



RESEARCH PAPER

**Increasing Political Intolerance in Pakistan and Charter of Democracy:
An Analysis**

¹Naila Younas, ²Muhammad Yousaf Iftikhar and ³ Dr. Mian Muhammad Azhar*

1. M. Phil Scholar Department of Political Science, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Advocate High Court and M. Phil/LLM Scholar, Department of Law, University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: muhammad.azhar@gcuf.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This article examines escalating political intolerance in Pakistan and advocate for the revival of the Charter of Democracy to address contemporary challenges facing the nation's democratic institutions. The paper delves into the historical context of political intolerance in Pakistan, highlighting factors such as martial law, political party behavior, and economic instability. It emphasizes the significance of the CoD, initially signed in 2006, as a framework for political cooperation and stability. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, this research explores the socio-political and economic factors contributing to political intolerance in Pakistan. Political tolerance emerges as essential for Pakistan's democratization process, fostering a participatory society that respects the interests of all segments. Conversely, political intolerance obstructs participatory behaviors and hinders true democracy. Reviving the CoD is proposed as solution to mitigate political intolerance and promote democracy. Encouraging political unity and stability will help Pakistan move closer to achieving real democracy.

KEYWORDS Authoritarianism, Contemporary, Extremism, Political Transition, Polarization

Introduction

Tolerance means appreciation for someone's activities whether it has diversity from own views. It is the ability to exercise a fair attitude towards those whose ideas, opinions, religion, language, nationality, and practices are different from someone's own. William Ury noted it as "Tolerance is not just to agree with someone or other remaining indifferent in front of injustice, but rather showing the respect for essential humanity of every person" (Peterson, 2003). Tolerance in itself is not a virtue, it is natural. It derives its values from what a person tolerates and a manner that expresses its tolerance. This is the outer growth of the moral qualities of a personality. It includes kindness, courtesy, patience, humanity, self-control, and love. Society is familiar with the simple definition of tolerance; society establishes the standards of what is best in our thinking (Beuhrer, 2018). From the time of independence, Pakistan faced instability and intolerance in its politics that directly affected the working of other institutions. The reason for that instability and intolerance is not the proper use of the democratic institution to present the demands and adopt the way of agitation. A frail political culture and the incompetence of leaders of political parties cause political instability and an intolerant environment in society (Zaheer, 2022).

Intolerance in different fields of life is a worldwide phenomenon. However, causes and consequences may vary from time to time, area to area, and nation to nation. Pakistan is suffering from intolerance almost in all fields of society, especially political intolerance is on top of the list of these crises. Even it is influencing the environment of homes, and the relationship between family members (Suleman, 2018). Without political stability and peace in the state, we cannot imagine national harmony, maintenance of law & order, and security in the state or country. Political stability is vital if a state wants to get development,

rule of law, and consistency in policies. Democracy requires a peaceful or tolerant environment as well as the smooth working of all institutions so that it may flourish (Bangwar, 2022).

Literature Review

Political tolerance has been a subject of scholarly inquiry for some time. It is typically defined as the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are extended to groups or individuals with whom we disagree (khan, 2016). Intolerance is increasing day by day in Pakistan. Political intolerance and the causes of its increase in society are traditional society and conservatism (Ahmed, 2011). Pakistan is an Islamic state and always needs certainty of Islamic rules and regulations in society. Intolerance is embedded in the evolution of the Islamic State.

Tolerance includes the study of available scales of tolerance, which are used to measure different aspects of it such as economic, religious, and political aspects of tolerance and the well-being of society. The study explains the available scales and results that, the focus of religious tolerance is about the following diversity with pluralism (Patricia & Avery, 2001). Tolerance in the political field is scaled and results in least-liked groups while economic tolerance deals with or depends on the well-being of the economy concerning social diversity or change. All given scales are discussed in detail and with references and explain the levels of instability and intolerance in society. The establishment of peace or tolerance is compulsory for the development of society is the key finding of the study (Ali, Alam, & Ali, 2018). Intolerance as a problem in every society is discussed in that an ethnically tolerant population or group can be politically intolerant, especially in front of those by whom the ethnically tolerant or ethnocentric group identifies as weak. This difference in behaviors creates an environment of instability and clashes between the populations.

Pakistan has faced many transitions of attitudes and values. The country is governed by an elite that could have led the society to cross the changeover threshold with opposite reforms. However, as the product of existing social structures, it possesses both a belief in legitimacy as well as the authoritarian tendency of a rational-democratic order (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2014). Political intolerance on the online political participation of European youth. The association between the online political participation of young people and the intolerant attitudes of the youth along with its impact is explained (Bosi, Lavizzari, & Portos, 2021). Pakistan always resisted dictatorship and struggled for the revival of democracy and peace. Various political parties established an alliance for the establishment of the democratic system in Pakistan (Curtis, 2016).

Violence and intolerance in Pakistan based on sect differences such as pointed out a gun attack on a bus in which there were people of the minority Ismaili Shi'i sect in Karachi and 40 people were killed in this attack on May 13, 2015 (Siddiqui, 2015). Another suicide bombing attack in Sindh and 61 Shia were killed in this attack in January 2015. In 2015 there were most of the Shia were killed which belong to the Shi'i sect of Islam and is almost 15% of the total population of Pakistan (Yaseen, et al., 2021). Furthermore, the attacks on minorities in Pakistan. Shia and Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ formerly Sipah-e-Sahabah), were targeted in Karachi attacks, Islamabad, and large-scale attacks were centered on Imambargahs (Waseem, 1997). Later on, sectarian intolerance was discussed and mentioned in Pew Data 2012 that 78% of our population believed that relations between Sunni and Shia are a "Moderately big" problem.

Material and Methods

The study aimed to investigate the rise of political intolerance in Pakistan using a mix of primary and secondary data. It focused on politicians from the three main political parties. Nine politicians, three from each party, were selected using purposive sampling.

Structured interviews with a concise questionnaire were used to collect primary data. The interview questions were carefully crafted in English and then translated into Urdu with expert input, undergoing testing for clarity and relevance. Thematic analysis was employed to identify trends in the causes and consequences of political intolerance. The interview protocol's validity was confirmed through expert consultation and testing. Ethical considerations, including participant confidentiality, were upheld throughout the research process, in line with ethical guidelines.

Results and Discussion

Increasing Political Intolerance in Pakistan: An Overview from 1947-2022

Political intolerance in Pakistan has been a persistent and multifaceted issue since its inception in 1947, with periodic episodes of authoritarian rule, military coups, and restrictions on democratic processes. The nation's political landscape has been marred by a history of power struggles, electoral irregularities, and a lack of peaceful transitions of power (Afzal, 2021). From the early years of its existence, Pakistan has experienced military takeovers, martial law, and political assassinations. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007 and the ousting of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2017 exemplify the continued challenges to democratic governance (Afzal, 2018). Blasphemy laws and restrictions on free speech have also contributed to an environment of political intolerance, with dissent often suppressed. Despite periods of relative political openness, Pakistan's political landscape has remained marked by a complex interplay of military, religious, and civilian forces, hindering the consolidation of a stable and enduring democratic system (khan, 2016). Examples of intolerance include a lack of tolerance, a failure to accept or respect others who hold differing opinions or beliefs, as well as individuals from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Intolerant people are often prepared to impose their views on political disagreements, freedom of speech, religion, and culture (Mir, 2021).

R. Pervaiz said that; I have witnessed for many years that the political divide is increasing very fast. There was a time when political workers and supporters felt hesitant about leaving the party and changing their political affiliation. But nowadays due to the uncertainty and instability of the political environment, political divide is common. He said the agenda of corrupt political parties like PMLN and PPP etc. is always about dividing the nation whether it's in the name of political activities, political differences, or based on differences in language, culture, etc. (Pervaiz, 2023). While Y. Suleeman said that in past times there was a very minor concept of the political divide and it was based on reasons and ideologies. But now this time there is a political divide based on the lust for power and position. Political workers and candidates left their parties without any explanation or reason for it. It became a game for political workers or candidates, to leave a party and join other parties for personal interests if the party does not provide what he/she wants. They leave this party too and join the other one. In short political workers or candidates became opportunists, which is not in favor of the stability of the political system (Suleeman, 2023). And, J. Anwar said, that the political divide has been part of Pakistani politics since its establishment. But, I am not in favor of the political divide and never support it. If any political worker wants to be separate from any political party, it should be based on the reasoning. He said "Lota cracy" is the evil of the political system, and PTI rooted this evil in Pakistani politics otherwise it was rare in our politics. Concluding he said I am personally against this activity and I think it should be declared illegal through a policy or amendment in the constitution (Anwar, 2023; Qasim & Ali, 2023).

Charter of Democracy Vs Increasing Political Intolerance

The Charter of Democracy is a historic document in the political landscape of Pakistan, jointly signed by two prominent political leaders, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, in London on May 14, 2006. This landmark agreement aimed to promote democratic principles and strengthen the democratic process in Pakistan, which had experienced

periods of political instability and military rule in its history (Mahar, Malik, & Bakhtiar, 2021). The Charter outlined a set of commitments and reforms to ensure fair and free elections, a level playing field for all political parties, and the protection of democratic institutions. It sought to end the cycle of political turmoil and military intervention in Pakistan, fostering a more stable and participatory democracy in the nation. The Charter of Democracy signaled a significant moment of political unity between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), both of which were the country's major opposition parties at the time (Text of the Charter of Democracy, 2006). This agreement underscored their commitment to democratic governance, constitutionalism, and the protection of human rights. The Charter played a vital role in paving the way for the return of civilian rule in Pakistan, and it continues to be a symbol of the country's struggle for democracy and in the development of political tolerance in Pakistan (Need to introduce tolerance in politics, 2022). While its full implementation has faced challenges over the years, the Charter of Democracy remains a crucial reference point for discussions on democratic reforms and the consolidation of democratic values in Pakistan.

Ch. R Pervaiz of PTI said Intolerance and instability are increased in our society. Pakistan is suffering from many difficulties and the situation is becoming more critical now. People in society are losing their ability to be patient in different situations. No one in society is willing to understand the viewpoint of the other and all are trying to impose their views on others (Pervaiz, 2023). "Intolerance means the lack of toleration, unwillingness or refusal to tolerate or respect contrary opinions or beliefs, persons of different races or backgrounds, etc." (Dictionary, 1997). M. J Anwar said intolerance, instability, violence, and aggression are at their peak in Pakistan nowadays. He said Imran Khan's politics of lust for power is the main reason behind this increase in intolerance in Pakistan. He said Imran Khan's main agenda is about getting power and control over the state, for which he is using his supporters who trust him blindly (Anwar, 2023). Y. Suleeman replied that intolerance, instability, and unemployment all these things are all increasing in our country rapidly. While talking about intolerance he said that intolerance in Pakistan increased after 2013's elections with the Dharana of PTI. The PTI leader Imran Khan Provoked the political opponents on an extreme level and now it can be seen that everyone replies to each other very harshly and does not care about the tone of language and meaning and impact of his or her words. He said in the present situation political intolerance is increasing more and more and two people are truly responsible for it in the political environment, The first one is Imran Khan and the second is Mariam Nawaz (Suleeman, 2023).

Evidence of Political Intolerance from the Present Situation

In present-day Pakistan, there has been a concerning surge in political intolerance, eroding democratic norms and stifling dissenting voices. The 2013 general elections were tainted by allegations of rigging, setting a divisive tone for subsequent years (Ahmed, 2011). The government's efforts to quell opposition and control the media intensified, resulting in the suppression of independent journalism and criticism of state policies. Instances of extra-judicial actions forced disappearances, and targeted attacks on political activists, journalists, and ethnic minority leaders exemplified this escalating intolerance (Bandow, 2012; Ali et al., 2021). The rise of extremist groups and their influence within the political landscape exacerbated the climate of fear and polarization (Baqir, 2014). By 2022, the erosion of democratic values and the diminishing space for political pluralism raised serious concerns about the future of democracy and political freedom in Pakistan, standing in stark contrast to the ideals outlined in the Charter of Democracy, which advocated for a democratic and inclusive political environment but now faces significant challenges (Cain, 2015). Sectarian violence and targeted attacks on particular religious groups also persist, fostering political intolerance (Nawaz, 2015).

Reviving the Charter of Democracy

The goals and tenets of the CoD must be modified to reflect the current political climate. The incorporation of fresh political forces and heightened interaction with civil society should also be taken into account in this adjustment. To reduce political intolerance, it is essential to support political parties in their reaffirmation of the CoD's tenets and to cultivate an atmosphere of communication, cooperation, and tolerance (Omar Hayat, 2023). The efficiency of the CoD can be increased by enlisting the aid of foreign partners in its rehabilitation efforts and by promoting stability and collaboration in the region.

Discussions

Intolerance is increasing in Pakistan at great speed at present. Political intolerance means that, instability and violence in the political environment by the people of the state. In Pakistan, political intolerance along with many other problems such as unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, and inflation is at its peak level.

- There are several causes of increasing intolerance in Pakistan, this study focused on the causes of increasing political intolerance in Pakistan and found that political leadership in Pakistan and social media both are the key factors behind this rapid increase.
- Opinion manipulation, especially among young people on social media damaged democracy. Fake news and propaganda propagated through automated accounts have targeted institutions and politicians, influencing public opinion in the absence of effective restrictions in Pakistan.
- Political statements of political leaders in Pakistan are mostly based on personal attacks and the threat of exposing each other which encourages their supporter's intolerant behavior.
- Negotiations or table talks between the leadership of political parties can result in agreements like the "Charter of Democracy" and can control the increasing Political intolerance in Pakistan. Implementation or execution of democratic values or norms is necessary to overcome the burning issue of increasing political intolerance.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to analyze the increasing political intolerance in Pakistan in the context of the usage of social media platforms by the political leadership and supporters of the political parties. Statements and posts by the political leadership and their effects, supporters' reactions, and arguments resulted in intolerance, instability, and violence. Subsequently, as indicated by this study about political intolerance and analysis of the need for the revival of the charter of democracy resulted that political tolerance is increasing at a rapid speed. Thus, this confirms the researcher's stance is solid that there are many causes of the increase of political intolerance in Pakistan but the vital role of political leaders and social media. The increasing political intolerance affects the development of every field of society and there is a great need for implementation of the charter of democracy to control it. Stability and tolerance are compulsory to keep society integrated and maintain peace. Tolerance in the attitudes of the population positively influences the process of nation-building. Anyhow, political intolerance is not normal and suitable for democracy all over the world.

Recommendations

This research work recommends that Pakistan must diminish the level of political intolerance and political instability to attain a tolerant and peaceful society and for the development of Pakistan

- Foster a culture of political inclusivity to encourage diversity of opinion and peaceful political discourse.

- Strengthen democratic institutions to ensure their independence and effectiveness in upholding democratic norms.
- Promote the rule of law and protect the independence of the judiciary to ensure impartial justice.
- Safeguard freedom of speech and freedom of the press to enable open debate and a free exchange of ideas.
- Address electoral irregularities, gerrymandering, and voter suppression to restore trust in the electoral process.
- Encourage a national dialogue among political parties, civil society, and stakeholders to find common ground and promote political tolerance.
- Combat the influence of extremist groups in politics and establish robust security measures to protect politicians and activists.

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