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Democracy, Development, and Social Change

By Touqir Hussain

An exclusive essay by the former Ambassador of Pakistan to Japan, Spain, and Brazil.

I have never understood the fascination here in the West, especially in the United States, to evaluate developing societies in terms of democracy. Democracy is of course the best form of governance that all countries should aspire to. But go and ask the masses in these societies if that is what is most important in their life. What is important for them, they will tell you, is social and economic justice, human security and dignity, and hope for a better future. And they will like any government that provides this kind of life.

During a recent lecture at the Foreign Service Institute of the State Department, a USAID official asked me a question that has exercised my mind all my adult life. "What," she asked, "do the people of Pakistan want? Development or democracy?" Prompt came my reply—if democracy brings development, they want democracy; if it does not, then they want development.

In her recently published book, *Thieves of State*, Sarah Chayes focuses on corruption in Afghanistan. Sarah, who spent a decade in Kandahar, realized that most people's concerns had little to do with democracy. The Afghan government, she concluded, was best understood not as a dysfunctional administrative system but as a highly functional criminal enterprise. And it doesn't work in the way most people think. Keep in mind, Sarah was describing the so-called democratic Afghanistan. Of course Pakistan is no Afghanistan, but hers is message that applies to Pakistan as well—for those societies struggling to varying degrees with nation and state building, maybe democracy is not the real issue?

While we should be happy that our democratic experiment has been far more successful than in most of the Islamic countries, we still need to cover a lot more ground. Pakistan has neither failed nor is it failing, but something has indeed gone horribly wrong. Rarely has a nation, with so much going for it and with so much idealism when it started its journey in 1947, fared so poorly.

Pakistan has great potential, but it will remain untapped if the country does not come to terms with its problems, which include the lack of all manner of justice, social exclusion of the marginalized and vulnerable (particularly women), high illiteracy rates, poor public services, corruption, inequities in land and income distribution, energy shortages, poor infrastructure, and internal security challenges.

We need action to attack the fundamental structural flaws in our country — the power imbalances; the stranglehold of a certain class over power; a security paradigm that lacks national consensus and is beginning to turn on itself; ethnic, linguistic and regional fault lines; sectarian tensions; class and culture wars; and a rising tide of extremism.

Changing Pakistan essentially amounts to winning the struggle between the forces of change and those of the status quo. And it will require a national reawakening to do so. If that does not happen then democracy will only empower the already empowered. So what good is it for the vast majority of the people? Who is to blame? Not just the leadership. With an elected government having returned to power for the third time, we have the democracy now that we always wanted. The people must share some responsibility for its successes or failures.

Democracy is a partnership between the government and the people, where various political forces vie for public support; and people ask for a better quality of life in return. This exchange largely takes place through the media. The educated class is supposed to help articulate public demands. But if the majority of this class is self-absorbed, lacks clarity about national challenges, and wants to live either in an intellectual

vacuum or enclaves of conflicting visions of Pakistan, what does it expect the government to do?

Governments in Pakistan have always been focused on maintaining the dominant social status of the ruling elite while minimally satisfying the public. If the public is confused and conflicted, like it is now, there is no pressure for change. And that is good news for the status quo. In any case, dismantling the status quo is not possible without tough decisions – in a democracy, that means a loss of voter support. As consequence, there is neither compulsion nor incentive for tough decisions. What do you then end up with? A weak democracy and a weak government.

Of course the biggest challenge Pakistan has is terrorism, and we cannot achieve stability and progress and change without defeating terrorism. The Pakistan Army, as well as the civilian leadership, is to be commended for finally taking on this challenge, but a lot more needs to be done. Pakistan cannot eliminate terrorism without addressing the issue of extremism and what gives rise to it. And to this end, it is said that we need to invent a new narrative. But it is not just extremism about which we need to invent a new narrative. It is Pakistan whose narrative needs to be reinvented, as extremism and radicalism has come to intersect with all facets of life – with identity, national purpose, class issues, social institutions, ethnic nationalism, the educational system, and -- above all -- with the political culture and the national security doctrine. Pakistan has seen a steady rise in the proportion of its working age population – almost 60 percent. They need employment, but the increasing likelihood of a lack of jobs is a prescription for social instability and an increased risk of extremism.

True, there is an emerging civil society inspired by the ideals of democracy. But democracy has also stoked nationalism and by extension anti-Americanism. The injection of Islam has turned it into ultra-nationalism or Islamic nationalism. And the democratic and the ultra-nationalistic waves are not reconciling. In fact, they have a zero-sum impact on each other—one is opposed to extremism and other vulnerable to it. But the irony is they merge also. Nationalism, religious populism, and discontent with governance and with the ruling elite have all come to find a common focus on Islam and anti-Americanism, making everybody, to varying degrees, vulnerable to radical thoughts.

Free media and the expanding civil society are to be greatly commended, but they on their own cannot bring about change. Liberals are under an illusion that they can, but they do not realize that they have been left by the mainstream as a stand-alone political force.

The media and civil society can help but only through great debates of ideas, rather

than as merely the voice of protest. They should help create awareness about the need for a third political force -- one that represents a younger Pakistan, is possibly supported by a new social class and a mass movement with no stakes in the system: a political force that is wholly committed to forming a new Pakistan. And a new national narrative. That is what INDUS – Mobilizing People’s Power is dedicated to doing.

Let me conclude with a poignant paragraph on the state of leadership in the country from Abbas Nasir’s essay (“The Whole Truth”) in *Dawn*. “In a country where attitudes, policies towards religious militancy are dominated by fear (PML-N), ideological affinity and unfounded, misplaced beliefs/theories (Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf), outright ineptitude and ignorant self-righteous indignation (PPP) and by disastrous strategic depth and low-cost warfare on enemy soil concepts (military), why should anyone be surprised at the daily dose of murder and mayhem that have come to mark the lives of almost all Pakistanis?”

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Registration and tax-deductible donations can be made through our website: www.induspk.org

Announcement: Director of Public Relations



INDUS welcomes Mr. Ali Asghar as the Director of Public Relations to the Board of Directors. Mr. Ali Asghar is resident of the Washington Metro Area. He is an Electrical Engineering graduate of the NED University of Engineering & Technology (1999-2003) and works in the telecommunication and information technology industries. He also served as President of [IEEE NED chapter](#). Mr. Ali Asghar is well connected with the D.C. Metro Area community and professional organizations such as NEDA-DC, OPEN DC, AdvoPak, and others. He brings with him a wealth of professional work experience, having worked in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, China, and Mexico.

President Athar Javaid announced the addition. "I am sure Mr. Ali Asghar's charismatic and dynamic personality and his devotion to INDUS objectives will be a great addition to the INDUS - Mobilizing People's Power BOD.

"I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude and thanks to Mr. Syed Mehdi Kamal who served as Director of Public Relations until recently. Mr. Syed Mehdi Kamal has relocated to New York, where we look forward to his support in introducing INDUS - Mobilizing People's Power to the Pakistani American community there, as prompted by Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi, recently."

The democracy debate

Dr. Hasan Askari Risvi

'Democracy offers the best possible approach to governance and political management, but the democratic system within a capitalist framework has a tendency to perpetuate socioeconomic inequities in society. Pakistan faces this dilemma on a more or less permanent basis. Consequently, society erroneously turns to the military to provide services when elected officials fail in their roles. Society also overlooks the failings of elected officials because their power is the result of a democratic process. These apposite institutions must work together and society should demand they fulfill their responsibilities while forming a collaborative relationship.'

[[Tribune](#)]

Romancing the car

Nadeem-ul-Haque

Urban infrastructure has changed from the 1970s, but a project underway in Lahore suggests policy planners in Pakistan have not kept up with the times. 'My contemporaries stuck in the 1960s continue to argue that there can be no development without an engineering industry and the heart of this industry is the car. We now have an industry that is totally uncompetitive and survives through preying on our local citizen.'

[[The News](#)]

Pakistan: The Next Colombia Success Story?

Daniel Runde

The Pakistan of today is similar to that of Colombia in the late 1990s. It has the potential to be a global turnaround story. Western headlines on Pakistan today gloss over the progress on the security front, the increased political stability, and incremental progress on the economic front. In spite of this potential for Pakistan, it continues to suffer from a terrible country brand that has not caught up with realities on the ground.

[[Forbes](#)]

Gangs of Karachi

Matthieu Aikins

Karachi is Pakistan's largest city, with an estimated population of 20 million, and stories of corruption and violence are commonplace there. The article profiles the Uzair Baloch, an example of the city's mix of crime, violence, and politics that go all the way to the top of major political parties.

[[Harper's](#)]

25 Non-Muslim Pakistanis Who Have Contributed A Lot To Our Society

Sumaenah Rizvi

They're labelled as the "white" in the Pakistani flag: The extraordinary Pakistanis who aren't Muslims include such individuals as Cecil Chaudhry, Bapsi Sidhwa, Julius Salik, and others.

[[parhlo](#)]

The seven long years when Pakistan did not sing its national anthem

Akhtar Baloch

The story of how, after seven years, Pakistan was able to select its national anthem. Before, they simply didn't have one. Linguistic differences prevailed and Quaid-e-Azam had already declared Urdu as the national language. To this day there is an ongoing debate among journalists and intellectuals over who was the first person to write a national anthem for Pakistan.

[[Dawn](#)]

Pakistan, the Next Software Hub?

Bina Shah

Pakistan isn't usually considered one of the world's information technology powerhouses; its share of global I.T. sales is only \$2.8 billion, of which \$1.6 billion represents tech and I.T. services and software exported abroad. Yet Pakistan's I.T. sector is carving a niche for itself as a favored place to go for freelance I.T. programmers, software coders and app designers. There are now 1,500 registered I.T. companies in Pakistan, and 10,000 I.T. grads enter the market every year.

[[NY Times](#)]

LUMS engineering faculty secures US patent for radar based electronic warfare technology

Web Desk

The Electrical Engineering faculty of the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) have secured a US patent on their research related to Electronic Counter – Counter Measure (ECCM) radar technique, which nullifies the effect of jamming by ground-based radars and hence detects the true location of targets. This is the first time that Pakistan has managed to get a US patent for electronic warfare.

[[Tribune](#)]

Youth Leadership Development

Creating campus-based, strictly nonpolitical Student Government Associations that offer functional Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary experiences within a campus environment, including the election of student representatives as Members of Parliament and Judges to manage all aspects of student affairs, in conjunction with campus administration.

Pakistan Civil Liberties Union

Civil liberties are personal guarantees and freedoms that the government cannot abridge, either by law or by judicial interpretation. However in today's Pakistan, violence, intolerance, weak rule of law, endemic corruption, and a lack of religious freedom and social and economic justice have become routine. The Pakistan Civil Liberties Union (PCLU) is a watchdog organization that will combat these issues at every level of society.

Policy Research – As It Happens

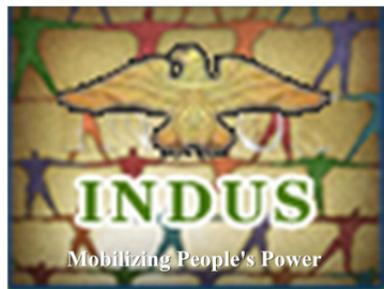
Campus-based political and social sciences research. Graduate Student and Faculty focusing on policy issues for possible social, cultural, and political reform, followed by advocacy action and awareness creation by the same researchers for the purposes of legislative reform as appropriate.

Cultivating Early Awareness

Aimed at increasing youngsters' awareness of rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and building a national bond at a very impressionable age, leading to real benefits to the nation in evolving future leadership.

As always, thank you for reading, and thank you for your efforts. If you have questions or comments, or desire to participate in any way, please don't hesitate to contact us at induspk.usa@gmail.com.

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