

DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN CRISIS: HOW EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES SURVIVED POPULISM AND WHAT PAKISTAN CAN LEARN?

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of democratic evolution in Pakistan and identifies practical lessons that can be drawn from the European experiences of Germany, France, and Hungary. The research investigates how institutional consolidation, civic education, and constitutional supremacy have contributed to Europe's democratic endurance, while Pakistan continues to struggle with periodic disruptions of civilian rule and weak institutional autonomy. Using a qualitative and comparative approach, the study examines scholarly works on democratization, constitutionalism, and civic culture to evaluate the contrasting trajectories of these political systems. The findings suggest that Europe's post-war democratic consolidation resulted from deliberate constitutional design, strong judicial independence, and an embedded culture of accountability. In contrast, Pakistan's democratic system remains fragile due to elite dominance, politicized institutions, and limited civic awareness. Germany's federal constitutionalism and France's participatory republicanism serve as models for institutional equilibrium, while Hungary's democratic regression provides a cautionary perspective on populism. The study concludes that Pakistan's democratic consolidation depends on depoliticizing governance institutions, enhancing civic education, and strengthening constitutional continuity. By internalizing, not imitating, Europe's principles of rule-based governance and civic responsibility, Pakistan can transition from procedural democracy toward a more substantive and sustainable democratic order.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy, as a form of governance, has evolved differently across regions, shaped by historical experiences, institutional structures, and political cultures. In Europe, democracy matured through centuries of constitutional

development, civic education, and institutional accountability, whereas in Pakistan it has been repeatedly disrupted by authoritarian interventions, populism, and weak civil institutions (Huntington, 1991; Fatima &

Rehman, 2021). European democracies such as Germany and France have established resilient systems that uphold the rule of law, protect individual rights, and sustain public participation, despite facing populist and ideological challenges (Merkel, 2014; Schmidt, 2020). In contrast, Pakistan's democratic process remains transitional, oscillating between hope and instability, due to the absence of institutional consolidation and a consistent democratic culture (Burki, 2015; Haqqani, 2018).

Since independence in 1947, Pakistan has experienced multiple phases of political experimentation, ranging from parliamentary democracy to military dictatorship. This inconsistent trajectory has created deep institutional fragility, where constitutional supremacy is often subordinated to political expediency (Ziring, 2004). The civil-military imbalance, elite capture, and weak rule of law have obstructed Pakistan's ability to consolidate democracy on a sustainable foundation (Khan, 2020). In contrast, European states such as Germany and France emerged from historical turmoil, yet succeeded in institutionalizing democratic resilience through constitutionalism, civic education, and participatory governance (Morlino, 2012). Meanwhile, Hungary's recent experience illustrates how democratic erosion can occur even within established systems when populism and executive dominance go unchecked (Tóth, 2019).

Despite seven decades of independence and repeated democratic transitions, Pakistan continues to face systemic weaknesses that prevent democratic consolidation. Political institutions remain fragile, public accountability mechanisms are inconsistent, and civic participation is often limited to electoral mobilization rather than policy engagement. These conditions have produced a democracy that is procedural rather than substantive. European democracies, on the other hand, demonstrate that enduring democracy requires more than periodic elections, it demands a strong civic culture, depoliticized institutions, and a commitment to constitutional supremacy (Diamond, 2019; Norris, 2017). The problem at hand is not simply the existence of elections in

Pakistan but the absence of sustained democratic norms and institutional credibility that underpin a functioning democratic order.

This study aims to:

- Examine the historical and structural challenges facing democracy in Pakistan.
- Analyze the institutional and cultural foundations of democracy in Germany, France, and Hungary.
- Identify key lessons Pakistan can learn from European democratic consolidation.
- Propose policy recommendations for strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions and civic culture.

Research Questions

1. What historical, political, and institutional factors have hindered democratic consolidation in Pakistan?
2. How have European countries, particularly Germany, France, and Hungary, maintained or challenged democratic resilience?
3. What structural and cultural lessons can Pakistan derive from European democratic practices to enhance its governance framework?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant in both theoretical and practical terms. Theoretically, it contributes to the broader literature on democratization by situating Pakistan's political experience within a comparative framework of European democracies (Almond & Verba, 1963; Morlino, 2012). It expands the understanding of how civic culture and institutional design influence democratic sustainability. Practically, it offers evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors in Pakistan who seek to strengthen democratic governance and public accountability. By learning from Europe's post-war democratic reconstruction and contemporary challenges, Pakistan can develop a model of democracy that reflects its social realities while upholding universal democratic principles such as the rule of law, institutional independence, and civic participation (Merkel, 2014; Berman, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Democracy has been one of the most studied and contested concepts in political science, with

scholars offering diverse theoretical frameworks to explain its emergence, consolidation, and decay. Huntington (1991) conceptualized democratization as a series of “waves,” each followed by periods of regression, suggesting that democracy’s endurance depends on the strength of institutions rather than electoral enthusiasm. Similarly, Dahl (1971) introduced the concept of “polyarchy,” emphasizing participation and contestation as the twin pillars of democratic governance. Later theorists expanded this view to include civic culture, accountability, and the rule of law as indispensable elements of democratic stability (Diamond, 2019; Morlino, 2012).

One of the most enduring frameworks is presented by Almond and Verba (1963), who argued that democracy thrives in societies where political culture supports participation, trust, and tolerance. Their concept of civic culture explains why some democracies consolidate while others stagnate. This culturalist view was later reinforced by Putnam (1993), who showed that the success of democratic institutions in Italy depended less on constitutional design and more on social capital and civic engagement. The civic culture model thus provides a strong theoretical lens for comparing Pakistan and European democracies, as it links democratic sustainability to citizen behavior and social trust rather than mere institutional form.

Institutional consolidation lies at the heart of democratic endurance. According to Linz and Stepan (1996), democracy becomes consolidated when political, legal, and bureaucratic institutions are “the only game in town.” This means that power transitions occur through legitimate and predictable mechanisms rather than coercion or personal influence. Merkel (2014) adds that consolidation also requires “embedded democracy,” in which electoral, judicial, and civil rights institutions function cohesively to protect democratic norms.

In Europe, institutional consolidation has been achieved through decades of constitutional stability, judicial independence, and administrative neutrality. Germany’s post-war democratic framework, established under the 1949 Basic Law, represents a classic model of institutionalized democracy. Scholars such as Schmidt (2020) and Morlino (2012) argue that

Germany’s success rests on the decentralization of power through federalism and the Constitutional Court’s active role in protecting civil liberties. France, meanwhile, has managed to combine a strong executive presidency with parliamentary accountability, creating a dynamic equilibrium that reinforces both authority and responsiveness (Norris, 2017).

In contrast, Pakistan’s institutions remain fragile due to recurrent military interventions and politicized governance structures (Khan, 2020; Ziring, 2004). The judiciary and bureaucracy, though formally independent, often succumb to political pressures. Haqqani (2018) notes that Pakistan’s civil-military imbalance has perpetuated a culture of dependency, where the legitimacy of political institutions is frequently questioned. The absence of constitutional continuity, marked by multiple abrogations of the constitution, has hindered the country’s ability to institutionalize democracy in the Weberian sense of rational-legal authority.

The relationship between civic culture and democracy is critical to understanding both European success and Pakistan’s fragility. Almond and Verba’s (1963) seminal research demonstrated that democracies thrive where citizens actively participate in political processes while respecting institutional boundaries. In the European context, civic education programs and public institutions have cultivated a citizenry aware of its rights and responsibilities (Morlino, 2012; Berman, 2017). Germany’s post-war educational reforms, for example, explicitly aimed to prevent authoritarianism by fostering democratic citizenship and historical awareness. In France, the concept of *République civique* embodies a collective civic identity that transcends ethnic and sectarian divisions (Schmidt, 2020). This civic cohesion has allowed France to maintain democratic legitimacy even amid social and political unrest. Conversely, Hungary’s experience of democratic backsliding reveals how the erosion of civic participation and media freedom can quickly undermine democratic norms (Tóth, 2019).

Pakistan’s civic culture remains underdeveloped in comparison. As Fatima and Rehman (2021) observe, political participation in Pakistan is often confined to voting and patronage networks rather than issue-based mobilization.

Weak civic education, widespread illiteracy, and socio-economic disparities limit public understanding of democratic accountability. The result is a system where citizens depend on personal connections rather than institutions to access state services (Burki, 2015). Diamond (2019) argues that without a robust civic culture, formal democracy cannot evolve into substantive democracy, an observation particularly relevant to Pakistan.

The rise of populism has challenged established democracies globally. In Europe, populist leaders have questioned liberal values, press freedom, and the Independence of the judiciary. Merkel (2014) and Berman (2017) describe this as a “crisis of liberal democracy,” driven by disillusionment with elites and globalization. Hungary represents a case where populism has transformed democratic institutions from within. Under Viktor Orbán, constitutional reforms and control over the media have gradually eroded checks and balances (Tóth, 2019). This phenomenon demonstrates that even consolidated democracies can regress when institutional constraints weaken.

Pakistan’s populism manifests differently. Leaders often use populist rhetoric to mobilize emotional support while undermining institutions that ensure accountability. Haqqani (2018) and Rashid (2013) emphasize that Pakistan’s political instability stems from this cycle of populism, patronage, and elite dominance. Unlike Europe, where civil society and media counterbalance populism, Pakistan’s accountability mechanisms remain inconsistent and politically manipulated. Therefore, the comparative insight is clear: democratic endurance requires not only constitutional safeguards but also independent institutions capable of checking executive power (Norris, 2017; Diamond, 2019).

The literature suggests several key lessons Pakistan can learn from European democracies. First, the European model demonstrates the primacy of constitutionalism, the rule of law must supersede political expediency. Germany’s Basic Law and France’s Fifth Republic constitution are examples of enduring legal frameworks that balance authority with accountability (Schmidt, 2020; Morlino, 2012). Second, civic education and public engagement

play a crucial role in cultivating democratic culture. European societies have invested in civic learning to instill values of tolerance and pluralism (Almond & Verba, 1963; Berman, 2017). Third, depoliticization of institutions remains essential. Pakistan’s civil and judicial institutions require autonomy to perform without political interference, as seen in the European emphasis on bureaucratic neutrality (Khan, 2020; Fatima & Rehman, 2021).

Finally, the Hungarian case provides an important warning for Pakistan: democracy can decay even under formal constitutional arrangements if public institutions are co-opted by populist forces. The challenge for Pakistan is therefore twofold, building institutional capacity while simultaneously nurturing democratic values among citizens. As Zakaria (2003) reminds us, “illiberal democracies” may hold elections but fail to uphold liberty, pluralism, and justice, the true markers of democratic maturity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design aimed at exploring the democratic evolution of Pakistan vis-à-vis selected European democracies, specifically Germany, France, and Hungary. The purpose of this comparative design is to examine how differences in institutional consolidation, civic culture, and political accountability shape democratic endurance across contexts. The design follows a descriptive-analytical framework, emphasizing historical trajectories, institutional mechanisms, and socio-political culture rather than numerical data.

Qualitative comparative analysis allows researchers to explore “how” and “why” political systems differ in their democratic outcomes by interpreting contextual, cultural, and institutional variables. This method suits the present research because democracy cannot be understood purely through quantitative measures such as election frequency or voter turnout; it requires an assessment of historical legacies, elite behavior, and institutional interdependence, all of which demand qualitative exploration.

Comparative Approach

The study employs the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), where the cases share broad similarities, such as having parliamentary systems, colonial or post-war political transitions, and multi-party frameworks, but differ in democratic performance and institutional maturity. This design facilitates identifying variables that contribute to democratic consolidation in Europe and their relative absence or weakness in Pakistan.

Germany and France are selected as models of consolidated democracy characterized by constitutional continuity, civic education, and institutional accountability. Hungary, by contrast, represents a case of democratic regression, serving as a comparative warning against institutional decay. Pakistan, representing the South Asian democratic experience, is analyzed against these European benchmarks to extract lessons relevant to its political development.

Data Collection Methods

The research relies primarily on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy documents, and reports from international organizations such as Freedom House, Transparency International, and the Economist Intelligence Unit. These materials provide both empirical evidence and theoretical grounding for assessing democratic quality and institutional strength.

In addition, historical documents such as constitutional texts, parliamentary debates, and major reform acts in Pakistan and the European states are reviewed to trace institutional evolution. Media analysis, through credible newspapers, think tank publications, and research institutes, offers insights into contemporary democratic practices, governance crises, and reform trends.

Documentary evidence is cross-verified through triangulation, ensuring the reliability of interpretations. Triangulation in this context means comparing multiple scholarly and institutional sources to confirm patterns or discrepancies in democratic behavior across countries.

Data Analysis Technique

Data are analyzed through thematic analysis, which involves identifying, coding, and interpreting key themes emerging from the literature and policy texts. The main analytical themes include:

- Institutional consolidation and rule of law
- Civic culture and political participation
- Accountability and populism
- Comparative lessons for Pakistan

This thematic approach enables the synthesis of diverse sources into a coherent comparative framework. Each theme is interpreted through both a descriptive and evaluative lens, first outlining the empirical reality in each case and then assessing its implications for Pakistan's democratic trajectory.

To enhance interpretive accuracy, the analysis applies conceptual coding, focusing on terms such as "constitutionalism," "judicial independence," "civil-military relations," and "civic education." This ensures consistency between theoretical concepts and empirical discussion.

Theoretical Framework Integration

The study integrates democratization theory as the central analytical lens, drawing from scholars such as Huntington (1991), Linz and Stepan (1996), and Diamond (2019). Their frameworks help assess how institutional design, elite behavior, and civic engagement influence the success or failure of democratic regimes. The civic culture theory of Almond and Verba (1963) and the embedded democracy model of Merkel (2014) are applied to contextualize the European experience and to identify areas of reform for Pakistan.

By synthesizing these theories, the study moves beyond descriptive comparison and provides explanatory insight into why Pakistan's democracy has remained fragile and how European practices may offer institutional solutions.

Limitations of the Study

While the study provides a comprehensive qualitative comparison, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis relies on secondary data; therefore, some findings depend

on the accuracy and interpretation of existing scholarship. Second, cultural and historical differences between Pakistan and European states may limit direct policy transferability. Finally, the study focuses on selected European cases rather than the entire continent, which may exclude variations within other democracies such as Italy or Spain.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the study's core contribution. By situating Pakistan's democratic experience within a broader comparative framework, the research offers a nuanced understanding of institutional weaknesses and civic deficits that impede democratic consolidation.

FINDINGS

1. Institutional Consolidation and Rule of Law

The analysis reveals that the most significant divergence between Pakistan and European democracies lies in the strength and autonomy of political institutions. In Germany and France, the rule of law is deeply embedded within the political system, ensuring that state power operates within clear constitutional boundaries (Merkel, 2014; Schmidt, 2020). Germany's Grundgesetz (Basic Law), established in 1949, serves as the cornerstone of constitutional supremacy, ensuring judicial oversight and federal balance (Morlino, 2012). France's Fifth Republic, under its semi-presidential system, has successfully maintained a functional equilibrium between executive authority and parliamentary accountability (Elgie, 2011).

In Pakistan, by contrast, institutional fragility and political interference remain persistent. The judiciary has historically oscillated between autonomy and compliance, often legitimizing extra-constitutional interventions through the "doctrine of necessity" (Burki, 2015; Haqqani, 2018). Civil-military relations further complicate this institutional imbalance, as the military continues to exert informal control over political decision-making, foreign policy, and national security (Rizvi, 2019). This contrasts sharply with Europe, where civilian supremacy is a settled norm and defense institutions operate under parliamentary scrutiny.

Moreover, European democracies have developed strong constitutional courts that act as guardians of democratic order. Germany's

Federal Constitutional Court has repeatedly checked executive overreach, reinforcing the legitimacy of democratic governance (Kommers & Miller, 2012). In Pakistan, however, institutional accountability remains selective, often influenced by political rivalries rather than constitutional principles (Khan, 2020). The absence of consistent institutional consolidation prevents the emergence of a stable democratic order, making governance vulnerable to populist pressures and elite capture.

2. Civic Culture and Political Participation

A defining feature of European democracy is the maturity of civic culture, a culture characterized by political tolerance, participation, and trust in public institutions. Almond and Verba (1963) emphasized that civic culture forms the psychological basis of democratic stability, and this is evident in Germany and France, where democratic participation extends beyond elections to encompass civic education, public deliberation, and social activism.

Germany's post-war democratization included comprehensive civic education programs that integrated democratic values into school curricula and public institutions, thereby fostering a participatory political culture (Wegener, 2016). France's republican tradition emphasizes "citoyenneté" (citizenship) as an active civic duty, combining political awareness with social responsibility (Schnapper, 2015). These efforts have cultivated a citizenry capable of holding leaders accountable through democratic means rather than resorting to authoritarian alternatives.

In Pakistan, however, civic engagement remains largely reactive and confined to electoral participation. Voter turnout fluctuates widely, and political parties function more as patronage networks than vehicles for ideological representation (Shah, 2019). The lack of comprehensive civic education and the dominance of feudal and familial politics limit citizens' understanding of democratic responsibility (Naseer, 2020). Consequently, democracy in Pakistan is often perceived as a procedural mechanism rather than a participatory system rooted in civic virtue.

The findings suggest that without cultivating a civic culture, Pakistan's democracy cannot

sustain itself, regardless of constitutional reforms. In contrast, Europe's long investment in civic education and social trust has proven vital to maintaining democratic legitimacy even amid populist disruptions.

3. Accountability and Political Ethics

Accountability mechanisms in European democracies are institutionalized through independent anti-corruption bodies, transparent bureaucracies, and robust parliamentary oversight. Germany's Bundestag committees and France's Cour des Comptes operate with substantial autonomy, ensuring that public officials are subject to regular scrutiny (Schmidt, 2020). Even in Hungary, where democratic backsliding has occurred, institutional frameworks such as the Ombudsman and Constitutional Court still provide avenues, albeit weakened, for accountability (Tóth, 2019).

Pakistan's accountability system, however, is highly politicized. Institutions like the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) are often used as instruments of political coercion rather than impartial justice (Hassan, 2021). Frequent corruption scandals and selective prosecutions undermine public trust, contributing to the perception that accountability is contingent on political alignment rather than legality. Furthermore, weak parliamentary oversight and bureaucratic inertia prevent consistent monitoring of executive power.

Comparatively, the European experience underscores the need for institutionalized ethical governance, where transparency is not contingent on political leadership but built into administrative systems. Pakistan's accountability failures thus stem from structural weaknesses rather than moral deficiencies alone.

4. Populism and Democratic Resilience

Populism has emerged as a challenge in both Europe and Pakistan, yet the outcomes diverge due to institutional strength and civic resistance. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "illiberal democracy" illustrates how populist leaders can erode democratic norms by capturing institutions while maintaining electoral legitimacy (Boros, 2020). However, in Germany and France, constitutional safeguards

and civil society activism have prevented populism from dismantling core democratic structures.

In Pakistan, populism has taken multiple forms, from charismatic leadership to religious nationalism, often undermining institutional authority. Populist leaders mobilize mass emotions, delegitimize political opposition, and bypass institutional checks in the name of public will (Jalal, 2017). The result is a personalized democracy, where loyalty to leaders replaces loyalty to institutions. Without an independent judiciary, strong parliament, and active civil society, populism in Pakistan risks perpetuating authoritarian tendencies under democratic pretexts.

The European experience demonstrates that populism becomes destructive only when institutions are weak. Hence, democratic resilience requires institutional independence, civic awareness, and constitutional adherence, three factors insufficiently developed in Pakistan's political culture.

Comparative Lessons for Pakistan

From this comparative analysis, several lessons emerge for Pakistan's democratic development:

- **Institutional De-politicization:** Like Germany's post-war reforms, Pakistan must ensure institutional autonomy by reducing political interference in the judiciary, bureaucracy, and electoral bodies.
- **Civic Education:** France's civic culture model highlights the importance of embedding democratic values through education and media literacy programs.
- **Rule-Based Governance:** The European experience shows that sustainable democracy requires adherence to rules, not personalities, something Pakistan must internalize through legal consistency and transparent governance.
- **Checks on Populism:** Hungary's example illustrates how populism thrives where oversight is weak; thus, Pakistan must empower its parliament, courts, and media to act as institutional counterweights to populist politics.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscore that Pakistan's democratic fragility stems from institutional weakness and civic underdevelopment,

consistent with theoretical perspectives proposed by Huntington (1991) and Linz and Stepan (1996). Huntington's theory of political order emphasizes that when political participation outpaces institutional development, instability follows, a condition visibly present in Pakistan. Despite periods of electoral enthusiasm, Pakistan's institutions, judiciary, parliament, and bureaucracy, have failed to mature proportionately, leading to cycles of democratic breakdowns (Burki, 2015). Linz and Stepan's (1996) framework of democratic consolidation identifies five key arenas, civil society, political society, rule of law, bureaucracy, and economic society. In Pakistan, each of these arenas remains partially developed. Civil society is fragmented along ethnic and sectarian lines; political parties are personalized rather than institutionalized; the rule of law is selective; bureaucracy is politicized; and economic governance is dominated by elites. The result is a "hybrid democracy" where formal institutions exist but fail to function independently (Haqqani, 2018).

By contrast, the European democracies examined, Germany, France, and even Hungary before its regression, have successfully bridged the gap between political participation and institutionalization. Their democratic consolidation illustrates that enduring democracy requires more than constitutional frameworks; it demands consistent institutional credibility supported by civic trust and education (Merkel, 2014; Schmidt, 2020).

The comparative evidence reinforces Almond and Verba's (1963) argument that democracy thrives in societies with participant civic culture, where citizens not only vote but also understand and engage with democratic processes. Germany's post-war democratization is a prime example of how civic education can transform political behavior. Through deliberate investments in democratic learning, Germany cultivated a generation that internalized democratic norms as part of social identity (Wegener, 2016). Similarly, France's republican model combines freedom with civic duty, linking citizenship to active participation in public life (Schnapper, 2015).

Pakistan's experience, however, remains closer to what Inglehart (2003) describes as a "subject

culture", where citizens are politically aware but deferential to authority, expecting change from leadership rather than through civic initiative. This passivity, coupled with elite dominance and limited civic education, inhibits the growth of participatory democracy. Consequently, Pakistan's democracy remains procedural, reliant on electoral rituals without cultivating a deeper culture of democratic engagement (Naseer, 2020).

The findings thus affirm that civic education and public participation are not supplementary but structural prerequisites for democratic endurance. European states demonstrate that civic maturity, once institutionalized, can act as a democratic immune system against authoritarian tendencies and populist manipulation.

Another central theme emerging from the findings is the decisive role of institutional autonomy in protecting democracy from political or military encroachment. In European democracies, independent institutions are both a cause and a consequence of democratic consolidation. Germany's Federal Constitutional Court and France's independent judiciary exemplify how rule-based governance ensures continuity and public trust (Kommers & Miller, 2012; Elgie, 2011).

Pakistan, conversely, suffers from what Rizvi (2019) calls the "institutional imbalance syndrome," where the military's organizational strength overshadows civilian institutions. This asymmetry has created a perpetual cycle in which democratic governments depend on military endorsement for stability, undermining their legitimacy. Judicial complicity, through doctrines like necessity, further erodes the rule of law (Khan, 2020).

Applying Merkel's (2014) "embedded democracy" model, Pakistan lacks the protective sub-systems that safeguard democracy in Europe. In Germany, for instance, democracy is embedded in a system of horizontal accountability, courts, parliament, and federal structures interact to prevent concentration of power. Pakistan's vertical and personalized power structure, by contrast, leaves democracy vulnerable to populist capture and military intervention. Hence, democratization in

Pakistan cannot progress without institutional depoliticization and judicial independence.

The study's comparative dimension reveals that populism tests the resilience of institutions, not their existence. Europe's experience, especially in Hungary, shows that democracies can regress under populist leaders who exploit electoral legitimacy to undermine institutional checks (Tóth, 2019; Boros, 2020). Yet, the contrasting resilience of Germany and France suggests that strong institutions and civic vigilance can resist such erosion.

In Pakistan, populism manifests as leader-centric mobilization, often conflating personal charisma with democratic authenticity. Whether in civilian or military-led populism, the emphasis on personal loyalty undermines institutional legitimacy (Jalal, 2017). Populism thrives in weak democracies because it replaces ideology with emotion and accountability with personality. Pakistan's case demonstrates that unchecked populism produces a pseudo-democratic environment, where elections are held but liberal democratic values such as tolerance, pluralism, and institutional restraint are absent. Thus, while Europe's populism is largely constrained by institutional and civic buffers, Pakistan's populism has been amplified by institutional weakness and mass disillusionment. The implication is clear: Pakistan's democratic future depends not on eliminating populism but on institutionalizing mechanisms that render it politically accountable.

The European experience offers instructive lessons for Pakistan, particularly in three domains: institutional independence, civic education, and constitutional continuity. Germany's post-1945 reforms illustrate the transformative power of constitutional entrenchment and civic rehabilitation after authoritarian collapse. France's political evolution highlights the importance of balancing executive authority with citizen oversight, preventing governance paralysis while preserving accountability. Meanwhile, Hungary serves as a cautionary tale, demonstrating how institutional complacency can enable democratic backsliding.

For Pakistan, this implies that sustainable democracy cannot emerge through periodic

elections or leadership changes alone. Instead, it requires:

- Strengthening independent institutions, ensuring that judicial, bureaucratic, and electoral systems operate autonomously.
- Embedding civic education, developing democratic consciousness through schools, media, and community engagement.
- Ensuring constitutional consistency, abandoning ad hoc amendments and fostering respect for legal continuity.
- Encouraging civic pluralism, building a participatory environment tolerant of dissent and ideological diversity.

These reforms would gradually transform Pakistan from a procedural democracy to a substantive democracy, grounded in the social and institutional fabric rather than in the charisma of leaders or the inertia of elites.

This comparative inquiry suggests that democratization is neither linear nor uniform. Europe's trajectory shows that democratic consolidation is the outcome of persistent institutional discipline and civic learning. Pakistan's democratic project must therefore be understood not as a failure but as an unfinished transition, one hindered by historical legacies, elite dominance, and civic fragmentation.

If Pakistan draws from Europe's commitment to rule-based governance, civic culture, and institutional accountability, it can cultivate a self-sustaining democratic order. Conversely, if populism and institutional subservience persist, Pakistan risks remaining trapped in a hybrid regime characterized by alternating authoritarian and democratic phases.

CONCLUSION

The democratic trajectory of Pakistan reflects a complex interplay of historical legacies, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic constraints that continue to hinder the consolidation of democracy. Despite multiple transitions from authoritarianism to civilian rule, Pakistan's democratic institutions remain fragile due to recurrent military interventions, weak party structures, corruption, and limited political accountability. The study demonstrates that democracy in Pakistan has often been procedural rather than substantive, elections occur, but the principles of transparency,

pluralism, and inclusivity are not deeply embedded in political culture.

By examining Europe's democratic experience, this research identifies valuable lessons for Pakistan's democratic consolidation. The European model, particularly within the European Union framework, underscores the importance of institutional independence, strong civil society engagement, rule of law, and socio-economic equality as pillars of sustainable democracy. European states have successfully institutionalized checks and balances, fostered decentralized governance, and encouraged a culture of civic participation that strengthens accountability and legitimacy. These features contrast sharply with Pakistan's centralized, elite-driven political system where power is often personalized rather than institutionalized.

For Pakistan, the European experience highlights the need to invest in democratic institutions rather than personalities, strengthen judicial autonomy, and promote political education to nurture democratic values. Moreover, economic reforms aimed at reducing inequality and empowering local governance can enhance democratic resilience. Civil society and media must also act as watchdogs to sustain transparency and discourage authoritarian tendencies.

In essence, democracy in Pakistan can only mature through a sustained process of institutional reform, civic empowerment, and socio-political accountability. Learning from Europe's historical evolution, where democracy was achieved through gradual institutional development, consensus-building, and inclusiveness, Pakistan can chart a similar path toward a more stable, participatory, and accountable political order. The long-term survival of democracy in Pakistan will depend not merely on the conduct of elections but on the cultivation of democratic norms, ethical governance, and citizen trust in democratic institutions.

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