**Social transformation for democratic survival**

[Waqar Hassan](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/waqar-hassan)

August 16, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

What caused humans to form societies? Why was it necessary to establish a governing system? The sole aim was to maximize benefits for people and provide security, and equal growth opportunities.
For a democratic system to flourish, societies require a strong base built on democratic principles.
It is because democracy’s fate is intricately tied to the process of social transformation. The flourishing of democratic values is a consequence of social transformation in societies.
In “The Future of Democracy,” a seminal work, Norberto Bobbio, a renowned political philosopher, highlights the importance of social change for the development of sustainable democratic systems. Bobbio suggests that a flourishing democracy necessitates societal changes that encourage agreement, unity, and inclusiveness, which are the foundation of a robust democratic society.
Many countries all over the globe have undergone this process, which is rigorous, to facilitate societies to adopt genuine democratic principles.
The peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa is a remarkable instance of social transformation positively affecting democratic survival. The country underwent a social transformation that required a collective effort to dismantle racial segregation and establish a democratic society based on equality and justice. Nelson Mandela led South Africa’s transition with a focus on reconciliation and inclusivity, promoting healing and cooperation among previously divided communities.
The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a critical mechanism during this transition. The TRC played a crucial role in enabling social healing and reconciliation by giving a platform for victims and perpetrators of human rights violations in the apartheid era to share their grievances. The TRC’s objective was to create an all-encompassing record of the past and foster a sense of national harmony in the future. This approach paved the way for a more inclusive and tolerant society in South Africa by allowing the country to confront its painful past.
The peaceful transition in South Africa illustrates how social transformation can lead to democratic progress and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.
On the other hand, negative social transformation can adversely affect democracy, as seen in the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring, a series of uprisings and protests across multiple Arab countries in 2010 and 2011, started with high hopes for democratic reforms. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of these uprisings, many Arab states experienced varying levels of instability and political turmoil.
In “The Arab Spring and Democracy,” Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner examine the intricate dynamics of social transformations during the Arab Spring and their influence on democratic processes. Conflicts, power struggles, and the rise of extremist ideologies in multiple countries overshadowed the initial optimism for democratic reforms. Failing to channel people’s aspirations toward democratic values and the lack of cohesive leadership led to prolonged political instability, which hindered the prospects of sustaining democracy.
Pakistan has seen many tumultuous periods in its democratic history. Social and political transformations in Pakistan have shaped the country’s democratic landscape. Social patterns within our society and political divisions have played a major role in shaping the path of democracy in the country in the country.
Anatol Lieven’s “Pakistan: A Hard Country” takes a deep dive into the challenges confronting Pakistan’s democracy and the likelihood of its sustainability. According to Lieven, social divisions based on ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status have prevented the formation of a united and inclusive society in Pakistan.
Colonial rule and subsequent struggles for independence have had a lasting impact on Pakistan’s social fabric. The existence of ethnic and sectarian divisions, regional disparities, and the lack of a unified national identity have all proven to be obstacles to democratic formation and survival.
Additionally, political parties in Pakistan tend to align themselves with certain ethnic groups and regions, which aggravates societal rifts and leads to political instability. It impacts democracy negatively as national integration is a product of the national character of political parties.
To create a more inclusive and egalitarian democratic system, Lieven contends that social transformation is necessary. Pakistan’s path towards a shared vision of democracy and national unity involves implementing policies that address regional and ethnic differences, as well as socioeconomic gaps.
Getting rid of social evils such as corruption is a must for a fruitful social transformation. This social evil is closely linked to other social evils such as favoritism, poor accountability, lack of transparency, poor governance, and cronyism. Truly, these evils have been hurting the essence of democracy. According to Ian Talbot’s “Pakistan: A Political History,” corruption poses another major obstacle to Pakistan’s democratic processes. It weakens public confidence in democratic institutions and hinders the fair allocation of resources, exacerbating social disparities.
The focus of Talbot’s work is on social transformation as the key to tackling corruption and promoting fair resource distribution, as an integral part of securing democratic survival. Pakistan can build public trust in its democratic institutions by creating transparent and accountable governance structures and promoting a culture of integrity. Social transformation demands the eradication of corruption and its tentacles to achieve a democratic system that is fair and just.
Bearing in mind the outcomes of a tumultuous social revolution throughout the Arab Spring, we must understand that the course of social transition must be calm and pacific.
It is essential to comprehend that actively working towards positive social transformation is a continuous process that necessitates attention and engagement from all segments of society.
Our democracy needs oxygen cylinders in the form of these political, social, and economic transformations. Embracing this endeavor will not only strengthen democratic values but also foster national unity and build a brighter future for Pakistan. Failure to respond to social transformation needs will lead to democratic values falling into turmoil, chaos, and disorder. We need to rise together and build a society that stands firm on the pillars of democracy, equality, and prosperity.
The ultimate aim of a democratic model is to serve our people, and it could be challenging to achieve this goal in Pakistan without a tranquil social transformation, hindering the growth of democracy.
We need a peaceful and fair society and positive social transformation is the only way to achieve it.