

[Working Paper Series: Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance in Asia – Part 2]

Pandemic Crisis and Democratic Governance in Pakistan

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Introduction

Since the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in China in December 2019, globally, it has caused the death of over 2 million people, infected many millions more, and compelled governments around the world to lock down their population.¹ Since December 2019, where on the one hand the pandemic has upended global life, global economy, national and global health systems, it has also affected democratic governance around the world and has forced many governments and systems to grapple with policies and actions that are feared to leave behind significant geopolitical wreckage.

This paper examines how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected democratic governance in Pakistan, an electoral democracy, which is continuously characterized as a “Hybrid Regime” in the Economist’s Democracy Index Regime,² owing to the role and influence of the military in politics and the ongoing concerns regarding the rule of law in Pakistan.

The Phenomenon of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Even though the first statement regarding the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China was announced on January 8, 2020, it took the World Health Organization (WHO) over 8 weeks to declare the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. This declaration was made on March 11, 2020, as more than 118,000 cases were detected in more than 110 countries and territories. By the end of May 2020, more than 5.5 million COVID-19 cases had been reported around the world.

Several leading studies from as early as May 2020 indicated that COVID-19 was undoing years of progress in curbing global poverty as the number of the poverty-stricken, which showed a pattern of a steady

¹ “Our coverage of the coronavirus,” The Economist, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/coronavirus-pandemic>.

² “Global democracy has a very bad year,” The Economist, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year>.

decrease earlier in the year, increased rapidly.³ Studies stated that the pandemic started a human development crisis that was equivalent to levels of deprivation during the mid-1980s. The sectors that were affected were the following: *income* (with the largest contraction in economic activity since the Great Depression), *health* (directly causing a death toll of over 300,000 and indirectly leading potentially to an additional 6,000 child deaths every day from preventable causes over the next 6 months) and *education* (with effective out-of-school rates – meaning, accounting for the inability to access the internet – in primary education expected to drop to the levels of actual rates of the mid-1980s levels).⁴

Many countries have had to declare a state of emergency to protect public health. From March 2020 to May 2020, at least 62 countries and territories had to postpone national and subnational elections, out of which at least 18 countries and territories decided to postpone national elections and referendums.⁵ In countries with weak democratic safeguards, there were concerns of autocrats using COVID-19 as an excuse to grab and hold onto power.⁶ Through the utilization of political predictions, social scientists and analysts argued that the pandemic might disrupt national politics⁷ leading to political instability, especially in developing countries already suffering from economic crises.⁸

Pakistan – An Overview

With a population of over 220 million people, Pakistan is the 5th most populous country in the world and its population is equivalent to 2.83% of the world's total population. The total land area of Pakistan is 770,880 Km² (297,638 sq. miles) and its population density is 287 per Km (742 people per mi²).⁹ A country situated in South Asia, Pakistan is bounded by Iran to the west, Afghanistan to the northwest, China to the northeast, and India to the east and southeast. The coast of the Arabian Sea forms its southern border.¹⁰

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and has a federal parliamentary democracy. It has a bicameral legislature at the federal level while each of the 4 provinces has unicameral legislatures. At the federal level, the Prime Minister is elected from the National Assembly, a population-based house, where seats are allocated to each province and federal capital based on population. In the National Assembly, elections are held by the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system while seats reserved for the women and non-Muslim population are chosen by the

³ "Covid-19 is undoing years of progress in curbing global poverty," The Economist, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/international/2020/05/23/covid-19-is-undoing-years-of-progress-in-curbing-global-poverty>

⁴ "COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery," United Nations Development Programme, accessed: May 28, 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/hdp-covid>.

⁵ "Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections," International IDEA, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>.

⁶ "Would-be autocrats are using covid-19 as an excuse to grab more power," The Economist, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/international/2020/04/23/would-be-autocrats-are-using-covid-19-as-an-excuse-to-grab-more-power>.

⁷ Alice Wenner, "Our Democracy Depends on A Safe Election in November," Fsi.stanford.edu, Stanford University, May 26, 2020, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/our-democracy-depends-safe-election-november>.

⁸ Nic Cheeseman, "The Coronavirus Could Topple Governments Around the World," Foreignpolicy.com, Foreign Policy, March 31, 2020, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/31/coronavirus-regime-change-could-topple-governments-around-the-world/>.

⁹ "Pakistan population live," Worldometer, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/pakistan-population/>.

¹⁰ "Pakistan", Britannica, accessed January 28 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pakistan>.

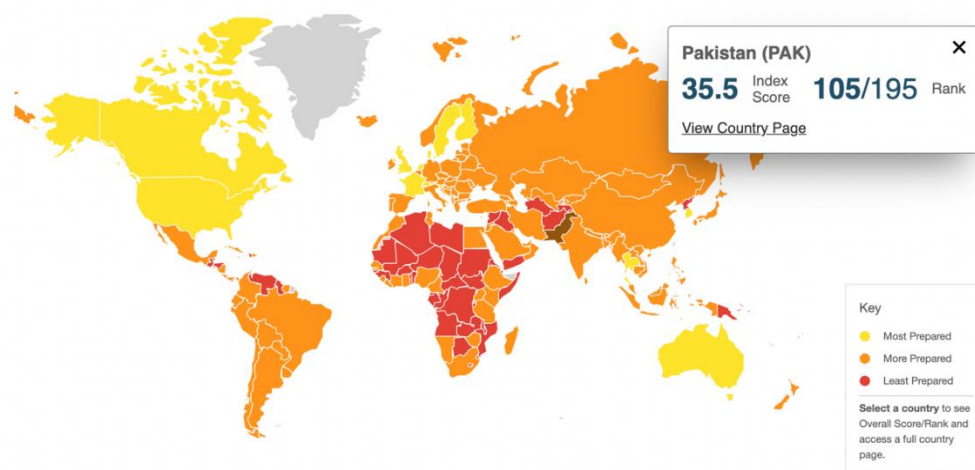
Proportional Representation (PR) system. The National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies each have a 5-year term. The executive authority of the federation is exercised in the name of the President by the Federal Government, consisting of the Prime Minister and the Federal Ministers. This is similar in the provinces where Chief Ministers, together with provincial cabinets, exercise executive authority in each of the 4 provinces. Seats in the Senate of Pakistan are equally allocated to each of the 4 provinces and are filled through PR system through the single transferable vote. The Senate does not dissolve while election on half of its seats is carried out every 3-years.¹¹

The latest general election in Pakistan was held in 2018 and resulted in Mr. Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to form government the Federal Government and Provincial Governments in 3 out of 4 provinces in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and a coalition government in Balochistan. Only one out of four provinces, i.e., Sindh, is governed by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

COVID-19 in Pakistan

The global health security index shows Pakistan in the list of 'more prepared' countries with an index score of 35.5 against the overall average GHS Index score of 40.2 out of a possible 100 highlighting that collectively, international preparedness for epidemics and pandemics remained very weak.¹²

Figure 1. 2019 Global Health Security Index Map¹³



¹¹ Article 59 (3), Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. (25th Amendment incorporated) [As amended up to the 31st May, 2018]. http://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf

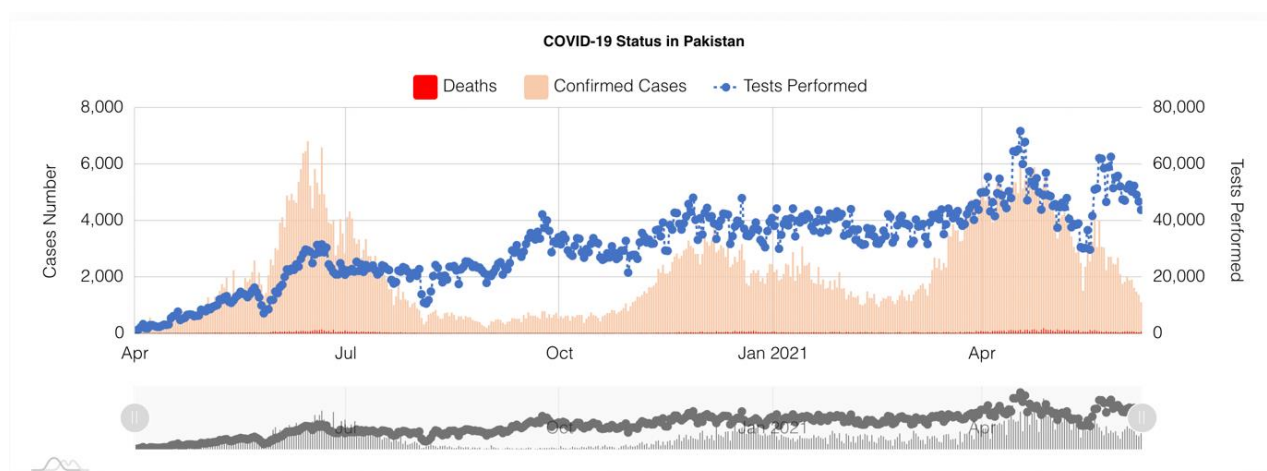
¹² "GHS Index Map," ghsindex.org, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.ghsindex.org/>.

¹³ "GHS Index Map," ghsindex.org, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.ghsindex.org/>.

From the last week of February 2020, when the first Pakistani citizen was diagnosed with the virus, to the third week of June, when COVID-19 cases are said to have peaked, Pakistan witnessed what is called the “First Coronavirus Wave.”¹⁴

However, the COVID-19 curve began to flatten by August 2020 in what many internationally called a “dramatic” reverse of COVID-19 cases and deaths decreased from more than 80% from their peaks. In its peak, wrote the Wallstreet Journal, Pakistan appeared to be ‘headed for disaster’ as it was at a peak of nearly 7000 new infections a day in June 2020, compared to Brazil, another developing country with similar population size. In August 2020, Pakistan recorded 903 new cases and the lowest death count of 27 in months. This happened despite India and Iran, Pakistan’s neighboring countries, peaking in infections and deaths at the time and while Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan, had ‘resisted advice from the World Health Organization, declaring in May that lockdowns are too costly for the poor and reopened the economy.’¹⁵

Figure 2. Status of Coronavirus Cases in Pakistan¹⁶



A more lethal second wave began in October 2020. On October 29, 2020, Pakistan reported over 1,000 COVID-19 cases which showed a rising peak after August 2020 when Pakistan first appeared to have got the pandemic pretty much under control. (See Figure 1). However, the curve of infections only dipped briefly and spiked again in March 2021 crossing over 4000 new cases a day. The rate of infection continued to climb in April 2021, termed as the third wave, as daily infections crossed over 6000 new cases a day.

Global data showing cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases shows that with 19 cases per million people, Pakistan has managed to avoid some of the most catastrophic impacts of the virus seen around the world. A similar trend is witnessed with 19 or 0.33 deaths per million due to COVID-19.

In December 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) began listing various COVID-19 vaccines for

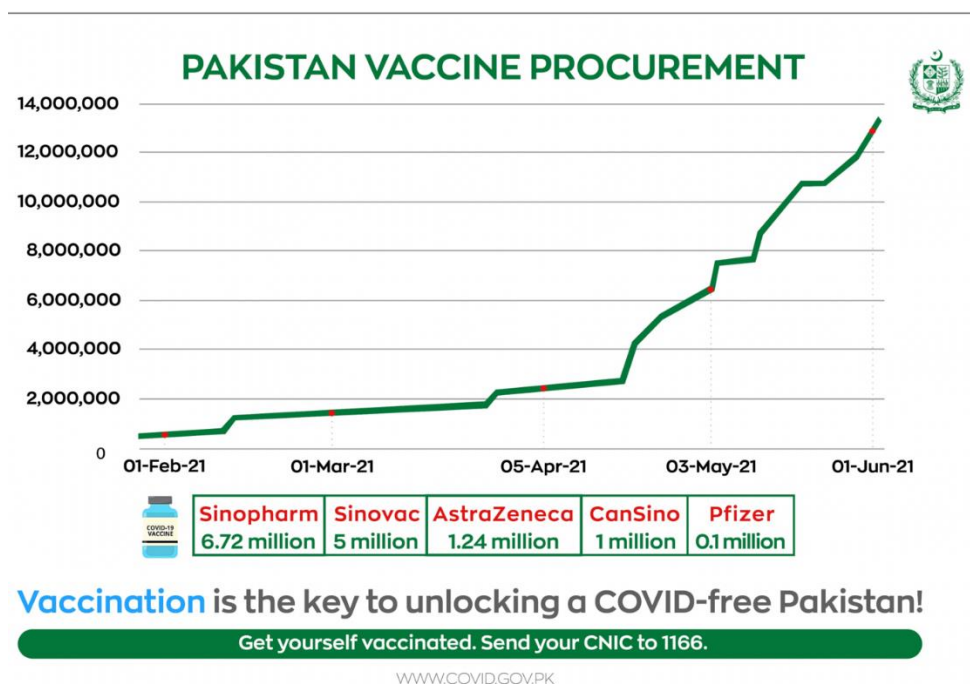
¹⁴ Ikram Junaidi, “Pakistan may soon cross peak of first wave as cases surge,” Dawn, March 28, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1615031/pakistan-may-soon-cross-peak-of-first-wave-as-cases-surge>.

¹⁵ Saeed Shah, “Why Youthful, Conservative Pakistan Is a Coronavirus Bright Spot,” The Wall Street Journal, August 01, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-youthful-conservative-pakistan-is-a-coronavirus-bright-spot-11596297600>.

¹⁶ “Covid-19 Status in Pakistan,” Covid.gov.pk, June 10, 2021, <https://covid.gov.pk/>.

WHO Emergency Use Listing.¹⁷ Pakistan, however, only began administering vaccines to the general population in March 2021, beginning with Sinopharm and Sinovac, vaccines developed and donated by China to Pakistan. Later, more vaccines became available in Pakistan ranging from AstraZeneca, CanSino, and Pfizer/BioNtech (see Figure 2) through COVAX.¹⁸

Figure 3. Vaccine Procurement in Pakistan (February 1-June 1, 2021)¹⁹



Pakistan administered 19 doses per 100 people by June 09, 2021.²⁰ The country plans to vaccinate 70 million of its adult population by the end of 2021. On June 8, 2021, Pakistan administered 10 million COVID-19 vaccine doses.²¹

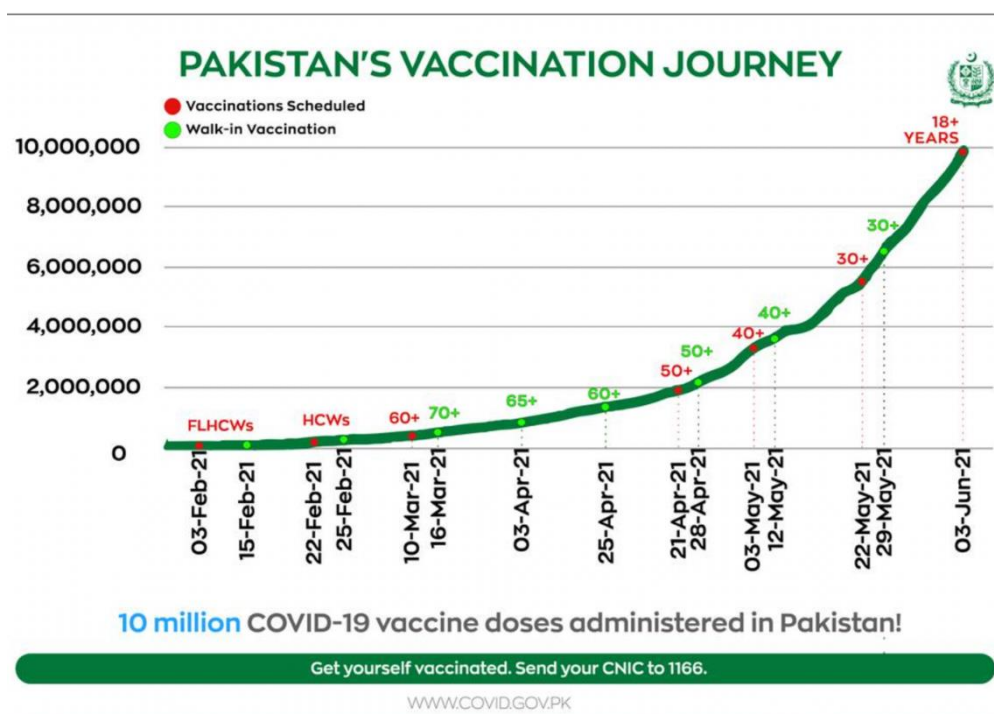
¹⁷ “Is there a vaccine for COVID-19?” WHO, May 13, 2021, accessed June 10, 2021, [https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccines](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccines)

¹⁸ “COVAX,” WHO, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>.

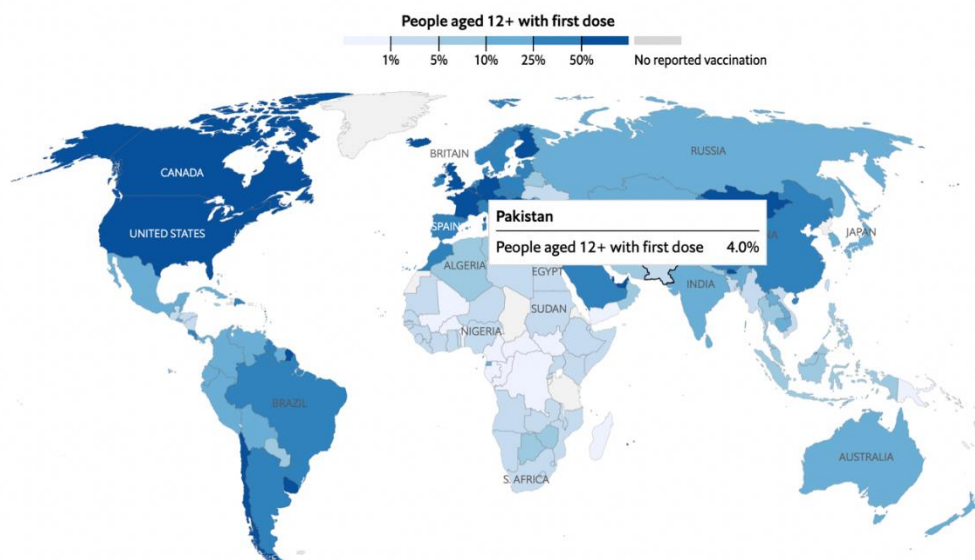
¹⁹ Faisal Sultan, Twitter Post. June 09, 2021, 07:32 pm. <https://twitter.com/fslsltn/status/1402634782371155968>.

²⁰ “Pakistan Coronavirus Pandemic Country Profile,” ghsindex.org, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/pakistan>.

²¹ “Pakistan administers 10 millionth Covid vaccine dose,” Dawn, June 08, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1628416/pakistan-administers-10-millionth-covid-vaccine-dose>.

Figure 4. Vaccination in Pakistan²²

Owing to the size of the population and the growing phenomenon of vaccine apartheid,²³ Pakistan's vaccination journey is presented in the global comparison in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Status of Coronavirus Vaccination around the World²⁴

²² Faisal Sultan, Twitter Post. June 10, 2021, 02:33 pm. <https://twitter.com/fslsltn/status/1402921959420276737>.

²³ "World has entered stage of 'vaccine apartheid' - WHO head," Reuters, May 17, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/world-has-entered-stage-vaccine-apartheid-who-head-2021-05-17/>

²⁴ "Our coverage of the coronavirus," The Economist, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/coronavirus-pandemic>.

After the partial lockdown during the first wave, Pakistan did not opt for full lockdown in view to avoid crippling the economy. Even though the World in Data has calculated the Pakistan government stringency index score to be at 63.43²⁵ in terms of strict policy response to coronavirus, only partial or smart lockdowns have been put in place at various stages throughout the pandemic tightening social distancing and restrictions on movement and public gatherings. Largely, the public did not favor strict lockdowns as it negatively impacted the economy. This meant that partial lockdowns allowed both industry, transport, and economy to remain functional. This, however, has not completely protected Pakistan's economy from the impact of COVID-19. Pakistan's economy had begun facing a negative GDP growth in 2019-2020.²⁶ As the IMF declared the economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic to be the worst since the Great Depression,²⁷ the World Bank warned of significant economic, social, and poverty impacts of this pandemic in Pakistan.²⁸ Local analyses also predicted rising levels of poverty and inequality.²⁹ While the incumbent government in Pakistan celebrated wins such as improvements in the current account and increase in foreign remittances, it has also estimated a GDP growth rate of 3.94%, way above the 1% growth rate predicted by the IMF, owing to policies aimed at boosting agriculture, industry, and services.³⁰

So, despite challenges faced by developing countries in health, economy, and lack of robust structures of democratic governance, how has Pakistan managed to evade some of the worst fallout of the pandemic despite the intensity felt in other South Asian neighbors, such as India.

Response: From Democratic Governance to Hybrid Structures

Even before COVID-19, Pakistan, characterized as a “Hybrid Regime,”³¹ owing to the role and influence of the military in politics, was faced with multiple democracy crises of electoral legitimacy and electoral meddling, populism and partisan accountability, institutions overreaching their constitutional domains, weak political parties, public distrust of politics, and performance of democratic governance. Pakistan's fledgling democracy appeared to be in a constant struggle to evolve out of the authoritarian shadows of the past.

²⁵ “Pakistan: Government Stringency Index,” Our World in Data, accessed June 10, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/pakistan>.

²⁶ S. Akbar Zaidi, “A forgettable year for Pakistan's economy,” East Asia Forum, January 01, 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/01/01/a-forgettable-year-for-pakistans-economy/>.

²⁷ “The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression,” IMF, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/03/23/pr2098-imf-managing-director-statement-following-a-g20-ministerial-call-on-the-coronavirus-emergency>.

²⁸ “COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Response,” The World Bank in Pakistan, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/coronavirus>

²⁹ Hafeez A. Pasha and Shahid Kardar, “Revisiting economic impact of coronavirus,” Business Recorder, April 14, 2020, <https://epaper.brecorder.com/2020/04/14/14-page/833587-news.html>.

³⁰ Imran Khan, Twitter post, May 21, 2021, 7:34 pm, <https://twitter.com/ImranKhanPTI/status/1395749812373446662>

³¹ “Global democracy has a very bad year,” The Economist, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year>.

The Pandemic Backsliding Project capturing the extent to which state responses to COVID-19 violated democratic standards for emergency responses, shows that in managing the pandemic, Pakistan's response has recorded 'some violations' affecting the quality of democratic governance.³²

This is indeed the case. Instead of utilizing existing civilian institutional structures of democratic governance, Pakistan has, instead, succumbed to its hybrid governance tendencies and created new structures under the administration of the military to respond to the pandemic. While the response seems to have helped Pakistan to deal with the pandemic reasonably well, this has deeper implications for an already strained civil and military relationship and the enlarging role of the military in governance. The COVID-19 management has further exacerbated the hybrid nature of Pakistan's de-facto system in its democratic governance.

In understanding the scale of this global public health crisis, comparisons have been drawn to earlier plagues and pandemics in the history of the world. One such comparison is drawn with the mid-1300 bubonic plague that resulted in the loss of half of Europe's population and the fall of the Roman empire.³³ The second, and most recent comparison, is made to the deadly influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919, which infected 500 million and killed 50 million people. However, in making such comparisons, historians have cautioned that crises like plagues and pandemics do not break societies, systems, and global order but instead they only exacerbate a crisis by revealing what is already broken.³⁴ Applying this analogy to the current challenges on Pakistan's democracy, it can be argued that COVID-19 has only revealed what was already strained in the system of democratic governance in Pakistan and this was witnessed through the continued interference of the military in the constitutionally demarcated domain of elected civilian governments. Management of COVID-19 in Pakistan has created a scenario in which the economic decline will further strain Pakistan's democratic governance, intensify authoritarian tendencies, and may result in the erosion of the already-strained public trust in democracy and democratic institutions.

Let us see the trajectory of how Pakistan dealt with the pandemic through creating hybrid structures under the military.

By February 2020, it was clear that the pandemic was spreading fast across the globe and specifically in Pakistan's neighborhood. Yet even as Iran saw a spike in cases and it was well known that it was only a matter of time before the infection would appear in Pakistan, Federal and Provincial governments remained relatively slow in their response. Precious time was wasted in debating the pros and cons of a lockdown which led to confusion in the context of the 'lives vs. livelihood' framing of a response. This confusion at the top percolated down to government policymaking and the administrative machinery leading to half-hearted measures at a time when a firm handling of the situation could have saved time, and possibly lives. Federal and Provincial governments experienced a non-ending series of crises, challenges, and uncertain policy outcomes. These months also witnessed a steep learning curve for decision-makers as they struggled to fight against the virus weighed down by

³² "Pandemic Backsliding: Democracy During COVID-19 (March to December 2020)," V-Dem, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/PanDem/>.

³³ Patrick Reis, "Ask an Expert on the Fall of Rome: Are we F-cked?" Rolling Stone, March 26, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/coronavirus-black-plague-fall-of-rome-973211/>.

³⁴ Patrick Reis, "Ask an Expert on the Fall of Rome: Are we F-cked?" Rolling Stone, March 26, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/coronavirus-black-plague-fall-of-rome-973211/>.

weak governance structures and acute political polarisation.³⁵

It was only on March 13, 2020, that Prime Minister Imran Khan convened a meeting of the National Security Committee on the “emerging public health threat of coronavirus pandemic.” It was announced that the Prime Minister formed and convened a National Coordination Committee for COVID-19 (NCC) under the Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health. The NCC was to include representation of all provinces and relevant civilian and military stakeholders to monitor the situation and make necessary decisions on a daily basis.³⁶ However, things did not go as planned as the initial meetings of the NCC were not attended by many key actors. The attendance thinned out even further in subsequent meetings as the Chief Ministers delegated their Chief Secretaries to attend the meetings. Even though the Prime Minister began to chair the meetings of the NCC himself, the NCC, under the civilian administration, was not getting the traction required for the challenge.

On April 1, 2020, the Pakistan Military’s Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced that a National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) was established to work as a “nucleus for the one-window operation” to manage COVID-19 with Commander Army Air Defence Command as its Chief Coordinator.³⁷ This meant the further entrenchment of Pakistan’s hybrid governance system through the establishment of a military-led National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC). The first-ever meeting of the NCOC was chaired by the Chief of Army Staff, and not the Prime Minister, even though almost the entire Federal Cabinet of the Prime Minister attended the meeting headed by the Army Chief.³⁸ Prime Minister only visited the NCOC on April 3, three days after its establishment and a Press release by the Prime Minister’s office noted that the NCOC “*is nerve center to synergize and articulate unified national effort against COVID-19, and to implement the decisions of National Coordination Committee on COVID-19. The center is one window operation to collate, analyze and process information based on digital input and human intelligence across Pakistan through all Provinces, AJ & K, GB & ICT dedicated representatives and centers.*” It also noted that “*recommendations based on information/data is then processed including health, finance, and all matter related to COVID-19 to NCC for real time projections and timely interventions by NCC headed by PM.*”³⁹

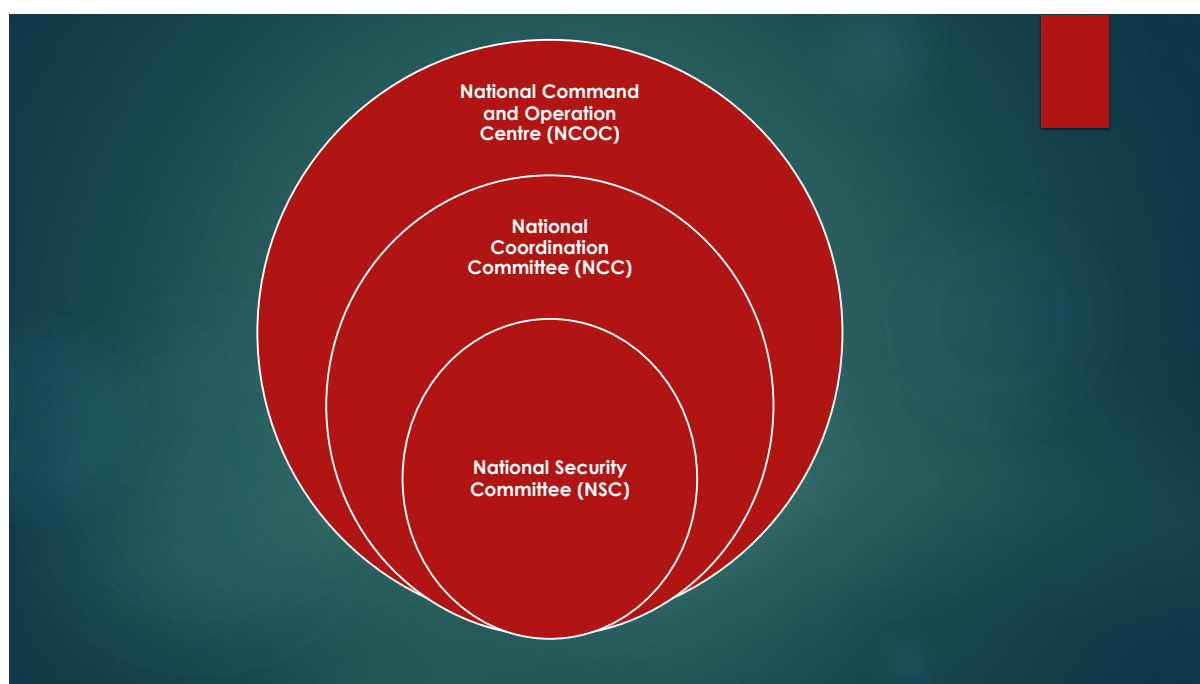
³⁵ Fahd Husain, Policy Issues relating to COVID-19 and Need for Policy Formulation by Political Parties (Pakistan: PILDAT, 2020), page 10, <https://pildat.org/political-parties1/policy-issues-relating-to-covid-19-and-need-for-policy-formulation-by-political-parties-discussion-paper>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ DG ISPR, Twitter Post, April 1 2020, 22: 37, <https://twitter.com/OfficialDGISPR/status/1245344582029713411> (accessed May 4 2020).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Prime Minister’s Office, “Prime Minister Imran Khan visited National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) for COVID-19 in Islamabad today,” Pmo.gov.pk, PMO, April 03, 2020, https://www.pmo.gov.pk/news_details.php?news_id=1068 (accessed August 15 2020).

Figure 6. Hybrid Governance: Structures within Structures⁴⁰

Thus, despite creating the NCC chaired by the Prime Minister to manage coronavirus across the country, the NCOC was created under the military as “*nerve centre to synergize and articulate unified national effort against Covid-19, and to implement the decisions of National Coordination Committee on Covid-19.*”⁴¹

The NCOC was constituted with the aim of leveraging resources, manpower, and expertise of multiple institutions that are all working as a team under one roof. The staffing of the organization reflects this aim. According to the official organogram, the NCOC reports to the National Coordination Committee (NCC) which in turn reports directly to the Prime Minister. The NCOC is led by the Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. The national coordinator for this body is the Commander of the Army Air Defence Command who is a three-star general. On the civilian side, the notified members of the NCOC were Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Federal Minister for Aviation, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Federal Minister for Federal Education, Professional Training, National Heritage and Culture, Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Federal Minister for Interior, Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Advisor to Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue, Advisor to Prime Minister on Commerce and Investment, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on National Security Division and Strategic Policy Planning, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health, in addition to the Chairman of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The Provinces are represented by the respective Chief Ministers or Chief Secretaries and other relevant civil and military officials. Joining via video conference, the provinces would provide situation reports to the main headquarter in Islamabad and coordinate not only in

⁴⁰ “PILDAT Monitor on Inter-Institutional Relations, April 2020,” PILDAT.Org, <https://pildat.org/inter-institutional-relations/pildat-monitor-on-inter-institutional-relations-in-pakistan-april-2020>.

⁴¹ “National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC),” NCOC, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://ncoc.gov.pk/>.

policymaking but its implementation as well. On the military side, the National Coordinator has been assisted by the Chief of Staff (COS) of the Army Air Defence. Other regular members include representatives from Military Operations (MO), Military Intelligence (MI), Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Air Force, as well as Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR).

The case of NCOC is the first hybrid response to the management of COVID-19 at a time when the political government and civil administration were ill-prepared for a crisis of such proportions. However, it did not remain the only hybrid model for long. When Pakistan was faced with the threat of locust, a National Locust Control Centre (NLCC) was also established with the Army's Engineer in Chief as its Chief Coordinator. Much like how the NCOC managed the pandemic, the NLCC was also run by the Pakistan Army with Chief of the Army Staff and Corps Commanders pledging all possible support of the Pakistan Army in combating locust threat.⁴² Although no similar body was created by the Pakistan Army to manage a national campaign against poliovirus, Pakistan's Army supported the national anti-polio drive across Pakistan as there have been repeated cases of telephone calls between Chief of Army Staff, and Bill Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).⁴³

A combination of various initiatives has worked in Pakistan. Firstly, Prime Minister's focus on livelihoods in the 'lives versus livelihoods' meant that Pakistan did not suspended economic activity. While Pakistan was just as unprepared as the world for the pandemic's impact on public health, a solution was found in smart lock-downs and public messaging on prevention. The microeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was dealt with largely through the cash grant program to, [Ehsaas](#) Emergency Cash Programme. The hybrid structure of NCOC as the nerve center synergizing, articulating, and implementing a unified national effort against COVID-19 contributed to efficient management of the pandemic in Pakistan. This hybrid system introduced a prosaic and proficient system of timely decision-making and the active implementation process throughout the country. It has utilized data and technology to develop insights, brought together federal and provincial decision-making based on those insights, developed and spread rapid and effective public messaging, and used the military and civilian infrastructures for timely implementation. A hybrid structure has introduced a coherent and cohesive national governance response in dealing with the pandemic. While the hybrid pandemic management system has worked, it has exposed and brought to the fore the weaknesses that exist in Pakistan's democratic governance structure. As of current, the elected governments, public representatives, and civil administration have not pondered over critical questions that must be answered if Pakistan wishes to overcome the critical weaknesses of democratic governance. These questions include, but are not limited to, areas such as a candid analysis of

⁴² ISPR, 'Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Qamar Javed Bajwa, visited National Locust Control Centre (NLCC) Rawalpindi today', ISPR, June 4 2020, <https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=5726> (accessed 7 July 2020); 'Bajwa promises help in anti-locust measures', Dawn, June 5 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1561434/bajwa-promises-help-in-anti-locust-measures> (accessed July 7 2020); Baqir Sajjad Syed, 'Army vows to continue foiling Indian designs', Dawn, June 18 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1564272/army-vows-to-continue-foiling-indian-designs> (accessed July 7 2020).

⁴³ 'General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and Mr. Bill Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) had a telephone conversation, today', ISPR, June 10 2020, <https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=5737> (accessed July 7 2020). And DG ISPR, Twitter post, August 15 2020, 13:30, <https://twitter.com/OfficialDGISPR/status/1294491591906861059> (accessed 17 August 2020).

weaknesses that might exist in political leadership's decision-making, of civilian administrative structures, and what lessons, if any, can be learned from the establishment and working of the NCOC. ■

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