



## Legitimacy Crises in Pakistan; A Study of Imran Khan Regime

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### ABSTRACT

Legitimacy is a public belief about the authority or government is just fair and valid accordance with established rules & regulations. It has popular support to implement its binding decisions. This paper explains the legality of democratic regimes in Pakistan and explains how they come into power, why they lose public trust, and cannot complete their tenure. There are three primary factors behind the legitimacy crises of the government in Pakistan; economic & political instability, rift with state's institutions and weak government performance. Further, Foreign conspiracy, religious sentiments, corruption, unemployment also play a significant role in it. This paper has critically analyzed those factors which are leading to the legitimacy crises of the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf (PTI) government. An analytical approach has been used in the present study.



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## INTRODUCTION

All regimes' success is based on legitimacy. A legitimate regime is well performed in society because of populous support. It accepted at the national as well as international level. Its decisions recognized and respected within and outside the state's border. When legitimacy crises begin, government face challenges to implement its policies at each level. The term "legitimacy" is derived from the Latin word "legitimare" which means 'to declare lawful' (Heywood, 2013). The idea of legitimacy or rightfulness of the regime is an ancient and fundamental political discussion topic. It deals with question, why do citizens obey the law and respect the authority?

Max Weber is a classical contributor to the understanding of this phenomenon. He was a sociologist who classified the system of domination and identified the factors on which legitimacy is based. He constructed it into three types<sup>1</sup> of legitimate power but he primarily focused on legal-rational authority. It is the right to exercise power based on the law by legally qualified persons. In simple words, it means popular perception about the governments, and nation recognized its policies & support them. If, the majority of citizens not only accept, but also trust the government, it is legitimate government. Legitimacy can be attained through propaganda, coercion, and clientelism (Ahmed, 2007). It is a bridge between the governed and the govern. If the government lost legitimacy, it cannot survive.

Pakistan is a south Asian state, it has been facing legitimacy crises since its independence. It experienced four martial law governments in its 75 years of life span that are approximately 33 years. Till today, no elected government has been able to complete its constitutional term due to legitimacy crises. There are many reasons behind the legitimacy crises including tensions with the state institutions, politico-economic instability, corruption, unemployment and foreign involvement. In this article, the primary focus is to find the reasons behind the legitimacy crises of the Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) government.

### **Reasons Behind the Legitimacy Crisis of PTI's Government**

General elections were held on July 25, 2018, then PTI succeeded in forming a coalition government with BAP, MQM, and PMLQ. On August 18, PTI's nominated candidate, Imran Khan sworn in as the 22<sup>nd</sup> prime minister of Pakistan. He was a former cricketer. He was not a seasoned politician who even not held a single portfolio in the cabinet before holding the prime minister's office. He is a well orator and a man of opportunity who won the hearts of youth and impressed with his speeches and promised to bring the moon and the stars but when he assumed power, unfortunately, he could not fulfill his promises. When he became premier, he claimed that he was unaware about the actual situation of the economic condition of the country. He faced many challenges including inexperienced team, mismanagement, and artificial and natural disasters.

The opposition alliance moved a confidence motion in the national assembly (NA) against prime minister Imran Khan on March 8, 2022, that passed on April 10, 2022. According to article 95 of the constitution of Pakistan 1973, a prime minister can be removed from his office through a no-confidence motion against him by members of NA. Twenty percent of the MNA's vote is required to move the motion in the assembly. After the motion is tabled, the Speaker of the NA is bound to hold a vote within four to seven days. If the resolution is passed with an absolute majority, the prime minister will be removed from office and an election will be held for the new prime minister.

### **Economic Instability**

The second factor that led to legitimacy was economic instability. It was a grave concern in the country because of some inappropriate policies of the government and the covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic negatively affected the economy all over the world. However Pakistani

government dealt very carefully pandemic, but it broke the backbone of the economy. According to world bank, in 2019, Pakistan's GDP was 2.5% as compared to 6.2% in 2018. During the pandemic, it went negative (-1.3%) in 2020 but was boosted in 2021 (6 percent) (Bank, 2022). Despite this, inflation was out of control. life became difficult for the common people, and ultimately government lost their trust. In 2020, food prices increased by 18 percent as compared to 6 percent in India (Younas, 2021). Price stability is key to the economic growth of the state. The inflation rate was 13.4% in April 2022 as compared to the previous year's 11.1% (Pakistan Economic Survey 2021-2022, 2022), and that was 3.8% before the PTI's government. Figures has been discussed in table no.1.

***Table 1: Inflation rate during the PTI's government***

2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
3.8%	7%	10.6%	9.5%	11%

**Note;** Data has been collected from the website (Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19, 2019; Pakistan Economic Survey 2021-2022, 2022).

Lack of economic development, high rate of inflation, and unemployment have been led to legitimacy crises. Owing to this, protests started all over the country. The opposition parties took advantage of the toxic combination of low economic growth and high inflation, incited public against the government, and led the “Mehngai Mukao March” from Lahore to the Islamabad in March 2022 (Desk, 2022) with parallely, TLP's announcement of protests. Some persons were killed during these protests including three security personnel (Younas, 2021).

### **Political Instability**

Political instability is another factor behind the legitimacy crises. In democratic states, government tries to make friendly relations with the opposition parties to secure the national interest and welfare of the citizens. Though, the opposition gives tough times to the government. A healthy debate held between treasury and opposition benches in Assemblies, it supports government appropriate policies. Pakistan is a democratic state in which governments tries to sideline the opposition. Therefore, it uses the state institutions to suppress the opposition and also used for political engineering. PTI's government also did the same. Like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, khan wanted to line up the opposition, but lost the government due to a lack of majority in the Assembly. It is very tough to suppress the opposition. In a democratic system, the government cannot make binding decisions independently only consulting the party and coalition members, but the opposition must also be taken into confidence. The government needed to compromise with other parties to run the business of government but PTI government failed to do so. He lacked basic principles of democracy, Consequently, his party members disintegrated and the party was divided into forward blocks<sup>2</sup> and he lost coalition members' support in the no-confidence motion.

When Imran khan approached the army chief and DG ISI on 30<sup>th</sup> March, they presented

three options; resign, hold new elections or face a confidence motion. He agreed to hold a new election but the opposition insisted either resign or faced a no-confidence motion in the national assembly (Ahmad, 2022). Finally, both parties not agreed. The session of the National Assembly was called on 3, April for voting, deputy Speaker dismissed the motion after the speech of the information minister<sup>3</sup> that US-backed the no-confidence motion and wanted to change the regime. It is contradictory to article 5 of the constitution of Pakistan (Gurmani & Chaudhry, 2022).

Khan advised President Dr. Arif Alvi to dissolve the Assemblies. Supreme Court of Pakistan restore the NA, declared the deputy speaker ruling null and void, and ordered the Speaker to summon the Assembly session on 10 April (Suo Moto on deputy speaker ruling on no-confidence motion, 2022). Speaker of NA Asad Qaisar resigned and ex-speaker Ayaz Sadiq take over the seat, he chaired the session (Jawad, 2022), vote of no-confidence passed with 174 votes against the Prime Minister (Chaudhry, 2022) and on the next day Shahbaz Sharif sworn in as the new Prime Minister (Gannon, 2022).

### **Rift Between State's Institutions and Government**

Conflict between state's institution & government is also led to legitimacy crises in Pakistan. PTI's government has faced significant criticism and opposition from various state institutions during his time in office. This has been attributed to a number of factors, including a perceived lack of cooperation and coordination between the government and these institutions, as well as tensions over policies and political objectives. The history is witness that whenever relations between government and state's state institution deteriorated, the government had to remove. It can be seen in the case of Iskandar Mirza, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto, or Nawaz Sharif: Whether the president dissolves the assembly or martial law imposed and now the opposition has been successfully passed a no-confidence motion against the PM.

One major source of conflict has been relationship between the government and judiciary. The Supreme Court of Pakistan has been critical of the government's handling of several key issues, including corruption, the economy, and human rights ((CIME), 2021). In particular, the court has raised concerns about the government's ability to tackle corruption, which has been a major focus of the Prime Minister's policy agenda.

Imran khan and the army has been on one page till 2020, but relation deteriorated in 2020. The army became frustrated with khan's failure to good governance even ensure law and order, stance on foreign policy towards America and India, & insurgency in Balochistan. The opposition blamed the Army Chief for bringing khan into government (Kermani, 2022). There has been a series of events that took place between the government & military. Differences took place between the army and Government in the Afghanistan-US war; according to khan, it was an American war on terror but we fought and lost many lives and material. It was "pressure on military leadership is if it was America's war, then all the sacrifices of young officers and soldiers were a waste," ret. Major general Athar Abbas said (Almeida, 2022).

Karachi incident of Inspector General (IG) of Sindh police Mushtaq Maher kidnapped from his office. Army Chief has ordered to establish the court of inquiry to investigation. It has

been founded that Pakistan rangers and ISI officials are involved. The ‘Court of inquiry’ recommended that concern officers were remove from the assignments for the departmental procedure (Siddiqui, 2020). A day after the PDM staged a rally in Karachi, Ranger arrested PMLN party member Mr. Safdar for violating the sanctity of Quaid’s mausoleum on October 19, 2020 (Siddiqui, 2020). Investigation inquiry court has been founded that ISI chief Faiz Hameed involved in these activities and pressurized the parliamentarians to support the government. Due to these dirty jobs, he was removed from the post because the army decided to remain neutral (Kermani, 2022).

Furthermore, relations escalated between the prime minister (PM) and military establishment on the appointment of a new ‘Director General of Interior Services Intelligence’ (DGISI). The ‘Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced the appointment of the new chief of ISI on 6 October 2021, while three weeks later prime minister's office issued a formal notification of the appointment (Dawn, 2021; Almeida, 2022). Because of this, many party members were frustrated and allies gradually began to deteriorate. Further, he lost public trust due to conflict with military. Public resisted against the government policies.

Some ministers tried to be overly efficient in order to get media coverage, which deteriorated the relations of the government with the bureaucracy; a minister insulted the Assistant commissioner of Sialkot in public in May 2021 (Newspaper, 2021), and the media. Media play a significant role in the formation of public opinion but there were no normal relations between media and government as PTI’s federal minister Fawad Choudhry slapped the face of journalist Sami Ibrahim in June 2019 (Hussain, 2019). Lack of government performance and rift with bureaucracy & media led to legitimacy crisis. The government lost the public trust. It agitated the public against the government.

### **Poor Government Performance**

The weak performance of the government has contributed to legitimacy crises by eroding public trust in the government's ability to effectively govern and address pressing social, economic, and political issues. This has led to widespread public dissatisfaction, protests, and calls for change, which can undermine the government's legitimacy and stability. PTI’s government was unable to maintained law & order effectively, control corruption, mafias, nepotism and best utilization of human resources. The best utilization of human resources condensed social distress and boost the economy. Because of not properly utilization of human resources crime rate has increased. High inflation and unemployment have been made people chaotic. It has become difficult to maintain a law & order situation. The lives of people had become tense. The poverty ratio was 5.4% in 2020 as compared to 3.5% in 2018, according to world bank. Further, it increased in the coming year 2021.

Corruption is like a termite that is affecting the economic growth, development, prosperity, and social change of a country. Like many other countries, Pakistan also has been suffering from it since 1980s, due to which economic prosperity could not come till today. There are 180 countries on the corruption perception index (CPI), out of which Pakistan is ranked 140. According to Transparency international’s 2021 report, Pakistan’s transparency score<sup>4</sup> continued

to decrease during the PTI regime, which decreased from 32 to 28 in 2021 (International, 2021). It was worst for the masses because they faced a lot of hardships even for legal work. The public servants have been charging the public for their duties. Meanwhile, Imran Khan won the election with slogan of ending corruption and nepotism. He hired his close associates to high posts from Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to higher bureaucracy and special assistants of the prime minister (SAPM) (Tanvir, 2022). People were fed up with this acute situation due to which the government faced legitimacy crises.

Mafia has been out of control, due to which government policies went wrong. People did not get any relief from the government policies. The entire mafia came together against the government and the artificial shortage of basic commodities like sugar, wheat, petroleum products, etc. become a common. Pakistani mafia has been very organized since the 1970's, because of cultural acceptability and their hold on key positions in all institutions. They invest during elections and funded the political parties to influence the decision makers. They got rewards from the government and it is bound to please them for cooperation in the coming election (Javed, 2021). Those who are responsible for ensuring law and order, established justice, and good governance either they surrender or join the them (Ahmar, 2020). Imran Khan has repeatedly mentioned in his speeches and meetings that the mafia is a major barrier in the way of progress and development. It was the government's responsibility to control mafias, but failed, which led to disillusionment and losing public confidence. It is time taking process to get rid of it because the mafia is deeply penetrated into the system so, it is not easy to control it (Malik, 2020).

Selection of the cabinet is also a reason behind the legitimacy crises of PTI's government. Its ministries have been one of the reasons of poor performance. It is responsible for the execution of policy, enforcement of laws and order, and maintenance of peace in every state. Unfortunately, he could not choose carefully right people for the right job. According to Ministries performance, I classified them into two types; firstly, some ministries were allotted to please the coalition parties who worked only for themselves instead of the people and many ministries were given to keep his control over them like Chief Minister of Punjab Usman Buzdar, secondly, only a few ministries were on the basis of ability like Asad Umar, Dr. Yasmeen Rashid, and Saniya Nishtar, etc. Ministers remained to keep changing due to their poor performance. No ministry has been given to founding members of the party, which led to a forward bloc<sup>5</sup> within the party. For that reason, the government could not perform well and faced a lot of criticism.

In addition to these, the government has faced criticism from civil society organizations and human rights groups over its handling of various issues, including freedom of expression, religious minorities, and the rights of women and children. They have accused the government of not doing enough to protect these rights, and of failing to adequately address the root causes of these problems. That's led to legitimacy crises.

### **Role of Religious Sentiments**

Khan, like many other political leaders, used the religious card to come into power and

the slogan of “Riasat e Madinah.” Although, he led the campaign against “Islamophobia” at the international level because of his efforts, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that marked the 15<sup>th</sup> of March every year as the international day to combat Islamophobia (Agency, 2022). But some of his actions hurt the nation. He nominated Princeton economist Latif Mian to an economic advisory council, who belongs to the Ahmadi community and nation severely criticized. Finally, the government revoked his appointment but tried to defend it (Sayeed, 2018). PTI’s government faced severe criticism for its supportive policies to the Ahmadi community as it came to power with the slogan of “Riasat e Madinah”. As PMLN leader Javed Latif accused the ex-prime minister of “attacking the basic Islamic principles and supporting Ahmadi community during the tenure” in a press conference (Dawn, PTI lambastes govt for 'using religion to instil hatred' against Imran, 2022). The supreme court of Pakistan acquitted Aasia Bibi (Christian women) on October 31, 2018, who was awarded the death penalty in a case of blasphemy in 2009. She was released from Multan jail on November 7 and brought to Islamabad via a special plane and given tight security. Then, she was secretly sent abroad (Saddiqui, 2019). In this case, the government was also involved so religion & political groups strongly protested against the government, but were appreciated by the United States.

French President Emmanuel Macron’s remarks about the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) led to nationwide protests and demonstrators demanded to expel the French ambassador, but the government denied. Consequently, the right-wing religious political party, the Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) announced a long march to pressurized the government, and instead of resolving the matter peacefully, the government resorted to a “lathi charge” on the protesters. Resultantly, clashes took place between them and security forces. A crackdown was launched against TLP leadership and the party declared the ban (Gabol & Hussain, 2021). It was also another factor behind the legitimacy crises. When religious sentiments combine with economic instability and poor performance it led to legitimacy crises.

### **Foreign Policy and Foreign Conspiracy**

Since the day first, Pakistan’s foreign policy tilted toward the west because of the pro-west military, bureaucracy, & political elite, and defense of the country (Qureshi, 1967). Prime minister Liaqat Ali Khan received the invitation of visiting the USSR but prefer to visit the United States while Prime Minister Imran khan was pro-East and wanted to expand his ties with Russia and other eastern countries. In this regard, he visited Russia. He made his last visit to Russia a day before Russian attacked the Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The United States perceived that Pakistan was involved in this conflict because it insisted on the premier not visiting Moscow. All major European states asked Pakistan to condemn Russian aggression on Ukraine in UN General Assembly. On this, the Prime minister said “Are we slaves?” in public meetings. It was against Pakistan’s foreign policy determinants and traditions, and he also displeased the western union which is the largest trading partner of the country. On March 31, the prime minister called the high command meeting of the National Security Council on the matter that US-backed the opposition to remove him. Differences increased between the army and government after the meeting. Army chief strongly condemn the Russian aggression at an event in Islamabad and emphasized long-lasting strategic and trade Pak-US relations on April 2, 2022. On the last day, PTI leadership has been claimed that we and the military are on one page and approached the military but the military establishment decided to avoid supporting anyone.

## **CONCLUSION**

Legitimacy crises occur when the government failed to fulfill basic necessities, ensure law and order situations, and established justice, and economic stability. Sometimes foreign invasions and anti-religious acts or policies also contributed to the legitimacy crisis. There are also many other reasons for legitimacy crises in Pakistan; religious sentiments, foreign conspiracy, political instability and rift between state's institutions and government. When these factors are combined with economic instability, then legitimacy crises occurred.

From the above discussion, it can be said that there were many reasons behind the PTI government's legitimacy crises; poor performance of PTI government. the leadership was not mentally prepared to run the business of government and did not do their homework after coming into power so, it failed to establish good governance, ensure law & order situation, politico-economic stability, and economic prosperity, control inflation, mafia, unemployment, corruption, gambling, nepotism and maintain good relations with state institutions and media. The PTI came into power with the support of the establishment but over time, bad governance led to deteriorated relations between the both. During the PTI regime, there were some incidents occurred that increased the pressure of the opposition and the public on the military. When the military establishment decided to remain neutral in order to appease the opposition parties and to establish its good image, respect, and avoidance of infamy in the eyes of the public thus government suffered degradation due to which the forward block was formed in the party. Many party members refused to support the government and the coalition parties also decided to support the Pakistan Democratic Movement (an alliance of opposition parties). The opposition parties succeeded in bringing a no-confidence motion in the Assembly against Prime Minister Imran Khan in April 2022. This motion succeeded and ultimately Imran Khan lost his majority. In this way, another Prime Minister of Pakistan failed to complete his five-year term because of legitimacy crises.



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