

## Governance Crisis In Pakistan: Genesis And Solutions



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**Abstract:** *Good governance performs an inevitable role in the smooth functioning of a state by ameliorating the livelihood standards of its citizens. Unfortunately, since its inception, governance has been a persistent challenge for Pakistan raising the question of whether the nation is inherently ungovernable. The military's intervention in the democratic process, incompetent political leadership, institutional decay, economic deprivation, corruption, lack of accountability, and absence of rule of law have manifested the trajectory of the democratic country as a crisis-ridden state incapable of good governance. This research paper involves both qualitative and quantitative research methods and discloses the perplexities of the governance crisis, underlying the historical, socioeconomic and political causes while illuminating the solution by offering stability and an efficiency-oriented approach to the problem*

**Key Words:** Governance, Political Instability, Transparency

### Introduction

The founders of Pakistan strived and sacrificed their lives for an independent country where everyone would be provided with a secure and prospering environment in which they could perform their political, social, economic and religious activities free from subjugation by any alien authority. The speeches and mantras of political leadership were a testament to the development of a people-oriented state structure. However, since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has faced a perpetual crisis of governance while encountering political chaos, institutional upheaval, social disintegration and economic demise through foreign hands. It was predestined that the lack of good governance paralyzed Pakistan from becoming a global economic actor with a problems-ridden society enduring the agony of terrorism, corruption, and a never-ending political crisis. Professor Rasul Bakhsh in his

book mentioned that ‘since long many problems in Pakistan remained unaddressed such as terrorism, extremism, inequality, and poverty. These unresolved issues have negatively affected the development process’ (Rais, 2017).

### Genesis of Bad Governance in Pakistan

What would be the future of a country which took nine long years to draft the very first constitution? The tragic story of political upheaval trembled the foundations of the fledgling democracy. In 1958, the first constitution was abrogated through a nightmare of martial law imposed by Iskandar Mirza. Since then political instability became a permanent characteristic of Pakistani politics. After completing the initial years of independence, military rule was imposed by Ayub and then Yahya Khan without any necessity. It was the first time in history that the

"doctrine of necessity" was instigated to legitimize an apolitical regime. The Dismemberment of East Pakistan in 1971 was the culmination of bad governance perpetuated by a powerful elite who were involved in a power struggle. After a peaceful civilian regime till 1977, the country was stabbed with another *coup d'état*. The first consensus-based constitution of 1973 was abrogated, the National Assembly was dissolved in 1985 and Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo was sacked. After Zia ul Haq's demise, civilian leadership tried to restore democracy but the political elite became at loggerheads for conquering the helms of affairs. From 1999 to 2008, the country remained under the dictatorship. Afterwards, there was no direct military involvement but still political leadership of the country remained reluctant to fulfill the dream of good governance in Pakistan. All this chaos and power gamble turned Pakistan into a crisis-ridden state with a stumbling economy and a society on the brink of civil war. After 75 years of independence, Pakistan is still suffering from maternal problems. But the reality of cultural development, economic growth, and social progress is yet to be realized.

## **Causes of Deteriorating Governance**

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### **Political Conundrum**

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Military coups led to interrupted changes in government, weak democratic institutions and political victimization engendered perpetual political flux in Pakistan. Prevented the continuity of policy making and its implementation damaging the stable governance framework. Political instability is one of the major causes behind socio-economic and political upheaval in Pakistan. The political elite of the country tries every possible way often apolitical in nature to topple the government. This undemocratic opposition precludes the development of political consensus on major national issues. Ishrat Hussain describes in his book that, the accumulation of power in the hands of the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers has resulted in over-centralization and hindered

the accountability process (Hussain, [2018](#)). Efficient management of the country is the duty of leadership. However, with an unstable circumstance of the state and unfulfilled commitment of the state, governance becomes a problem rather than a solution. Moreover, a system of kinship and patronage along with the exercise of discretionary powers of the executive benefits only a small group of powerful elite hegemonies' the interests of civil society. This system of governance leads to corruption in the institutions and affects their policy implementation capacity.

## **Institutional Weaknesses**

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According to the World Bank, Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced—the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. Institutional decay has plagued the governance system in Pakistan. The internal and external challenges inherited from separation have deep imprints on the institutional development of the state. The perception of threat hindered the growth of political institutions. Not even a single Prime Minister in history has fulfilled the tenure. Those who served largely worked for the representation of a specific dynasty and tried to concentrate power in the hands of a few. The chief executive in Pakistan more or less serves as the titular head of the government with the power to exercise nominal powers. The key policy decisions related to foreign policy, internal security, and the economy are taken by the powerful military.

There is a prevailing trust deficit in the public for Parliament to be considered a rigged institution. The election engineering and horse-trading are the characteristics of elector politics in Pakistan. In most cases, neither party enjoys a 2/3 majority resulting in a hung parliament. The premature government-making depends upon the support of the

powerful military. A rigged parliament does not possess the respect of its representatives. Hence political leadership use this platform to enhance and abuse the public mandate for personal point scoring. The legislature used to pass laws in favour of the incumbent government. If the role of the parliament is ambiguous then how the election commission can function smoothly? This malfunctioning of the legislature is a direct challenge to the credibility of the electoral process in Pakistan (Najam, 2022).

Saeed Shafqat elaborated that there are two categories of elite. The group of elite who are selected through merit, excellence, and achievement enjoys power and prestige on the basis of their competence (Shafqat, 1999). The same is the case with Pakistan where a small group of the bureaucratic elite was selected through competitive exams, a system of administration established by the British to control the large swathes of population. This group of public servants enjoy enormous power over the institutional administration of the state. Bureaucracy in its initial years made significant progress in efficiently governing the country. Later on, it turned into a henchman. Military dictators and even politicians use this institution to preserve their control over the general public. The exploitation of civil services led to distortion and inefficiency in the administrative institution and is seen to be a major avenue for corruption. Moreover, the institutionalized system for civil servant management and promotion is nonexistent in Pakistan. They can be transferred and posted with the aspirations of the pertinent minister without considering the specialization. Judicial activism in Pakistan has also barred the system of checks and balances to prevail. Instead of providing fair and timely justice to the citizens, the judiciary turned accomplices with the military and politicians to victimize and ouster the political rivals. The doctrine of necessity, writ of mandamus, quo warranto, and suo moto notices are the legacy of the judicial system where the discretionary power of the dictators was legitimized through Chief Justices. Thus, governance without properly

functioning institutions is merely a dream. There would be no purpose in formulating a policy when it is not going to be adopted comprehensively. Furthermore, inconsistent policy implementation results in maladministration and inefficient governance.

### Socio-economic Disparities

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An empirical study conducted by IMF in 2003, suggests interdependence between governance and economic growth. Pakistan was once ranked in the top economies of the developing countries now on the brink of default. The time and again toppling of political regimes, depiction of an economic crisis by the opposition, and disruption in policies have significantly crippled the economic structure of the country. The institutional implementation of the policies is based on long-term projects that are abandoned by successive regimes due to political rivalry with the predecessors, bringing more damage than good. The general public didn't benefit from these projects; however, the national exchequer witnessed heavy financial loss from these interrupted policies of every successive regime. The prevailing political instability, energy crisis, the resurgence of terrorism, the outflow of capital, and the perception of global recession at international are further exacerbating the economic crisis in the country.

According to a survey conducted by South Asia Economic Outlook. The growth rate of Pakistan is 1.9% as compared to India's 4.2 per cent, Bangladesh's 8.1 per cent, and war-ridden Afghanistan at 3.9 per cent. The IMF bailout packages for reducing the balance of payment crisis are overshadowed due to the year's long political instability. The derailment in the \$ 6.5 billion loan is further deteriorating the economic crisis. The \$4 billion foreign exchange reserves do not cater for the import bill of even one month. Now is the situation where citizens have no access to basic economic rights. Their trust in any government is eroded due to perpetual political instability. National and international corporations are shutting down their offices and plants due to

uncertainty creating fluctuations in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Since, 2018 there has been no progress on the projects initiated under the umbrella of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The continued balance crisis and the inability to capture deals of debt relief may lead Pakistan toward bankruptcy. (Malik, [2022](#)).

## **Security Concerns**

The governance of a state is intertwined with the security. The geopolitical prospect of Pakistan along with inherited external and internal challenges develop a perception of threat dominating the political landscape of the country. The current security challenges include Islamist movements and the rise of non-state actors, proliferation and nuclear deterrence, and relations with Afghanistan and India. However, the domestic challenges that are more severe in nature are economic decline, sectarian and ethnic disintegration, climatic change, maladroitness in resource management, and population explosion. The predominant role of the military as a commercial enterprise and incompetent civilian leadership turned Pakistan into a garrison state. Professor Ishtiaq Ahmed wrote in his book that there is an argument that if civilian institutions are not aligned with the polity then military establishment and bureaucracy would eventually dominate the system. In such a state of affairs, the military becomes apolitical and interferes with the working of civilian institutions (Ahmed, [2013](#)). The Kashmir issue is the core of external physical challenges faced by Pakistan. India's occupation of J&K and the recent imposition of Article 370 and 35(A) changing the status of the occupied territory closed almost all doors of dialogue between the two nations.

On the other hand, the root cause of most of the problems in Pakistan is corruption. It is pervasive not only in the form of bribery but at all levels of private, social, political, economic and public institutions. According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) Report 2022 issued by Transparency International, Pakistan ranks at 140<sup>th</sup> position out of 180

countries. According to Chief Executive Officer Daniel Eriksson Global peace has been deteriorating for the last 15 years and corruption is both the cause and result behind this. It undermines government efficiency and creates a trust deficit among the public. On the other hand, conflict in a state creates opportunities for corruption and sabotages government efforts to curb it (Eriksson, [2022](#)). Mostly in developing countries, corruption is a Frankenstein monster hindering the growth of civil society and the polity. It has also significant impacts on overall economic development. Public policies are derailed and funds are embezzled escalating poverty and illiteracy.

Another security challenge encompassing citizen's well-being to food security is climatic change. The monster facing Pakistan is the mother of many security challenges. Being one of the top vulnerable countries in the world, Pakistan shares 0.5 % of the climate control activities globally. The economic loss in recent floods is almost \$40 billion affecting around 30 million of the population. However, the country still lacks the potential and ability to fight the natural disaster. Anatol Lieven in his book *Pakistan A Hard Country* signified the climatic environment of Pakistan and stated that if ecological disasters continue on the previous scale, then they will eventually destroy Pakistan as a society and state (Lieven, [2011](#)).

The relationship between the state and society is determined by the rule of law. It is a prerequisite under which both are kept accountable to the legal machinery of a country. Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations described that the 'rule of law is publicly promulgated, independently adjudicated, equally enforced, and which is consistent with the international norms and standards of the human rights'. Rule of law is one of the basic differences between developing and developed countries which is the basic requirement for the development of political and socioeconomic development of a country. Due to its conflict-ridden society, numerous laws, and authoritarian regimes,

Pakistan has witnessed the lack or inequitable implementation of the rule of law. The law of the land works only for the poor while other classes seem to be alien or immune from its clutches. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan suggests for rule of law in Article (4) (5) and provides for the protection of fundamental rights in Article (8) (28); however, there exists no equality in accessibility and implementation. As Chief Justice Athar Minallah has categorically said, "There's no rule law here, but the rule of the elite."

## Potential Solutions

The only accessible way available for growth and prosperity is through reforming the governing system of Pakistan. The first and foremost task of the stakeholders is to bring back political stability which has been derailed in the last few years due to the power gamble between the political elite and institutions. Actions are required to re-establish substantive democracy and a legitimately coherent state. The prevailing chasm between jolting institutions and the polarized public must be diminished to eliminate the sense of mistrust, uncertainty, and insecurity. Good governance is a contract between state and citizens achieved through a stable democratic setup, the supremacy of the rule of law, the equitable justice system, transparency and accountability across the board, and proper utilization of resources among all segments of the society

I. A decentralized democratic setup guarantees institutional capacity building. It requires a system in which power is kept distributed among all tiers of the government rather than a head of state or government. When all administrative and financial powers are distributed among people with supplementary grants in the budget there would be less chance of monopoly over authority and financial embezzlement. The coordination between administrative institutions and policymakers may expand the scale of better governance. Most of the

developed countries in the world like the USA and the UK, have established a system of checks and balances in which every state institution works independently without any interference. Pakistan also has a hierarchy of management systems which is divided into three tiers: federal, provincial, and local government. The coordination among all three subjects of government is inevitable in order to dispense good governance among its citizens.

II. Article 19A reads as: "Right to Information: Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law." The inadequacy of information pertaining to the formulation and implementation of public policies leads to poor policy decisions that have terrible effects on the governance system. The publication of the government policies is the fundamental right of citizens. Thus, free media can safeguard the interest of people through perception building about bureaucratic management, check for key policy decisions, and ensure accountability of the state machinery. The role of media is insignificant in raising awareness among the masses.

III. Now it's time for Pakistan to send to Coventry the old colonial civil services system which hegemonies small groups over the state's management system. In the modern era, a bureaucratic setup is required in which civil servants are specialized in their respective departments. The right for the right job is necessary for reforming and re-orienting the entire bureaucracy infrastructure. Their main task should be to serve the people of the country not to affiliate with any political party or to rule the public. In order to ascribe the impartial foundations for civil servants; their allocation, transfer, and posting

should be on merit. The uplift of academic standards is necessary to promote human capital with intellectual calibre, integrity, and honesty. Good governance upholding effective public service delivery is inexorable without a modernized bureaucratic system. The use of innovative technologies for public reach is the need of the hour; moreover, it would help to gauge the extent of policy implementation and performance delivery of the civil servants.

- IV. The available evidence recommends the relationship between economic prosperity and good governance. Success is possible only when state institutions create opportunities for all citizens to invest in the future (Hussain, [2017](#)). The key indicators of economic governance are Gross Domestic Product (GDP), current account deficit, inflation rate, and government expenditure on health and education with the GDP ratio. It is due to economic governance that good living standards of the citizens could be maintained by giving them access to the market at reasonable prices. In order to improve the economic governance in Pakistan, an uninterrupted long-term charter of the economy is required among all political parties and institutions. The institutional capacity is significant for delivering public services and sustaining economic growth and macroeconomic stability. Moreover, retrieving energy shortages, countering terrorism, holding the brain drain of capital, and political stability with a great consensus is insignificant to bringing back the economy from the verge of default and bankruptcy.
- V. Accountability and transparency are the backbone of good governance. According to the OECD (2019), there are five characteristics of quality governance: rule of law, transparency, accountability, participation, and

impartiality (Rafique, [2023](#)). Pakistan is suffering from a menace of rampant corruption that discourages foreign investment and creates a trust deficit among domestic and international stakeholders. It also exacerbates socio-economic disparity and poverty. Lack of citizen participation in policy matters and political victimization in the name of accountability are the stumbling blocks in the governing system of Pakistan. David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz in their book *Deceit and Denial* wrote, 'access to information is the component of a democracy so that an informed decision about the lives of citizens could be made (Markowitz & Rosner, [2013](#)). Pakistan was one of the first countries in South Asia to enact the Right to Information law but its implementation is imperceptible. The fundamental objective of this law was to make public officials accountable for their performance and actions so that people have the power to assess the working of state apparatus. At present, there exist RTI laws on five levels in Pakistan: one federal and four provincial. Effective implementation of the laws would help citizens to get information from all public bodies. The role of media is crucial in this aspect. It is the duty of Pakistan's electronic media to make the public aware of government policies and their right implementation. Instead of becoming a political agent, they must play their role as a neutral pillar of state discarding all personal prejudices and PR indicators. All content that is broadcasted and delivered by media helps to establish public opinion regarding the functioning of the state.

- VI. Last but not the least. In order to combat the prevailing challenges, Pakistan has to fight a long-term battle on various fronts. To improve the governance system and lives of citizens there is a dire need for a strong rule of law. Accountability should be held across the board regardless of any political

dynasty or social status. Everyone should have access to the justice system providing a framework for equality, fairness and speedy justice. The resilience to implement the rule of law would exterminate the vicious cycle of crimes, rampant corruption, and violence in the country. It's time for Pakistan to establish a legal system that holds accountable the culprits without considering their clan, caste, and creed.

## **Conclusion**

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Pakistan's governance crisis is deeply embedded in the mal-administration of the state institutions and the cost of this upheaval is being paid by Pakistani citizens. The study highlights the remedy for this ongoing mayhem and prescribes strong institutions, public participation, and transparency across the board. With good governance, Pakistan has the potential to become democratically stable and economically prosperous in order to become a global stakeholder.

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