
Akmal HUSSAIN

**PAKISTAN, INSTITUTIONAL
INSTABILITY AND
UNDERDEVELOPMENT: STATE,
PEOPLE, AND CONSCIOUSNESS**

London: Folio Books, 2023,
pp. 372; 38,31 EUR
(ISBN: 978-969-7834-52-5)

The book »Pakistan, Institutional Instability and Underdevelopment: State, People, and Consciousness» was published by Folio Books in April 2023. The author Akmal Hussain is a renowned economist, writer and professor. He has written several books and journals on economic development, public policy etc. In the reviewed book, he explains why Pakistan has continuously struggled with fragile government institutions and slow economic growth. He describes how history and other factors have shaped the way the country is run and how both the economy and society function. His work presents an extensive analytical study of the weak institutions, reasons and factors behind such circumstances, and its impact on the country's development. In this review, the focus is on Hussain's explanation of the core challenges Pakistan has faced as an independent country. However, the book also discusses the important role of the public for the development of any country, there is no doubt that powerful and independent institutions are a requisite for a strong political setup while it cannot be denied that political and social awareness makes political structure strong when people can raise questions on right and wrong. Hussain

argues Pakistan's problems are not new but long-term, extending back to when the country attained its independence in 1947. His view is that these problems are not due to a weak economy and economic policies and the key issue is instead the country's institutions (government, legal system, economy etc.) that were not developed and managed properly from the outset. In turn, the country has encountered political instability and fallen behind in making progress. Although apparently a democratic system had been introduced in Pakistan after its independence from the British colonial system in 1947 but unfortunately the power remained in the hands of few. The military directly ruled the country for several years, also influencing the democratic setup from behind the scenes. Additionally certain elites such as influential political leaders, bureaucrats, influential advisors, ministers and powerful feudal families have had an impact as well on Pakistan's democratic system where they dominate public opinion and control national interests. The country's political institutions have accordingly had no space to grow and been unable to provide stability and progress. Weak governance has been a further element, with long-term policies being abandoned that otherwise would have helped the country become more economically and institutionally stable.

In addition, Hussain describes how the Pakistani public has lost interest in the institutions, and weak governance, inconsistent policies, political leaders not meeting their promises, and one-sided policies that support the elites and neglect the masses have been the

major factors explaining the public's lack of trust.

He believes that after Pakistan's independence the country's biggest institutions continued to be influenced by the British Empire. The powerful role of the bureaucracy in shaping Pakistani politics remained unchallenged. The Pakistani political system was subjected to the power of bureaucrats' decisions, whereas the role of the common man was completely ignored. For decades, the ongoing political instability, frequent changes in government, and lack of consistent policies and proper planning have pushed the country into a weaker situation. Hussain states that while Pakistan possesses rich natural resources, its political leaders have not focused on the country's progress and stability and typically taken decisions in their own interests or those of particular groups; again making the country more fragile. The absence of a system of accountability has seen corruption develop in all institutions. The weak legislation has been unable to ensure law and order. As a result, Pakistan has struggled with poor governance, namely, a precondition for long-term growth and prosperity. Rather than concentrating on stability and progress, leaders have often made short-term decisions to the benefit of a few powerful groups, not the whole country. They have managed to get their grips on everything including all institutions, economic policies, under control so the whole system can easily work in their favour, giving benefits to their persons of choice rather than broad public welfare programmes for everyone. The unequal distribution

of power and wealth is today the biggest obstacle to the country's economic development and has seen it become ever more fragile.

The author looks at the Pakistani economy and determines that instead of being strong and independent it appears to seek out foreign aid. Although Pakistan is rich in natural resources and could have a strong economic structure in place, powerful elites either influential political parties, feudal lords, army generals, bureaucracy directly influenced the overall system of Pakistan's political setup since its independence. No focus has been given to formulating long-term economic policies that would assure a strong economic infrastructure. This explains why the country always needs support from external financial organisations or countries to manage the weak economy. The outcome is that most of the population does not see any overall economic progress and is aware that it depends considerably on foreign aid rather than a strong and self-sufficient system. The unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities continue to be available to only a few while the majority has lived hand to mouth. He is critical of the economic policies that have failed to bring countrywide prosperity and calls for a model that brings development for the common people, improves their lifestyle, and is shared equally across the entire country.

He highlights that it is essential to raise the awareness of Pakistani people to bring positive change. The author labels the word "consciousness" in the book title *Pakistan, Institutional Instability and Underdevelopment: State,*

People, and Consciousness, to refer about the awareness that citizens have for their state country & its system where the government does not work to improve the lives of its citizens, people lose interest in the government. They do not feel a connection with it. Such a situation adds to feelings of restlessness across the country. People often display violent behaviour and adopt illegal ways to survive. According to Hussain, development does not simply mean institutional and economic development but also that the people show interest and support the government; their mindset should be positive and supportive, and this only happens when the public is aware that the government in power is bringing social welfare and making things easier for them, which regrettably is not the case. The long history of poor governance has led to the people having a weak connection with the state. Hussain states that identity issues since the country's independence are also a critical factor in why people do not show unity. Identity politics is a large hurdle that limits the public's political interest and engagement with the system. Instead of blaming any single department, the author states the whole system is responsible for the underdevelopment including judiciary, parliament, political parties, leaders and every influential entity that directly or indirectly use power to manipulate institutions to work for their own agendas.

In the reviewed book, Hussain provides valuable suggestions for improving issues like the poor governance and shattered economic circumstances. He insists that Pakistan should stick to clear-cut policies to strengthen demo-

cracy, making government institutions more transparent and corruption-free, ensuring equal power distribution, and sharing power between the federal and provincial governments, allowing the local government to interact directly with public opinion than keeping it in the hands centre run by political elites. He adds the economic policies should not only benefit the rich and powerful but focus on improving the lives of ordinary people by promoting local businesses, creating jobs, and assuring a fair distribution of resources. His book offers sound advice for both government officials and researchers looking for long-term solutions to Pakistan's political and economic challenges.

The author wrote this book after undertaking extensive research, going through historical analysis and economic theories in depth. It is a useful reference for anyone who wants to understand the true causes of the fragile state of Pakistan. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Hussain connects economics, political science, and sociology to provide a well-rounded explanation of the country's ongoing challenges. Despite the book being written in a scholarly way, anyone can easily understand the socioeconomic challenges facing Pakistan. This makes it not only a good resource for political scientists and policymakers but it also thoroughly informs students and general readers interested in discovering the political, social and economic problems of Pakistan, in particular the country's political underdevelopment.

The book is not without criticism however. It does not include real-life case studies to support the theoretical

arguments. Adding case studies from Pakistan or similar countries could have demonstrated how the proposed solutions might work in practice. It would also have been fruitful to include countries that have survived similar difficulties, and the way they overcame those obstacles so as to help readers better understand the issues and reforms. Even though the book explains in detail the key causes of the country's problems, he may be criticised for leaving out an important part containing a few possible reforms as how to awake the consciousness and through which means; moral reforms, civic education or political activism and should be through media, leadership or by countrywide campaigns. While public awareness is clearly an important factor, but change is not easy to bring until or unless the power has been decentralised and every institution can work independently for national interests

without getting influenced by interference of any powerful circle. Further, Hussain does not explain well which type of political awareness is needed and In brief, "Pakistan, Institutional Instability, and Underdevelopment: State, People, and Consciousness" is an important and thought-provoking work that sheds light on Pakistan's poor governance and economic failures. The book explains why Pakistan faces political and economic challenges today. Hussain presents critical analysis of the country's institutional weaknesses and tried his best to present the root causes of country's weak political structure. The book is especially valuable for political science students, scholars of South Asian politics, policymakers, and anyone interested in understanding the root causes of Pakistan's political and economic struggles.

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