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### Populist Politics in Pakistan: Case Study of Pakistan Tehreek-I- Insaf Regime

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#### Abstract

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**Keywords:** Democracy, PTI, Donald Trump, Political Parties, Military Establishment

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## Title

### Populist Politics in Pakistan: Case Study of Pakistan Tehreek-I- Insaf Regime

#### Abstract

*The advent of right-wing populist parties in Europe and America has given populist politics in South Asia more clout. There has been a lot of discussion among political analysts about how the rise of populist governments around the world is likely to undermine established democracies and eventually impede democratic advancement in developing countries. The research paper gives deep insights of populist regime of PTI and shedding light on frequent democratic decline in the country owing to this style of politics and also exploring that democracy has been inflicted by the populist politics is critical discourse of contemporary times and particularly in the context of Pakistan. The paper finds out that owing to its populist politics, the PTI government subverted the process of democratic development in the country, stifled the dissenting voices and curtailed the freedom of media.*

#### Keywords:

[Democracy](#), [PTI](#), [Donald Trump](#), [Political Parties](#), [Military Establishment](#)

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## Introduction

The term "populism" is a reflection of all these overlapping functions- mirror, signifier, screen, or political ideology for several decades. Populism's growing influence in the contemporary world appeared more prominently after the global recession in 2008. The widening array of discontents in European politics is also believed to have been the resurgence of populist politics. The global downturn in democracy, rampant unemployment, and poverty multiplying reflect that populist politics counters corrupt elites and mainstream political parties to gain maximum political advantages. Arguably, it is a rhetorical weapon to be used against the elite to

disseminate the opponent's voices and eventually, this paves the way for the decline of democracy in European countries (Wood, 2016). Populism has become a frequent buzzword in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's political discourse. Populist leaders are becoming more successful around the world because of their immense vociferous speeches, catchy election campaigns, and increasing media attention. The growing academic literature on populism is largely Orientalist in nature because populist literature is mostly found in the Global North-West. The movements in the Global South-East are largely overlooked (Zaslove, Geurkink, Jacobs, & Akkerman, 2020).





The rising tide of right-wing populist governments and groups is subverting democracies resulting in obstructing democratic progress in advanced as well as developing countries which have become a subject of intense debate among scholars of social sciences. Significantly, after the conspicuous victory of Donald Trump in the presidential elections of 2016 in the US and the United Kingdom's exit from Brexit is considered a triumph of populism. Since populist movements acquire legitimate power through elections. Truly, populist leaders used to have catchy slogans to disrupt the process of democratization, distort information, and consolidate their regime by holding divisive rhetoric (Azam & Falki, 2021). Presently, the majority of us live in a populist world where leaders have little understanding of running the effective governance machinery. A political leader attracts the audience due to his charisma and flamboyance. Populist leader shapes people's minds by using the tool of fiery rhetoric winning the hearts and minds of the people believing them they would change the existing system.

Resultantly, populist politics has largely marred the effectiveness of democratic government (Nekokara, 2022).

One important development of the modern era is the phrase "a death of ideology," which refers to the factors contributing to the rise of populism and the disintegration of left-right ideological paradigms. Party politics in a hybrid regime are shaped by the neo-liberal discourse on themes of inequality, social justice denial, and restriction of free speech. Populist discourse has gained traction in several European nations, such as Poland, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Italy, France, Hungary, Finland, Pakistan, and India, following Brexit and Donald Trump's election. With Pakistan PTI's resounding win in the 2018 legislative elections, a new era of populist governance was ushered in. It is crucial to consider the electoral canvas in a mixed democracy like Pakistan in order to identify the factors contributing to the rise of populism there and the breakdown of the left-right paradigm (Raja, Mukhtar, & Ishaque, 2021).

A defining feature of populism is a strong belief in a political people, a manifestation of homogenous characteristics. The scholarly literature on populism discusses the nature of people. Sometimes it

becomes more difficult to define who is pure

people and who is not. Arguably, various populist movements portray people in various terms, with some definitions identifying people as more homogenous than other definitions. However, a common feature that unifies all populist movements is the idea of a pure people (Wu & Ali, 2020)

Even while structural changes in a nation's political system with respect to the number of parties are not a recent occurrence, they remain an important topic of discussion among academics. The political system of Pakistan has undergone significant changes in recent decades, evolving from a two-party system to a multi-party system. Through organization mobilization, counter-narrative, ideology, and the anti-corruption mantra, Pakistan has successfully achieved its political will by challenging the political forces of the status quo. To convey the political realities while addressing structural complexities, external relations, and domestic economic compulsions, a transformation in a complex fabric was required. Saeed drew attention to the contentious struggle going on between the bureaucracies of the civil-military and political leadership.

Hussain explained that throughout the nation's history, a military-bureaucratic oligarchy had a significant impact on the political system. He pointed out how, in order to consolidate their control, military rulers appropriated political parties' decision-making authority. Similar to this, Ziring thought that Pakistan's political system was undermined by the political elites of different political parties. According to him, political forces spent the majority of their time on electioneering, which would have limited the space available for civil society and institutionalized political parties (Khalid, 2020).

### **Global Trends: what is Deriving Populism?**

It is important to note here that populist politics is characterized by complicated and often competing impulses. Populist politics evolve in response to rising economic insecurity and the threat to identity. Populist movements around the world are generally defined by a huge part of society's dissatisfaction with unresponsive political establishments, which often fuels the desire for change while shattering the status quo. Populist politics increased most significantly in the 1990s when the extreme right movement in Europe attacked society's corrupt elite.

Supporters of the populist movement argued that the people should hold the reins of power instead of the government and called for the restoration of stable order. Populism in the European context is mostly embodied by left- and right-wing factions. According to Khalid (2020), both forms of populism communicate the political idea of 'us' against 'them' while representing the same idea of uniting people.

It is well known that far-right populists are indifferent to and hostile toward foreigners and immigrants. Conversely, leftist populists mobilize people in favor of greater equality and justice. With movements expanding quickly, populist political ideologies have spread throughout Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. On the other hand, hardly much has been written on populism in Asia, especially in Pakistan. By all accounts, the majority of academics and social scientists in Pakistan undervalue the rise of populist political movements, in which leaders fight against the ruling class on issues of culture, economy, or politics in the service of a common goal. ruling the state. In addition, populists see democracy as the "tyranny of the majority" and would sooner handle their political disputes in public squares than in state legislatures (Khalid, 2020).

## Methodology

Since there was an effort to explore populism's challenges to democracy in Pakistan and how the regime of Imran Khan epitomizes populist politics, the research study uses a qualitative method of research. This research method will help to answer the critical questions as well as empirical analysis. The analysis in this study is also qualitative in nature because populism is a vast term and impossible to explain with quantitative and deductive methods. Investigating the case of the former ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Justice Party) (PTI) was the goal of the study. It will try to explain why such changes in the political trajectory are not taken more seriously in undernourished democracies like Pakistan as opposed to Western democracies, and it will explain the previous government's ideological and political shift under the sway of populist politics.

In order to gather primary data for the qualitative study, academics from Lahore University of Management Sciences and Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad participated in structured

interviews. The purpose of the fieldwork is to gather a range of scholarly perspectives regarding the PTI regime. The invaluable opinions of these scholars will help to analyze the data with deep insights. Similarly, for this research data has been collected from secondary sources. The secondary research data has been derived from published books, international journals, newspaper articles, research papers, and various documents from websites, etc. which are available on the topic.

## Political and Valence Populism of the PTI

This populist characteristic refers to the emphasis of political parties and leaders on valence populism (mostly non-ideological) and governance reforms, as well as focusing their efforts on mega corruption scandals and questioning morality by projecting oneself as a member of ordinary people against corrupt politicians. It goes without saying that most populist parties envision a methodical framework for implementing institutional changes in their specific regions (Zaidi, 2017).

Imran Khan, a cricketer turned superstar in Pakistan, captivated the audience with his catch-all comments during the historic Minar-e-Pakistan march in 2011. The crowd-puller jalsa, together with the strong morale of the people, completely altered the PTI's political perspective. Lahore has traditionally been a significant constituency in Pakistan's political and democratic environment, as well as the headquarters of the Punjab-centric PML-N. As a result, drawing out one lakh people through his team's power display was an unparalleled shock for the incumbent government in the capital. Khan's power show in the megacities of Lahore and Karachi was politically meaningful because both are strongholds of the PML-N and PPP. His populist politics in Pakistan were influenced by hyperpolarized politics. In Pakistan, institutionalization and legitimization are on the verge of declining. Although Khan's populist speeches explained references to the ancient Islamic kingdom of Medina and the golden principles of the four caliphs of Islam, the valence aspect of populism in Pakistan seemed to be clear. It is sufficient to establish that his politics are not planned nor based on intellectual principles.

To reform the Pakistani state and society by incorporating some productive ideologies (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). However, Khan's current political

division will last for an extended length of time, making the democratization process difficult. After winning the elections, the PTI government's aim was to bring reform to the ordinary people through systematic accountability of the PPP and PML-N, which had been controlling the country for the previous three decades. Khan took a deliberate aggressive stance against political elites, emphasizing slogans such as corruption, rigged and fixed elections, PPP and PML-N dynastic politics, horse dealing, and nepotism. Against this setting, one may claim that Imran Khan harbored tremendous resentment towards Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, Pakistan People's Party lawmakers, and Jamiat Ulema Islami. Another measure for establishing the grade of political communication is the support of a large portion of the young and women's political vote in favor of the PTI, which eventually reduced the influence of dynastic elements in Pakistan's political landscape (Yilmaz & Saleem, [2022](#)).

### **Populist Politics of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto**

Pakistan's seventy-five-year history appears to have had a turbulent past with democracy. In an effort to promote the peaceful development of democracy, the nation has held 10 general elections, passed three constitutions, experienced four military takeovers, and experimented with both presidential and parliamentary systems of administration. During both democratic eras, Pakistan undoubtedly experienced two significant populist waves. The first was under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who seized power of the state apparatus by using socialist populist rhetoric. In an attempt to mobilize the populace, he founded the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and incorporated religion into his platform, while his ideological stance remained centrist-left. His populist narrative incited public discontent by denouncing the widespread corruption committed by the then-dictator Ayub Khan. Populist-left politics were promoted by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (Zaidi, 2017). Similar to this, Bhutto's catchphrase "roti, kapra aur makan" drew common people to his political speeches. In actuality, Bhutto's brand of populism was not a novel approach to Third World politics; rather, it was developed during the regimes of Sukarno in Indonesia, Nkrumah in Ghana, Peron in Argentina, and Castro in Cuba. In essence, Bhutto and the Pakistan People's Party adopted a populist

program that included socialist and Islamic components (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021).

Openly, populists declare that they alone speak for the people. They are superior to other institutions, even the judiciary, according to this claim. They rationalize their affiliation with people's emotions, and their sense of fairness and morality makes them seem good in the eyes of the public. The prosperous populist of South Asia, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, would often remark in front of large gatherings, "There are two Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, me and the one who is each of you!" (Jaffrelot, [2018](#))

### **Imran Khan: A Charismatic Populist**

The greatest qualities of populist leaders in the past were their inherent charm and their ideology, which contrasted the governing class with the general populace. Leaders who espouse populism oppose the existing quo. At first glance, the intriguing notion of the people's savior, a very charming leader who appears to be the only voice of the country and the champion of the average person. Political scientists and historians, however, believe that populist leaders are not entirely ideal. Undoubtedly, Imran Khan has used the traditional notion of the "corrupt elite" as a political cash cow. Despite the multitude of socio-political issues facing Pakistan, the former prime minister has consistently expressed significant concerns about the unethical elite. His political narrative, which divides society into two groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite," is thus able to survive. In 2014, he experimented with using politics to gain a large following by using dharna politics to disparage the major party's ruling class. When everyone believed he was the people's Messiah, ready to finally bring the political establishment to justice, the atmosphere felt revolutionary (Mazhar, [2022](#)).

PTI leadership constantly used religious phrases such as Riasat-i-Madina to justify the party's position in public in a bid to win the favor of the massive urban educated middle class as a sole organization in Pakistan which curtailed the influence of corrupt traditional political parties who looted the money by holding public office (Waraich, [2018](#)). The second phase of PTI's populism in Pakistan was initiated with the ideological campaign of Imran Khan and his dharna politics which ultimately paved the road for a map of his victory. Imran Khan's whole political platform is predicated on

demonizing the ruling class as corrupt, promoting social justice, moral rectitude, and transparency in the broken political system. The most recent parliamentary elections held in Pakistan in 2018 signified, for the first time in the nation's history, the successful conclusion of five years of continuous democratic administration and the handover of power from one civilian government to another, free from military intervention. Without a doubt, Khan's PTI was brought to power by popular political rhetoric in the face of what some academics saw as unwavering military support for the current regime. This was demonstrated by the opposition parties' limited ability to campaign and engage in politics, as well as by politically motivated accusations made against their leaders in parliament (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021).

PTI emerged on the political map as the largest political party in the general elections of 2018 and formed a coalition government. Indeed, it was a commendable victory for a party that had no electoral success before 2013. In the general elections of 2018, the PTI promised a NAYA (new) Pakistan to dismantle the political system from traditional dynastic politics along with a new style of politics that would hunt down the dynastic and corrupt civilian leaders. It accused both mainstream political parties of the country the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League- Nawaz (PML-N) of having massive money laundering. Cricketer-turned-politician and PTI chairman vociferously condemned the leaders of both traditional political parties and presented himself as an honest leader, not a "politician" whose campaign was to transform Pakistan. Since assuming office in the capital in 2018, the PTI continued to flourish the populist rhetoric by accusing the previous government of all failures and proposing politically motivated cases against the opposition. Similarly, PTI introduced new forms of recruitment and an agenda for institutional reforms. Its preference was the rule of law and constitutional supremacy, spending on the health and education sector rather than on large infrastructure projects in big cities, transparency and accountability instead of corruption and nepotism, de-politicization of bureaucracy, and instituting democracy and meritocracy instead of allowing certain families to have hegemony over the decision making and resources. Unfortunately, the turbulent history. The nation considers how military dictators' meddling in the past caused all democratic regimes to fall suddenly and ruined democracy in the fledgling

state. The PTI's rhetoric about doing away with corruption and other non-ideological elements is reminiscent of the hegemonic military dictatorship's earlier use of these same strategies. Furthermore, the PTI's resolute military backing during the 2018 elections supports the notion that it represents a hybrid administration (Malik, 2021).

### **PTI's Ideological Appeal**

Political parties in Pakistan that uphold certain ideals that are widely seen as the primary means of achieving legitimacy across the political and social spectrum do so because they represent the shared beliefs of their members. Since its founding, PTI has propagated the idea that the nation's dynastic political structure is to blame for the disease of corruption and the destruction of civilian institutions. As a result, the PTI, the sole political party, started to represent the public's complaints. Consequently, the party ran a cunning and brutal election campaign in 2018 that saw a radical change in Pakistan's political environment. The distinctive sloganeering of "change" and "anti-corruption" defined the PTI's philosophy by keeping the PTI different from the other two parties. The party said it supported "national unity," "tolerance," and "eliminating hatred and religious prejudice." Pakistan's growing middle class was drawn to its radical ideology, which set it apart from conventional political parties and Islamic doctrines (Khalid, 2020).

Imran Khan a classic populist leader believed that corrupt politicians morally inferior class of elites who played havoc with the institutions of the country. His rhetoric by and large was brimmed with national and religious sentiments. Unlike other populist leaders, Khan's rhetoric critically centered on the elimination of corruption within the system in 90 days. He casts himself as a morally upright person as the only alternative to inept, crooked, money-hungry cheats' politicians. He once propounded: You've hired the others not give him a try this time? His support base which was once limited to the urban middle class drew attention from a remarkably diverse group of people who viewed dynastic political parties shifted with the passage of time. Imran Khan and the army came on the page and blamed that they both wanted to oust Nawaz Sharif from office. PTI and the military both viewed the PPP and PML-N as corrupt dynastic



parties that plundered the resources and exacerbated the economy of the country (Raees, 2022).

### **PTI's Populist Narrative Against Dynastic Corruption**

Corruption in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. Its roots date back to the pre-colonial period when British colonial masters awarded lands to their loyalists, leading to corruption and nepotism. Gradually, in post-colonial history, various episodes of corruption in the public sector were considered impediments to development. Since the 1950s, Pakistani politicians have been accused of being involved in massive corruption scandals by the military establishment. They are entitled as 'rotten apples' neglecting political, economic, and social structures. They are primarily responsible for alleged abuse of public authority for vested interests (Dr. Siddiqui, 2021). A populist leader appeals to people's psychology by projecting the mainstream political parties, as the only parasites which are involved in mega-corruption cases. Imran Khan built the narrative of 'Naya

Pakistan' by frequently terming cancer of corruption would be dealt with stringent hands. The prevailing dysfunctional democracy, elite-based and elite-driven parties in the recorded history of Pakistan have conflicting interests which are quite challenging for the PTI government. Dr. Rasul Baksh Raees, the social scientist, articulated about Imran Khan's anti-corruption campaign in the country and how he perceives the political elites of the country. He expressed:

"Imran Khan is a populist leader because he has been in the political movements against corruption. Khan is less of a populism and more of a narrative against dynastic politics and elite corruption. He created an image of his credibility, honesty, commitment, and selflessness, and particularly the youth in the country wanted to see a shift away from dynastic politics. The two families who were the same looters and plunderers and then escaping the accountability were the success of his narrative" (Shehzad, 2022).

Moreover, the notable scholar Dr. Farhan Siddiqui articulated;

"The political elites while being in power are seen problem for populist leaders. One of the primary problems is that these leaders who have ruled

previously are corrupt. Populist leaders say that they need people in power who are pure, and right, and who were not the part of power structure before. They say that those people have been in power for the last thirty to forty years but still, the crisis in the country is huge. There is still unemployment, illiteracy, and problems with housing and transportation. The populist leaders present themselves as authentic, original, indigenous, and they mark themselves against the traditional ruling elites" (Dr. Siddiqui, 2021).

On the other hand, Ayesha Jalal writes that:

"Politicians in Pakistan need to strengthen institutions instead of simply asserting their constitutional rights to shape the destiny of the country. This can only happen when they genuinely start to deliver on their promises to the electorate and create the space to assert themselves vis-s-vis the army in substance rather than form". The dictatorial style of democracy which has been practiced by two political families in the last fifty years by only three individuals, i.e., Nawaz Sharif, Benazir/ Zardari, and the army chief witnessed that there is no space to add a third entrant on the political scene. Unfortunately, the principles of PTI to establish Riyasat-i-Madina and attempt to introduce democracy within the PTI to distinguish it from other dynastic parties certainly met failure. One popular theory offered by the PTI leadership to explain Pakistan's subpar socioeconomic results is the prevalence of dynastic politics. The political opponents of PTI critique its populist promises which are unrealistic and unattainable. These promises include a swift campaign to end corruption in ninety days, a promise to build 5 million affordable homes for poor classes of the society, create 19 million jobs, and reinvigorate tourism" (Historian Ayesha Jalal, 2018).

### **Implications of PTI's Populist Politics**

In the last twenty years, the most notable aspect of world politics has been the retreat of democracy. How is it derived? The most significant justifications offered by observers range from the development of populism and the influence of China and Russia to disruptive technology, the expansion of political polarization, and the shortcomings of democracies. The central role of leader-driven antidemocratic political objectives is the subject of Democratic backsliding.

Numerous publications expose the ways in which populism undermines democracy, highlighting the rise of leaders who espouse populist ideologies with questionable democratic credentials and characterizing populism as a propagator of the anti-democratic virus of our day. Although President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fascist authoritarian rule in India, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, and President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador are examples in this regard, Donald Trump was a significant figure in these narratives. The problematic situation of democracy in each of these populist nations, with their illiberal outlooks and aspirations, is crucial (Ellis, Petersen, & Baloch, [2019](#)).

The world has been in a mild democratic recession since 2006. Beyond the lack of improvement and erosion of the global level of democracy, there have been several other causes for concern. Authoritarianism has been deepening in important countries strategically. On the broader level, the space for civil society, opposition parties, and media is shrinking, identity crisis has been politically polarizing many societies around the world. Ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other racial cleavages have destroyed the well-structured democratic institutions in many societies. State structures are frequently weak and permeable, failing to protect citizens' rights, meet their most fundamental social requirements, or rise above corrupt practices, clientelistic, and hegemonic impulses. Weak economic performance and rising inequality have exacerbated issues of power struggles, election rigging, and violations of democratic norms (Diamond, [2015](#)).

In Pakistan's context, in the government of PTI, the famous Pakistani journalist, Talat Hussain, who hosted a popular current affairs talk show on Geo TV, faced a total blackout of the news while openly criticizing the military and previous government of PTI. While Pakistan has had an unsettled relationship with media freedom, under the government of PTI the censorship on media was heavier than before. Activists, journalists, authors, and politicians spoke openly about the climate of "extreme fear and self-censorship", and the stamping out of voices of opposition, even worse than the military dictatorship regime of General Zia-ul-Haq (Hannah & Shah Meer, 2019).

When PTI assumed power in 2018, people had great aspirations with the Populist Party. Cricketer-

cum-Politician-Imran Khan's slogan to stamp out corruption in 90 days remained completely failed. The political unrest and economic downturn ultimately dashed the optimistic expectations of the populace regarding the PTI administration. A few of the significant issues that people were wondering about were the rapidly rising rates of inflation, widespread unemployment and poverty, the highest gasoline costs ever, and the depreciation of the Pakistani rupee. Ahmad Bilal Mehboob, the president of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), stated that populism sacrifices long-term benefits in order to win popularity among the populace in the short term. He added that political leaders who turn to populism are common in democracies. The success of populism in a society, according to Mehboob, is determined by the caliber of leadership and the political awakening of the public. In a similar vein, notable leaders such as Charles de Gaulle and Margaret Thatcher overcame pressures and made wise choices to benefit the general public. Political analyst Zaigham Khan made a statement regarding populist politics' detrimental effects on Pakistan's political system. He uttered,

"Populism is doing immense damage to Pakistan's democracy, economy, and society, such as to each country where this brand of politics has influenced the masses". For instance, Zaigham said, that Imran Khan neglected every problem the problem of corruption, and presented himself as the

only savior of solutions. Though the cancer of corruption is a grave problem, he argued, it is not the only serious one over which many issues of the economy have been neglected. Pakistan's economy has suffered largely under the PTI regime as compared to the neighboring country Bangladesh. Imran Khan also created deep divisions in Pakistani society and promoted a culture of hate and intolerance, Zaigham said, adding that the government has totally failed to solve the problems and is undermining democracy (Dr. Akhtar, [2022](#)).

Political economist and analyst, Dr. Asim Sajjad, conspicuously said;

"It has not helped as Pakistan's democracy has always been overshadowed by the military. It is a common thing in the existing literature that the most powerful institution in the country is the establishment. When there is a democracy, it is totally a dilemma because behind the scenes there is

a military. The mainstream politics of Pakistan reflects this kind of attitude. Who has had a good relationship with the military wins its heart? The standard of politics did not enhance. There is no space for discussions on real issues instead the slandering and politics of absurdity gained momentum. There is no justifiable development at the grassroots level and the socio-economic fabric of the country is still derailed. The PTI government got failed in its campaign of accountability from the powerful constituencies of the country" (Aamer, 2018).

In his convincing book "How Democracy Ends", David Runciman explores the disastrous effects on democracy and the discourse around the pitfall of democracy. In the contemporary world, the rise of demagogues, authoritarianism, nationalism, fundamentalism, populism, and the defamation of political institutes along with the celebration of ignorance cause severe hit back to democracy. The accelerating polarization in society and people's discontent about representative democracy are the critical questions to be addressed (Runciman, 2018).

According to the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2021, "Pakistan is among the lowest

-ranked countries in terms of rule of law, ranking 130<sup>th</sup> out of 139<sup>th</sup> nations." Growing money laundering and politicization of institutions have been exacerbated under Khan's government. Further, the report of Transparency International shows a rise in corruption. Additionally, the slogans of bringing change in the entire criminal justice did not bring fruitful results. In terms of minorities, Pakistan has been manifesting abysmal indicators. Forced conversions of minorities particularly Hindu girls have become common. The demolishing of Hindu temples has also been witnessed. Similarly, the marginalized Christian community has been the victim of severe despotism (Nekokara, 2022).

### **Economic Recession in the Regime of PTI**

PTI's victory in the elections of 2018 reflects a tremendous political transformation in the country's history and a promising step for the future. Khan's primary voter base was the bulging youth of Pakistan who were earnestly looking for him as the icon of the new political era. Khan's regime survived the critical juncture of battling the economic crisis and policy predicament in the face of China's growing economic foothold in the country. PTI's landslide

victory in the aftermath of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's sudden political debacle triggered the opportunists to utilize the anti-corruption slogan against PML-N. Apparently, the manifesto of PTI manifested the transparent democratic system and inclusive economic vision. It presented to

marginalized audiences the prospect of hope by projecting the robust policies of creating millions of jobs, increasing Pakistan's economic growth, and depoliticizing economic institutions (Carothers & Press, 2022).

The political parties in Pakistan directly pointed out the direct interference of the military establishment in politics while being in opposition. Ironically when they are in government, they enjoy that support and do little to challenge it. It was the hallmark of Khan's party when it was in power, and recently it is true of Sharif's incumbent government. Pakistan's soaring political tensions failed to address the chronic cycle of struggle for power. It has left the country a political tinderbox. Regrettably, the civilians continue to pay the price for the long turbulent history of political volatility (Afzal, 2022).

Dr. Farhan Siddiqi, the political analyst, expressed his views on how the economic recession paved the way for populist leaders to hold the reins of power. He said "The populist leaders always emerge in a situation where there is an economic recession. Hitler and his rise are directly associated with the Great Depression. President Trump's rise is related to the economic decline in the U.S. Unemployment, mortgages play an essential role in the rise of populist leader" (Dr. Siddiqui, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Building upon the literature on populism, the research examined the diverse populist figures worldwide. In general, moral or social crises linked to economic crises give rise to populist movements. The research paper elaborates on Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's rise to prominence in populist politics and the threats it poses to the nation's democratic process. The creation of Naya Pakistan by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf was an unsuccessful attempt to set itself apart from the previous hegemonic political elites. Scholars and intellectuals differ in their assessments of the PTI's populist government. During the 2018 legislative elections, populist rhetoric helped the PTI win. Imran Khan's abrupt ascent to prominence in the nation's politics

through the use of populist rhetoric of opposition, morality, and employment to the youth did not bring productive results.

In PTI's regime, the frequent claims of the establishment of Rayast-e-Madina were envisioned to follow principles of justice and equity yet it did not come up with the desired results. Khan's corruption campaign significantly damaged the democratic outlook of the country. The pathway to the consolidation of the governance system was hindered by elite capture of institutions and military constraints. The research shows that a populist leader uses the authority of the state to consolidate his power once he comes to power. Through his persuading communication style to get the support

of people for his political ideology, Khan projected the two major families' looters and plunderers who always escaped the accountability process. PTI did not have the capacity to tolerate opposition. The government's attitude towards journalists, media, and the press was much controversial and it had muffled the voices with each passing day. The media organizations complained about the restrictions in front of authoritarian policies. In a democratic country, political parties are like institutions that work efficiently to keep the governance system functioning. As far as Pakistan's political culture is concerned, mostly democracy has been overshadowed by the powerful military establishment.



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