

SUMMARY of the Article **“Challenges to Social Cohesion” by** **Shahid Kardar, Dawn, August 10th,** **2024**

The article explores the numerous and interconnected crises, referred to as a “polycrisis,” that have severely weakened Pakistan’s governance and social cohesion. The state is described as teetering on the brink of financial insolvency due to the burdens of a bloated and self-serving state machinery, which enjoys lavish perks while the general population suffers from disenfranchisement and lack of security. The erosion of public trust is exacerbated by a lack of rule of law, growing terrorism, and a governance system that is increasingly dysfunctional. Civilian institutions, which should act as the pillars of the state, are described as fragile and largely ineffective due to political interference, corruption, and mismanagement. The education system is failing to equip the workforce with the necessary skills, further marginalizing the population and contributing to high unemployment rates, especially among youth. Meanwhile, excessive and outdated regulations are stifling economic growth, and the country is facing deepening regional and ethnic disparities. Social cohesion is under severe strain, with society becoming increasingly polarized and fractured. The article argues that addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive reconfiguration of state and society, a task so daunting that it would challenge even the most capable leadership, which Pakistan currently lacks.

Easy/Short SUMMARY:

The article discusses the many problems facing Pakistan, such as financial troubles, weak government institutions, and a lack of unity in society. It explains how these issues are making it difficult for the country to function properly. The



education system is not preparing people for jobs, and there is a growing divide between different regions and ethnic groups. The article stresses the need for major changes in the way the country is run, but also points out that this will be a difficult task given the current leadership.

SOLUTIONS of The Problem:

Strengthening Institutions

Reform and empower civilian institutions by reducing political interference, ensuring merit-based appointments, and promoting transparency to restore public trust.

Education and Skill Development

Invest in education and skill development programs that align with market demands, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to participate in the modern economy.

Economic Reforms

Simplify and update regulations to remove unnecessary obstacles to business, encourage investment, and stimulate economic growth. Focus on high-value industries to improve competitiveness.

Social Cohesion Initiatives

Implement programs aimed at bridging regional and ethnic divides, promoting a shared national identity, and fostering dialogue between different communities.

Judicial Reforms

Enhance the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary to ensure the rule of law and provide citizens with reliable grievance redressal mechanisms, especially against state actions.

Decentralization of Power

Promote decentralization by empowering local governments and ensuring fair distribution of resources to reduce regional disparities and strengthen the federation.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Launch campaigns to educate the public about the importance of social cohesion, rule of law, and the dangers of corruption, encouraging citizen participation in governance.

Youth Engagement

Develop programs that engage the youth in positive activities, such as community service and civic engagement, to reduce alienation and foster a sense of belonging.

Anti-Corruption Measures

Strengthen anti-corruption bodies, enforce strict penalties for corruption, and create a culture of accountability within government institutions.

National Dialogue

Facilitate a national dialogue involving all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and the military, to address the underlying causes of the polycrisis and develop a collective vision for the future.

IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the Article:

- The state's governing capacity is weakening, with institutions increasingly dysfunctional.
- The country is facing financial insolvency, burdened by a bloated state machinery.
- Education spending has decreased significantly, while defense spending

remains high.

- 31% of graduates are unemployed, and 34% of 15-to-29-year-olds have dropped out of the labor force.
- Social and regional disparities are deepening, contributing to ethnic and intercommunal tensions.

MCQs from the Article:

1. What is the primary focus of the article “Challenges to Social Cohesion”?

- A. Economic growth in Pakistan
- B. Political stability in Pakistan
- C. The weakening of governance and social cohesion in Pakistan**
- D. Military strategies in Pakistan

2. What percentage of graduates in Pakistan are unemployed, according to the article?

- A. 25%
- B. 31%**
- C. 40%
- D. 50%

3. Which sector has seen a significant decrease in spending over the decades, as mentioned in the article?

- A. Defense
- B. Education**
- C. Infrastructure
- D. Health

4. What has contributed to the erosion of Pakistan’s competitiveness, as discussed in the article?

- A. High population growth
- B. Political stability

C. Strong industrial growth

D. A poorly negotiated power sector and misgovernance

5. What does the article suggest is needed to address the challenges facing Pakistan?

A. Increased defense spending

B. A comprehensive reconfiguration of state and society

C. More centralized power

D. Expansion of military rule

VOCABULARY:

1. **Polycrisis** (پولی کریسس): A complex and interconnected series of crises.
2. **Insurgency** (انسورجنسی): A rebellion against authority or government.
3. **Enfranchisement** (انفرانچسمنٹ): The giving of a right or privilege, especially the right to vote.
4. **Disenfranchised** (دیس انفرانچسمنٹ): Deprived of the right to vote or other rights.
5. **Grievance** (گریوانس): A real or imagined wrong or other cause for complaint or protest.
6. **Patronage** (پاترنیج): The support given by a patron, often in a political context.
7. **Competitiveness** (کمپیٹیٹوینس): The ability of a country or company to compete effectively in the market.
8. **Meritocratic** (میریٹوکریٹک): A system in which advancement is based on individual ability or achievement.
9. **Alienation** (الیئینیشن): The state of being isolated or estranged.
10. **Polarized** (پولاریزڈ): Divided into sharply opposing factions or groups.
11. **Mistrust** (میسٹرسٹ): Lack of trust or confidence.
12. **Disparities** (ڈسپاریٹیز): A great difference.
13. **Mismanagement** (میس منیجمنٹ): Poor management of something.
14. **Interference** (انٹرفیرنس): The action of interfering or meddling in the affairs of others.
15. **Extractive** (ایکسٹریکٹو): Involving the extraction of resources, often in a way that is harmful or unsustainable.
16. **Insolvency** (انسولونسی): The inability to pay debts when they are due.
17. **Redressal** (ریڈریسٹل): The act of setting something right.



18. **Depletion** (□□□): Reduction in the number or quantity of something.
19. **Cohesion** (□□□□□): The action or fact of forming a united whole.
20. **Degeneration** (□□□□□□): The process of decline or deterioration.

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Challenges to social cohesion

Shahid Kardar

CONFRONTING a polycrisis mostly of its own making, the state's governing capacity has gravely weakened and is wobbling between distress and failure. There are increasing signs that degeneration has set in, with the capability to deliver on the social contract between the citizenry and the rulers compromised — even when it comes to the primary function of providing security to life and property. An attempt is made below to identify the manifestations of the polycrisis.

The country is teetering on the brink of financial insolvency, as the economy is

hard-pressed to bear the burden of a bloated, predatory and extractive state machinery and its key functionaries' lavish perks and privileges. The privileged segments, state functionaries and those well-connected with decision-makers have arrogated to themselves increasing shares of the pie.

Representative and supporting institutions lack moral legitimacy and general public ownership. Disenfranchised, people are discontented; they are not able to participate freely, openly and transparently in the political process, and are also hurt by the absence of the rule of law.

There is a deepening sense of vulnerability due to growing terrorism, the nature of the governing class, and the failure of administrative governance. The gap between diminishing state capability and the challenges being faced makes the task formidable.

Civilian institutions, which serve as pillars on which the structure of the state rests, are largely dysfunctional and in a condition of utter disrepair. The institutions are fragile, with a disempowered executive, an inadequately functioning bureaucracy with limited capability, a rubber-stamping parliament, and a judiciary unable to operate a grievance redressal system, especially against the state. All of them also suffer from a lack of internal stability and unity, having depleted their professional independence.

The growing gap between state capability and challenges has made the task formidable.

The reasons are several: political and establishment interference, mismanagement, non-merited appointments to decision-making positions driven by a culture of loyalty and patronage, sheer incompetence as an outcome of inadequate resource allocations for decent quality education and skill development, and 'entrenched institutionalised corruption'. The challenge is how to remedy this situation by making these institutions 'normal' through orderliness, harmony, and consistency.

Then, there are self-serving definitions of national interest. A rational view of engagement with the world is missing. While harbouring a victim syndrome, we also entertain an exaggerated view of our own importance. In the past, this assessment was fed by fortuitous global events, coupled with an institutionally

ingrained belief that the establishment was better equipped to address the country's multifarious challenges, while holding a poor opinion of the capability of civilian institutions to deliver on such a mission.

It is difficult for the vast majority of the labour force, with limited education and skills, to participate meaningfully in the modern economy, which is also constrained by suffocating regulations.

The education and skill development systems have failed to enable this participation. Even university education is not producing knowledge and skill — nor the ability to acquire it — to meet the market demands of an economy growing at barely 2.5-3 per cent. The latest Labour Force Survey reveals that 31pc of graduates are unemployed and 34pc of 15-to-29-year olds have simply dropped out of the labour force.

Social indicators have not been allocated adequate funds for investments and operational spending. While spending on education and health was 1.7pc of GDP in the 1980s, 3pc of GDP in the 1990s, and 2.3pc of GDP in the 2000s, the comparatives for defence have been 6.5pc of GDP, 5.6pc of GDP and 3.6pc of GDP respectively, enabling establishment-related institutions to strengthen their capabilities significantly. To their credit, they deployed these resources to create and embed a culture of discipline and internal cohesion and a meritocratic system for career progression. They also brooked no civilian interference in their institutional affairs, jealously guarding their independence.

The economy is not growing at a pace to absorb the high population growth rate. But thanks to the internet and cable television, the youth is exposed to global developments, magnifying the challenges of managing expectations.

The state's huge footprint on the economy distorts markets, blocks opportunities and raises the cost of doing business through excessive, obsolete and flawed regulations — with little clarity about why activity needs regulation. All this is presided over by a generalist, cadre-dominated civil service with a 19th-century mindset.

A highly protected industrial structure is producing low productivity and low value-added goods. The growth of one such industry has created markets for others (each flourishing with varying degrees of inefficiencies). The economy's



SUMMARY of the Article Challenges to Social Cohesion by Shahid Kardar

competitiveness is being eroded by a power sector beleaguered by poorly negotiated contracts, incompetence and misgovernance.

While there is deep-seated mistrust between Islamabad and the smaller provinces, widening regional disparities in growth rates, quality of physical infrastructure and social and economic services have contributed to ethnic and intercommunal strains and stresses. Even the much-referred to monolithic category of the youth as an emerging vocal stakeholder is alienated along national/ ethnic/ values lines, with little by way of a sense of shared identity, shared values and moral compasses between, say, the youth of Punjab and those of Balochistan and KP.

Society is fractured and polarised, both horizontally and vertically. Social divides are deepening, the space for talks is narrowing and hampering possibilities of coexistence, which is critical to social cohesion.

The result of all this is an unfair socioeconomic structure.

Social cohesion built around a set of values requires a holistic approach to our sociopolitical and economic affairs. It needs reconfiguration of state and society. This is a huge challenge. Tackling it would be overwhelming for the most capable leadership anywhere in the world. And what are we blessed with? Subsequent articles on the key issues will attempt to propose the structures, policy actions, instruments, and institutional arrangements on the way forward.

The writer is a former governor of the State Bank of Pakistan.

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