

Navigating Political Instability: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Public Officials

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Abstract

Political instability is a major challenge to the governance of the state, especially in areas where the political leadership is volatile. This qualitative study examines how political instabilities affect the lives of power holders, their experiences and issues, and how they deal with them. It defines political instability as a chain of leadership transitions that interrupt continuity and normal service delivery. The theories that have been used in the research are bureaucracy, organizational stress, and political economic theories because the research investigates the impacts of instability on the performance and functions of officials. The data was gathered in the form of 33 semi-structured interviews with the Pakistani officials and analyzed under the thematic approach. The findings reveal four main themes: the perceptions of political instability and the causes of political instability, the difficulties of unstable political environments, and the methods that are used by the officials to cope. The results indicate that high dynamism of political systems creates an element of uncertainty, strain on the administration, confusion of roles, and diminishes institutional performance. This research adds to existing literature by offering context-specific insights into the human and organizational impacts of political instability and highlights the importance of institutional safeguards to strengthen administrative resilience and maintain continuity in public service.

Keywords: Political Instability, Perceptions of Political Instability, Causes of Political Instability, Challenges of Unstable Political Environments, and Coping Strategies Employed

Introduction:

All over the world, local governments are considered that part of government that should provide the immediate necessary intervention in terms of provision of services because it is much closer to communities. (Masuku & Jili 2019). In recent times, there have been several studies conducted, and the main focus of those studies is on the root causes of poor public service delivery in local governments. Some researchers thought that it was the weak administrative capacity leads to problems in delivering public services. But in some cases, even after reforms and the implementation of all required policies, the problems remain unresolved. Along with weak administrative structure reforms on the components like financial management, audits, performance, personnel, and organization, were focused. (Ongaro, 2009). Some authors have suggested that political instability may affect the administrative structure. (Milio, 2008). Political Instability has become a serious threat. Especially in developing and underdeveloped countries. It is creating massive problems and hindering the development of these countries. (Saima & Fahmeeda, 2019). “Political Stability creates conditions for administrative capacity to succeed in implementation of long-term programs.” (Milio 2008). Political Stability is a precondition for any nation-building, and nation-building is an obvious element for the survival and development of any nation.

This environment of political instability hinders the work of public officials. Frequent personnel changes in higher political and bureaucratic positions could reduce their willingness to actively promote reforms. (Cohen, 2022). Decision-making in the environment of political instability is also difficult. Planning strategically and formulating public policy, as well as efficient implementation of public policy, is also difficult for officials. (Cohen, 2022). It is important to understand how public officials cope with this situation of political instability. Political interference in the work of local governments and officials is directly related to political instability because politicians need to maximize their interests in less time. (Masuku & Jili 2019; Cohen 2022). A vast number of studies have been conducted in this regard. Many researchers have highlighted how political instability has affected the performance of public officials and how this situation hinders public service delivery. Also, there are models for forecasting political instability.

All those studies indicate that political instability leads to inefficient working of public officials and difficulty in service delivery. Much of the research is conducted as case studies (Cohen, 2022; Masuku & Jili, 2019; Milio, 2018). Case studies have the limitations that they are conducted at a

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single place at a single time, so they cannot be generalized widely. Moreover, there are several studies conducted on “How Political Instability affects the working of public officials, but there exists a smaller number of studies on “how public officials cope with this situation. Also, there are not many suggested strategies for dealing with the problem in the existing literature.

The scarcity of research on “How public officials deal or cope with the obstacles in their work which are caused by political instability” will contribute to the literature. Or it will open new ways for further exploration in the field of Public Administration. Moreover, this study will help us to propose or develop some strategies for officials to cope with challenges.

Literature Review

Political instability can manifest itself in the form of abrupt leadership changes, policy fluctuations, riots, and economic situations (Cohen 2015; Collier & Hoeffler 2004). This instability will cause a disequilibrium in the political landscape, making the process of decision-making and policy implementation much less linear as a result of the high levels of unpredictability. (Huntington 1968; Gerring et al 2005). Private individuals are under no such constraints and can pick and choose interactions to suit personal needs. Public officials, including elected leaders, civil servants, and bureaucrats, must operate in this challenging environment focused on maintaining daily governmental activities and delivering critical services to citizens (Perry & Wise, 1990). The purpose of this review was to determine the impact of political instability on public officials, and thus on the well-being and performance at work (mental health, job satisfaction) of public officials, which are essential elements in efficient government. This also discusses some of the theoretical perspectives to assess these impacts, evidence of these impacts in the empirical literature, and responses and challenges.

Theoretically, this conceptual model brings together insights from bureaucracy, organizational stress, political economy, and resilience literature to find a solution to how political instability might display or show itself among public officials. Political instability means that the failure of government due to internal or external pressures is reflected in frequent turnover of political leaders, reversals of policies, and economic decline (Alesina et al., 1996; Fearon, 2004). This disturbance messes with the predictability of the surroundings in which political officials function, weakens organizational stability, and implies confused decision-making (Peters, 1995).

Public Officials are responsible for transforming government policies into practical programs that influence the lives of citizens. They also need to address an entirely different set of challenges in

politically unstable countries, as they have to act under uncertainty (Raadschelders, 2003), deal with supply shortages (Hill and Lynn, 2005), and fight against checks and balances. The consequences of political instability are evident in the way in which the public officials conduct their work; an increased amount of stress and a lack of trust in the institution itself (Boyne & Meier, 2009; Perry, 2010). The impact of political instability on various activities in the public sector has been found to have negative implications (Krause 1996; Lu et al. 2015). The coping mechanisms encompass the way in which the public officials cope with stress and various forms of challenges related to political instability. These programs include adaptive leadership programs, stress management programs, as well as professional development with a never-ending collaborative networking process (Heifetz et al. 2009; Cooper et al. 2001).

Bureaucratic, Organizational Stress, Political Economy, and Resilience theories provide us with handy frames to explain the way in which political instability influences the officials in the course of the challenges posed by their occupations. According to Max Weber (1978), bureaucracy is the most important aspect of public administration, i.e., systematic and rule-based administration. However, although IT in Indonesia has been implemented through the structures of formal institutions, the political instability has played into the bureaucracy and norms and procedures of the organization, and this could erode the stability of organizations and make good governance hard to achieve (Peters, 1995). This theory is concerned with the analysis of the impact of workplace stressors on people and organizations. It investigates some of the causes of stress (workload, role ambiguity, job insecurity) that impact the well-being and effectiveness of the organization (Beehr and Newman, 1978). Moreover, political instability may cause extreme stress to individuals who may lose their jobs and superiors who are already close to job insecurity in the first place (Hobfoll, 1989).

Political economic theory examines how political processes determine economic outcomes in society (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2001). Political instability often ends in decades of economic variation and even fiscal constraints, thereby influencing resource allocation and public sector operations (Fukuyama, 2014). Resilience theory highlights a process of developing and employing individual and organizational resources to enhance resistance to challenging situations and strong responses. (Masten, 2001). Similarly, political instability represents an environmental uncertainty that officials are known to address by developing coping strategies or adapted behaviors (Luthar et al. 2000).

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Political instability affected the job performance and satisfaction of public officials. (Buchanan, 1974) Political Instability leads to Policy Uncertainty (Boyne & Meier, 2009). Because instability actually can enhance policy uncertainty, officials are also less likely to know what it is that they are supposed to do to be effective. Similarly, Andrews and Boyne (2010) report that political instability leads to lower organizational performance in public agencies. Further exploratory studies on instability found that Political Instability negatively affects bureaucratic performance as well as employee morale (Krause, 1996; Perry, 2010). The findings suggested that having stable governance structures is supportive of organizational stability and, therefore, enhances performance in the public sector. Political uncertainty can cause high levels of stress to public officials, which can affect their mental health. These results in what Perry (2010) refers to as the anxiety-stress nexus that is likely responsible for higher levels of burnout and distress rates among public officials. (Cooper et al.) In addition, Kirkman et al. (2001) also explore the effects of organizational stressors on well-being and job satisfaction within a context of political disturbance of public officials. A study by Pihlall (2005) also found that political instability was related to job stress.

Political instability reduces the effectiveness of public officials. (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008) Find that political instability, defined as changes in government and reversals in policy, is strongly negatively correlated with trust; people's belief in the integrity of the public sector collapses when they view it as being corrupt. This distrust reduces cooperation and compliance with government projects and thus increases the challenges for public officials (Mishler & Rose, 2001).

Moreover, Newton (2007) problematizes trust in public institutions as such and explains the functions of political instability at high levels of corruption on social capital and civic engagement. Political stability and effectiveness were questioned more openly, resulting in increased public distrust of the government.

Challenges faced by Public Officials

Public Officials serve in an environment of political instability and face numerous challenges that compromise efficiency, which weakens the effectiveness of public officials. These challenges could be of different types.

Uncertainty and Ambiguity: The uncertainty and ambiguity that always envelops the political authorities are one of the biggest hindrances to dealing with the health crises in the politically unstable locations. With the frequent change in political leadership and decisions taken to shift the policy directions which are predetermined by short-term political interests (Hartley and Benington,

2010), we do run a real risk of falling into a reactive mode with no obvious point of stop. It compromises the underpinning of decision-making and stability of organizations, which is among the largest obstacles to good governance (Bovens et al 2007).

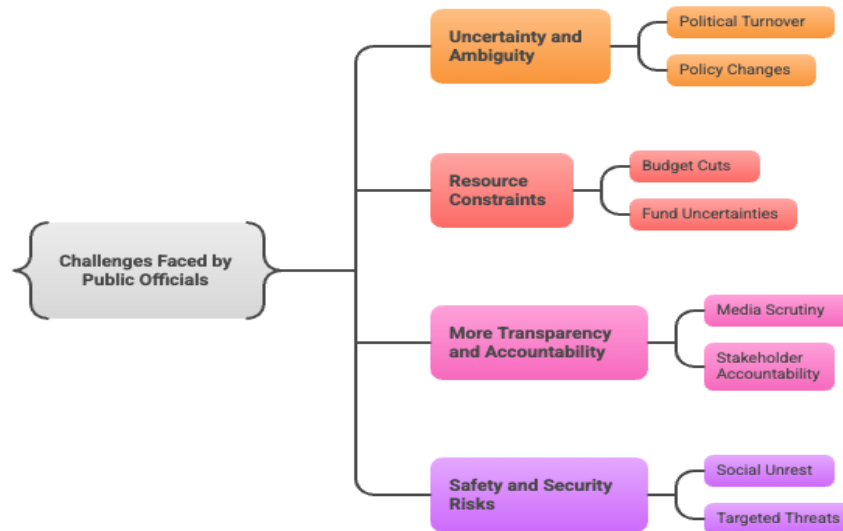
Resource Constraints: Political instability is typically indicated by decreased economic and fiscal pressures, which result in fewer resources for the public sector entities. As budget constraints, fund uncertainties, and austerity measures set in, the public officials would have less to offer the bare bones services that they are supposed to offer (Pollitt and Bouckaert). They experience operational challenges. It is a thousand times worse since there is a lack of resources. This complicates it in a very big way, as the officials are unable to manage fresh issues and act swiftly during emergencies.

Greater Transparency and Accountability: It means that the political leaders in unstable situations will be more accountable to a broader group of stakeholders (the media, the general public, the opposition parties) and, therefore, the decision-making process will be more subject to scrutiny. This is the religious sense of accountability, which entails transparency, responsiveness, responsibility, and probity (Bovens, 2007). Employees working in the public sector are highly visible to the media and the general population and, therefore, are prone to stressful experiences because they are highly scrutinized employees (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

Safety and Security Risks: The fact that there is political instability can pose a great threat to the security and safety of the people in the office, particularly when there is social unrest or conflict in a certain territory. Effective governance depends on confidence, as pointed out by Wilkinson (2004). Nevertheless, under the conditions of violence, intimidation, or selective threats to their safety, people may lose confidence in the government and its capacity to work efficiently. Such distrust complicates the decision-making process of the officials and the work of the government. Thus, safety is not only a matter of protecting people, but also the maintenance of trust and confidence, which are critical to good governance. Governments that are in charge of official security are under an obligation to make sure that security and risks are carefully controlled during turbulent political situations.

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Challenges Faced by Public Officials in Unstable Environments



Coping Strategies

Through the literature review, the following coping strategies were found:

Adaptive Leadership: Adaptive leadership refers to flexibility and agility to changing circumstances, typically because of the dynamic political circumstances (Heifetz et al., 2009). Since political instability is a factor that influences predictability, human capital, and the state of order in society, as political officials, it allows you to drive third space thinking, decentralize power in a team, and make decisions concerning the complexity of an organization where tasks are large and manage outputs (Bryman, 2011).

Stress Management Programs: It is significant to implement stress management programs to produce well targeted among the public officials operating in a politically unstable environment. Examples of such programs may be a general wellness program, counselling, and mindfulness training in a bid to assist officials to manage stress, anxiety, and pressure of work (Kabat- Zinn, 1990; Cooper et al., 2001). Perhaps the least harmful effect of political instability on the mental health of employees can be reduced by public organizations advocating the idea of self-care and developing resilience skills.

Professional Development: Everything is based on the ability of public officials to lead and govern because meeting with people suffering is mandatory, and this requirement corresponds to continuous

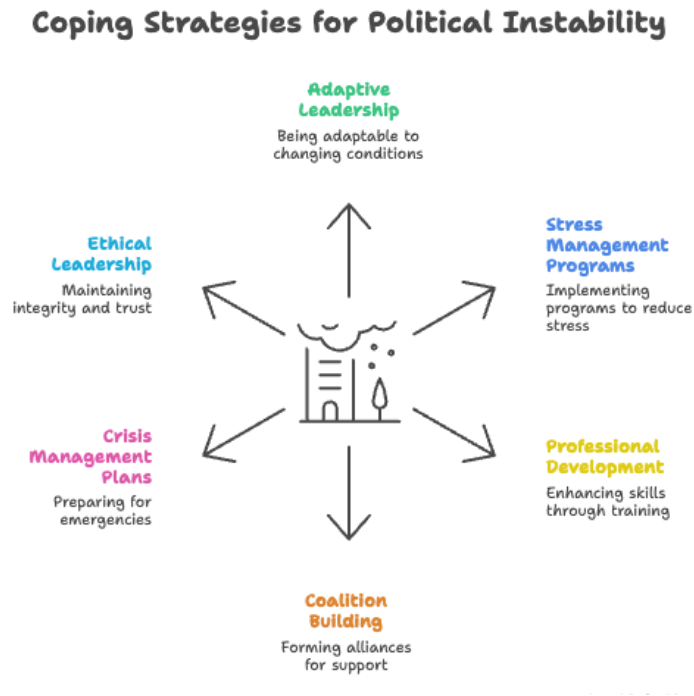
professional development. In several circumstances, we can increase "adaptation capacity" (the potential to modify one's models and actions in the light of new or likely information) by training programs, leadership development initiatives, or skill-building workshops (Berman et al. 2012). Creating investments in personal development makes the team strong enough to face up to and well-equipped to handle political crises or unrest that surrounds you within and out of the organization.

Coalition building: Networking and forming alliances outside of those politically aligned will enhance the ability of public officials to navigate through political disturbance. When projects are linked to community organizations, academic institutions, or international bodies, there is shared resource provision and a mutual learning process through collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The partnerships enable learning from a broader perspective of experience, expertise, and resources of different sectors, resulting in more strategic changes (Kickert et al., 1997).

Development of crisis management strategies: In the case of political instability, the crisis management strategies must be sound and implemented to mitigate the various risks. This comes with the strategies of handling emergent and urgent response, communication, and business continuity activities in times of crisis (Comfort, 2007). Anticipating disruptions and preparing against them allows the authorities of the populace to deal with the instability and its effects on organizational operations and the provision of public services (Boin and Hart, 2003).

Ethical Leadership: It is important, particularly in times of political disturbance, to protect the trust bond between citizens and leaders, thus practicing a standard of ethical conduct and integrity (Brown et al., 2005). Ciulla (2004) describes ethical leadership as being transparent, accountable, and principled in decision making, which results in a sense of public service. Ethical behavior protects public servants and public officials against reputational risks on the one hand and will also foster the culture of trust within the public organization (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012).

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Methodology

As methodology is one of the most crucial parts of any research, we would like to discuss the methodology for this study. This section includes philosophical assumptions, approaches, designs, methods, population, sample, sampling technique, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Let's have a look at each section one by one:

Philosophical Assumptions:

Philosophical Assumptions are the basis for logical reasoning in research, so the importance and significance of philosophical assumptions cannot be neglected or ignored. Philosophically, this study aims to see the perspectives of the individuals, so this study is epistemologically interpretivist and ontologically constructionist in nature.

Approaches:

Keeping in view the philosophical assumptions, we would follow a qualitative approach, as the qualitative approach is concerned with the development of a theory or when we are intended towards understanding a certain phenomenon or when less is known about a topic.

Designs:

Our study design is phenomenological as the purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences and perceptions of Public Officials dealing with Political Instability.

Methods:

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 33 public officials. The interviews mainly focused on three sections, i.e., perceptions regarding political instability, challenges faced by the officials, and the mechanisms adopted by the officials regarding dealing with political instability. An interview guide was prepared after going through the intensive literature review regarding the above-mentioned sections. Interviews were recorded on the mobile phone recorder with permission and consent of the interviewees, and later these interviews were transcribed, so we can use them for further coding process in NVivo.

Population:

This study aims to understand and explore the perception of public officials in the Pakistani context. Keeping this in view, the population for this study was kept to the public officials working in Pakistan.

Sample:

Out of the whole Pakistani region, 28 interviewees were sampled for the interviews.

Sampling Technique:

Convenience and Snowball sampling were adopted for sampling the 33 public officials. 2 officials were approached whom we have known. From these 2 officials, the other 1 official was contacted through snowball sampling.

Data Analysis:

Data from 33 public officials was collected through semi-structured interviews, and later these interviews were transcribed. That was the data collection phase; for data analysis, a method suggested by Braun & Crarke, 2006 known as thematic analysis, was used. In thematic analysis, we identify, analyze, and report themes within the data. For this purpose, we used Nvivo 11 for coding, from these codes, categories were made, and from those categories, themes were identified.

Ethical Considerations:

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Ethical Considerations are very important in any research, especially when the topic is of a sensitive nature. To fulfil the ethical protocols of this study, a permission letter from the institute was obtained and signed by the coordinator. The interviewees were informed that their responses were being recorded. Interviewees were assured that their identity would be kept anonymous, and this interview is for research purposes only, and the interviewer or researcher is not associated or affiliated with any political party.

Findings and Analysis

Main Themes	Sub -Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perception of Public Officials regarding Political Instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is Political Instability?• Is Pakistan Politically Unstable
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Factors Causing Political Instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External Intervention.• Establishment Intervention• Power Hunger
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenges Faced by Public Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal Challenges• Professional Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coping Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual Responses• Institutional Responses

Perception of Public Officials regarding Political Instability

What is Political Instability?

Political instability, as defined as perceived by public officials, refers to more frequent government turnovers, policy inconsistency, and widespread uncertainty. This instability gets in the way of governance and creates civil unrest, a crisis similar to extremism. One official said:

"If a government does not complete its tenure of 5 years, we can say there exists political instability"
(P06).

This demonstrates how it is for a government to complete its tenure for good results. Political instability results in half-made projects and a lack of public involvement in the government. The focus on five years is a reflection of the necessity for consistency in leadership, if policymaking and governance are to advance without sharp variation.

An official highlighting the impact of political instability on safety and service delivery said:

"With political instability, lawlessness also comes. Take the 9th of May incident; government officials were not even able to roam on the road freely and hid in their homes for fear of their lives. It affects public service delivery" (P04).

This clearly implies that political instability causes lawlessness, which in turn affects the safety of public officials and the quality of services to the public. The incident that took place on the 9th of May refers to a unique event in which people went out to the streets, causing damage to public officials, government buildings, and roadblocks.

Some officials also said that political instability is simply an economic downfall. According to some officials, political instability and economic distress are positively related to each other. One official said:

"People don't invest in a country where there is political instability. Capitalists avoid investing in politically unstable countries. Because of political instability in Pakistan, investors have moved to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. International institutions like the IMF and World Bank are not even ready to talk. Talented youth are leaving Pakistan because of the unavailability of jobs" (P04).

This clarifies the relationship between political stress and economic downturn. The loss of young and skilled labor is a major loss to any country. Similarly, international institutions are also unwilling to invest.

Another official said:

"Political instability means a government that cannot provide continuity in policies and services, leading to public distrust and frequent disruptions" (P03).

This highlights the simplest definition of political instability.

Is Pakistan Politically Unstable?

All the interviewees agreed that Pakistan is politically unstable, pointing to the many military coups and changes in government or corruption scandals. One official said:

"Yes, it is highly unstable politically since its creation" (P05).

In this statement, the permanent political instability in Pakistan is clearly called a politically unstable state since its creation:

Another official said:

"Pakistan has been politically unstable since its creation. No doubt it's an open secret" (P06).

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Factors Causing Political Instability

External Intervention

One important factor causing political instability, highlighted by public officials, is external interventions by foreign governments and international organizations. One official stated:

"International pressure from countries like India, Iran, and America impacts our stability" (P030).

This highlights that external forces play a very crucial role in the political stability of any country.

Public officials also highlighted the impact of international financial institutions:

"First of all, the main factor is the economy, financial position, foreign loans, not using our resources, trade deficit due to more imports and fewer exports" (P029).

"Foreign aid and loans often come with conditions that force the government to implement unpopular policies leading to public dissatisfaction and unrest" (P02).

The responses given by the public officials raise a question about whether seeking financial help from international institutions is good for the country or not, as after they provide loans, we are bound to follow their instructions, which causes a threat to integrity and sovereignty.

Another official, highlighting the geopolitical factor that influences political instability, said:

"External interventions are not just economic but also geopolitical. Countries like the United States have strategic interests that sometimes conflict with our national interests, causing further instability" (P07).

Once again, it is an example of geopolitical interests held by superpowers conflicting with national sovereign security measures. The participation of such nations corrupts domestic politics and usually results in foreign-dictated policies rather than those that would serve their own people.

Establishment Intervention

Numerous officials highlighted the importance of keeping the establishment out of politics, as it is a key driver of overall political instability. One official said:

"The intervention of the establishment in politics is the main reason that persists political instability in Pakistan. The establishment did not let any elected government in the past complete its constitutional tenure" (P01).

Another public official said:

"Due to the Army's role and martial laws, it shows that Pakistan is a politically unstable country" (P029).

These views state that military intervention interrupts the democratic process and causes a politically unstable government. Another public official highlighted the continuous and ongoing interference and its impact on governance:

"The establishment has consistently interfered in political matters, preventing the development of a stable democratic system" (P04).

This shows that continuous establishment intervention prohibits democratic institutions and procedures from doing their work properly. It implies that the military and other establishments should stay away from political activities in order for politics to achieve stability.

One official said:

"Political instability is only due to the military role; however, civil bureaucracy is being used by military bureaucracy. Civil bureaucracy obeys the order of the government regardless of which party is in government and does not even hesitate or react to any illegal order. But on top, there is the Army who run the country. Civil bureaucracy cannot change anything but to follow government order" (P030).

Power Hunger

Power hunger is another factor identified by the interviewees. One official said:

"Political instability occurs due to improper hold of government and intervention of other institutions in all matters. Once government and political entities get a strong hold of all political matters and situations, instability will disappear, but institutions don't want to let go of their political hold and power" (P010).

This is a statement that clearly shows that the power struggles, as well as so many interfering bodies of institutions, are the root causes behind political instability. However, fights among the political parties to take control and influence the administration process keeps a government politically unstable.

Another public official said:

"Power Struggle, Opposition Movements, Regional Disparities, Economic Crisis, Natural Disasters, and External Factors play an important role" (P011).

Public officials also noted the role of personal ambitions:

"Leaders often prioritize their own ambitions and control over state resources, which leads to corruption and nepotism, further destabilizing the political environment" (P05).

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One official illustrated the issue with a recent example of elections:

"Recent elections were a clear example of the hold of other entities. Regardless of the immense support for the relevant party, the government was set up by those entities. So, it doesn't matter what people actually want for their country or whom they see as their leaders; it's always preplanned according to their benefits" (P010).

The result of a general election appears to have been affected by the powerful manipulation, causing damage to democracy and greater political instability.

Challenges Faced by Public Officials

Personal Challenges

When the political environment is unstable, public officials are struggling with numerous personal issues as well - from self-preservation to psychological stress.

One official said:

"With political instability, lawlessness also comes, affecting the safety of officials" (P04).

The consistent risk of life stops the officials from carrying out their duties, creating a work environment that leads to stress and demotivation. Public officials also stated the psychological effects of it.

"Job satisfaction is what you want to do and what impact it has, a positive impact. If you are doing something which is not productive and not producing any positive impact, and you keep working on stereotypical things, then it leads to job dissatisfaction" (P03).

This demonstrates that political instability influences not only governance, but public officers have impacts on mental health and job satisfaction as well. Frustration and dissatisfaction are the result when we fail to find any meaningful work where our efforts actually have a positive impact.

"Political instability leads to situations where public officials fear for their lives and safety, making it difficult to perform their duties effectively" (P06).

Another public official highlighted the impact of political instability on mental health:

"Yes, definitely, it affects the morale and motivation of our colleagues, and with the passage of time, it is increasing. And if the same circumstances persist, we will have to face very pitiful or disappointing situations" (P03).

Politicians were also considered a source of pressure.

"Continuously, politicians gave orders to officials for their benefits, and officials make a mind what Minister Sir is saying, I have to do that only so they save their skills and stop giving input" (P04).

The quote illustrates how politicians exploit public officials for their own interests. This reduces the independence of officials, as they strive to please their political bosses in order to retain their positions.

Another official said:

"During these times when political parties fight, they use public officials to collect or make evidence against each other, which causes a great shift in the goals and objectives of officials. For instance, police officers, tax officers, judiciary, etc., all would be doing the work of political parties instead of focusing on their goal of public service delivery" (P04).

This explains how a public official gets distracted from their duties. Instead of providing a public service to citizens, public officials start work to please their bosses.

Professional Challenges

From a professional view, policy inconsistency and resource constraints affect public officials. One official said:

"We make decisions according to the policy of a government, and suddenly the government changes overnight and reverses the policy. It affects our administrative works because we have made decisions according to the former ones" (P05).

Another highlighted the impact of inconsistency in policies, one public official said:

"If there is a politically unstable government and the successive government's policies are affected by it, if there is a regime change, then the policies implemented by the previous government will not be carried forward by the next government" (P02).

This highlights the most important aspect of all, policy continuity. Now, long-term projects and initiatives are doomed to fail, ultimately affecting the progress of the nation.

Red-tapism is also considered a challenge for public officials, as it is a bureaucratic hurdle causing the effects on work of public officials.

"The role of a public or civil servant is very limited; he is bound in a circle. He can rearrange the things on his table, but if you think he or she can make huge decisions, it is next to impossible. The tenure of a civil servant to serve at a particular designation and place is 3 years according to law, but when the government changes without completing its tenure, the civil servants are afraid of doing anything against the new boss who comes into power due to political instability. If the boss gets angry, he transfers the civil servants, and it happens quite often that instead of letting a civil servant

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complete his tenure, he is transferred to remote areas, calling it a punishment for your decisions. If you decide against the boss's will, you will pay for it. But mostly people do not want to leave their comfort zone, so they do not go against the boss." (P01)

It is a statement that reflects clearly that public officials have little control in decision-making due to political instability.

Another official highlighted the impact on morale:

"The constant changes and lack of support lead to a decrease in morale and motivation among public officials. It's hard to stay focused and productive when you don't know what will happen next" (P05).

This highlights the uncertainty in the political environment, and it makes it difficult for public officials to work happily.

Another official illustrated the impact of instability on policy implementation:

"We start working on projects and policies as per the guidelines of the current government, and if the government changes, all our efforts go in vain because the new government comes with its own agenda and policies. It becomes a waste of resources and time" (P07).

Coping Mechanisms

Moving towards the coping mechanisms, this topic investigates how public officials manage the challenging conditions of political instability. It consists of the following two sub-themes, i.e., Individual Responses and Institutional Responses.

Individual Responses

On a personal level, public officials might use different personal coping mechanisms like knowing and playing by the rules, keeping their minds ethically & morally strong, keeping themselves calm, minding their own business, staying away from political affiliations, etc.

The majority of our interviewees said that the best way or best strategy for coping with political instability is to know the rules and play by the rules. In the perceptions of public officials, to know and play by the rules is a very effective mechanism to cope with political instability. Public Officials should abide by the law.

"You should abide by the law; you should not exceed your mandate." (P01)

"You should not go beyond the given mandate and law. Public officials do not have a personal language to communicate; laws provide us with the protocols to communicate, and our communication is solely based on the language of law and mandate. Civil servants do have personal interests; they do favouritism, but if you follow the rules and regulations, your personal interests are nullified to a maximum extent." (P01)

“Just that you have to play your part, if you think that the high ups they are involved in any types of malpractices, then we do not need to... we are not accountable for that. We are accountable for our deeds, which we have responsibilities, and I intend to stick to those responsibilities.” (P02)

“Develop a realistic view of life, do not get sensitive about everything. Youngsters behave sensitively, which makes it difficult to cope with situations, so they should learn how to behave and cope with the uncertainties and learn to act sensibly without getting emotionally involved. Secondly, you should abide by the law in every situation and never deviate from it. Thirdly, your personal interests should be kept aside while performing your duties as public officials so that you can make decisions on merit.” (P01)

“I take help from available rules & regulations. I take reference from the rules for my actions.” (P05)

“They should be vibrant, vigilant, and be aware of the rules and regulations, know about rulings of their work.” (P05)

“I follow rules and regulation pertain to any particular situation and specific circumstance, and follow the guidelines of my seniors and policy guidelines issued by the head of department, also implement the same at my offices. We, as government servants, are bound to follow the rules and policies.” (P028)

There is also a high perception of further education and training as mechanisms for increasing resilience and professional skills. It is an opportunity for many public officials to obtain knowledge and best practices in their field. Sincerity with the job and awareness of its job description are seen as the best coping mechanisms.

“I can give you instances, a decision of A.S.I of police (low rank of police) is unchallenged to the Supreme Court. If you’re sincere with your job, you cannot be influenced or affected.” (P04)

Institutional Responses

Leadership is seen as a very crucial element regarding the institutional responses. The majority of our interviewees focused on leadership, and the majority of them have a single stance that strong leadership can save the institute from being affected during the challenging times of Political Instability.

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“Leadership or top-level management should not take pressure. If it takes pressure, it will not be able to help employees or subordinates. If it does not take pressure, it will help and encourage employees to cope.” (P04)

“Leadership should be strong so that it may help its subordinates not to take external pressure, and subordinates also feel satisfied and secure. Weak leadership does the opposite.” (P05)

“A leader can nicely manage everything, without any hesitation, so a leader should be bold and the positive minded. He can give equal rights to subordinates.” (P06)

Another essential institutional response is to enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms. Institutions help foster accountability and transparency in decisions made by public officials, provide a paradox of good governance and transparency, besides reducing corruption far better.

“If I could implement one policy to better support public officials during political instability, I would focus on building a more decentralized decision-making structure and ensuring transparency in everything. (highlighting)” (P07)

“Leadership's pivotal role in aiding government officials to manage political instability is essential. Effective leaders offer direction, stability, and encouragement, fostering confidence and teamwork amidst uncertainty. They advocate transparency, open dialogue, and cooperation to unite the organization” (P09)

“I would suggest fostering open dialogue, reinforcing organizational structures to withstand disturbance, and emphasizing transparency and accountability.” (P09)

Discussion

This finding is consistent with what is available in the literature on public officials and the impact of political instability on them. Though political stability is a requirement in the achievement of administrative capacity, it is needed to provide sufficient time to the programs in place (Milio, 1989).

The coping strategies were aligned with the recommendations of Heifetz et al., like acting within the limits of the law and having strong leadership. (2009) and Cooper et al. Adapted from Stressed For Success by Dr. Interwoven (2001) on adaptive leadership and stress management. This emphasis on the need to be transparent and accountable echoes in a different sphere as well - It fits perfectly in

what Provan and Kenis (2008) claim are some of the main motivators of good governance, which is also backed by Bovens (2007).

This research paper provides a complement to the academic work on the empirical data of how the political instability in Pakistan is interpreted and handled by the officials. It emphasizes the need to build strong institutions and leadership in order to deal with the instability that is associated with political dysfunction. With such systemic problems, the policymakers should establish a supportive policy environment to enable gradual, sustainable development, improve the delivery of public services, and have confidence in the institutions of governance. And so they are significant strides to long-term stability and prosperity.

The findings also indicate that aid and loan terms imposed by international actors can lead to increased instability. Such reforms are supposed to be channeled in curbing the power struggle and ensuring that each arm of government operates within its boundaries. The institutions of democracy must also be enhanced and the good governance practices promoted as critical instruments that would bring about stability.

All this research is an indication of the complex relationship between political instability and the negative effects of change in Pakistan. These are narrations of people in positions of power, and the lessons they have acquired can be used to guide what other policymakers, providers, or practitioners in the same kind of settings should be considering. Also, it is possible to introduce future studies on the long-term consequences of these coping mechanisms and determine the extent to which suggested reforms were likely to contribute to the realization of political stability.

Adaptation of the proposed strategies will help Pakistan establish a more stable and efficient governance, and address the issues that have been identified to improve the working conditions of public officials, which in general will lead to an increase in trust and level of satisfaction of citizens. The keys to this transformation are transparency and accountability, which ensure that a public servant is able to perform their functions extremely well, even in the face of political turbulence.

Conclusion

The results expound an agreement among the authorities on the definition and the effects of political instability. Political Instability has been understood as a situation in which the constant change of governance has an impact on the continuity of policies, which leads to unrest among the people, economic collapse, and mistrust. This brings out the long-run impacts or implications of the political

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instability on the capacity and service delivery in governance, and the development, through governance, to the socio-economic performance.

The justifications mentioned by the officials of the population are largely presented in the context of outside interventions and power desires. Foreign policies and international financial institutions, politics within the country, and past military interventions are crucial in making Pakistan politically unstable. These are aspects that not only disrupt internal governance but also hinder the development of long-term policies and a stable economy.

Also, the challenges that the representatives of the state experience during the period of political instability are complicated. They also endure individual issues such as the security risks and psychological stressors, which have enormous impacts on their performance effectiveness.

Professional challenges like inconsistencies in policies and complexities of bureaucracy are also parallel to operational challenges, and they contribute to the hindrance of the delivery of public service.

It is these challenges that invite the application of coping mechanisms by the officials of the government, be it at the individual or the institutional level. On the individual level, the officials emphasize the observance of legal regulations, ethical conduct, and lifelong learning as the means of bargaining with political turmoil. Good institutional-level leadership is quite critical; leaders who are able to offer constancy during the period of chaos can offer a secure and safe environment to the subordinates. Development of institutional accountability mechanisms and decentralization of decision-making power are considered as the parameters of the policy in order to curb the negative impact of political instability.

All these arguments indicate the urgent need to undertake extensive reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, limiting foreign interventions, and advancing robust governance structures in Pakistan. The identified systemic issues require policymakers to strive in an effort to help solve them in case they are planning to have an environment that will support sustainable development and better delivery of the services to the people, as well as an environment where people will develop trust in the governmental institutions. These are important initiatives to long term stability and prosperity.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

Like all studies, this study also has some limitations; one limitation is that this study only investigates Lahore, which could impact the generalizability of findings at other regions and levels of government within Pakistan. In addition, this study is being conducted for a single point in time,

study will not necessarily keep up with current events in the future. In the future, it is a possibility that perceptions and trends may change, which would affect the perceptions of public officials. Furthermore, this study is mostly conducted by male members in the majority. The views of the establishment should also be studied.

Future recommendations include that a longitudinal study should be conducted. Also, a diversity in methodology could confirm qualitative findings with quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive examination of the quantifiable effects and successful coping strategies of political instability. For broader generalizability, studies should be conducted in other geographical regions of Pakistan and abroad.

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