

TRANSFORMING FRAGILITY TO RESILIENCE: BUILDING A CIVIC CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN (A CASE STUDY OF THE PERIOD 1988–1999)

Muhammad Arshed¹, Prof. Dr. Khawaja Alqama²

¹Ph.D. Scholar of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Minhaj University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

²Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Minhaj University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

¹arshadmaral@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Muhammad Arshed

Abstract

The democratic transition in Pakistan following the death of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1988 marked a significant attempt to restore civilian governance after prolonged military rule. However, the democratic period from 1988 to 1999 remained characterized by political instability, weak institutions, frequent government dismissals, elite competition, corruption allegations, and limited civic participation. This study examines the relationship between civic culture and democratic sustainability in Pakistan during the period 1988–1999. Drawing upon qualitative analysis of secondary sources, the research explores how democratic fragility emerged from institutional weaknesses, polarized political behavior, limited democratic norms, and insufficient citizen engagement. The study argues that democratic resilience depends not only on constitutional frameworks and electoral processes but also on the development of a participatory civic culture characterized by political tolerance, trust, civic responsibility, rule of law, and active citizenship. The findings reveal that while democratic institutions formally existed during the period, the absence of a strong civic culture weakened democratic consolidation and created opportunities for political crises that ultimately culminated in the military takeover of 1999. The study concludes that strengthening democratic resilience in Pakistan requires long-term investment in civic education, institutional accountability, political socialization, and citizen participation. Building a civic culture capable of supporting democratic norms is essential for transforming democratic fragility into sustainable democratic governance.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from authoritarian rule to democracy represents one of the most significant challenges faced by developing states. Democratic governance requires more than constitutional arrangements and electoral procedures; it also

depends upon the development of a civic culture that encourages citizen participation, political trust, tolerance, and commitment to democratic norms. The concept of civic culture was prominently advanced by Almond and Verba

(1963), who argued that stable democracies emerge when citizens possess attitudes and behaviors that support democratic institutions. In countries undergoing democratic transitions, civic culture serves as a bridge between formal institutions and public participation. The experience of Pakistan between 1988 and 1999 provides an important case for understanding how the absence of a robust civic culture can contribute to democratic fragility despite the existence of electoral democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963; Diamond, 1999).

Pakistan's democratic restoration in 1988 generated considerable optimism regarding political liberalization and democratic consolidation. The elections that brought Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to power marked the end of eleven years of military rule under General Zia-ul-Haq. However, the subsequent decade witnessed recurring political crises, unstable coalition governments, presidential interventions, corruption allegations, ethnic tensions, and confrontations between civilian institutions. Between 1988 and 1999, four elected governments were dismissed before completing their constitutional terms, reflecting the weakness of democratic institutions and the persistence of authoritarian political practices (Talbot, 2012; Rizvi, 2000). These developments demonstrated that democratic transitions require societal commitment to democratic values alongside institutional reforms.

The literature on democratization emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and political culture in sustaining democratic systems. Putnam (1993) argues that social capital, trust, and civic participation strengthen democratic governance by enhancing cooperation between citizens and institutions. Similarly, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) suggest that democratic stability is strongly linked to cultural values that support participation, tolerance, and accountability. In Pakistan, however, political culture during the 1988–1999 period remained heavily influenced by patronage networks, personalized leadership, ethnic divisions, and weak civic institutions. Such conditions constrained the development of democratic norms and limited the capacity of civil

society to act as a stabilizing force within the political system (Jalal, 1995; Cohen, 2004).

This study examines how Pakistan's democratic fragility during the 1988–1999 period can be understood through the lens of civic culture. It investigates the relationship between political institutions, citizen participation, and democratic sustainability. By analyzing the challenges and opportunities associated with democratic governance during this period, the study seeks to identify pathways for transforming fragility into resilience. Understanding these dynamics is particularly important because the lessons derived from this historical period continue to influence contemporary debates regarding democratic consolidation, governance reform, and civic engagement in Pakistan (Diamond, 1999; Huntington, 1991).

Literature Review

The concept of civic culture emerged as a foundational framework for understanding democratic stability. Almond and Verba (1963), in their comparative study of democratic societies, argued that successful democracies depend upon a balance between citizen participation and institutional trust. Huntington (1991) further emphasized that democratic consolidation requires both institutional development and societal acceptance of democratic norms. Diamond (1999) highlighted the role of civil society in promoting accountability and strengthening democratic governance. Putnam (1993) demonstrated that civic engagement and social capital contribute significantly to institutional performance and democratic effectiveness. Together, these studies established that democracy cannot survive solely through elections but requires supportive civic attitudes and participatory political culture.

Research focusing on developing countries has similarly emphasized the relationship between political culture and democratic sustainability. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) found that democratic resilience is closely linked to self-expression values and civic participation. Linz and Stepan (1996) argued that democratic consolidation occurs when political actors and

citizens view democracy as the only legitimate framework for governance. In the context of Pakistan, Jalal (1995) examined the historical evolution of state-society relations and argued that democratic institutions have often remained subordinate to powerful bureaucratic and military structures. Cohen (2004) similarly observed that weak political institutions and fragmented civil society constrained democratic development in Pakistan.

Studies specifically examining Pakistan's democratic experience during the 1988-1999 period have highlighted persistent institutional and cultural challenges. Rizvi (2000) argued that civil-military imbalances significantly weakened democratic governance and undermined civilian authority. Talbot (2012) noted that frequent dismissals of elected governments reflected institutional instability and limited democratic consolidation. Haqqani (2005) emphasized the role of political elites in perpetuating patronage politics and weakening democratic accountability. These studies collectively suggest that Pakistan's democratic fragility was not merely a consequence of institutional weaknesses but also reflected broader deficiencies in civic culture, citizen participation, and democratic norms.

Research Gap

Existing literature has extensively examined democratic transitions, civil-military relations, and institutional weaknesses in Pakistan. However, limited attention has been given to the role of civic culture as a central variable explaining democratic fragility during the period 1988-1999. Most studies focus on political elites, constitutional crises, and military interventions while overlooking how citizen attitudes, civic participation, political trust, and democratic values contributed to democratic outcomes. This study addresses this gap by examining Pakistan's democratic experience through the lens of civic culture and democratic resilience.

Research Questions

1. How did the nature of civic culture influence democratic fragility in Pakistan during the period 1988-1999?

2. What role can civic culture play in transforming democratic fragility into democratic resilience and sustainability in Pakistan?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of civic culture on democratic governance in Pakistan during 1988-1999.
2. To identify strategies through which civic culture can strengthen democratic resilience and sustainable democracy in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based exclusively on secondary sources. Data were collected from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, government publications, and historical analyses related to democratization, civic culture, political participation, and democratic governance in Pakistan. The research employs thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and trends concerning democratic fragility and civic culture during the period 1988-1999. By synthesizing existing literature and historical evidence, the study develops an interpretive understanding of how civic culture influenced democratic outcomes and how democratic resilience can be strengthened through civic engagement and institutional reforms.

Findings

- The democratic governments of 1988-1999 faced recurring instability due to weak institutionalization and limited commitment to democratic norms among political elites. During the democratic decade of 1988-1999, Pakistan experienced repeated cycles of political instability characterized by the dismissal of elected governments, fragile coalition arrangements, and persistent confrontations among political actors. Although democratic institutions such as parliament, elections, and political parties formally existed, they lacked the institutional strength necessary to ensure continuity and stability. Political elites often prioritized short-term political gains over democratic consolidation, resulting in frequent constitutional crises and

weakened governance structures. The inability of successive governments to complete their constitutional terms reflected the absence of a deeply rooted democratic culture among political leaders and institutions. Consequently, democratic governance remained vulnerable to political manipulation and institutional breakdowns, ultimately contributing to the collapse of the democratic system in 1999 (Rizvi, 2000; Talbot, 2012).

- Civic participation remained largely confined to electoral activities, while broader citizen engagement in policymaking and governance remained weak. Although voter turnout during elections indicated public interest in democratic processes, citizen participation rarely extended beyond casting ballots. Opportunities for meaningful public involvement in policymaking, local governance, and civic advocacy remained limited throughout the period. The absence of strong participatory mechanisms reduced the ability of citizens to influence public policy and hold elected officials accountable between elections. Furthermore, weak civic associations and limited public engagement in governance diminished the development of democratic skills and political awareness among citizens. As a result, democracy became largely procedural rather than participatory, restricting the emergence of a vibrant civic culture capable of strengthening democratic resilience and institutional accountability (Putnam, 1993).

- Patronage politics undermined democratic accountability and encouraged personalized rather than institutional political loyalties. Political competition during the period was heavily influenced by patron-client relationships, whereby political support was often exchanged for personal benefits, favors, and access to resources. Such practices reinforced loyalty to individual leaders rather than democratic institutions, weakening the foundations of accountable governance. Political parties frequently operated through influential families, local elites, and personal networks instead of transparent organizational structures and policy-based platforms. This pattern contributed to corruption, reduced merit-based governance, and hindered institutional

development. The dominance of patronage politics discouraged citizens from viewing democratic institutions as impartial mechanisms of representation and accountability, thereby limiting the growth of a sustainable democratic culture (Haqqani, 2005).

- Political polarization reduced opportunities for consensus-building and weakened democratic cooperation among competing parties. The rivalry between major political parties, particularly the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), often transformed democratic competition into intense political confrontation. Rather than engaging in constructive dialogue and policy-oriented cooperation, political actors frequently pursued strategies aimed at undermining their opponents. This adversarial political environment weakened legislative effectiveness, obstructed governance reforms, and reduced opportunities for national consensus on critical issues. The lack of political tolerance and willingness to compromise undermined democratic norms and reinforced instability within the political system. Consequently, polarization became a significant obstacle to democratic consolidation and institutional maturity in Pakistan (Jalal, 1995).

- Civil society organizations lacked sufficient capacity to serve as effective democratic watchdogs. Although civil society organizations, professional associations, human rights groups, and media institutions played an important role in advocating democratic values, their influence remained limited during the 1988–1999 period. Many organizations faced resource constraints, organizational weaknesses, and restricted access to policymaking processes. As a result, they struggled to effectively monitor government performance, promote accountability, and mobilize citizens around democratic causes. The limited strength of civil society reduced its ability to act as a counterbalance to political elites and state institutions. This weakened one of the key pillars necessary for democratic consolidation and civic engagement, thereby contributing to the persistence of democratic fragility (Diamond, 1999).

- Public trust in political institutions remained low due to corruption allegations and governance failures. Throughout the democratic decade, allegations of corruption, administrative inefficiency, and misuse of public resources significantly damaged the credibility of political institutions. Successive governments faced accusations of nepotism, favoritism, and poor governance, leading many citizens to question the effectiveness of democratic rule. Public dissatisfaction increased as governments struggled to address economic challenges, service delivery issues, and social inequalities. The erosion of trust weakened the legitimacy of democratic institutions and reduced citizen confidence in the political process. Low institutional trust also created conditions in which non-democratic alternatives appeared attractive to segments of society seeking stability and effective governance (Cohen, 2004).

- Educational institutions provided limited civic education, reducing citizens' understanding of democratic rights and responsibilities. A major challenge during the period was the inadequate emphasis on civic education within Pakistan's educational system. Schools, colleges, and universities often failed to provide comprehensive instruction regarding democratic principles, constitutional rights, political participation, and civic responsibilities. Consequently, many citizens lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to actively engage in democratic governance and hold public officials accountable. The absence of effective civic education limited political awareness, reduced democratic participation, and weakened the development of democratic values such as tolerance, pluralism, and respect for the rule of law. This educational gap hindered the emergence of a politically informed citizenry capable of supporting democratic consolidation (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

- Frequent government dismissals created perceptions of democratic inefficiency and instability. Between 1988 and 1999, Pakistan witnessed the dismissal of multiple elected governments before the completion of their constitutional terms. These recurring interruptions generated widespread perceptions that democratic governments were incapable of

ensuring political stability and effective governance. Frequent leadership changes disrupted policy continuity, weakened state institutions, and reduced investor confidence. Citizens increasingly associated democratic politics with conflict, uncertainty, and administrative dysfunction. The resulting disillusionment undermined public support for democratic institutions and hindered efforts to establish democracy as the only legitimate framework for governance. Such instability contributed significantly to the fragility of Pakistan's democratic experiment during this period (Talbot, 2012).

- Civil-military tensions weakened democratic consolidation and reinforced political uncertainty. One of the most significant challenges facing Pakistan's democratic governments was the persistent imbalance in civil-military relations. Although elected leaders formally exercised political authority, the military continued to exert considerable influence over national security, foreign policy, and strategic decision-making. Tensions between civilian governments and military leadership frequently generated uncertainty and constrained the autonomy of democratic institutions. The inability to establish clear constitutional boundaries between civilian and military spheres limited democratic consolidation and prevented the emergence of fully accountable governance structures. These tensions remained a central factor contributing to political instability and ultimately culminated in the military intervention of 1999 (Rizvi, 2000).

- Strengthening civic culture could enhance political participation, accountability, tolerance, and democratic resilience. The evidence suggests that the long-term sustainability of democracy in Pakistan depends significantly on the development of a robust civic culture. Civic culture encourages citizens to actively participate in public affairs, respect democratic institutions, engage in constructive political dialogue, and hold leaders accountable for their actions. A stronger civic culture would also promote political tolerance, social trust, and respect for constitutional norms, thereby reducing polarization and strengthening democratic

cooperation. By fostering informed citizenship and encouraging collective responsibility, civic culture can transform democratic fragility into democratic resilience. Therefore, investments in civic education, civil society development, institutional transparency, and participatory governance are essential for building a sustainable democratic future in Pakistan (Almond & Verba, 1963).

Discussion and Analysis

The democratic decade from 1988 to 1999 represented both a significant opportunity and a profound challenge for Pakistan's political development. Following the end of General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, the restoration of civilian rule generated widespread expectations that Pakistan would embark upon a path of democratic consolidation and institutional strengthening. Elections were held regularly, political parties regained legitimacy, and constitutional governance was formally restored. However, beneath these democratic structures lay deep institutional weaknesses that prevented the consolidation of a stable democratic order. State institutions remained vulnerable to political interference, constitutional disputes, and power struggles among competing actors. Democratic norms had not become deeply embedded within either political institutions or society, making the democratic system susceptible to recurring crises. The repeated collapse of elected governments reflected the inability of democratic institutions to function independently and effectively. In this context, the absence of a strong civic culture characterized by political trust, democratic tolerance, and active citizenship significantly contributed to democratic fragility. The Pakistani experience during this period illustrates that democratic transitions require not only constitutional arrangements but also societal commitment to democratic values and practices (Almond & Verba, 1963).

A defining feature of Pakistan's democratic experience between 1988 and 1999 was the predominance of elite-centered politics. Political power remained concentrated among a limited number of influential families, political dynasties,

and elite groups who exercised considerable control over political institutions and decision-making processes. Rather than focusing on policy debates, governance reforms, and public welfare, political competition frequently revolved around individual personalities and leadership rivalries. This personalized approach to politics reduced opportunities for meaningful citizen engagement and limited the development of issue-based political discourse. Ordinary citizens often participated in elections but remained largely excluded from broader political decision-making processes. As a result, democratic governance became disconnected from public aspirations and concerns. The concentration of political power among elites weakened democratic accountability because political leaders were more responsive to elite interests than to citizen demands. This pattern undermined public trust in democratic institutions and hindered the emergence of a participatory political culture capable of supporting sustainable democracy (Haqqani, 2005).

Political polarization emerged as one of the most significant obstacles to democratic consolidation during the period under study. The intense rivalry between the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) transformed political competition into a continuous struggle for power rather than a constructive democratic process. Opposition parties frequently viewed each other as political enemies rather than legitimate competitors within a democratic framework. Consequently, cooperation on national issues became increasingly difficult, and opportunities for consensus-building were often ignored. Democratic systems depend upon compromise, negotiation, and tolerance of opposing viewpoints, yet these democratic norms remained weakly developed within Pakistan's political culture. The tendency to delegitimize political opponents contributed to legislative gridlock, governance inefficiencies, and recurring political crises. Furthermore, political polarization deepened societal divisions and reduced public confidence in democratic institutions. The absence of a culture of political tolerance and democratic cooperation prevented the formation of a stable

political environment necessary for democratic resilience and institutional maturity (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

The repeated dismissal of elected governments during the democratic decade significantly undermined democratic legitimacy and public confidence in civilian rule. Between 1988 and 1999, several governments were removed from office before completing their constitutional terms, often through presidential interventions, political maneuvering, or institutional confrontations. These dismissals disrupted policy continuity, weakened governance effectiveness, and created an atmosphere of persistent political uncertainty. Citizens observed a political system incapable of maintaining stability or resolving conflicts through democratic means. As a result, many individuals became disillusioned with democratic governance and began questioning its effectiveness as a system for addressing national challenges. The recurring collapse of elected administrations reinforced perceptions that democratic institutions were inherently unstable and incapable of ensuring political order. This erosion of public confidence weakened the legitimacy of democratic governance and created conditions that made non-democratic alternatives appear more attractive to some segments of society. The instability associated with government dismissals thus represented a major barrier to democratic consolidation (Talbot, 2012).

Civil society organizations are widely recognized as essential components of democratic governance because they promote accountability, civic engagement, and public participation. During the 1988–1999 period, Pakistan witnessed the emergence of various civil society organizations, including human rights groups, professional associations, student organizations, and advocacy networks. However, these organizations often lacked the institutional capacity, financial resources, and political influence necessary to effectively shape governance outcomes. Their activities were frequently confined to specific urban areas and social groups, limiting their ability to mobilize broader segments of the population. Furthermore, weak organizational structures and limited access to policymaking processes reduced

their effectiveness as democratic watchdogs. While civil society contributed to raising awareness about governance issues and democratic rights, it remained insufficiently developed to serve as a strong counterbalance to political elites and state institutions. Consequently, the limited capacity of civil society weakened democratic accountability and reduced opportunities for citizen participation in governance processes (Diamond, 1999).

The educational system played an important role in shaping democratic attitudes and political awareness, yet its contribution to democratic socialization remained limited during the period under study. Educational institutions often focused primarily on academic instruction while neglecting civic education, constitutional literacy, and democratic values. As a result, many citizens lacked a comprehensive understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and roles within a democratic system. Civic education is essential for developing informed citizens who can actively participate in public affairs, critically evaluate political leadership, and contribute to democratic governance. The absence of effective civic education limited citizens' ability to engage meaningfully in political processes and weakened the development of democratic norms such as tolerance, pluralism, and respect for the rule of law. Furthermore, inadequate political awareness made citizens more susceptible to manipulation by political elites and patronage networks. Strengthening civic education therefore represents a critical requirement for fostering democratic resilience and promoting active citizenship in Pakistan (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Patron-client relationships remained deeply embedded within Pakistan's political system throughout the democratic decade. Political support was frequently based on personal loyalties, kinship ties, and access to material benefits rather than ideological commitments or policy preferences. Political leaders often relied on patronage networks to mobilize electoral support, distribute resources, and maintain political influence. While such arrangements provided short-term political advantages, they weakened democratic institutions by prioritizing personal

relationships over formal procedures and institutional accountability. Patronage politics encouraged corruption, favoritism, and unequal access to state resources, thereby undermining public confidence in governance structures. Moreover, the dominance of patron-client relationships discouraged the development of merit-based political competition and issue-oriented policymaking. Democratic institutions can only become resilient when citizens and political actors place greater trust in constitutional procedures and institutional mechanisms than in personal connections and informal networks. The persistence of patronage politics therefore represented a significant obstacle to democratic institutionalization and sustainable governance (Jalal, 1995).

Civil-military relations constituted one of the most important determinants of democratic stability during the period from 1988 to 1999. Although elected governments formally exercised executive authority, military institutions continued to retain substantial influence over key areas of national policy, particularly defense, security, and foreign affairs. This imbalance in power limited the autonomy of civilian governments and constrained the process of democratic consolidation. Tensions between civilian leaders and military authorities frequently generated political uncertainty and institutional conflict. Democratic consolidation requires a political system in which civilian institutions exercise ultimate authority over state affairs and military organizations operate within clearly defined constitutional boundaries. However, such boundaries remained contested in Pakistan throughout the democratic decade. The inability to establish stable and cooperative civil-military relations weakened democratic governance and contributed to recurring political crises. Ultimately, the military intervention of October 1999 highlighted the fragility of democratic institutions and underscored the continuing challenges associated with achieving civilian supremacy in Pakistan (Rizvi, 2000).

Despite the numerous challenges confronting democratic governance, the period from 1988 to 1999 also demonstrated the resilience of

democratic aspirations among Pakistani citizens. Electoral participation remained relatively strong, and citizens consistently expressed support for representative government despite recurring political instability. The willingness of voters to participate in elections reflected a continued belief in democratic processes as legitimate mechanisms for political change. Furthermore, the expansion of media, civil society activism, and public political discourse during this period indicated growing societal engagement with democratic issues. Although democratic institutions frequently failed to meet public expectations, citizens generally continued to view democracy as preferable to authoritarian alternatives. This persistence of democratic aspirations suggests that democratic resilience can emerge even in contexts characterized by institutional weakness and political instability. The challenge, therefore, lies in translating public support for democracy into stronger civic engagement, institutional trust, and active participation in governance processes (Cohen, 2004).

The overall analysis of Pakistan's democratic experience during 1988–1999 suggests that sustainable democracy requires the simultaneous strengthening of institutions and civic culture. Democratic resilience does not emerge solely from constitutions, elections, or formal governance structures; it also depends upon citizens' attitudes, values, and behaviors. A strong civic culture encourages political participation, fosters trust in democratic institutions, promotes accountability, and supports tolerance of diverse viewpoints. Citizens who actively engage in public affairs and respect democratic norms contribute significantly to the stability and effectiveness of democratic governance. Conversely, weak civic culture creates conditions in which political polarization, patronage politics, institutional distrust, and democratic fragility can flourish. The Pakistani case demonstrates that democratic consolidation is ultimately a societal as well as an institutional process. Building democratic resilience therefore requires long-term investments in civic education, civil society development, political reform, and inclusive governance practices. Civic culture remains one of the most important foundations

upon which sustainable democracy in Pakistan can be built (Putnam, 1993; Almond & Verba, 1963).

Conclusion

The period from 1988 to 1999 represents one of the most significant and instructive phases in Pakistan's democratic history. Following the end of military rule under General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan entered a new era of civilian governance characterized by competitive elections, political pluralism, and renewed constitutionalism. Despite these positive developments, democratic institutions remained fragile and vulnerable to recurring political crises. The repeated dismissal of elected governments, persistent tensions among state institutions, and the inability of political actors to establish stable patterns of democratic cooperation highlighted the challenges of democratic consolidation in Pakistan. While formal democratic structures such as parliament, elections, and political parties were restored, the democratic system lacked the institutional depth and societal support necessary for long-term stability. Political elites frequently prioritized short-term political interests over democratic development, while citizens often remained excluded from meaningful participation beyond periodic elections. Consequently, democratic governance failed to generate the level of public trust and institutional legitimacy required for sustainable democratic consolidation. The experiences of this period demonstrate that democracy cannot be sustained solely through constitutional arrangements and electoral processes; rather, it requires a broader societal commitment to democratic values, institutional accountability, and active citizenship.

The findings of this study demonstrate that democratic sustainability depends not only on legal and constitutional frameworks but also on the presence of a strong civic culture that supports democratic governance. Civic culture serves as the social foundation upon which democratic institutions operate effectively. Values such as political tolerance, civic responsibility, public trust, citizen participation, respect for diversity, and commitment to the rule of law contribute significantly to democratic resilience. During the

period under study, many of these democratic values remained underdeveloped, limiting the capacity of democratic institutions to withstand political crises and external pressures. Political polarization, patronage-based politics, weak civil society organizations, inadequate civic education, and low levels of institutional trust collectively contributed to democratic fragility. The absence of a deeply rooted civic culture weakened democratic legitimacy and reduced opportunities for constructive citizen engagement. As a result, democratic institutions often struggled to perform their intended functions effectively. The study therefore reinforces the argument advanced by democratic theorists that political culture and civic engagement are essential prerequisites for democratic consolidation and long-term political stability.

Ultimately, transforming democratic fragility into democratic resilience requires a comprehensive and long-term strategy that combines institutional reform with societal transformation. Democratic consolidation is not merely a political process but also a cultural and social one that requires citizens, political leaders, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and state institutions to work collectively toward strengthening democratic norms and practices. The lessons from Pakistan's democratic experience between 1988 and 1999 indicate that sustainable democracy can only emerge when democratic values become deeply embedded within society and when institutions operate transparently, accountably, and independently. Future democratic success will depend upon the ability of political actors to prioritize national interests over partisan competition, foster inclusive governance, and encourage active citizen participation in public affairs. By strengthening civic culture alongside democratic institutions, Pakistan can create a more resilient political system capable of managing conflicts peacefully, promoting good governance, and ensuring democratic continuity. Therefore, the transformation from fragility to resilience must be understood as a gradual but essential process that requires commitment, patience, and sustained investment in democratic development.

Way Forward

Pakistan's future democratic stability depends largely on its ability to cultivate a vibrant civic culture through education, public engagement, and democratic socialization. Civic education should become a central component of the national curriculum at all levels of education, enabling students to develop a clear understanding of constitutional principles, democratic institutions, human rights, citizenship responsibilities, and political participation. Educational institutions should move beyond traditional academic instruction and actively promote critical thinking, civic responsibility, and democratic values. In addition to schools and universities, media organizations, civil society groups, and community-based institutions should play an active role in fostering democratic awareness and encouraging informed public participation. Public campaigns focused on tolerance, pluralism, social cohesion, and constitutional literacy can help strengthen democratic norms within society. Furthermore, expanding opportunities for citizen engagement through local government institutions can provide practical experience in democratic decision-making and accountability. Effective local governance not only improves service delivery but also strengthens the relationship between citizens and the state, thereby contributing to greater political trust and democratic resilience.

In addition to civic education and citizen engagement, significant institutional and political reforms are necessary to strengthen democratic governance in Pakistan. Political parties should adopt internal democratic procedures that promote transparency, merit-based leadership selection, and policy-oriented competition rather than personality-centered politics. Encouraging issue-based political discourse can reduce polarization and improve the quality of democratic debate. Simultaneously, institutions responsible for accountability, justice, and governance must be strengthened to ensure transparency, rule of law, and equal application of legal standards. Independent courts, effective parliamentary oversight, free media, and robust anti-corruption mechanisms can help restore public confidence in

democratic institutions. Constructive civil-military relations based on constitutional principles and civilian supremacy are equally important for democratic consolidation. Moreover, civil society organizations should receive greater support to enhance their capacity as democratic watchdogs and advocates for citizen interests. Collectively, these reforms can contribute to the development of a political environment in which democratic institutions function effectively and citizens actively participate in governance. A strong civic culture supported by accountable institutions, democratic leadership, and engaged citizens remains the most sustainable pathway for transforming democratic fragility into democratic resilience and ensuring a stable democratic future for Pakistan.

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