



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Interplay between Political Stability and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan: An Assessment**

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to examine the fact that how political stability is directly interlinked with the future of sustainable development goals (SDG's) in Pakistan. Pakistan is a country which is facing multiple issues like corruption, poor governance and weak institutions which are the significant challenges in achieving SDG's by 2030. Political instability in Pakistan is a serious issue and a key barrier in the progress of important aspects like education, poverty alleviation, climate change and healthcare problems. The study adopt a qualitative research methodology by using both primary and secondary data sources of data. The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 33 key stakeholders from three sectors: officials from the Ministry of Planning and Development, representatives from Commerce and Trade and legal experts affiliated with bar councils. The collected data was analyzed through content and thematic analysis techniques to extract required answer of research questions and data are assessed the coherence of institutional narratives around SDG implementation. Strengthening democratic institutions, reducing political polarization, stability in economic sector, balance in civil-military relations and combating corruption to improve governance will be the possible solutions to ensure political stability in Pakistan to achieve SDG's till 2030.

**KEYWORDS** Political Stability, Sustainable Development Goals, Governance Education Progress

**Introduction**

As the global world entered the new Millennium, the world adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce human suffering and foster cooperation with underdeveloped nations. Contrary to it, the framework lacked a comprehensive system to measure progress or ensure accountability (Hulme, 2009). The sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in 2015, were introduced with aim to counter the social, Political and economic challenges around the world. They aim to promote equality, reduce poverty, ensure access to quality education and healthcare, protect the environment and promote peace and justice. They are like a roadmap to make the world a better place for everyone. The global community came together under vision 2030 to achieve these goals, with a focus on goal 17, which emphasizes cooperation, networking and support (Kumar et al., 2016). It is obvious that to achieve these ambitious goals, a sustained socio-political certainty in Pakistan is inevitable. As in the state of political uncertainty and instability, it is impossible to achieve the global agenda-particularly the commitment 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Political uncertainty not only cause of social disturbance but also creates a situation of chaos that ultimately affect the social fabric of any society. A nation that lacks clarity about its destination will find it nearly impossible to progress and compete with other global nations, especially in the era of technology (Brende & Høie, 2015).

political situation in Pakistan is a clear hurdle in way of Pakistan's progress towards sustainable development goals. Since the research topic is revolving around

calibrating Pakistan's measures to achieve the sustainable development goals in ever changing socio-political situation. Pakistan is among those countries where a rich diversity in society, makes difficult to achieve 2030 agenda of sustainable development goals in situation of political chaos and uncertainty ( Hassan, 2021). Regarding Pakistan's response towards SDG's, Pakistan is the only country that discussed the SDGs in the parliament in 2015, initiated debates on it and in 2016 with the consent of the constituent assembly of 2013-2018, introduced 2025 vision (One Nation-One Vision) and established task force on SDG's. But unfortunately, inconsistency and uncertainty in socio-political situation of Pakistan makes it difficult for the state to achieve 2025 and 2030 agenda of SDG's. There is dire need of sustained political situation to achieve the goals of SDG's which mainly focus to transform the lives of people by eradicating poverty and inequality, protect the planet and ensure that all people have health, prosperity and justice (Cho et al., 2017; Jeelani et al., 2021).

It becomes obvious that the principle of left no one behind is purely related to political process and needs certain political situation. Therefore, in the context of Pakistan, where the de jure parliamentary democracy is in practice, it is very crucial and complicated as well to examine the compliance of international agreements, specifically SDGs. The derailment of democracy, uncertain socio-political context and interference of non-democratic forces in state affairs have undermined the political institutions that affected the governance and administration (Muzaffar, & Choudhary, 2017).

This principle requires appropriate approaches from state parties to guarantee it that no one is excluded from the mainstream of development and decision-making processes. For the sake of proper decision making, certain socio-political situation is necessary in Pakistan. Authorities should be guaranteed with powers to uplift the standard of living for masses in Pakistan. It encompasses the measures to identify groups that are left behind and the reasons behind their exclusion. There is no doubt that it is essential to establish a proper monitoring and measuring mechanism with stable socio-political situation and accountability of government authorities of Pakistan to ensure that no one is left behind from development process in Pakistan.

### **Literature Review**

Unstable socio-political situation is a major hurdle in Pakistan's progress. Socio political situation is a real cause of threat in many developed and developing countries. It is the reason behind lagging in progress phase in many countries of the world. Hurdles in prosperity and development are because of socio-political uncertainty and instability. Country's legitimacy and rule of law badly affected just because of not having political stability. It is prerequisite for social stability, economic growth and rule of law in a state. Countries with political instability possess direct effects on nation and state building. Nation and state building both are mandatory for real progress and development of masses. Political parties and interest groups only pursue their interests and they don't have concern with public welfare. Achievement of SDG's goals up till now in Pakistan is not possible because of uncertain socio-political situation in Pakistan.

Socio-political instability can have a significant impact on the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in several ways. In politically unstable environments, governments often prioritize short-term stability and survival over long-term development goals. This can lead to a lack of policy focus and inadequate resources being allocated to address the SDGs effectively. Political instability can result in frequent changes in leadership, policy reversals and policy inconsistency, making it difficult to implement sustainable development plans (Washaya, 2021). However the author tries his best to cover all issues in achieving SDGs in Pakistan but failed to shed light on current status. This study tries to highlight all issues with first hand data from relevant personalities. It requires building strong institutions, promoting good governance,

fostering inclusive political processes and ensuring social stability (Muzaffar, Fern & Yaseen, 2024). Resolving conflicts, promoting social cohesion and creating an enabling environment for economic growth are essential steps towards overcoming the challenges posed by political instability and advancing the SDGs. United Nations independent assessment of the national context of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Examines the country's diverse socio-economic, demographic, political, cultural, climatic and environmental situation to understand where Pakistan stands and why and the implications this has for development. Using the lens of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, it analyses progress, challenges, gaps and ways forward in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Throughout, the CCA draws on the rich expertise and knowledge base of UN agencies active in Pakistan. Pakistan faced various socio-political challenges. The country has a complex political landscape with periodic political tensions, issues of governance, corruption and economic disparities. Political parties and institutions have played a significant role in shaping the country's political environment (Khan, 2024). The manuscript deals the socio-political issues only but this thesis tried to explore current status of SDGs in Pakistan as well as covers all hindered in this regard. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for countries like Pakistan to achieve socio-political stability and sustainable development. These goals address a wide range of interconnected challenges, including poverty, inequality, health, education, gender equality, clean water and peace, that contribute to a stable and prosperous society. Here's how the SDGs are important to overcome Pakistan's socio-political instability.

Moreover, Frank Biermann et al. critically examines the political sway of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since their adoption in 2015. The authors argue that while the SDGs have contributed to discursive shifts and evinced some normative and institutional effects, they have not yet materialized as a transformative force at the global, national, or local governance levels. The writers underscore the non-linear and multidirectional nature of the SDGs' effects, emphasizing that the 2030 Agenda and its 17 goals with 169 targets function as robust normative guidelines (Biermann et al., 2022). However, the realization of these goals at the national and local levels is depicted as a convoluted and dynamic political process, accentuating challenges in implementation, translation and dissemination across diverse societal sectors. This suggests a need for further research on how to bridge the gap between the SDGs' normative aspirations and their real-world implementation.

Regarding the research topic, Magdalena Bexell and Kristina Jonsson provided a comprehensive narrative around sustainable development goals by connecting them with politics and discussing their different dimensions, considering legitimacy, responsibility and accountability. The writers have put their emphasis on the global to local approach and highlighted the influence of such an approach on national politics that covers the legislative process, implementation mechanism and accountability procedures (Jönsson & Bexell, 2021). The argument of the writer that the clear distribution of responsibility among political institutions is indispensable for achieving the 2030 Agenda contributed a lot to understanding the politics, legitimacy and accountability for assessing its trickle-down results (Malik, Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2023).

Likewise, Amanda Lange Salvia et al. delves into the complex interplay between global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and local priorities across diverse geographic regions. Adopting the snowball sampling, the writers collected the responses from 266 specialists from people belonging to different continents to highlight the universal nature of the 17 SDGs and 169 targets. This write-up emphasizes that the successful implementation of SDGs depends on the prioritization of individual countries, which is often influenced by local challenges (Salvia et al., 2019). The writers have focused on SDGs 4, 11 and 13 which are concerned with equitable quality education, sustainable cities and communities and climate actions. This study contributes valuable insights into

the contemporary discourse on sustainable development research trends. From the sociopolitical perspective, political stability and quality of governance appear as one of the top most determinants of the SDG attainment. Goals of ending poverty (SDG 1), quality education (SDG 4), equality (SDG 10) needs good governance and good governance includes transparency, accountability, the rule of law and efficient delivery of public services (Batool, Asmat, & Muzaffar, 2023). Pakistan has faced political instability for long and it disrupts long-term planning and policy continuity, which is typically characterised by issues like persistent shifts in governance and confrontation between civilian and military rule. But the decentralisation process like the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the transfer of powers to the provinces has opened up new avenues of regional and situation specific development plans especially in the health, education and infrastructure sectors.

It's the political will and commitment of top executives that matter. For SDGs, political will is also needed to spend in social and economic development on the long run. While there are programs in Pakistan, such as the Ehsaas Program, which aim to address the issue of poverty through improved social protection and financial inclusion, they often lack the same level of an integrated framework to address poverty as in other countries (Xu et al., 2023). The Vision 2025 and other provincial plans in Pakistan ooze political consensus on sustainable development as most of these plans include SDG targets. Federal and provincial SDG Support Units (in partnership with the UNDP) are another example of progress at the institutional level to align national and international development goals.

**Public Engagement to Achieve SDGs in Pakistan and Role of the Civil Society** The involvement of NGOs, CBOs and youth-led initiatives in bringing awareness and implementing programs related to SDGs has increased in recent years. These organisations have emerged as powerful advocates for the causes of environmental protection, gender equality, universal access to quality education and universal healthcare. In order for development projects to be people-centered and reflect local needs—both matters of utmost importance to the sustainability of SDG efforts—access to democratic processes at the level of local governments is critical and public participation is vital (Brollo et al., 2021). Education also prepares important ingredient in determining public engagement and political awareness. Everybody is educated and informed, people are more willing to ask for transparency, to participate in development projects and to support sustainable development policies. Pakistan's National Education Policy reflects ambitions for SDG 4, including universal primary education. But there are still problems and there are still areas such as the old FATA and Balochistan where the figures of out-of-school children, gender gaps and differences between regions remain disproportionate. Another critical component is the importance of federal-provincial coordination in implementing development goals. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, provincial governments in Pakistan have been solely responsible for healthcare, schools and community development. Federal and provincial governments must cooperate closely to ensure SDG implementation remains coherent. However the consequences of weak coordination often include gaps in monitoring and assessment, inconsistent policies and redundant activities (Mujtaba et al., 2024). It is therefore imperative that mechanisms for data-sharing are improved and intergovernmental institutions strengthened so progress can be tracked and accountability ensured.

Lastly a climate fit for sustainable development is one characterized by democratic institutions and freedom of expression. Pakistan enjoys an activist media landscape and an active court, both of which have often highlighted the failings of administration and agitated for reforms to social justice, environmental regulation and public services. The social and political pressure encourages government action and policy that aligns with sustainable development agendas (Aziz et al., 2021; Hinduja et al., 2023; Zeewaqaar, 2024a). Finally, while there are significant sociopolitical challenges to achieving the SDGs in Pakistan, there are also critical catalysts that have the potential to spur development.

Five essential factors, better leadership, political will, public participation, more education and changing social norms, will dictate whether sustainable development will have a future in the country. While these investments come as a blessing for Pakistan, to reap maximum benefits from these investments, Pakistan needs to invest in inclusive institutions, strengthen democracy and ensure that development programs are transparent, accountable and participatory.

### **Material and Methods**

The study is qualitative in nature to study the political stability and future of SDG's in Pakistan. In qualitative methodology, researchers deal with the themes conceptually and analytically. With the help of local trends of how, what, when why and whom. This method includes interpretation from researchers as information collected through observations and through interviews response. The study adopt a qualitative research methodology by using both primary and secondary data sources of data. The primary data was collected through 33 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from three sectors: officials from the Ministry of Planning and Development, representatives from Commerce and Trade and legal experts affiliated with bar councils. Purposive and Convenient sampling technique is used to collect data from the targeted population. A self-developed semi-structured interview protocol is used to conduct this study. The interview protocols are developed by the researcher based on overall aims and objectives of political stability and future of SDG's in Pakistan. The collected data was analyzed through content and thematic analysis techniques to extract required answer of research questions and data are assessed the coherence of institutional narratives around SDG implementation.

### **Results and Discussions**

#### **Political Instability**

One more critical governance issue in Pakistan is its unstable political situation. The nation has confronted various military overthrows, political assassinations and sectarian violence, all adding hurdles for political stability in Pakistan. This flimsiness has obstructed the improvement of a vigorous and successful administration framework. One possible answer for this issue is the reinforcing of democratic norms to guarantee stability and sense of accountability in Pakistan. Accomplishing this requires the foundation of a free and fair judicial system, a functioning common society and a free press. Government needs to address people's grievances related to their socio-economic issues. By addressing socio-economic issues, it will be possible for the government to tackle the hindrances that hinder their way towards political stability and socio-economic stability (Akram, 2023; Imran et al., 2023).

Moreover, powerless organizations are difficult for Pakistan's administration framework. Establishments like the police, legal executive and administration frequently experience the ill effects of being understaffed, underfunded and inadequately prepared. This has established an environment where people with significant influence can act unafraid of repercussions and law and order are habitually dismissed. To address these difficulties, a coordinated exertion is expected to reinforce these organizations. This can be accomplished through satisfactory asset distribution and financing, arrangement of preparing and limit building drives and the execution of a legitimacy-based enrollment framework (Hussain & Zaman, 2024).

#### **Initiative of Pakistan's Government to ensure the Implementation of SDG's in Pakistan**

According to (Salman et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023) Pakistan has been substantially assisted by the UN in order to meet the SDGs. Pakistan has made tremendous progress

toward meeting its SDGs thanks in large part to UN policy and technical aid. As the UN Sustainable Development Framework was signed, the government of Pakistan and the UN in Pakistan officially kicked off the program, namely the Pakistan One UN Program III (OP III), 2018–2022. The ten main out-comes which are being targeted in the Framework as a blueprint for medium term strategic arrangement were defined after intensive stakeholder consultations and should be integrated with Pakistan’s development primacies. These aims cannot be attained without collaboration between the Pakistani government and UN agencies, and under OP III 2018–2022 they have been working closely.

The unanimous adoption of SDGs by Pakistan’s National Assembly in 2016 — as its country’s own national development framework — further reflects the country’s resolve to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Pakistan has come a long way in so far as integrating the SDGs in its national policies and programs and creating institutional framework for its implementation is concerned. To oversee and monitor implementation of the SDGs, the federal and provincial planning commissions have all been establish SDG support units. These teams are comprised of the Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives and the Provincial Planning and Development Departments (Asad, 2019).

For a national agenda of prioritizing and localizing SDGs, the government has developed and approved the National SDGs Framework in 2018. Customized SDG Frameworks for every province are in the making presently. The Government is also strongly dedicated to putting the SDGs into planning, closely monitoring and reporting on SDG progress, directing public funds to support the SDGs, exploring different means of financing and harnessing the power of technology to accelerate the process” (Javeed et al., 2022). The unanimous adoption of SDGs by Pakistan’s National Assembly in 2016 — as its country’s own national development framework — further reflects the country’s resolve to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Pakistan has come a long way in so far as integrating the SDGs in its national policies and programs and creating institutional framework for its implementation is concerned. To oversee and monitor implementation of the SDGs, the federal and provincial planning commissions have all been establish SDG support units. These teams are comprised of the Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives and the Provincial Planning and Development Departments (Asad, 2019).

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These task forces will bring together experts from government, political parties, opposition representatives, and both the public and private sectors to collaborate in driving progress toward the SDGs.Iqbal emphasised the need for collective efforts from all sectors of society to alleviate poverty and place Pakistan on the path to sustainable development. “To move the country forward, political forces and experts from all walks of life must come together. Instead of protesting on the streets, it is imperative that we sit in parliament and relevant forums to contribute to national stability,” he stated.

He highlighted that sustainable development is not just a UN agenda but also an agenda for the welfare of the Pakistani people. He added that In 2016, the previous Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government formally adopted the SDGs as a national agenda through a resolution in the National Assembly, making Pakistan the first country to do so at parliamentary level. Discussing the Vision 2025 launched in 2013, which prioritised poverty alleviation, Iqbal pointed out that human resource development is essential for any country's progress. "Without eradicating poverty, hunger, and destitution, sustainable national development is impossible," he remarked, adding that poverty eradication is a fundamental indicator of a society's stability.

The finding reflects the struggle of the nation between political stability and sustainable development. Pakistan has a lot of work to be doing to ensure that its national policies are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Common themes noted in interviews included political instability, governance issues and socio-economic disparities. The participants also noted that lack of uniformity in implementing policy, insufficient political will and bureaucratic red tape have impeded sustainable progress. Also, social-political fragmentation and the constant changes in official objectives hinder the long-term preparation and implementation of development programs. This research highlights the importance of stable and inclusive governance as a catalyst for sustainable development. The analysis presented are largely an investigation of the impact of political stability on the future of SDG's in Pakistan.

The analysis presented are largely an investigation of the impact of various socio-political factors on individual Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Economic inequality and the lack of substantive social security institutions heavily affect SDG 1 (No Poverty). This is reflected in the strong role of political patronage in allocation of resources where marginalized groups are seen as less beneficial as compared to other target groups. Likewise, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) continues to pose difficulties, stemming from deeply rooted cultural realities along with weak legislative enforcement mechanisms. They stated that while statutory frameworks exist, socio-political resistance and limited institutional backing impede effective implementation.

The interviews highlighted how significantly governance quality impacts on SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Many of those participating in the event said that corruption, lack of transparency and little public involvement puts institutional integrity at risk and hampers the course of justice. Furthermore, this socio-political gap is compounded by regional disparities, further discouraging the adoption of a cohesive development policy in the region. These gains are consistent with current empirical literature more broadly, reaffirming the view that progress toward sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing the relevant socio-political dimensions. Despite the challenges, the report also describes opportunities for improvement. Encouraging political stability, strengthening institutional capacity and promoting accountability in governance are likely to accelerate progress towards the SDGs — another potential key message from the participants. Focusing on local government and community-led initiatives proved to be a key approach for meeting the developmental needs for a given region. In addition, cross-sector collaboration and evidence-based policymaking were identified as essential for coordinating policy formulation and implementation (Muzaffar, Fern, & Yaseen, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

the results of research on the socio-political context and its influence on the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan. The study utilizes a purposive sample technique comprising 33 semi-structured interviews. The participants consisted of a diverse group of legislators, academics, civil society representatives and professionals in sectors related to sustainable development. A questionnaire consisting of

24 questions was then carefully created to reflect the first sixteen Sustainable Development Goals, such as poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. The Interviews provided an in-depth understanding of insights related to the role of socio-political factors in the study of how best to achieve the SDGs in Pakistan.

The finding reflects the struggle of the nation between political stability and sustainable development. Pakistan has a lot of work to be doing to ensure that its national policies are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Common themes noted in interviews included political instability, governance issues and socio-economic disparities. The participants also noted that lack of uniformity in implementing policy, insufficient political will and bureaucratic red tape have impeded sustainable progress. Also, social-political fragmentation and the constant changes in official objectives hinder the long-term preparation and implementation of development programs. This research highlights the importance of stable and inclusive governance as a catalyst for sustainable development. The analysis presented are largely an investigation of the impact of political stability on the future of SDG's in Pakistan. Responses from the interview show challenges in the political, socio-structural aspects hampering the progress of Pakistan in achieving SDGs, education in particular. Then post-18th Amendment tensions between the federation and federating units are undermining the policy process resulting in policy vacuums and implementation gaps. Respondents pointed to low spending on education, a lack of proper infrastructure, obsolete syllabus, a shortage of trained teachers – particularly in remote areas, and poor accountability.

### **Recommendations**

These recommendations are basically for the policy makers and legislators to address effectively the underlined barriers and development toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We are going to provide a set of comprehensive recommendations on the bases of this study. The primary purpose of these recommendations are long-term prosperity of Pakistan in stable government, growing economy, prosperous society and healthy environment.

- It takes a sincere democracy to uphold the democratic virtues of stable rule and wise policies. Ensuring that elected leaders fulfill their pledges and restraining the influence of nondemocratic factions, such as the military, are some of the ways to keep democratic values shining. Political turmoil does cast a pall over public confidence in government, policy-making and the functioning of the government. Structural changes to enhance transparency, voting modalities and public participation in decision-making are indispensable to strengthen democratic institutions. The ease of administration, the continuity of development, and the confidence of the financiers reap the benefit of political stability.
- Respect Personal Freedoms and Press Individual Rights Protecting human rights and press freedom is essential for a democratic society to grow and for peace to blossom internationally. National legislation should be in conformity with international human rights principles if we are to fight discrimination, defend minority rights and promote social justice. For citizens to hold their governments to responsibility and for an honest government, free and open media is absolutely important. A free and independent press supports democracies by allowing public debate on important national and international concerns and by providing access to accurate information.
- Should create a harmonic SDG plan. Getting Only with a coherent and well-coordinated strategy to carry out the SDGs can one make appreciable improvement. This should include timings, particular objectives and strategies for making people answerable. Different parts of government must cooperate to match national policy with SDG



objectives. Establishing a national SDG task team will help to improve coordination and tracking of development. By setting reasonable and attainable targets, policymakers may methodically track advancement toward sustainable development; thereafter, they can make the necessary changes depending on that data.

- Good government depends on properly operating institutions. Strong institutions have to be built to coordinate and supervise activities pertinent to the SDGs thereby guaranteeing responsibility and efficiency. Programs for capacity-building for legislators and government personnel help to enable effective application of sustainable development policies. By supporting local government institutions and enhancing municipal administrations, grassroots level service delivery improvements are possible. This guarantees that efforts of growth benefit every sphere of life.

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