

WHEN PROCEDURE BECOMES PARTISAN: INSTITUTIONAL DISTRUST, AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION, AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN PAKISTAN, 2008-2024

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Abstract

Ordinary political competition can take on a new face when trust is lacking in the institutions. This is particularly crucial in Pakistan, where in recent years, no longer is an election, a court verdict, a parliamentary vote, an accountability process considered 'business as usual' but as a tool for one political side against the other. This article looks at the change in three key moments since 2008 – the proceedings and disqualification controversy linked to the Panama Papers, the 2022 vote of no confidence and the general elections of 2024. An historical-institutional interpretation, together with process-tracing logic, identifies five patterns of processes: procedural ambiguity, selective institutional legitimacy, moralized leadership language, media acceleration and citizen-level identity sorting. Just because they are there, does not mean that all the charges of bias are baseless. That is not the most important point; the more important is that until the uncertainty about the matter is resolved, partisan interpretations can take time to crystallize before it is given full play in the public arena in the light of the evidence. This analysis thus distinguishes between ideological, affective and institutional polarization and will suggest that democracy's resilience in Pakistan should not be based on the elimination of political conflict, but on the maintenance of conflict within the framework of rules that all parties can deem palatable to continue using. An increased level of transparency in the procedures, communication between institutions, better quality of parliamentary practice, more responsible politicians, professional media behavior and civic education can all contribute to minimizing the "humiliation/exclusion" dimension. Depolarization in this way is not a matter of consensus, but of rules that are credible and democratic restraint.

1. Introduction

Political competition is not fresh in the political arena of Pakistan's democracy. Gamification is not new and has been a part of parties' competition since the beginning: by winning or losing at the polling place, by mobilizing the streets, by forming coalitions, by litigating in the court, by presenting alternative visions of the national interest. None of this is as such a failure

of democracy. Democracy must not be defined by consensus, but by the capacity of citizens to disagree, to oppose the decisions of the government, to challenge those in power and to change them when they have made mistakes by using the democratic process. The challenge starts when the competition over the political stops being considered as a game played between the legitimate alternatives. Opponents are then

not only denounced as being in the right and in the best interests of the government, but are also called out as unfit to rule, as disloyal to the state or even as not being a part of the political community whatsoever.

In this context, it's the institutional aspect of that shift that is under focus. The article addresses the following question: why people do not trust the public institutions, how conflicts over procedure take an affective quality and what does this imply for the resilience of the Pakistani democracy from 2008 to 2024? No particular party, leader, province or institution is considered as the main point of polarization. Rather than historical memories of institutional imbalance, elite rhetoric's, media incentives, social identities and institutional behaviors, the argument in this essay considers the interaction among these elements. Political players are not playing in a vacuum, they are operating in a climate of mistrust and their perceptions of new events can either amplify the mistrust or, sometimes, mitigate it.

Thus, it is important to distinguish between ordinary political disagreement and attempts to question the legitimacy of political institutions or opponents. It is possible for a person to not agree with a court decision, a result in an election, or a decision by a parliament, while at the same time respecting the constitutional authority of the institution to which they disagree, and the equal political status of those who vote to support the decision. Things are different if the outcome is bad, as it then becomes an indication that the process was illegitimate, therefore that those who have reaped the benefits are not entitled to political power. So long as you think of politics like that, lawful competition becomes a funny concept, even with all constitutional processes for challenge and appeal, and with the possibility of elections in the future.

From this argument several conclusions can be drawn. From this argument, there are three inferences. The first is conceptual, being the separation of ideological, affective, and institutional polarization in a party system with not strictly demarcated program differences. A second is a form of explanation: It explains how uncertainty about formal procedures can be turned into an emotional conflict between political groups. The third involves the

connection of diagnosis with reform, namely, how could one engage in strong opposition without transforming one's adversary into an enemy? It is not to act against criticism of institutions. It's to differentiate criticism that helps hold the most responsible individuals accountable from criticism that undermines the common procedures that underlie democratic competition.

2. Literature review and theoretical position.

In comparative literature polarization is generally regarded as a rather multi-faceted phenomenon. Polarization of ideology means an opinion or a political stance difference in policies. Affective polarization, however, is the emotional identification with one's own political group and distrust, disaffection or social avoidance of out-groups (Iyengar et al., 2012, 2019). Institutional polarization occurs where courts, legislatures, election authorities, regulators or accountability institutions are perceived as more of an extension of partisan power. These forms can complement each other, but do not necessarily overlap. Citizens can be polarized in their views on policy and party supporters can be very hostile even if the parties are not that far apart in policy.

The polarization of politics is of particular interest because of the moralization of political identity, which is particularly highlighted in the work of pernicious polarization. When compromise is seen as betrayal, by having one side perceived as good and the other side as bad, and the word compromise becomes synonymous with the words 'us' and 'them' (McCoy et al., 2018; Somer & McCoy, 2019), then compromise can start to seem like betrayal. One explanation is in terms of social identity theory. Group membership is a component of people's self-identities, and information is often interpreted in a manner that serves to preserve the integrity of group membership (Huddy, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The political leaders can accentuate these tendencies when common conflicts are presented as issues of dignity, patriotism, religion, sovereignty or even democracy's survival.

There is an affective dimension to polarization, and this can change the nature of the political defeat. A democracy is supposed to be a system that allows people to elect and be elected to

office, and losing an election or sitting in a minority in Parliament will be a hardship but is generally accepted as a short period. The losing side can regroup, criticize the government, hold the government accountable, and be able to compete once again. When it comes to affective polarization, being defeated can have a very different meaning. Their opponents may perceive their triumph as a sign of embarrassment, loss of political influence or that their nation has been taken over by an enemy. From competing alternatives to competing identities, it's politics. Such a turn can lead to lower levels of support for democratic values, and lower tolerances for violations of them when those violations are aimed at "enemies." For example, Svolik (2019) illustrates how voters who perceive the other side as the more dangerous option will embrace out-of-the-ordinary measures, institutional shortcuts or limitations that they otherwise would not.

This picture is complicated by the institutional theory. Institutions influence both political decision who is making them and how decisions are made and remedies available (North, 1990). They have an authority not only in the law but also on the basis of the predictability, transparency and fairness of procedures. In a hybrid or fragile democracy, formal elections and constitutional mechanisms might be accompanied by informal vetoes, unequal implementation of the constitution, access to information and other forms of political domination (Diamond, 1999; Schedler, 2013). Often, in such a state, ambiguity turns out to be politically fertile. But if the public is unaware of the difference between normal discretion and partisan action, competing elites are able to respond to the uncertainty with their own interpretations of it, which fit into prevailing suspicions.

This issue is given special significance in the context of the Pakistani political history. The politicians' volatility, federal interference, judicial activism, party non-institutionalization, disparities in the federal structure, and politicians' accountability issues have been studied (Jalal, 1995; Haqqani, 2005; Shah, 2014; Waseem, 2006, 2010). With the rise of digital communication, new layers have been introduced with regards to the speed of alliances, opposition narratives, and political identities

being created and shared. A study of the political sphere on Pakistani internet websites indicates that when individuals are divided into segments, a nationalist identity can be bolstered by partisan identity (Ali et al., 2022; Mir et al., 2023). These strands are brought together in the present argument as a sequence beginning with institutional uncertainty and ending with the absorption of this uncertainty into the identities of citizens' groups, as mediated by political elites and the media.

3. Analytical Framework

The framework is grounded in a simple premise the controversial procedures do not necessarily lead to social polarization. It is the interpretation of the uncertainty of those procedures that is important. Citizens are not allowed to turn political disagreement into social hostility, nor can they challenge an election result, criticize a judgment or oppose a parliamentary decision. When the parties to this dispute are defined as "legitimate" and the "ordinary procedures" are seen as "tricks of partisan actors" or "overreaching institutions" then it takes a new form.

The first is procedural ambiguity. The first is procedural ambiguity. Can be caused by ineffective communication, lack of documentation, conflicting regulations, official statements or legal thinking that is not easily understood by non-specialists. Under such conditions citizens are frequently deprived of seeing the documents and are left to the interpretation. Some suspicions could be warranted; others could be taken to the extreme or presented in a way that plays into the victim's hands. It is not a point to determine a priori which of these allegations is right. It's time to acknowledge that uncertainty is an interpretative space in which a narrative with emotional satisfaction can be more contagious than a meticulously crafted narrative or a documentary record.

The second, selective legitimacy, is another mechanism. Once a political actor makes a favorable decision, they can celebrate an institution and once they make an un-favorable decision, they can attack the same institution. This helps to train supporters to expect an institution's credibility to be dependent on their political interests. Next, courts, legislatures,

election bodies, and accountability bodies become potential allies or adversaries and fail to function as public institutions. The deeper fault is that there is no consistent standard; the same procedure is considered different when it benefits the party on one side as opposed to the other.

The third one is moralized communication about leadership and the fourth one is the acceleration of the media. Leaders can use the difficult political issues as an opportunity to define 'anti-national' or 'anti-democratic' or 'anti-state' as the qualities of opposition members. Leaders can frame the difficult political issues as a test of loyalty by defining the opposition members as corrupt, foreign controlled, anti-national or anti-democratic. Then complicated legal and political issues are reduced to sound bite, can be easily relayed through TV debates, short clips, livestreaming, hashtags and partisan accounts. The timing matters. Citizens might become hardened and

have rigid opinions before reading a judgment, parliamentary record or an election text. Later corrections are difficult to get traction on, particularly if already distrusted source of correction.

The fifth mechanism is citizen sorting by identity. National events can't be understood without reference to everyday life. Political judgement is influenced by the family, locality, class, generation, occupation, religion and state. Therefore, party affiliations spread into the factories, among the students, to the neighborhoods, and into private groups. As sorting gets more intense, it seems easier that opponents of the competition may be doing it for ulterior motives, or that they are not really patriotic or just. This is far more than merely partisan. Empathy in democracy must be made possible by citizens who see opponents as fellow political actors who have rights even if they do not agree with them.

Table 1. Mechanisms Connecting Institutional Distrust to Affective Polarization

Mechanism	Observable Indicators	Democratic Risk
Procedural ambiguity	Delayed explanations, inaccessible records, contradictory statements, or uncertain legal standards	Rumor and partisan interpretation fill informational gaps
Selective legitimacy	Institutions praised after favorable outcomes and rejected after adverse outcomes	Public authority becomes conditional on partisan advantage
Moralized leadership language	Opponents described as traitors, enemies, foreign-controlled, or morally polluted	Compromise and lawful defeat come to appear dishonorable
Media acceleration	Clips, slogans, hashtags, and commentary circulate before primary evidence is assessed	Early emotional framing becomes difficult to correct
Identity sorting	Political claims judged through party loyalty, family, region, class, generation, or national identity	Rival supporters are treated as socially suspect, not simply politically different

Note. The mechanisms may overlap and reinforce one another; their presence does not determine whether a particular allegation is factually correct.

4. Research Design and Methodological Position

The research design used in this study is an interpretative design and comparative design which is based on historical institutionalism and process-tracing logic. The focus of analysis is the political action, and not the personality of individual leaders or the percentage of votes for a specific party. The goal is to trace the evolution

of the partisan significance of an institutional occasion and the transmission of this significance from elite expression to media to general expression. Documentary analysis can be used for this purpose because the documents contain evidence that is mostly public: official documents, court documents, parliamentary proceedings, party statements, election documents, observation documents and

archived political communication (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018).

The three episodes were selected because each is characterized by interpretive challenges of a similar nature, but under different institutional conditions. The Panama Papers proceedings/disqualification saga is about court/Accountability proceedings. The 2022 vote of no confidence puts parliamentary procedure and interpretation of the constitution at the forefront. The general elections of 2024 focus on electoral administration, results management, and remedies following the elections. Not all of these cases were alike and the evidence presented was not of equal weight in all of them. The interest in them for comparison is based on the fact that there are similar mechanisms in different procedures.

The analysis is thus focused on construction of claims on institutions, political opponents, and rules of democracy. It is not accepted as true or rejected as false just because it's from the government or opposition. The article instead questions whether there was documentary evidence presented, whether institutions had

offered themselves in a timely and accessible manner, whether there was commonality in standards so that oppositions could be understood as legitimate participants in a democratic process, and whether there was still political rhetoric that acknowledged opponents as legitimate democratic participants. This is a very measured strategy: it seeks to avoid partisan slogans and it respects what may be public perceptions.

The scope is very limited. The article offers no evidence from nationally representative surveys, and offers no estimate of the extent of the affective polarization or that institutional distrust is its sole cause. Other economic, ideological, regional, leadership, and international factors are also important. The cases are not used in generalizing statistics. If interviews, private communications, or information from individuals from the public had been incorporated, then in a larger empirical project, the process of document selection and coding, the reliability of coding, and the ethical protections of the obtained data would be more explicitly stated.

Table 2. Comparative Case Logic

Episode	Institutional Arena	Core Analytical Question
Panama Papers-related proceedings, 2016-2017	Judicial and accountability processes	When does legal accountability become a partisan struggle over political legitimacy?
Vote of no confidence, 2022	Parliamentary procedure and constitutional interpretation	When does a lawful transfer mechanism become narrated as betrayal, conspiracy, or exclusion?
General elections, 2024	Electoral administration, results management, and remedies	How is trust in electoral procedure built, damaged, defended, or rejected?

Note. The cases are compared for recurring mechanisms, not treated as identical events.

5. Institutional Distrust in Three Political Arenas

Panama Papers-Related Proceedings and Disqualification Debate

The Panama Papers incident of 2016-2017 is a good example of how a legal accountability process can be mired in political identity. Citizens need accountability if they think that the elite are not held to account and judicial review is the constitutionally sanctioned mechanism for scrutinizing serious allegations. However, soon the debate over the case before

the court spilled over into the public arena. For many who supported the final product, the process was a long-overdue challenge to political privilege; for many who were opposed, selective accountability or institutional engineering. Such competing readings involved different conceptions of legal uniformity, evidentiary requirements, and of the proper functioning of institutions in political competition.

The polarization cannot be attributed to just the winner and loser. It was bound to become part of rival moral histories of those who could rule.

Issues of law became linked with notions of corruption, victimization, national renewal and democratic mandate. Then the issue became one of judicious reasoning, and opposition to judicial reasoning morphed into opposition to the legitimacy of the other side. Selective legitimacy also was evident. Those who disparaged the role of judges in politics could always turn to the judges for assistance when it suited their interests, and those who had high expectations of accountability could characterize the same when it was a hindrance.

Vote of No Confidence in 2022

The vote of no confidence in 2022 came in a different institutional context but it had a familiar theme to it, namely interpretation. Constitutional process of determining the majority of the Prime Minister in the National Assembly. In a higher-trust setting, individuals might strongly reject defections, coalition bargaining, motives of legislators, and yet stay loyal to the notion of parliamentary majorities changing. In Pakistan, however, the episode became closely associated with public perceptions of mistrust, foreign conspiracy, elite betrayal, and a stolen electoral mandate. There was a moral question also, with regard to who spoke for the 'true will of the people,' but at the same time, the procedural question of whether the government continued to maintain a majority was difficult to distinguish.

There were two links between the public and how their understanding of the episode changed. Coalition politics, which is so prevalent in the UK, was viewed as a form of corruption, or as disloyalty, rather than a practice that could be assessed using clear standards and political accountability. Meanwhile, the shift of executive control was seen by many citizens as a change of constitution, not one that could be undone, but one that took away their political voice. The emotional gulf between the two sets of supporters was further increased by the language of sovereignty and betrayal. Indeed, each camp had its own set of legal arguments and democratic values, making it more difficult to envision the other side as a legitimate player in the same game.

The 2024 General Elections

Citizen trust was particularly relevant during the 2024 general elections as elections represent the primary channel for citizens' preferences to be realized in government. Legitimacy of elections is not just about the day of the election. It also requires a conducive pre-election climate, meaningful opportunities for election contestation, transparent counting, timely record keeping, effective complaints and adjudication processes. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) released election materials, election forms, the General Elections Result 2024 and the General Elections Report 2024 post the polls. The size of participation and ongoing apprehensions of the overall political context and post-election management have also been documented by domestic observers (Free and Fair Election Network [FAFEN] 2024; Election Commission of Pakistan [ECP] 2025). In this case, it is important to consider the link between technical procedure and public interpretation. In times of low trust, delays, communications problems, counting problems, restrictions or legal rulings can easily be integrated into a larger narrative of manipulation. An official explanation may not be as effective as it could be by the time it is issued, because by then an alternative explanation may have provided the emotional meaning for the event, thus leaving its actual meaning to be known only after the official one. A litany of allegations can also be more difficult to address when requests for evidence are construed as being attacks on the affected group. The consequence of this is an epistemic gap two sides (or factions) adopt different documents, authorities and standards of proof.

Comparative Implications

The same issue of communication arises in each of the three episodes. To convey legal and administrative messages, they typically rely on formal orders, technical documents and sometimes on press releases, which are released with a delay. Political actors speak in other ways: their messages are quicker, more direct, and frequently emotionally evocative. There are some situations where it is impossible to avoid technical complexity but opacity can be avoided. When decisions are not made promptly and clearly, when records are difficult and/or scarce

to find, when obvious gaps in information are not addressed, citizens feel compelled to rely on partisans for information. In a low-trust environment, silence cannot be neutral. It can be a scaffolding of any story that offers some sort of values to the uncertainty.

But at the same time, the lack of trust cannot be simply attributed to irrationality. The formal procedures are used and whether other players are having an impact on the political process these are all part of Pakistan's political past. Just institutional guarantees are not enough for democratic reform. Trust can only be earned through regular performance, adherence to the rules and review and remedy processes. However, it's not the same to question history as to be opposed to it altogether. Challenge the institutions, but don't go so far as to lose faith in all procedures, explanations and remedies, which is the challenge of democracy.

6. Cross-Case Discussion: From Procedure to Identity Threat

The three cases may be viewed as a pattern of a conflict over procedure to a perceived identity threat. The first act in an event is to introduce uncertainty regarding the rules, evidence, timing and/or institutional authority. Such uncertainty is then read in a different way by the interpretations of the political leaders, which are the various moral stories that are created from it: accountability is compromised, constitutionalism is in danger, representation is denied, or some other fundamental democratic value is in question. The media systems are focused on the more melodramatic and direct versions of those stories. Gradually, citizens can learn the desired interpretation and make it a part of their group identity, making it seem as though it is an act of betrayal to reject it. From then on, they will not only assess the information that they are presented with, but also determine who the speaker is and how they are motivated.

The reason for this is why factual correction will not often work. A fact check can discredit a statement, but it can never rebuild trust in the institution and/or relationship that the statement has undermined. If it is thought a court, an election body or a media outlet or expert belongs to a political faction, then giving them further information can instigate further

arguments, not solve them. Democratic resilience, however, relies on a credibility infrastructure: records that can be accessed, procedures that can be predicted, scrutiny that is independent and political leaders willing to accept inconvenient facts even if they harm their side.

There's a payment problem, too, the reciprocity. The other camper's misconduct can be used to give the other camp an excuse to have their own selective standards. Demonizing language is justified in reaction to provocation in the past; objections to process are objections to process; "the other side did it too" is a justification for institutional shortcuts; "the other side did it too" is an excuse to establish a new level of threat to which the institutional shortcuts are perceived as a protective measure. This logic has an impact on political power, but it undermines the ability to make a consistent democratic judgment. Although responsibility might be different in each episode, the standards must withstand political shifts in the political balance of power and in the government.

7. Democratic Consequences

One result is cooperation is decreased. If it is primarily perceived that legislation is for an illegal opponent, then there is less motivation from either side to agree to beneficial legislation. Then the work of committees, the process of budget discussions, nominations and long-term policies would be opportunities for symbolic confrontation. Conditions of institutional trust is also created. If a body like a court or an election body or an accountability body provides a favorable result it can be defended, but if it does not it can be rejected. This type of assistance does not enhance institutional power: it brings public institutions into the political arena whose role and utility fluctuate depending on the outcome.

The time horizon of policies is also shortened when governments are constantly forced to defend their legitimacy rather than focus on long-term planning and development., they can be tempted to pay attention to political survival, to communicating their messages, and to the short-term results of their actions, instead of doing what it takes to achieve ends that can only be felt in the long run. Meanwhile, opposition parties are likely to get more credit for fighting

than negotiating. This is expensive as it is necessary to have commitments to economic governance, education, public health, local government and climate adaptation which last beyond the one election cycle. It is hard to keep such commitments when the opposition is considered an "illegitimate part of the political system."

The impact of the social effects is not limited to the formal institutions. Political identities are seeping into families, campuses, workplaces and professional networks, with the displacement of more ordinary disagreements. Claims become more believable when they are consistent with the emotional needs of the audience and when the claims are corrected, it is the source that is disbelieved (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The democratic cost for each is not just a bit of bad language. It's also the loss of a common ground of facts and values on which citizens can question power but not the other citizens' political equality.

8. Reform Agenda for Democratic Resilience.

It is important to note that depolarization is not synonymous with silence or censorship, or calls by the elite for unity. Opposition and scrutiny, participation and disagreement are the ingredients of Pakistan's democracy. The better the political objective is to ensure that political losses are reversible by legitimate competition and that everyone continues to be treated equally politically, irrespective of their election or parliamentary outcome. That has to go beyond a slogan of reconciliation. This needs institutional improvement, strengthening of political parties, answerable media practices, and more civic education.

The first step can be taken by electoral, judicial and accountability institutions: to minimize unnecessary uncertainty. It is important that decisions include reasons that are accessible to the public; that decisions are summarized, if applicable; that decisions are clearly expressed with respect to time and place of implementation; and that relevant record is published, where legally allowed, where relevant to the decision. Complaint and appeal procedures must be easily accessible, timely, consistent and visible. Transparency should not

stop political accusations, but it will help to reduce the political level where rumors instead of facts will reign and provide the basis for the critics to question the official actions, based on common documentation.

Parliament should serve as a forum for constructive debate and cooperation rather than a place where political opponents constantly question each other's legitimacy. Opposition rights and committee authority must be safeguarded; attendance and voting records must be made public; and working together in a way that can tackle long-term issues of national importance must be possible even in the face of bitter party opposition. There are also needs for political parties to establish rules in relation to threats, dehumanizing language and false allegations. Standards that are seen as credible are only credible when they're applied to others besides those who are competing against them, and when leaders are willing to admit when they're doing wrong in their own ranks.

Media practice is likewise important because of this. Journalists should continue to report and avoid commentary; have easily accessible archives; correct errors openly; and organize debates to ensure that evidence is not swamped with interruption. Sponsored content and political communication teams should clearly identify sponsored content, and avoid coordinated harassment. This regulation should also be viewpoint neutral, otherwise the regulation could be another cause of partisan distrust.

Civic education is the longer-term element to that agenda. Media, constitutional and democratic disagreement literacy ought to be conveyed together. The citizens should be equipped with knowledge about the functioning of elections, the parliamentary confidence procedure, judicial review and appeals. They also have to develop democratic judgement, which means they must learn to accept difference, distinguish criticism from dehumanization, verify information from multiple sources, and understand that there is no such thing as a patriot who rejects the political opposition of another citizen. But it is not to eliminate conflict from politics, but to make partisan identity the only criterion of citizenship.

Table 3. Reform Priorities and Credibility Tests

Reform Area	Primary Actors	Credibility Test
Procedural transparency	Election bodies, courts, accountability institutions	Are records, reasons, timelines, and remedies accessible even when outcomes are politically sensitive?
Parliamentary normalization	Government, opposition, committees, secretariats	Can opposition rights and committee work survive intense party conflict?
Responsible party communication	Party leaders, spokespersons, digital teams	Are standards against threats and unsupported allegations applied to allies as well as rivals?
Professional media practice	Editors, reporters, anchors, platforms, regulators	Are reporting and commentary clearly separated, corrections visible, archives accessible, and sponsored content identified?
Civic and constitutional literacy	Universities, schools, civil society, public broadcasters	Can citizens explain procedures, assess evidence, and disagree without denying equal citizenship?

9. Conclusion

There is no single solution to the problem of polarization in Pakistan whether it is a single leader, one election or one short dispute. It is multi-layered, as a result of historical institutional imbalances, repeated doubts on the procedures, political discourse, media coverage and citizen's perception of national conflict in terms of social identity. The threat is highest when the ideological differences are accompanied by affective and institutional polarization: ideology opponents are no longer considered legitimate participants and common rules are seen primarily as tools in a partisan battle.

The argument put forward in this paper is that the key to democratic resilience is in establishing procedures over which citizens can have confidence and political interpretations that do not undermine the legitimacy of the other side. Institutions must be communicating and acting in a fashion that will withstand harsh criticism, and maintain their constitutional credibility. Political leaders on the other hand, are expected to be able to question decisions, but not in a way that undermines the opposition's political position. What Pakistan doesn't need is a decrease in politics. It requires that there be political competition, wherein the loss of an election or parliament is not final and irrevocable, but one that can be overcome by the next day's opponent, who is welcome as the next

day's competitor. It will take time to get people to trust each other again. It's not going to happen after every election, after every judgment, after every package of reforms. It's more likely to be a growth narrative when rules are clear, consistent, subject to change, and are equally followed by winners and losers.

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