Opiate of the Masses: Analysing Dynamics, Rhetoric, and Sociopolitical Consequences of Populism in Contemporary Politics of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Populism is a political phenomenon that has gained significant attention in recent times due to its ability to appeal to the masses for common good and to bring about changes in established political systems. It has become a significant political force in many parts of the world, including Pakistan. Pakistan is a country that has experienced political instability and economic challenges since its inception. While populism has provided a platform for addressing the grievances of marginalized communities, it has also posed significant challenges to democratic governance and economic stability. Mixed method research approach is utilized in the study to examine the role of populism in the political history of Pakistan. To study political dynamics of Pakistan, the works of scholars such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter are used in the research paper. To gather empirical data, a questionnaire has been employed as a research tool. This enables a deeper understanding of recent developments in populism within Pakistan. By examining the historical and social context of Pakistan and identifying the factors that have contributed to the rise of populist movements in the country, the research paper aims to analyze the developments of populism in Pakistan offering insights into its potential benefits and pitfalls. The findings of the study will have significant implications for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners in Pakistan and beyond.

Key Words: Populism, Democracy, Pakistan, Political dynamics, Hybrid regime

Introduction

The paper deals with the dynamic landscape of contemporary politics, shedding light on the recent political developments manifested in rise of populism across the world. The rise of leaders like Donald Trump, Narinder Modi, Boris Johnson; driving their power from masses by employing the narrative of revivalism based

on the concept of othering within and outside; raised questions that a democracy with a populist coloring tend to become absolutist regime. Pakistan case is somewhat (dis)similar with the examples discussed in previous lines. The representative governments of Pakistan drive their power not only from the masses but also from the power base formed by non-representative state institutions like judiciary and military. The relation between representative and non-representative institutions in Pakistan is multifaceted and beyond the bounds of this paper. The emphasis of paper is on populism at play in a hybrid system that is democratic in theory. By examining the interplay between power structures and governance systems, it seeks to unravel the complexities of populism and implications in a hybrid regime. The paper is based on Historical Comparative approach contextualizing the legacy of populism in world and Pakistan.

A Kaleidoscope of Voices: Populism's Legacy in World

The current age of anger is a consequence of the failures of modernity, including the failures of liberalism, capitalism, and democracy. Democracy has been hijacked by elites who use it to maintain their power and privilege. This has led to a rise in populism and nationalism, as people seek to reclaim their sense of identity and purpose (Mishra, 2017). Populism and democracy are closely intertwined as they both prioritise the needs and aspirations of ordinary individuals (Pasquino, 2008). Populism champions the needs of ordinary people against elites and often involves attacking representative democracy. It can lead to the rise of illiberal democracies, where democratic institutions exist but are hollowed out and manipulated to serve the interests of the populist leader (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019).

Populist rhetorics are often used by authoritarian regimes to legitimize their rule, marginalize opponents, and maintain control. Populist leaders in postcolonial societies use anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism rhetoric to appeal to nationalist sentiments and gain legitimacy. They rely on charismatic leadership, which can lead to the erosion of democratic institutions and the concentration of power in the hands of the leader, who can become increasingly authoritarian over time (Devinney & Hartwell, 2020).

In postcolonial societies, populism takes on a distinct character shaped by historical legacies and ongoing power dynamics. The phenomenon of populism in these contexts is rooted in a complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors (Mudde, 2004). Postcolonial imaginaries play a significant role in shaping the appeal of populism, as they reflect the collective aspirations, frustrations, and identity struggles of formerly colonized societies. The experience of ontological insecurities, stemming from a disrupted sense of self and a search for agency and recognition, often fuels the emotional appeal of populism. Populist leaders adeptly tap into these insecurities by offering simple narratives, promises of protection, and a restoration of dignity and pride. By capitalizing on the grievances and anxieties prevalent in postcolonial societies, populism gains traction and resonates

with those seeking a sense of belonging, empowerment, and a voice against perceived external threats (Kinnvall, 2018).

The second decade of the 21st century has seen a surge in populist movements and leaders around the world. Populism has been defined as a political phenomenon that pits the people against the elites, and which often involves anti-establishment and anti-immigrant rhetoric (Deiwiks, 2009). Economic anxiety and insecurity felt by many people after the global financial crisis of 2008 created a fertile ground for populist movements to emerge, as they promised to restore economic prosperity and to protect the interests of the ordinary people (Pappas & Kriesi, 2015; Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022). The cultural anxiety and backlash against globalization and multiculturalism have also contributed to the rise of populism, as some people feel a sense of loss of identity and a fear of cultural change (Cohen, 2019). Populist leaders have exploited these fears by portraying themselves as defenders of national identity and culture, and by promoting anti-immigrant and anti-globalization policies (Jay et al., 2019). Social media and the internet have also played a significant role in the rise of populism (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020; Postill, 2018).

In postcolonial societies like Pakistan, the struggle for independence and the subsequent quest for democracy have left a profound mark on the political landscape. The legacy of colonialism and the subsequent authoritarian and martial law regimes have sown deep seeds of distrust and discontent among the people, giving rise to populist movements that seek to mobilize the masses against the ruling elites. (Jalal, 2009). The roots of populism in these societies are complex, intertwined with the social conditions of poverty, inequality, and exclusion that afflict the most vulnerable sections of society. Populist leaders often emerge as champions of these marginalized groups, offering promises of greater representation and a more equitable distribution of resources and power. Proponents of populism view it as a potent force to challenge established elites and address the concerns of historically marginalized communities. There is also a belief that populist leaders' ability to mobilize the masses can lead to the emergence of more inclusive and egalitarian societies ((Ruth-Lovell & Grahn, 2023). The social dimension of populism in postcolonial societies is particularly evident in the rise of movements that advocate for the rights of workers, peasants, and other oppressed groups. These movements, born of a deep sense of injustice and a desire for change, offer a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness of a political culture shaped by decades of colonialism and authoritarian rule (Talukdar, 2019).

Embracing Paradox: Pakistan's Mosaic of Hybrid Governance

With the advent of the 21st century, the global trend of democratization, known as the Third Wave, experienced a slowdown in many countries, leading to the emergence of a distinct type of governance. These new regimes, characterized by a

combination of democratic and authoritarian elements, were recognized as hybrid regimes (Riaz, 2019). Pakistan's political landscape has been characterized by a complex interplay of democratic governance, military interventions, and political instability (Staniland, 2008). This oscillation has contributed to the formation of a hybrid regime. Electoral contestation, although present in the form of periodic elections, has often been marred by allegations of rigging, manipulation, and undue influence. This raises questions about the authenticity and fairness of electoral outcomes and challenges the notion of genuine popular representation (Adeney, 2017). Civil society organizations exist and play an active role in Pakistan, but they often face constraints and limitations (Rosilawati et al., 2018). Freedom of expression is curtailed, dissent is suppressed, and intimidation tactics are used (Shah et al.,2017). These factors contribute to the fragmentation of civil society, hindering the development of robust and independent movements that could challenge the ruling establishment. The weakness of the rule of law is also a pervasive issue in Pakistan's political system. The judicial system often faces challenges related to independence, political interference, and delays in delivering justice. This undermines the rule of law and affect good governance, enabling the ruling elite to manipulate the legal framework to their advantage and suppress dissenting voices (Adnan & Fatima, 2018).

Pakistan's political system exhibits a degree of vertical accountability through periodic elections and public representation. This accountability remains selective and conditional, with limited responsiveness to the demands and grievances of citizens (Bhidal, 2013; Iqbal & Mustafa, 2022). The separation of powers is often undermined leading to limited checks and balances between different branches of government. Concentration of power within ruling parties or individuals further reduces accountability and weakens democratic principles (Sultana, 2012). State capture is also a recurring phenomenon in Pakistan's political landscape. Influential groups often exert significant influence, leading to the manipulation or control of key state institutions and resources for personal or political gain. This state capture undermines democratic processes and consolidates power within certain factions. (Shoukat et al., 2017; Tunio & Nabi, 2021).

Methods

The current study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, utilizing a quantitative questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection. The objective of this research was to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of populism in contemporary Pakistani politics. To gather data, a snowball sampling technique was employed, and the questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms. The target participants were individuals in Pakistan who possess political knowledge, such as students, active voters, and those who closely follow political developments in the country. Qualitatively data was collected through

using secondary sources and past literature. A review of the literature is presented to analyze the information to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:
1. What factors have contributed to the rise of populist movements in Pakistan?
2. How does populism impact democratic governance and economic stability in Pakistan?
3. What are the specific grievances and aspirations of the marginalized communities that populism addresses in Pakistan?
4. How did the PTI's populist approach and narrative influence the political landscape in Pakistan?
5. What are the recent developments in populism within Pakistan, and how do they manifest in the political landscape?

Theoretical Framework

The main task of "democratic politics is to provide the institutions which will permit conflicts to take an agonistic form, where the opponents are not enemies but adversaries among whom exists a conflictual consensus." (Mouffe, 2013). Mouffe (2005; 2018) argued that populism can be a positive force for democracy. It can be a way of challenging the dominance of neoliberalism and promoting a more egalitarian and participatory form of democracy by constructing a people as a political force through building a counter-hegemonic movement. She argues that populist movements can help to mobilize citizens who feel excluded or marginalized by traditional political institutions, and can provide a way of channeling popular discontent into constructive political change. Her work emphasizes the importance of building a radical democratic movement that is committed to the principles of equality, liberty, and solidarity. She argues that such a movement can help to counteract the depoliticization and disaffection that are often associated with neoliberalism, and can provide a way of promoting a more inclusive and participatory form of democracy.

Laclau's theoretical framework of populism (2005; 2005) offers a coherent understanding of social and political conflicts by highlighting the struggle between different social groups. According to Laclau, these conflicts do not stem from objective differences but rather from the construction and representation of these differences. A central aspect of his framework lies in the construction of political identities and the significant role discourse plays in shaping these identities. Political identities, as Laclau argues, are formed through the articulation of various demands and struggles. Although these demands may not have an inherent connection, they can be articulated in a manner that gives rise to a new political

identity. Laclau also highlights the importance of moments of crisis in shaping these political identities. Crises provide an opportune time for different demands to be articulated and converge into a novel political identity. It is crucial to recognize that the construction of political identities is an ongoing process, as new demands and struggles continuously emerge and find new avenues of expression. Dominant groups hold the power to influence the political discourse and establish their own worldview. This dominance allows them to sway public opinion, set the terms of debate, and mould the collective understanding of societal issues. Thus, hegemonic control over the political narrative significantly impacts the construction and development of political identities.

Hybrid regimes, as outlined by O'Donnell and Schmitter (2013), are characterized by a dispersed distribution of power among various actors and institutions, including political parties, the military, judiciary, bureaucracy, religious groups, and influential families. These regimes experience power struggles and limited accountability due to the fragmentation of authority. While they may possess formal democratic institutions, such as constitutions and elected legislatures, their functioning is often undermined by executive dominance, military intervention, and restrictions on political rights and civil liberties. Within hybrid regimes, the coexistence of democratic and authoritarian elements is evident. Although some political competition may exist, it is often constrained and manipulated to favor the ruling elite. Opposition parties face challenges such as unequal access to resources, state interference, and restrictions on political rights. Levitsky and Way (2010) describe this system as competitive authoritarianism, where ruling parties employ co-optation and repression strategies to neutralize potential challenges. Co-optation involves offering limited benefits or positions of power to rival elites, while repression entails the use of force, intimidation, or legal measures to suppress dissent and limit opposition activities. These regimes often utilize tactics such as gerrymandering, biased electoral frameworks, media bias, and reported incidents of electoral fraud to control the electoral process and maintain an advantage for the ruling party or leader. These practices undermine the integrity of elections and hinder genuine democratic competition. Hybrid regimes may also rely on informal power networks, such as patronage systems and clientelism, to consolidate and maintain control. Political leaders utilize the distribution of benefits, privileges, and positions of power to co-opt loyal supporters and neutralize potential challengers.

The linkage to the West plays a significant role in the democratization process of these regimes. International attention and pressure generated by Western countries can increase the cost of authoritarian rule, incentivize power-sharing or ceding of power, and shift resources in favor of opposition forces. This heightened Western leverage increases the likelihood of authoritarian incumbents falling and creates a window for democratization. Conversely, the absence of a strong domestic push for democracy or close ties to the West can impede the transition to full democracy, resulting in the persistence of competitive authoritarianism.

Discussion

Discussion, with comprehensive analysis of the growth and development of populism in Pakistan, elucidates the underlying factors that have contributed to its emergence, while discussing the positive and negative outcomes of populism. It also creates a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the interplay between populism, institutional dynamics, and democratic processes in Pakistan.

In the Name of the People: Unraveling Pakistan's Populist Past

The history of Pakistan is deeply intertwined with the rise of populism that shaped the country's politics from its very inception. Populist leaders often position themselves as outsiders who are not part of the established political class, and they may criticize the perceived corruption and inefficiency of the existing political system. From the days of the country's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, who promised land reforms and social justice, to the populist movements of later leaders such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Imran Khan, the appeal of populist rhetoric has been a constant in Pakistani politics. (Jalal, 2014; Alavi, 1972; Kalia, 2012; Haasan, 2020; Yılmaz & Shakil, 2021).

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founder of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Imran Khan, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party are two towering figures in the country's political history. Bhutto's populist appeal, centered on his promise of *"roti, kapra aur makan"* (bread, clothing, and shelter), resonated deeply with Pakistan's poor and marginalized population, helping him to secure a decisive victory in the 1970 election. As Prime Minister from 1971 to 1977, Bhutto's populist rhetoric translated into a series of policies designed to uplift the most vulnerable sections of society, including land reforms and the nationalization of key industries (Ali, 1987). But while his populist vision brought hope and change to millions of Pakistanis, it also raised concerns about the impact of populism on democracy and governance. Imran Khan on the other hand is one of the most prominent populist leaders in the world and especially in Pakistan's current political system. Khan's populist appeal centres on his promises to create an Islamic welfare state that will benefit all Pakistanis and to tackle corruption in government. In 2018, he won a historic victory in the general election and became Pakistan's Prime Minister (Batool, 2023; Faiz, 2022; Rastogi, 2021; Tu et al., 2019; Zahoor, 2018; Qadeer, 2006). In particular, powerful institutions have also influenced the nature and trajectory of populist movements in the country (Cohen, 2002; Rizvi, 1998; Waseem, 2012).

The resurgence of populism has brought to the forefront critical discussions about the very nature of democracy, representation, and social justice. There are also concerns that populist movements can be divisive, authoritarian, and prone to exclusivist politics. Populist leaders' tendency to create a charismatic cult of

personality around themselves can also lead to the erosion of democratic institutions and values (Berman & Snegovaya 2019; Zanoni et al., 2017; Abromeit, 2017). Therefore, the re-emergence of populism in Pakistan requires careful examination of the role of populism in shaping democratic politics, and its impact on social justice in postcolonial societies.

Sculpting Hope: PTI's Artistry of Positive Populism

To harbor positive populism, it is important for leaders to focus on policies that benefit the marginalized sections of society while also promoting democratic institutions. Populist policies should aim to increase political participation and representation of the masses in the decision-making process. Populist leaders should aim to build consensus and promote social cohesion rather than creating divisions. This can be achieved by promoting dialogue and engaging in constructive discourse with different segments of society (de la Torre, 2021; la Torre, 2019; Bang & Marsh, 2018).

During the rule of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, populism had significant effects on the political and economic landscape of Pakistan. PTI's populist rhetoric resonated with a large portion of the population, leading to increased political mobilization and support. The party's promises of anti-corruption, social justice, and welfare-oriented policies based on Islam appealed to marginalized communities and disenchanted citizens, resulting in a surge of political activism and support (Akhtar & Ashraf, 2022).

The PTI government implemented various governance reforms, including anti-corruption measures such as amending the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to combat corruption at different levels. They also prioritized digital governance, introducing initiatives like the Citizen's Portal and the Ehsaas program to enhance transparency and service delivery. Devolution of power was promoted to empower local governments in addressing grassroots issues, and merit-based appointments aimed to eliminate favoritism. Efforts were made to improve the business environment by simplifying regulations and attracting investments (Bano et al., 2022; Alam, 2021; Hamida & Khan, 2022; Dahri & Maitlo, 2020; Batool et al., 2021; Hussain et al., 2021; Meo et al., 2021; Butt, 2022). Despite the populist promises of economic prosperity, Pakistan faced significant economic challenges during the PTI's rule. Inflation, a widening fiscal deficit, and a sluggish economy worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic were key issues. Critics argue that the populist policies, including expansive spending measures, may have contributed to these economic difficulties (Corsi, 2020; Malik et al., 2020).

Beyond Bloodlines: Struggle to Overcome Dynastic Politics

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party embarked on a populist mission to upend the deep-rooted dynastic politics that had long held sway over Pakistan's political

landscape. Through their rhetoric and actions, PTI aimed to dismantle the grip of traditional political families and foster a system based on merit and inclusivity. Positioning themselves as champions against the entrenched political elite, PTI rallied public support by presenting themselves as the voice of the common people. Central to their approach was advocating for merit-based politics, emphasizing competence, skills, and qualifications as crucial factors for political leadership. By prioritizing ability over familial connections, PTI sought to break the cycle of nepotism and create opportunities for new faces to enter politics, thus challenging the stranglehold of dynastic power (Khan, 2011; Sadiq, 2017; Fatima & Asif, 2021; Kapur, 2018).

Grassroots mobilization and direct engagement with the masses were key focal points for PTI. Their populist narrative struck a chord, particularly resonating with the youth and marginalized communities. By forging direct connections with the people and circumventing traditional power structures, PTI aimed to undermine the dominance of political families. The electoral victories of PTI played a pivotal role in dismantling dynastic politics, as they secured seats in national and provincial assemblies, effectively shattering the monopoly of political families and injecting a fresh political dynamic. These triumphs served as a powerful testament that electoral support could be garnered without relying solely on familial ties or inherited political influence (Akhtar, 2020; Khan, 2020; Nadeem & Bashir, 2021).

## Institutional Fractures: The Perils of Populist Surge

Judicial activism has been playing its role since the inception of Pakistan in 1947. After the adoption of the country's first constitution in 1956, a particular variation of the rule of justice surfaced within Pakistan (Niaz, 2020; Gazdar, 2009; Shabbir, 2013; KHAN & ZUBAIR, 2023). In the contemporary politics of Pakistan, Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaf (PTI) and its populist approach have raised concerns about potential damage to institutions in Pakistan (Murtaza, 2020). Despite the controversial rule of judiciary (Kureshi, 2022) during its tenure, the PTI' government actions, such as appointing and removing judges, interfering in high-profile court cases, and criticizing judicial decisions, have undermined the autonomy and impartiality of the judiciary. These actions can weaken the judiciary's role as a guardian of constitutional principles and the rule of law. The PTI government had also been criticised for employing tactics to control and manipulate the media, including pressuring or influencing media outlets, restricting journalistic freedom, and using state resources to promote a preferred narrative. These actions can stifle critical voices, limit media independence, and undermine the role of the media as a watchdog and platform for diverse opinions (Afzal, 2019; Memon & Shaikh, 2019). The autonomy and professionalism of the civil service and bureaucratic institutions have also been questioned. The PTI's

government's populist approach, focusing on political loyalty and patronage, may have compromised the merit-based selection and promotion of civil servants, undermining the effectiveness and efficiency of public administration that erodes institutional expertise, and hinder impartial decision-making. With a significant number of seats, the ruling party has been able to exercise control over the legislative process, including the appointment of committee chairs and the allocation of resources. This dominance has resulted in a lack of robust scrutiny and critical examination of government policies and actions. The PTI government has also been criticised for showing reluctance to engage in constructive dialogue with opposition parties (Zaman, 2022). The ruling party's refusal to address opposition concerns and consider alternative viewpoints had hindered the effectiveness of parliamentary committees in holding the executive branch accountable. The absence of meaningful debate, deliberation and then bypassing parliamentary procedures and relying on executive orders and ordinances further weakened the oversight function of the parliament (Shafqat, 2022; Faiz, 2022).

Populist movements often bring about societal polarization, and the PTI's rule was no exception (Akhtar & Rasul, 2021). The political landscape became increasingly divided, with confrontations and strong divisions between the ruling party and opposition factions. This polarization hindered effective governance and consensus-building, potentially impeding progress on crucial policy matters (Shafiq & Munir, 2017).

Data Analysis

Following is the illustration of data collected through questionnaires.
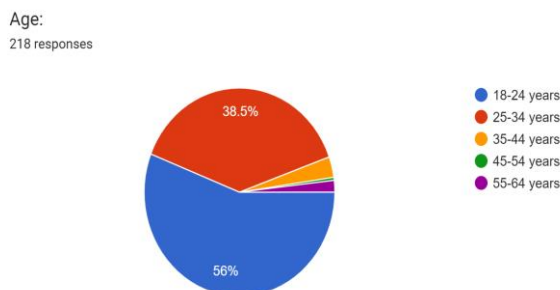
From the given result, we can conclude that the majority of respondents in the questionnaire were young adults. Specifically, 56 percent of the respondents fell within the age range of 18-24 years old, indicating a significant representation of the younger population. Additionally, 38.5 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 25-34, further highlighting the prominence of young adults in the sample. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of respondents were from older age groups, with 3.2 percent falling within the 35-44 years old category, and

only 1.8 percent belonging to the 55-64 years old group. These findings suggest that the survey primarily captured the perspectives and opinions of younger individuals, while the participation of older age groups was comparatively lower.
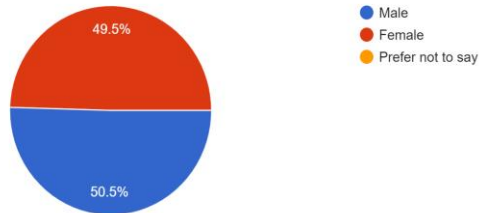
The survey demonstrated a near equal gender participation, with 49.5 percent females and 50.5 percent males actively engaging in the questionnaire. This balanced representation contributes to the diversity of perspectives and strengthens the validity of the research findings.
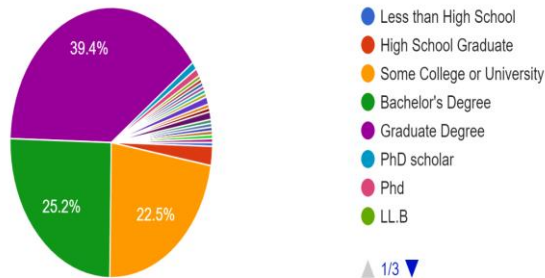
In terms of educational qualifications, the survey captured a diverse range, with a substantial percentage of respondents holding Graduate and Bachelor's degrees. This suggests that the survey attracted a well-educated sample of participants. The presence of individuals with various educational backgrounds, including specialized degrees and high school graduates, indicates a broad representation across different educational levels.

Employment Status
218 responses
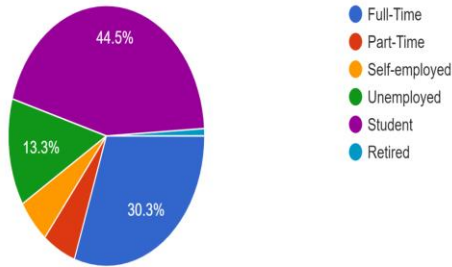
The results of the survey indicate a diverse range of participants with various employment statuses. Among the respondents, a significant portion, approximately 44.5 percent, consisted of students, highlighting the engagement of the younger population in the survey. The survey also captured the opinions of those who were retired (30.3 percent) unemployed (13.3 percent), self-employed (5.5 percent), and working part-time (5.5 percent). This broad representation reflects the involvement of individuals from different employment backgrounds, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the surveyed topic.

1. Populist leaders in Pakistan tend to concentrate power in their own hands, rather than distributing it among different branches of government.
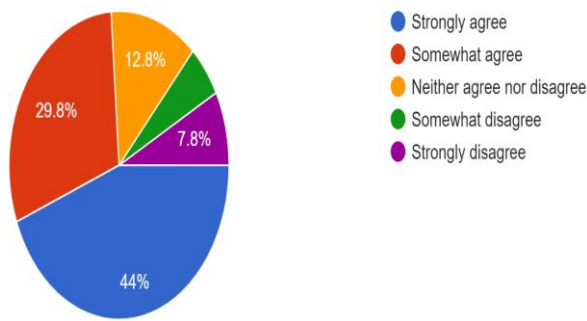218 responses
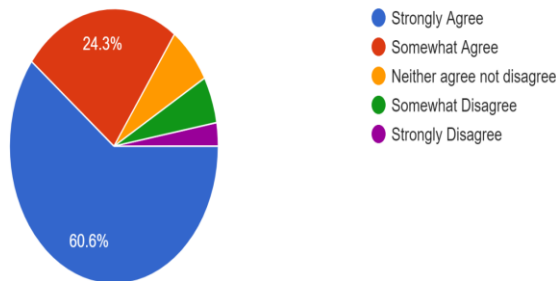
Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of respondents, approximately 60.6 percent, strongly agreed that populist leaders in Pakistan tend to concentrate power in their own hands rather than distributing it among different branches of government. An additional 24.3 percent somewhat agreed with this statement. These findings suggest a widespread perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan exhibit a tendency to

centralize power, potentially raising concerns about democratic principles and the balance of power within the government. The relatively low percentages of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (6.9 percent), somewhat disagreed (5.5 percent), and strongly disagreed (2.8 percent) indicate a general alignment with the notion that power concentration is a characteristic of populist leadership in Pakistan.

2. Populist leaders in Pakistan often use anti-establishment rhetoric to mobilize public support.
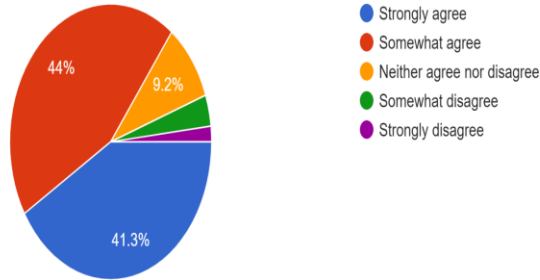218 responses

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant portion of respondents, with 44 percent strongly agreeing and 29.8 percent somewhat agreeing, perceive that populist leaders in Pakistan often employ anti-establishment rhetoric to mobilize public support. This indicates a prevalent belief among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan utilize such rhetoric as a strategy to garner public backing. The percentages of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (12.8 percent), strongly disagreed (7.8 percent), and somewhat disagreed (5.5 percent) suggest a mixed range of opinions on the extent to which anti-establishment rhetoric is employed by populist leaders in Pakistan. The overall majority agreement underscores the perception of the surveyed individuals regarding the use of this particular strategy by populist leaders to mobilize public support.

3. Populist leaders in Pakistan often appeal to nationalism and cultural identity to legitimize their rule.

218 responses

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of the respondents, with 41.3 percent strongly agreeing and 44 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan often appeal to nationalism and cultural identity to legitimize their rule. This suggests that a considerable portion of the surveyed individuals perceive the utilization of nationalist and cultural rhetoric by populist leaders as a common strategy in Pakistan. The percentages of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (9.2 percent), somewhat disagreed (3.3 percent), and strongly disagreed (1.8 percent) indicate some diversity of opinion. The substantial agreement among the majority of participants highlights the perception that populist leaders in Pakistan frequently employ appeals to nationalism and cultural identity for legitimacy.

4. Populist leaders in Pakistan tend to undermine the independence of the judiciary and other institutions that are meant to check their power.

218 responses
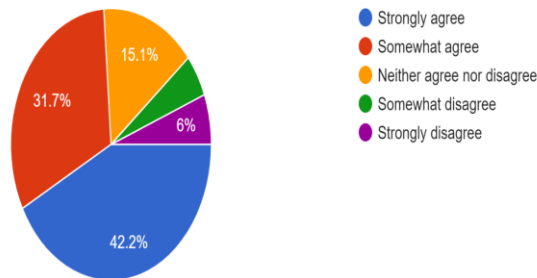
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of the respondents, with 42.2 percent strongly agreeing and 31.7 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan tend to undermine the independence of the judiciary and other institutions that are meant to check their power. This indicates a widespread perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan have a tendency to weaken the autonomy and authority of key institutions. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (15.1 percent) suggests some uncertainty or lack of consensus on the issue. However, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (6 percent) and strongly disagreed (5 percent) indicate that a notable portion of participants also perceive that populist leaders in Pakistan do not necessarily undermine the independence of these institutions. The results highlight a concern among a significant majority of respondents regarding the potential negative impact of populism on institutional checks and balances in Pakistan.

5. Populist leaders in Pakistan often use state resources to reward their supporters and punish their opponents.
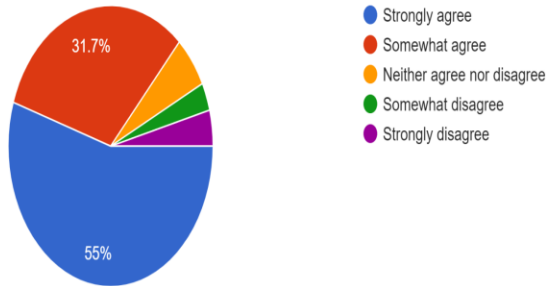218 responses
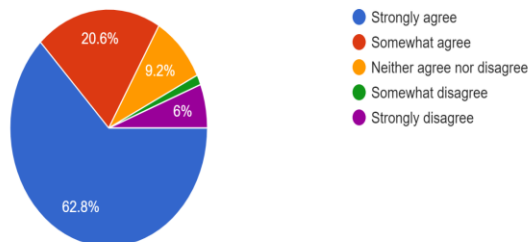
Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a large majority of the respondents, with 62.8 percent strongly agreeing and 20.6 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan often use state resources to reward their supporters and punish their opponents. This indicates a strong perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan engage in patronage politics and utilize state resources for their own political gain. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (9.3 percent) suggests a small degree of uncertainty or lack of consensus on the issue. However, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (1.4 percent) and strongly disagreed (6 percent) indicate that a minority of participants do not perceive this phenomenon to be prevalent among populist leaders in Pakistan. The results highlight a widespread concern among the majority of respondents regarding the potential misuse of state resources for political purposes by populist leaders in the country.

6. Populist leaders in Pakistan tend to rely on personalized forms of governance, rather than following established rules and procedures.
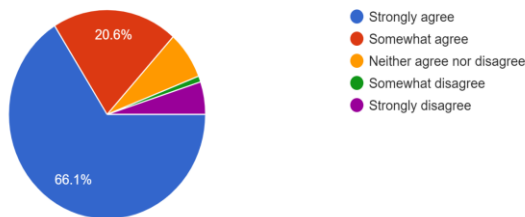
218 responses

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of the respondents, with 55 percent strongly agreeing and 31.7 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan tend to rely on personalized forms of governance rather than following established rules and procedures. This indicates a strong perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan exhibit tendencies towards personalized and discretionary decision-making, bypassing formal structures and established norms. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (6 percent) suggests a small degree of uncertainty or lack of consensus on the issue. However, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (3.2 percent) and strongly disagreed (4 percent) indicate that a minority of participants do not perceive this characteristic to be prominent among populist leaders in Pakistan. The results highlight a prevailing perception among the majority of respondents regarding the tendency of populist leaders to rely on personalized forms of governance, which can have implications for accountability, transparency, and the rule of law in the country.

7. Populist leaders in Pakistan often use the media to project a positive image of themselves, while attacking their critics.
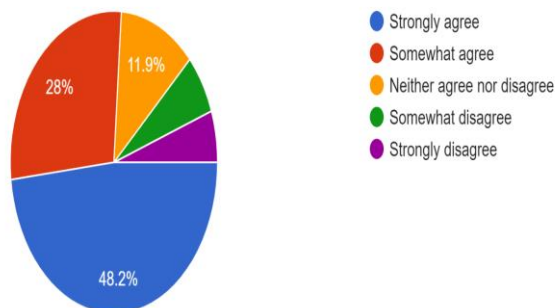
218 responses

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of the respondents, with 61 percent strongly agreeing and 20.6 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan often use the media to project a positive image of themselves while attacking their critics. This indicates a prevailing perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan utilize media platforms to shape public opinion in their favor and undermine their detractors. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (7.3 percent) suggests a moderate level of uncertainty or neutrality on the issue. However, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (0.9 percent) and strongly disagreed (5 percent) indicate that a minority of participants do not perceive this behavior as prominent among populist leaders in Pakistan. The results highlight a prevalent perception among the majority of respondents regarding the utilization of media by populist leaders for self-promotion and criticism of their opponents, which underscores the influence of media narratives in shaping public discourse and political dynamics in the country.

8. Populist leaders in Pakistan tend to suppress dissent and limit the freedom of expression.
218 responses

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
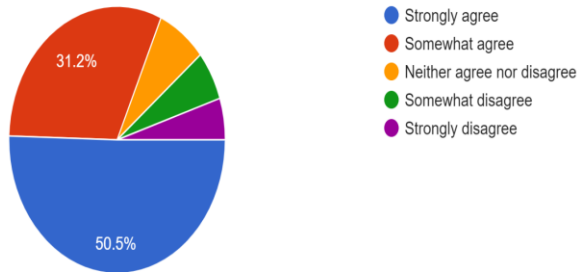- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of respondents, with 48.2 percent strongly agreeing and 28 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan tend to suppress dissent and limit the freedom of expression. This suggests a prevailing perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders in Pakistan employ strategies to curtail dissenting voices and restrict the free expression of ideas. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (11.9 percent) indicates a moderate level of uncertainty or neutrality on the issue. However, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (6.4 percent) and strongly disagreed (5.5 percent) suggest that a minority of participants do not perceive the suppression of dissent and limitation of freedom of expression as characteristic of populist leaders

in Pakistan. The results highlight a prevalent perception among the majority of respondents regarding the impact of populist leaders on dissent and freedom of expression, emphasizing the importance of upholding these fundamental democratic principles in the country.

9. Populist leaders in Pakistan tend to prioritize short term gains over long-term planning and development.

218 responses

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on the survey results, it can be concluded that a significant majority of respondents, with 50.5 percent strongly agreeing and 31.2 percent somewhat agreeing, believe that populist leaders in Pakistan tend to prioritize short-term gains over long-term planning and development. This indicates a prevailing perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders prioritize immediate benefits or political gains rather than focusing on sustainable long-term development for the country. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (7.3 percent) suggests a moderate level of uncertainty or neutrality on the issue. However, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (6 percent) and strongly disagreed (5 percent) indicate that a minority of participants do not perceive the prioritization of short-term gains as characteristic of populist leaders in Pakistan. The results highlight a prevalent perception among the majority of respondents regarding the prioritization of short-term gains by populist leaders, emphasizing the importance of long-term planning and development for the country's progress.

10. Populist leaders in Pakistan often blame external forces and enemies for the country's problems, rather than taking responsibility for their own actions.
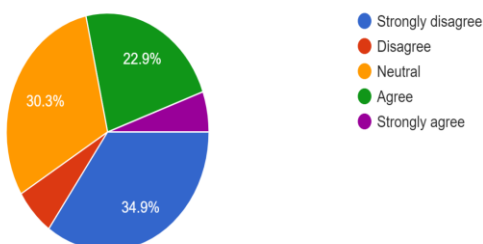218 responses
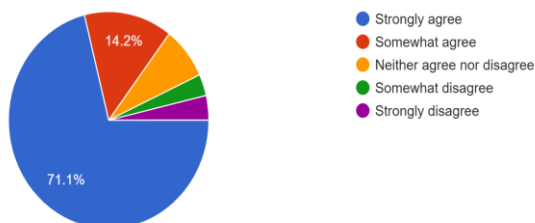
Based on the survey results, it is evident that a significant majority of respondents strongly agree (71.1 percent) with the statement that populist leaders in Pakistan often blame external forces and enemies for the country's problems instead of taking responsibility for their own actions. An additional 14.2 percent somewhat agreed with this perception. This indicates a widespread perception among the surveyed individuals that populist leaders tend to deflect accountability by attributing the nation's challenges to external factors. The percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed (7.8 percent) suggests a moderate level of uncertainty or neutrality on the issue. Conversely, the combined percentages of those who somewhat disagreed (3.2 percent) and strongly disagreed (3.7 percent) indicate a minority of participants who do not perceive populist leaders as extensively blaming external forces. Overall, the results highlight a prevailing belief among the majority of respondents that populist leaders in Pakistan exhibit a tendency to shift blame rather than taking responsibility for the country's issues. This perception sheds light on the perceived lack of accountability within populist governance.

11. Populist leaders in Pakistan are more likely to undermine the institutions of democracy than non-populist leaders.
218 responses

Based on the survey results, it is evident that the responses regarding whether populist leaders in Pakistan are more likely to undermine the institutions of democracy than non-populist leaders were varied. A significant percentage of respondents strongly disagreed (34.9 percent) with the statement, indicating a belief that populist leaders do not pose a greater threat to democratic institutions. Additionally, 30.3 percent of respondents expressed a neutral stance, suggesting a lack of strong conviction either way. On the other hand, 22.9 percent agreed and 5.5 percent strongly agreed that populist leaders are more likely to undermine democratic institutions. A smaller percentage (6.4 percent) disagreed with the statement.

These mixed responses indicate a diversity of opinions among the surveyed individuals regarding the impact of populist leaders on democratic institutions. It highlights the complexity of evaluating the relationship between populism and the strength of democratic institutions. The range of perspectives suggests that perceptions of populist leaders' impact on democracy in Pakistan are not universally shared. It underscores the need for further analysis and exploration of specific instances and contexts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between populism and democratic institutions in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has explored the dynamics of populism in Pakistan, shedding light on various aspects related to populist leaders and their impact on democratic governance. Considering that politics should serve as a manifestation of "*volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2018), populism can play a very crucial role with its potential to play a constructive role in addressing the concerns of marginalized communities by promoting social inclusion and economic stability for the betterment of society. However, through the analysis of survey results and discussions on the characteristics of populism, several key findings have emerged. It is evident that populist leaders in Pakistan have concentrated power in their own hands, used anti-establishment rhetoric, appealed to nationalism and cultural identity, undermined the independence of institutions, and utilized state resources for personal gains. They often relied on personalized forms of governance, manipulated media narratives, suppressed dissent, and prioritized short-term gains over long-term planning. It is important to note that the survey results also reflect a diversity of perspectives, highlighting the complexity of assessing the impact of populism on democratic governance. This variation in responses necessitates a nuanced understanding of populism in Pakistan and the specific contexts in which it operates.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made for policymakers and civil society organizations of Pakistan to understand populism and address the challenges that come with it;

First of all, strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring their independence is crucial. Efforts should be made to bolster the judiciary, media freedom, and civil society organizations, enabling them to act as effective checks on executive power. This can be achieved through reforms that enhance transparency, accountability, and the separation of powers. Promoting civic education and political awareness is essential. By enhancing citizens' understanding of democratic principles, the rule of law, and the importance of pluralism, they can be equipped to critically evaluate populist narratives and make informed decisions. This can be achieved through educational curricula that emphasize democratic values and civic participation, as well as public awareness campaigns and grassroots initiatives.

Fostering an inclusive and participatory political culture is vital. Encouraging citizen engagement, dialogue, and inclusivity can help counter divisive rhetoric and bridge social and political divides. Political parties, civil society organizations, and the media play a crucial role in facilitating open and constructive discourse. Promoting transparency and accountability in governance is essential to combat populist tendencies that are not favourable for democratic institutions. Implementing mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the use of state resources, as well as ensuring transparency in political financing, can help prevent the abuse of power and address the perception of favouritism. Fostering economic development and addressing socio-economic inequalities can help alleviate some of the underlying grievances that contribute to the rise of populism. By promoting inclusive growth, job creation, and social welfare programs, governments can address the concerns of marginalized communities and reduce the appeal of populist rhetoric.

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