

Governance and Political Stability in Pakistan 2008-2018: An Analysis of World Governance Indicators

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Abstract

Good governance is important indicator for the political stability of a state. This study aims to evaluate the governance performance in Pakistan (2008-2018) by using key governance indicators of World Bank. This study examines the impact of rule of law, control on corruption, and economic growth on political stability of Pakistan. This is qualitative, descriptive and analytical approach. Data is obtained from World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators and scholarly articles, books, official reports and Statistical Bureau of Pakistan. Data is analyzed using tables to identify the relationship between governance indicators and political stability. The Findings show modest improvements in governance indicators over the ten-year period. The Rule of Law improved from -0.973 in 2008 to -0.684 in 2018, Control of Corruption indicator increased from -0.899 in 2008 to -0.801 in 2018, despite a dip to -1.083 in 2011, indicating gradual progress in institutional transparency. Meanwhile, economic growth rose significantly from 0.4% in 2008 to 6.0% in 2018. The study concludes that Pakistan can ensure governance and long term democratic consolidation and resilience through political integrity.

Key Words: Good Governance, Pakistan, Rule of Law, Economic Growth, Control on Corruption, Political Stability

Introduction

Since the inception of Pakistan has struggled with the challenge of poor governance. The political and democratic history of Pakistan has been shaped by frequent constitutional crisis, political failures, weakening of political institutions and frequent rule of civil-military bureaucracy. These factors have deeply undermined the foundations of good governance and hindered the country's political stability and development. Pakistan is a democratic and federal state since its birth but the poor governance is deep rooted and the country is facing the problems of poor health facilities, social stratification, and unequal distribution of wealth, weak infra structure and institutional malpractice. The political, social and economic issues are major hurdle to achieving good governance. Politically, Pakistan faced political instability due to massive involvement of civil military bureaucracy, legitimacy crisis and instability of coalition governments, rigging and malpractices in electoral process and rift among national political parties have made difficult to ensure effective governance in country. Pakistan is fragile state economically. Fiscal deficit, inflation, balance of payments deficits, imbalance system of imports-exports, slow and inconsistent economic growth made the country economically weak. Pakistan's reliance on IMF affects the debt burden and austerity measures taken by government leads to slow down economic growth and living standard of people are going below the poverty line (Fareed, et. al., 2019). This led to public's dissatisfaction and government's inability to manage these challenges leads to political unrest in Pakistan. Good governance is essential indicator for the political stability of a state. Currently, the absence of rule of law, corruption, and weak economic growth is central obstacles to achieve effective governance in Pakistan.

Pakistan returned to democratic rule after long journey of military regime after general elections of 2008. The period from 2008 to 2018 has seen two elected governments, Pakistan People's Party formed government in 2008, Pakistan Muslim League assumed power in 2013 general elections. Unlike the past decades, these two governments completed their five year term, which was a turning point in the political history of Pakistan. Although the country move

towards the path of democracy in the decade but it faced challenges like weak rule of law, corruption and accountability, weak institutions, elite and bureaucratic domination, passive political culture and stagnated economy. The research paper examines the 2008 and 2013 regimes of Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-N respectively to evaluate democracy and political stability. This study analyzes the governance performance of Pakistan (2008-2018) by analyzing Worldwide Governance Indicators. It focuses on three key world governance indicators such as Rule of Law, Control of Corruption, and Economic Growth to assess the impact on political stability and good governance. By critically examining trends in these indicators, the study aims to understand the extent to which democratic continuity contributed to institutional strengthening and governance reform in Pakistan (Jathol, et. al., 2024).

Literature Review

Past research on Pakistan's governance has brought attention to problems of good governance. These studies give readers grounding in context for comprehending the World Governance Indicators scores and how they affect Pakistan's governance environment.

Many studies conducted on the challenges and issues of governance (Grindle, 2004). Underlined that practice of good governance is not simply associated with development rather it necessitates to take steps for poverty alleviation, combating corruption and major irritants causing hurdle in achieving economic development.

Hassan and Zeb, (2021) analyzes the impact of good governance on socio-economic development in Pakistan. He argued that good governance and corruption are inversely related, they reinforce one another in a vicious cycle. Corruption is a multilayered process. If good governance standards are rigorously followed, the area becomes smaller, this encourages corruption. Corrupt practices are strongly linked to inadequate monitoring of the rule of law, accountability, and openness. Thus, the relationship between corruption and bad governance threatens democracy and also erodes the rule of law and the growth of a nation's economy. Therefore, corruption spawns bad governance, which promotes economic stagnation, insufficient allocation of resources, socioeconomic inequality, and ultimately political instability and conflict. Pakistan is a democratic nation whose government faces numerous problems and difficulties and threat to Pakistan's governance is the country's high rate of corruption, which has an impact on the nation's development. There is also an unequal distribution of funds and a high rate of illiteracy, making Pakistan's governance inadequate and in need of transparency and accountability.

Yaseen, Anisa, and Zahra, (2020) discussed the concept of good governance and assessed the historical and present state of governance in Pakistan. They highlighted the prevalence of nepotism as a significant weakness and proposed measures to strengthen Pakistan's administration. (Smith, 2007) explained that good governance is linked to proper oversight of political authority and socioeconomic resources because it improves governments' capacity to provide a variety of economic policies and carry them out effectively.

Khan and Alam (2020) Explains that the governance have been a 'suffering experience' in Pakistan. They identified major problems which hinder good governance such as corruption, illiteracy, security, poverty and unemployment etc. have never been curbed out. He suggested that through accountability, transparency, and participation are the components that make any government successful. However, Pakistan lags behind in planning and budgeting, which leads to unethical practices like resource exploitation and corruption. The people of Pakistan must demand excellent governance, and the government must heed their requests (Mushtaq, et. al., 2017). Studies on governance in Pakistan indicate that economic growth and control on corruption is key indicator of good governance in Pakistan.

Material and Methods

This study adopts qualitative, descriptive and analytical approach to examine the relationship between governance indicators and political stability in Pakistan over the period 2008 to 2018. The research is based entirely on secondary data. Data is collected from World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators and scholarly articles, books, official reports and Statistical Bureau of Pakistan. Data is analyzed using tables to identify patterns, fluctuations and correlations over the time. The relationship between governance indicators and political stability was analyzed through a combination of descriptive statistics, comparative indicator assessment and textual interpretations. The progression of each variable was interpreted in light of political developments and economic performance to draw causal and correlative inferences. Data is analyzed through descriptive analysis which is conducted over the period of 2008-2018. The study draws connections between rule of law, corruption control, and economic performance and their impact on political stability.

Results and Discussion

Good Governance

Good governance is globally gains importance because it encourages accountability and transparency for the political stability of a state. It promotes trust between the government and its citizens which is essential for preserving social order and legitimacy. Without good governance, political systems are prone to instability, conflict, and weakened institutional structures (Malik, et. al., 2023). The exercise of economic, political, and administrative power to oversee state operations at all levels is known as governance. It aims to raise people's living conditions and give them access to all basic needs. The process of making and carrying out decisions is known as governance. Governance is an effective way-out for the stability and peace of a state (Batoool, et. al., 2024; Weiss, 2000) Two main components make up governance: the first how the state institutions are governed and how laws, policies, procedures, and oversight mechanisms are put into action. Second, "its cultural and ideological setting as values, culture, traditions, and ideology are perceived and shaped by the governance (Hassan & Zeb, 2021)

The United Nations (UN) defines governance as the actions taken by the governmental and administrative branches to run their respective nations. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on the other hand, governance refers to the idea of managing a nation's economic, policy, and legal components. Thus, decision-making and the process of deciding which policies will be adopted or not are the general definitions of governance. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) describe eight main attributes of good governance. It adheres to the rule of law and is democratic, inclusive, accountable, transparent, responsive, and focused on reaching consensus. It guarantees that the appearance of corruption is reduced, minority perspectives are considered, and the voices of the most disadvantaged members of society are heard during the decision-making process. Additionally, it responds to the requirements of society both now and in the future. (Sheng, 2009)

There are two major aspects in order to asses a country's governance, good governance indicators and governance principles. World Bank identified six broad Worldwide Governance indicators to study good governance for over 200 countries and territories includes Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2024; Sheng, 2009)The UN defined eight principles for effective governance. Political systems are regarded as excellent governance if the following characteristics are tied to it in its genuine essence: Participatory, Consistent with the rule of law, Transparent, Responsive, Consensus-oriented, Equitable and inclusive, Effective and efficient, and Accountable (WorldBank).

Governance and Democracy in Pakistan: A Historical Overview

Pakistan faced challenges in establishing a stable democratic system and ensuring good governance throughout its history. The state is culturally pluralistic society with different ethno-regional, mass-elite, religio-sectarian and parochial segments of people living there. All the segments of society have their own demands and aspiration to which the constitutional and legal framework must respond to them. In order to establish good governance in any country, it is important to full the needs of the people (Muzaffar, et. al., 2023). Pakistan has experienced different forms of government which include Parliamentary, Presidential systems, martial law, and democracy. But unfortunately democratic traditions have not rooted and the governments failed to perform their paramount duty of law-making and unable to introduce a system of good governance to form a welfare society. Corruption, Lack of accountability, absence of democratic norms, and fragile economy have been hampered the system (Yaseen, et. al., 2021).

The years 1947-1958 marked as the constitutional and political struggle between the different factions of society. The country adopted its first constitution after long 09 year in 1956, but was characterized with vagueness and ambiguities. After the enforcement of constitution, four were frequently installed and dismissed. During the parliamentary period, the governance was influenced by civil-military bureaucracy, the policies of governor general Ghulam Muhamamd and Iskandar Mirza threw the country into chaos and confusion. There were huge disruptions which hindered the progress of the system. The struggle among the political factions slowed down the economic development. During the 1950s economic growth averaged 3.1 percent per annum, and the decade was marked by both political and macroeconomic instability and a shortage of resources. This weak economic and political system gave upper hand to military and bureaucracy to fill the gap created by the leaders. (Kazmi) To establish national integration among East and West wings, the slogan of one nation, one religion, one political party and one language have badly affected the process of democratization and institutionalization. No General Elections were held in Pakistan after independence which creates a vacuum between the masses and government which result the politics of regionalism, factionalism in early phase. (Ahmed & Begum, 2015)The deterioration of social infrastructure over time, persistent poverty, and increasing regional disparities have weakened civil society and hastened the march towards militarization. (Hussain & Hussain, 1993)

The unpredictable and instable political environment and deteriorated economy created qualms among the masses. As a result, in Pakistan military justifies it to take the control of the country in October 1958, March 1969, July 1977 and October 1999 assumed the power with propagation of socio-economic reforms and re-structuring of polity. Every military dictator that took control aimed to establish its legitimacy with a clear ideology of good governance such as modernization, industrialization, rule of law, eradication of corruption and transparent accountability. It is assumed that the military administration's GDP growth rate was faster than that of the civilian regimes. The average GDP growth under military rule was 6.3%. The GDP has always grown faster under military authority than it did under civilian control. (Khan S. , 2013)

Transition from military autocracy to democracy witnessed a challenge for elected governments of Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993, 1997-1999). The decade is marked by (Hoffman, 2011) as a temporary democracy" during which the military withdrew from direct control to preserve its privileges. Four elections (1989, 1990, 1993, and 1997) were held during this time, with the PPP and PML (N) switching in power. This period manifest with rapidly shifting regimes, corruption, unstable political parties, and the president's extensive powers. For the years 1988 to 1999, the army was a silent observer. Democracy was not given a chance to flourish. Economic sanctions such as brown and pressler amendments were repeatedly placed on Pakistan during this period due to the poor economic conditions. The president's extreme presidential powers, embodied in the 8th Amendment, were a major factor in the fall of several regimes. Several governments have been overthrown due to allegation of corruption and poor governance, which were contributing factors in the

destabilization of democracy. The era of 90's is remembered as a wasted era in the history. (Butt & Bandara, 2008)

The military coup of General Musharraf in October 1999, Pakistan once again been put under military rule and process of democracy was in trouble. His emphasis was on the establishment of a wealthier and secure Pakistan. 1999-2008 the country had achieved a primary surplus in three of the five years, and the fiscal deficit was less than 4% of GDP. On average, the GDP grew by 6.0 percent, while headline inflation was 5.8 percent. Since then, no other era has demonstrated such economic grandeur. (Khizar, 2023) General Musharraf's government launched social initiatives like building hospitals, supporting poor students, and introducing health insurance. He actively supported the global war on terror through alliances, notably with the U.S. However, his authoritarian rule—marked by judicial suspensions, election interference, and suppression of dissent—drew criticism for undermining democracy. After General Musharraf resigned on August 18, 2008, Pakistan entered a new phase of democratic transition.

An Analysis of Democratic Decade: 2008-2018

The decade is known as the “decade of democracy” after a transition from military rule to democracy. The two elected governments during this period make an effort to achieve political stability, sustainable economic growth, social development, and strengthening democratic norms. However, both governments faced numerous governance challenges of corruption, rule of law, Political instability, and frequent changes in leadership, energy crisis, security threats and tensions between civilian and military authorities.

The military regime came to end with the 2008 general elections and Pakistan People's Party formed a coalition government (PPP) under leadership of Asif Ali Zardari. This coalition government has taken measures to strengthen the institution of democracy i.e the restoration of judges who were kept under detention has shown the dedication of the PPP government to maintaining institutional integrity and the rule of law, the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 which eliminated the article 58(2B) and reduced presidential powers. More Provincial autonomy has been given after removal of concurrent list. This brought structural, institutional and legal changes in the political system. PPP government faced constant challenges of corruption charges, judicial activism, despite of achievements (Khan, Ullah, & Khan, 2021).

Corruption remained a persistent obstacle to effective governance and political stability in Pakistan since its independence in 1947. During the Pakistan People's Party government (2008–2013), efforts were made to improve transparency, notably with the insertion of Article 19-A into the Constitution in 2010, recognizing the Right to Information as a fundamental right. This initiative aimed to promote transparency, accountability and better service delivery. However, despite these reforms the PPP government struggled to combat corruption charges. Allegations of corruption and nepotism undermined public trust with former President Asif Ali Zardari facing multiple charges, including money laundering. Although he denied all allegations and was not convicted, the repeated accusations significantly tarnished the government's credibility. (Masood, 2020) Economically, the Pakistan People's Party government came to power during the global financial crisis of 2008, facing severe challenges including energy shortages, inflation, fiscal and trade deficits, currency depreciation, and mounting external debt. To address these issues, the government implemented austerity measures and entered a stabilization program with the IMF to tackle macroeconomic imbalances. While the economy showed signs of recovery with GDP growth reaching 4.7% in 2012, the momentum was short-lived, and by 2013, the economy began to decline again due to a lack of sustained structural reforms and continued political instability (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017; Kanwal, 2017).

The Pakistan Muslim League-N government, led by Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, came into power in 2013 with a fragile political environment. It soon faced major political unrest due to Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf's allegations of election rigging, culminating in a 126-day

sit-in that severely disrupted governance. (Malik, 2013) The 2014 Army Public School terrorist attack led to national consensus on the National Action Plan, strengthening the fight against terrorism and improving the internal security situation. Some normalization of civic life followed, such as the resumption of international cricket and national parades. Despite these gains, economic challenges remained due to the energy crisis, low exports, declining foreign investment, and governance issues. However, the launch of CPEC in 2015 was a major infrastructure and economic initiative expected to transform Pakistan's regional standing. This challenged the PML-N political legitimacy and authority, resulted a weakened central government that struggled to maintain law and order in country. (Hashim, 2018)

Despite hopes that political stability and improved law and order would boost economic growth, Pakistan's economy struggled, with growth falling to 3.5% amid a balance of payments crisis and declining foreign reserves. Key challenges included an energy crisis, poor governance, nepotism, and unclear policies, which led to reduced exports and foreign investment. Even falling global oil prices failed to spur recovery. A major positive development was the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015, with \$46 billion in Chinese investment, viewed by many as a potential regional game-changer. (Ali, 2016) The political landscape again shifted dramatically with the 2016 Panama Papers leak, implicating Nawaz Sharif's family in offshore corruption. This led to his disqualification and removal from office by the Supreme Court, destabilizing the PML-N government. Further legal proceedings saw convictions of Sharif's daughter Maryam and son-in-law Muhammad Safdar, damaging the party's credibility. Although the PML-N attempted to maintain economic stability, structural problems like poor governance, policy inconsistency, and the energy crisis continued to hinder progress, leaving Pakistan in a vulnerable state politically and economically by the end of its term.

Table 1
Pakistan's Governance Performance 2008-2018

Year	Political Stability	Control of Corruption	Rule of Law	Economic Growth (%)
2008	-2.573	-0.899	-0.973	0.4
2009	-2.645	-1.076	-0.839	2.6
2010	-2.676	-1.090	-0.738	3.6
2011	-2.810	-1.083	-0.907	3.8
2012	-2.677	-1.069	-0.883	3.7
2013	-2.603	-0.963	-0.856	4.4
2014	-2.401	-0.839	-0.751	4.1
2015	-2.472	-0.834	-0.777	4.56
2016	-2.474	-0.901	-0.816	5.37
2017	-2.397	-0.803	-0.733	5.7
2018	-2.254	-0.801	-0.684	6.0

Source: World Bank Worldwide Indicators: Rule of law, control on corruption and political stability. Data for economic growth is obtained from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

The democratic journey of Pakistan (2008-2018) has been characterized by two consecutive democratic governments and ongoing challenges in governance. As seen in the above data political stability remained significantly weak throughout the early years of this decade. In 2008, Pakistan's political stability score stood at -2.573 and declining further to -2.810 in 2011 which was the lowest point of the decade. This period was characterized by internal insecurity, political violence, and institutional fragility, which were exacerbated by weak rule of law and poor control of corruption.

A closer analysis of the rule of law indicator shows a negative trajectory in the early part of the decade. From -0.973 in 2008, it remained in the negative range, reaching -0.907 in 2011.

The decline in rule of law suggests the persistent weakness of legal institutions, law enforcement agencies, and judicial mechanisms, contributing to a lack of public trust and deteriorating political order. The association between rule of law and political stability appears closely correlated; as the rule of law weakened, so did political stability. It was only after 2013 that both indicators began to show gradual improvement by 2018 the rule of law had improved to -0.684, and political stability to -2.254. This suggests that strengthening legal frameworks and institutional accountability played a significant role in stabilizing the political environment.

In parallel, the control of corruption indicator also reveals important insights into the political dynamics of the country. From -0.899 in 2008, corruption levels worsened, dropping to -1.083 in 2011, indicating a perception of widespread and deep-rooted corruption within public institutions. The lack of effective anti-corruption mechanisms during this period likely eroded institutional credibility and contributed to political disenchantment. However, afterwards 2013, a gradual recovery in control on corruption has seen. The score improved from -0.899 in 2008 to -0.801 in 2018. This was achieved through the efforts of National Accountability Bureau, suo motu actions of judiciary and active role of print and electronic media. The data shows that controlling corruption leads to political stability in Pakistan.

Another aspect that impact political stability during this period is economic growth. The data shows a clear upward trend in Pakistan's GDP growth rate from a meager 0.4% in 2008 to a strong 6.0% in 2018. For the stability of governments, stable economy is prerequisite for the state. The government should take measures like control and check on inflation, reduce unemployment and promotion of cottage industries leads to a stable political environment. The launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) after 2015 further amplified this effect by promising long-term economic benefits and boosting investor confidence.

Table 2
Comparison of rule of law, control of corruption, and economic growth with political Stability in Pakistan 2008-2018

Indicators	Trends 2008-2018	Impact on Political Stability
Rule of Law	Improved from -0.973 (2008) to -0.684 (2018)	Strengthened legal institutions and judicial reforms contributed to reduced lawlessness, helping stabilize the political environment.
Control of Corruption	Improved from -0.899 (2008) to -0.801 (2018) (worst at -1.083 in 2011)	Better corruption control increased public trust and institutional credibility, leading to lower political unrest.
Economic Growth (%)	Increased from 0.4% (2008) to 6.0% (2018)	Higher growth boosted public satisfaction, job creation, and government legitimacy, supporting greater political stability.

Conclusion

The study concludes that rule of law, control of corruption, and economic growth are essential indicators for the stability of Pakistan. A stable and democratic government cannot achieve the goal of governance in isolate but it needs institutional strength and economic governance. For the continuity of democratic norms efforts has been made, such as improvements in legal frameworks, transparency and accountability and imposition of rule of law. The data from 2008 to 2018 clearly illustrates that political stability in Pakistan achieved only by the support of rule of law, economic growth and control on corruption. Now days due to communication revolution, people are more politically aware about the system. They are keen observer of political change, governance problems, legal and social reforms. For the stability of state and governance it is necessary to gain public trust by solving their socio-economic problems and giving them hopes for the future.

In sum, sustainable political stability in Pakistan is achieved through regular elections, transparent governance, economic development and institutional integrity. Pakistan can ensure long-term democratic consolidation and resilience against political stability only through the

enforcement of these pillars. Democratic process remains fragile without the strengthening the institutions and good governance.

Recommendations

Pakistan is not only state who is struggling with political stability and governance. By taking few steps this can be achieved.

1. Democratic institutions should be strengthens so that the accountability and transparency can be ensured and political system works efficiently.
2. Provide civic education to youth and encourage them to participate actively in political activities.
3. Introduce judicial reforms so that the impartial justice can enhance public trust on government. This will help to provide a stable legal governance system.
4. Cooperation between civil and military leadership is required, so that the domestic challenges should be addressed such as corruption, economic growth, poverty and terrorism.
5. Education plays an important role among masses for awareness of their rights. They will more inform about the democratic norms, values and traditions and actively participate in state matters.

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