

**Ravi Kalia, ed., Pakistan:
From the Rhetoric of
Democracy to the Rise
of Militancy, New Delhi:
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Abraham Lincoln, defined democracy as: “Government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Democracy is a form of government in which the authority of government is based on the will of its individuals. Governmental authority is legitimately exercised in accordance with a written constitution which is the “supreme law of the land”. In the 60 plus years of its history, however, democracy has remained an elusive dream in Pakistan. Several reasons for this failure have been put forth, including the failure to construct a constitution, military takeovers, a prevailing feudal culture particularly among political parties, an incompetent and corrupt leadership, an outdated institutional infrastructure, an ineffective civil society, a low literacy rate, and foreign interventions due to Pakistan’s geo-strategic location in South Asia. The book *Pakistan: From the Rhetoric of Democracy to the Rise of Militancy* edited by Ravi Kalia deals with such an important and relevant subject and reveals in a great detail the various reasons for the failure of democracy in Pakistan. The book analyses and examines how Pakistan created the “Islam in danger” bogey and on the promise of providing a territorial safe haven to Indian Muslims in post-colonial India found it very difficult to politically make Islam a unifying force. And, how despite the political rhetoric of both the civilian and military leaders in support of democracy, liberalism, inclusiveness, freedom of expression, secularism, it has continued to drift towards an increasingly brittle authoritarianism, religious extremism, and intolerance towards minorities in Pakistan. This compilation explains and explores the dichotomy that exists between rhetoric and the reality in present day Pakistan.

An important reason for the failure of democracy in Pakistan is the absence of a political culture in its body politic which is an important ingredient for a sustainable democracy. However, as this book argues, democratically elected Pakistani governments did not adhere to the democratic principles and values in the conduct of affairs. And similarly, the opposition also played an important role in destabilising elected governments, ultimately eroding the democratic process. The political parties also failed to train and educate their cadres in democratic traditions, which further undermined the growth of democracy at the grass-roots. Further more, the lack of democratic discourse provided belligerent generals with opportunities for prolonging military regimes (pp. 138-139). Consequently,

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under a powerful military, Pakistan became a “praetorian state”. In such a state, institutions such as the legislature and judiciary are weak and serve the dominant interest of the military (p. 152).

In Pakistan, thus, the absence of political culture and democracy has made it increasingly unfit for democracy. Decades of military manipulations of the political system have further weakened democratic institutions but also made the very possibility of an alternative to the existing political system increasingly unlikely. Since the 2008 elections, Pakistan is no longer formally a military dictatorship. But it is still a “praetorian state” with only a democratic façade (p. 174).

As a matter of fact, Pakistan at the time of its creation had all the characteristics of a developing state that was likely to encourage and expanding role for the army such as: a weak social cohesion, an extremely fragmented class structure, a weak middle class, an absence of symbols for social and political mobilisation, weak political institutions, a weak, inefficient and corrupt political parties, a mediocre political class, and a lingering conflict between the centre and the provinces (p. 161). Even the democratically elected civilian leaders were never truly interested in consolidating democratic institutions. Neither were the political leaders willing nor able to enforce good government, economic progress, or simply accept the orderly succession of elected governments. Moreover, the civil society in Pakistan has also remained deficient and insignificant where as an active and vibrant civil society could have played a considerable role in ensuring the success of democracy in the country. In short, the lack of democracy, eats into the vitals of the nation by plunging it in a state of uncertainty. The failure to fulfil requirements for inclusiveness and unity, good government, women’s empowerment, socio-economic development to Pakistan, and rise of cultural chauvinism and religious militancy has contributed to the inherent instability of the country which is undermining democracy (pp. 86, 162).

On the Pakistan-US relationship, the book states that Qaid-i-Azam, MA Jinnah defined the relationship and it was assiduously pursued by succeeding generations of leaders. Pakistan’s interest in the US was, and remains, financial and military; America’s interest in Pakistan was, and remains, geo-political. But external aid and the geo-political significance of Pakistan is always transactional, and ceases after the crisis passes. This is what happened with the Afghanistan war in the 1980s, and will most likely to happen after the ongoing war on terrorism is over. This might explain Pakistan’s interest in perpetuating the Afghan war by playing both sides of the street. However, this divergence of interest has proved expensive for both nations, but they remain locked in a symbiotic relationship unable to cut the troubled ties (pp. 30, 38).

Moreover, in the aftermath of 9/11, under blunt threats from the Bush administration, General Pervez Musharraf made Pakistan a frontline state in the war on terror by agreeing to support the US war on terrorism. During his nine years in power, Musharraf failed to devise an effective, holistic policy to deal with the Taliban and Al Qaeda, allowing the two organisations to grow exponentially, and they now pose a serious threat to the stability of Pakistan (p. 154). The book points out that after many years and billions of dollars, US efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan are in danger of failing entirely, causing a major setback to US strategic interests in the region. Pakistan is at the crossroads of virtually all major terrorist movements in the world today (p. 210). As a result, Pakistan is viewed by the world, despite its intimate but toxic relationship with the US, as a client state of the US, Saudi Arabia, and China, an international school for training jihadi terrorists, a proliferator of nuclear technology, a theocratic state on the brink of bankruptcy, a government that is principally controlled by the military, and a nation in unending conflict with its neighbours. The book argues that the future of Pakistan lies in moderation. However, moderation and reshaping of the popular Pakistani mindset would come through an evolutionary process, and not by any state-sponsored doctrine. The Pakistani state needs to reinvent itself as a moderate and tolerant state, responsive to the needs of its citizens, supportive of pluralistic ideas, interested in progressive education, and globally engaged if it has to prosper in a globalised, multicultural, and competitive world (p. 191).

Taken together, therefore, the chapters reveal a great deal not only about the various reasons for the failure of Pakistan's civilian and military leaders' rhetoric of providing a democratic government, but also about the complex problems that Pakistan has been confronting. More broadly, the papers, contributed by scholars and practitioners of statecraft from around the world, provide insights and assessments about the Pakistan's habitual drift from the political rhetoric of democracy to the rise of militancy which has profound implications for the South Asian region and the world at large.

