

Political Churn in Pakistan

What is the issue?

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- Democracy has always been fragile in Pakistan, and popularly elected governments have been overthrown repeatedly by the military.
- In this context, the recent conviction and sentencing of the former PM and leader of the ruling PML party “Nawaz Sharif”, is seen as politically motivated.

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What is the political context in Pakistan?

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- After repeated military coups and instability, it was only in 2013 that a transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another was realised.
- The country is nearing a second such transfer, and general elections are scheduled for July 2018, but recent developments have cast serious doubts.
- **The Case** - Nawaz Sharif was convicted and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for a corruption case.
- The conviction disqualifies Nawaz Sharif from contesting the upcoming elections this year, and has caused a vacuum in his party and the overall polity.
- The charges are indeed serious, but the case is largely perceived as politically motivated by Pakistan’s deep state that is seeking to curtail democracy.

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- **Suspensions** - Many politicians (including Mr. Sharif's critics), have voiced that the military and judiciary seem overzealous to convict Mr. Sharif.
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- Mr. Sharif has been accusing the state agencies of directly colluding with opposition parties like Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf.
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- Further, Mr. Sharif has also stated that deep state actors (implying military and intelligence) are financing Imran's campaigns against him.
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What are the political implications?

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- Neutralising Mr. Sharif's political role in Pakistan's future clearly seems to be the main motive of this campaign, but the resultant implications look serious.
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- To disrupt any neutral opinions from being voiced, media houses have been facing harassment, and journalists have been threatened.
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- In line with the systematic campaign to eliminate secularist politicians who don't tow the military line, ANP leader Haroon was recently assassinated.
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- While it is already too volatile for "free and fair elections", the atmosphere has been further vitiated by extremist factions entering mainstream politics.
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- Notably, radical groups like "Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek" are being tolerated by the military, despite stern warnings from the international agencies.
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- The elections will serve as one marker for the democratic process; the larger struggle in Pakistan for the deepening of democracy will continue.
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Source: The Hindu

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