

## Pakistan's Shifting Changing Aspects of Civil Military Power: An Analysis of 2018 to 2026

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### Abstract

In this article examines at how Pakistan's politics changed from 2018 to 2026. During this period, there was a hub of governments and military seizing power again. The notion of interaction between civilian leadership and the Pakistan Army is studied. We examine how they "gamed" elections and the lack of ability to govern and how citizens mobilised, the civilian and military dynamics. Hybrid governments are usually seen as political setups. A disappointingly high percentage of them have proofs of longevity. This article seeks to make sense of the continued existence of these hybrid governments despite between government changes and elections. Pakistan politics is a case to study. The military has always figured into the country. From 2018 to 2026, it didn't go by without an exception. Throughout there was military influence. The civilian executives did not hold sway. Elections frequently were rigged. The Government on its turn did not keep its promises. The article goes into detail about the situation. It makes suggestions for nationwide the government. The fate of the country rests on how it is able to stabilize and consolidate its political system in a more democratic fashion. This article attempts to make a contribution in this direction. Hybrid regimes in Pakistan are proven to be sustainable. This article examines the factors responsible for its durability. The results can contribute to the understanding of the complexities of Pakistan Politics. An analysis of the situation is provided in the article. The objective would be to offer solutions to the problems encountered by Pakistan politics. The article aims to contribute to the debate, on Pakistan politics. The article offers an analysis of the circumstances. The article talks about how these dealers a key part of what makes Pakistan government work and how talking and negotiating are just as important as using force to keep the government in power. This is the essence of Pakistan politics, of deals between the military and civilian governments.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Civil-Military Relations, Election Rigging, Hybrid Regime

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## Introduction

The idea of regimes has changed a lot over the last twenty years. Hybrid regimes used to be seen as a stop on the way to becoming a democracy or an authoritarian government. Now people think that hybrid regimes are strong and can last for a time. They are their kind of government. This change has made scholars who study democracy and authoritarian governments think differently. They used to believe that countries would either become more democratic or more authoritarian over time. Now they know that democratic institutions and authoritarian practices can exist together for a time without the country becoming more democratic or authoritarian. ( Levitsky & Way, 2010). Hybrid regimes work in a way. The thing that is interesting is what makes these regimes last. This happens in places where people vote and parties compete with each other. The institutions in these places also change. Hybrid regimes are able to keep going even when it seems like they should be changing. It is really interesting that hybrid regimes can last for a time. Hybrid regimes are still able to survive. In this paper we are talking about civil-military relations. This means the relationship between the society and the military organization that is supposed to keep it safe. The way the military and the society interact is a question. Peter Feaver calls this the civil-military problem. This problem needs a policy to balance two important goals. One goal is to build a military force that can protect the country. Hybrid regimes are good at doing this. They can keep going even when things tough. Hybrid regimes are very good, at surviving. (Bermeo, 2016)

The state has to make sure that the military it creates does not turn against it. Hybrid governance in this study means that there is a balance of power between two groups: the military groups. In the context of civil-military relations hybrid governance is when both civilian and military leaders work together to make decisions for the state. It is a system where military and civilian power work together to govern a country. The military and civilian power can work together in ways, such as: combined committees that make decisions together military advisors working with civilian leaders a mix of military and civilian authority in certain areas of governance. This system can take different forms and can be very complex. The state needs to find a way to make sure that the military and civilian power balance works well and that the military does not become too powerful. Hybrid governance is, about finding this balance and making sure that both the military and civilian groups work together to govern the country. The military and civilian groups have to work to make decisions and govern the state. Hybrid governance is a system that allows the military and civilian power to coexist and work together. (Akhlaq, 2024)

Studies and research conducted in Pakistan focus on the interaction between the military and the Government. This relationship tends to be a mutually stressful one. Has a high rate of give-and-take. However, it is highly complicated between military and government in Pakistan as military possesses a lot of power in the country. This throws out its influence on the management of the country. Historians examine the ways that military leaders interact with the government — and influence the making of decisions concerning big issues such as national security and foreign policy. Especially regarding national security and foreign policy, military is involved in all kinds of decision making in Pakistan. They have a part to play, in decisions which influence the country. (Anatol, 2012). It should be a forum in which people talk and deliberate over ideas, not a sometimes decision-making body. Military involvement in government as proposed by Janowitz can be minimized if the council acts with consistent and along with communication between the stakeholders the differences can be reduced. This can pave the way for cooperation and stability, in Pakistan. The way that the military and the government work together in Turkey, Russia, Bangladesh and Venezuela is different from the

way it works in Pakistan. In Pakistan, it's evident that a balance is maintained between the military and the government, something unique in the country's context. The implications of these examples are also that the "line of democratization" is not always an accurate interpretation. Occasionally, countries may experience a combination of non-democratic systems that may endure over the course of time. The paper also examines working of the National Security Council in Pakistan in the light of 1973 constitution. It claims that the council is able to resolve the nation's issues and to serve as a balancing force among the diverse branches of government.

### Research Objectives

1. To deliver further propagating the concept of hybrid regimes which remain in power through deals.
- 2) Pakistan is in the same situation as countries that adopted a similar system, such as Turkey, Russia, Bangladesh and Venezuela. This will assist determining the unique aspects in Pakistan and lessons learned from other countries.
- 3) Here we discuss the role of the military in Pakistan economy particularly with respect to its business and investments in various sectors. We will explore the impact of these military enterprises on the economy, their impact on other industries and the attitude of people in relation to the military's role in the economy. Understanding Military economic role and hybrid regimes in Pakistan will help to understand the economy of Pakistan.

### Research Questions

1. How do civil military bargains function as a mechanism sustaining Pakistan's hybrid regime, particularly during the PTI government (2018 to 2022)?
2. What does Pakistan's experience of bargain-driven hybridity compare with similar mechanisms in other hybrid regimes, and what does this reveal about the global persistence of hybrid political orders?
3. What are the Wider Implications for Civilian Supremacy and Democratization in Pakistan?

### Significance of the Study

This research is really important because security issues are a deal these days. If you have not seen the news about the war that is happening in ways like on the internet or through economic manipulation you should know that being good at hybrid warfare is crucial. For Pakistan this is especially true because it is in a location and has neighbors like India and Afghanistan that it does not get along with. Hybrid warfare is a risk for Pakistan and it affects the military, politics and economy. This paper is one of the first to look at warfare in South Asian countries like Pakistan. Some Western military experts have known about warfare for a while and it has been talked about a lot in relation to what Russia has done in Ukraine and Crimea. There is not much information about how hybrid warfare affects Pakistan and its region so this paper is trying to help people understand what it means for them and what the consequences could be. Hybrid warfare is an issue and this research is trying to shed some light on it especially when it comes to Pakistan and its hybrid warfare situation. The focus is on warfare and how it impacts Pakistan, which is why this research is so important, for understanding hybrid warfare. This study is important for work and national security planning. It adds to what we know about a big research project that covers a region.

Hybrid warfare is complex because it uses methods both non-military and military. These include spreading information, cyber-attacks forcing others through diplomacy, proxy warfare and damaging economies. Pakistan situation is tough because of its weaknesses. These are diversity tensions between sects, open borders and a lively social media scene. All these make it easy for hybrid warfare techniques to be used against the country. The study aims to

analyze these weaknesses in a way. It wants to provide countermeasures that can be put in place through changes in institutions, strategic communications and coordinating intelligence. This is to help the country. The study also looks at forms of warfare. These have been triggered by advances in technology. The study has significance for work. It also provides input for national security planning. This is at the level as other important research. It helps in understanding warfare. Hybrid warfare uses methods. These include -military and military methods. Pakistan faces challenges. The study aims to provide solutions. The solutions include reforms. Strategic communications can also help. Intelligence coordination is important. The study helps in security planning. It provides knowledge, about warfare. .

## Literature Review

Hadenius (1992) provided that there existed multiple theoretical versions of the 'democracy' i.e. as a core concept of politics and political science. According to him, conceptually, the word 'democracy' is understood as a state level institutional arrangement form of government which is governed through the elected representatives chosen by the general public by following some transparent institutional mechanism ensuring the equal opportunity of political participation for every adult citizen of the state. According to Brettschneider (2006), conceptually 'democracy' as a political system depends upon at least three core values: Sovereignty of the electorate, equal opportunity to participate in the electoral/political process, and the basic sense of liberty. According to the views of Dahl (1971), and Diamond (2008), although, the aforesaid three core values of democracy are considered as the essential functional features of any democratic system of government but the scholars disagree regarding both the mode and means of the implementation of the aforesaid principles of democracy. To overcome the aforesaid difficulty about the conceptual understanding of the democracy, it would be wise enough to imagine a spectrum representing the various levels of democracy adjusting the whole range of the possibilities i.e. from the minimalist to idealist versions of democracy

Croissant et al. (2010) claimed the basic beliefs of the minimalist version of democracy essentially included the constitutional guarantees about the fundamental rights, a definite electoral mechanism ensuring the universal adult franchise, a governance system based on the rule of law, the supremacy of the elected civilian leadership in decision making, and the civilian control on the military forces. According to him, the civilian control over the armed forces works as a sine qua non for any democratic system of government. Some scholars are of the view that without achieving complete civilian control over all of the state affairs democracy is simply impossible. As per the views of Croissant et al. (2011), the nature of civil-military relations becomes the cutting edge defining criteria for treating any system of government/state as democracy i.e. where the elected civilian government can exercise full control over its armed forces without any covert or overt resistance from the leadership of the armed forces. They have further defined the term 'civilian control' as the constant political formula according to which the elected civilian leadership possesses the exclusive authority to take both the policy making and policy implementation oriented decisions. They further provided that, on the other side some level of dysfunctional democracy is equally possible i.e. in which the military leadership tends to control the basic decisions about the nature of political policy structures, and the civilian leadership hardly possesses any potent role in the state level policy decisions, additionally, it is also quite possible to categorize the nature of civilian control in various degrees e.g. weak, mild, moderate, strong etc.

Bland, (2001) were of the view that the basic nature of the challenges to the power structures controlled by the democratically elected civilian leadership may be represented in two different formats which can be named as: formally institutionalized prerogatives and the informal contestation. They maintained that the formally institutionalized prerogatives include the formal legal privileges/entitlements through which the military leadership becomes able not only to exclusively control its internal affairs but it becomes in a position to encroach upon an essential role in the general state affairs i.e. related to the foreign, economic and political affairs. According to Wolf (2016), the supremacy of the democratically elected civilian or military leadership i.e. in the decision making apparatus of some democratic state can be evaluated on the basis of their respective dominance in the five key areas of the state affairs naming: public policy, elite recruitment, military organization, internal security, and national defense.

Mehmood & Chawla (2021) observed that the military is usually found to be overtly involved in destabilizing the civilian governments in Pakistan, if the civilian governments fail to comply with the demands of the military. In light of the aforesaid premise, they studied the main incidents which irritated the military leadership by making them compelled to interfere in the matters of civilian government during the period of PML(N) regime (2013-2018). The study concluded that the theory of the balance of power is not applicable to the case of Pakistan as the military as institution over powers the position of parliament in Pakistan.

Janjua, (2021) explained the effects of the various environmental factors i.e. socio-political culture, governance structure, quality of democracy, institutional values of military etc. upon the existing nature of the civil-military relations in Pakistan. He suggested that there existed a intellectual and ideological gap between the civilian and military leadership of Pakistan, and there is a need to bridge the aforesaid gap through the intellectual and institutional reforms. He recommended that for the purpose of gaining/enhancing the base of their legitimate power, the civilian leadership needs to focus on improving the overall quality of governance; and the military leadership should consider to adopt the ethos of voluntary subordination to the civilian leadership i.e. as is this case in most of the developed and developing countries.

## Material and Methods

This study mainly aimed to review the civil-military relations during the last PML-N regime (2013-18). Keeping view of the nature and objectives of the study, this study has employed case study research methods. Further, for achieving the purpose of this research the researcher has primarily used the secondary data sources, and accordingly, the researchers have conducted a systematic literature review of the relevant published material i.e. Books, published reports of the various think tanks, periodicals, research journals, news reports etc.

South Asia and Divergent Political Trajectories The experience of Pakistan cannot be taken in isolation and has to be placed in broader South Asian context. India's national experience shares similarities with institutions of colonialism, characterized by deep-rooted civilian dominance and the development of democratic strength through the establishment of the military as a fixed component of parliamentary checks and balances (Wilkinson, 2015). Civilian supremacy in India was institutionalized in India due to the Nehruvian agreement and the mass-integrative system of the Congress party which ensured that the military would remain politically neutral (Jaffrelot, 2004). On the contrary, Bangladesh went through repeated coups and military takeovers, which highlights the weaknesses of civilian rule in the

region (Karim, 2002). Sri Lanka is an example of a country that, despite being under civilian rule, underwent a process of militarization during its long-term conflict, but never granted military control over the state apparatus. Pakistan, therefore, is a typical example of a so-called praetorian state in which the military has consistently served as a protector, referee, and dictator in national politics (Shah, 2014). These contrasting case studies reinforce the point that Pakistan's continued military hegemony was not predetermined but instead prompted by certain institutional, geopolitical, and leadership conditions that were fortuitous. A brief account of some of these factors is presented below.

## **History of Civilian and Military Rule in Pakistan**

Ever since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has had a pattern of frequent military involvement in country's political affairs and the military has emerged as the most powerful political force in the history of the nation. This military dominance first became entrenched during the early years of state formation with political instability, poor institutional structures and inefficiencies in civilian governance. In 1958, General Ayub Khan, the first leader to seize control through direct military action, formalized the military's role as a political arbitrator, a precedent for later coup attempts in 1969, 1977 and 1999. This continuity of military interference in the democratic processes is an indication of the consolidation of praetorianism which can be understood as the militarisation pursues its own agenda of "true interest of the country", in detriment of civil and democratic processes (Siddiqi, 2007). The coup that occurred in 1958 by Lt Gen. Ayub Khan was a major turning point. Under the regime of President Iskander Mirza who abrogated the Constitution of 1956, the transition to the centralized military regime was facilitated by Ayub Khan who deposed Mirza and implemented martial law in the country. Such a centralisation of authority demonstrated the military's right to rule, through being able to promise stability and modernization in an era of constant political instability (Aziz, 2007). Ayub's introduction of the "Basic Democracies system in 1960 institutionalized controlled political participation under a military framework, blurring the lines between civilian and military governance. In 1969, General Yahya Khan replaced Ayub Khan in Pakistan's first military-to-military transfer of power, underscoring the military's entrenched institutional autonomy. Yahya Khan's administration, while promising democratization through direct elections, failed to manage political pluralism, particularly with the Awami League's electoral victory in East Pakistan. The regime's refusal to transfer power and subsequent military crackdown led to the secession of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 (Khan, 2017). This episode highlighted the military's limitations in political governance and its inability to accommodate federal democratic structures. The 1977 coup by General Zia-ul-Haq ushered in a new phase of military rule, distinguished by ideological transformation through state-led Islamization. Zia's regime redefined the military's legitimacy, integrating religious narratives to justify authoritarian control. By embedding Islamic laws into Pakistan's legal and political systems, Zia expanded the military's sociopolitical influence and forged long-standing alliances with conservative religious elements (Nasir, 2004). His execution of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto further eliminated political opposition and exemplified the coercive tactics used to suppress civilian resistance (Bhutto, 1979). The 1999 military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf illustrated the evolution of military rule into a more refined and internationally palatable form. Unlike previous regimes, Musharraf sought to combine liberal economic reforms and selective democratization under the banner of "enlightened moderation." One of the features of his tenure was also the ways in which the army exploited

the geopolitics of the world, such as global alignments after 9/11, for its strategic relevance and international legitimacy (Kumar, 2012).

## **Colonial Legacy and Military Dominance in Pakistan**

Pakistan is characterized by praetorianism, whose origins can be traced back to its colonial past. The British Raj had bequeathed a centralized bureaucracy controlled by the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Army; both were intended to maintain law and order and imperial security, rather than facilitating democratic involvement. When Pakistan gained its independence in 1947, it inherited these centralized institutions and lacked strong, mass-based political organizations that could check them. Thus, the new state inherited a civil-military bureaucracy that was disproportionately strong and regarded as the source of the state's stability in the absence of mass-based political parties (Jalal, 1995). Combined with factionalism within the Muslim League, this weakened parliamentary legitimacy with the early assassination of the Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951.

In 1958, General Ayub Khan had institutionalized military supremacy through the first coup sanctioned through the judiciary under the 'doctrine of necessity' (Newberg, 1995). These processes created an institutional imbalance, where unelected institutions repeatedly ousted elected ones. By 1977, when General Zia-ul-Haq declared martial law, the military had established a strong self-identity of being an institution of security but also the judge of the ideological and political order in Pakistan (Haqqani, 2005). According to Cohen (2004), Pakistan later became a garrison state, where security and order imperatives always triumphed over democratic development. The Strategic Environment and State Mentality of Security in Pakistan Since its early days, Pakistan faced acute security challenges- the territorial problems with India, the Kashmir conflict, and the trauma of Partition. Such insecurities created what Cohen (2004) describes as the state of mind of a garrison state, in which military readiness and survival take precedence over participatory politics. The 1948, 1965, and 1971 wars established the army as the protector of the national identity, and Cold War relationships with the United States provided financial and military aid, which now bypassed the control of civilian authorities (Haqqani, 2005).

**Military-guardian and Wars** The wars waged in 1965 and 1971 further boosted the military legitimacy of Pakistan. The military conflict with India that occurred in 1965 elevated the armed forces to the role of protectors of national honor, but its uncertain outcome undermined the civilian regime of Ayub Khan. It was a watershed, however, with the 1971 civil war and the secession of East Pakistan. The defeat in the war undermined General Yahya Khan, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto rose to power. A new civilian constitution was established in 1973 ordinating civilian authority.

## **Pakistan as a Hybrid State**

Since 1988, Pakistan has been a classic example of what researchers refer to as hybrid regimes or competitive authoritarian governments, where institutions of democracy are present, but are recurrently overridden by informal veto actors (Levitsky & Way, 2010) The president and military still dominated the structure even though regular elections were conducted. The Varieties of Democracy Project assigned Pakistan in the 1990s to neither the category of consolidated democracy nor a closed autocracy, but to the grey zone of authoritarian resilience (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). This framing emphasizes the need to interpret the decade as a failed democracy, rather than as an experiment in hybrid government. The most apparent institutional and structural imbalances that we can see today were crystalized during this decade: the legitimization of executive dismissal by the judiciary, military involvement in strategic policymaking, and patronage politics by the elite. According to Waseem (2022), the

political skirmishes of the 1990s were a precursor to the subsequent issues that civilian leaders and the military faced during the period from 2008 to 2018. In this way, the analysis of this decade offers a necessary analytic space between the dictatorial history of Pakistan and its ongoing crises of democratic weakness. Research into the decade of democracy in Pakistan is not merely a matter of historical concern but also has modern significance. Many of the institutions' legacies that today can be observed, including judicial-executive disputes, military control over the security policy, and the patronage based functioning of the political parties, were concentrated in the 1990s (Waseem, 2022)

### **Reasons why the Pakistan army's influence over a democratically elected govt does not come as a shock**

As mentioned in the introduction, Pakistan has been ruled by four different military rulers under three different military coups, which allows us to safely assume that no one generation in Pakistan has seen a complete democratic rule, the military has always been involved so the people of Pakistan have started to accept these interferences and control in the democracy. Ayesha Siddiqua, a Pakistani political scientist has in her article in the East Asian Forum expressed her concern over the weakening of politics in Pakistan as the people have almost stopped protesting to express their discontentment with the government over even comparatively trivial but important matters like hike in food and basic utilities. Siddiqua blames decades of 'patronage politics' that have systematically weakened the politics in the country. Siddiqua also mentions how the second half of 2019 saw a plummeting economy and rising inflation. But patronage politics deprived people of their capacity to protest and conduct political movements. This clearly shows that Pakistan's lack of experience with democracy and excess experience with patronage politics now has a direct impact on the expectations that the citizens of Pakistan have concerning a leader.

### **Reasons for the military's resistance to renounce political control**

Theoretically speaking, one wouldn't expect an army that has since its inception had the availability of excess power and control over the entire country to suddenly give it up for a system like 'Democracy' which is so utopian to them. But the real problem is not Democracy, it is that the military leaders feel that the political leaders in the past have failed to deliver Good Governance hence, they believe they can do what the politicians failed to do. Once the military has been exposed to supreme political powers like the ones under the cover of martial law or emergency decrees, they are reluctant to surrender all such powers. Hasan Rizvi Sheikh mentions the different courses of action available to them to maintain power. The ruling generals sometimes resign their military rank and civilianize their regime by co-opting civilians (this is a course that was adopted by gen. Ayub Khan);

### **PTI Government in the time of Challenges**

Right after controlling the reigns of the power, newly elected government of PTI had to face grave issues like inflation, poverty, injustice, internal and external security threats. Due to its unique strategic importance and geographical location Pakistan has faced grave issue of security since its inception. Its riches have compelled the regional as well global powers to entangle with Pakistan. While political instability in Pakistan is decades old notion which was always a valid point for Pakistan army to interfere in internal realm of affairs either in form of direct or indirect coup. Though civilian supremacy has always been a favorite form of government but Pakistan has experienced four long military coups. During the era of military coups the civil government remained responsible for this military action. The repeated military intervention created a rift between the civil and military elite resulting in a continuous unseen standoff between the two institutions. Civil-military relations in Pakistan

experienced a bumpy road long travel till 2008. Military elite took a new turn during 2008 general elections and preferred to support democracy in the country and this initiative led both civil and military elite to remain on same page to tackle the greatest menace of terrorism in wake of war on terror and other grave issues faced by the state. Nawaz Sharif era 2013-2018 witness sourness in civil-military relations. (Aslam, 2025)

## Conclusion

A healthy balance in the civil-military relations is absolutely essential for a democratic control of the armed forces in countries like Pakistan. A criterion for democratic control of the armed forces brings to the fore the fact that the civil and military components of the state are operating under the desired constitutional limits. The improvement, however, is required in the quality of response to indicators of the civilian control. The quest for democratic stability in Pakistan has been a long, winding road and one that has been constantly interrupted. This research aimed at investigating why democratic consolidation is not achieving in Pakistan whereby the country has a constitutional set up and transition of power is a regular affair. Taking a look through an institutional lens, the research examined the interactions of formal structures like the parliament, judiciary, electoral bodies and institutions against graft as they collide—turbulently at times—with informal powerholders, like the military establishment, patronage-based political networks, and a media environment that oscillates between activism and manipulation.

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