



RESEARCH PAPER

Economic Performance and its Relationship with Democratic Stability: Evidences from Pakistan

¹Arooj Nasir, ²Laiba Nadeem and ³Aleeza

1. MS Scholar, Department of Politics & IR, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
2. MS Scholar, Department of Politics & IR, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
3. MS Scholar, Department of Politics & IR, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** aroojn979@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between economic performance and democratic stability in Pakistan. It seeks to assess whether economic growth alone can ensure democratic consolidation or if institutional factors play a mediating role. Pakistan's democratic experience has remained fragile due to recurring economic crises and political instability. High unemployment, income inequality, and weak governance have eroded public trust. Electoral transitions and regional disparities, particularly in Baluchistan and former FATA, further highlight democratic vulnerabilities. These challenges make it necessary to analyze the economic foundations of democratic stability. The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary sources, including academic literature, economic reports, and election data. A descriptive analytical method is applied. The findings indicate that economic growth encourages democratic participation and institutional trust. However, economic downturns intensify socio-political discontent and instability. Democratic stability depends heavily on institutional quality, civil-military balance, and media freedom. The study recommends integrated policies focusing on inclusive growth, strong institutions, media autonomy, and active civic engagement to ensure democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS Economic Performance, Democratic Stability, Governance, Institutions

Introduction

Democratic stability is a multifaceted and disputable notion, particularly in the nations where the authoritarian regime and structural laxity have occurred several times. In Pakistan, which is one of the best examples, there is a combination of formal democracy that operates alongside continuous political unrest and power centers that are unelected (Hashmi, 2021). Pakistan has been going through periods of civilian and military governments since its independence in 1947, undermining democratic standards and institutional independence (Amin & Faqir, 2021). At times of civilian government, the delivery of governance is limited by informal sources of power, elite bargaining, and socio-economic demands.

This paper examines the role of economic performance in the interaction with governance quality and institutional trust to determine the role of democratic stability in Pakistan. The trends of democratic backsliding around the world demonstrate that the influence of economic inequality, unemployment, and failures in governance on the concept of democratic legitimacy is something that should be studied in tandem (Zureiqat, 2005). The peculiar case of political experience in Pakistan offers the important lesson of how economic vulnerabilities and institutional weaknesses work together to produce democratic tenacity.

Literature Review

The body of literature that has been written on the issue of democratic stability in Pakistan presents several aspects that have been identified to be interrelated, which are institutional weakness, civil-military imbalance, governance weakness, economic performance, media influence, and the involvement of the population. As a main concern, Shafqat (2021) highlights the continuation of military interventions and ineffective political institutions as the key impediments to the democratic consolidation. He posits that the reason why Pakistan has not been able to enjoy stable democracy is because of personality-based politics, divided institutions, and a weak accountability system. Although Shafqat is insightful, he failed to address the influence of international aspects, international pressure on policies and regional geopolitics, which also influence the domestic democratic results.

Mubarak, Nawaz, and Khalid (2020) pay attention to the importance of political awareness, youth engagement, and media democracy promotion. In their research, they contend that the level of civic engagement has now increased, but structural issues, corruption, and elite domination remain to curtail the efficacy of democracy. Nevertheless, the paper fails to examine the impacts of economic inequalities such as poverty, unemployment and income inequality on political participation and institutional trust adequately. These gaps are filled in this research through the analysis of the socio-economic context as well as institutional and governance aspects.

According to Hashmi (2021), the author of the paper presents a thorough evaluation of the governance in Pakistan, with the focus on the significance of electoral and judicial reforms as the key to ensuring democratic stability. Her argument against this is that lack of political will compromises long-term institutional change. However, Hashmi fails to discuss ethnic, regional divisions, including Baloch and Pashtun nationalist movements, which are still very important to determine the political cohesion and institutional legitimacy.

Ali (2022) concentrates on systemic factors that bring about political instability, and the weak institutions of the state, corruption, and poor civil society are seen as barriers to democracy. He proposes the idea of grassroots state-building and good local governance. Nevertheless, the military has continued to undermine democratic institutions, which is one of the key aspects of the Pakistani political situation that Ali fails to properly represent in his examination. The current paper fills this knowledge gap by evaluating civil-military relations and the effects they have on institutional trust.

Amin and Faqir (2021) present the Charter of Democracy as the step towards establishing the political consensus and institutional change. Although they acknowledge that it helps in the cooperation between the political parties, they state that more institutional dysfunctions and outside influences, including foreign aid and security dynamics in the region are not mentioned. In this research, external geopolitical factors are used as a mediating factor to democratic consolidation.

Rotberg and Gisselquist (2009) focus on the world-based correlation between the quality of governance and the survival of democracy with particular attention to transparency, accountability, and the role of civil society. They claim that democracy is undermined by weak institutions and this is evident in semi authoritarian democracies such as Pakistan. On the same note, Campos and Nugent (2000) associate political stability to institutional performance with the fact that certainty of governance and rule of law encourages investment and builds societal confidence. Although these studies offer the

world perspective, they lack specific empirical analysis on South Asia, a case that is presented in this study.

Khawaja and Khalid (2022) investigate the issue of civil-military relations, stating that the recurrence of military interventions harms the self-governance of the civilian institutions and reduces the electoral legitimacy. According to Ananyev and Guryev (2018), the credibility of institutions to the citizens is one of the key aspects of democratic resilience, as they indicate that institutional credibility decreases with service delivery failures and lack of transparency. In the article by Newton (2001), social trust is brought up as the cause and effect of good governance with a particular emphasis on participatory politics and responsive institutions. According to Boadi (1999), the weak institutions of fragile states make them less competent to uphold democracy because political manipulation of judiciary and legislature is common. Algan and Cahuc (2014) also state that the low institutional trust is associated with political instability and worse civic participation.

Zureiqat (2005) links the economic performance and democratic stability indicating that high political trust and stability are achieved in countries with efficient institutions and a positive economic performance. As Mazenda (2022) shows, transparent and accountable governance allows the process of development and democratic consolidation. All these sources point to the fact that the weaknesses of Pakistani democracy cannot be explained by one particular factor but are the result of the interplay between weak institutions, the absence of equilibrium between the civil and military, economic inequalities, the manipulation of the media, and a lack of public involvement (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019)

To sum up, the literature available is informative but still lacking in knowledge regarding the cemented effect of the economic performance, the quality of governance, the media influence and public trust in the democratic stability of Pakistan. The paper aims to fill these gaps by providing a combined method, which offers both empirical and qualitative research on the issues of structure and society at large, which affect the sustainability of democracy in Pakistan.

Although much literature has been done on political instability in Pakistan, there is no much emphasis on the relationship between economic performance and democratic stability. The literature on the topic tends to study governance or institutions independently without taking into account economic inequality and unemployment as a factor influencing the legitimacy of democracy (Muzaffar, et. Al., 2020; Zureiqat, 2005). Also, the empirical relationships between media freedom, popular trust, and democratic survival are not well investigated. This paper fills these loopholes in an institutional and economic structure.

Material and Methods

The research design of this study is the qualitative research where the secondary sources were analyzed through historical analysis, institutional assessment, and interpretation review. The political changes, political practices and media conduct are analysed using policy documents, analytic reports and professional evaluations (Campos & Nugent, 2000). As an alternative to replicate tables, narrative summaries are employed in the assessment of the institutional performance and democratic outcomes.

A democratic government is supposed to govern under a transparent and accountable participatory and rule of law governance. The formal governance in Pakistan

is constituted of the constitution, parliament and the bureaucracy but the question of quality of governance has still been a challenge. Lack of access to information, institutional uncertainty and poor enforcement mechanisms result in mistrust between the state and the citizens reducing democratic stability. The long military government has gutted civilian institutions and the informal rules of that system have taken the place of nepotism and selective accountability (Muzaffar & Choudhary, 2017; Muzaffar, et.al., 2023; Ali, 2022; Muzaffar, et.al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

Democracy does not only concern itself with election, it concerns the stability and durability of political institutions, rule of law, accountability, and confidence of citizens to the system (North, 1990; Ali, 2022). The theory on which this paper was based is mostly the institutionalist theory which focuses on the interaction between formal structures such as constitutions, parliaments, and courts on one hand with the informal history, which includes patronage, elite bargaining, and political culture on the other hand to affect democratic stability. Formal democratic institutions also exist in Pakistan such as written constitution, independent judiciary, parliamentary structure and operational bureaucracy. Nevertheless, they oftentimes coexist with the informal centers of power, such as the military and the deep-seated political elites, often going around constitutional regulations or violating them (Khawaja and Khalid, 2022). This conflict between the formal and informal institutions becomes the core axis of the institutionalist analysis in this situation.

The institutionalist theory assumes that democratic resilience can only be dependent on the conformity between formality rules and reality on the ground. Formal institutions in those nations that have historically been characterized by authoritarianism in their political behavior are not able to work as an autonomous entity or be consistently functioning, and this generates what can be called a hybrid regime (Lane, 2010). The history of military interventions in Pakistan has established the traditions of centralized authority, scarcity of consultation, and selective responsibility, subverting the civilian control mechanisms (Amin and Faqir, 2021). Calamities of extra-constitutional interventions have proven to be a vicious circle in which democratic institutions are enshrined in the legal space but undermined in practice.

Path dependency is another concept of institutionalism that is also important to the current work, as it describes the role of the historical past in today's political processes (North, 1990; Ali, 2022). The colonial and post-colonial forms of government in Pakistan influenced the early institutional design in such a way that supported centralized and hierarchical control instead of participatory democracy in the country. Today these legacies can be traced in bureaucratic inflexibility, insufficient public control and inability of the elite to lose its control of the political process. Moreover, the institutionalist theory focuses on the importance of norms and informal practices. These are patronage networks, nepotism and elite bargaining, which in Pakistan are known to circumvent official democratic processes, i.e. fair judicial decisions or open budgetary allocations (Rotberg & Gisselquist, 2009). These informal processes have a way of influencing the political practices more than what the rules do, hence the need to view the political systems in their social and historical perspectives.

Another factor that is directly linked with institutionalism is economic performance. According to Zureiqat (2005) and Campos and Nugent (2000), economic stability and equal growth enhance legitimacy of a democracy, whereas inequality, jobless, and poverty undermine trust in the political institutions. In Pakistan, it is the high rates of income inequality, underemployment, and corruption which diminish the trust of the

population in the ability of the democratic institutions to bring effectual change, which consequently erodes democratic stability (Algan & Cahuc, 2014). Institutional theory describes this connection by indicating that failure by formal institutions to deliver economic security or social services causes citizens to lose confidence in the process and the system, leading to the probability of political disengagement, populist calls or intervening in the extra-constitutional manner.

Another important point of the theoretical framework is the civil-military relations. In Pakistan, the limitation of democratic consolidation is due to constant military interventions and the active role that the military plays in policy making (Khawaja & Khalid, 2022). The institutional theory views this as failure by formal civilian institutions to remain independent of informal centers of power. This lack of balance does not only strip the power of elected officials but also destroys the trust of the people, which starts a vicious circle of a lack of democracy whereby the electorate would have to rely on non-democratic institutions to keep the political order.

Lastly, the theoretical framework focuses on the use of civic engagement and media as informal institutions, which may either support or undermine democratic norms. The media freedom, awareness of the people, and the mechanisms of participatory governance are essential in formulating institutional legitimacy. In cases where media is limited by the control of states or elites, the media cannot serve as a watchdog and this limits transparency and accountability (Newton, 2001). On the other hand, active civic associations and the independent press can enhance the democratic persistence by creating accountability, empowering the citizens, and delivering responsive governance (Batool, et. al., 2024)

In conclusion, the theoretical context of this paper combines the institutionalist theory, path dependency, economic performance frameworks and civil-society factors in the quest to comprehend the stability of democracy in Pakistan. Resilience towards democracy is not a rule that is put in place by formal rules but the means through which historical legacies, informal practices, institutional trust, economic conditions, and engagement of people all interact. The country of Pakistan is an interesting example to study these dynamics due to the repetitive cycles of dictatorship, a complicated civil-military relationship, and socio-economic issues that coexist with the developed formal political systems (Ali, 2022; Shafqat, 2021).

Media role in Democratic Consolidation

The media is at the center stage of achieving democratic consolidation, as it is both a mediator of information and a control of institutional power. The role of media is not simple in Pakistan as it fulfills various roles, some of which enhance democracy, and others undermine it. The fourth pillar of democracy is media, which keeps the government institutions restrained and makes them transparent. Investigative journalism reveals corruption, inefficiency in administration, and damages to human rights and makes people aware of these issues and encourages civic activity. Television debates, news coverage and online journalism assists citizens in making informed decisions at elections. Through media watchdog activities, it can compel institutions to be guided by the law, human rights, and respect the interests of the populace. Indicatively, in the case of Lawyers Movement (2007-2009), a public opinion was enlisted through media coverage, which was independent.

Simultaneously, media can at times be employed by political parties, military or other elites to influence the opinion of the population or justify some actions. Partisan interests may be represented in editorial work instead of reporting the facts. The media influences degree of political polarization because media houses focus on party loyalty or

sensationalism rather than facts. The controlled messaging can give misleading information to the citizens, decrease accountability and undermine democratic consolidation. The media run by the state, such as Pakistan Television (PTV), in the past served as a government and military propaganda machine. Under military rule, the state media advanced religious conservatism, made the military leadership a hero, and silenced dissenting opinions. State media even under civilian governments is prone to reflect the views of the ruling party, and this restricts pluralism and editorial freedom. Such a non-neutral position diminishes the trust of people in institutions and undermines democracy.

The liberalization of the media in the early 2000s resulted in the development of the private TV channels, radio FM, and online. The involvement of the population increased with the help of the private media that allowed reporting corruption scandals, political discussions, and investigative work. Nevertheless, most of the private outlets are under the ownership of business conglomerates or politically affiliated people, and this may interfere with editorial autonomy. Objective reporting is at times dwarfed by profit motives and sensationalism which produce one sided stories.

Media influences the views of political institutions, leaders and the consequence of governance. The lack of convergence between state-controlled and privately controlled media messages tends to polarize and distrustful popular opinion, making it less agreeable about the democratic norms. The social media has also increased the voices of citizens but it has also misinformed them making democratic conversation even more difficult (Salam, et. al., 2024; Asghar et. al., 2025).

The censorship in Pakistan is apparent and subtle, as those that are hostile to the state institutions are intimidated, harassed, or battled in court. Topics such as military influence, Baluchistan insurgency and enforced disappearances are highly sensitive issues that tend to be suppressed. Simultaneously, media is provided to propagate some political ideologies, romanticize the military, or demonize the enemy. Propaganda transgresses one of the fundamental tenets of democracy: trust. Propaganda restricts the discussion, and propaganda helps elite consolidation of power. Institutionalist views of such actions take into account the inability of informal institutions to fulfil their role, preventing the media to carry out the democratic role.

Pakistan has a low index of press freedom, and journalists are threatened, monitored, or even restricted by law. Such difficulties do not halt independent journalists, bloggers, and civil society media houses that continue to reveal corruption, foster transparency, and educate people. The autonomy of the press and self-expression is the key to the development of the institutional trust and the maintenance of participatory democracy.

The free and an independent media brings about accountability, transparency, and civic participation, which are required to a stable democracy. Manipulation of the media, censorship, and influence of the elites causes confusion and mistrust and polarization of the political system, undermining the democracy process. Media independence, curbing misinformation and journalistic integrity are essential measures that would help in enhancing democracy in Pakistan.

Pakistan Economic Performance and Stability Democratic

The stability of the democratic situation in Pakistan has been constantly linked with the economic performance. This has been proved across time as economic growth or decline have impacted directly on the trust that people have in political institutions, voter

turnout and government legitimacy. The history of civilian regimes and military takeovers of the country shows that the connection between economic performance and democratic stability is delicate. This analysis examines how economic conditions influence democratic stability in Pakistan using the data on past elections, institutional assessments as well as the socio-economic trends.

Case Study 1: General Elections, 2008

In 2008, Pakistan reverted to civilian rules following almost 10 years of military rule in the country. That period was a period of stress on the economy creating a high rate of inflation, increasing unemployment rates and the global financial crisis. Through these obstacles, the voter turnout was very high at 44 percent with an indication that people wanted democratic consolidation. Through the analysis, economic conditions were unfavorable as people were eager to participate because the institutional reform and reestablishing civilian government promised better prospects. The media were instrumental in bringing out corruption scandals and pushing towards judicial independence especially during the Lawyers Movement which took place in 2007- 2009. The case illustrates that economic distress is not always a failsafe in inhibiting democratic involvement, however, it can enhance popular unhappiness assuming the institutions are not proactive.

Case Study 2: General elections of 2013

As of 2013, moderate economic growth in Pakistan was recorded, yet the fundamental problems existed such as prevalent corruption, unequal income, and political insecurity. The voter turnout was high at 55 percent since 1970s. This implies that the performance of the economy is united with political interactions: the better the growth was, the more the media attention was paid, and the more people became interested in politics. Through investigative journalism, large-scale cases of corruption were uncovered placing pressure on political elites. Nevertheless, there were still income inequalities and inequalities between regions so that the marginalized groups in rural areas and conflict-prone areas like Baluchistan and FATA were still underrepresented. It has been analyzed that although positive economic outcomes have the potential to boost the democratization process, unequal resource allocation and poor governance might curtail the stabilizing factors of economic development (Muzaffar, et. al., 2024; Malik et. al., 2023)

Case Study 3: 2018 General elections

The 2018 elections can be viewed as an insight into how the youth and the digital media affect democracy in economic challenges. The situation in Pakistan caused frustration among the traditional political parties as more than 60 percent of the Pakistani population is under 30 years old, youth unemployment is high, inflation is high, and the austerity measures are implemented. The social media sites emerged as potent agents of young voters mobilization and dissemination of political stories. Nevertheless, there was also misinformation, political polarization and elite-driven propaganda on those platforms. The turnout dropped to 51% slightly, which means that new types of civic activities were implemented, although economic insecurity and mistrust in the institutions limited the participation. The case identifies the duality of the media as a facilitator of civic engagement, as well as a possible source of democratic instability in combination with economic pressure.

Case Study: Baluchistan and FATA Region

The marginalization of the economic components of the Pakistani peripheral areas is a poignant picture of how disparate economic development weakens the democratic stability. Baluchistan and FATA have traditionally been characterized by low level of investment, development of infrastructures, and access of educational and health facilities. This is economic marginalization that is manifested through low voter turnout, massive disenfranchisement, and vulnerability to warfare and militancy. A review of these regions reveals that correction of the poor performance of the economy is not enough and an institutional reform, civic engagement initiatives and specific socio-economic development are necessary to promote democratic consolidation in the marginalized regions.

Governance and Institutional Performance

Institutions mediate between the effect of economic performance and democracy. The effectiveness of parliament, independence of the judiciary, and efficiency in the bureaucracy is a determinant of whether economic benefits result into trust and democratic legitimacy of the people. Institutional failures, selective accountability and elite capture in Pakistan have in the past undermined the stabilizing impacts of economic growth. As an example, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which is usually accused of politically-oriented activities, diminishes the trust of people to governance. An efficient institutional framework must then be made transparent in order to transform the economic performance into sustainable democratic stability.

Media and Public Perception

Freedom of media and access to information plays a major role in the impact that the economic outcomes have on democratic legitimacy. Through a free media, corruption can be detected during times of economic pressure, citizens can be empowered to make decisions, and fair distribution of resources encouraged. On the other hand, the lack of freedom of speech, propaganda, and the manipulation of media contents to support political agendas only increase people's mistrust. The media reporting of corruption scandals, electioneering, and economic policies according to case studies directly impacted on voter turnout and the perception of democratic efficacy. Even though social media increases civic engagement, it also poses the danger of misinformation propagation that undermines institutional confidence in the periods of economic recession.

The Democratic Participation and Socioeconomic Inequality

The factors that are paramount in the correlation of economic performance and democratic stability are income inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Underprivileged groups usually feel disenfranchised by the political process, and the turnout at the ballots is lower, making the civic engagement less significant. Participation gaps are also enhanced by gender differences especially in rural and conservative regions. It has been analyzed that economic reforms which do not solve the inequality or the social inclusion can contribute to the increase of the democratic fragility unintentionally. Policies which are grounded in bringing economic development along with fair allocation of resources, education, and workplaces would be more likely to enhance democratic institutions and public trust.

Civil-Military Relations and Economic Impact

The history of Pakistan illustrates that the relationship between civil-military relations and economic performance determines democracy. Military interventions are usually involved in the era of alleged mismanagement or instability on the economic grounds, which means that the level of economic performance determines the choices of the elite members on the topic of democratic continuity. The issue of military control in economic planning, distribution of resources and control over media makes the correlation between economic performance and democratic stability even more challenging. Seeing 2008, 2013, and 2018 elections, it is possible to note that economic performance is better and less military intervention contributes to the growth of democratic engagement and that such a factor as economic crisis and military dominance make the politics more volatile.

On the whole, the discussion shows that there is a definite correlation between the economic performance and the democratic stability in Pakistan. Effective economic performance has the capacity to boost citizen participation, civil trust and organizational honesty. This is however subject to proper governance, free media, fair socio-economic policies and equal civil-military relations. Case studies indicate that economic distresses exert greater susceptibilities to democracies in regions where institutions do not address the situation properly, and the adverse effects are adjusted by media liberty as well as civic participation. These regional inequalities indicate that special development intervention measures are necessary so that the economic development can help everyone in the society to create an inclusive democratic stability.

Conclusion

Democratic stability in Pakistan is similarly as well as a result of economic performance. The association between economic performance and democratic consolidation is intermediated by institutional weakness, elite manipulation and socio-economic inequalities. Enhancing governance, increasing media freedom, inequality, and including the region are critical policies towards exploiting economic performance to maintain democracy. Empirical data on case studies conducted in 2008, 2013, 2018 elections and in marginalized areas such as Baluchistan and FATA can confirm the importance of integrated economic and institutional reforms as the main means of consolidating the democratic stability in Pakistan.

This paper focus on the relationship between economic performance and democratic stability in Pakistan and the way that the macroeconomic situation, the quality of governance, and the level of institutional trust influence the democratic resilience. Based on historical examples, the 2008, 2013 and 2018 general elections case studies and regional analysis of.

The research indicates the complicated interconnection between political stability and economic outcomes in Baluchistan and FATA. The evidence shows that the high economic growth rates, media freedom, and good governance contribute to the increase of the number of people taking up their role, the legitimacy of institutions, and the resilience of democracy. On the other hand, economic crises, inequality in income, and unemployment contribute to the problems of dissatisfaction among people, undermining the confidence in institutions, and making it more vulnerable to political instability and military conflicts. The paper also highlights the mediation effect of civil-military relationship, capture of the elite, and media in determining the outcome of democracies. Regional inequalities depict that inclusive development is essential in maintaining democratic consolidation in the varied socio-economic settings. Combining both institutionalise theory and economic and socio-political analysis, the present research indicates that the formal institutions are not the only determinants of democratic stability

in Pakistan, but also the correspondence of the economic performance, the effectiveness of the governance, the autonomy of the media and the active participation of the masses. The results offer policy implications to enhance democracy by ensuring equal economic development as well as institutional changes.

Recommendations

- Citing what is available through literature review, data analysis of questionnaire and the achievement test the following suggestions are recommended to improve the role of media to create the political awareness;
- Strengthen the autonomy, capacity and performance of the parliament, the election commission and bodies of accountability in order to guarantee live checks and balances in governance.
- Instantialize mechanisms which constrain military intrusion into civilian activities through strengthening the democratic control of national security and policymaking procedures.
- Shield judiciary from political intrusion by establishment of open procurement, tenure security and accountability mechanisms to earn public confidence in the rule of law.
- Enhance the level of transparency in elections, empower the role of Election Commission and embrace the use of technology to conduct free, fair, credible elections.
- Establish severe anti-corruption regulations and destroy patronage-based political mandates that are detrimental to institutional integrity, and representation.
- Promote civic education with a particular emphasis on youth, and increase opportunities of the citizen for discussion of policy issues and local government.

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