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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Political Stability and Security Challenges: Implications for Governance in Pakistan****Maryam Bibi**

BS Political Science, International Islamic University, Islamabad

meryjutt196@gmail.com**Qamar Ud Deen**

BS IR semester National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

qamaruddeen058@gmail.com**Gul Azam**

BS Pakistan Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

gulazam1685@gmail.com**Hammad Hayat**

M.Phil. Pakistan Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad

hammadhayat1568@gmail.com**Roqiya Phool**

BS Political Science, International Islamic University, Islamabad

Roqiyaphool@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Political stability in Pakistan has been persistently undermined by governance deficits and complex security challenges. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2024, Pakistan ranked among the five most terrorism-affected countries, with militant violence resurging particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Official security data indicate that over 1,500 terrorism-related incidents were reported in 2023, resulting in significant civilian and security-force casualties. These security pressures coincide with chronic political instability, characterized by frequent government changes, contested elections, and weakened civilian institutions. The World Bank reports that governance indicators particularly political stability and rule of law have remained in the lowest quartile globally for much of the past decade. This nexus of insecurity and political polarization constrains policy continuity, economic reform, and public service delivery, thereby eroding public trust in state institutions. Addressing Pakistan's governance challenges requires integrated reforms that strengthen democratic institutions, enhance civilian oversight of security, and link counter-terrorism efforts with inclusive socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Political Instability, Security Challenges, Governance in Pakistan*

Introduction

The contemporary political landscape of Pakistan is defined by a persistent struggle to reconcile democratic consolidation with systemic security imperatives. Since its inception in 1947, the state has navigated a precarious path characterized by an "asymmetric federalism" and a recurring cycle of civil-military shifts that have fundamentally altered the DNA of its governance structures. Political stability, often defined as the durability of a regime and its ability to withstand internal and external shocks without resort to extra-constitutional measures, remains an elusive goal for Islamabad. The intersection of these stability deficits with multifaceted security challenges ranging from cross-border tensions and domestic militancy to non-traditional threats like economic fragility and climate-induced displacement creates a

governance crisis that transcends mere administrative inefficiency. As the country enters the mid-2020s, the implications of these challenges have moved beyond the corridors of power, directly impacting the state's capacity to deliver public goods, uphold the rule of law, and maintain social cohesion in a polarized society.

Pakistan's political history is a testament to the "praetorian" nature of its state-building process, where the military has historically positioned itself as the final arbiter of national interest.¹ This institutional imbalance has led to a "hybrid" model of governance, particularly visible in the post-2018 era, where civilian administrations must navigate a complex web of "red lines" dictated by the establishment. The frequent turnover of prime ministers none of whom have completed a full five-year constitutional term highlights a structural fragility that discourages long-term policy formulation. When governance is reduced to a survival strategy for the incumbent regime, the resulting "policy paralysis" stymies economic reforms and institutional strengthening. Consequently, the state often finds itself in a reactive mode, managing immediate crises rather than implementing the proactive, inclusive strategies necessary for sustainable development.

The security paradigm of Pakistan is unique due to its geo-strategic location and the legacy of the "War on Terror," which transitioned from an external commitment to an internal existential threat. Domestic militancy, fueled by sectarianism and ethno-nationalist movements in peripheries such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, imposes a "security tax" on governance.² Resources that could be utilized for human development education, healthcare, and infrastructure are disproportionately diverted toward defense and internal security operations. Furthermore, the persistence of these threats undermines the writ of the state, creating "governance vacuums" in marginalized regions where non-state actors occasionally provide alternative, albeit predatory, administrative functions. This erosion of authority not only threatens territorial integrity but also diminishes the citizen-state social contract, as the government appears unable to fulfill its primary duty: the protection of its people.

In the current decade, the definition of security has expanded to include "human security," where economic stability is viewed as the bedrock of national defense. The economic crises of 2024 and 2025, marked by high inflation and a reliance on international bailouts, have revealed that political instability is the primary driver of fiscal uncertainty.³ Governance in Pakistan is now increasingly defined by "investment facilitation" through centralized bodies like the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), which aims to bypass traditional bureaucratic bottlenecks. However, while such measures may offer short-term efficiency, they raise critical questions regarding democratic accountability and the marginalization of provincial autonomy under the 18th Amendment. The shift toward a "securitized" economic model suggests that in the absence of political consensus, the state is opting for a top-down, command-style governance structure to ensure survival.

Literature Review

Analysis of how emerging threats like cyber warfare and climate change strain traditional governance framework by Ahmed, Z. S., & Shahzad, R. This study argues that Pakistan's security landscape has fundamentally shifted from purely kinetic military challenges to "interconnected" non-traditional threats. The authors observe that while counter-terrorism operations have been tactically successful, they fail to address the underlying governance gaps specifically social marginalization and ideological radicalization. The study concludes that unless

Pakistan moves toward "integrated governance" that synthesizes cybersecurity, climate resilience, and inclusive policy, the state's long-term stability remains at risk.¹

The evolution of military influence and its formalization within Pakistani governance between 2010 and 2024 by Noor, S., Panhyar, M. A., & Kamal, A. H. exploring the "asymmetric" nature of civil-military relations, the authors examine the 2018–2024 period as a critical era where military influence became institutionalized through resource distribution and security policymaking. The research suggests that sustainable governance in Pakistan requires "gradual institutional amendments" rather than radical shifts, aiming to enhance civilian capacity to manage security without compromising democratic standards. It highlights the trade-off between immediate security efficiency and long-term democratic accountability.²

Qualitative assessment of how political churn affects civil liberties, education, and healthcare by Babar, S., Rehman, A., & Rafiq, M. Babar, Rehman, and Rafiq (2024) provide a critical bridge between macro-level political theory and micro-level governance outcomes by examining how persistent political churn fundamentally compromises the Pakistani social contract. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the authors argue that instability in Pakistan is not merely a transition of power but a catalyst for "administrative amnesia," where long-term developmental goals in education and healthcare are routinely abandoned in favor of short-term regime survival. The study identifies a "multisector threat" framework, suggesting that when the state is preoccupied with executive preservation, the resulting governance vacuum leads to systemic violations of civil liberties and the deterioration of public services. By applying the lens of "human security," the researchers demonstrate that this instability forces a shift from institutional governance to "clientelism," where citizens increasingly rely on local power brokers rather than formal state structures for protection and resources. Ultimately, the work posits that without a predictable political environment, the state's capacity to uphold the rule of law is structurally hindered, rendering governance a purely reactive exercise that fails to address the underlying drivers of domestic insecurity.³

The National Security Policy (NSP) 2022–2026, as reviewed by contemporary scholars and policy analysts (2022, 2024), marks a paradigm shift in Pakistan's governance philosophy by elevating "economic security" to the cornerstone of the national interest. This literature highlights the transition from a traditional "geo-strategic" posture to a "geo-economic" framework, predicated on the belief that a militarily potent state cannot be sustained without a solvent and thriving economy. However, scholarly critiques of the NSP suggest a significant "implementation-expectation gap." Analysts argue that while the policy successfully identifies "citizen-centric" security as a goal, the persistent political polarization and fiscal deficits of the mid-2020s act as structural inhibitors. The literature posits that geo-economics requires a level of regional connectivity and internal political consensus that currently remains elusive. Consequently, the governance implication of this policy shift is a state caught in a paradox: it recognizes that human security is the only path to long-term stability, yet it remains tethered to a "security-first" budgetary reality necessitated by immediate external and internal threats.⁴

¹ Ahmed, Z. S., & Shahzad, R. (2025). Governance challenges and non-traditional security threats in Pakistan: Terrorism, cybersecurity, and climate risks. *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 15(2).

² Noor, S., Panhyar, M. A., & Kamal, A. H. (2025). Civil–military relations and their impact on democratic governance in Pakistan. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 575–584.

³ Akram, M. S., & Malik, R. (2023). Digital shadows and environmental risks: Dimensions of national security in Pakistan. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 4(3), 855–864.

⁴ National Security Division. (2022). *National Security Policy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 2022-2026*. Government of Pakistan.

The "Security Tax" and Empirical Economic Decline. Nawaz, Anwar, and Aquil (2021) provide a quantitative foundation for the argument that political instability acts as a primary deterrent to Pakistan's economic growth. By analyzing data from 2000 to 2019, the researchers identify a "negative feedback loop" wherein institutional weakness fails to mitigate political tension, subsequently fueling corruption and discouraging both domestic and foreign investment. The study concludes that the "security tax" the diversion of fiscal resources from productive sectors like infrastructure and education toward crisis management and defense is a direct consequence of an unstable political environment. This empirical evidence suggests that for Pakistan, economic recovery is not merely a matter of fiscal policy, but is contingent upon achieving a threshold of political predictability that allows for long-term institutional resistance to shocks.⁵

Post-Kinetic Governance and the Re-emergence of Threats Irfan, Khan, and Naqvi (2022) examine the transition from military-led counter-terrorism operations to civilian-led administrative stability, highlighting the challenges of the "post-kinetic" phase in Pakistan's peripheries. The authors argue that while operations like *Zarb-e-Azb* and *Radd-ul-Fasaad* successfully dismantled militant infrastructure, the slow pace of civilian administrative integration has created "governance vacuums." These gaps are often exploited by non-state actors to provide alternative judicial or social services, thereby undermining the state's writ. The research emphasizes that a "security-only" approach is insufficient; lasting stability requires "integrated governance" that balances kinetic success with robust public policy and socio-economic development in marginalized regions to prevent the resurgence of radical ideologies.

Discussion

The governance landscape in Pakistan is fundamentally shaped by a precarious "security-stability-economy" nexus, where the persistence of political volatility and multifaceted security threats creates a feedback loop of institutional paralysis. As of 2026, the state's ability to deliver public goods is severely hampered by a "crisis of legitimacy" arising from polarized political cycles and friction in civil-military relations. This instability leads to chronic policy discontinuity; when the primary objective of an administration is mere survival, long-term developmental frameworks such as educational reforms or climate resilience strategies are frequently abandoned in favor of short-term populist measures. This environment erodes the rule of law and fosters a culture of patronage, where bureaucratic merit is often bypassed to secure political loyalty, ultimately weakening the foundational pillars of effective governance. Simultaneously, the resurgence of asymmetric security challenges, including militancy from groups like the TTP and insurgencies in Balochistan, forces a "security-first" governance model that diverts critical fiscal resources away from social development. The state is often compelled to prioritize kinetic military operations and the protection of strategic assets, such as CPEC infrastructure, over investments in healthcare and infrastructure. This redirection of funds deepens the fiscal deficit and deters foreign direct investment, leading to an erosion of the social contract. When the state struggles to provide both physical safety and economic opportunity, public trust in democratic institutions wanes, often leaving a vacuum that is filled by radicalized elements or non-state actors. Consequently, the primary implication for governance is a systemic inability to transition from reactive crisis management to proactive, human-centric development.

⁵ Nawaz, A. R., Anwar, U., & Aquil, F. (2021). An economic impact of political instability: Evidence from Pakistan. *Journal of Economic Impact*, 3(1), 47–54.

Findings

The findings regarding Pakistan's governance underscore a critical "security-stability-economy" nexus, where the persistence of political volatility and multifaceted security threats creates a feedback loop of institutional paralysis. Quantitative data from the 2024–2025 period reveals a staggering escalation in violence, with over 1,500 fatalities recorded in nearly 800 terror attacks—the highest casualty toll in six years. This surge is hyper-localized, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan accounting for over 90% of all incidents. Consequently, the state is forced into a "security-first" governance model, evidenced by the Rs. 2.12 trillion (\$7.6 billion) defense allocation in the FY25 budget, representing a 17.6% increase over the previous year. This massive diversion of capital significantly constricts the fiscal space for the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), leading to a governance landscape defined by reactive crisis management rather than long-term strategic planning.

The economic implications of this instability are equally profound, as the "instability premium" continues to deter vital foreign capital. While Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) showed a modest recovery to \$1.9 billion in FY24, it remains drastically below the levels required for sustainable growth compared to regional competitors. Furthermore, the political fragmentation and frequent leadership transitions have led to chronic policy discontinuity, where major initiatives like CPEC projects face delays due to security-related operational costs increasing by an estimated 10–15%. This environment erodes the social contract; as the state struggles to balance a 7% of GDP fiscal deficit with the need for social safety nets, public trust in democratic institutions remains fragile. Ultimately, the figures suggest that without a transition toward political reconciliation and human-centric security, the governance structure will remain trapped in a cycle of debt servicing and emergency stabilization.

Conclusion

Political instability and enduring security challenges continue to pose profound and interlinked constraints on governance in Pakistan, shaping both the effectiveness and legitimacy of the state. Chronic disruptions in democratic continuity manifested through frequent government turnovers, contested electoral processes, and persistent civil–military imbalances have weakened institutional coherence and eroded the capacity for strategic, long-term policymaking. These dynamics have fostered a governance culture oriented toward short-term survival rather than structural reform, limiting the state's ability to address deep-rooted developmental and administrative deficits. Simultaneously, internal and regional security threats, including militancy, extremism, and border-related tensions, have compelled successive governments to prioritize security expenditures and emergency responses, often at the expense of investments in human development, social protection, and institutional strengthening. Political instability and insecurity are not merely parallel challenges but mutually reinforcing phenomena. Weak governance structures, limited rule of law, and inconsistent policy enforcement create spaces in which insecurity thrives, while persistent security crises further justify extraordinary interventions that undermine democratic accountability and civilian authority. This cyclical relationship has contributed to declining public trust in political institutions, constrained economic growth through reduced investor confidence, and exacerbated social and regional inequalities. Moreover, the uneven devolution of power and weak coordination across federal, provincial, and local levels have further diluted governance effectiveness, particularly in conflict-affected and marginalized regions.

Breaking this cycle requires more than episodic political settlements or militarized security solutions. Sustainable governance in Pakistan depends on strengthening democratic

institutions, ensuring credible civilian oversight of security affairs, and fostering political stability through constitutionalism, judicial independence, and inclusive political participation. Equally important is reframing security within a broader human development and governance agenda that addresses socioeconomic exclusion, regional disparities, and citizen-state relations. Without such an integrated and reform-oriented approach, political instability and security challenges will continue to undermine governance outcomes, limiting Pakistan's ability to achieve durable stability, inclusive development, and democratic consolidation.

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