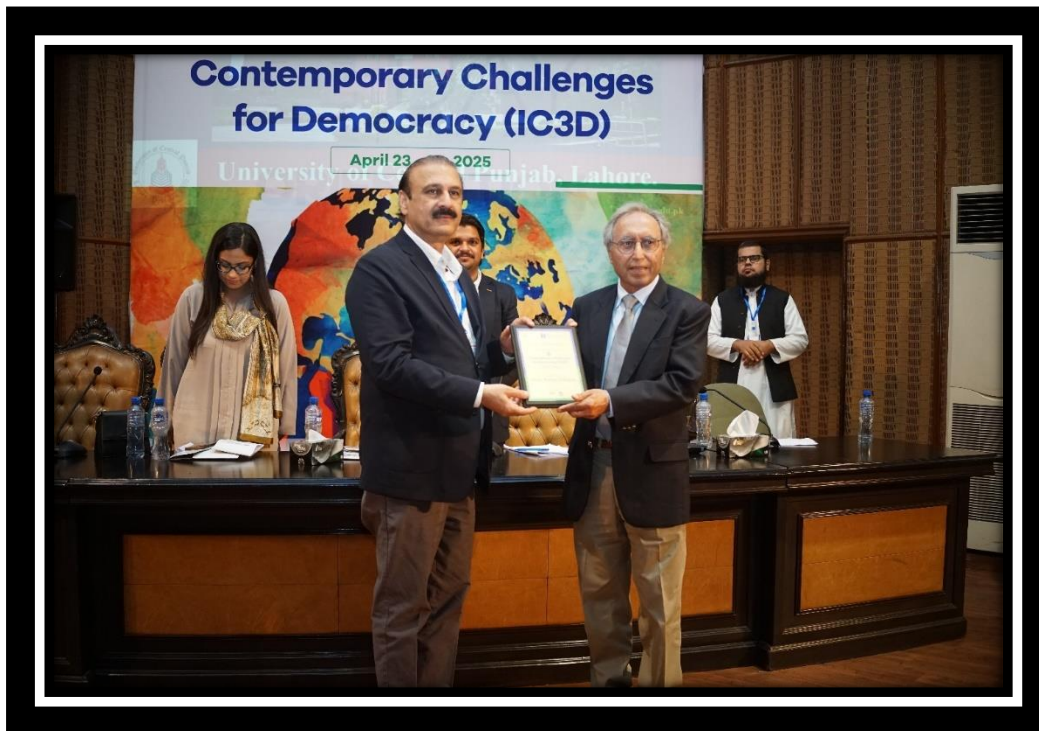
**Participants of Policy Dialogue Session Mr. Abdul Rehman and  
Mr. Mehran Iqbal (Secretary Conference)**



**Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash (Dean, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Department of Governance and Global Studies, ITU Lahore) and  
Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (Dean, FoHSS/Chief Organizer) during Policy Dialogue**



**Group Photo after the Policy Dialogue**



**Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt presenting Souvenir to Prof. Rasul Bakhsh Rais**



**Miss Majreeha, Hosting the Concluding Ceremony**

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**Prof. Dr. Uzma Quraishi (Vice Chancellor, Lahore College for Women University)  
attending the conference**



**Concluding Ceremony –  
Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (Dean, FoHSS / Chief Organizer), Malik Ahmad Khan  
(Speaker, Punjab Assembly) & Dr. Hammad Naveed (Pro-Rector, UCP)**

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**Chief Guest, Malik Ahmad Khan (Speaker, Punjab Assembly)**



**Dr. Hammad Naveed (Pro- Rector, UCP) and Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt (Dean, FoHSS) presenting souvenir to Malik Ahmad Khan (Speaker, Punjab Assembly)**

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**Chief Guest, Malik Ahmad Khan (Speaker, Punjab Assembly)  
presenting souvenir to Dr. Waheed Khan (Organizer)**



**Chief Guest, Malik Ahmad Khan (Speaker, Punjab Assembly) presenting souvenir  
to Mr. Mehran Iqbal (Secretary Conference)**

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**Group Photo after concluding ceremony**



**Group Photo after the session**



**Performance by Umm-E-Laila Shamsi from Music Society  
(Student of MS Organizational Psychology)**



**Music Performance by Afnan Baig (Student of BS IR)**

*CLIPPINGS OF  
MEDIA COVERAGE*

بدرنامہ آواز لاہور

25 APR 2025

6-7

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

**یونیورسٹی آف سنٹرل پنجاب کے زیر اہتمام بین الاقوامی کانفرنس**

مختلف چیلنجز سے گزر رہے ہیں، شوشل میڈیا کی وجہ سے جہاں خبریں پھیلنے کی رفتار بڑھ گئی ہے وہیں جہاں جھوٹ اور ہراسہ بھی پھیلنے لگا ہے۔

لاہور (خاتون رپورٹر) یونیورسٹی آف سنٹرل پنجاب کے شعبہ بین الاقوامی تعلقات اور سیاسیات کے زیر اہتمام دو روزہ بین الاقوامی کانفرنس "Contemporary Challenges for Democracy (IC3D)" کا افتتاحی سیشن منسٹر آف ہومز اور گورنمنٹ کے زیر اہتمام منعقد ہو رہا ہے۔

میں ملک و بیرون ملک کی نامور شخصیات نے شرکت کی۔ افتتاحی اجلاس میں چیرمین شعبہ ڈاکٹر خالد منظور نے کہا کہ دنیا بھر میں جمہوری ادارے کیلئے چیلنجز سے گزر رہے ہیں۔ شوشل میڈیا کی وجہ سے جہاں خبریں پھیلنے کی رفتار بڑھ گئی ہے وہیں جہاں جھوٹ اور ہراسہ بھی پھیلنے لگا ہے۔

جمہوریت کیلئے خطرہ بن چکی ہے لیکن ڈیجیٹل پلیٹ فارمز شہریوں کو شفافیت اور اصلاحات کا اختیار بھی دے رہے ہیں۔ انہوں نے بتایا کہ کانفرنس کیلئے 100 سے زائد تحقیقی خلاصے موصول ہوئے جن میں 40 منتخب کیے گئے، جن میں 15 بین الاقوامی مقالے شامل تھے۔ سگاپور سے بلورنگکھ اور پولینڈ سے ڈاکٹر ماریا نے بھی تحقیقی مقالہ پیش کیا۔

مہمان خصوصی سینیٹر منشاہد حسان سید نے خطاب کرتے ہوئے کہا کہ جمہوریت کا کردار بڑھ رہا ہے۔ انہوں نے فلسفین کے معاملے پر جمہوریت کے دہرے معیار پر سوال اٹھایا اور چین کی ترقی کو اجاگر کیا۔ تاروس کے فیئر پرائبرٹ الساس نے کہا کہ تاروس کی جمہوریت ایک طویل ارتقائی عمل کا نتیجہ ہے۔ آج جمہوریت کو "بیک سلائیڈنگ" جیسے رجحانات کا سامنا ہے، جہاں آن لائن ہراسائی اور عدم مساوات بڑھ رہے ہیں۔ معروف تجزیہ کار ڈاکٹر حسن عسکری نے کہا کہ آمریت یا یک جماعتی نظام رکھنے والی ریاستیں بھی جمہوری اصول اپناتی رہی ہیں، جو جمہوریت کیلئے چیلنج ہیں۔

Daily TIMES Lahore

25 APR 2025

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**UCP conference explores contemporary challenges for democracy**

Contemporary Challenges for Democracy (IC3D)



The Department of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Central Punjab organized a two-day international conference on the theme "Contemporary Challenges for Democracy," attracting renowned scholars from both Pakistan and abroad.

In the inaugural session, Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, stated that democratic institutions worldwide are facing serious challenges. He noted that social manipulation poses a significant threat to democracy, yet digital platforms are simultaneously empowering citizens with transparency and reform.

He shared that over 100 research abstracts were received for the conference, of which 40 were selected, including 15 international papers. Contributors included Balveer Singh from Singapore and Dr. Maria from Poland. Dr. Xie from China, Mr. Mishra from Germany, and several scholars also joined the sessions online.

Mr. Mushahid Hussain Sayed, the chief guest, emphasized that the world is undergoing a historic transformation, with Asia playing an increasingly important role. He questioned the double standards of democracy in the context of Palestine and highlighted China's rise as a global power.

Norwegian Ambassador Per Albert Ilsaas remarked that Norway's democratic system is the result of a long evolutionary process, noting that democracy today faces trends like "backsliding," growing online harassment, and inequality.

Renowned analyst Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi observed that even authoritarian or one-party states are adopting certain democratic principles, posing further challenges to democratic norms.

Over 30 scholars presented their research papers across various sessions of the conference. Dr. Hammad Naveed, protector of UCP, presented souvenirs to speakers. The concluding session will be graced by the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly, Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, as the chief guest. PR

**UCP Hosts International Conference On Contemporary Challenges To Democracy**



Soon Times Correspondent  
ISLAMABAD

The Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Central Punjab inaugurated a prestigious two-day international conference titled "Contemporary Challenges to Democracy" on April 23, 2025, which concluded on April 24, 2025, at the university's main auditorium. The academic and intellectual gathering brought together prominent scholars, researchers, media representatives, and diplomatic figures from across Pakistan and abroad. The conference opened on April 23. Professor Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, welcomed participants and emphasised the need for research-based inquiry into the challenges democracy faces today.

Keynote speakers included Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi, eminent political analyst and former Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab, who highlighted the importance of international cooperation in democratic development.

The conference was graced by Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed as chief guest. In his address, he emphasised that "democracy's threats can only be countered through intellectual freedom, institutional reforms, and youth engagement," noting that educational institutions play a pivotal role in nurturing democratic values.

In his concluding remarks today, Professor Dr. Hammad Naveed, Pro-Rector of UCP, thanked all distinguished guests, speakers, and organisers, reiterating the university's commitment to fostering academic dialogue and democratic engagement.

Over the two days, participants engaged in various sessions exploring both global and local challenges to democracy.



25-4-2025

**سوشل میڈیہ لیشن جمہوریت کے لیے خطرہ بن چکی، ڈاکٹر خالد منظور**


**دنیا بھر میں جمہوری ادارے مختلف چیلنجز سے گزر رہے ہیں، کانفرنس سے خطاب**

لاہور (خبرنگار) یونیورسٹی آف سنٹرل پنجاب کے شعبہ بین الاقوامی تعلقات اور سیاسیات کے زیر اہتمام 2 روزہ بین الاقوامی کانفرنس "جمہوریت کو درپیش عالمی چیلنجز" کے موضوع پر منعقد ہوئی، جس میں ملک و بیرون ملک کی نامور شخصیات نے شرکت کی۔ افتتاحی اجلاس میں چیئرمین شعبہ ڈاکٹر خالد منظور بٹ نے کہا کہ دنیا بھر میں جمہوری ادارے مختلف چیلنجز سے گزر رہے ہیں۔ سوشل میڈیہ لیشن جمہوریت کے لیے خطرہ بن چکی ہے، لیکن ڈیجیٹل پلیٹ فارمز شہریوں کو شفافیت اور اصلاحات کا اختیار بھی دے رہے ہیں۔ انہوں نے بتایا کہ کانفرنس کے لیے 100 سے زائد تحقیقی خلاصے موصول ہوئے جن میں سے 40 منتخب کیے گئے، جن میں 15 بین الاقوامی مقالے شامل تھے۔ سنگاپور سے بلویر سنگھ اور پولینڈ سے ڈاکٹر ماریانے

بھی تحقیقی تعاون کیا۔ متعدد اسکالرز نے آن لائن شرکت کی۔ مہمان خصوصی سینیٹر مشاہد حسین سید نے کہا کہ دنیا تاریخی تبدیلی کے عمل سے گزر رہی ہے جہاں ایٹیا کا کردار بڑھ رہا ہے۔ انہوں نے فلسطین کے معاملے پر جمہوریت کے دہرے معیار پر سوال اٹھایا اور چین کی ترقی کو اجاگر کیا۔ ناروے کی جمہوریت پر البرٹ الساس نے کہا کہ ناروے کی جمہوریت ایک طویل ارتقائی عمل کا نتیجہ ہے۔ آج جمہوریت کو "بیک سلائیڈنگ" جیسے رجحانات کا سامنا ہے، جہاں آن لائن ہراساںی اور عدم مساوات بڑھ رہے ہیں۔ معروف تجزیہ کار ڈاکٹر حسن مسکری نے کہا کہ آمریت یا ایک جماعتی نظام رکھنے والی ریاستیں بھی بعض جمہوری اصول اپنا رہی ہیں، جو جمہوریت کے لیے چیلنج ہیں۔ کانفرنس کے مختلف اجلاسوں میں 30 سے زائد اسکالرز نے اپنے تحقیقی مقالے پیش کیے۔



لاہور مشاہد حسین ڈاکٹر حسن مسکری ڈاکٹر خالد منظور بٹ سوشل میڈیہ لیشن کر رہے ہیں



**Daily Notable**

Friday, April 25 2025 | 26 Shawal 1446 | Rs 10 | Pages 4 | Registered | CPL No. 401 | Volume: VI | Issue No. CII | Lahore

**The foundation of democracy is the power of the vote; the provision of public services is essential**  
– Speaker Punjab Assembly

Social media should be used for the promotion of the national narrative and raising awareness – Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan-Pakistan is a nuclear power, our armed forces are brave and professional, India's terrorism allegations are baseless, Pakistan's sacrifices and role are clear at the global level – Speaker Punjab Assembly's media talk

By our correspondent Lahore: According to the sources of Daily Notable, – The foundation of democracy lies in the power of the people's vote, and this power can only be effective when the public is provided with basic facilities like health, education, employment, and justice. It is the responsibility of policy-makers to present practical suggestions for national development while keeping ground realities in mind, and to strengthen state institutions with better strategies. These views were expressed by Speaker Punjab Assembly Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan while addressing the International Democracy Conference held at a private university in Lahore. On this occasion, he emphasised that social media should be used for promoting the national narrative and raising public awareness, so that positive thinking and responsible behavior can be promoted in society.

He said that in the development of nations, not only governments but every individual, every institution, and every segment has an equal role to play, and we must recognize our collective responsibility and play our part. Later, while talking to the media, Speaker Punjab Assembly Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan said that Pakistan is a nuclear power. The Armed Forces of Pakistan are an institution to be proud of, whose professional skills and history of national service make the entire nation proud. We will not tolerate any kind of negligence or slackness in matters of our independence, the protection of Pakistan, and its security. Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan termed India's allegations of terrorism as baseless and harmful for regional peace and said that Pakistan has always adopted a responsible political approach, and the purpose of these baseless accusations without evidence is to weaken Pakistan's positive role at the global level. Referring to the Jaffer Express incident, he said that Pakistan's sacrifices and strategy in the war against terrorism are exemplary. Teachers, students, civil society, and media representatives from various universities participated in the conference, and the speakers expressed their views on democracy, governance, social media, and human rights. – PUNA

**روزنامہ نوائے وقت لاہور**

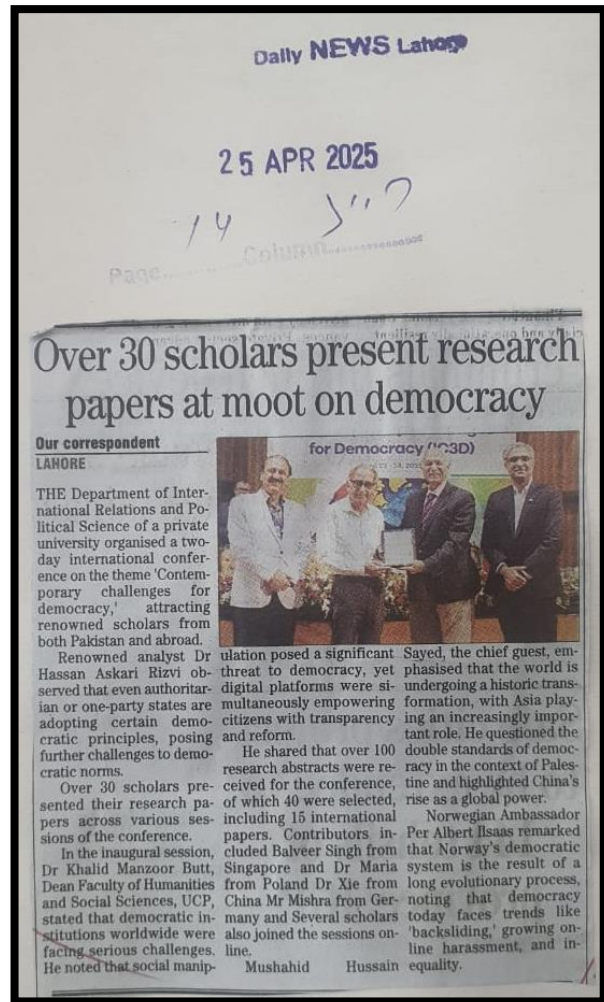
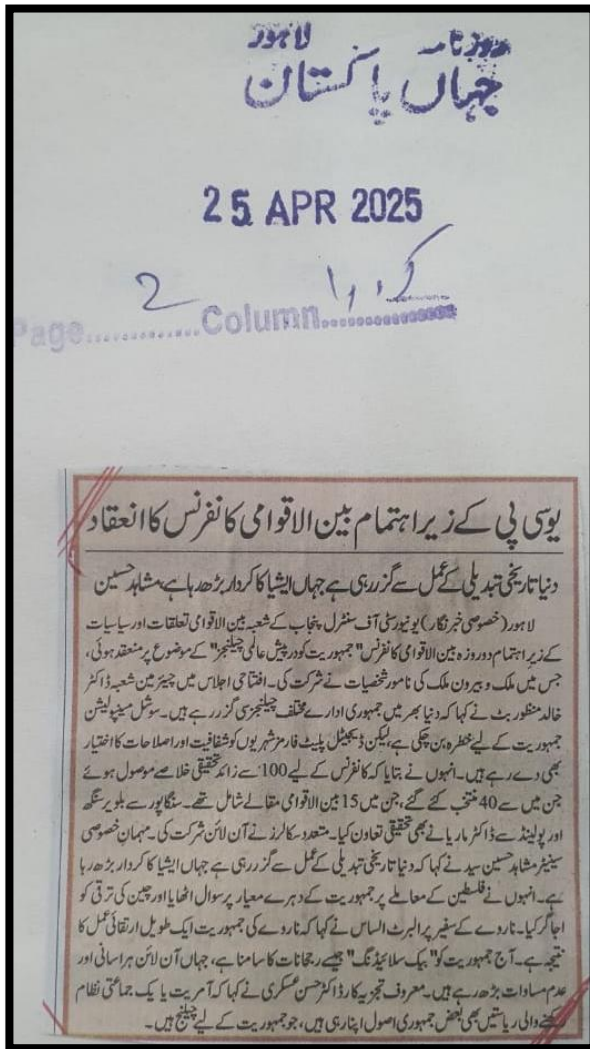
**25 APR 2025**

Page.....Column.....

**2 روزہ بین الاقوامی کانفرنس، دنیا بھر میں جمہوری ادارے چیلنجز کا شکار: خالد منظور**

دنیا تاریخی تبدیلی کے عمل سے گزر رہی ہے، ایٹیا کا کردار بڑھ رہا ہے: مہمان خصوصی سینیٹر مشاہد حسین سید

لاہور (ایڈیٹر رپورٹ) یونیورسٹی آف سنٹرل پنجاب کے شعبہ بین الاقوامی تعلقات اور سیاسیات کے زیر اہتمام 2 روزہ بین الاقوامی کانفرنس "جمہوریت کو درپیش عالمی چیلنجز" کے موضوع پر منعقد ہوئی، جس میں ملک و بیرون ملک کی نامور شخصیات نے شرکت کی۔ افتتاحی اجلاس میں چیئرمین شعبہ ڈاکٹر خالد منظور بٹ نے کہا کہ دنیا بھر میں جمہوری ادارے مختلف چیلنجز سے گزر رہے ہیں۔ سوشل میڈیہ لیشن جمہوریت کے لیے خطرہ بن چکی ہے لیکن ڈیجیٹل پلیٹ فارمز شہریوں کو شفافیت اور اصلاحات کا اختیار بھی دے رہے ہیں۔ انہوں نے بتایا کہ کانفرنس کے لیے 100 سے زائد تحقیقی خلاصے موصول ہوئے جن میں سے 40 منتخب کیے گئے، جن میں 15 بین الاقوامی مقالے شامل تھے۔ سنگاپور سے بلویر سنگھ اور پولینڈ سے ڈاکٹر ماریانے



# The Business

An English Daily published simultaneously from Lahore and Faisalabad

## 25 April 2025

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### International Conference at UCP explores contemporary challenges for democracy

By Our Staff Reporter

**LAHORE:** The Department of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Central Punjab organised a two-day international conference on the theme "Contemporary Challenges for Democracy," attracting renowned scholars from both Pakistan and abroad.

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