

PAKISTAN'S DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE: LESSONS FROM INDIA AND SPAIN

Muhammad Asif Khan^{*1}, Dr. Amanullah Khan²^{*1}MPhil Scholar in Department of Strategic Studies, Air University Islamabad²Assistant Professor in Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad^{*1}muhmmadasifkhan786@gmail.com, ²amanullah@ndu.edu.pkDOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16557927>**Keywords**

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Corresponding Author: *

Muhammad Asif Khan

Abstract

Civilian supremacy is integral to any functioning democracy. The democratic progress of Pakistan has been long stunted by the enduring influence of military authority in political and economic affairs. Even though it has experienced multiple switches to civilian governments over the years, the establishment remained in the shadows behind these governments. India, on the other hand, has remained under civilian control since its independence, while Spain experienced a movement from prodemocracy under a military-backed authoritarian regime to a consolidated democracy through continuous legal, institutional, and cultural processes that have lasted more than three decades. This study examines the origins of civil-military imbalance in Pakistan, and aspirations drawn from India and Spain to outline a realistic pathway for Pakistan to achieve a stable form of civilian supremacy. The study aims to: (1) understand the historical and institutional context of military dominance in Pakistan; (2) understand how both India and Spain achieved and maintained (relative) civilian supremacy; and (3) recommend context-specific reforms that Pakistan might undertake that would limit military influence and empower the civilian state actors. The study relies on qualitative comparative case study methods using secondary data. The empirical analysis is framed around three theoretical perspectives Praetorianism, Objective Civilian Control, and Democratization Theory. The findings demonstrate that Pakistan's praetorian political culture is a result of legal loopholes, institutional weakness, and fragmented civilian authority, while India was able to provide constitutional safeguards, and a depoliticized military culture that prevented praetorianism. In Spain, the democratization process was carried out with elite consensus, empowered judiciary, symbolic leadership in the political/political sphere, and NATO/EU incentives, pointing to two quite different experiences of development of civilian authority. The study concludes that true civilian supremacy is possible in Pakistan; however, it requires significant institution building, legal reforms, political cohesiveness, and international support.

INTRODUCTION

Civilian supremacy ensures that only elected representatives are entitled to shape the national agenda. However, for much of Pakistan's political

history, the country has witnessed military interventions and interference. The civilian control over important state domestic and foreign affairs has

been undermined, it is presumed. Conversely, India, has found alternatives using civilian institutions to take prominence in almost every sector of public life (Wilkinson, 2015). Likewise, the change in Spain after Franco's death offers a positive example of democratic recovery, and suggests that existing military dominance is not inevitable (Preston, 2006). This study has evaluated both actions taken by India and Spain in order to glean practical lessons for moving Pakistan towards democratization and emphasizes how the models of preventive institutional design (such as in India) and recovery through reform and consensus (such as in Spain) can be complementary. With this framework Pakistan can better address the required structural challenges and promote a culture necessary to effect a true transition to civilian rule.

The study is an attempt to contribute toward the overall understanding how Pakistan might achieve a transition from military dominance in national politics to sustainable civilian rule, utilizing a model of prevention with India and a model of recovery with Spain, a dualistic framework which emphasizes not only a historical perspective, but also options for practical reforms. The study's contribution comes from the analysis of the comparative study, and the specificity of recommendations for policy makers, civil society, and international actors. The study identifies not only the causes of Pakistan's democratic stasis, but makes recommendations for reforms.

The study employs Samuel P. Huntington's Praetorianism as a theoretical basis for analysis in conjunction with the comparative data. According to Huntington, Praetorianism refers to societies in which social forces attempt to act in their interest through governmental institutions that are either weak or absent. In these societies, the military overtakes the political roles due to institutional weaknesses and public discontent, as well as the perception that it is justified to act on behalf of the public justifiably. Pakistan is an example of a praetorian society in which the military has filled derelict civilian institutional power vacancies. India on the other hand, developed strong democratic institutions following independence, and successfully employed these institutions to secure military subordination to civilians. Spain was a praetorian society under Franco; the country demilitarized its politics, and established a stable democracy. Hence, the study explores the

origins and implications of military dominance in Pakistan, compares it to the Indian model of preventative control and to Spain's model of recovery, and assesses how Pakistan could pursue structural reforms to overcome praetorianism and establish democratic norms for the long haul. At the same time, this study is located within the multi-disciplinary ambit of civil-military relations theory, while drawing heavily from democratization theory. The respective analytical works of Samuel P. Huntington and Peter D. Feaver, which focus on the institutional relationship between military institutions and civilian authorities, are used as foundational frames to conceptualize military dominance. Huntington's "Objective Civilian Control," for example, stipulates that the best way to achieve civilian supremacy over military leadership is to professionalize the military, and completely divest it from politics (Huntington, 1957). This theory is particularly relevant in the Indian setting, in which early-starting politicians built institutional bulwarks to stave off military involvement in political matters. Feaver's "agency theory" (Feaver, 1999), on the other hand, examines the military as an agent that has information and operational advantages over its civilian principals. This framework identifies chronic challenges for civilian governments in Pakistan, wherein the military is an autonomous institution that may act without civilian authority, and is resistant to oversight.

Democratization theory, also, provides a powerful perspective on some of these matters, particularly the analysis of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) that focuses on the processes in which regimes shift from authoritarian rule to democracy (see p.3). The case of Spanish democratic recovery supports how elite agreements, ceremonial leadership, and institutional reform can be crucial in overcoming military supremacy. These theoretical lenses on civil-military relations and democratization together, provide a comparative analytical framework in which to assess Pakistan's democratic struggles, and to explore options for reform.

Research Objectives

1. Critically analyze the historical and structural conditions that have made military dominance effectively ingrained in Pakistan's political system.

2.Examine and compare how India and Spain engaged institutional strategies to attain and maintain civilian control over the military.

3.Offer a number of context specific reform and policy recommendations for Pakistan to realize sustainable democratic civilian supremacy.

Research Questions

1.What historical, institutional, and political aspects maintain military dominance over Pakistan's governance?

2.How have India and Spain maintained civilian supremacy to the military, and what mechanisms were essential to their success?

3.What context-sensitive and practical reforms can Pakistan implement based on India's and Spain's experience to make the transition to genuine civilian control and democratic consolidation with citizen consensus?

Significance of the Study

This research is of significant academic, policy, and practice value. By taking a comparative approach to civil-military relations, it strengthens an existing body of literature on democratization in post-colonial and praetorian societies. While many studies related to Pakistan post-colonial state have been preoccupied with Pakistan's own failures related to internal politics, this study has drawn from studied, comparative successes and distinguishes the experiences of India and Spain sharing actionable practices uniquely defined for Pakistani politics. This research provides two pathways for policymakers, preventive (India) and recuperative (Spain) practices to understand the long-standing civil-military imbalance and to recognize and challenge it. It highlights actionable institutional reforms, such as, strengthening parliamentary oversight roles, depoliticizing the military, legitimizing reforms for legal representation, and so on.

Theoretically, the study adds to the theory of civil-military relations because it deals with civil-military relations within a comparative framework. It also opens up new avenues of inquiry on the subject of democratic transitions in fragile and hybrid regimes.

Research Methodology

This study utilizes qualitative comparative case studies to explore civil-military relations in Pakistan and to some extent utilize the lessons from India and Spain. The study is informed by Praetorianism (Samuel P. Huntington) which helps to explain Pakistan's structural weaknesses, Objective Civilian Control (Huntington, 1957), Agency Theory (Peter D. Feaver) and Democratization Theory (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986) that helps understand democratization transition in Spain. Data analysis is based on a comparative qualitative thematic process which is intended to systematically identify, interpret, and analyses themes through comparable contexts of the chosen cases study - Pakistan, India, and Spain.

Pakistan: A History of Military Dominance

Since independence in 1947, Pakistan has been under direct military rule for almost 34 years, and army has had an indirect role in managing the country's affairs for most of the decades since. The military can stake a claim to be the guardian of Pakistan's ideological and geographical boundaries particularly in reference to India, and this has provided some legitimacy for the military's continuing interventions into the political space. The army framed its first overt takeover of politics in 1958 when General Muhammad Ayub Khan overthrew the civilian government, and again when General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq intervened in 1977, and later with General Pervez Musharraf in 1999. Interestingly, these interventions were legitimized by the judiciary by reference to so-called doctrines of necessity (Rizvi, 2000), and endorsed by political parties as well in the interests of short-term political gains.

In addition to coups, the military has established a foothold in policymaking of all kinds, the media, foreign relations, and the economy. The military has branched out into the realm of economy in Pakistan as well, which also provides cover under its vast business empire, called MilBus commercial ventures, which are owned by military institutions. These companies are taxed as MilBus businesses providing the military a level of financial independence from civilian and government regulation and political protection (Siddiq, 2007). Path dependency in Pakistan favors these significant advantages enabling the military to access resources that incentivized

further tensions politically and economically against civilian rule, producing a cycle of militarism.

The emergence of hybrid regimes where civilian governments operate under military tutelage has further blurred the lines between civilian and military rule. Political engineering, selective accountability, and media manipulation makes elections less meaningful and hampers democratic consolidation (International Crisis Group, 2021). Civilian governments have repeatedly failed to provide coherence, institutional vision, or a governing capacity. They have relied on the military establishment to provide stability, security, and representation in international negotiations. Political elites are primarily interested in securing short-term political gains, patronage politics, and show very little interest in reforming political institutions that will reduce the influence of the military in political affairs. A major factor is the lack of a political system based on merit and accountable governance; party nominations, cabinet appointments, and other relatively high offices are given based on loyalty, kinship, and wealth rather than qualifications and experience. This has created a culture of administrative inefficiency, poor service delivery, and weak public institutions that diminishes public trust and confidence in democratic governance (International Crisis Group, 2021). The lack of institutional checks and balances also means that corruption and misuse of authority with civilian governments go often unchecked which undermines their legitimacy and gives the military an opportunity to intervene in the name of "stability" or "national interest" (Shah, 2014). The civil-military relations in Pakistan therefore present a larger structural imbalance arising from political dysfunction and decay of institutions.

Compounding this challenge is Pakistan's immature political culture, which hinders democratic development. Political awareness and democratic values among the general public remain underdeveloped, partly due to low literacy rates, weak civic education, and decades of authoritarian conditioning. Voter behavior is frequently shaped by kinship ties, religious affiliations, or regional loyalties, rather than performance-based accountability or ideological alignment. This socio-political environment allows traditional elites and dynastic

politicians to dominate the political arena, discouraging reformist or policy-driven politics. The situation is further exacerbated by the role of foreign powers particularly the United States and China who have historically provided military aid, direct funding, and strategic cooperation to Pakistan's armed forces, often bypassing civilian authorities. During the Cold War and post-9/11 era, the U.S. in particular prioritized military partnerships over democratic strengthening, inadvertently empowering the military to further entrench itself (Rizvi, 2000; Siddiq, 2007). Such external support has legitimized the military's supremacy at the expense of democratic development. In contrast to India's preventive institutional design and Spain's reform-driven transition from military rule, Pakistan lacks the structural reforms, elite consensus, and international incentives that are essential to recalibrating civil-military relations. Without strong civilian leadership, institutional accountability, and political maturity, efforts to dismantle praetorian influence in Pakistan will remain aspirational rather than achievable.

India: A Model of Preventive Civilian Supremacy

India's democratic experience is of special salience. Despite wars (1947, 1962, 1965, 1971), insurgencies (Kashmir, Punjab, Northeast), and political crises (Emergency period, coalition governments), India has maintained uninterrupted civilian rule. This has not been due to all democratic luck, rather it has been the result of explicit institutional choices. From the very beginning, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his successors were committed to democratic principles and made it clear that the military would be subordinate to civilian authority (Cohen, 2001). Indian civil-military relations reflect a constitutional context in which the civilian head of state (the president) is the nominal head of the armed forces, with authority imparted by the President as the civil authority resting with the Prime Minister and The Cabinet Committee on Security. It is important to highlight that the Indian military does not have representation in structures of the executive branch, such as the National Security Council. The civil bureaucracy is the intermediary between the military and executive branch, with very limited reporting mechanisms.

According to Steven Wilkinson (2015), the military in India has contextual peculiarities that keep it underfunded and so that the military was excluded from political debate, which limits its political clout. The limitations placed on funding may have created operational challenges, yet this was successful in guaranteeing civilian supremacy over the military. The Indian military has developed a professional ethos that discourages political pursuits; this is important as the opposite is true in Pakistan, a country in which the military routinely intervenes in governance and policymaking.

Also, the judiciary, press, and Election Commission have acted as effective overseers of democratic accountability. Furthermore, federalism and vibrant regional politics dilute power and permit democratic competition; this contributes to an environment that acts as a natural restraint on authoritarian behavior.

India is a comprehensive example of the effective civilian dominance of the military, given that since independence the military has had to accept or tolerated the supremacy of duly elected civilian authority. Most of the developing nations, particularly in South Asia, were faced with issues of stability, weak civilian institutions and a militarized legacy from colonial rule. India has never witnessed a military coup or direct military intervention in its politics. There were several factors within its institutional, historical and political backdrop. The first factor is the deep professionalization of the Indian Armed Forces trained in a tradition of apolitical military activity under British colonial rule, which enforced a strict separation of the military as an institution from civil authority. The first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and every civilian leader ensured that political authority remained strictly within democratically elected institutions and retained the military in a civilian controlled environment under the Ministry of Defense while also being led by civilian authority and not military authority.

The second factor is the Indian Constitution clearly delineates the separation between the armed forces and the political authority, as well Indian democratic tradition has remained stable, with regular elections, a vibrant civil society and independent judiciary. In addition, the lack of structural incentives specifically with the absence of political offices or the allure of large economic interests has limited the disincentives

for the Indian military from intervening or engaging in politics. The political elite, the media, and public opinion have similarly always reinforced the military's role as not political, thereby reinforcing a normative barrier to political engagement. Also, the Indian military's own self-regard for institutional professionalism and operational focus against external threats have formed a self-imposed barrier to any political engagement (Puri, 2020). All-in-all these reasons have formed a strong political culture where civilian supremacy has not just been enforced but also respected; rendering India the hallmark of democratic resilience in civil-military relations.

Spain: A Case of Democratic Recovery

Spain offers a distinct, yet equally powerful case. After the death of Dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, Spain transitioned to democratic rule relatively peacefully through a transition negotiated by King Juan Carlos I, who appalled military expectations and facilitated the writing of a democratic constitution in 1978. When an attempt coup took place on February 23, 1981 (23-F), during which a selection of the military attempted to storm and take over the parliament, it became a defining moment: the King's televised condemnation of the coup effectively delegitimized the military's role in politics and the military DE politicization began (BBC News, 2011).

Spain's transition raised out of elite consensus, public mobilization and external incentives. Spain had to comply with democratic practices and norms aimed at joining the EU and NATO, including civilian control of the military. Several institutional reforms that followed included the restructuring of the Ministry of Defense around a civilian head and the restructuring of military education to reflect democratic values (Encarnación, 2008).

Preston (2006) and Aguilar (2002) mention pasting between democratic reformers and old regime elites is essential. Pact in this sense would ensure a peaceful transfer of power while ensuring accountability and justice would not become an afterthought. Pact also empowered the judiciary and complicated the work of historical memory legislation which assisted in moving to a fresh start, overcoming some of the wounds from the Franco era (e.g., 1939 to 1975), and further instilling democratic norms.

While Spain illustrates that deep rooted military power may be rolled back or dismantled, this is possible through the presence of strong leadership, institutional change, and the anchoring of the issue to international agreements. Spain's democratic recovery stands out as a compelling example of how internal leadership combined with regional and international support can facilitate a successful transition from authoritarianism. After the death of Francisco Franco, King Juan Carlos I played a pivotal role in defying the military's political ambitions and guiding the country toward democracy. His decision to back democratic reforms rather than uphold Francoist authoritarianism culminated in the 1978 democratic constitution (Encarnación, 2008). The attempted coup on February 23, 1981, became a turning point; the King's public condemnation of the coup attempt not only delegitimized military interference but also marked the beginning of military DE politicization. These internal efforts were complemented by strategic consensus-building among democratic reformers and regime elites, which helped ensure a peaceful transition and avoided the risks of political revenge or instability. The pact-driven process also enabled meaningful judicial reform and institutional restructuring, which were essential for embedding democratic norms and healing the nation's post-authoritarian legacy.

In addition to internal factors, Spain's regional and international environment played a crucial role in reinforcing its democratic path. A strong incentive for democratization was Spain's ambition to join key Western institutions such as the European Union (EU) and NATO. Both organizations required firm commitments to democratic governance, civilian supremacy over the military, and respect for human rights. These conditions served as powerful external pressures that accelerated legal and institutional reforms. Spain had to civilianize the Ministry of Defense, overhaul military education to align with democratic principles, and implement structural changes that fostered political accountability. Furthermore, international partnerships and recognition provided legitimacy to the newly emerging democratic institutions, while technical and financial assistance from European allies supported governance reform. Thus, Spain's experience demonstrates how a combination of elite-driven reform, public

mobilization, and external democratic benchmarks can successfully overcome deep seated authoritarian structures and reorient a state toward a stable democratic future (Gunther et al., 2004).

Lessons for Pakistan

Taken together, the two cases of India and Spain provide a roadmap for establishing a strategy for Pakistan. From India, the lessons are early institutional design and political culture. Civilian supremacy is best established before the military organizational and cultural power takes root; strong political parties, professional bureaucracies, and democratic education are further related means of strategy which invariably support civilian supremacy. From Spain, the lessons depict that existing military dominance while creating its own pathologies can be reversed, but for this it requires political consensus, symbolic leadership, and the ability to enact explicit legal and institutional change. The earlier framing of King Juan Carlos to undo a coup and create a decisive pivoting of the army to align with democratic norms suggests what Pakistan should be able to achieve provided that its civilian leadership is willing or able to do it together with international support (Preston, 2006).

These two examples demonstrate, at a minimum, the requirements of civilian consolidation, media freedom, judicial independence and civil education. In Pakistan, it is imperative for political parties to think beyond the present election cycle, to come together and revive the democratic space. Civil-military-dialogues need to proceed beyond adversarial disagreement, to constitutional negotiations, allowing reevaluation and repositioning. Multi-lateral stakeholders such as international donors and organizations, can support this process by providing aid and/or trade incentives related to democratic outputs.

Challenges in Pakistan

To achieve real civilian supremacy in Pakistan politics, require a multi-faceted process collectively, the lessons from both India and Spain can lay out a strategy for Pakistan. Pakistan's impeded path towards democratic solidification is riddled with structural and institutional barriers to civilian executive authority, favoring military supremacy. These barriers

arise from the persistent frailty of its civilian institutions. Pakistan has placed no such distance between civilian and military domains. This weakened distinction has allowed the military to enter into that policy space, not only at the direct level of government and constitutionally, but through its path dependency to embed its role there and normalize such a behavior. Further compounding institutional weakness is the abiding hybrid regime model wherein democratically elected civilian government operates within a broad, tacit, and at times overt, domain of authority defined by military ultimately determining “what is civil in the political space”. The persistent constitutional ambiguities and, most importantly, weak provisions that would hold the military from interfering, has led to military interferences into political space, usually with little institutional retribution. The earlier willingness of the courts to confer legitimacy on military take overs through legal ideas such as the Doctrine of Necessity added another layer to establishing required direct military intervention, when the state is under threat due to civilian incapacity or disorder (Rizvi, 2000).

Pakistan's political landscape has become increasingly complex, with governance heavily dominated by elite interests, making the situation even more challenging. Civilians have tended to be pre-occupied habitually with politics, especially when it comes to establishing patronage networks and winning the next election, and not necessarily developing long-term institutional reforms. Political parties are dynastic, without adhered to a system of internal democracy and/or political platforms. This weakens the civilian front and builds dependence on military state authorities for stability or continuation. In fact, in many cases politicians seek military backing to gain or maintain power at the expense of the democracy that they are supposed to defend (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Moreover, the country suffers from a rudimentary political culture where democratic norms have neither penetrated the populace nor been enforced by civil education. The lack of real political consciousness leads voters to act based on ethnic, regional, or religious connections, rather than policy based or ideological preferences. However, decades of authoritarian conditioning and fragmented democratic practices, undermined the development of

a politically engaged citizenry to demand civilian supremacy.

Militarization of the economy is another serious issue. The armed forces of Pakistan have a large and predominantly independent commercial infrastructure, known as Military Business or MilBus, with a wide variety of extractive, logistic and agricultural business ventures covering various industries and sectors of the economy. Not only do these enterprises provide the military economic independence, but they also serve to strengthen the military's hold over significant sectors of the state, thereby enabling indirect influence over the political process and to intimidate civilian actors from directly challenging the military (Siddiqi, 2007).

Judicial and media institutions that are supposed to facilitate accountability in a democratic system are regularly undermined or otherwise manipulated. An example of this is the judiciary, which has legitimized the military's interventions historically. Media outlets, including the press, are facing censorship and intimidation. In functioning democracies, independent civic discourse is supported and power is regulated through an autonomous judiciary, a credible and responsible media, and established public norm. In Pakistan, however, these checks and balances are relatively weak, compromised by politicization, resulting in a low level of accountability and public distrust.

The process of democratization is complicated by external factors as well. Strategic relationships with international "partners" such as the United States and China over the years have placed priority on military alliances at the cost of democratic development. Military aid and security agreements with these countries tend to overlook civilian institutions, which increase the military's autonomy relative to civilians, and reduce the space and influence of "democratic" actors (Rizvi, 2000).

Pakistan is also without a cohesive national consensus around the issue of reforming civil-military relations. Fragmented elite, partisan divisions, and a general ethos of political opportunism, meant that nothing emerged out of a broad based and coherent understanding of deriving a perception of meaning for democratization. In both India and Spain, civilian supremacy was institutionalized, through elite cohesiveness around a shared commitment to

democratic norms. There has been no such binding in Pakistan. Without working in concert towards legal reform, civic education, and institutional reorganization, aspirations for a future of civilian supremacy would remain a distant project, rather than an attainable political ambition.

Key Findings

The research found out that the military establishment remains the powerful stakeholder and continue to operate as the key power broker in political authority. The political degeneration is attribute to the underdeveloped state of democratic institutions and repeated military invasions, existence of hybrid regime and lack of constitutional insulation from political activity. Additionally, the political fragmentation and the military's foundational position in the identity of state and its policies.

The uninterrupted civilian rule experienced in India can be attributed to the foresight of leaders after independence who established constitutional supremacy, eliminated the military from the political agenda, and ensured that democratic norms were institutionalized in all levels of politics. At the other hand, Spain's transition from a militarized authoritarian regime to democratic state involved a set of legal reforms, redefining the civil-military divide, creating elite consensus, and coding its transition to international democratic standards (i.e. conditions of joining the EU and NATO).

In contrast, Pakistan currently has no unity of civilian leadership and is lacking any serious legal or institutional reforms that would limit military encroachment into civilian authority, nor facilitate the consolidation of democracy in Pakistan. The study found out that independent judiciary and media, like in India and Spain, are significant components of ensuring accountability and opposing military intervention— two of the weakest areas in Pakistani democracy.

Conclusion

Pakistan is at a crossroads. Continued hybrid regimes and indirect military rule undermine the progression of the possibility of substantive democratic consolidation. Nevertheless, the relative cases of India and Spain show that both preventive and corrective routes for ensuring civilization exist. In the example

of India, civilian supremacy depends on; foresight, institutional fortification, and political unity. These are not easy paths, nor are they short-term solutions. But, by employing domestic reforms and institution engagement, Pakistan has a potential to move towards tangible and sustainable democratic process. It is time for Pakistan to reclaim its democratic mandate and return power back to where it actually resides: its people.

The Indian situation demonstrates the necessity of initial institutional insulation and political foresight and the case of Spain, albeit one involves dictatorship and the other military-supported democracy, can show how deeply entrenched political and military power might be extracted and/or nullified through reforms and consensus. Lessons from these two systems in terms of functional capability demonstrate that democratic consolidation in a praetorian-style society is practical if political will for reforms is present along with a robust accountability mechanism in place.

The paper concludes how particular institutions, political culture, and civil-military boundaries can impact democratization, and Pakistan ought to envision and pursue significant legal, political, and cultural reforms along with institutions building, and marking the clear boundary between civil and military authorities in order to establish real democratic governance. Institutional and legal reforms, effective parliamentary oversight, empowerment of civilian institutions, judicial independence, media freedom, abolishing doctrines such as the Doctrine of Necessity and increased political engagement for productive outcomes could be a way forward. A comprehensive strategy can help move in the direction of bringing real democracy in Pakistan.

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