



REGIME CHANGE IN PAKISTAN: THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF 2022 AND ITS
IMPACT

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Abstract

The political crisis in Pakistan in 2022, which culminated in the removal of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote, significantly impacted the country's political dynamics, governance, and democratic integrity. This research paper examines the causes, events, and consequences of the crisis, focusing on its implications for Pakistan's democracy and political stability. The paper explores how the political upheaval, fueled by allegations of foreign interference and internal power struggles, deepened political polarization and eroded public trust in democratic institutions. It also highlights the role of Pakistan's military, whose indirect influence over civilian governments raised concerns about the true autonomy of elected leaders. The economic repercussions of the crisis, including the inability of the new government to address ongoing financial and social issues, further destabilized the country. Moreover, the political paralysis resulting from fierce party rivalries and protests hindered the government's ability to implement reforms. The paper concludes that the 2022 political crisis exposed the fragility of Pakistan's democratic system and governance structures. It argues that for Pakistan to move forward, comprehensive political reforms are essential to strengthen democratic institutions, ensure civilian control, and restore public confidence in the political process.

Keywords: Regime Change, Democracy, Pakistan, Political Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

In its 75 years of history, Pakistan has seen numerous changes in government. The most recent shift occurred on April 3, 2022, when the Parliament ousted a sitting prime minister for the first time ever through a vote of no confidence. Pakistan faced another major political crisis on April 3, 2022, when a vote of no confidence was scheduled to remove the Prime Minister from office. However, the Speaker of the Parliament blocked the motion, claiming that the U.S. was plotting against Pakistan in retaliation for refusing their illegal request for army bases to carry out strikes in Afghanistan. In response, Imran Khan proposed to the President that the National Assembly be dissolved and new elections be held as a political maneuver. In a suo-motu case, the Supreme Court of Pakistan intervened and took up the issue. A five-member bench ruled that the actions of the previous administration were illegal and ordered the National Assembly to proceed with the no-confidence motion. This led to the dismissal of Prime Minister Imran Khan from office (Mirza, S, & Kumar, 2023) . Many academics warned that the political upheaval could have serious economic consequences for the country's population. The ongoing financial struggles of the public further highlighted the opposition's narrative of a deteriorating economy and the PTI's failure to deliver on its promises. To address the economic challenges, Pakistan's adherence to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) guidelines became crucial, as the country sought financial support from the IMF to stabilize its economy. The PML-N's popularity declined due to their failure to restore stability in the country, while Imran Khan took to the streets, rallying behind his narrative of a foreign conspiracy. The former prime minister, in his criticism of the alleged external plot that led to the removal of his government, accused the Pakistani establishment of failing to recognize the damage this political shift would cause. He targeted the incumbent government and the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), lamenting that handing power to these corrupt politicians would severely harm Pakistan's economy and international reputation. Imran Khan believed that the "neutrals," who were unaware of the looming threat to Pakistan, would also suffer if the country's economic situation deteriorated. He eventually expressed the view that, after 13 months of the PDM government's failure, both the country's military and political leaders had come to realize the grave mistake they made in ousting him from office (Ghauri, Khan, & Ahmed, 2023).

POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN PAKISTAN AFTER REGIME CHANGE

Political divisiveness in Pakistan deepened following the 2022 regime change, which saw Shehbaz Sharif replace Imran Khan as Prime Minister after his removal through a no-confidence motion. This shift not only intensified the political discourse but also affected the public's attitudes toward their government, institutions, and broader social issues, further fueling the polarization in the country. After his ousting, Imran Khan ramped up his criticism of the establishment, accusing it of interfering in politics—an especially sensitive issue in Pakistan's history. His anti-establishment rhetoric resonated with many, particularly the youth, and deepened the divide between pro- and anti-establishment factions. Social media became a battleground for political narratives, with both opposition parties and PTI supporters launching campaigns (Mufti, 2023) . Amidst widespread misinformation, political polarization became increasingly evident, with digital campaigns amplifying complaints and criticism to such an extent that online polarization became a significant force in shaping public opinion. The divisions in Pakistan were further deepened by the country's economic crisis, rising inflation, and the need for an IMF bailout. The ruling coalition accused the PTI of mismanaging the economy during its five-year tenure, while PTI supporters countered, blaming the coalition government for its mishandling of economic affairs. This blame game only fueled public mistrust and deepened the existing divisions, further exacerbating the sense of polarization and dissatisfaction among the people. No Pakistani president has ever served a full five-year term, either due to assassination or through presidential decree under the Eighth Amendment. For the first time in the country's history, a vote of no confidence was used to bring about a change in government. While this

process was legal, former Prime Minister Imran Khan claimed that foreign powers were interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs (Afzal, 2023).

It is understandable why the regime transition in Pakistan was so significant, as well as the conditions that contributed to the domestic crisis worsening even after Imran Khan's ousting. Pakistan has experienced several unconstitutional regime changes in its history, but Imran Khan's allegations of a U.S.-backed conspiracy, involving collaboration from opposition leadership, remain highly debatable. According to Khan, the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S. was allegedly threatened by Donald Lu, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, who reportedly suggested that there would be consequences if the Prime Minister survived the no-confidence vote in the National Assembly. Khan's claims of a foreign conspiracy were dismissed by the opposition, and the Director-General of Inter-Services Public Relations stated that there was no evidence to support the allegation. With Khan now ousted by a coalition government consisting of around a dozen political groups, it's time to objectively assess how this regime transition has contributed to Pakistan's ongoing political and economic challenges. The current administration rejects accusations regarding the crises that followed, arguing that Pakistan is far removed from the corrupt, vengeful, and ineffective PTI rule (Mirza & Lodhi, 2024). However, the situation is more complex. The country is facing significant economic turmoil, and the political climate has only been worsened by the shift in government. The majority of people argued that, in addition to the rise in gas and electricity prices, the incumbent government's decision to significantly increase fuel prices two months ago marked a troubling first in the country's history. They warned that if this situation persists, middle- and lower-income groups will be severely impacted, potentially wiped out by the ongoing economic challenges. The public also strongly criticized the taxes introduced in the federal budget for 2022–2023, seeing them as an attempt to prevent Pakistan from defaulting and facing an economic disaster, but one that further burdened the average citizen. Despite Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's claims of taking steps to reduce wasteful government spending, imports have not yet decreased. In fact, he hosted an extravagant dinner for the leadership of allied parties at the Prime Minister House, which has raised questions among the public. At a time when the people are struggling with economic difficulties, this move highlights the ruling elites' double standards and further fuels frustration over their perceived disconnect from the realities faced by ordinary citizens. However, imports have yet to decrease. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif hosted an extravagant dinner for the leadership of allied parties at the Prime Minister House, despite his claims of taking steps to reduce wasteful government spending. At a time when the public is questioning these actions, this move exposes the ruling elites' double standards and their apparent disconnect from the struggles of ordinary citizens (Gul, Bahadar, & Taj, 2022).

Imran Khan had warned before the vote against him that he would pose an even greater threat to the opposition once he was removed from office. With the public already disillusioned with the current government, the PML-N now faces significant challenges. Simply blaming the previous PTI administration won't absolve the PML-N from accountability for its failure to address the ongoing economic crisis. During his bye-election rallies in Lahore, Imran Khan targeted individuals who, in his view, had "compromised the sovereignty of the country by siding with the U.S. over the regime change conspiracy," intensifying the political divide. By appealing to people's emotions, Imran Khan has gained significant popularity. However, during his time in office, he was also unable to escape accusations of inefficiency, corruption, nepotism, targeting political opponents, vindictiveness, ego-centric behavior, arrogance, and disrespect towards others. This has called into question both the fragility and legitimacy of civilian administrations in Pakistan. Khan's narrative suggests that domestic factors played a role in supporting a foreign plot, which led to the no-confidence vote. For decades, Pakistan has experienced recurring political, economic, and social crises, largely due to the constraints placed on democracy and the instability that has followed. For the welfare of the nation and its citizens, this situation is

catastrophic (Hassan, Khan , & Khalid, 2024). It's unrealistic to expect Pakistan to experience a "turnaround" under a government that has failed to strengthen the economy, ensure effective governance, or improve the standard of living for the majority. Instead, the current administration has only exacerbated the economic crisis, pushing Pakistan's 220 million citizens further into hardship.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

Imran Khan led a coalition government under the PTI after the August 2018 general elections, raising hopes for administrative and economic reforms. As a former cricket star and philanthropist, Khan took power at a time when Pakistan was already grappling with multiple national crises. These challenges were further compounded by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global economic downturn, one of the worst since the Great Depression and World War II, severely affected economies worldwide. Pakistan, a developing nation already dealing with financial struggles, was hit particularly hard. However, the country managed to navigate through these tumultuous times thanks to swift and well-planned government actions. To mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, the PTI administration introduced a range of economic policies throughout its tenure. These policies were largely revenue-driven, incorporating anti-corruption measures, and aimed at creating opportunities for alternative resource mobilization. Recognizing the need for external support, Pakistan signed a \$6 billion Extended Financing Facility (EFF) agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in July 2019 (Ali, Naeem, Ahmed, & Iftikhar , 2023). However, the disruptions caused by COVID-19 led to delays in the proposed fiscal program, particularly in terms of structural reforms. Despite these efforts, significant progress on key structural changes has been slow, especially in areas such as tax system reform and the privatization of both the public and private sectors. One of the most significant challenges Pakistan faced during the pandemic was financial in nature. To overcome this obstacle, Pakistan began leveraging foreign markets starting in March 2021 to bolster corporate operations. While many expected the economy to collapse due to the pandemic's effects, the government's strategic decisions helped strengthen the economy instead. This is reflected in the 5.6% GDP growth during 2020-21, which was much higher than anticipated at the time. A key initiative by the government was the creation of a flexible exchange rate system, which allowed for adjustments in currency valuation to help stabilize the economy (Hussain & Zaman , 2024). It is noteworthy that Pakistan's economy is currently facing more severe financial challenges than it did during the pandemic, despite performing better at that time. While the government has seemingly adopted an open policy for foreign direct investment (FDI), Pakistan remains a difficult target for investors. In 2022, the inflation rate soared, reaching over 12%, making it increasingly difficult for businesses and the general population to maintain their financial standards. This has further exacerbated the country's already fragile economic situation, deepening the challenges faced by both the business community and everyday Pakistanis.

Despite some improvements in recent years, security concerns continue to be a significant deterrent for investors. Issues such as a lengthy dispute resolution process, inconsistent tax laws, weak enforcement of intellectual property rights, and geographical challenges have further complicated the investment climate. As a result, Pakistan lagged behind other emerging nations in attracting foreign investment in 2021, with foreign direct investment (FDI) dropping by 8.9% compared to the previous fiscal year. To make matters worse, the severe floods in 2022 caused widespread economic and infrastructure damage, further intensifying the financial crisis and complicating the country's path to recovery. The PTI administration introduced several policy changes focused on energy and environmental sustainability in response to the growing climate crisis. In 2021, Pakistan updated its National Wildlife Conservation Policy and National Climate Change Policy, addressing issues such as water conservation, agriculture, forest management, biodiversity protection, and other environmental challenges. To further promote sustainability, Pakistan unveiled the 'Electric Vehicle Policy 2020-2025' and the 'National Energy Plan 2020-

2023,' which aimed to advance electric vehicles—particularly two- and three-wheelers—and expand the use of renewable energy sources. These policies highlight Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change and its commitment to the global sustainability framework, recognizing the urgent need for action to mitigate environmental risks (Hassan, Khan, & Khalid, 2024). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) remains a central pillar of Pakistan's foreign direct investment strategy, with China expected to be the largest investor in 2021. However, it is anticipated that investment under the CPEC may proceed slowly and face restrictions, particularly those limiting migration to Pakistan. There is also concern that funding may continue to favor Chinese businesses through licenses, while essential infrastructure projects could face delays or reduced support. Meanwhile, the United States remains a significant source of foreign direct investment in Pakistan. U.S. businesses have been investing across a range of industries, including clean energy, consumer products, retail, financial services, franchising, and information and communication technology. American businesses in Pakistan are supported by organizations such as the American Chamber of Commerce in Lahore and the American Business Council in Karachi, which play key roles in fostering business ties and providing support for American investments in the country (Khan, 2024).

Additionally, the 2003 US-Pakistan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) has been an important tool in fostering bilateral economic ties and addressing trade and investment issues between the two countries. Under the PTI administration, efforts were made to maintain stability in Pakistan's stock market. Although the stock market fluctuated alongside global markets during the pandemic, it showed a steady upward trajectory until 2020, reflecting investor confidence in the country's economic projections and hopes for recovery. Despite the challenging international climate, the rising activity in the stock market has been a key indicator of Pakistan's economic resilience, signaling optimism about the nation's ability to recover and navigate through global economic turbulence. Despite these efforts, Pakistan's economic prospects continue to be influenced by a variety of domestic and foreign factors (Zazai & Rahmani, 2024). Political instability is becoming increasingly apparent, with shifting coalitions and internal disputes within the government undermining investor confidence and policy continuity. As opposition parties began raising concerns about the administration's handling of the economy towards the end of the PTI's tenure, the political climate grew more challenging. This volatility further jeopardizes the prospects for economic growth, causing both international investors and local businesses to feel uncertain. The PTI-led administration has been working tirelessly to navigate Pakistan through an unprecedented period of domestic and international challenges, aiming to stabilize the economy amid these mounting difficulties. The PTI administration's economic policies, particularly those related to revenue collection, exchange rate stabilization, and environmental sustainability, produced several positive outcomes, including the growth of the national GDP during the crisis and increased stock market activity. However, broad-based economic progress has been hindered by persistent challenges such as inflation, widening current account deficits, political instability, and delays in implementing structural reforms (George, 2023). These issues were further exacerbated by the devastating floods, which underscored the urgent need for more infrastructure investment and stronger economic policies. To build a resilient economy capable of withstanding future shocks, it is clear that a more comprehensive and forward-thinking approach is necessary.

CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS IN PAKISTAN 2022- 2023 AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Pakistan's history is marked by numerous constitutional crises that have significantly influenced the nation's political landscape. The judiciary's role in interpreting the constitution and legitimizing martial laws has sometimes blurred the separation of powers between state institutions. Political disputes that result in court cases have often further eroded the stability of the government. Recently, significant political unrest has occurred, particularly in 2022 and 2023,

largely due to challenges arising from changes in administration and the judiciary's perceived influence on the political environment. The situation was further complicated after former Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Russia, as the volatility of the Ukraine conflict spilled over into early 2022, contributing to heightened political instability in Pakistan. The Supreme Court ruled that the government's attempts to dissolve the National Assembly before the vote of no confidence were illegal (Talbot, 2024). As a result, Imran Khan was ousted through a no-confidence resolution backed by the opposition, and Shehbaz Sharif was appointed as prime minister. In response, Khan's party, PTI, called for early elections and all its members resigned from the National Assembly. The political crisis then spread to the provincial assemblies, with significant developments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Punjab. Usman Buzdar, the chief minister of Punjab, resigned, and his replacement was elected in a controversial manner. After a shift in favor of PTI following a successful by-election in July 2022, Hamza Shahbaz briefly served as Chief Minister of Punjab before Pervaiz Elahi took over. A similar sense of political instability also gripped Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), with populism and divisions deepening across the country. The PTI capitalized on these tensions to gain political leverage, particularly after the attempt on Imran Khan's life at a political gathering (Arshad, 2024). This incident further fueled the narrative of political victimization and bolstered PTI's rhetoric, playing a significant role in stirring emotions and intensifying the already polarized political environment.

In the early months of 2023, the PTI called for new elections and dissolved the provincial assemblies of Punjab and KPK. However, the Election Commission of Pakistan raised objections to the Supreme Court's directive for a general election, citing concerns over budget and security. During this period, Imran Khan faced numerous legal challenges, leading to several arrests that triggered large-scale protests. On May 9, 2023, Khan's arrest sparked violent demonstrations, including disturbances at military facilities. He was later detained again on a separate corruption charge after the Supreme Court ruled that his initial arrest had been unlawful. Meanwhile, the general elections, which were initially scheduled for February 2024, have been delayed multiple times. During this period, the judiciary's interventions were pivotal in addressing constitutional disputes and electoral challenges. For example, the Supreme Court declared Imran Khan's dissolution of the National Assembly illegal, reinstated the legislature, and ensured the continuity of democratic processes (Abbas, 2023). The judiciary also focused on resolving issues related to provincial governments and the timing of elections. While these actions reinforced constitutional principles, they also sparked debates about impartiality and the potential for judicial overreach. In this way, the judiciary has played a complex and influential role in Pakistan's democratic evolution. The progress of Pakistan's democracy can be sustained. While the judiciary plays a crucial role in ensuring constitutional integrity and stabilizing governance, its political neutrality and independence remain key concerns. The decisions made by the courts set important legal precedents and significantly influence the political landscape of the country. For example, the judiciary's rulings on the structure of governance, election schedules, and intra-party conflicts have not only clarified constitutional principles but also shaped the nation's political trajectory. Ultimately, the judiciary represents a vital stage in Pakistan's democratic evolution. However, for democracy to truly thrive, it requires the collaboration of the judiciary, political leaders, and citizens, all of whom must prioritize fairness, accountability, and transparency (Ismail, Mehdi, Ali, Gilani, & Ahmad, 984-992). It is through these collective efforts that the rule of law can be upheld, and strong democratic institutions can take root. By working together to uphold the rule of law and strengthen democratic institutions, Pakistan can overcome its challenges and move closer to its democratic goals. The judiciary plays a key role in balancing legal and political issues, ensuring that the core values of equality, justice, and constitutional integrity are upheld. The success in navigating these challenges will ultimately determine the democratic stability and progress of the country. It is through this delicate balance that Pakistan can achieve a more resilient and thriving democracy.

PAKISTAN JOURNALISTS THREAT AND MURDER OF ARSHAD SHARIF

Throughout Pakistan's history, the government has often struggled to complete its five-year mandate. In Pakistan, the establishment is seen as a dominant force that influences the country's decisions and uses the government to advance its own interests. The United States has historically played a significant role in shaping global politics, including influencing Pakistan's internal affairs. One notable instance of this influence occurred in 2022, when Prime Minister Imran Khan's government changed after he returned from a visit to Russia. The lack of a vote of confidence led to Khan's resignation, and Shehbaz Sharif was appointed as his successor. This shift in power was met with opposition from some journalists, who voiced their concerns over the political maneuvering and the influence of external forces. Journalists, particularly Arshad Sharif and Sami Ibrahim, voiced strong opposition to the regime change, raising questions about how external forces could interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs and alter the government. Both Sharif and Ibrahim were vocal in their criticism, highlighting concerns about the erosion of Pakistan's sovereignty and the role of foreign influence in shaping domestic politics (Noor & Nazir, 2023). Their stance reflected widespread frustration over the political dynamics and the perceived undermining of the democratic process. Pakistan witnessed a regime change that sparked widespread resistance, especially from a number of journalists who openly opposed the political shift. Among these outspoken critics were Sabir Shakir, Imran Riaz Khan, Shaheed Arshad Sharif, and Sami Ibrahim. These journalists condemned the actions of the establishment, which sought to consolidate its control and manipulate the political landscape. Despite facing mounting pressure and accusations, the journalists remained defiant, continuing to speak out against the coup. However, their bold stance came at a heavy cost. Many of these journalists endured severe harassment, with their families targeted and their homes raided. Some were subjected to extreme torture, forcing several to flee the country for their safety. The establishment responded by warning them against speaking out further, using both coercive tactics and intimidation to silence dissent. This period marked a dark chapter for press freedom in Pakistan, as the regime took drastic measures to stifle opposition and control the narrative surrounding the regime change. Journalist Arshad Sharif continued to educate the public and expose the influence of Pakistan's military establishment, despite the mounting pressure (Ghauri, Khan, & Ahmed, 2022). The establishment began targeting journalists, especially Sharif, by harassing his family and pressuring him to silence his voice. Eventually, due to these relentless actions, Sharif was forced to leave Pakistan. Tragically, he was brutally assassinated while in Kenya.

IMPACT ON PAKISTAN'S DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

The political crisis in Pakistan that unfolded in 2022 had profound consequences for the country's governance, exacerbating an already fragile economic situation. This crisis, initiated by the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote, laid bare deep-rooted issues within Pakistan's political and economic systems. While the crisis led to a change in leadership, the incoming Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government faced numerous challenges in addressing economic difficulties, political instability, and governance deficits. The aftermath of this political upheaval highlighted the fragility of Pakistan's democratic processes and raised questions about the future trajectory of its governance. At the heart of the crisis was Pakistan's struggling economy. By 2022, Pakistan had been grappling with persistent economic challenges, including high inflation, a growing debt burden, and an unsustainable trade deficit. The country's economy was already under pressure from these factors, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and rising global commodity prices (Aziz, Mumtaz, Butt, & Tariq, 2023). The political uncertainty that followed the removal of Imran Khan worsened the economic situation further. The political infighting and instability made it incredibly difficult for the new government to implement much-needed economic reforms. Pakistan's economy, which was already fragile, could not afford to be distracted by political unrest, but that was exactly what

happened. The failure of the political leadership to unite and resolve pressing economic issues led to a prolonged period of stagnation.

Inflation, which had already been a serious concern, soared to new heights as political instability stifled any coordinated efforts to address the economic crisis. Basic goods became unaffordable for large segments of the population, and the middle class saw its purchasing power diminish drastically. Pakistan's public sector was ill-equipped to manage this crisis, as political factions and opposing forces were focused on securing political victories rather than tackling the economic challenges facing the country. Energy shortages, one of the most critical issues in Pakistan's economic landscape, worsened during this period. Electricity outages became more frequent, affecting businesses, industries, and households alike. Energy supply disruptions were particularly harmful to the industrial sector, which relies on a steady power supply to function effectively. As a result, economic growth stagnated, and the unemployment rate increased, deepening the crisis. The governance challenges facing Pakistan were not solely due to economic difficulties; the role of the military also played a crucial part in the unfolding political crisis (Shah, Khan, & Afridi, 2023). Historically, the military in Pakistan has wielded significant influence over the political sphere, either through direct military coups or by exerting indirect control over civilian governments. The 2022 crisis once again illustrated this reality. Imran Khan had enjoyed a relatively cordial relationship with Pakistan's military leadership during the initial years of his tenure as prime minister, but by 2022, tensions between Khan and the military became increasingly evident. These tensions, along with Khan's allegations of foreign interference in the no-confidence vote that led to his ousting, suggested a complex interplay between Pakistan's civilian and military leadership. Although the military did not directly intervene to remove Khan from office, many observers speculated that its influence was instrumental in ensuring the success of the no-confidence motion. Imran Khan's rhetoric of a "foreign-backed conspiracy" further complicated the political landscape, as it painted the military's role in the crisis as a proxy for foreign powers. The perception that the military had tacitly supported the new PML-N-led government created an atmosphere of distrust and resentment among Khan's supporters, who believed that the military's involvement in political matters had undermined the democratic process. The military's involvement in civilian politics raised concerns about the independence of Pakistan's democratic institutions and about the extent to which these institutions could function autonomously from military influence (Hashmi, 2022). This fostered a sense of disillusionment among many Pakistanis, who saw their democracy being manipulated by powerful unelected institutions. The perception that the military had played a role in undermining civilian governance also raised questions about the future of democratic practices in Pakistan.

The political crisis of 2022 also threw into sharp relief the weaknesses and limitations of Pakistan's democratic system. Democracy in Pakistan has long been unstable, marked by frequent interruptions due to military coups, political infighting, and internal conflicts. The crisis of 2022 exemplified these systemic flaws. Although the no-confidence motion was a product of democratic processes, the ensuing political instability revealed how fragile these democratic processes truly were. The continued turnover of governments, combined with elite infighting, made it difficult for Pakistan to develop strong, stable democratic institutions capable of addressing the country's long-term challenges. The political elite, regardless of their party affiliation, appeared more focused on securing political power than on tackling critical issues such as poverty, education, and healthcare. As a result, democratic institutions struggled to gain the trust and confidence of the people. Another layer of complexity in the political crisis was the provincial governance system. Pakistan is a federation, and its provinces play a significant role in the overall governance of the country. The provinces, particularly Punjab, became battlegrounds for political control during the crisis. Punjab, the largest province in terms of population, has been a stronghold for the Sharif family, the leading political force within the PML-N. On the

other hand, Imran Khan's PTI had significant support in the province. The conflict between the PML-N and PTI in Punjab led to a power struggle that undermined governance at the provincial level. The competition for control in Punjab resulted in administrative paralysis, as both parties focused on securing political dominance rather than addressing the pressing needs of the people (Amjad & Shehzad, 2024). This provincial rivalry exacerbated governance challenges in Pakistan. With both federal and provincial governments locked in political conflict, coordination on policy issues became exceedingly difficult. Issues such as education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation—already pressing before the crisis—were pushed further down the agenda as political actors fought for control. The inability of political leaders to focus on governance and deliver basic services to citizens increased the sense of alienation among the population. For many, the political crisis of 2022 was not just about a change in leadership but about the failure of Pakistan's political system to improve their daily lives.

THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF THE POLITICAL CRISIS

The political crisis of 2022 in Pakistan, marked by the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote, has had far-reaching and long-term consequences that continue to shape the country's political, economic, and social landscape. While the immediate aftermath of the crisis saw a shift in leadership, its lingering effects have exposed deep flaws within Pakistan's democratic institutions and governance structures. The crisis not only intensified the country's political polarization but also exacerbated existing economic challenges, deepened the role of the military in civilian affairs, and raised serious questions about the future of democracy in Pakistan. These consequences are likely to reverberate for years, as the political system grapples with its inability to manage national crises effectively and the public grows increasingly disillusioned with the political elite. In examining the long-term impact of this crisis, it becomes clear that Pakistan's democratic institutions, governance mechanisms, and national unity face profound challenges that must be addressed for the country to progress. One of the most significant long-term consequences of the 2022 political crisis is the erosion of public trust in Pakistan's democratic institutions. Democracy in Pakistan has always been fragile, with frequent interruptions due to military coups, political instability, and elite power struggles (Ali M. , Naeem, Ahmed, & Iftikhar, 2023). The 2022 crisis, however, exposed the extent to which these institutions remain vulnerable to manipulation by powerful non-democratic forces, such as the military. Imran Khan's removal, while constitutionally valid, was presented by him and his supporters as part of a "foreign conspiracy," which not only delegitimized the political process but also fostered a widespread belief that Pakistan's democracy is susceptible to external influences and internal power struggles. The notion that a foreign-backed regime change was orchestrated to remove Khan further eroded the credibility of the democratic process, and many Pakistanis were left questioning the legitimacy of the new government. This deepened the divide between political factions, as Imran Khan's supporters, particularly his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, accused the opposition and the military of orchestrating a coup-like event. As a result, the perception that the political system is more about securing power than serving the people gained ground, leading to greater skepticism toward democratic institutions and a sense of helplessness among the electorate. Over time, this erosion of trust may result in increased voter apathy, which undermines the foundational principle of democracy.

The governance challenges that Pakistan has long struggled with were further exacerbated by the political crisis. The incoming Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led government faced immense pressure to address the country's numerous economic issues, including rising inflation, soaring debt, and energy shortages. However, the political instability that followed the no-confidence vote made it nearly impossible for the new government to focus on or implement essential reforms. The PTI, under Khan's leadership, launched mass protests against the new government, accusing it of being illegitimate. These protests created a chaotic political environment in which the government was unable to address the economic needs of the country.

The public, already suffering from the effects of high inflation and unemployment, saw little improvement in their day-to-day lives. As a result, the government's inability to stabilize the economy or improve the living standards of ordinary Pakistanis alienated large segments of the population, particularly the middle class. This growing frustration with the political system was compounded by the prolonged energy crises, which worsened under the new government's watch, and an increasingly complex governance environment where political infighting took precedence over effective policy implementation (Ullah & Khan, 2023). Moreover, the political crisis highlighted the continued dominance of the military in Pakistan's political life, raising serious concerns about the future of civilian governance. The military in Pakistan has historically played a decisive role in shaping the political landscape, either through direct military rule or indirect influence over civilian governments. The 2022 crisis was no different, as Khan's government, which had initially been aligned with the military, began to clash with key military leaders in the months leading up to his removal. Khan's public accusations that foreign powers, including the United States, were involved in his ousting, and his increasingly strained relationship with the military, only added to the speculation that the military's influence had played a significant role in orchestrating the no-confidence vote. Although the military did not directly intervene in the vote, many observers believed its support was a key factor in the success of the opposition's efforts to remove Khan. This perception of military involvement in civilian politics has far-reaching implications for Pakistan's democracy. It raises critical questions about the independence of political leaders and institutions and whether civilian governments can truly function without the influence of unelected bodies. Over time, this dynamic could further weaken Pakistan's democratic processes, as citizens become more disillusioned with the idea of an independent, accountable government.

Another long-term consequence of the crisis is the deepening political polarization in the country. The political divide between Imran Khan's PTI and the opposition parties, led by the PML-N, became increasingly bitter after the no-confidence vote. Khan's supporters viewed the transition as an affront to democracy, while the opposition portrayed Khan as a leader who had failed to deliver on his promises. The crisis turned political debates into a battle between rival factions, with both sides accusing each other of corruption, incompetence, and betrayal. The situation was made worse by the role of the media, which amplified partisan narratives, further inflaming the divisions. This heightened polarization spilled over into public life, with families, communities, and even workplaces becoming divided along political lines. This fragmentation of society has far-reaching implications for Pakistan's social fabric. As political discourse becomes more hostile and combative, it becomes harder to engage in constructive dialogue or find common ground on the country's critical issues. This polarization also makes it more difficult to forge a united front on issues such as national security, economic reform, and social justice (George A. S., 2023). The governance crisis and the ensuing political instability have also hindered efforts to address Pakistan's critical socio-economic challenges. Provinces like Punjab, which have historically been battlegrounds for political power, became even more fragmented during the crisis. The rivalry between the PML-N and PTI resulted in a lack of coordinated efforts to address critical issues such as poverty, healthcare, and education. This competition for political control left citizens in the provinces, particularly in Punjab, with few tangible improvements in their quality of life. The continued political instability has thus slowed down the country's progress in achieving broader developmental goals, further entrenching Pakistan's position as one of the world's most economically vulnerable and politically unstable countries.

CONCLUSION

The political crisis of 2022 in Pakistan, which culminated in the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan through a no-confidence vote, marked a significant turning point in the country's political landscape, with far-reaching consequences that continue to reverberate. This crisis not only altered the political trajectory of Pakistan but also exposed deep-rooted flaws in the country's

democratic institutions, governance frameworks, and socio-political fabric. The long-term impact of the crisis has been characterized by increasing political polarization, the erosion of trust in democratic processes, and the deepening involvement of Pakistan's military in civilian politics, which collectively pose significant challenges to the future of Pakistan's democracy and stability. One of the most notable consequences of the 2022 crisis has been the erosion of public trust in Pakistan's democratic institutions. Imran Khan's removal from office, though constitutionally legitimate, was clouded by allegations of a foreign conspiracy, which Khan and his supporters used to delegitimize the new government. The resulting narrative created a deep divide between political factions and led many Pakistanis to question the integrity of their political system. The perception that the political process could be manipulated by powerful external and internal forces, including the military, further weakened public faith in democratic institutions. This has far-reaching consequences, as it undermines the foundation of democracy itself by cultivating a sense of disillusionment among the electorate, which could result in voter apathy and a decline in civic engagement over time.

Additionally, the political crisis exacerbated Pakistan's governance challenges. The country was already grappling with a host of issues such as inflation, energy shortages, and a growing debt burden when the crisis unfolded. However, the political instability following Khan's removal rendered it even more difficult for the new government to address these pressing problems. Protests and political unrest diverted attention away from economic reforms, worsening the living conditions of ordinary citizens. The new government, led by the PML-N, struggled to implement the necessary reforms to stabilize the economy, while the opposition's continued mobilization ensured that the political climate remained toxic. The ensuing economic stagnation only deepened the country's social and economic crises, leaving the population more frustrated and disillusioned with the political class.

Furthermore, the role of Pakistan's military during the crisis and its continued influence over political affairs has had profound implications for the country's democratic processes. The military's involvement in Pakistan's politics, whether through direct control or indirect influence, has long been a characteristic feature of the country's governance. In 2022, although the military did not directly oust Khan, its alleged support for the new government led to concerns that the military's influence was once again undermining civilian control. This has sparked debates about the true autonomy of civilian governments in Pakistan and raised doubts about whether the country can achieve a fully functional democracy, free from military intervention.

Lastly, the political crisis has deepened political polarization in Pakistan, further fragmenting an already divided society. The rivalry between Imran Khan's PTI and the opposition parties, particularly the PML-N, has led to hostile political discourse, which has spilled over into social and cultural spheres. This polarization has made it difficult for the country to unite around common national interests, further hindering effective governance and policy-making. The sharp divide between the political elite and the masses, as well as the increasing gulf between opposing political factions, threatens to destabilize Pakistan's future political and social cohesion.

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