

A Modernist Perspective on the Role of Political Parties in Democratic Consolidation

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: Feb 08, 2025 Revised: Jan 01, 2026 Accepted: June 29, 2026	This paper discusses the activities and roles of political parties towards the democratic consolidation of the post-colonial states with specific focus on Pakistan. It examines the concept of political development in the light of the modernisation theory that anticipates changes in the form of the traditional structures into the present-day institutions and political cultures. The manuscript assumes that the political parties are an essential tool in this process and they are some of the most powerful sources of democratization and political change. This research paper aims at discussing the relationship between political development and modernization and the role played by political parties in this change. It also discusses the issues that affect political parties in Pakistan which are complicated in nature such as factionalism in every political party, the leadership that is dominated by the dynastic leadership of almost everything in politics, and external forces that are exerted on them by frequent military interventions. This research is qualitative and theory-oriented using secondary sources to assess these dynamics. The analysis shows that the systemic issues have not eliminated the fact that political parties still have the important functions of participation, representation, and continuity of institutions. This paper will be more enlightening on how the political parties may assist in and sustain democratic consolidation in the shifting institutional milieu by exploring the dynamics between political development and modernisation. The conclusion of the paper is that the future of democratic consolidation of Pakistan lies in the consolidation of party institutionalisation and internal democracy without the interference of the outside world.
Keywords <i>Modernisation,</i> <i>Political development,</i> <i>Military Interventions,</i> <i>Governance,</i> <i>Democratic consolidation.</i>	

1. Introduction

Political parties are the foundation of democratic systems and are regarded as influential mediators and directing the channel of connecting the citizens to the political process. This issue is even more relevant in situations of post-colonial state in which it is not only necessary to develop colonial authoritarianism into democratic governance but also to develop institutional stability at the same time (Leys, 1982). This is how it is entirely summed up in a post-colonial state, such as Pakistan. The process of democratization in Pakistan has not been easy, full of military interferences, political conflicts in the country, and social-economic issues. Political parties were forced to operate within such an unstable socio-political structure marked by factional politics, dynastic nepotism /external influence leadership. During the post-independent period, Pakistan still has not been able to reach

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democratic consolidation and institutional stability, although political parties and numerous elections have taken place. This leads to an important research question, why have political parties in Pakistan not worked as effective agents of democratisation even though they are central to democratic systems the world over?

The importance of this research is that it attempts to examine the issue of political development in Pakistan using the Modernisation Theory that provides a theoretical understanding as well as practical implications of the democratization of institutions in other post-colonial settings.

The paper will discuss the following main proposals: (1) to discuss the role of political parties in democratic consolidation; (2) to assess the lack of structural and historical issues to limit the capacity of this solution; and (3) to explore their role in the development of institutions in Pakistan.

The paper is laid out as follows, it gives the theoretical framework and literature available, second it gives the methodology and third is the analysis of politics of political parties and their role in the institutions of Pakistan. Offering an academic image of the essential component of the political parties in this process, Modernisation Theory offers an analytical framework behind the support of the democratic structures as well as processes. The political parties had been theorised to wake the popular conscience to shape it, though, within regulation, the socialisation of politics was perceived through the education of a bunch of savages who were compelled to cooperate with one another. In the long run, this theory assumes that societies are transitioning out of traditionalist as a phase where the institutional change in the real world may (Fukuyama, 2014). The performance and behaviour of political parties and its leaders are directly attributed to democratic consolidation and strengthening of institutions such as the judiciary, parliament, etc, in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

The Modernisation Theory has been a basic tool in understanding political development. According to classical theorists like Talcott Parsons (1968) and Daniel Lerner (1958), societies move through traditional systems to modern systems, and the political institutions adapt to the socio-economic change. Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) also brought in a connection between economic development and political legitimacy which brings out the importance of political parties in the maintenance of democratic rule.

The latter interventions, such as Cheibub and Vreeland (2018) have returned to these arguments with increased focus on institutional maturity, inclusiveness, and stability as the primary predictors of effective democratisation. Though these classical and contemporary views have a rich theoretical explanation, they rarely put in context their arguments in post-colonial context where democratic institutions are weak and are easily destroyed. Bates (2018) and Huntington (1968) acknowledge the disruptive history of colonialism and the active control of military dominance, but in a general comparative context.

The studies on Pakistan, including those by Waseem (1997) and Alavi (1973), illuminate how political instability and intervention by the authoritarian regime are repeated processes but lacks sufficient context of situating the process within a systematic modernisation process. Later scholarship has attempted to address this deficiency by examining the democratic course of Pakistan in terms of structure, institution and culture.

Wu (2020) discusses the changes in the party politics of Pakistan, especially the emergence of new centres such as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the disintegration of conventional party regimes. Taking the position of the very future of democracy in Pakistan, Jalal (2024) puts the debate into the context of the long-standing civil-military relationships, and Janjua (2021) highlights that the asymmetry of the civil-military relations still limits the process of democratic consolidation. The Journal of Democracy (2024) commentaries also identify the problems with elections and the

structural hindrances to competition of the parties. Raza (2023) theorises Pakistan as a hybrid regime of with a weakly institutionalised party structure, but larger region analyses of the Oxford Research Encyclopaedia (2024) appear to place these trends in the context of South Asian party system dynamics. Together, these writings provide a reassertion that the political parties have a paradoxical position in the Pakistani politics, both as an engine of democracy participation and weak institutionality.

2.1 Research Gap Identification

Even though a considerable amount of literature is present, there are still critical gaps. Much of the literature that is available on modernisation and democracy is too generalised and does not give much country-specific analysis that reflects the unique post-colonial and militarised setting of Pakistan. Furthermore, recent studies are inclined to use mostly formulations of the theories that were developed in the middle of the 20th century, and there is not enough interaction with the new empirical material and theoretical developments. There are not many studies that directly look at the role of institutional resilience in Pakistan political system through the mediation of political parties, which are central actors in the democratic system. The research fills these gaps by directly applying the Modernisation Theory to the Pakistani context and thoroughly addressing both the traditional and modern literature. Thus, it tries to make some contribution to the refining of theories and at the same time providing an empirical explanation of the process of democratic consolidation in a post-colonial South Asian context.

3. Objectives

The main objectives of this research are:

- To critically analyse the role of political parties as institutional players in the democratic consolidation process in post-colonial states with a particular reference to a state like Pakistan.
- To analytically use Modernisation Theory in the process of explaining the socio-economic change and development of political institutions in Pakistan.
- To determine and examine the structural, historic, and civil-military limitations that inhibit institutionalisation the political parties in Pakistan.
- To determine how much of a role are played by the political parties in enhancing the democratic standards, institutional stability, and the outcomes of governance in the modernisation path of Pakistan.

4. Research methodology

The research design as has been employed in this study is qualitative in nature, theory based and has sought to analyse the role played by the political party in the consolidation of democracy in a post-colonial nation. The study does not involve the empirical test of hypotheses but the analytical test of the interpretation to specify the connection between theoretical propositions and observed political patterns in Pakistan. The study only uses secondary sources, such as academic literature, history, institutional reports, and policy documents.

4.1 Research Design

Theoretical Framework: It uses the Modernisation Theory as the analytical instrument to determine the interplay between socio-economic change, political mobilisation and institutional development in

the case of democratic experience in Pakistan. The theory serves as an explanatory and a critical assessment instrument especially in connection to its shortage in militarised political systems.

Data Collection: The peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, election reports, party manifestos, Freedom House indices, and valid institutional evaluations are the sources of secondary data. The sources were filtered according to their applicability in relation to party politics, democratic institutions, and civil-military relations in Pakistan.

Analytical Process: The paper uses thematic content analysis to point-by-point analysis on recurrent trends based on institutionalisation of parties, leadership systems, electoral procedures, and military intervention. These themes are discussed within the framework of important assumptions of Modernisation Theory which enables determination of the extent to which the realities in Pakistan are aligned or lacking alignment with the theories.

The given methodological procedure allows interpreting political trends in Pakistan in a systematic way and preserving analytical integrity between theory and data..

4.2 Data Analysis

The empirical data on this research relies completely on the secondary sources; it includes election reports, party manifestos, Freedom House indices, and the analysis that remained available to academics. The party politics in Pakistan since the independence shows very similar trends of military interruption, loose institutionalisation of parties, and elite control over the democratic procedures. To illustrate, lack of intra-party democracy between Pakistan people party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim league (Nawaz): decades of alternation among the two parties had deeply rooted dynastic leadership to the extent that it limited the intra-party democracy. The advent of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has broken this duopoly, which reflects general modernisation processes in the political courtesy of urban and middle-class people (Wu, 2020); but the break has not yet led to any institutional changes. The civil-military relations continue to be the cornerstone to an explanation of the democratic path of Pakistan. As Janjua (2021) shows, the military remains a regulatory force in the government, thus directing the political fortunes. Freedom House statistics continuously categorise Pakistan as one that is Partly Free, which is an indication of poor democracy consolidation. In addition to this, the perennial dissolution of the elected assemblies is adversely affecting the vertical and horizontal accountability, thus undermining the institutions of democracy.

Comparative evidence in South Asia as provided by Oxford Research Encyclopaedia (2024) shows that Pakistan is below India, Sri Lanka and even Bangladesh in terms of party-system institutionalisation and successful democratic transitions. These short-term results indicate that the role of Pakistan political parties is two-fold as they enable political participation and representation, yet structural weaknesses drive the country to instability.

4.3 Discussion

The results point to the conflict between the modernisation processes and institutional failures that Pakistan still experiences in its democracy. Regarding the Modernisation Theory, the growing urbanisation, literacy, and middle relative mobilisation of Pakistan to the concept of democracy consolidation should contribute to the development; nonetheless, as Jalal (2024) claims, the influence of civil-military dominance thwarts this path. This analysis has shown that political parties have failed to become strong institutions of absorbing socio-economic change. Instead, they can be easily subject to capture and clientelism by the elites (Javid, 2019), which is symptomatic of a greater paradox of modernisation in the post-colonial states, where socio-economic change is not accompanied by a growing institutional back-up. Placing the identities of Pakistan into the wider context of South Asia, it is quite clear that structural legacies and geopolitical demands make the process of democratisation difficult but internal party weaknesses are a very decisive issue in postponing consolidation. This is

consistent with the thesis advanced by Huntington (1968) which argues that the failure of political institutions in advancing leads to political decay in cases where political mobilisation is occurring faster than that of institutions. The argument therefore strives to support the point that in a democratic future of Pakistan, the institutionalisation of parties must be empowered, the military influence must be restrained and the elements of accountability must be enhanced.

5. Theoretical Framework: Modernisation Theory

Modernisation theory has its foundations back to some significant scholars who have contributed towards its development. One such name is Talcott Parsons, a sociologist by profession who advocated for societal differentiation and transcendence from older to more recent forms. Parsons maintained that as societies progress through modernity, they undergo evolutionary processes in their structures, which make them more intricate and specialised; thus, contributing to the advancement of society (Parsons, 1968). This field is also represented by Robert H. Bates. Among other issues, the author elaborates on the Modernisation Theory, which is crucial for understanding development politics. The theory connects the politics of development, democracy, culture, ethnic politics and religion. Its growth happened between World War II and the Vietnam War (Lancaster, C., & Van de Walle, N., 2018).

Bates (2018) connects the modernisation school with the decline of colonial empires during the mid-twentieth century. Political development, as a branch of political science, appeared in the 1960s, as stated by him. When states progressed into modernity, they were characterised by rising levels of urbanisation, enhanced education, increasing levels of wealth and the modern media. Conditions became conducive for politicians to mobilise the common citizens for mass action. This was the case, for instance, in France's withdrawal from Africa, the Dutch exit from Indonesia and Great Britain's departure from India. Bates (2018) presents the dissolution of colonialism as one of the key evolutionary points towards political development.

6. Modernisation Theory and Institutional Stability

The intellectual roots of Modernisation Theory lie in people, who attempted to describe political development because of the socio-economic change. Talcott Parsons (1968) stated that societies develop in structural differentiation processes, in which old institutions undergo the stages of replacement by more specialised and functional autonomous structure. Under this paradigm, politics and political parties are supposed to be increasingly professionalised, programme and rule based as societies grow modern.

Theory of Modernisation was later extended by others to include political development in relation to decolonisation and the formation of states. Bates (2018) places modernisation in wider context of politics of development, and states that post-colonial states face increased mobilisation politically because of urbanisation, education, and development of media. Nevertheless, Bates is also able to state that in most cases, institutional development is not becoming in pace with social change which establishes the circumstances of political instability. The same warning was by Huntington (1968) who argued that in the speed of political mobilisation that exceeds institutional capacity, societies can only face political decay instead of democratic consolidation.

This observation applies especially to the Pakistani politics. Political institutions have also been weakly institutionalised even though there have been tremendous social-economic transformations since independence. Modernisation Theory would anticipate that this kind of transformation would be one of the implications of which strengthened political parties; Pakistan, however, is an uncharacteristic situation where modernisation has not brought about any consolidated democratic state.

6.1 Modernisation Theory and Political Parties in Pakistan

This theory is not applied as a forecast model, but the critical model to evaluate why the results of modernisation were expected to take place in Pakistan did not happen. The political parties are theoretically supposed to be the mediating institution where political participation is channelled into democratic governing bodies, which was supposed to stabilize the governance. In Pakistan, though, the political parties have tended to be personalistic, factionalised, and dynastic in terms of limiting their capacity to institutionalise the political parties. Although the socio-economic modernisation has increased the involvement, the inability of military dominance has broken the learning process of democracies and institutionalisation of parties. Such deviation depicts the conditionality of the Modernisation Theory in post-colonial states that are militarised.

6.1.1 Monetary Progress and Political Stability

Modernisation Theory also posits that economic development induces political change. Industrialisation and urbanisation lead to the rise of new social classes, changing power dynamics, leading to fresh political opportunities (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). The unevenness of economic development across Pakistan has resulted in notable disparities among regions, and these regional variations are frequently mirrored by corresponding contrasts within the political atmosphere. At the same time, political parties have to operate across the economic inequalities, trying to build the alliances amidst the social divide which is growing.

6.1.2 Institutionalisation of Democratic Patterns

The institutionalisation of democratic pattern in the form of a governmental framework should be depicted in form of structures and not just a culture with its irregularities and should therefore be a guarantee in the stability of the political structure. Freedom of politics, openness and responsibility will depend on platforms offered by political parties. However, in Pakistan, these norms have been compromised so much especially due to the fact that the ancillary institutions, the judiciary and parliament have the ability to apply these norms effectively (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi, 2000).

6.1.3 Political Participation

The level of political participation expands with the increase in complexity of the society and the replacement of traditional values by the modern ideology. The feudalism, and the traditional sources of power, pose a strong challenge to the political parties within Pakistan, thus establishing some levels of social inequality which existed previously. The parties are needed to break the legacy limits in order to encourage more individuals to participate in the elections to maintain a healthy democratic culture (Kitschelt, 2000).

6.1.4 Political Parties as Drivers of Democratic Consolidation

Political parties form the building blocks of democratic consolidation especially in a scenario such as the one in Pakistan. Democratic consolidation refers to the process through which democracy stabilises and becomes less prone to shun authoritarian regimes. Parties also serve as the main intermediaries between citizens and the state in that they organize elections, it consists of different interests and facilitate peaceful transfer of power. In addition, they play significant functions in cultivating political conversation, consensus-building, and responsibility and thus develop a culture of conflict resolution in the society. Their value is enhanced in the presence of the unrelenting conflicts in the form of political instability, military intervention, and ethno-religious fault lines. The needs of such a process as modernization of society and its institutions highlight the necessity of the parties to gain institutional stability. The modernisation theory argues that the evolution of societies leads to the increased complexity, and specialization of political structures to accommodate the social and political

tensions. Parties, therefore, can play the key role in establishing and sustaining stable institutions- a claim that is especially apt when dealing with Pakistan, whereby democratic institutions are weak because of the constant military dictatorships and political instabilities in the country (Huntington, 1968).

Political parties in Pakistan have also worked to consolidate democracy in the state by participating in elections and passing of constitutional amendments aimed at increasing citizen participation. However, they are faced by enormous challenges such as internal disintegration and dynastic politics that cripple their ability to work as consolidation drivers.

7. Role of Political Parties in Stabilising Institutions

Political parties are important not only for the consolidation of democracy, but also as part of ensuring institutional stability. The importance of stable institutions for democratic consolidation, good governance and durable socio-economic development is highlighted in the study titled "Political Parties as Agents of Institutional Stability in Pakistan".

Political parties have a great impact on functional stability in various ways:

7.1 Forming and Improving Institutions

Political parties are central in the activity of democratic governance can build and enhance institutions such as the judiciary, parliament and executive arms of government (Huntington, 1968). They help to form a rules-based system where institutions operate free of the whims of man. In Pakistan, political parties were instrumental in successfully adopting the 18th Amendment (2010) that institutionalised a parliamentary system and curtailed presidential authority to bolster democracy.

7.2 Encouraging Accountability

In these obligatory tasks, political parties are guardians of accountability in governance. Elections are an important accountability mechanism for political parties in Pakistan. Political parties offer citizens the opportunity to participate in elections as a means of evaluating previous accomplishments both by serving government and opposition forces. This is not the whole story, as political accountability may in turn be undermined by problems such as electoral fraud and vote-rigging or simply of democratic choice. These problems undermine the credibility of democracy and are obstacles in the way that political parties can use to control government with effective performance (Hine, 1996).

7.3 Dispute Negotiation and Harmony Developing

Political parties play a critical role in not only democratic consolidation but also establishment of institutions stability. Through their key responsibility of arbitrating between opposing interests, their main role is to find a consensus over important national issues especially in the year 2018. Through conflict mitigation and avoiding the continuation of the social cleavages into political crisis, parties maintain social cohesion in a fragmented polity. They cultivate mediation and political compromise by coalition-building, negotiating cross cutting alliances making institutions to be continued (Waseem, 1997).

With less political mediating force, divisions in society – be they ethnic or religious and even political — are more likely to lead eventually to a weak state that competing forces seek ultimately to control. As a result, political parties perform the important function of mediating between these conflicts and fostering social cohesion

8. Obstacles Faced by Political Parties in Pakistan

8.1 Domestic Factionalism

Political parties in Pakistan face a significant obstacle to their effective functioning: internal factionalism. Faction, in this sense refers to the power-related intra-party divisions, which cripple party organisational coherence and orientation towards an electorate (Carey, 2007). One of the reasons why political parties in Pakistan have always been inefficient and unable to govern is factionalism, which has fuelled for long time unstable political system.

Over the years, dozens of splits have occurred within several factions prompting an inevitable dilution in its overall power including the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party. While increasingly inward-looking, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been beset by inner-party rifts in any case — most pronounced during leadership transitions or immediately afterwards — and this public confidence that they can effectively rule is at an all-time low.

8.2 Dynastic Leadership

Dynastic leadership is another major challenge for political parties in Pakistan. Most of Pakistan's leading parties — including the PPP, led by the Bhuttos; and PML-N, controlled by Sharifs — are family-run enterprises. Power concentration in the hands of few families distorts internal democratic practices by parties, as well as, the rise of fresh talents.

Dynastic leadership also integrates patron-client networks, which entrap political loyalists in government positions and resources thus undermining the integrity of democratic institutions. Such a system encourages leaders to safeguard their interests to the impetus of national issues.

8.3 Army Intervention

Pakistan's political history can be best understood through its distinct phases of military interventions that endlessly interrupted the process of democratic consolidation. Pakistan, created in 1947 has been dominated by the military for most of its history with a continued pattern following through several successful and failed coups where almost every single democratic phase has promised a new era (Alavi, 1973). These interventions have served to weaken political parties as well as undermine civilian public faith the rule of law

Although civilian rule still prevails, political parties often have to strike a fragile balance of power vis-a-vis the armed forces who retain an upper hand in national security and foreign policy along with ruling having majoritarian character. As a result, political parties are unable to demand civilian supremacy over the military and govern effectively due to unpredictable politics.

8.4 Ethnic and Sacred Divisions

The politics of Pakistan is one where diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and language which the more often than not gets reflected in all walks specifically political as well. Hence, parties have to manage social divisions and establish large coalitions which will attract significant chocolate of voters. However, ethnic and religious identity make it difficult to establish unified and all-inclusive parties (Lancaster and Van de Walle, 2018). The agendas of the regional and ethnic parties, including ANP and MQM, tend to be narrow in nature and thus, moving the political spectrum, undermining the ability of parties to bring the people together and promote democratic consolidation.

8.5 Election Manipulation

Pakistan has been facing a regular problem of electoral malfeasance, and this has been manifested through rigging and voter fraud and even intimidation that have cast doubt on the integrity of the

electoral process. The parties that have large financial resources or business connections can vote through manipulations, open ballots and boxes, and exaggerate the number of votes in the chosen polling stations. These activities undermine the democratic standards and reduce the level of trust in political establishments. The manipulation of elections tends to favour established elites at the expense of smaller players and eliminate any real sense of democracy. Consequently, elected governments usually become less legitimate, and the level of voter alienation also increases (Azhar and Khan, 2020).

8.6 Media Bias/Misinformation

In Pakistan, the media play a very important role in influencing the minds of people; most media houses are characterized by strong partisanship whose interests are linked to the corporate worlds. This prejudice spreads false information, polarises politics and weakens the growth of an enlightened voter.

Moreover, another factor that has complicated political waters is the inundation of the politics with false information and fabricated news through social media. Political parties are generally interested in their image, and an ill-informed voter may always vote on fake or inaccurate accounts (Zelenkauskaitė, 2022). Besides creating a distortion on the results of the electoral process, this phenomenon complicates political discourse.

8.7 Financial Dependency

Most of the political parties in Pakistan are dependent on financial support based on business interests, rich individuals or business people. This economic dependency can create vested interests whereby parties may choose the desires of those who pay to keep them in power over serving the broader electorate. The rich or corporations will often want something in exchange for their donation, hence policies that cater to the affluent rather than the common man. Rather it also leads to questions concerning the transparency and accountability of political parties. In any electoral campaign, richer parties have a very clear edge since they can pay for media campaigns and rallies which reach the masses.

9. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Political development can be nurtured in various ways and the political system and political codes can be improved and updated. These include:

- Improving the electoral system. Such a system is designed to ensure that the government applies proportional representations to enhance the presence of minority groups in the legislature.
- Weakening of the judicial. A control over nominating judges to the Supreme Court and legal regulation of the constitutionality of statutory acts are reserved for the government.
- Bringing a level of professionalism into the bureaucracy. A policy that emphasizes merit over seniority should be implemented in promoting civil service employees.
- Fostering Development of Political Parties: Encouraging the development of political parties through creating the right atmosphere for their creation and working. Such regulations can include those that promote internal democracy in political parties, advocate for party programs that are in the interest of the general public and support the strengthening of the structures of political parties.
- Reduce the use of the military in state affairs: Restructure the organisation and functioning of the military and bring it under civilian control.
- For the system of political democracy to function effectively, it is crucial to ensure that the real power is exercised by the masses.

10. Evaluation

Political parties in Pakistan play an important role as far as democratic consolidation and institutional stability of the country are concerned. Political parties have made substantial contributions to the growth of democratic institutions, but they are still encumbered with formidable internal problems, among which party factionalism, dynastic leaderships and military relics linger. In addition, political development is failing due to the absence of a coherent party system and traditional control powers.

Nevertheless, the political parties are part and parcel of the democratic flow in the country. These are supposed to prompt political interest, arbitrage conflicts in the society, and institutionalise democratic norms. More successful parties in consolidating democracy do it through alleviating their weaknesses, filling the gap where more structured organisations are required, and eventually giving rise to a stronger and less elite political system.

11. Conclusion

This paper focused on the political parties and their role in the process of democratic consolidation of post-colonial states, and in particular Pakistan was considered. The results indicate that alongside increased political participation due to the process of socio-economic modernisation, it has not coincided with the similar institution-level consolidation. The Democratic form of governance is still based on political parties, though lacking institutional independence, personalised leadership systems as well as repeated military interventions. Consequently, the modernisation pathway which is envisaged by classical theory has not been achieved.

This work contributes something to a conditional conceptualisation of recipe of Modernisation Theory, which states that political parties may act as effective organization of democratic consolidation only when socio-economic change is justified by the autonomous state of institutions, in-party democracy and civilian dominance. Lack of the above means that modernisation can lead to political turmoil instead of democratic enrichment.

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