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## Pakistan Early Turmoil: The Roots of Political Chaos and Military Dominance in 1947-58

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### ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, political chaos has been a constant problem since its beginning in 1947. It has diminished economic, social and democratic development. There were many causes of political chaos including the deaths of the greatest leaders Muhammad Ali Jinnah (first Governor-General of Pakistan) and Liaquat Ali Khan (first Prime Minister), rapidly changing civilian governments and the dissolution of the national assembly for their own purposes. The main purpose of this research is to analyze the first ten years of Pakistan to understand how democracy failed and how military dominance rose in early times. This study identifies and analyzes the roots and impacts of political chaos in Pakistan. Due to political instability and chaos, there was increased military intervention, corruption, and weakened political institutions and civilian governments. After that Ayub Khan directly imposed martial law in 1958. This research utilizes qualitative research and historical and analytical design to

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identify the roots of political chaos and military intervention in early years. The primary and secondary data were collected through research articles, government websites and peer-reviewed journals. These sites and sources provide detailed and analytical information for understanding civil-military relations. There are two theories applied to this research as civil military relations (Huntington, 1957), which identifies weak civilian governments that are enabling military intervention, and political culture theory (Finer, 1962), which explains why societies with low political culture are vulnerable to military takeover. The findings indicate that in the early years of Pakistan political chaos was caused by fragile institutions, insincere leadership and frequently changing prime ministers of Pakistan (Jalal,1990). The 1954 dissolution of the Constituent Assembly weakened parliamentary authority and normalized executive interference, which reduced civilian control over state institutions. These factors raised the role of bureaucracy and the military in the political system of Pakistan. Therefore, the imbalance of power between military and civilians set a pattern in early years which still affects the country's political affairs.

**Keywords:** Political chaos, Military rule, Weak civilian government, Political Institutions, Democratic failure

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## INTRODUCTION

The inception of Pakistan was based on Islam and democratic provisions. Elections were held based on these same provisions in 1945-46 but after independence it faced many challenges in the way of democracy. There were many determinants responsible for the failure of democracy and political chaos in early years 1947-58. Military rule is one of the most significant factors that badly affected the country's political and economic growth and development. It had happened because of inefficient leadership. After inception, and the deaths of greatest leaders Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan no one was loyal to the country (Bandyopadhyay, 2022). Other political parties and leaders worked for their own political advancement. Ghulam Muhammad (governor general of Pakistan) unconstitutionally dissolved the first Constituent Assembly and claimed that it failed to frame a constitution in seven years. After this step he lost the confidence of the public.

He also removed prime minister Khawaja Nazimuddin in 1953. He called back Muhammad Ali Bogra from the USA and appointed him as Prime minister of Pakistan. This move of Governor-General Ghulam Muhammad was a big blunder because Bogra was an ambassador of Pakistan to the USA (bureaucrat) and not a person with a political mandate (Callard, 1957). In 1953-58, the political crisis increased because the Governor-General rapidly changed civilian governments for his own purpose and political advancement. In just eleven years, seven civilian governments changed in undemocratic ways. At that time politicians were playing a seesaw game to gain power. These days, the National assembly has played no significant role in political affairs. These were the causes that destroyed the structure of the county. The biggest mistake was that civilians involved the military in political affairs (Rizvi, 2000).

Military institutions emerged as the most powerful and disciplined institutions in the chaotic environment. For the first time the military took over in Pakistan in 1958 under Ayub Khan. He imposed martial law, abolished the 1956 constitution and dissolved the National Assembly (Ergashev, 2025). This sets a pattern in early years which still affects the country's political affairs. It was the reason for political chaos, civil military imbalance and failure of democracy in early years. So, from this point, the role of bureaucracy and military increased in Pakistan (Shafqat, 2019). Pakistan's early political instability was not merely a result of leadership failure, but a structural process through which weak institutions gradually enabled military dominance.

In contemporary times, the early years pattern continues as civilian governments are weak, and the military dominates Pakistan indirectly. In the 1950s the Governor-General rapidly changed civilian governments in undemocratic ways for their own purpose but now the National Assembly passes constitutional amendments as on the 26th and 27th through these amendments the military wants to do the same thing legally. The 27th amendment gave the additional role of Chief of defense forces (CDF) to Army Chief Asif Munir and extended his term to 2030. These amendments strengthen military rule while weakening the judicial and legislative system. The role of CDF in the military is more secure than elected leader because removing the CDF needs two-thirds of minority in parliament. while an elected leader needs a simple majority in parliament. Therefore, the pattern of early years did not end but existed in a new form today (Butt et al., 2025). Existing literature on this study treats early years and contemporary times as separate subjects. Many scholars have studied Pakistan political history including early political chaos, failures of democracy and military intervention but have not linked these recent developments like amendments with history of early years (Talbot, 1998; Ziring, 1980). Basically, they did not directly link early times with today. This study linked directly and explained how democracy failed and the cause of political chaos in Pakistan.

### **Problem statement**

In 1947, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan gained independence with hopes to establish a democratic and sovereign state. Despite this vision of the founding leader, (Muhammad Ali Jinnah) Pakistan failed to establish democratic governance within its first decade. In the Early times, Pakistan experienced institutional breakdown and political chaos due to the unconstitutional dissolution of the first constituent assembly, seven civilian governments that changed in just eleven years and no general election being held. However, these political crises destabilized civilian rule and raised military dominance in Pakistan (Jalal,1990). Despite extensive research on Pakistan's early political instability, there remains limited analytical work explaining how institutional weaknesses between 1947 and 1958 systematically enabled military dominance. Existing studies often treat political chaos and military intervention as separate phenomena or focus only on descriptive causes. This creates a gap in understanding the causal relationship between constitutional crises, weak civilian institutions, and the gradual rise of military authority. Therefore, this study examines

how structural and institutional failures in early Pakistan transformed political instability into sustained military dominance.

### **Research Question**

What determinants led to the failure of democracy, and the rise of military dominance in the early political system of Pakistan between 1947 and 1958?

### **Research Objectives**

To examine how political instability increased after the deaths of the greatest leaders of Pakistan (Quaid -e- Azam and Liaquat Ali Khan).

To identify and analyze how the political crisis of 1953-58 created the conditions for military intervention in 1958.

To compare early years' development with contemporary development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **According to Ismail et al. (2025):**

The research paper was authored by Muhammad Ismail, Asif Mehdi, Fatima Ali, and Aminah Gilani. The key problem of this study is understanding the dynamics (causes and impacts) of political instability in Pakistan in its early years. The aims of the study include the identification of social and political causes of political instability, a comprehensive study of impacts on democracy, political institutions and economic development, and a study of external geopolitical factors. This study uses a qualitative descriptive research approach for studying the dynamics of political instability in Pakistan. Primary and secondary data were collected from peer reviewed articles, academic journals and policy reports. The methodology is organized thematically and studies bureaucratic corruption, military dominance and ethnic divisions. While existing studies identify key causes of instability, they often lack a theoretical explanation of how these factors translate into military dominance.

The key findings of this study are the identification of eleven causes of political instability as military dominance, weak and corrupt political institutions, ethnic divisions, cold war, absence of political decision-making by civilian governments and absence of free and fair elections (Ismail et al. (2025). Due to these causes of political instability, Pakistan faced many challenges in political, social and economic areas such as social unrest, poor governance, rising poverty, economic difficulties and weakened political institutions. This study concludes with multiple reforms such as judicial independence, economic development, decentralization of power, decreasing the role of military and bureaucrats in politics and strengthening of the media. Through these reforms we overcame political instability and brought political stability for a long time in Pakistan.

### **Research gaps**

Despite its comprehensive contribution to this paper, it also contains several research gaps that limit its analytical depth. Firstly, the most critical research gap of this study is the absence of a historical analysis of the early period (1948-58). The author just focuses on presenting the causes and impacts of political instability in Pakistan. This is a fundamental gap because Pakistan faced many challenges in early

years such as establishing military dominance, constitutional manipulation, and political crisis. Secondly, the major research gap of this study is the absence of a structural theoretical framework. This research uses qualitative and descriptive research methods. Therefore, the study is conducted in a descriptive mode and does not explain the theories of Civil military relations, political developments and institutionalism. Due to the absence of a theoretical framework this study did not explain in-depth insights for comparative study. Thirdly, this study did not try to link the early years (1947-58) to contemporary times. Therefore, the methodology section of this paper is deficient.

This study addresses these gaps of Muhammad Ismail research paper and provides a historical analysis of early years and employs a theoretical framework in which discusses two theories of Huntington (1957) theory (civil-military relations) and Finer (1962) theory (political culture theory). This study also provides a linkage between the history of Early years with contemporary times developments.

**According to Aisha et al. (2024):**

Aisha Bibi is a PhD scholar from University of Peshawar. Her paper Published in the Competitive Research Journal Archive (Vol. 2, No. 4, 2024), this article examines what the main root causes are the rise of military coup and failure of Leadership, Institutional and Structural, that accumulated progressively between 1947 and 1958. The main objective of this research is what factors created the condition for Pakistan's first military coup under General Ayub Khan in 1958 and examining the Political, Constitutional, Institutional, economic and administrative failure of Pakistan's that invited the military intervention. This article provides a comprehensive causal account of military rule rather than treating the 1958 coup as a sudden or externally imposed event. This is the Qualitative oriented research methodology. This research methodology is based on primary and secondary sources such as books, magazines, libraries, research articles, newspapers, journals, and internet-based resources. This source base reflects a traditional historical methodology relevant under this period, where empirical data is derived from evidence rather than research. This Methodology is descriptive and scientific that identifies the main cause that raises the military take over.

This study identifies ten interconnected causes of Pakistan's first military rule. First, the delayed constitution, Pakistan drafted a constitution after nine years, on the other hand India completed its constitution within two years. Second, the 1956 constitution was abolished within two and half years. Third, no general election was held for eleven years that destroyed the democratic structure of Pakistan. Fourth, the direct military interference in civilian affairs. Fifth, the economic crisis of 1958 that caused food shortage and Inflation. Sixth, the imperfect role Muslim League, the poor legislature system, a corrupt bureaucracy destroying the national resources. Weak administration structure that causes institutional, political, and economic instability. Her emphasis on this research is that the main cause of turmoil and rise of military coup intervention is abolition of Constituent Assembly, absence of General Election, Changing seven Prime ministers. The present study is about imbalance between

military and civilian institutions and examines how the international factors reinforced the military dominance.

**Research Gap:**

Her only focuses on cause's only military rule not explaining why these things happened, such as not being used or explaining what theory applied in this research. The present study fills this gap in which apply elite, military Intervention, and Huntington's theory that explain the events successfully. Without this theory this research is like a simple explanation not seen in an analytical study. In which they also ignore the main key effect that raised the military coup, basically the main cause of colonial Britain rule that affected the Pakistan political system. The present study examines how colonial legacy caused the military dominance in early Pakistan.

The main research gap is only focused on how the military rose in the era of 1947 to 1958, she did not discuss the early events. This research does not clearly define the research question and its objectives. In academic research a research question gives direction and focus to the entire study. This article used very old references that were mostly published before 1990. She did not use modern research articles that work on military Intervention of Pakistan.

**According to Bandyopadhyay et al.**

In this literature review the author of this article is Drona Bandyopadhyay, who works as an assistant professor at Salboni Government College in West Bengal, India. Bandyopadhyay's South Asian but non-Pakistani background allows him to study the Pakistani political structure and its objectivity.

The focus of this research question is how Mohajir Community manages the political crisis, bureaucratic, and social Institutions after the 1947 partition. And further, what were the traditional and political crises that shaped their journey through Pakistan's first decade of creation, eventually leading to the collapse of parliamentary government in 1958? The main objectives of this research, find out the historical roots of Muslim community before the partition in India. Second in which examines how leading roles-built Pakistan earliest state institutions including bureaucracy, media and educational sector. Third, analyze the conflict that emerged in the muhajir community and local population of Pakistan. Fourth and finally, the main study of this research tries to examine how these traditional divisions and power struggles contributed to the breakdown of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan by 1958, and the rise of the military coup. In this article Bandyopadhyay used the qualitative method that meant he did not conduct surveys instead used secondary sources such as books, magazines, historical records, and academic articles. The findings of this author are that the Mohajir community held a significant advantage over other communities when Pakistan was created in 1947. They were largely educated, urban, professionally experienced, and politically organized, which allowed them to quickly fill the most important positions in the new state's institutions. In which he analyzes that the dominance began to decline when the death of Mohajir leader of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and then Liaquat Ali Khan caused the dominance of the military in state affairs. All of these factors together created the institutional and

political conditions that made Ayub Khan's military coup of 1958 not only possible but almost assured. The article also examines the causes of political instability and military dominance in Pakistan between 1947 and 1958.

**Research Gap:**

The first main gap of this research, the author only focuses on the Mohajir community, not on the main cause of military coup intervention in Pakistan in the era of 1947 to 1958. Second, in which the author discusses the growing power of the Punjabi military, he does not provide any systematic or theoretical analysis of civil-military relations. He does not explain the institutional mechanisms that cause military dominance. In this article, Huntington's theory of civil-military relations and Finer's institutional model to explain military dominance in a theoretically structured way. Another gap of this article is totally ignored constitutional and political crisis of this period such as dissolution of first Constituent Assembly, the delay of Constitution, the changing of continuously seven prime ministers, basically this is the main key roots of turmoil democracy and rise military dominance. Constitutional Amendments, which have further raised the military institutional power, are not examined in this research.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study employs two interconnected theories of Huntington and Finer to analyze the failure of democracy and military dominance in early years in Pakistan. These theories provide comprehensive and analytical insights about institutions and civil- military relations.

**Civil military relations Theory:**

This theory was introduced by Samuel R. Huntington in 1957. It provides a comprehensive and foundational basis for this study. This theory explains the relationship between military and civilians. Huntington argues that separation between military and civilian governments are vital elements for stable democratic governance and political development. According to him, when civilian governments and political institutions are weak and corrupt, then the military starts to intervene and increase its role and control in political affairs. This theoretical framework directly links with Pakistan's early years political crisis. In early years, civilian governments weakened and military dominance rose because of political crises such as, no loyal leaders after deaths of Jinnah and Liaquat, abrogation of constitution, abolition of constituent assembly and weak institutions. Huntington argues that weak civilian control invites military intervention. This is visible in the 1954 dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, where civilian authority itself undermined constitutional order, creating space for non-elected institutions.

**Political Culture Theory:**

This theory was introduced by Samuel Edward Finer in 1962. He was a British political scientist. He wrote a book "The man on horseback: The role of the military in politics. His main objective of study was why and how does the military intervene in politics in some countries but in all. Finer argues that military dominance does not depend on military intent, but it primarily depends on political culture. He explained

four types of political culture such as mature, developed, minimal and low political culture. When societies have matured and developed political culture, civilian governments are strong and the public has political awareness about political affairs. When societies have minimal and low political culture, civilian governments are weak and the public does not have political awareness about politics. Therefore, in these societies military dominance structurally became possible. In early years, Pakistan had minimal political culture, which means civilian governments were not powerful and the public also had minimal political awareness about political affairs. So according to him, the Ayub Khan military coup 1958 was not a sudden event but it occurred because of minimal political culture. Basically, Pakistan faced military coups three times in history (1958, 1969 and 1999) because of minimal or low political culture. Low Political culture is also a prominent factor that caused the failure of democracy and military dominance.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative research approach because the main research question requires an explanatory study of institutional behaviors, political and constitutional developments that cannot be deeply studied through a quantitative research approach. This study uses a qualitative historical method with process tracing to analyze how political events between 1947 and 1958 gradually shifted power from civilian institutions to the military. Key political crises are examined chronologically to identify causal relationships between institutional weakness and military intervention. Basically, this study is based on secondary sources such as the academic books of Huntington (1957) and Finer (1962), peer-reviewed journals and research articles.

### **Analysis and Discussion:**

This study examines the failure of democratic governance and the rise of military dominance in Pakistan between 1947 and 1958 through the application of theoretical frameworks developed by Samuel P. Huntington and Samuel Edward Finer. The analysis shows that military interventions are not sudden but rather caused by weak institutions, constitutional crises and Political Instability. According to Huntington's, in civil military relations theory the stability of the political system depends on the separation between civilian authority and military institutions. Civil institutions failed to establish control over the military due to leadership crisis and constitutional delays. Furthermore, a weak political culture also affected institutional weakness. (Huntington, 1968) Finer's Political culture theory provides further explanation for the rise of military dominance. This pattern clearly reflects institutional and political underdevelopment.

In the first decade of Independence the main cause of military intervention was absence of general elections, further weakening the political culture. This situation not only reduced accountability but also increased political instability, as power struggles among elites replaced democratic processes. As a result, the military, being a more organized and structured institution, emerged as a stabilizing force in a



turbulent political environment. (Finer, 1962) In this research paper, the primary cause of political instability and weak institutions was British colonialism. The legacy of British colonialism played a prominent role in shaping Pakistan's political structure. The colonial administrative system emphasized centralized authority and bureaucratic control, which continued after independence. This structural imbalance favored non-democratic institutions, particularly the civil bureaucracy and the military. (Jalal, 1990) The era between 1953 and 1958 marked an intensification of political instability, frequent changes in leadership and increasing executive interference. The appointment of non-elected individuals to key political positions further weakened democratic norms and entrenched the dominance of bureaucratic elites. These causes of instability and weak governance created the necessary conditions for direct military intervention. (Rizvi, 2000). The period between 1953 and 1958 marked a critical shift, where repeated constitutional violations normalized non-democratic intervention and eroded civilian authority. This analysis suggests that contemporary civil-military relations in Pakistan cannot be fully understood without examining the historical foundations laid between 1947 and 1958.

## CONCLUSION

This research analyzes the roots of political chaos and military dominance in Pakistan between 1947 and 1958, through a central research question: what determinants led to the failure of democracy and the rise of military dominance in Pakistan's early political system? This research was conducted through the qualitative methods applying Huntington's (1957) civil military relations theory and Finer's (1962) theory of military intervention (Huntington, 1957; Finer, 1962). This study shows that military dominance in Pakistan was not sudden but developed through a series of institutional failures between 1947 and 1958. These early patterns created a long-term imbalance between civilian and military power that continues to influence Pakistan's political system. The findings of this study confirm that the deaths of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan created an irreplaceable civilian authority. The nine-year delay in constitution-making, the unconstitutional dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1954, the dismissal of elected prime ministers without democratic justification, and the complete absence of general elections for eleven years collectively destroyed the institutional foundations of democratic governance (Bibi, 2024). Most significantly, this study demonstrates that the civil-military imbalance established in 1947–1958 has not been overcome but has persisted and evolved (Shafqat, 2019).

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