

**Political Instability in Pakistan:
Causes, Implications and A Way Forward**

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Abstract:

Political instability has emerged as a defining challenge for Pakistan, significantly undermining governance, public trust and developmental progress across the country since 2022. This study examines this period of turmoil, characterized by fragile democratic institutions and the enduring influence of military in political affairs. Employing a qualitative research methodology based on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, reports, newspapers and official documents, the study identifies both domestic and external drivers of political instability. Internally, systemic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and regional tensions, have eroded institutional legitimacy, weakened service delivery, and diminished public confidence in the political system. Externally, Pakistan's reliance on foreign aid, international alliances and military support has influenced policy priorities, creating structural dependencies that compromise autonomous decision-making. This study applies Interdependence Theory to analyze how these interconnected factors collectively shape political outcomes and governance effectiveness. The findings reveal that political instability has generated cycles of inefficiency, mistrust and public dissatisfaction, impeding long-term development, policy continuity and institutional strengthening.

Keywords: Pakistan, political instability, governance challenges, democracy, political institutions, regional tensions, domestic issues, external factors

INTRODUCTION

Political instability has been a long-standing features of Pakistan's socio-political landscape which has a significant impact on the governance system of Pakistan. Since its independence, Pakistan experienced recurring political upheavals that have shaped its institutional development and economic trajectory. On 14 August 1947, Pakistan emerged as an independent state and immediately confronted profound political, economic and security challenges. The country adopted its first constitution in 1956, declaring Pakistan as a republic with parliamentary system of governance.

Pakistan experienced its first military coup in 1958 when General Ayub Khan assumed power and ruled as a president until 1969. He was succeeded by General Yahya Khan whose military rule

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ended in 1971 following the secession of East Pakistan in Bangladesh liberation war. In the aftermath of this national crisis, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto came in power. His tenure is notable for significant social reforms, nationalization policy and promulgated the constitution of 1973. His charismatic leadership style attracted widespread public support. However, his government was overthrown in 1977 by General Zia ul Haq who remained in power until his death in 1988. He held the non-party base election in 1985 for the first time and introduced the Islamization policy during his term. Following his death, Pakistan entered a long period of political instability, marked by alternating, non-consecutive governments led by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. This was the era of political instability when two democratic leaders came to power for a short period of time undermining the democratic consolidation.

Pakistan experienced another military coup in 1999, in the aftermath of Kargil conflict with India. Consequently, General Pervez Musharraf seized power and remained in office until 2008. The general elections were held in 2008 and PPP came into power with Asif Ali Zardari serving as a president and Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani as a prime minister, formally marking an end to Musharraf's rule. From 2008 to 2013, there was a return of civilian democratic rule in Pakistan's politics with both Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) taking turns in power.

In 2013 elections, Nawaz Sharif came into power as a prime minister for the third time and later was disqualified in a controversial way in 2017. His era, however, was characterized by successful war on terrorism, return to peace in Karachi, control on energy crises and electricity shortages, and sustained economic growth with low inflation and improvement of relations with neighbouring countries including Afghanistan, India and Iran. Pakistan's relations with China reached to new heights in the shape of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) while ties with Russia also witnessed warmth. However, Pakistan's relations with the US, and Gulf states deteriorated. The controversial general elections of 2018 brought Imran Khan into power in 2018. His government prioritized anti-corruption efforts, economic reforms, governance reforms and more independent foreign policy. However, he was ousted from power as a result of a no confidence motion against him in the national assembly in 2022. The frequent change of governments and removal of two elected prime ministers from power plunged the country into political instability that brought or deepened several challenges such as corruption, terrorism, economic crises etc.

This article aims to examine the issues and challenges faced by the governance system of Pakistan, encompassing political, economic, social and security problems that require resolution for effective public service delivery. In the last few years, Pakistan experienced significant political instability characterized by frequent leadership changes, institutional weaknesses, economic challenges and widespread public discontent. This instability created obstacles in governance process, hindered policy-making and eroded public trust in state institutions. To analyze these complex dynamics, the study applies Interdependence Theory providing a framework to understand how internal and external factors interact to shape governance outcomes in Pakistan.

Thus, political instability constitutes a major challenge to Pakistan's governance system and has significantly hindered the development and stability of the country. Since its inception, Pakistan has faced persistent political, economic and security challenges. Therefore, it is crucial for the Pakistan government to address the issues of political instability and work for development and stability of

country. This study explores the factors contributing to political instability in Pakistan and the impacts it has on the governance system of Pakistan. Addressing these governance challenges is essential because this may lead to the sustainable development and growth of the country.

This study has the following research objectives: To explore the Political instability and its impact on the governance system of Pakistan. To, analyze the factors that led to political instability in Pakistan. This study focuses on these research questions: How does Political instability impact governance system in Pakistan? What are the factors that led to political instability in Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sheikh et al. (2022) explored the complex relationship between historical legacies, governance issues, socioeconomic inequities, external pressures and internal dynamics that have collectively led to political instability in Pakistan. The study shows an intricate and persistent landscape of instability. The authors emphasize that effective governance is central determinant of political stability noting that weak institutional performance undermines public trust and resilience within political system.

Ahmad and Akbar (2019) examined the range of challenges faced by Pakistan, including low socioeconomic status, ineffective political leadership, absence of law and order, issues with accountability, political unpredictability, economic crises and lack of political involvement. Pakistan was founded to provide people with the freedom to engage in their social, economic, political and religious pursuits. However, the nation also had to deal with issues like low socioeconomic status and ineffective political leadership. The absence of effective law and order, issues with accountability, political unpredictability, economic crises and a lack of political involvement were some factors contributing to the collapse of good governance.

Hashmi (2022) and Imran et al. (2023) discussed Pakistan's contemporary governance challenges, identifying corruption, administrative inefficiency, lack of accountability and institutional weaknesses as core factor driving political instability. Religious extremism, ethnic diversity and regional conflicts are also identified as major contributors to Pakistan's political instability. In addition to polarizing political discourse and creating barriers to inclusive government and consensus-building, the historical grievances, identity-based politics and security issues further deepen social divisions. Furthermore, neighbouring countries, international powers and non-state actors use geopolitical dynamics, strategic alliances and proxy conflicts to protect their interests and influence Pakistan's political landscape.

Political instability has several effects on the nation, including, deterring investment and contributing to economic collapse. Rashid et. al., (2024) notes that a volatile climate causes intellectual brain drains. Social discontent and violence are contributing elements to political instability, while persistent political instability, in turn, weakens state institutions or deteriorates them. Political instability exacerbates security issues and terrorism. Economic growth is further impacted by political instability which ultimately causes economic activity to decline and slow down, threatening both domestic and international investors from making investments in such a hazardous environment. The productivity gains are diminished by this decline in investment, moreover the consumption level due to a decline in the general public's purchasing power and earning potential. Political instability leads to strikes, violence against the government, inflation

and unemployment. As a result, indicators become hesitant to take significant risks or make long-term investments in such an uncertain environment. Across the existing literature, it becomes clear that Pakistan's political instability cannot be attributed to any single factor but emerges from the *interdependent interaction* of governance failures, socioeconomic inequality, institutional weaknesses, regional conflicts and external pressures (Sheikh et al., 2022; Ahmad & Akbar, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interdependence theory, originally developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and later expanded by subsequent scholars, explains how social and political interactions are shaped by both the situation and the actors involved. It identifies four major principles: the structure of the situation itself, the transformations individuals make when interpreting and responding to that situation, the interaction between people and the objective conditions they face and adaptation, which reflects how repeated experiences create stable behavior patterns in similar contexts. These principles collectively explain a wide range of social processes, including power dynamics, cooperation, trust, self-presentation and stereotyping (van Lange & Balliet, 2015). The theory offers a framework for understanding how people influence one another and provides important directions for future research on the social mind and the relationship between personal and material outcomes.

Pakistan's governance dynamics between 2022 to 2024 reflects the core assumptions of interdependence theory, especially when examined through the lens of political instability highlighted in this study. The structure of the political situation marked by frequent government changes, weak democratic institutions and a long history of civil-military imbalance created an environment where instability could easily intensify. The transformation principle appears in how political actors, including government leaders, opposition parties, state institutions and regional groups, interpreted this unstable environment. Some framed it as a constitutional transition while others saw it as political manipulation, fueling conflict and mass polarization. The interaction between domestic factors such as corruption, institutional inefficiency, public distrust and regional tensions particularly in Balochistan combined with external influences like foreign aid, international alliances and reliance on military assistance shows how internal and external actors continuously shaped one another's choices and outcomes.

Over time, these repeated cycles of instability protests, economic crises, court interventions, shifting alliances and security challenges produced an adaptation pattern in which mistrust deepened, democratic institutions further weakened and governance capacity declined. Consistent with the findings of this study, addressing political instability requires strengthening democratic institutions, improving governance transparency, resolving regional conflicts and building stable, mutually respectful international relationships. Only by reshaping these interdependent interactions can Pakistan move toward a more stable and effective governance system.

METHODOLOGY

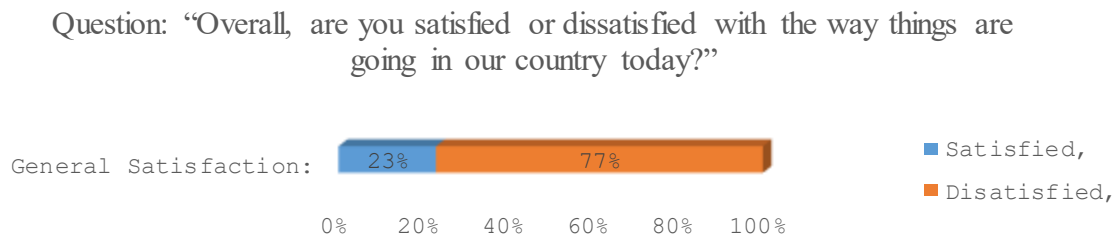
This study is qualitative in nature designed to analyze the political instability and its impacts on governance system of Pakistan. The research is based on secondary sources like articles, journals, newspapers and official governments and institutional websites. The existing sources are used to analyze this study. An analytical approach is employed to analyze the nature, causes and governance implications of political instability in Pakistan.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN PAKISTAN: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS

Political instability refers to the unpredictable nature of a country's system of government, wherein stability is threatened by weak institutions, civil unrest and frequent changes in political leadership. When individuals avoid violence or look for better opportunities, this instability can change population dynamics, cause forced migration, shifts in population distribution and broader demographic challenges.

Causes of Political Instability in Pakistan

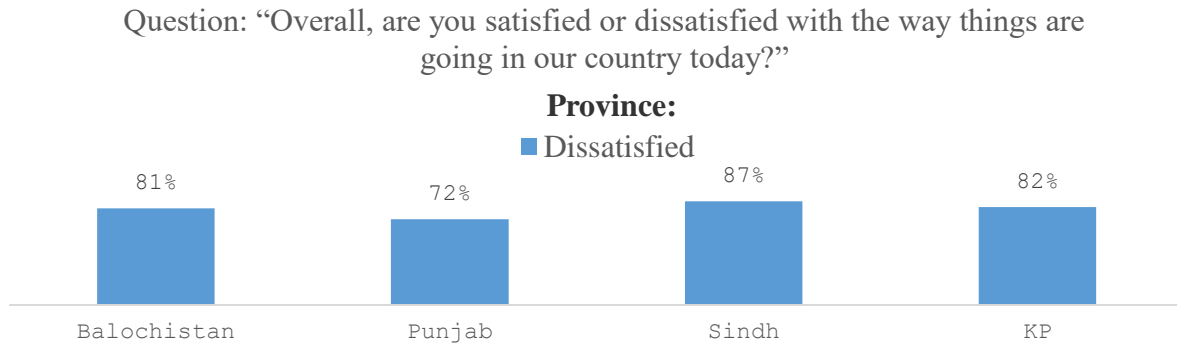
As individuals look for safety and security in another country, political unrest may raise migration rates, which can affect both the nations of origin and the countries of destination. Politically unstable governments may find it difficult to deliver basic services, which might worsen the economic and health situations of people. As people migrate from war-prone areas to relatively stable areas, demographic changes become common in regions with high levels of political instability. A population's distribution of opportunities and resources can be impacted by political instability, which can worsen already existing disparities (Dogar & Khalid, 2024).



Source: Powered by Gallup Pakistan, June 2023

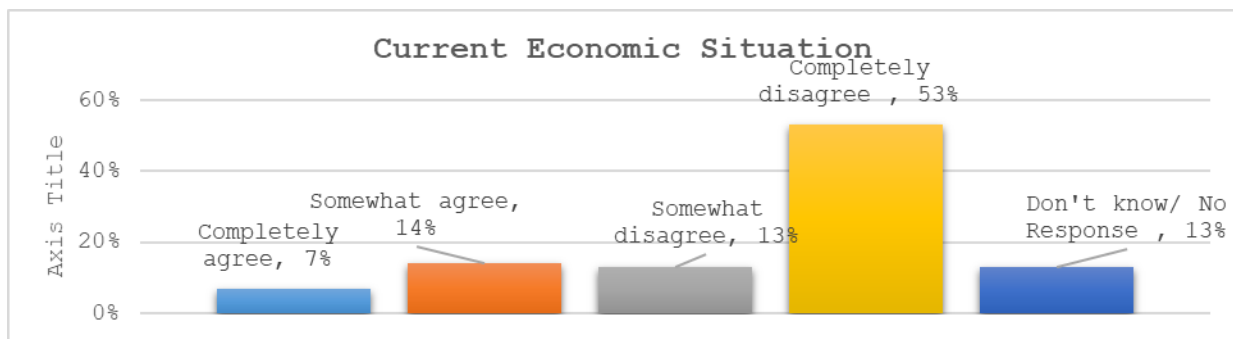
Gallup Pakistan surveys provide valuable insight into public sentiment regarding the state of the country, which can serve as an important context for governance analysis. According to the Gallup Pakistan National Public Opinion Poll 5 (June 2023), 77 percent of respondents reported dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country, while only 23percent expressed satisfaction. Although this survey measures general national sentiment rather than governance directly, such widespread dissatisfaction reflects the broader environment in which government policies and leadership decisions are experienced.

A provincial breakdown of public sentiment further highlights regional variations in perceptions. The National Public Opinion Poll 6 shows that dissatisfaction is widespread across all provinces, with Sindh reporting the highest dissatisfaction (87%), followed by KP (82%), Balochistan (81%) and Punjab (72%). While these figures do not measure governance explicitly, they indicate how citizens across different regions perceive national conditions. Such perceptions are shaped by factors including government performance, public service delivery and policy implementation at both national and provincial levels.



Source: Powered by Gallup Pakistan, June 2023

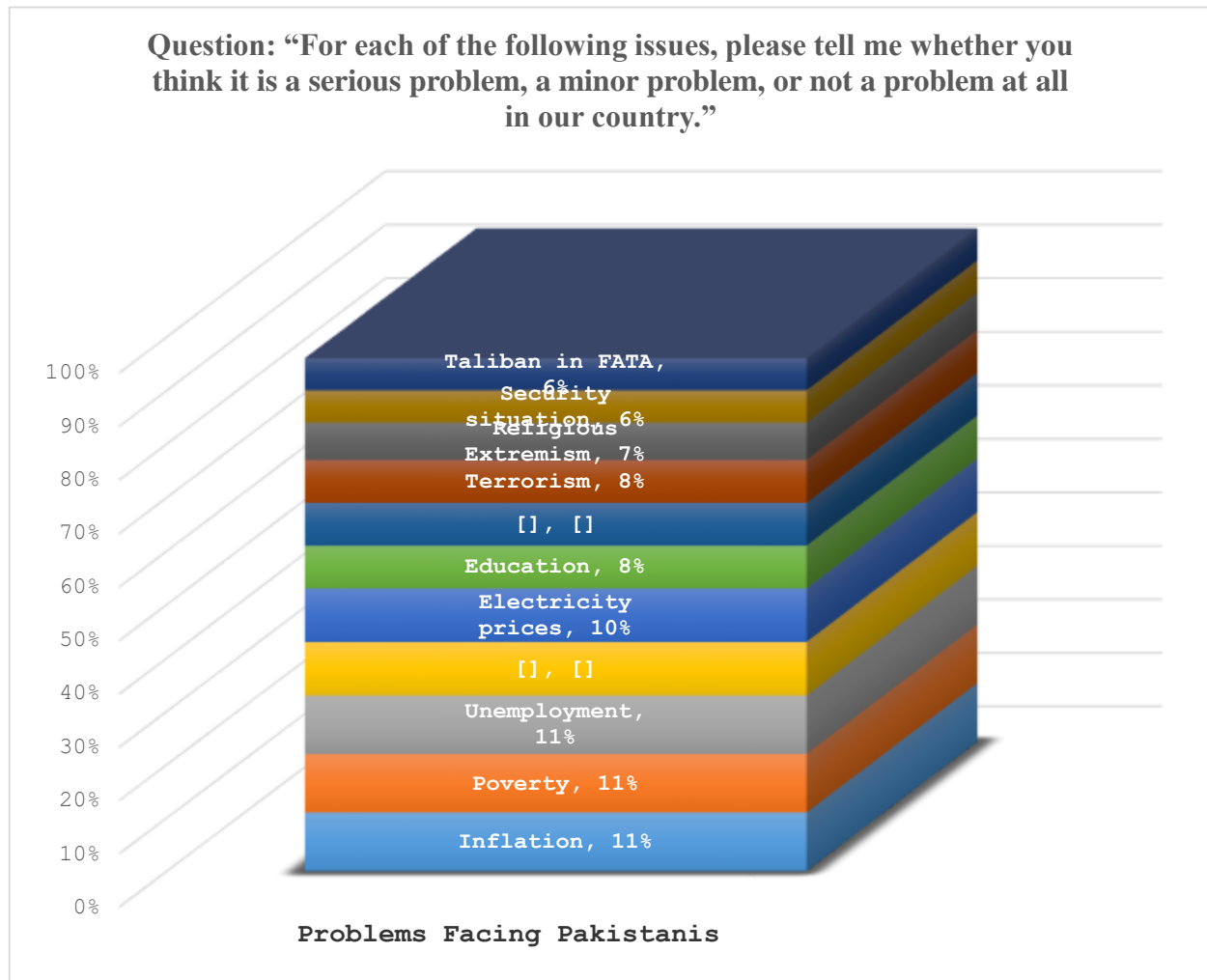
Political instability in Pakistan manifested through rising migration, weakened public services, demographic shifts and widening inequalities relates directly to interdependence theory because each of these outcomes is shaped by the continuous interaction between citizens and the unstable political environment. According to the theory, the structure of the situation characterized by weak institutions, insecurity and poor governance influences how people interpret and respond to political unrest, such as choosing to migrate or losing trust in the system. These individual and collective responses then interact with government performance, creating feedback loops that further affect service delivery, economic conditions and public perceptions. The Gallup findings showing high dissatisfaction across provinces reflect this process, as public sentiment is shaped by the ongoing interaction between governance failures and lived experiences of citizens.



Source: Powered by Gallup Pakistan, 29th Jan 2025

Public perceptions of the economy also contribute to understanding governance challenges. The Gallup Pakistan National Public Opinion Poll 8 reports that 47% of respondents described the current economic situation as very bad and 22% described it as bad, with only 30% rating it as “good” or “very good.” Economic conditions are closely linked to governance outcomes, as they reflect the effectiveness of policy decisions, fiscal management and institutional performance. High levels of economic dissatisfaction therefore suggest that citizens perceive weaknesses in government decision-making and service delivery, which can shape public trust in state institutions.

Further highlighting public skepticism, a Gallup & Gilani Pakistan survey conducted in January 2025 found that 53% of respondents completely disagreed with the government's claim of a decrease in inflation, with disagreement particularly high among women (59%) and urban residents (56%). Only 7% of respondents completely agreed while 14% somewhat agreed with the government's statement, showing a clear disconnect between government assertions and citizens' experiences.



Source: Powered by Gallup Pakistan, June 2023

The analysis of public perception in Pakistan indicates that economic, governance and security issues are viewed as serious problems to varying degrees. Normalizing the "Serious problem" responses reveals that unemployment, inflation and poverty are the most critical concerns, each representing approximately 11% of overall public attention. Electricity related issues including high prices and shortages, account for roughly 19% collectively, highlighting significant challenges in energy provision and affordability. Corruption is similarly recognized as a major governance issue, contributing approximately 10% to overall public concern. Security related challenges, including terrorism, religious extremism, the local security situation and the presence of militant groups in FATA, collectively account for 6–8% each, indicating persistent but relatively lower levels

of immediate public concern. Education and healthcare, while slightly lower in perceived severity at about 8% each, remain important areas for policy intervention. Overall, this distribution reflects that economic hardships, governance deficits and security threats are closely interrelated in shaping public perceptions, emphasizing the need for integrated policy measures to address both socio-economic and security challenges in Pakistan.

The patterns of public perception reported in the Gallup surveys relate directly to interdependence theory because they demonstrate how citizens' experiences, government actions and structural conditions continuously shape one another. The structure of the situation marked by inflation, unemployment, poverty, energy shortages, corruption and security concerns creates a context in which people evaluate government performance. Citizens then transform this situation by interpreting economic hardship and governance failures as indicators of weak policy-making, which is reflected in high dissatisfaction levels and widespread disagreement with official claims such as inflation reduction. These perceptions subsequently interact with governance outcomes, as declining trust makes it harder for state institutions to implement policies effectively or gain public cooperation.

The January 2023 Peshawar mosque bombing, which resulted in deaths of over 100 worshippers and injured more than 200, illustrates the structure principle of interdependence theory, as the persistent threat of terrorism forms the situational context affecting public behavior and governance. Public fear and heightened insecurity reflect the transformation principle, showing how individuals interpret the threat and adjust their perception of safety and trust in state institutions. Similarly, the expansion of TTP into Balochistan and Pakistan's military response highlight the interaction principle, as government actions, terrorist strategies and regional cooperation continuously shape each other's outcomes. Concerns about financing the operation due to economic vulnerabilities also reflect adaptation, as repeated cycles of security threats and fiscal constraints influence how both the state and the public adjust expectations and behaviors.

The political transitions in Pakistan since 2017 demonstrate the structure principle, with legal and institutional frameworks defining who can hold office and how elections are conducted. Public reactions to arrests, election delays and redrawing of electoral regions reflect the transformation principle as citizens interpret these changes and modify their political engagement and trust. These transformations then affect the interaction between leaders, political parties and voters, influencing election outcomes, political alliances and governance effectiveness. Over time, repeated exposure to political uncertainty shapes adaptation, where citizens and institutions adjust expectations and normalize instability as part of Pakistan's political landscape.

Pakistan's ongoing economic crisis, marked by record inflation, unemployment, depleting foreign reserves and reliance on IMF bailouts, aligns with the structure principle, as the economic environment constrains government decision-making and policy effectiveness. Public dissatisfaction and migration in response to economic hardship illustrate the transformation principle showing how citizens interpret economic conditions and act accordingly. Economic challenges interact with governance and security, highlighting the interaction principle, since fiscal limitations influence policy, public trust and the capacity to address security threats. Through repeated cycles of economic decline, public unrest and migration, the patterns of adaptation

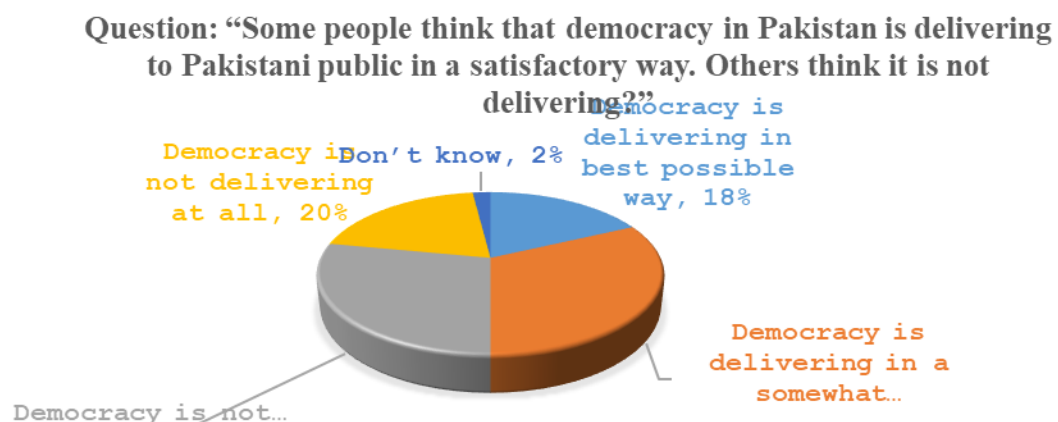
emerge with citizens gradually normalizing economic insecurity and governments adjusting policy strategies to manage crises under constrained conditions.

Factors Leading to Political Instability

The political instability in Pakistan is the result of multiple interrelated factors rather than a single cause. Weak democratic institutions, ineffective governance system, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, rule of law, domestic issues, failure of leadership, weak economy, lack of education and external influence are the major factors that led to political instability in Pakistan.

Challenges to Democracy in Pakistan

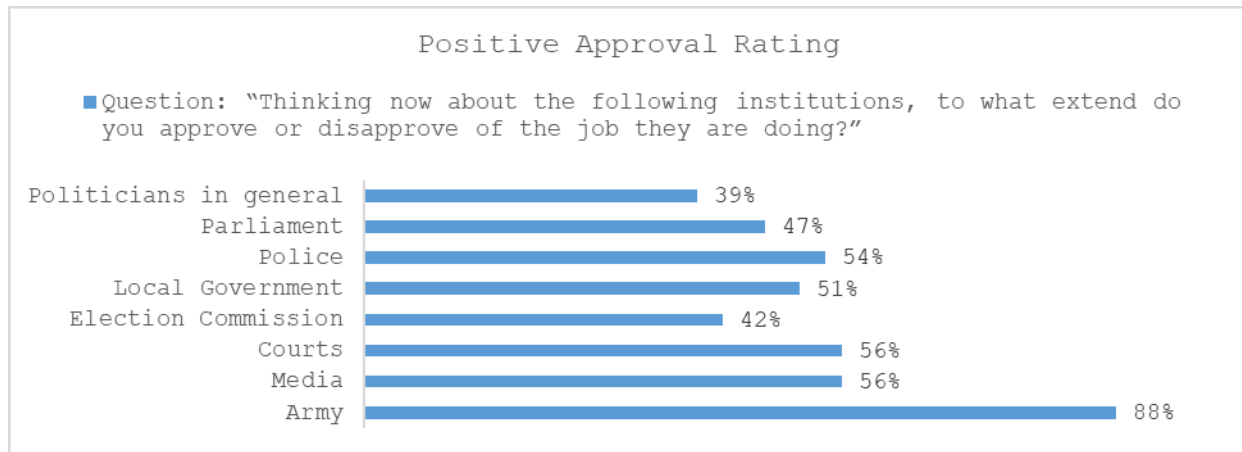
Many Pakistanis express deep dissatisfaction with both the functioning of democracy and the integrity of the political system. Although the elections are formally organized by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), they are often viewed with skepticism due to persistent problems such as vote buying, intimidation and alleged rigging. A 2023 Gallup survey found that 70% of citizens had little or no confidence in the honesty of elections, reflecting broader concerns about corruption and the manipulation of political power by elites (Pasha & Vigers, 2024). This distrust is reinforced by the dominance of a few powerful political families or personalities, who maintain influence through networks of patronage and favors. These informal systems often prioritize rewarding loyal supporters over implementing effective policies, weakening political competition and fostering public cynicism. Long periods of governance by certain parties, such as the PPP in Sindh and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have coincided with high levels of bureaucratic corruption, further undermining citizens' trust in institutions (Adaramola, 2025). Surveys indicate that most Pakistanis perceive politicians as corrupt, a sentiment echoed across other South Asian democracies, highlighting the challenge of translating democratic structures into fair, accountable and effective governance.



Source: Powered by Gallup Pakistan, June 2023

This lack of trust in political institutions is further reflected in public perception of democracy itself. Public sentiment shows widespread dissatisfaction, with one in five Pakistanis (20%) feeling that democracy is not delivering at all. According to the National Public Opinion Poll and Gallup Pakistan

surveys, 16% of respondents believe democracy is functioning in the best possible way, 18% find it somewhat satisfactory, while 32% feel it is not delivering effectively and 28% express moderate concerns. These perceptions mirror broader concerns about electoral integrity and the influence of powerful political families, highlighting a persistent gap between democratic ideals and citizens' experiences. The findings underscore the need for stronger accountability, more responsive governance and inclusive political processes to ensure that democratic institutions can deliver tangible benefits to all segments of society.



Source: Powered by Gallup Pakistan, June 2023

Gallup Pakistan surveys show a sharp contrast in how citizens view different state institutions, with the military receiving an overwhelmingly high approval compared to civilian bodies. According to the National Public Opinion Poll conducted by Gallup, 88% of respondents approve of the military's performance, making it by far the most trusted institution in the country. In comparison, media and judiciary each receive an approval rating of 56%, indicating moderate public confidence in their ability to inform and deliver justice. The trust in democratic institutions remains significantly weaker: The Election Commission holds an approval rating of 42%, local governments 51%, the police 54%, parliament 47% and politicians in general only 39% (Gallup Pakistan National Public Opinion Poll, 2023). These findings illustrate a clear imbalance in institutional credibility, where security institutions command strong public support while political and governance related institutions struggle to gain legitimacy. Amid this environment of political instability and institutional mistrust, Imran Khan was removed as prime minister in April 2022 following a vote of no confidence. His party, the PTI, had first come to power in 2018 as a result of a controversial election and alleged political engineering, but growing economic problems especially rising inflation led to a major decline in public support and caused some coalition partners to withdraw (Rabia et al, 2025).

In early 2023, Khan dissolved the PTI-led governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in an attempt to push for early elections. Simultaneously, he faced an increasing number of legal cases, including more than 150 charges by mid-2023 which he claimed were politically motivated to block him and his party from returning to power. On May 9, 2023, Khan was arrested on corruption charges during a court appearance. This arrest sparked nationwide protests, some of which turned

violent, leading to deaths, attacks on police and unprecedented incidents such as protesters storming military buildings and damaging the Lahore home of a senior army officer. Thousands of PTI supporters were arrested afterward, with some reportedly tried in military courts.

The Election Commission later announced that the general elections would be held in the final week of January 2024, although concerns remained due to earlier delays in provincial elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A major setback for PTI occurred when the party was denied to use its election symbol, which effectively prevented it from securing reserved seats for women and minorities that are allocated based on party performance in each province. In the final days of January 2024, Imran Khan was convicted in two separate cases. He received a 10-year sentence for allegedly leaking state secrets while he and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment on corruption charges. In addition, he was barred from holding public office for ten years.

The failure of political leadership significantly contributed to the poor performance of elected leadership at both federal and provincial levels, making the functioning of democracy more complicated. Many political leaders have roots in feudal social structures, a characteristic common across politics in South Asia, where feudal leaders are highly respected and they continue to command social influence and political authority. The elected authorities are now acting like tyrants. Political leaders, according to the military, were incapable of maintaining national authority. A strong political model agreement has been difficult to establish in Pakistani politics. Political actors often immediately leave politics because of their own political goals and interests, regardless of the power sharing deal. Beginning in the early 1980s, the rise of Islamic extremism and militancy as well as sectarian movements stifled open debate of important national issues. It used hate speech, increased the level of violence inside its organizations and fostered intolerance. Consequently, the main results of these efforts were religious harmony, cultural and social value pluralism and diversity. The advancement of democratization was seriously hindered by these groups' growing influence inside the social and political systems. The rule of law and the growth of democratic norms and ideals are not supported by such conditions (Rashid, 2023).

In addition to the lack of leadership, low levels of education and political literacy have weakened democratic participation. This problem is also present in our nation, where many people do not even understand the basics of politics. Lack of political education has a negative impact on the country's economy as most people are ignorant of politics and do not even know how to cast their votes. Most people are unaware of the power and importance of their vote and as a result, they usually waste it by not casting it. People's poor critical thinking skills about politics are caused by their ignorance, which makes it difficult for them to evaluate the objectives, plans, agendas and tactics of the politicians.

Effects on Governance System of Pakistan

In Pakistan, the problem of effective governance or its lack thereof, has always been a major and controversial concern. The population's well-being depends on effective governance, but it is hampered by issues like accountability, institutional failures, corruption, constitutional crises and a lack of checks and balances (Imran & Nordin, 2018). Political instability throughout Pakistan's history has been typified by changes in both military and civilian regimes. Several historical

occurrences, including military takeovers and martial law have exacerbated the current governance problems. The concepts such as centralization movement, the necessity theory and the function of bureaucracy have all had a long-lasting effect on Pakistani governance. The nation continues to struggle with establishing effective government even in the face of changing leadership (Khan & Alam, 2020). Poor governance is frequently associated with corruption, weak institutional autonomy and policy inconsistency, whereas good governance is characterized by effective, responsible and inclusive public institutions. While institutions often display a high level of independence in states with effective administration and support long term growth, Pakistan struggles with a weak institutional structure that is impacted by self-interests motivated by politics (Ghani & Qureshi, 2019).

Political developments in recent years have further influenced governance outcomes. The elections held significance for Pakistan's democratic progress, as they were expected to determine the nation's future stability. Ultimately, the new elections held on February 8th, 2024, marked a pivotal moment in Pakistani politics. Over the past seven years, Pakistan has grappled with internal instability fueled by political tensions and leadership changes. The political landscape has witnessed dramatic shifts as various parties have come to power through elections or other means. Economic challenges have also contributed to internal instability. High inflation has driven up prices for essentials like food and fuel, sparking protests and social unrest. The economic crisis from 2018–2023 exacerbated political turbulence, highlighting long standing issues within governance and institutional performance (Spies, 2024). Therefore, collaborative efforts between Pakistan and its global partners aim to address systemic issues, strengthen economic growth and promote self-reliance.

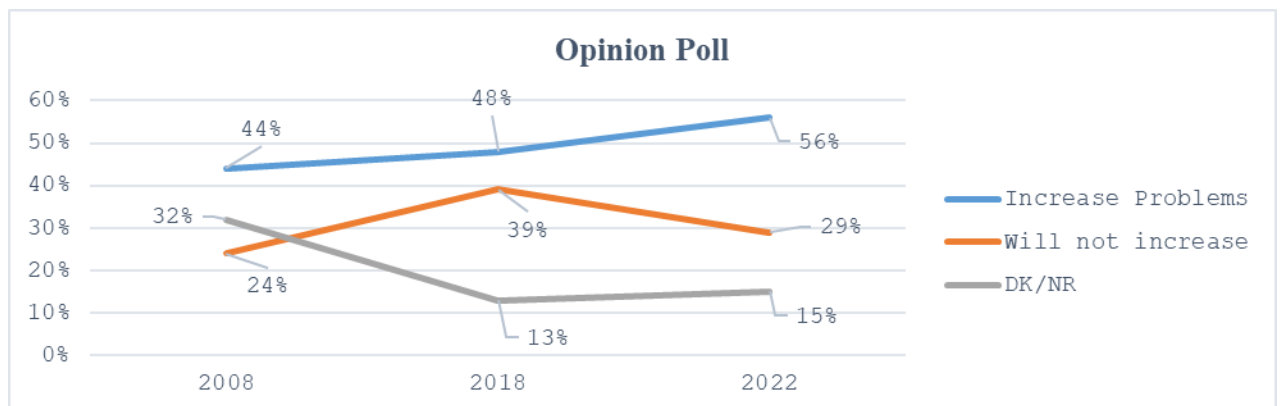


Fig: xi Source: (Gallup Pakistan, 2022)

Recent political and economic challenges in Pakistan have significantly exacerbated security concerns, posing serious threats to internal stability. The collapse of the Afghan government and subsequent takeover by the Taliban intensified security risks along Pakistan's western border, leading to increased attacks on civilians and soldiers in the erstwhile FATA region. The Taliban's actions resulted in loss of life, widespread fear and the diversion of resources from other critical priorities. Simultaneously, India remains a persistent security threat, with both nations engaging in retaliatory attacks and accusations of terrorism, particularly across the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Efforts to ease tensions such as the return of downed Indian fighter pilot Abhinandan Varthaman as a gesture of peace by Prime Minister Imran Khan, were overshadowed by enduring regional tensions and broader geopolitical pressures involving major powers such as the US and China.

The prioritization of security measures often overshadows governance in other vital sectors such as education, healthcare and infrastructure development, contributing to a fragmented approach that reinforces public instability. Natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods and droughts, further strain limited resources and divert attention from long-term planning and development projects. The devastating floods in 2022 and flash floods in July 2023 caused widespread displacement, infrastructure damage and health risks due to contaminated water sources, highlighting the country's vulnerability to environmental shocks. While some regions benefited from nutrient-rich soil deposits following floods, short-term food scarcity remained a pressing concern, demonstrating the adaptation principle of interdependence, whereby repeated exposure to crises encourages government, institutions and citizens to adopt relatively stable, often reactive, response patterns. This situation builds on the security challenges described earlier, showing how environmental factors interact with political and economic instability to compound governance difficulties.

Corruption further complicates governance in Pakistan by undermining both political and economic stability. According to Transparency International and UN sources, corruption ranges from petty bribery to grand-scale misuse of authority ultimately undermining institutional effectiveness, public trust and social cohesion (Dori, 2024). Inequality and public discontent stemming from corruption increase the risk of conflict and social unrest, creating conditions where instability feeds on itself. This reflects the transformation principle, as the behavior of political and bureaucratic actors transforms structural opportunities and constraints into outcomes that perpetuate inequality and weaken governance. The interaction of corruption with natural disasters and security crises illustrates how multiple factors reinforce each other, shaping patterns of institutional and public behavior across Pakistan. In recent years, entrenched corruption combined with unstable political environment have weakened the foundations of effective governance. Political favoritism, clientelism and nepotism, combined with bureaucratic inefficiency have limited social and economic advancement, while economic stagnation and youth unemployment exacerbate societal discontent (Mubashar & Salman, 2020). The adaptation principle explains how repeated interactions among political elites, bureaucrats and citizens create relatively stable behavioral patterns that sustain institutional weaknesses. These governance challenges reinforce the economic and security pressures discussed earlier, showing how political, economic and societal factors are interconnected and how each domain depends on the functioning of others to shape overall stability in Pakistan.

Political appointments and favoritism have weakened the merit-based system within Pakistan's bureaucracy, leading to a lack of accountability, transparency and efficiency. Excessive documentation and prolonged procedures hinder the execution of policies and service delivery while reforms are often resisted due to bureaucrats' fears of losing privileges or authority. Additionally, persistent brain drain has further reduced institutional capacity, leaving critical services understaffed and inefficient. These dynamics illustrate the structure principle of interdependence theory, as the institutional framework and bureaucratic rules set the environment in which governance occurs. Simultaneously, they reflect the transformation principle, whereby the

actions and choices of bureaucrat shape outcomes that affect public trust, service delivery and overall governance.

International organizations, bilateral relations and global economic trends further complicate governance landscape in Pakistan. Aid, loans, trade agreements and diplomatic pressures shape the country's policy options, while technological advancements, human rights standards and anti-corruption initiatives influence domestic decision-making. The structure principle is evident in the way these external frameworks define the context within which national governance operates, while the interaction principle shows how Pakistan's government responds and adapts to the actions and expectations of multiple global actors. This dynamic interplay of internal and external pressures underscores the deeply interconnected nature of governance, in which domestic decisions and responses are shaped by international forces and vice versa, creating a complex system of interdependent influences that must be carefully navigated to achieve political stability, accountability and inclusivity.

Findings

With 77% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with national conditions (Gallup Pakistan, June 2023), the structure principle of interdependence theory becomes evident. Weak institutions, policy inconsistency and unstable governance constitute the structural conditions shaping citizens' perceptions and responses to political and economic instability.

The finding that 47% of citizens describing the economy as very bad (Gallup Pakistan, Jan 2025) reflects transformation principle. Citizens interpret and respond to economic conditions, translating poor fiscal management into decreased trust in government institutions, influencing both political behavior and social attitudes.

Issues like unemployment, poverty and inflation ($\approx 11\%$ each) show how citizens respond to instability, aligning with the interaction principle. Their experiences of economic hardship continuously influence and are influenced by government policy and institutional efficiency, creating feedback loops affecting governance outcomes.

Political transitions, including the removal of Imran Khan, election delays and recurrent nationwide protests, have led to persistent instability, demonstrating the adaptation principle, as citizens and institutions develop relatively stable responses to cycles of uncertainty.

Public trust remains disproportionately higher in the military over civilian institutions, reflecting how ongoing interactions between institutional performance and citizen expectations continuously shape legitimacy, in line with the interaction principle.

WAY FORWARD

Enact and Enforce Laws to Protect and Manage Pakistan's Natural Resources

The effective use of natural resources has the potential to enhance production capabilities, expand industrial capacity and support sustainable economic growth in the country. The expansion of the agricultural industry depends heavily on the availability and efficient allocation of land, water and energy resources. However, a strong correlation exists between the expansion of the agricultural sector and the expansion of the industrial sector. The availability of energy resources, such as oil

and gas, is crucial for facilitating industrial development. The identification and use of iron and steel deposits provide significant benefits to the development of the industrial sector. Pakistan actively participates in the exporting of goods, leveraging its large reserves of natural resources, which plays a crucial role in enhancing foreign currency reserves. The use of natural resources is necessary for the development and progress of basic infrastructure, including water, sanitation, roads, energy and power. Effective resource management is necessary to address energy challenges, reduce dependence on foreign aid and improve the overall well-being of the population. However, Pakistan faces challenges such as declining law and order, terrorism and inadequate resource management, leading to a low GDP growth rate, trade imbalance, inflation, poverty and unemployment. A comprehensive approach to resource management is necessary to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on external aid.

Improve Education Quality and Expand Access to Education.

Pakistan's education system faces numerous challenges, including a lack of direction and uniformity, prioritizing rote learning over critical thinking skills. The enrollment and completion rates remain low, with only 60% of children completing primary school and 30% completing secondary level education. Despite these issues, there is a positive trend in education spending, with a 1.59% increase to 9.40% of the budget in 2022, following a decline to 7.82% in 2021 and 10.80% in 2020. However, the system still needs improvement, as it is disproportionately oriented towards religious and cultural aspects neglecting essential subjects like STEM, leading to a lack of preparedness for real life challenges. Moreover, the lack of uniformity in curricula, teaching standards and examination systems across schools perpetuates unequal distribution of educational opportunities, exacerbating poverty and inequality. To address these issues, Pakistan should consider initiatives like structured career guidance projects, which have been successful in other countries, to reform its education system and improve outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The governance and political landscape of Pakistan between 2022 and 2024 demonstrates a complex interplay of interdependent factors, where political instability, economic challenges, security threats and public perception continuously influence each other. The removal of Imran Khan as Prime Minister in April 2022, followed by subsequent protests and frequent changes in provincial governments highlight how weak democratic institutions, incomplete policy continuity and civil-military tensions create structural conditions that hinder effective governance. These developments align with the structure principle of Interdependence Theory which emphasizes how institutional and situational contexts shape political outcomes. Public reactions during this period exemplify the transformation principle, as citizens interpreted political events, economic hardships and security failures through their lived experiences. This process produced widespread public dissatisfaction reflected in Gallup surveys from 2023–2024, showing public dissatisfaction level exceeding 70%. It demonstrated how individual and collective perceptions transform structural realities into tangible outcomes, such as declining trust in institutions and reduced civic engagement.

The interaction principle is evident in the dynamic relationships among political leaders, bureaucrats, citizens and international actors. Domestic economic crises, rising inflation and

unemployment constrained policy-making, while public protests and migration further shaped government decisions. Security challenges including terrorism, cross-border tensions with India and the Taliban's presence along the western border interacted with governance priorities, often forcing the state to focus on security at the expense of education, healthcare and infrastructure. International organizations, bilateral aid arrangements and trade agreements simultaneously influenced domestic governance, showing that internal and external actors continuously influence policy choices and outcomes. Repeated exposure to political, economic and security crises triggered adaptation, as citizens and institutions developed relatively stable patterns of behavior. Citizens normalized distrust, skepticism toward political leaders and low expectations of service delivery, while institutions repeated crisis response strategies without addressing systemic weaknesses. The devastating floods of 2022 and subsequent flash floods in 2023 further revealed this adaptive pattern, as governmental responses exposed persistent resource constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies, reinforcing public perceptions of inadequate governance.

Corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and political favoritism remained central challenges, reflecting the transformation and interaction principles, where the behavior of political and bureaucratic actors converts structural opportunities into recurring governance deficits. Economic vulnerabilities such as high inflation, energy shortages and reliance on IMF and Chinese loans further illustrate how domestic governance interacts with external pressures, shaping policy priorities, resource allocation and citizen experiences. Addressing these interdependent challenges requires governance strategies emphasizing transparency, accountability, equity and responsibility. Strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring policy continuity, enhancing bureaucratic capacity, combating corruption and promoting citizen engagement are essential for rebuilding public trust and delivering effective services. International frameworks including human rights, anti-corruption standards and technical assistance from organizations such as the World Bank, IMF and UN create both constraints and opportunities, demonstrating the ongoing interaction between global and domestic actors.

By analyzing Pakistan's experience through the lens of Interdependence Theory, it becomes evident that political instability, economic crises, security threats and public perception are not isolated phenomena. Structural conditions, individual and institutional transformations, reciprocal interactions and adaptive behaviors collectively shape governance outcomes. This analysis highlights the need for integrated, adaptive and resilient policy approaches that address interdependent challenges across political, economic and social domains to promote sustainable governance and long-term stability in Pakistan.

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