Socio-Economic Development Analysis: A Comparative Study of Democratic versus Autocratic Governance in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Since the inception of Pakistan, there remained two forms of government namely autocratic and democratic. Both types of government keep on taking their turns in an almost consistent manner in terms of time duration. This study endeavors to comprehensively compare and contrast the performance of autocracy with democracy in Pakistan. Considering the significant duration of autocratic rule, spanning 32 out of 75 years, Pakistan's geostrategic position has subjected it to various internal and externally-driven crises. By analyzing 15 carefully selected socio-economic indicators over a span of 54 years (1960-2018), this research aims to elucidate the disparities between autocracy and democracy. Employing rigorous statistical methods such as independent t-tests and logistic regression, this study seeks to discern the distinct effects and efficacy of both forms of government on Pakistan's socio-economic landscape. The outcomes of this research endeavor to shed light on the implications and performance of differing governance systems in Pakistan. Results have indicated that out of these 15 indicators, eight have shown significant differences in the performance of both forms of government while the other seven showed no significant differences (could not reject the null hypothesis). Overall, the performance of autocratic governments has remained better with respect to economic indicators. While the political governments have an edge over social indicators although majority of the results are insignificant. The study will promote the understanding of authorities and concerned individuals to accelerate the process of better economic and social reforms. The successful models of past irrespective of the type of government be followed to bring sustainability in the policies. Furthermore, this study will pave the way for further research to deeply analyze the causes of better economic performance under autocratic regimes and establishment of credible policies to attain the better results under democratic regimes as well.

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1. Introduction

Since 1947, Pakistan has experienced two prevailing forms of governance: autocratic and democratic regimes. These modes of governance have consistently alternated over time in terms of their duration, shaping the country's political landscape (Cohen, 2004). The autocratic forces has governed the country for approximately 32 out of the 75 years of its history. Throughout this period, Pakistan has faced numerous critical junctures. Due to its strategic geographical location, it has been at the center of various crises, both internal and

externally influenced (Niaz, 2022). The country has faced a series of challenges, including conflicts with its rivals, as well as low-intensity conflicts (Irfan & Muhammad Yasin, 2009). The combination of external forces working against Pakistan and the ineffectiveness of various governments has worsened the nation's difficulties. Supporters and critics of both types of government often blame each other for the current circumstances. Since its inception, Pakistan has struggled with a volatile and ineffective political system (Fair & Gregory, 2012), characterized by frequent changes in government and the constant threat of the political system collapsing. These factors have hindered institutional development, macroeconomic stability, and eroded confidence among foreign investors (Burki, 2018). The economic challenges faced by Pakistan are complex and multifaceted. There have been frequent policy revisions and attempts to explore different approaches, such as transitioning from industrialization to agriculture-based growth and shifting from a nationalized economic development model to a deregulated, privatized, and open economic system (Aamir, 2023). Planning strategies have ranged from long-term economic planning to annual development strategies. Unfortunately, these efforts have not yielded the desired outcomes. Despite Pakistan's significant natural economic potential, the country has found itself dependent on international creditors, which has further exacerbated its economic predicament (Butt, 2004).

There are two distinct perspectives that offer contrasting explanations based on their respective perceptions. The first school of thought argues that developing countries necessitate a strong and capable leader to guide them in the right direction, and proponents of this view often consider the autocracy as the most suitable choice for such leadership (Uwizeyimana, 2016). On the other hand, the second school of thought believes that democracy has not been given a fair opportunity to flourish. According to this perspective, when democracy finally emerges after a prolonged period of autocratic rule, it tends to overlook the lessons learned and begins anew from an immature stage (Naseem, 2004). The military's persistent engagement in politics primarily stemmed from its self-perception as the sole institution capable of effectively addressing the diverse range of issues, threats, and challenges confronting the nation. Although military regimes did exhibit relatively higher GDP growth rates and certain macroeconomic indicators, the overall long-term impact of the military's involvement in politics has been detrimental to the country (Shah, 2014). The majority of articles on this subject tend to be qualitative in nature. Since qualitative data relies on subjective interpretation, it can be challenging to obtain a completely unbiased and comprehensive understanding of the topic. Many writers tend to have inherent biases, focusing on only one side of the picture.

However, there are a few articles that provide well-elaborated discussions on the topic. Unfortunately, these articles often limit their analysis to comparing the two forms of government without considering the broader historical context or examining other eras Raheem and Vishnu (2011) or included a very few variables (Hayat, Fatima, Mukhtar, & Bano, 2016). This research article strives to present an unbiased and accurate representation of the subject matter by relying on factual information and verifiable data. The aim is to provide a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the affairs under consideration. By utilizing reliable facts and figures, the article intends to shed light on the topic from an objective standpoint, devoid of personal biases or preconceived notions. The study intends to achieve several objectives, including comparing the performance of autocratic governments and political governments based on a range of macroeconomic and social indicators. It seeks to assess whether autocratic governments have outperformed political governments in terms of socio-economic indicators by analyzing statistical results. Additionally, the study aims to analyze and distinguish the socio-economic performance of both types of governments using various indicators. By relying on factual data, the research aims to provide evidence either supporting or refuting the common perception of superior economic development during military rule compared to democratic regimes. The primary objective of this study is to contribute to the establishment of a knowledge foundation grounded on factual data and figures. In contemporary times, the media plays a significant role in shaping the perceptions of the general public. However, the information disseminated through these channels tends to be qualitative in nature and is often influenced by bias. To address this, the study aims to shift the common person's knowledge from qualitative understanding to quantitative facts and figures. By doing so, it seeks to foster a more accurate and informed opinion based on historical and real-time data. Furthermore, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the

development that has occurred under both forms of government. By analyzing the successes and failures of different governments, it offers valuable information that can guide efforts to improve the country's economy. In essence, the study highlights the importance of learning from our history in order to formulate robust and sustainable socio-economic policies.

2.   Literature Review

Over the course of history, debates surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of democracies and autocracies have persisted. Autocratic governance is characterized by a strong chief executive, limited separation of power, constrained voting, weak pluralism, and restricted civil liberties and political rights (Hsieh, 2022). In autocracies, the ruling elite holds wide control over state institutions, with constitutions serving to secure their power rather than challenge it. Elections, if held, are often manipulated to favor the ruling regime (Murphy, 2019). On the other hand, democratic governance allows citizens to exercise civil liberties, political rights, and freedoms, empowering them through voting and participation in political processes (Sarsar, 2022). Democracies feature well-functioning legislatures, independent judiciaries, and a free media, with popular consent being crucial for legitimacy (Thornhill, Fincher, Thornhill, & Fincher, 2014). Autocracies tend to exhibit authoritarianism, while democracies emphasize liberalism and openness (Chen, Frey, & Presidente, 2023). Extensive literature exists, both in support of and against each form of government. One widely acknowledged viewpoint is that democracy plays a direct and crucial role in accelerating economic development (Boudriga & Ghardallou, 2012). Autocracy and democracy compete in global governance, impacting security. The debate on which offers better security, considering national, international, and human aspects, remains complex and requires further discussion (Das, 2022). The presence of democratically elected governments does not automatically ensure desired outcomes such as good governance.

It requires specific conditions to function optimally. Factors such as the education level of the population, social behaviors, access to information, and equality play significant roles in determining the effectiveness of a democratic government. Empirical evidence indicates that countries with lower income levels tend to score lower on many of the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of democracy (Fortunato, 2015). Democratic regimes in Bangladesh are more effective in promoting economic growth, education, and healthcare as compared to autocratic setups. However, in China the GDP growth is mainly attributed to its infrastructure development and manufacturing sector (Islam, 2023). At the time of Pakistan's inception in 1947, its economy was primarily based on agriculture, with the sector playing a crucial role in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 1947, agriculture accounted for 53% of the GDP, and this percentage remained similar at 53.2% in 1948/49. The population of Pakistan at that time was around 30 million, with approximately 20% (6 million) residing in urban areas and the remaining 80% in rural areas. The agricultural sector employed 65% of the workforce, indicating its significance in providing livelihoods. Furthermore, Pakistan's exports during that period were predominantly composed of agricultural products. In fact, agricultural outputs accounted for 99.2% of the total exports, highlighting the country's heavy reliance on agricultural trade. Additionally, the agriculture sector contributed to 90% of Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, underscoring its critical role in supporting the country's economy and external financial stability during that time (Husain, 2000).

Between 1997 and 2004, Pakistan witnessed significant improvements in its economic conditions, as evident from various macroeconomic indicators. Almost all economic indicators displayed a positive trend during this period. Notably, the country achieved a substantial increase in GDP growth, surpassing the milestone of 5%, marking a significant achievement. The focus on maintaining macroeconomic stability was evident, and efforts were made to curb the pace of escalating debt through stringent fiscal discipline. However, despite these positive economic indicators, there was a disparity in translating the economic progress into improved living standards for the common people. The quality of life for the general population did not see commensurate improvement alongside the country's economic performance (Munir, Waheed, & Shakeel, 2022). Issues such as poverty and unemployment continued to persist, presenting a challenging situation for the government. These socio-economic challenges posed hurdles in ensuring a better standard of living for the people, despite the favorable macroeconomic conditions during that period (Cheema, 2004). Those critics of autocratic rule in Pakistan argue that the country's improved economic performance under autocratic leaders was largely due to their close alliance with the United States. They claim that substantial aid

and grants from the West played a vital role in fostering economic growth. However, a closer examination reveals that there is no causal relationship between these two phenomena, which researchers refer to as a "spurious correlation." Moreover, opponents of autocratic rule also contend that the economic progress experienced during the third autocratic rule was a consequence of the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. However, empirical evidence contradicts this assertion, demonstrating that Pakistan's economic reforms were already in progress prior to the tragic event. Additionally, critics suggest that defense expenditures had a crowding-out effect on other sectors. Nevertheless, data indicates that defense spending as a percentage of GDP was higher in the 1990s compared to the early 2000s. The increase in defense expenditures during the mid-1980s can be attributed to Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan movement against the Soviet Union (Husain, 2004).

Inferential statistics conducted for the period from 1989 to 2005 revealed that out of 28 indicators analyzed, 16 showed no statistically significant difference between military and civilian governments. This suggests that, overall, military governments did not demonstrate significantly better economic performance compared to civilian governments. Similarly, when examining social indicators such as health, education, and poverty, there was no significant improvement observed under military rule compared to democratic governments during the same period. In fact, these social indicators appeared to have worsened under military rule, indicating a lack of progress in these areas (Parmar & Azam, 2006). Democratic governments often struggle to make politically challenging yet economically prudent decisions, in contrast to military governments in the past. Democracies typically operate through consensus and compromise, which can lead to slower overall progress. While the inclusive approach is commendable, delaying crucial decisions can result in economic downturns if timely actions are not taken into consideration (Husain, 2004). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Pakistan's economy demonstrated strong performance, consistently surpassing the regional average and even surpassing the combined exports of countries such as Thailand, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. However, a shift occurred in the 1990s, as Pakistan's economic growth began to slow down, making it the slowest-growing nation in South Asia. This decline can be attributed to a variety of factors, including unfavorable policies implemented by successive governments. These policies resulted in a reversal of progress in poverty reduction, as the incidence of poverty, which had declined significantly from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, rose once again to 34 percent by the late 1990s. The adverse impact of these policies on the country's poverty levels highlights the importance of sound and effective policy-making for sustained economic growth and social development (Husain, 2009).

A comparative study was undertaken, utilizing three decades of data from 1980 to 2010, to evaluate the performance of dictatorships and democracies. The findings of the study revealed that, on the whole, military governments exhibited superior economic performance and a more favorable economic structure in comparison to democratic governments. The majority of economic indicators demonstrated better outcomes during periods of military rule (Subhani, Osman, & Lakhiya, 2011). The continuous interventions of the military in Pakistan's governance system have often been justified on the grounds of perceived incompetence and corrupt practices of democratic governments. However, the assertion that military governments were more proficient in managing the country's economic affairs lacks substantial support and evidence. In fact, such interventions have often led to inefficiencies within the system, rather than improving it (Khan & Senhadji, 2012). Historically, the economic performance of Pakistan has been argued to be comparatively better under military rule in comparison to democratic regimes. While the military may have shown better performance on certain economic indicators from 1947 to 2009, it is important to note that the differences observed were not statistically significant, except in the case of GDP growth rate, consumer price index (CPI), and floating debt (Qadir et al., 2016). There is a contention that military coups in Pakistan resulted in significantly better economic performance compared to democratic regimes. However, it is worth noting that the impact on foreign direct investment (FDI) and unemployment rate did not show statistically significant differences between the two forms of government (Hayat et al., 2016). With this literature leads to following hypotheses;

H_1: Economic indicators show substantial variations in the performance between military and democratic governments.

H₂: Social indicators show substantial variations in the performance between military and democratic governments*.*

3. Data and Methodology

The statistical analysis of the study has been conducted using data from 1960 to 2018, with the exclusion of the initial 13 years and periods of government changeovers. This approach results in a total of 54 observations, with 29 corresponding to autocratic regimes and 25 to democratic eras. The analysis focus on examining 15 selected macroeconomic and social variables to assess the disparities in mean values between the two forms of government. By exploring these indicators, the study aims to provide insights into the differences in performance between military and democratic governments.

3.1. Data Collection Method

The data for all 15 macroeconomic and social indicators are sourced from publications and electronic resources of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, and State Bank of Pakistan. In some cases, data is also collected from the World Development Indicators (WDI) electronic source/catalog. While certain variables have readily available data in publications like economic surveys and statistical yearbooks, calculations have been conducted for the remaining variables. Great care has been taken to gather data from single sources where ever possible to minimize the likelihood of errors. Following formulas/ procedures have been used;

$$\text{For growth rate} = \left(\frac{v1-v0}{v0}\right) \times 100 \qquad (1)$$

Where "$v1$" is the value of specific indicator in present year and "$v0$" the preceding year.

$$\text{For \% of GDP} = \left(\frac{v}{GDP}\right) \times 100 \qquad (2)$$

Where "v" is the value of particular indicator in any specific year. "GDP" is the value of current GDP in the same specific year.

3.2. Data Analysis Software and Statistical Methods

The statistical analysis involved the utilization of the SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences) software for econometric tests and R Studio for data visualization. Independent t-tests and binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to investigate the differences in mean values of various indicators between autocratic and democratic governments in Pakistan. These tests aimed to provide insights into the contrasting performance of the two forms of government based on the selected indicators.

3.3. Framework of Analysis

A comprehensive quantitative statistical model was constructed, employing descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were employed to measure central tendency using methods such as mean, median, and mode. Initial independent t-tests were conducted to assess variations in the mean values of socio-economic indicators between autocratic and democratic governments in Pakistan. Following the independent samples t-tests, binary logistic regressions were performed to examine the relationship between the binary dependent variable (democracy/autocratic government) and various independent variables representing social and macroeconomic indicators. All assumptions necessary for the respective statistical tests were met prior to the interpretation and analysis of the results.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides the group statistics, while Table 2 presents a summary of the outcomes. The graphs show visualization of each indicator with color coding representing autocratic and democratic eras. The results presented in the tables illustrate substantial disparities across various economic indicators between autocratic and democratic governments. Notably, autocratic regimes exhibited superior performance in several key metrics, including GDP growth rate (Figure 1) and manufacturing growth rate (Figure 2), suggesting a propensity for rapid economic expansion under centralized decision-making. Higher GDP growth rates during autocratic governments indicate that autocratic regimes may

implement policies that lead to more rapid economic growth. Similarly, manufacturing growth is higher under autocratic governments.
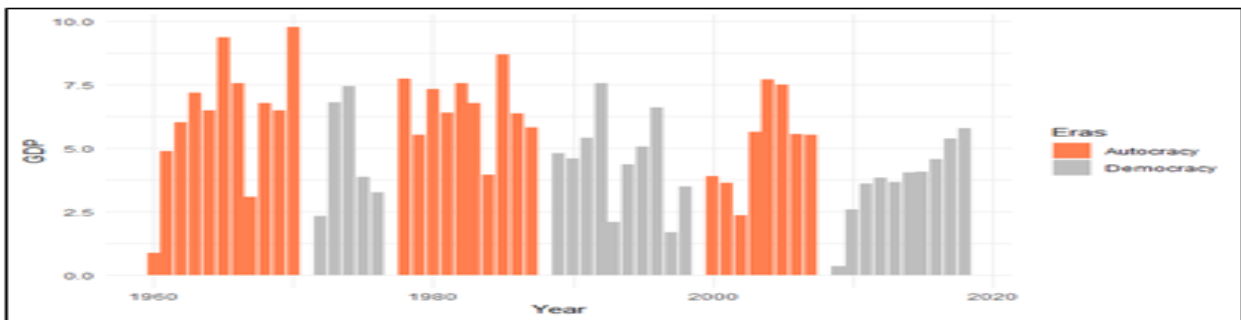
Figure 1: GDP Growth Rate

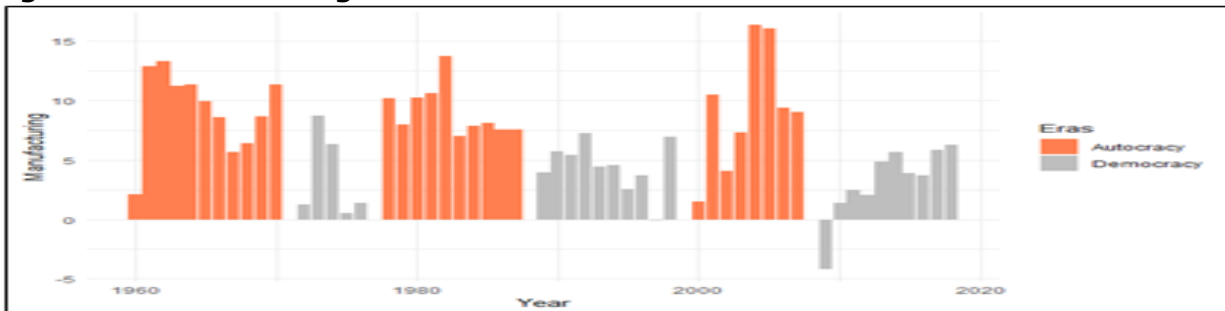

Figure 2: Manufacturing Growth Rate
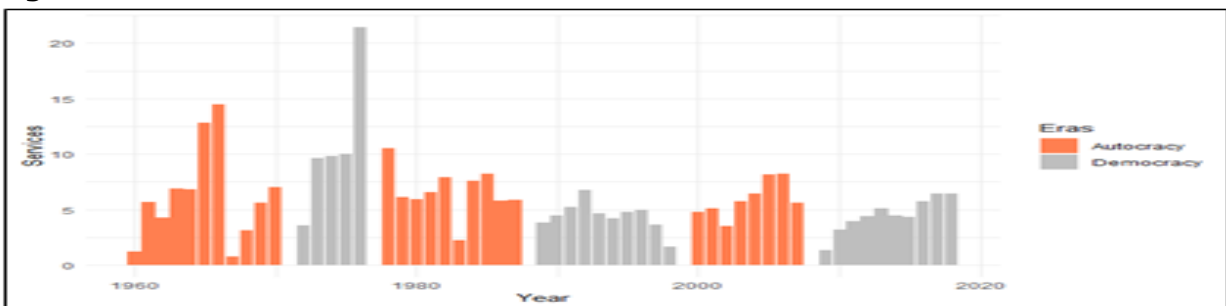

Figure 3: Services Growth Rate
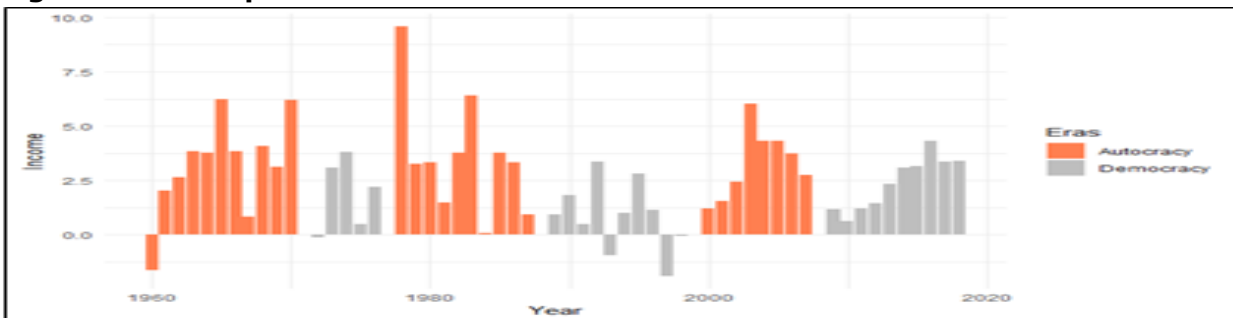

Figure 4: Per-Capita Income Growth Rate

Figure 5: Inflation Rate
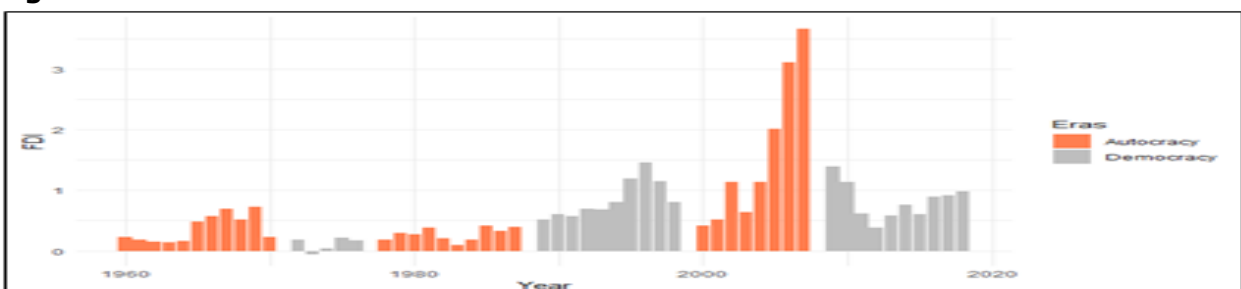
Figure 6: FDI/ GDP
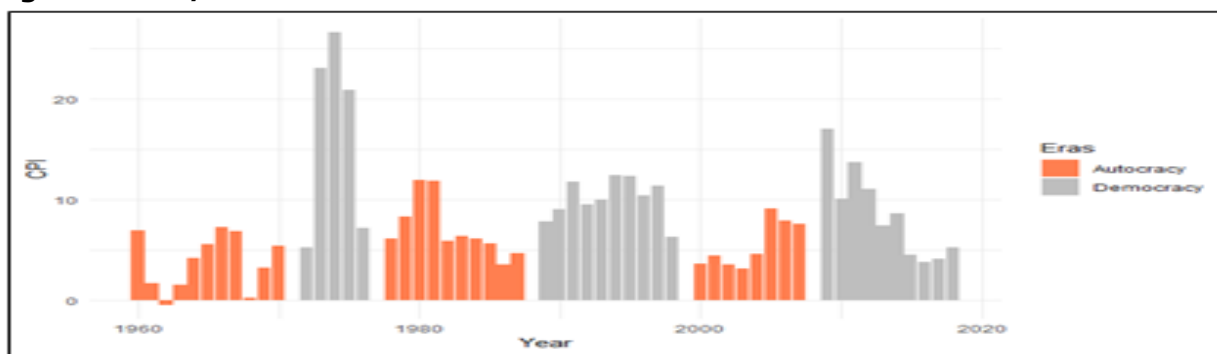
Table 1: Group Statistics (1960 - 2018)

Indicators	Mean (%)		Mean difference	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
	Autocratic	Democratic			
GDP Growth rate	6.09	4.29	1.80	-3.45	.001
Manufacturing Growth rate	9.19	3.78	5.41	-6.20	.000
Services Growth rate	6.31	5.76	.54	-.580	.565
Inflation	5.38	10.77	-5.39	4.17	.000
Per-Capita Income Growth rate	3.35	1.68	1.67	-3.13	.003
FDI / GDP	.67	.69	-.02	.11	.914
Public Debt/ GDP	53.64	74.36	-20.72	4.60	.000
Exports/ GDP	10.11	11.02	-.91	1.55	.126
CAB/ GDP	-2.73	-4.04	1.31	-2.03	.047
Forex Res/ GDP	4.73	4.04	.68	-.98	.330
Fiscal Deficit/ GDP	-2.30	-5.40	3.00	-3.51	.001
Exp on Education/ GDP	1.90	2.35	-.45	3.74	.000
Exp on Health/ GDP	.64	.71	-.07	1.25	.218
Unemployment Rate	3.72	4.53	-.81	1.44	.155
Poverty Headcount	32.85	30.36	2.48	-1.18	.241

Moreover, indicators such as inflation/CPI (Figure 5), per-capita income growth rate (Figure 4), public debt/GDP (Figure 7), current account balance/GDP (Figure 9), and fiscal deficit/GDP (Figure 11) showcased notable variations favoring autocratic governments, implying better financial management and stability within these regimes. The lower inflation/CPI and higher per-capita income growth rate in autocratic settings hint at better control over price levels and potentially faster improvements in living standards. The notable variations in public debt/GDP, current account balance/GDP, and fiscal deficit/GDP highlight differing approaches to financial management, with autocratic governments demonstrating comparatively stronger fiscal performance. Conversely, democratic governments excelled in the social indicator of expenditure on education/GDP (Figure 12), reflecting a prioritization of human capital development and social investment. However, no significant disparities were observed in indicators such as services sector growth rate, foreign direct investment/GDP (Figure 6), exports/GDP (Figures 8), forex reserves/GDP (Figure 10), expenditure on health/GDP (Figure 13), Unemployment rate (Figure 14), and poverty headcount (Figure 15), suggesting that certain aspects of economic and social performance remain consistent across different types of governance. These findings highlight the nuanced interplay between political systems and economic outcomes, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of governance's impact on a nation's prosperity and well-being.

The results of binary logistic regression further endorse the results of independent t-tests which shows the contribution of particular variable in discriminating the outcome variable. The results of logit regression are in line with that of independent t-tests except for current account balance/GDP where the result of independent t-test is marginally significant and the result of logit regression shows insignificant contribution of IV in predicting the outcome variable. Additionally, the observed differences in indicators such as inflation/CPI and per-capita income growth rate point towards potential divergences in economic stability and individual prosperity under different governance systems. Moreover, the variations in public debt/GDP, current account balance/GDP, and fiscal deficit/GDP highlight contrasting approaches to fiscal policy and financial management between autocratic and democratic governments, which can have significant implications for long-term economic sustainability. These fin dings provide valuable insights into the distinct economic trajectories shaped by

different governance models and underscore the importance of considering political context in economic analysis and policymaking.
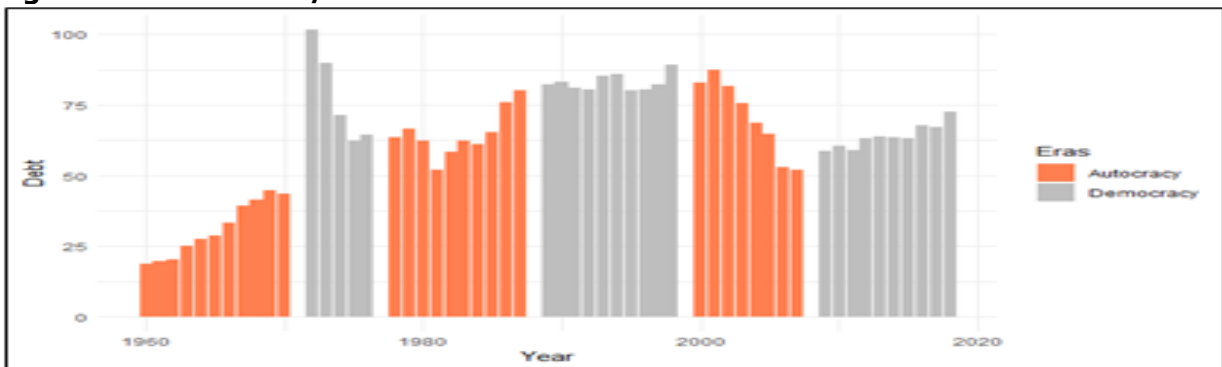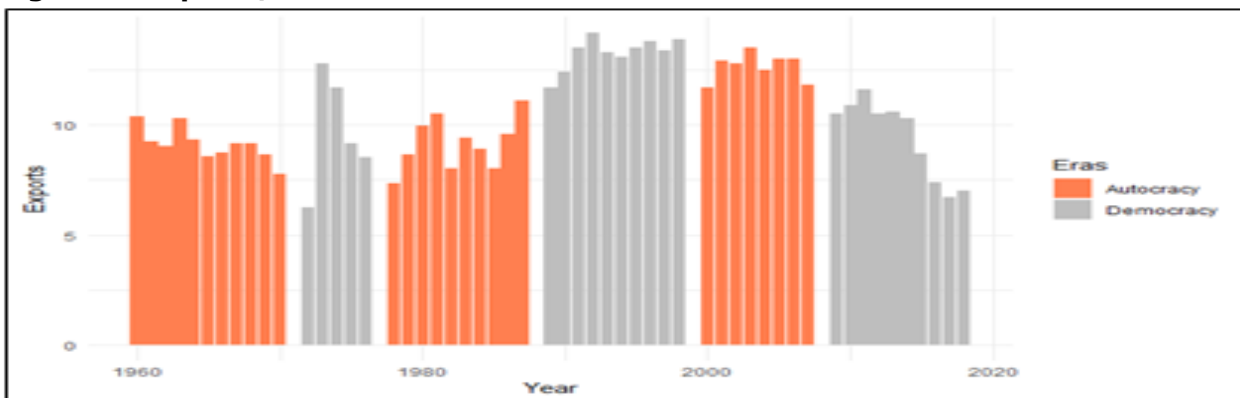
Figure 7: Public Debt/ GDP

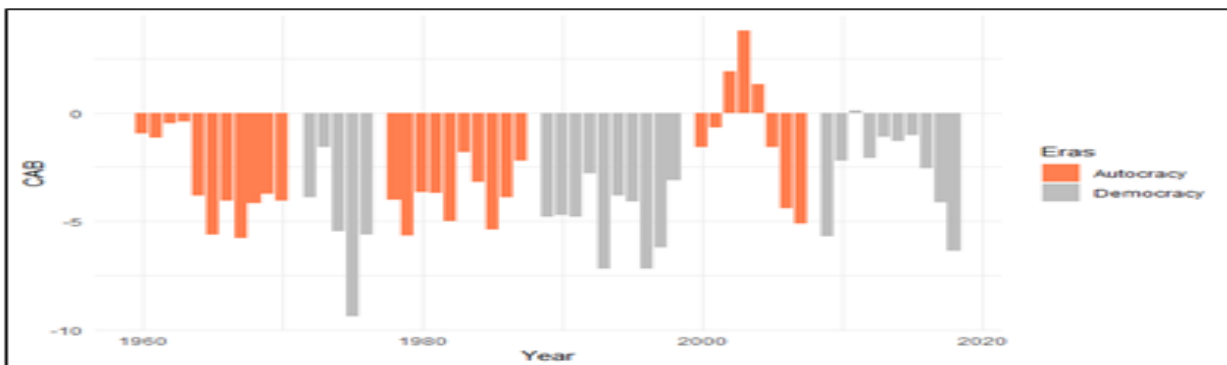**Figure 8: Exports/ GDP**

Figure 9: CAB/ GDP

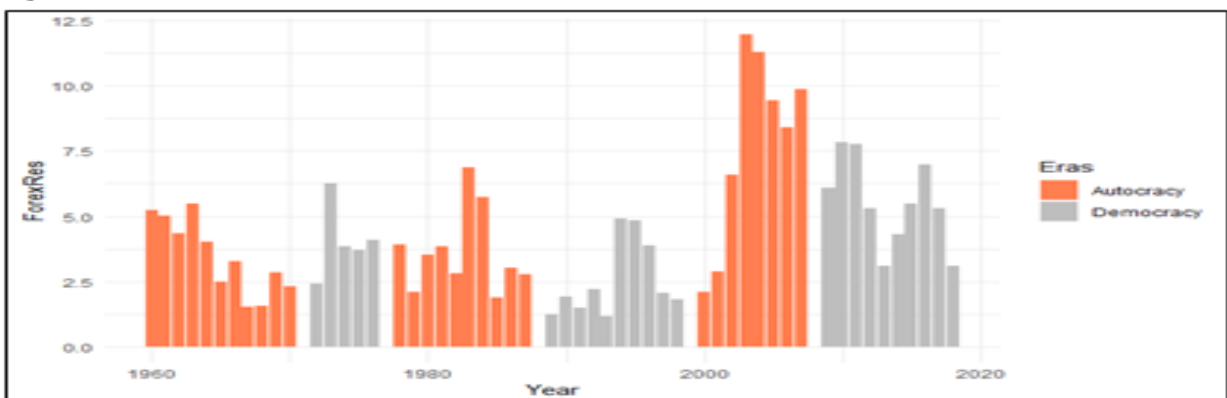**Figure 10: Forex Reserves / GDP**

Figure 11: Fiscal deficit / GDP
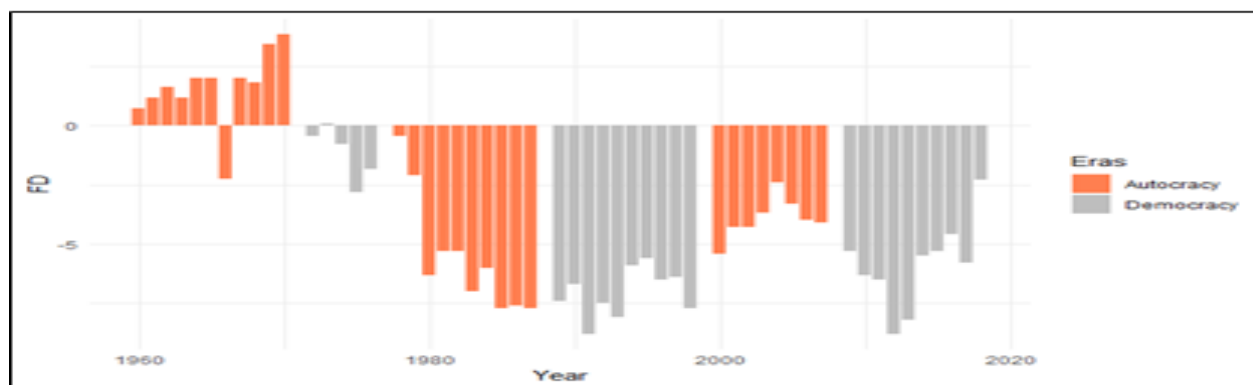
Figure 12: Exp on Education/ GDP
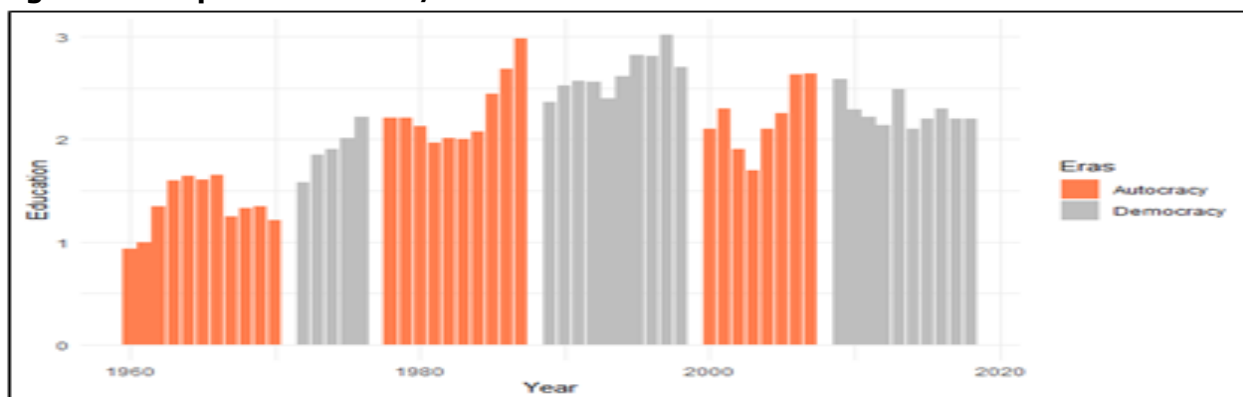
Table 2: Summary of Outcomes

Indicators	Better Performance (Independent t-test)				Binary Logit Regression Discriminating DV
	P < .05		P > .05		
	Autocracy	Democracy	Autocracy	Democracy	
GDP Growth Rate	√	-	-	-	Sig
Manufacturing GR	√	-	-	-	Sig
Services Sector GR	-	-	√	-	Insig
Inflation	√	-	-	-	Sig
Per-Capita Income GR	√	-	-	-	Sig
FDI / GDP	-	-	-	√	Insig
Public Debt/ GDP	√	-	-	-	Sig
Exports/ GDP	-	-	-	√	Insig
CAB/ GDP	√	-	-	-	Insig
Forex Res/ GDP	-	-	√	-	Insig
Fiscal Deficit/ GDP	√	-	-	-	Sig
Exp on Education/ GDP	-	√	-	-	Sig
Exp on Health/ GDP	-	-	-	√	Insig
Unemployment Rate	-	-	√	-	Insig
Poverty Headcount	-	-	-	√	Insig

Most of the findings of this study are consistent to that of research already carried on the subject as mentioned in the literature review. Although most of the researches include a limited time period but the major deviations in the results are not observed. However certain contradictions are found in the findings of this study with respect to previous researches like, per-capita income by Hayat et al. (2016) which showed significantly higher per-capita income during political governments, net exports by Subhani, Osman, and Lakhiya (2011) which found statistically significant higher net exports during military governments, forex reserves/GDP by Parmar and Azam (2006) which experienced the statistically siginificant higher mean values of forex reserves as % of GDP during military rules and expenditure on education by Subhani, Osman, and Lakhiya (2011) which found the significantly higher values by military governments.
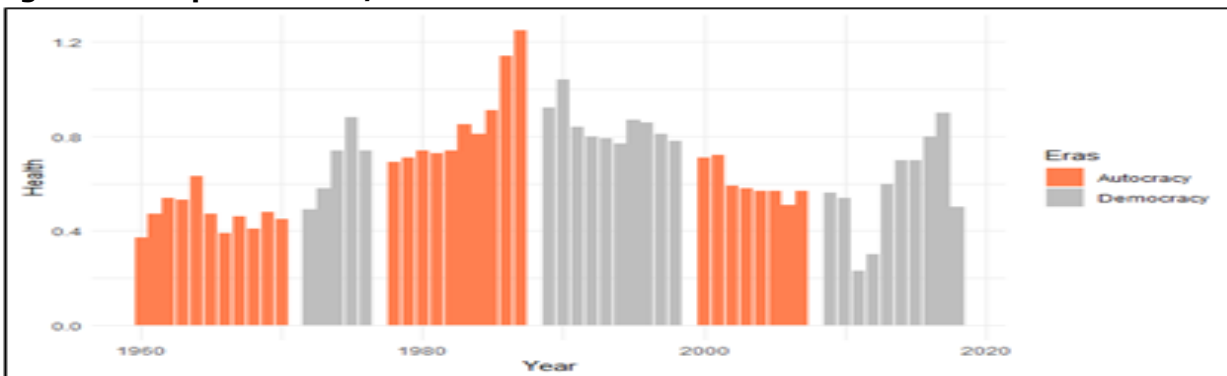
Figure 13: Exp on Health/ GDP

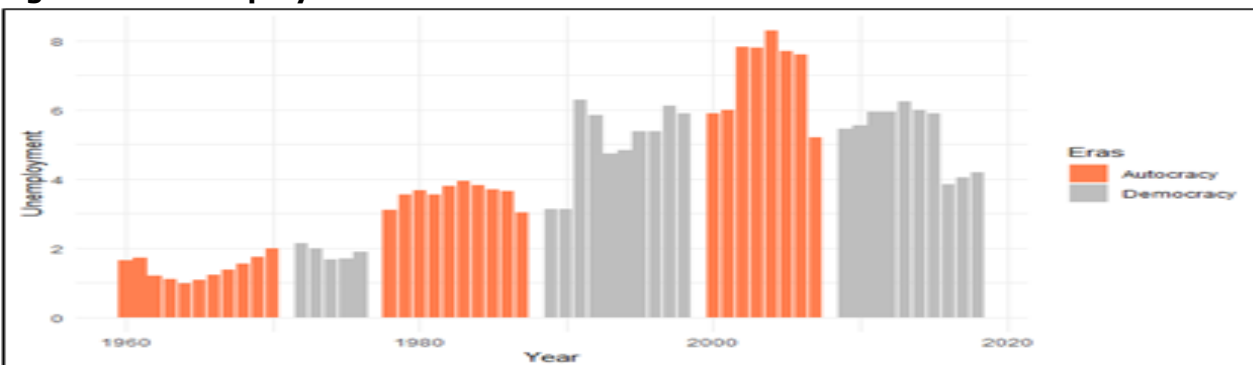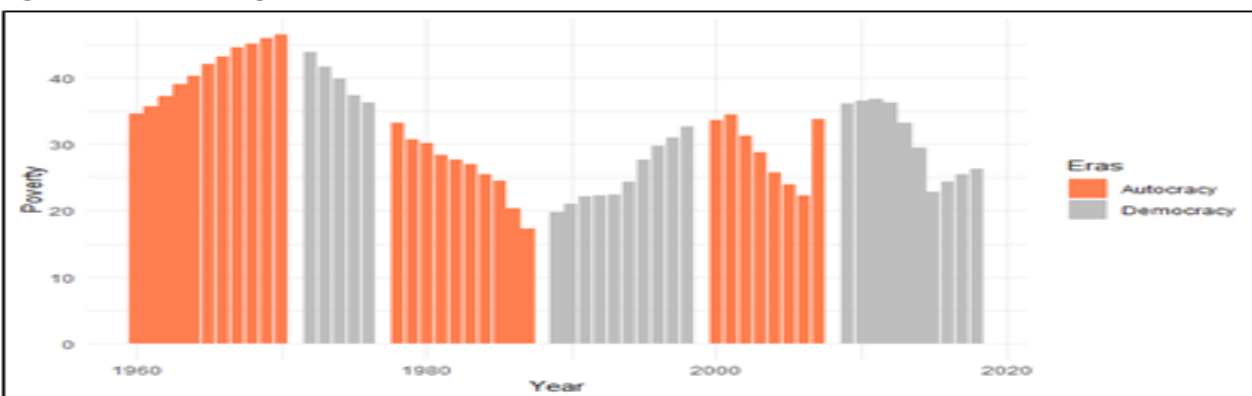**Figure 14: Unemployment rate**

Figure 15: Poverty Head Count

5.   Conclusions

The study aimed to compare the socio-economic performance of autocratic and democratic governments. Based on the detailed analysis of the results from various tests conducted in section four, it is evident that military governments performed better in most economic indicators compared to democratic regimes. However, when considering social indicators, political regimes displayed better figures, albeit not significantly different. This leads to important conclusions: while military governments excelled in economic indicators, the benefits did not translate into overall societal improvement. Economic prosperity resulted in inequitable income distribution, with improvement not significantly better than under democratic governments. Many writers attribute the economic success of military governments to consistent policies implemented during their relatively long periods in power. Conversely, political governments faced significant instability, particularly in the 20th century, hindering institutional development and true performance. Despite Pakistan's considerable natural economic potential, the country fell victim to international money lenders. Establishing a strong economic foundation and sustaining momentum require sound macroeconomic policies, financial discipline, policy consistency, political and regional stability. Alongside robust economic growth, significant investment in social sectors and poverty alleviation programs can positively impact the lives of ordinary citizens. In summary, the economy of Pakistan

experienced positive performance under military rule, attributed to factors such as good governance, effective management, a proactive approach, commitment and consistency of policies. However, it is important to note that military rule is not a definitive solution or the ultimate form of government for sustainable socio-economic reforms. Democracy has the potential to achieve similar results if its foundations are strengthened. While democracy may face challenges initially, its long-term outcomes are expected to be inclusive and sustainable. Strengthening institutions is crucial for fostering prosperity and harmony while building a robust democratic system.

5.1. Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, it focuses on a limited set of 15 major macroeconomic and social variables, which may not capture the full complexity of the economic and social landscape. Including additional variables could provide a more comprehensive analysis. Additionally, certain qualitative social variables were excluded due to the difficulty of measurement, potentially limiting the understanding of their impact. Secondly, the data for certain variables are based on specific base years as reported in publications by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and State Bank of Pakistan. This may introduce inaccuracies when comparing different time periods, as the data may not be a true representation of those specific time periods. Moreover, comparing indicators as percentages of GDP can introduce issues, as GDP growth rates may differ from the growth rates of individual indicators. This can lead to misleading results, with indicators appearing to have lower percentages relative to GDP due to differences in their growth rates. Lastly, it is important to recognize that an economy does not operate in isolation. Global factors have a significant influence on the performance of an economy. A global economic boom can bring prosperity to a country, while a global downturn can have adverse effects. The same applies to Pakistan, as its economy is interconnected with the global economic environment. These limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings of the study.

5.2. Future Research Directions

Future research can address the limitations identified in this study by incorporating additional economic and social variables to provide a more comprehensive analysis. Variables such as debt servicing, defense spending, total investment, savings, industrial growth, and literacy rate can be included to further differentiate the performance of military and democratic governments. Furthermore, future studies can explore qualitative social variables such as tolerance level, depression level, and state of happiness by developing suitable proxies for measurement. In terms of methodology, future research can consider comparing the growth rates of all indicators rather than relying solely on their percentage with respect to GDP. This approach would provide a more accurate representation of the performance trends. Additionally, future studies can broaden the analysis by comparing Pakistan's economy with that of other countries to determine whether its economic performance aligns with global trends. This comparative perspective would offer valuable insights into the country's economic position and trajectory.

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