

Political instability in Pakistan

(Evidence from rural Punjab, Pakistan)

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Department of Political Science (Superior College for University Program)**Abstract**

The study sought to understand causes and consequences of political instability in research locale. Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and content analysis, were employed to gather data from respondents from, Mandi Baha-ud-Din district. Our findings suggested that political instability arises from factors like military intervention, weak governance, and political polarization, leading to severe consequences such as social unrest, financial instability, and brain drain. These issues undermine trust and development, creating a cycle of disruption. Addressing political instability demands a comprehensive approach that strengthens institutions, ensures fair governance, and fosters national unity. Effective solutions are essential for restoring stability and enabling long-term progress.

Key words:- Qualitative Political Military Polarization Social**Introduction**

Political instability has been a persistent challenge in Pakistan since its formation in 1947, marked by a volatile political landscape characterized by coups, fragile democratic transitions, and governmental dysfunctions (Ahmad, 2020). The historical and socio-political factors contributing to this instability are complex. Colonial legacies, combined with the early death of key political figures like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, left a vacuum that the newly established state struggled to fill (Talbot, 2012). Additionally, the overreach of military influence, particularly from the 1950s onwards, has repeatedly disrupted democratic processes, fostering an environment where political institutions remain weak and vulnerable (Shah, 2014).

Economic instability and inequality have further exacerbated political challenges. Pakistan has experienced repeated economic crises, with high levels of debt, inflation, and unemployment,

which fuel discontent among the population (Naseem, 2016). This economic volatility, compounded by corruption and mismanagement, has left successive governments struggling to address the needs of the populace, leading to widespread dissatisfaction (Ahsan, 2019). In this context, political elites often prioritize short-term power retention over long-term national development, contributing to a cyclical pattern of instability (Siddiqa, 2007).

The consequences of political instability in Pakistan are far-reaching. Economically, it has led to underinvestment, capital flight, and reduced foreign direct investment, hindering sustainable growth (Zaidi, 2015). Socially, political instability has fostered deep divisions, often along ethnic and sectarian lines, which have been exploited by extremist groups (Fair, 2014). Furthermore, Pakistan's international standing has been affected, as the country struggles to maintain consistent foreign policies, complicating relations with both regional neighbors and global powers (Akhtar, 2018).

Moreover, the cyclical nature of instability has also weakened the rule of law and exacerbated governance challenges. With an inefficient judiciary and corrupt law enforcement agencies, the state struggles to maintain order, often resulting in extra-judicial measures such as military courts (Khan, 2018). As Khan (2020) argues, the inability to establish a lasting political framework has not only undermined economic development but has also contributed to the radicalization of segments of the population. This article will analyze the root causes of political instability in Pakistan, emphasizing the intersection of economic, social, and institutional factors, and examine its long-term consequences for the country's future.

Objective of Research

- To find out possible reasons of political instability.
- To find out possible consequences of political instability.

Material and Method

Locale of the present research was rural areas of district Mandi Baha ud din, Punjab, Pakistan. A qualitative technique was principally used to gather and interpret the obtained data and findings of the study are mainly based on empirical results. The researchers used individuals in depth interviews, content analysis method. The respondents of the study were natives of research locale. In the phase of data collection 20 respondents were selected in the phase of

sampling. Purposes sampling techniques were used in the phase of sampling. A semi-structure interview guide was used .The interview guide consisted of different parts. All interview were conducted in Urdu languages and interpreted into English for the purposes of analysis. Similar techniques were used (Iqbal, S., Idrees, B., & Mohyuddin, A. 2014). Respondents were encouraged to participate in a discussion in which they able to talk extensively about causes and consequences of Political instability. The interview was not limited to prepared schedule but was open-minded and encouraged additional comments from the respondents. Data collection and analysis were took places from end of June to end of July 2024. All the respondents were selected after informed consent. Extensive notes were taken during each interview and those were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Result and Discussion

The data analysis reveals that Pakistan's political instability is influenced by a range of interconnected factors. Military interventions, weak rule of law, and ineffective governance create a volatile political environment. Additionally, foreign interference, political polarization, and social and economic challenges further complicate the situation. This analysis explores each factor in detail, highlighting their impact on the overall stability of the country.

Military Interventions

Military interventions in Pakistan have significantly impacted the country's political stability, often leading to a cycle of instability. The involvement of the military in political affairs disrupts democratic processes and weakens civilian governance structures. According to our respondent, *"The military's frequent interventions in Pakistani politics have been a significant source of instability. Many believe that the military's direct or indirect influence on governance has undermined democratic processes and hindered the development of civilian."* This influence not only impedes the development of democratic institutions but also creates an environment where political power is concentrated, making it difficult to build a stable and functioning democracy. Consequently, the recurring military involvement undermines efforts to establish a consistent and peaceful political framework.

Rule of Law

A robust rule of law is essential for maintaining political stability and ensuring justice within a society. In Pakistan, the legal system's effectiveness is undermined by corruption, impunity, and diminished judicial independence, which weakens public trust in government institutions. According to our respondent, *"The weak rule of law in Pakistan is a chronic problem that contributes to political instability. Corruption, impunity, and the erosion of judicial independence have undermined the effectiveness of the legal system and eroded public trust in government institutions."* The erosion of legal integrity results in inconsistent law enforcement and a lack of accountability, further fueling dissatisfaction and contributing to an unstable political environment. Without a strong legal framework, efforts to address grievances and enforce justice are severely compromised.

Weak Governance

Effective governance is crucial for ensuring political stability and public confidence in government institutions. In Pakistan, governance issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability have created a volatile political climate. According to our respondent, *"Weak governance, characterized by corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability, has contributed to political instability. This has led to a loss of public confidence in the government and created a fertile ground for political unrest."* The persistent failures in governance undermine the government's ability to address key issues and meet public needs, leading to increased political unrest and instability. The lack of effective governance structures exacerbates existing problems and hinders the development of solutions.

Foreign Interference

Foreign interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs often complicates internal political issues and exacerbates existing conflicts. External influences from neighboring countries and global powers can undermine the country's sovereignty and stability. According to our respondent, *"Foreign interference, particularly from neighboring countries and major powers, has been a recurring theme in Pakistani politics. This interference has often exacerbated existing tensions and undermined the country's sovereignty."* Such interference not only worsens internal tensions but also creates additional challenges for the government in managing its domestic affairs. The influence of external actors can destabilize the political landscape and make it more difficult for Pakistan to address its internal issues effectively.

Political Polarization

Political polarization can significantly impact the stability of a country by creating deep divisions and hindering effective governance. In Pakistan, intense rivalries between political parties and ideological groups often lead to political gridlock and instability. According to our respondent, "*Deep-rooted political polarization has been a persistent feature of Pakistani politics. The rivalry between different political parties and ideologies has often led to gridlock, instability, and violence.*" This polarization results in frequent conflicts and makes it challenging to achieve political consensus, further contributing to a fragmented and unstable political environment. The inability to bridge these divides hampers progress and the implementation of effective policies.

Social Unrest

Social unrest is often a manifestation of underlying issues within a politically unstable environment. Factors such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities can lead to widespread discontent and unrest. According to our respondent, "*Social unrest, including protests, demonstrations, and violence, can contribute to political instability. Factors such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities can fuel social discontent and lead to unrest.*" This unrest not only reflects societal frustrations but also exacerbates political instability by creating a turbulent environment where governance and social cohesion are challenged. The cycle of social unrest and political instability further impedes efforts to achieve long-term stability and development.

Financial Instability

Economic conditions have a direct and significant impact on political stability. High inflation, unemployment, and a weak currency undermine public confidence in the government and can lead to further political unrest. According to our respondent, "*Economic instability, including high inflation, unemployment, and a weak currency, can undermine public confidence in the government and contribute to political instability. Financial crises can also lead to social unrest and political upheaval.*" Financial instability not only erodes trust in the government but also triggers broader social and political challenges, creating a vicious cycle that exacerbates overall instability. Addressing economic issues is crucial for stabilizing the political environment and fostering sustainable development.

Brain Drain

The emigration of skilled and educated individuals, or brain drain, has significant implications for a country's stability and development. The loss of valuable human capital hampers economic growth and innovation in Pakistan. According to our respondent, "*Brain drain, the emigration of skilled and educated individuals to other countries, can contribute to political instability by depriving Pakistan of valuable human capital. This can hinder economic growth, development, and innovation.*" The depletion of talent and expertise weakens the country's capacity to address its economic and social challenges effectively, further contributing to political instability. Retaining and utilizing skilled individuals is essential for fostering development and achieving political stability.

Limited Political Participation

Political participation is fundamental for a stable and democratic political system. Restrictions on voting rights, access to political office and freedom of expression can lead to a sense of exclusion among the populace. According to our respondent, "*Limited political participation, including restrictions on voting rights, access to political office, and freedom of expression, can erode public trust in the government and contribute to political instability. When people feel excluded from the political process, they may resort to more radical or violent means to express their grievances.*" The lack of inclusive participation drives frustration and can lead to radicalization, further destabilizing the political environment. Ensuring broader and more inclusive political engagement is crucial for maintaining stability and addressing public grievances effectively.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that political instability in Pakistan is driven by a complex interplay of factors. Military interventions disrupt democratic processes and hinder civilian governance, while a weak rule of law and ineffective governance erode public trust and contribute to instability. Foreign interference exacerbates internal tensions and undermines sovereignty, further complicating efforts to stabilize the political environment. Political polarization and deep-rooted rivalries create gridlock and violence, impeding effective governance. Social unrest, driven by poverty and inequality, and financial instability, marked by high inflation and unemployment, exacerbate political turmoil. The brain drain deprives the country of essential human capital, while limited political participation fosters exclusion and radicalization. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that strengthens democratic institutions, ensures effective governance, and fosters economic stability. Only through

comprehensive and inclusive strategies can Pakistan hope to achieve lasting political stability and development.

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