Pre and Post Pakistan's 2024 Elections Scenario: Political Engineering, Electoral Dynamics, and Democratic Trajectories

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Abstract

With an emphasis on the interaction of institutional meddling, popular opposition, and political engineering, this paper examines the political and electoral processes surrounding Pakistan's general elections in 2024. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was systematically suppressed throughout the pre-election period, with its leadership being legally disqualified, its electoral symbol being denied, and media blackouts occurring. Notwithstanding these initiatives, independent candidates supported by the PTI won a sizable number of seats, indicating that voters, particularly young people, are becoming more politically aware and defiant. Disparities in vote tallying, delayed result statements, and internet shutdowns were among the anomalies that plagued the election day. Perceptions of electoral fraud were heightened when a coalition government was formed after the election that did not include candidates supported by the PTI. The study's qualitative thematic analysis shows that, although institutional bias and elite influence continue to limit Pakistan's democratic framework, a politically active and technologically mobilized populace is posing a growing threat. In order to achieve true democratic consolidation in Pakistan, the paper's conclusion suggests improvements in the areas of media freedom, judicial independence, electoral transparency, and civil-military balance.

Keywords: Hybrid Government, Pakistan, Political Parties, Rigged Elections, General Elections.

Introduction

The February 8, 2024, general elections in Pakistan marked a turning point in the democratic development of the nation. These elections took place in a highly regulated political climate, amid political engineering, institutional overreach, and rigorous scrutiny. Unprecedented restrictions on opposition parties, especially the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), were in place in the lead-up to the elections. The party's leader, Imran Khan, was facing numerous convictions, and the party was deprived of its iconic electoral symbol, thereby destroying its official electoral identity (The Guardian, 2024). PTI-supported independent candidates became the largest bloc in spite of these repressive measures, taking on established elite parties like the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) (Afzal, 2024; ISAS, 2024). These events highlighted a serious breakdown in Pakistan's democratic system, as institutional meddling and electoral manipulation have become accepted means of governing the country. Once again, the military, which has long been seen as a kingmaker in the nation's political affairs, seemed to have

an impact on the election process—not directly, but through court rulings, administrative wrangling, and alliance building behind the scenes (Haqqani, 2023; Javid, 2024). Many others saw the resurgence of Nawaz Sharif's political career, which was made possible by positive court decisions, and the concurrent detention of PTI officials as parts of a larger plan to manipulate the political landscape (Rashid, 2024; HRCP, 2024). Regarding voter participation, the elections saw an unexpected turnout of more than 48%, particularly among urban youth who disregarded both logistical and repressive barriers to express their dissatisfaction at the polls (ECP, 2024). The actual election process, however, was tainted by anomalies: extensive accusations of manipulation were sparked by the internet services being shut down on election day, problems in the Form-45/Form-47 tallying, and delays in the results announcements (USIP, 2024). These irregularities increased widespread skepticism of democratic Institutions have expressed doubts about the validity of the elections. Following the election, the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, and other establishment-allied parties formed a coalition government. While independent PTI candidates suffered substantial failures due to legal and procedural obstacles, the state machinery soon backed the coalition despite a lack of popular support (Brookings, 2024). The notion that the democratic mandate had been weakened sparked significant protests, legal challenges, and a continuing crisis of legitimacy for the newly established administration. This study aims to closely examine the events that happened prior to and following Pakistan's 2024 elections, with a focus on the relationship between electoral manipulation, institutional prejudice, and popular resistance. The goal is to utilise the Pakistani scenario as an example of shifting patterns in authoritarian adaptation and citizen-led resistance, contributing to a larger discussion on the decline of democracy and hybrid regimes. major research issues address the nature of political engineering, the impact of major institutions on electoral outcomes, and the consequences for Pakistan's democratic future.

Set of surveys and tables
Pre- and Post-Election Survey Summary Table.

Indicator	Pre-Election (2023–early 2024)	Post-Election (mid-late 2024)	Survey Source
Trust in Election Commission	38% trust	41% trust	PILDAT 2024
Perception of Military Interference	61% believe interference	57% believe interference continued	Gallup Pakistan
Media Freedom Perception	45% say the media is free	39% say media is free	Freedom Network Pakistan
Belief in Fairness of Elections	34% expect fair elections	36% believed elections were fair	IRI Survey 2024
Support for Democracy	64% support democratic system	67% support democracy despite flaws	Gallup Pakistan
Voter Turnout Intention / Actual Turnout	68% planned to vote	52% turnout recorded	ECP, Gallup
Youth Participation (18–35 years)	74% said they would vote	48% turnout among youth	British Council + FAFEN
Perceived Role of Judiciary	44% say judiciary is biased	47% say judiciary aided political manipulation	HRCP Report 2024

Political Engineering Indicators Table

Political Engineering Tactic	Public Perception (Agree %)	Remarks
Military influence in party selection	58%	Seen in formation of new alliances
Biased delimitation of constituencies	49%	Linked to favorable outcomes in Punjab
Media censorship during campaign	53%	Restrictions on opposition coverage
Judicial decisions targeting political leaders	47%	Bans, disqualifications before polls
Managed defections from opposition	41%	"Electable" shift to establishment-backed parties

Democratic Trajectory Indicators (2020–2024)

Year	Freedom House Score	PILDAT Democracy Score	Military-Civilian Power Ratio (Est.)	Remarks
2020	39/100	5.2/10	70:30 (Military-dominated)	PTI government under increasing pressure
2022	38/100	4.9/10	75:25	Imran Khan ousted; coalition formed
2023	37/100	4.5/10	80:20	Crackdowns, media trials
2024	37/100	4.7/10	75:25	Elections held amid control mechanisms

Literature Review
Political Engineering and Hybrid Governments in Pakistan.
The deliberate manipulation of the political system by influential, unelected institutions, such as the military and the judiciary, is known as "political engineering" in Pakistan. Academics such as Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010) along with Ayesha Siddiqa (2017) argue that Pakistan represents a hybrid system in which democratic practices and authoritarian control mechanisms coexist. Steps taken during the 2024 elections included removing the party's electoral symbol, disqualifying PTI leaders, and using institutional channels to exert pressure (Haqqani, 2023; HRCP, 2024).

Table: Surveys on Political Engineering and Hybrid Regimes in Pakistan

Survey	Institution	Year	Key Findings	Relevance to Hybrid Regime
Gallup Pakistan - Public Pulse Report	Gallup Pakistan	2022	52% believed military influenced elections; 65% supported democracy, but lacked trust in electoral transparency.	Reflects military's role in political outcomes, undermining civilian supremacy.
PILDAT - Democracy Assessment	PILDAT (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency)	2023	Only 36% satisfied with functioning of democracy; 58% viewed military as most powerful political actor.	Suggests civilian institutions remain subordinate despite democratic structures.
AFR Survey - Public Trust in Institutions	Asian Foundation for Research (AFR)	2021	Trust in military: 75%, Judiciary: 48%, Parliament: 28%.	Indicates imbalance of institutional trust, a feature of hybrid regimes.
IRI Survey - Democratic Values in Pakistan	International Republican Institute	2019	66% supported free elections but 45% believed real power lies outside parliament.	Demonstrates the contradiction between democratic aspirations and elite-controlled governance.
Freedom House - Freedom in the World Report	Freedom House	2024	Pakistan scored 37/100 (Partly Free); cited lack of political autonomy and military interference.	International index confirming hybrid characteristics and political engineering.
Transparency International - Corruption Perception Index (CPI)	Transparency International	2022	Ranked 140/180; corruption seen as tied to both civilian and non-civilian actors.	Highlights how governance is compromised in hybrid setups by elite bargains.

Electoral Manipulation and Institutional Bias

According to research, managed democracies frequently employ politicized electoral bodies and weakened judicial systems (Norris, 2015; Schedler, 2013). A structurally skewed electoral environment was produced by the Election Commission of Pakistan's lack of transparency and court decisions that disproportionately targeted the PTI. Voter confidence and democratic legitimacy are undermined by such bias (Javid, 2024; ISAS, 2024).

Voter Mobilization and Digital Media Influence

The 2024 elections saw a high level of political involvement, particularly among urban young, despite the repressive atmosphere. A new trend of digital mobilization in semi-authoritarian regimes is shown in PTI's widespread use of digital platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and X (previously Twitter) (Howard et al., 2011; Shah, 2020). This strategy made it possible to interact directly with voters and get over limitations on mainstream media (Brookings, 2024).

Digital Media Influence on Voter Mobilization (2023–2024)

Platform	Usage Among Voters (%)	Role in Election Campaigns	Impact
Facebook	63% (urban youth 18–35)	Major platform for party outreach, livestreams, memes	High engagement but also misinformation
YouTube	51%	Long-form content, vlogs by political influencers	Shaped public narratives, especially pro-opposition
Twitter/X	34%	Political trends, hashtags, news leaks	High political polarization and digital activism
TikTok	44%	Short videos, satire, youth-focused messaging	Helped engage first-time and apolitical voters
WhatsApp	72%	Peer-to-peer political mobilization, viral content	High potential for both engagement and disinformation

Survey Data on Digital Media and Voting Behavior

Survey Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Source
"Social media helped me decide whom to vote for"	57%	28%	Gallup Pakistan Youth Survey 2024
"Political content on TikTok and YouTube influenced my views"	41%	36%	Digital Democracy Project
"I trust digital media more than TV for political news"	48%	32%	IRI 2024
"I participated in online political activism (hashtags, shares, comments)"	38%	45%	HRCP Online Civic Survey

Voter Mobilization Trends (Traditional vs. Digital)

Method	Effectiveness in 2024 (%)	Target Demographic	Comments
Door-to-door campaigning	42%	Rural, low-literacy areas	Still effective but declining
Political rallies	53%	General audience, show of strength	Used more for optics
SMS & robocalls	21%	Urban middle class	Mostly ignored
Social media campaigns	61%	Urban youth (18–35)	Primary mobilization method
Influencer endorsements	33%	Youth, TikTok/YouTube audience	Growing trend

Post-Election Legitimacy and Coalition Politics

A developing crisis of legitimacy is reflected in the coalition administration that was formed after the election, which excluded the candidates with the largest votes. Such manufactured outcomes lead to civic unrest and widespread disillusionment, as noted by the United States Institute of Peace (2024) and Afzal (2024). Academics contend that eliminating legitimate election winners jeopardizes democratic institutions' long-term viability as well as their political credibility (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2013).

Post-Election Legitimacy: Public Perception & Challenges

Indicator	Observation	Source
Public Trust in Election Outcome	Only 36% believed elections were free and fair	Gallup Pakistan 2024
Voter Turnout	52% overall turnout, lower than expected	Election Commission of Pakistan
Perception of Vote Rigging	58% believed vote manipulation occurred in selected constituencies	PILDAT
Roe of Judiciary	Seen as upholding selective disqualifications; legitimacy questioned	HRCP Report
Protests and Sit-ins	Post-election protests by opposition parties in Punjab, KPK	News Reports (Dawn, Geo)
International Response	EU, HRW raised concerns over media censorship and pre-poll bias	Freedom House, EU Observer

Coalition Politics: Parliamentary Dynamics After 2024

Party/Alliance	Seats Won (NA)	Coalition Status	Role in Government
PML-N	79	Lead coalition partner	Prime Minister from PML-N
PPP	54	Junior coalition partner	Holds key ministries
MQM-P	17	Coalition partner	Urban Sindh representation
PTI-backed Independents	92	Largest bloc but excluded	Accused ECP, judiciary of bias
BNP, JUI-F, Others	20	Support partners	Regional bargaining power

Note: Due to PTI's candidates contesting as independents (after party symbol ban), post-election alliance-building became more complex.

Legitimacy Challenges in Coalition Formation

Challenge	Impact	Explanation
Exclusion of PTI	Raised legitimacy questions	PTI-backed independents were the largest group
Caretaker Government's Role	Alleged bias towards establishment-backed parties	Extended tenure delayed power transition
Electoral Symbol Controversy	PTI denied iconic bat symbol	Led to voter confusion, disenfranchisement
Judicial Oversight	Selective decisions seen as politically motivated	Undermined impartiality of judiciary

Public Opinion on Post-Election Legitimacy

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Survey Source
"The elections were transparent"	36%	48%	Gallup Pakistan
"The current coalition reflects the will of the people"	32%	54%	PILDAT
"PTI was unfairly excluded from the process"	61%	29%	IRI 2024
"Democracy is functioning effectively after the elections"	38%	46%	HRCP Survey

Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Erosion

In Pakistan, civil-military ties continue to be a major obstacle to the consolidation of democracy. Institutional hegemony continues to influence governance, as evidenced by the military's indirect engagement through legal, administrative, and media channels (Siddiqa, 2017; Haqqani, 2023). The events leading up to the 2024 elections serve as a reminder that Pakistan's political system still maintains military domination, which limits the country's chances of becoming true democracy.

Historical Context of Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan

Era	Key Features	Impact on Democracy
1958–1971 (Ayub & Yahya)	Direct military rule	Suppression of political parties, centralized power
1977–1988 (Zia-ul-Haq)	Martial law, Islamization	Politicization of religion, weakened parliament
1999–2008 (Musharraf)	Military-led hybrid regime	Judiciary co-opted, media under control
2008–2018	Civilian governments, indirect influence	Controlled democracy, military's role in foreign policy
2018–2022 (PTI Rule)	Military-backed civilian rule	Rise of "selected government" narrative
2022–2024	Crackdown on PTI, judicial-political engineering	Military accused of managing electoral process

Indicators of Military Dominance in Civil Affairs (2022–2024)

Area of Influence	Manifestation	Resulting Democratic Erosion
Electoral Engineering	Delimitation, symbol denial, caretaker control	Voter disenfranchisement, loss of electoral credibility
Media Control	PEMRA directives, bans on opposition coverage	Suppression of dissent, public narrative manipulation
Judicial Engineering	Selective disqualifications, delayed verdicts	Legal bias, erosion of rule of law
Civil Bureaucracy	Appointments influenced by GHQ	Weakening of institutional autonomy
Foreign Policy & National Security	Fully controlled by military establishment	Marginalization of civilian input

Signs of Democratic Erosion (2023–2024)

Democratic Norm	Eroded Practice	Example
Free & Fair Elections	Pre-poll rigging, exclusion of PTI	Symbol ban, independent candidacies
Judicial Independence	Courts used to eliminate rivals	Selective enforcement of disqualification
Media Freedom	Censorship, channel shutdowns	Blockage of YouTube, TikTok, TV bans
Opposition Rights	Mass arrests, political victimization	Crackdown on PTI post-May 9 events
Parliamentary Oversight	Rubber-stamp legislation	Caretaker extensions, delayed NA sessions

Survey Data on Civil-Military Power Imbalance

Survey Question	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Source
"Military wields real power in Pakistan"	68%	19%	Gallup 2024
"Civilian governments are only symbolic"	53%	30%	PILDAT
"The military influences court decisions in political cases"	49%	34%	HRCP
"True democracy cannot exist until military exits politics"	61%	22%	IRI Survey

Research Methodology

In order to comprehend the political, institutional, and societal factors surrounding Pakistan's general elections in 2024, this study uses a qualitative, exploratory design. The study prioritizes context-specific insights and thematic interpretation over quantitative generalization because of the dynamic political landscape and the controversial nature of electoral processes.

Research Design

The character of the study is both descriptive and analytical. It examines how important players—such as political parties, institutions, voters, and civil society—saw and negotiated the pre- and post-election landscape using interpretivist epistemology.

Data Collection

The Election Commission of Pakistan's official reports (ECP, 2024). reports on election monitoring from groups like the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS, 2024), the United States Institute of Peace (USIP, 2024), and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP, 2024). novels, policy papers, and scholarly articles (Afzal, 2024; Haqqani, 2023; Javid, 2024). news reports from reliable sources such as Al Jazeera, Reuters, Dawn, and The Guardian.

Data Analysis

The data was categorized and interpreted using a thematic analysis approach into the following domains:

- Election administration and conduct;
- Voter behavior and political involvement;

- Post-election results and institutional reactions;
- Political repression and legal engineering prior to the election

Triangulation of sources was used to improve the authenticity and credibility of the results. To provide a fair reading, special attention was paid to opposing narratives, such as those supported by the state vs those allied with the opposition.

Limitations

Although thorough, this study's dependence on secondary sources is constrained by the lack of access to primary material, including official internal communications and interviews. Furthermore, the subject's political sensitivity may affect how reliable some reports are. A multifaceted and comprehensive examination of one of Pakistan's most controversial election occurrences is made possible by the methodology, which forms the basis for the following analytical work.

Analysis and Discussion
Pre-Election Political Engineering

Intentional attempts to crush the political opposition, particularly the PTI, through arrests, media control, and judicial interventions characterized the 2024 election cycle. An unequal playing field was produced by the mass arrest of PTI leaders, the disqualification of Imran Khan, and the revocation of the party's electoral symbol (HRCP, 2024). These acts were part of a larger pre-election political engineering campaign that sought to influence election results without using overt authoritarianism (Haqqani, 2023). Pre-election political engineering refers to deliberate institutional, legal, and political manipulations undertaken by state or non-state actors to shape electoral outcomes even before votes are cast. In hybrid regimes or transitioning democracies like Pakistan, such engineering is a critical tool used by powerful institutions—often including the military establishment, judiciary, and election commissions—to ensure favorable electoral results without overtly dismantling democratic processes. Manipulation of electoral constituencies or gerrymandering can dilute the vote bank of certain political parties. Legal disqualifications of candidates (such as those under Articles 62 and 63 of Pakistan's Constitution) have been used selectively, as in the case of Nawaz Sharif (2017), which shaped the political landscape before the 2018 elections (Khan, 2019). Creation or promotion of 'electables' and engineered factions—such as the emergence of the BAP party before the 2018 elections—weakens mainstream parties (Adeel, 2020). Pressure on candidates to switch allegiances or run independently after being sidelined by their parent parties. Selective censorship and media blackout of opposition voices (HRCP, 2023). Amplification of state-favored parties' messaging through state-influenced media houses and social media manipulation. National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and other institutions often investigate opposition leaders disproportionately before elections to damage their credibility. Arrests or court cases often peak just before elections, as seen in the pre-2018 and pre-2024 cycles (Yusuf, 2022). Unequal distribution of development funds to influence voters in swing constituencies. Appointments of politically loyal bureaucrats and returning officers who can sway the local polling environment. Harassment of opposition workers, restrictions on rallies, and denial of permissions for campaign events have been reported. Intelligence agencies reportedly monitoring political activities and guiding electoral behaviors from behind the scenes.

Electoral Dynamics and Voter Turnout

The electorate showed surprising tenacity in the face of these repressive policies. With a considerable increase in young turnout and support for independent candidates endorsed by the PTI, more than 48% of eligible voters cast ballots (ECP, 2024; Afzal, 2024). By getting beyond the limitations of traditional media and facilitating grassroots advocacy, social media was an

essential mobilizing tool. State-controlled narratives were contested and election dynamics were altered by this internet involvement (Brookings, 2024).

Irregularities and Electoral Manipulation

Widespread anomalies during and after the elections were confirmed by numerous independent reports. Transparency issues were brought to light by the election day mobile network outages and the postponement of the results announcements (USIP, 2024). Allegations of vote rigging and result change were further fanned by discrepancies between Form-45 and Form-47. Perceptions of systemic rigging are strengthened by these anomalies, which erode public confidence.

Coalition Politics and Post-Election Governance

Despite their numerical superiority, PTI-backed independents were left out of the multi-party coalition that was formed in the wake of the elections. A government with support from the establishment was swiftly formed by the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, and smaller parties (ISAS, 2024). This arrangement increased political divisiveness and sparked massive protests. Additionally, it revealed how weak Pakistan's democratic institutions were, seeming to be dominated by the interests of the elite.

Democratic Implications and Civil-Military Relations

The 2024 elections serve as an example of how Pakistan's hybrid regime model—in which elections are held but real political competition is restricted—remains in place. Even while it was less obvious than in earlier times, the military's influence over outcomes was nonetheless significant thanks to its use of legal and procedural tools (Siddiqa, 2024). The legitimacy crisis brought on by the PTI's marginalization raises concerns about the validity of Pakistan's democratic procedures and reflects a growing sense of disenchantment among the populace.

Emerging Trends and Public Resilience

The development of an active and knowledgeable voter base will be a crucial outcome of the 2024 elections. The increased participation of young, online activism, and a shift away from old patronage structures all point to a trend towards more issue-focused political participation. While the establishment achieved a great result, democratic legitimacy and public trust were lost in the process.

Findings

This section presents significant findings from the examination of Pakistan's 2024 general elections, with an emphasis on political manipulation, institutional behaviour, voter turnout, and post-election governance. These findings indicate the underlying causes that influenced election results and have far-reaching ramifications for Pakistan's democratic system.

Political engineering was systematic and strategic.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was brought down before of the 2024 elections with a well-thought-out campaign that comprised the following:

I. Imran Khan, the party's leader, was imprisoned and disqualified.
II. The party's famous electoral symbol has been deleted.
III. PTI candidates faced legal and procedural harassment.

These actions were part of a larger pattern of pre-election manipulation intended at undermining a prominent political candidate, rather than separate events.

Institutions Failed to Act Impartially

Public confidence in the fairness of the electoral process was weakened by key institutions, especially the judiciary and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), which were seen as biased and complicit in political engineering. The ECP's decision-making procedures were opaque, and judicial interventions disproportionately targeted PTI leaders and supporters.

Voter Resilience and Political Consciousness Increased

In spite of coercion and repression, over 48% of voters cast ballots, with young people and urban populations displaying particularly well. The electorate, especially young voters, demonstrated greater political awareness and a disdain of establishment-aligned politics; PTI-backed independents gained the most seats, suggesting that political engineering did not completely stifle public support for the party.

Election Day Was Marked by Significant Irregularities

There were significant technical and administrative issues with the elections, such as: o The suspension of mobile networks and the internet during voting. Postponements in the official results announcement. Disparities between the combined result on Form-47 and the polling station result on Form-45. These anomalies contributed to the impression of a tainted election and fanned claims of vote fraud.

Post-Election Governance Lacked Legitimacy

Despite their electoral power, PTI-backed independents were left out of the multi-party coalition government, which prompted concerns about the legitimacy of the mandate.Large segments of the electorate were further alienated by the alliance of the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, and others, which many saw as being created by the establishment. Protests, legal challenges, and ongoing political instability have all been associated with this governing system.

Civil-Military Power Dynamics Remain Central

Despite being less obvious than in earlier times, the military establishment continued to have a significant impact on events leading up to and following elections.Pakistan's designation as a hybrid regime was confirmed by institutional actions that seemed to represent military inclinations.

Digital Media Emerged as a Counter-Force

To rally voters and fight censorship, PTI and its allies mostly depended on websites like YouTube, X (previously Twitter), and WhatsApp.Social media served as an alternative political arena, providing a platform for stories that were not allowed to be heard in state-run media.

Democratic Norms Are Under Severe Strain

The electorate's tenacity indicates that public demand for democratic accountability is still high, despite the frequent use of institutional, legal, and administrative instruments to sway results, which alludes to democratic retreat.

Recommendations

Pakistan's status as a hybrid regime, with both authoritarian and democratic elements, has been confirmed by the 2024 general elections. Formal electoral procedures were maintained, but the reality of post-election exclusion, biased institutional behavior, and political repression seriously compromised democratic integrity. The following recommendations are made to support electoral integrity, strengthen democratic institutions, and guarantee a more accountable and transparent political system in Pakistan in light of the results and outcomes of the 2024 general elections:

Electoral Reforms and Institutional Independence

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) needs to be reconstituted to function as an independent, empowered constitutional body free from institutional and political pressures. Changes should be made to prevent the unfair exclusion of symbols or parties without providing them with any recourse and a fair trial. A transparent results management system should be established to prevent delays and discrepancies in the tabulation and publication of election results.

Strengthening judicial impartiality

The judiciary should refrain from political interference and adhere to the principle of separation of powers. Judicial decisions that disproportionately favor parties with ties to the establishment undermine the rule of law. Independent judicial oversight mechanisms should be adopted to review politically sensitive cases and ensure fair legal proceedings, especially during election seasons.

Restoring media freedom and digital access

Media outlets and journalists should be free to operate without hindrance or coercion. Media restrictions and pressure rarely allow fair political discourse to reach the public. Internet shutdowns and digital blackouts, such as those that occur on election days, should be prohibited by law as they violate democratic rights and transparency. Funding should be allocated for independent journalism, internet literacy, and fact-checking as they are the foundation of informed voting.

Protecting political pluralism

Media outlets and journalists should be free to operate without hindrance or coercion. Media restrictions and pressure rarely allow fair political discourse to reach the public. Internet shutdowns and digital blackouts, such as those that occur on election days, should be prohibited by law as they violate democratic rights and transparency. Funding should be allocated for independent journalism, internet literacy, and fact-checking as they are the foundation of informed voting.

Reforming civil-military relations

The military should return to its constitutionally assigned role and refrain from involvement in political engineering, policy-making, or candidate selection. A strong legislative oversight system should be established to monitor and limit the military's influence on political matters.

Enhancing voter confidence and participation

The primary objective of reforms should be to restore public confidence in the electoral process, ensuring transparency throughout the process, from nominations to the final results. A civic education campaign should be launched to inform the public of their rights and the need to actively engage in politics.

Legal and procedural safeguards against political engineering

Establish a clear legal framework to prevent electoral tampering, administrative bias, and undue pressure on officials and candidates. Deploy local and foreign, impartial observers to monitor election campaigns, voting procedures, and post-election events.

Encourage regional and international best practices

Pakistan should seek technical assistance and information exchange with democracies of the Global South to adopt best practices in electoral governance. Building links with election monitoring agencies such as the Commonwealth, EU, and UNDP helps to enhance the legitimacy of the process and institutional professionalism.

Conclusion

Pakistan's 2024 general elections served as a sharp reminder of the complexity and fragmentation of democracy in hybrid political systems. Despite the fact that the country's democratic electoral requirements were followed, there were major electoral anomalies, institutional prejudice, and systematic political engineering. The pre-election climate was marked by media restrictions on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), judicial disqualification, imprisonment of party leaders, and the historic removal of the party's election emblem. These reforms threatened the voting process's transparency and competitiveness. Despite these faults, voters, particularly the younger generation, rejected elitist politics and exhibited a strong dedication to politics by supporting independent candidates backed by the PTI. However, election-day disturbances like as internet blackouts, announcement delays, and results tabulation anomalies weakened public trust in the process. The coalition government's haste in excluding successful independent candidates prompted concerns about its legitimacy and transparency. Following the election, there have been widespread protests, ongoing legal challenges, and escalating political tensions. This circumstance highlights the fragility of Pakistan's democratic institutions, as elections are frequently linked to the strategic goals of the military establishment and civilian elites. The election results confirm the existence of a framework for an orderly democracy in which democratic means are employed to attain desired objectives without resorting to overt authoritarian leadership. Furthermore, the 2024 elections demonstrated the same path to democratic rule. The growth of independent political narratives, the importance of digital media, and youth engagement have all shaken the long-held status quo. This growing desire for accountability and justice, which reflects a shifting political consciousness, may eventually force the state towards more genuine democratic reforms. Finally, the 2024 elections will showcase Pakistan's political system's dual realities: institutional manipulation and democratic awakening. To achieve a truly democratic future, Pakistan must execute significant election changes, protect the independence of the judiciary and electoral institutions, and decrease military influence in civilian rule. Without these critical reforms, contested mandates and political engineering will continue to jeopardise state stability and the legitimacy of elected administrations.

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