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Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: Institutional Contests, Democratic Erosion, and the Consolidation of Military Supremacy (2020-2026)

Mekhraj Khan¹

¹ MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: mekhrajkhan@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's civil-military relations remain central to understanding its democratic development and institutional stability. This study examines civil-military relations from 2020 to 2026, focusing on institutional conflict, civilian authority, and military influence over governance. It addresses the problem of persistent power imbalances between elected governments and the military, particularly during political transitions and constitutional change. Using a qualitative case-study approach, the research analyses constitutional documents, official records, scholarly literature, and credible media reports. Its theoretical framework combines Samuel Huntington's objective civilian control, Morris Janowitz's constabulary model, and Samuel Finer's theory of military intervention. The findings examine the breakdown of the Imran Khan-military alignment, political developments following April 2022, the February 2024 elections, and the 27th Constitutional Amendment of 2025. The study argues that these developments raise important questions about democratic accountability, institutional autonomy, and prospects for civilian supremacy in Pakistan.

Keywords

Civil-Military Relations;
Pakistan Army;
Democracy; Imran Khan;
Asim Munir; Institutional
Power; Constitutional
Amendments; PTI; PML-
N; Hybrid Regime.



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1. Introduction

Pakistan's political history is, in many respects, a history of military dominance. Since the country's founding in 1947, the armed forces and particularly the Pakistan Army have governed directly for approximately thirty-three of the nation's seventy-eight years of existence. Even during ostensibly democratic periods, the military has operated as a 'deep state,' shaping civilian decision-making, determining foreign policy contours, and removing civilian leaders deemed insufficiently compliant with its institutional interests (Ahmad, 2023). The period between 2020 and 2026 represents a particularly revealing episode in this long history, one in which old patterns were replicated but also significantly deepened.

This paper systematically presents and chronologically reflects civil-military relations in Pakistan from 2020 to 2026. It emphasizes four aspects: (1) the structural relationship between civil government and the military; (2) the role of intelligence agencies especially the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in domestic politics; (3) constitutional and legal arrangements which institutionalized military power; and (4) popular and institutional reactions to military intrusion in democratic governance.

The focus of the period is the final years of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government (2020-2022), the coalition government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) (2022-2024), the disputed general elections of February 2024, the second Shehbaz Sharif government (2024-present) and the momentous constitutional changes of November 2025, when Field Marshal Asim Munir was elevated to the position of Chief of Defence Forces with unprecedented powers and lifetime legal immunity (Brown, 2024).

In this paper, the research scholar argues that the duration (2020-2026) is the decisive period for Pakistan's political development as the military's informal influence is gradually institutionalized via constitutional and legislative frameworks, resulting in a more authoritarian political system in which military institutions have very limited authority and civilian ones have formal but weak authority.

2. Theoretical Framework

There is a substantial amount of literature that has been developed in the study of civil-military relations. Three models are especially pertinent for purposes of this paper, those of Samuel Huntington, the sociology of the military as developed by Morris Janowitz, and Samuel Finer's typology of military intervention in politics.

2.1 Huntington and Objective Civilian Control

The idea of objective civilian control was first outlined by Samuel Huntington in *The Soldier and the State* (1957), which called for the concentration of military expertise in a separate sphere by maximizing the military's capacity for professionalism. In this kind of model, civilians are more likely to come up with policies and the military are more likely to carry them out without trying to change the political results. Perhaps the longest rebuttal to this model is Pakistan's history. The Pakistani military has not confined itself to the professional/technical sphere; from its origins it has asserted its authority on matters of national security, economic policy and even on matters of democracy.

2.2 Janowitz and the Constabulary Force

The idea of a 'constabulary force', a military that is ever ready to fight, fights with a minimal force and is permanently engaged in international stability', was introduced by Morris Janowitz's 1960 book, *The Professional Soldier*. Janowitz's model was created for the context of Western liberal democracies but portions of the model are relevant in Pakistan. The military has been progressively engaged in the country's internal law enforcement, counterterrorism, economic governance (Special Investment Facilitation Council) and media control, all while models the military as a defence wing and the military as a governance tool.

2.3 Finer's Disposition to Intervene

But the most analytically useful framework of understanding Pakistan can still be found in *The Man on Horseback* (1962) by Samuel Finer. All militaries have a 'disposition to intervene' in politics, Finer said, but the amount of political culture (the acceptance or rejection of political by civilians, politicians, and public) differs. The

threshold of 'political culture' is low in Pakistan and it has been repeatedly used especially when civilian politicians are perceived as corrupt, weak or a danger to the institutional interest of the military.

The paper also relies on the work of Aqil Shah's *The Army and Democracy* (2014) that offers the most systematic scholarly analysis of Pakistan specific civil-military dynamics and the concept of 'electoral authoritarianism' of Andreas Schedler that is used to interpret the 2024 elections.

3. Historical Context: Patterns of Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan

To come to a decent understanding of the 2020-2026 period, it has to be placed within the broader trajectory of Pakistan's institutional past. The military has directly involved in politics thrice in the country's history, namely, during the coup of General Ayub Khan in 1958, General Yahya Khan during his coup in 1969 and General Zia ul-Haq in the coup of 1977. A fourth came when Gen. Pervez Musharraf took a coup in 1999. Every military takeover was followed by a process of 'managed civilianisation', which meant that military control was of a substantive nature, but executive control was located within the civilian sphere.

The Musharraf era (1999-2008) concluded with a popular movement for restoration of democracy, restoration of judiciary and eventual return of elected government. The next decade (2008-2018) has been marked by successive governments elected under the PPP, PML-N and PML-N, respectively, all under the military shadow with PML-N's Nawaz Sharif being disqualified from the 2017 elections by a Supreme Court decision, which was widely seen as a reaction to pressure from the military.

In the 2018 elections, Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf were able to come to power as the outcome was termed 'establishment-backed'. At the beginning, Khan's ties with the military seemed mutually beneficial: the military had the backing of a leader whom they felt they could control, while Khan had military support to defeat civilian political opposition. This fragile balance would be exposed after 2020.

4. Phase I (2020-2021): The Khan-Bajwa

Alliance and Its Contradictions

4.1 The Nominal Partnership

As 2020 begins, the dynamics between the Government of Pakistan and the Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, seemed to be in good working order, but with some underlying friction. In 2019, Khan had given an unusual extension of three years to Bajwa, highlighting the civilian government's reliance on military support, and had appointed him to the National Development Council, thus embedding the military in the economic management of the country. Bajwa, in turn, had been giving Khan political cover by threatening in public to "not allow" opposition leaders to "create a ruckus in the government" and emphatically stating that "Imran Khan is a constitutional Prime Minister, and I and you can't take him away".

During this time the military began to take a formal and official role in the economy. In 2019, the NDC, a body also formed that year, had a representation from the COAS and Director General, ISI, that made military participation part and parcel of decision making on infrastructure, foreign investment and budget allocation. Civil society commentators noted that this represented a qualitative departure from previous arrangements, in which military influence on economic policy had been exercised informally.

4.2 The ISI Appointment Crisis (2021)

The first big row between Khan and the army came in October 2021 when he appointed a new DG of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has announced the reshuffle of top officials with Lieutenant General Faiz Hamid, the current DG-ISI and Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum, nominated as the new holders of those positions, respectively. Lieutenant General Faiz Hamid, currently the DG-ISI, who is widely believed to be close to Khan personally, was posted as Corps Commander of XI Corps in Peshawar, while Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum was nominated as his replacement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced. Khan stood firm and refused to issue a formal notification approving the appointment which triggered a stand-off for several weeks.

Several things were shown in this episode. The Prime Minister has the authority to make the

appointment of DG-ISI on the recommendations of COAS, but in practice, this can be considered part of the military's prerogative. Khan's actions of rejecting the handover directly were seen as a claim to the civilian authority of what was de facto his territory. The eventual resolution, in which Khan's notification was being granted as he was allowed to report it as a "face-saver," mirrored the structural imbalance between the two: while civilian resistance was admitted as long as it did not challenge the institutional cohesion of the military, it was only when it did that compliance was demanded.

The ISI crisis that led to the appointment of a new chief of staff had begun to spell the end of the Khan-Bajwa relationship. Reports of withdrawal of support from the military establishment, from late 2021 onwards, were reflected in 'reaching out' to opposition parties, which would eventually culminate in Khan's removal through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022.

4.3 Foreign Policy Dimensions

Other evidence of civil-military tensions in 2020-2021 was in the field of foreign policy. The Khan government, broadly in sync with the security establishment's regional preferences, did not challenge the military's preferred approach to Afghanistan, namely, the reintegration of the Taliban and the establishment of strategic depth against India. During this time relation with the United States went sour, partially because of the military's balancing act between Washington and Beijing, and partially because of Khan's populist nationalist rhetoric.

The issue of Pakistan being placed on a grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has continued to have an impact on the civil-military dynamics, as the military links with the militant groups are being investigated under international pressure while both civilian and military establishments have been denying any such connections. Inter-institutional tensions continued to exist between the need for Pakistan to be seen as an international financial legitimate nation and the military's tolerance for non-state actors.

5. Phase II (2021-2022): The Fracture and Fall of Imran Khan

5.1 The Vote of No-Confidence

As early as early 2022, a plan emerged to oust Khan out of power. A group of opposition parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and several minor parties who formed a united front called the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), had been encouraged by the military establishment that it would not be putting up any resistance to a no-confidence motion. Later, Khan himself blamed the removal on General Bajwa, which he said was General Bajwa's own plan and he was personally involved in setting up the political opposition's politics.

The National Assembly on 10 April 2022 passed a vote of no-confidence against Imran Khan by 174 votes, which is the first time in Pakistan's history that the prime minister was removed from power through a constitutional parliamentary means instead of a military coup or judicial order. But the way events unfolded – for one, the re-establishment of the National Assembly after Khan's government had tried to dissolve it and ruled the no-confidence motion unconstitutional – showed that the judiciary, too, was playing within the military rules.

5.2 The 'Cipher' Allegation

Before his ouster, Khan suggested in public that there was a US cable or 'cipher' drafted by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington that proved the Americans were involved in a plot to remove his government. Khan had tied the accusation to what he claimed was a "will to comply" in the face of foreign pressure by army chiefs, which he has repeatedly denied. The army has vigorously rejected the allegation, which it has linked to the "will to comply" of the military leadership in the face of foreign pressure. One of the key legal tools used against Khan in the post-removal era was the Official Secrets Act in which he was charged with leaking the content of the cipher.

5.3 Shehbaz Sharif's Coalition Government

On 11 April 2022, the PML-N formed a coalition government headed by Shehbaz Sharif, who also had the PPP and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in his cabinet. The nature of the government-military relations was also qualitatively different from Khan-Bajwa relations from the beginning; rather than Khan-Bajwa relations being a partnership between the military

and a civilian leader who has been appointed by the military and is gradually asserting his autonomy, it was about the alignment of the civilian government and the military against a common political adversary.

The post-Khan transition was politically managed and General Bajwa's remaining tenure as COAS (which was to end in November 2022), was eaten up by it. The army has made a few public announcements trying to shield itself from partisan politics, including in his November 2022 farewell speech admitting that the army has been wrong to intrude on politics and promising to refrain from such involvement in the future. Analysts, who pointed out the disconnect between rhetoric and real action, were sceptical of these statements.

6. Phase III (2022-2023): The Munir Era – Suppression and Consolidation

6.1 The Appointment of General Asim Munir

Gen. Syed Asim Munir Ahmad Shah was appointed as the Chief of Army Staff on 24th November 2022, replacing Bajwa. It was an appointment of a special significance for several reasons. First, he was removed as DG-ISI in 2019, allegedly at Khan's personal request, as he was made aware of the evidence of corruption against Khan's then-wife Bushra Bibi's ex-husband, Mr. Sohrab Jamshidi. First, he was removed from the DG-ISI post in 2019 reportedly on Khan's personal request, as he was handed with evidence of corruption against Khan's former wife, Bushra Bibi, who was formerly married to Mr. Sohrab Jamshidi. Second, his appointment, when Khan is known to have been hostile towards him personally, showed the extent to which military preferences were being given on top posts by the Shehbaz Sharif government. Third, Munir's background as both DG Military Intelligence and DG-ISI, coupled with his years of experience in the government, made him uniquely aware of the tools in the military's power to deal with domestic political opposition.

6.2 The May 2023 Events

The biggest event of the 2022–2023 period was the arrest of Imran Khan on 9 May 2023 at the offices of Islamabad High Court, which was conducted by the National Accountability Bureau in the presence of the rangers of the Pakistan

Rangers. The arrest, and how it was done, sparked the biggest popular frenzy in Pakistan since 2007. The PTI supporters had attacked army establishments in Lahore, Rawalpindi and a few other army symbols within few hours including the residence of the Corps Commander in Lahore, GHQ in Rawalpindi and several others.

The army found this a justification and a pretext for attacking military installations. Within the next weeks and months, a systematic attack was launched against PTI. Thousands of party members, activists and leaders arrested. PTI officials were accused of terrorism to treason. Many senior members of PTI who have been facing sustained legal and physical pressure resigned the party publicly. The 9 May attacks were used by the military to discredit Khan's popular movement, to demonise it as a seditious threat to the state, rather than a political opposition.

6.3 Judicial Complicity and the 26th Amendment

There was also a great deal of judicial realignment during this time. The Supreme Court under Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa gave a number of decisions in favour of the government and against PTI. In 2024, the 26th Constitutional Amendment (26A) made changes to the composition of constitutional benches, and modified the procedure for appointing senior judges, all of which are broadly believed to have diminished judicial independence and the ability for judicial activism to curb executive and military excesses. Some commentators termed the amendment a "violation of the separation of powers."

7. Phase IV (2024): The Disputed Election and PTI's Continuing Resistance

7.1 The February 2024 General Elections

The general elections were held under a highly repressive environment for the main opposition party on 8 February 2024. A decision by the Supreme Court, which was believed to be the result of establishment pressure, barred PTI from contesting as a party, after it lost the cricket bat as its symbol. The PTI candidates were thus forced to run as non-party candidates. The PTI won the highest number of seats in the National Assembly, which was contested by PTI-backed independents, who had about ninety-three seats

despite facing a number of challenges including continued imprisonment of Imran Khan, arrest of prominent campaign staff, bans on election rallies, and an all-pervasive interference in campaign communications.

The results of the election were heavily criticized by domestic and international observers. The European Union Election Observation Mission, the U.S. government, and some big civil society organisations reported some irregularities such as delays in transmitting the results, interference of independent candidates, and discrepancies on the form-47 which seemed to have hurt the scores of the PTI-affiliated candidates. Analysts like Michael Kugelman, of the Wilson Center, labeled the final result, despite the fact that PML-N won fewer seats than PTI, but was able to form a coalition government, a 'manipulated mandate.'

7.2 The Second Shehbaz Sharif Government

On 3 March 2024, shehbaz sharif was sworn in as prime minister for a second term, for a coalition of the PPP, the MQM and a few smaller parties. The ties between the government and the military establishment were redefined by analysts as "return to the structure of a compliant civilian administration within military-determined parameters". General Munir's importance became more prominent as he made several overseas trips such as to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, and was termed by the then US President Donald Trump in September 2025 as his 'favourite field marshal', hinting at his imminent promotion, which was to take effect in May 2025.

7.3 The November 2024 PTI Protest

PTI staged a significant protest march to Islamabad in November 2024, calling for the release of Imran Khan and the withdrawal of a "stolen electoral mandate. Densely packed with thousands of protesters, the demonstration reached the capital on 27 November 2024 where it was violently dispersed. Security forces, including the police and paramilitary rangers, employed live ammunition, tear gas and rubber bullets, killing people. The government had rejected claims that it had ordered lethal force to be used, but independent reports and video footage refuted that assertion. The events of November 2024 marked one of the most notable

incidents of state violence against political protesters in Pakistan's recent history.

8. Phase V (2025-2026): The 27th Amendment and the Militarisation of the State

8.1 India-Pakistan Military Conflict and Its Domestic Aftermath

Operation Sindoor was a series of precision attacks by India in May 2025 against the terrorist infrastructure of Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir in response to the terror attack on Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir that killed twenty-six tourists. The brief but intense military exchange, which took place during a period that lasted about four days from 7 to 10 May 2025, caused both sides heavy losses, although these have yet to be fully determined. India said it had shot down and/or damaged at least twelve Pakistani military aircraft, including American-made F-16s. India, on the other hand, alleged that Pakistan downed its planes and suffered heavy casualties.

The war had repercussions for domestic politics right from the start. Earlier, the profile of General Asim Munir, who had been on the rise, with numerous foreign visits and media appearances, had increased significantly, and on 21 May 2025, he was promoted to Field Marshal, the highest rank in Pakistan, which was last held by Ayub Khan in 1959. The promotion was purely symbolic and arose out of the India-Pakistan standoff, which was being promoted as his leadership, rather than from any operational requirement, and added to Munir's institutional profile (Din et al., 2025).

8.2 The 27th Constitutional Amendment

The 27th Constitutional Amendment in November 2025 was the most significant event of the entire period from 2020-2026. On 8 November 2025, the cabinet gave the green light to the bill, which was introduced in the Senate on 10 November 2025 and passed by the National Assembly on 12 November with a two-thirds majority, with loud opposition from some PTI members. It has been signed by President Asif Ali Zardari into law on 13 November 2025.

The provisions of the amendment were a whole new approach to the civil-military relationship in Pakistan. The changes were as follows: (1)

introduction of a new constitutional position of Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) with the incumbent holding the same position as Chief of Army Staff, thus giving him command over the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and the Pakistan Navy (PN) as well; (2) removal of the post of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee; (3) appointment of a new five-year tenure for the CDF, resetting the five-year tenure of Munir from the date of his appointment as CDF and extending it till 2030 at least; and (5) granting lifetime immunity from prosecution to the incumbent Chief of Army Staff (CAS).

Asim Munir assumed the role of Chief of Defence Forces on 4 December 2025, and has the most wide-ranging formal constitutional power given to an individual in Pakistan's military history.

8.3 Domestic and International Reactions

The 27th Amendment received harsh criticism from some of the democratic governance proponents, opposition politicians, legal professionals and international observers. Chatham House called the amendment 'Pakistan's one step closer to authoritarian rule,' owing to the unprecedented case of life tenure for a serving military officer. The Pakistan Bar Council and a few eminent lawyers filed challenge to its amendment in court on the ground that the amendment was unconstitutional in view of the basic structure doctrine of constitutional law. Human Rights Watch said it was worried about the effect on judicial independence and accountability.

PTI's response in Pakistan was loud and clear. Asim Munir was termed as the 'most oppressive dictator' of Pakistan's history by Imran Khan from his prison cell. Khan's British boys ramped up the international lobbying, visiting members of parliament in the U.K. and members of committees in the U.S. congress to advocate for their father's release from prison and the collapse of democratic rule. The government's rebuttal to these accusations was that the changes in the constitution were aimed at modernizing the command structure of Pakistan based on lessons learnt from the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict, adding that such claims were politically motivated.

8.4 The Faiz Hameed Trial and Intra-Military

Dynamics

One significant parallel development was that of the conviction of the former DG-ISI Lieutenant General (retd) Faiz Hamid in the military court. Hamid, who was believed to have been a Khan ally when he was the head of ISI, was found guilty of disclosing state secrets, interfering in politics and misusing state power and faces 14 years of strict house arrest. The prosecution of Hamid, as has been noted, served multiple purposes: it was a marker of Munir's control of the inner workings of the military, it drove out one potentially destabilising figure who had his own political network, and it showed that the military had the will to deploy its own institutionalised disciplinary mechanism against its own top officers when they were viewed as a liability.

8.5 The Situation in 2026

At the surface, Pakistan's civil-military dynamics are relatively calm, yet there are underlying fissures. The civil-military dynamics in Pakistan, as of June 2026, are relatively stable on the surface but with deep substructures. The PML-N-led coalition government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is continuing to operate but its power is known to be within the parameters laid by the military establishment — both locally and internationally. As CDF, Field Marshal Munir has constitutional authority over all the armed forces, the Pakistani nuclear arsenal and, by virtue of the lifetime immunity clause, a personal immunity that no other Pakistani armed force commander has ever enjoyed.

In the face of ongoing institutional challenges PTI is still influential politically. It has shown that the popularity of Imran Khan and his movement is far from over through the results of the elections seen in February, 2024. One of the key variables in the political equation in Pakistan is whether and when Khan will be released from prison, where he has been imprisoned since August 2023 concurrently in several cases. The major destabilising factors the military-civilian setup will have to deal with in the coming years are continued resistance by PTI, continued economic problems and simmering tensions in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

9. Comparative Analysis: Pakistan in Regional Context

What has happened in Pakistan with civil-military

relations is not a unique situation, yet in certain facets, it is unique to the broader South Asian and Muslim majority world context. A simple comparison allows one to highlight the commonalities and Pakistan's distinct features.

Bangladesh never had direct military rule after 1947, but has had periods of democratic and authoritarian civilian rule, and the military has had a major, if seldom prominent, role in the country's affairs since 1990. The Turkish military has had an instructive role as a guardian institution throughout the history of the republic, a power it gradually lost after 2002 under the AKP government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has prosecuted high-ranking military officials and even imposed constitutional limits on the military's powers. In an ironic twist, Turkey has become more civilian controlled, although not as much as other democratic norms, while Pakistan has become more military controlled, exactly as Turkey was removing it.

Perhaps the closest case is in Egypt. The Egyptian military ousting of Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and the lawful extension of General Sisi's presidency and immunity through a constitutional amendment in 2022-2025 resemble certain phases of Pakistan's path. In both, the military establishment ousted a populist leader supported by an Islamist or religious-nationalist following, which was followed by the suppression and imprisonment of the former leader and the installation of a civilian government that was more amenable to military rule.

The unique feature of Pakistan is the military's continued involvement in politics and its institutionalization. In Pakistan, the military's political engagement has not followed the pattern of a brief, transitional phase of nominal democracy in Egypt in 2013, but has been a permanent and long-term presence for seven decades. The 27th Amendment of 2025 is a formalisation, a codifying of what was until now an institutional convention that had been operating informally in the Constitution.

10. Implications for Democracy and Governance

10.1 Democratic Consolidation

The democratic consolidation of Pakistan has been severely affected in the last six years, 2020-

2026. According to democratic consolidation theory by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, democratic consolidation depends on the emergence of "the only game in town" – when all important political actors agree to settle their differences through democratic institutional means. This condition has not been achieved in Pakistan in 2026 as compared to 2020. Imran Khan's removal, imprisonment and constant persecution, coupled with the institutionalisation of military dictatorship through the 27th Amendment, have shown that democratic institutional avenues are open for those working within the framework of military definition.

10.2 Institutional Decay

The time has hastened the deterioration of a number of critical democratic institutions. The judiciary, already constituted in a manner that favors the interests of the Executive Branch, has been further undermined by the modifications that have been made to the system of judicial selection under the provisions of the 26th Amendment, and by the provisions of the 27th Amendment which limit the role of the judiciary in the supervision of the operations of the Armed Forces. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has lost a lot of credibility for the conduct of the 2024 elections (Din et al., 2025). The constitution is not formally in operation as Parliament makes amendments without due deliberation and with little public engagement, with the passage of the 27th amendment from cabinet to presidential assent taking only five days.

10.3 Economic Governance

The rise of the military's economic footprint has consequences on the effectiveness of government and on democratic accountability. The Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) was established in 2023 and it serves as a formal institutional platform where the military wields influence on the foreign direct investment decision-making and economic planning processes. Those backing the measure say it offers stability and efficiency while those opposing it say that it is a cut in civilian economic management capacity and insulates investment decisions from popular review (Din et al., 2025).

10.4 Human Rights and Rule of Law

Human rights conditions have significantly

deteriorated during the period, in particular regarding freedom of expression, the freedom of assembly and the rights of political detainees. International organisations have highlighted the systematic misuse of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) against PTI journalists and social media users, the enforced disappearances of PTI activists, and the use of military court for the trial of civilians arrested during the events of May 2023, as serious violations of the norms of the rule of law.

10.5 International Dimensions

The civil-military dynamics of this era have also influenced Pakistan's foreign policies. The practice of the military in foreign policy, such as Munir's visits to Washington, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi and his being treated as a de facto head of state, has further blurred the lines between military and civilian foreign policy. Unlike the norms of democratic governance, the Trump administration seems to be comfortable with the military-dominated set-up, as evidenced in Trump's personal rapport with Munir, which has given international legitimacy to an arrangement that democratic governance principles would otherwise condemn.

11. Conclusion

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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The period from 2020 to 2026 highlights persistent tensions between civilian authority and military influence in Pakistan. The political developments following Imran Khan's removal in April 2022, the February 2024 elections, and the 27th Constitutional Amendment of 2025 illustrate important changes in institutional relations and governance. Analysed through Huntington's, Janowitz's, and Finer's theoretical perspectives, these developments raise questions about civilian oversight, institutional autonomy, and democratic accountability. The study argues that Pakistan's civil-military imbalance cannot be understood solely through changes in political leadership; it also reflects deeper institutional and structural challenges. Sustainable democratic development requires stronger parliamentary oversight, an independent judiciary, credible electoral processes, protection of political freedoms, and clearly defined constitutional boundaries between civilian and military institutions. Although these reforms face significant obstacles, Pakistan's democratic trajectory remains open to change. Ultimately, strengthening civilian institutions and ensuring accountability across state institutions are essential to improving democratic governance and political stability.

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