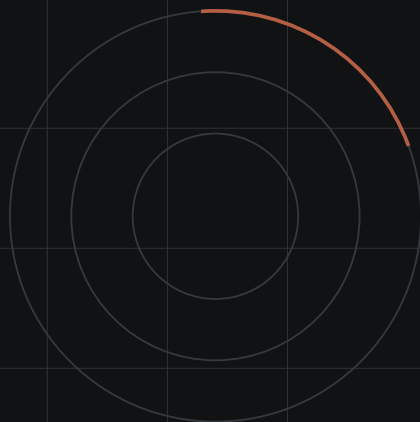


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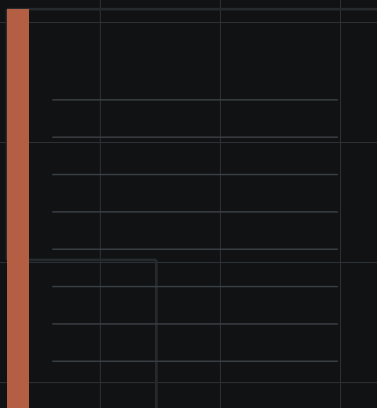


# RULE WITHOUT CONSENT

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*Loyalty to One's Own Demise*

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**HESHAM SULTAN IJAZ**

RULE WITHOUT CONSENT

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# Preface

*On Loyalty, Power, and the Quiet Acceptance of Things*

This book did not begin as an argument. It began as an observation so ordinary that it might easily have been ignored. Over the years, while moving through the streets of various cities in Pakistan, I repeatedly encountered the same small scene: traffic halted without protest, pedestrians stepping aside, shopkeepers pausing mid-conversation, and a convoy of official vehicles passing at speed through space that, only moments earlier, had belonged to everyone. The interruption was brief and yet curiously revealing. No explanation was offered, none requested. The road, for those seconds, ceased to be public and became the property of authority. What was striking was not merely the privilege of the convoy but the acceptance of it. The people who surrendered the space did so without visible resentment. Some even watched with a degree of admiration. It seemed, at first, an insignificant detail of urban life. Over time it began to resemble something else: a metaphor for the relationship between the citizen and the state.

The question that followed was simple and persistent. Why do those who bear the heaviest burdens of

governance so often defend the very structures that impose those burdens? Why does exploitation produce not sustained resistance but accommodation? Why do citizens who complain privately about corruption, inefficiency, and inequality nevertheless exhibit public loyalty to the offices responsible for those conditions? These questions are not unique to Pakistan, yet the clarity with which they appear there makes the country an unusually instructive case. One encounters not merely poverty or mismanagement, which are common enough across the world, but a peculiar moral posture in which obedience is treated as virtue and skepticism as impropriety. The paradox is not that the system fails; it is that the failure is so widely tolerated.

It would have been easy to attribute this tolerance to ignorance, apathy, or cultural deficiency. Such explanations are convenient and frequently repeated, yet they collapse under even modest scrutiny. The ordinary citizen is not unaware of injustice. On the contrary, he is often intimately familiar with the mechanics of corruption. He knows the cost of permits, the delays of offices, the networks through which influence travels. He understands, sometimes with painful precision, how decisions taken far above him shape the narrow possibilities of his life. What he lacks is not knowledge but leverage. He navigates rather than confronts. He adapts rather than reforms. The puzzle, therefore, lies not in what people know but in how they have learned to respond to what they know. This book is an attempt to trace that learning.

It proceeds from the assumption that political behavior is rarely the product of isolated choices. It is shaped instead by structures that predate the individual: institutions, economic arrangements, habits of language, systems of education, and the small daily practices through which authority is encountered. When these structures align in a particular direction, they produce predictable outcomes. Loyalty emerges not because citizens consciously decide to defend exploitation, but because the environment in which they live gradually renders alternatives implausible. Obedience becomes practical, then customary, and finally moral. By the time one asks why the poor defend the powerful, the answer has already been embedded in decades of routine.

The chapters that follow therefore avoid the temptation to focus solely on personalities or scandals. Individual leaders matter, but they matter less than the systems that outlast them. Governments rise and fall; procedures persist. It is easier to denounce a corrupt official than to examine the administrative design that makes corruption profitable. Yet the latter is the more important task. For if the structure remains intact, replacing individuals merely rearranges the beneficiaries. The aim here is not accusation but diagnosis: to identify the historical and institutional conditions that have produced a state more skilled at extracting compliance than at earning consent.

To that end, the book begins with everyday scenes and moves gradually outward, from the street to the office, from the office to the bureaucracy, from the bureaucracy to the economy, from the economy to education and

language. This widening perspective is deliberate. The relationship between citizen and state cannot be understood through law or politics alone. It is reinforced at every level of social life. A child taught never to question authority will behave differently from one encouraged to scrutinize it. A worker dependent on favors will calculate risks differently from one protected by rights. A public conversation saturated with the language of security and sacrifice will interpret dissent differently from one accustomed to debate. Each layer contributes to the same outcome. Only by examining them together does the pattern become visible.

The tone adopted throughout is intentionally restrained. Outrage, though understandable, often obscures more than it clarifies. Anger may describe injustice but rarely explains it. The purpose of this work is not to condemn the citizen for compliance or to romanticize resistance. It is to understand why rational individuals, acting within the constraints they inherit, repeatedly choose accommodation. Such choices are frequently pragmatic, even intelligent. Survival in a hierarchical system demands caution. The tragedy is that strategies suited to short-term survival can, when generalized across generations, entrench long-term stagnation. A society that learns to endure everything eventually expects nothing.

If the book contains a criticism, it is directed less at people than at arrangements. The poor are not at fault for being loyal; they have been taught loyalty as a condition of safety. The problem arises when loyalty is demanded

without accountability, when the state expects devotion while providing little reciprocal responsibility. In such circumstances loyalty ceases to be a civic virtue and becomes a mechanism of control. The distinction between the two forms of loyalty—one grounded in shared ownership, the other in inherited submission—is central to the argument that follows.

The reader should not expect simple solutions. Historical patterns embedded over decades cannot be reversed by a single reform or election. Nor does this book claim that Pakistan is uniquely flawed or that other societies are free from similar tendencies. Rather, it treats the country as a case study in a broader question: how does a government come to rule not merely through force but through the internalized compliance of its citizens? And conversely, what conditions would be necessary for genuine consent to replace that compliance? These questions concern any society that values democracy in more than name.

If, by the final page, the reader begins to see familiar scenes differently—the crowded office, the delayed file, the patriotic slogan, the passing convoy—not as isolated inconveniences but as elements of a coherent structure, then the purpose of this book will have been fulfilled. For the first step toward change is recognition. What remains invisible cannot be challenged. Once visible, however, even the most permanent arrangements reveal themselves as historical constructions rather than destiny.

The chapters that follow are offered in that spirit: not as a manifesto, but as an inquiry into how loyalty is manufactured, how power is preserved, and how a different relationship between citizen and state might, with patience and clarity, become imaginable.



# Loyalty Without Consent

*State, Power, and the Structure of Obedience*

The central argument of this book is that the persistent political and economic dysfunction observable in Pakistan cannot be explained adequately by reference to individual corruption, electoral instability, or cultural disposition alone, but must instead be understood as the predictable outcome of a deeper structural arrangement in which authority is concentrated in permanent administrative institutions while legitimacy is periodically simulated through democratic ritual. The result is a state that governs largely without genuine consent yet continues to command widespread public loyalty. This loyalty, far from being evidence of satisfaction, is better interpreted as the product of historical conditioning, economic dependence, bureaucratic design, and moral narrative. In other words, the system persists not because it serves the majority effectively, but because it has shaped the expectations and behaviors of that majority in ways that render sustained resistance both risky and seemingly futile. The

paradox that animates this study is therefore straightforward: why do those most disadvantaged by the system continue to defend it, comply with it, and, at crucial moments, legitimize it?

Conventional explanations tend to locate failure in personalities rather than structures. Political discourse commonly attributes national decline to corrupt leaders, incompetent governments, or dishonest officials. Such explanations possess intuitive appeal, for they offer clear villains and promise simple remedies: replace the individual and the system will improve. Yet decades of experience suggest that this approach is insufficient. Leaders change frequently; outcomes change little. Elections rotate parties; administrative practices persist. Scandals erupt, courts intervene, sentences are handed down, and yet the everyday encounter between citizen and state remains remarkably consistent. Delays, patronage, discretionary authority, and economic extraction continue irrespective of who occupies office. The recurrence of the same patterns across different regimes indicates that the problem lies less in who governs than in how governance is structured. To focus exclusively on individuals is therefore to mistake symptoms for causes.

This book proposes that Pakistan's political order is best understood as what might be termed an "invisible government": a durable nexus of bureaucracy, security institutions, regulatory frameworks, and informal

patronage networks that operates continuously beneath the visible surface of electoral politics. While elected officials provide the public face of authority, decisive power frequently resides in permanent offices that neither depend upon nor are substantially altered by electoral outcomes. These offices control the movement of files, the allocation of contracts, the enforcement of rules, and the interpretation of law. Their continuity grants them practical supremacy over transient political leadership. The ordinary citizen, encountering the state in daily life, interacts far more often with these unelected structures than with representatives. Consequently, the lived experience of governance is shaped primarily by bureaucratic procedure rather than democratic choice. The ballot, though symbolically important, rarely penetrates the deeper layers of decision-making.

The persistence of such an arrangement might ordinarily be expected to generate widespread resistance. History offers numerous examples of populations mobilizing against unaccountable authority. Yet in Pakistan, while episodes of protest and dissent certainly occur, they seldom translate into sustained structural transformation. Instead, a more complicated pattern emerges: criticism coexists with compliance, resentment with loyalty. Citizens frequently denounce corruption and inefficiency, yet continue to participate in rituals that legitimize the very institutions they criticize. They vote, queue, negotiate favors, and publicly affirm respect for authority even as they privately acknowledge its failures. This coexistence of awareness and obedience constitutes the central empirical puzzle of the book. It suggests that

power operates not solely through coercion or deception but through habituation. People learn, over time, what forms of behavior are safe, effective, or futile. Accommodation becomes rational. Submission becomes practical. Eventually these practical adaptations are reinterpreted as moral obligations.

Understanding this process requires moving beyond the narrow domain of formal politics. Consent or its absence is not produced exclusively in legislatures or courts. It is cultivated across multiple sites: in schools that reward memorization over inquiry, in families that teach caution as survival, in offices that privilege connection over right, in economic systems that make access contingent upon patronage, and in public language that equates criticism with disloyalty. Each site contributes incrementally to the formation of a compliant citizen. By adulthood, individuals have internalized assumptions about authority that predate any conscious political judgment. They approach the state not as co-owners but as petitioners. They seek favors rather than rights. Under such conditions, democratic forms can exist without democratic substance, for the psychological prerequisites of active citizenship have been systematically weakened.

The methodological approach adopted here is therefore interdisciplinary by necessity. The analysis draws upon political history, institutional sociology, public finance, and social psychology, combining macro-level examination of state structures with micro-level observation of everyday practices. Historical chapters trace the continuity of colonial administrative

frameworks into the post-independence period and the subsequent consolidation of military-bureaucratic authority. Economic chapters examine how taxation, debt, and corruption produce upward flows of wealth that reinforce dependence. Social chapters explore how education, religion, and media normalize obedience. Later sections analyze the routine interactions—queues, permits, negotiations—through which citizens reproduce the system even while complaining about it. The intent is cumulative: each domain alone offers partial insight, but together they reveal a coherent pattern in which structural design and human behavior reinforce one another.

It is important to clarify what this book does not claim. It does not argue that citizens are passive victims or that resistance is absent. Nor does it suggest that Pakistan is uniquely flawed or culturally predisposed to submission. Comparable dynamics can be observed in many post-colonial and developing states where centralized administration preceded democratic practice. The case examined here is specific but not exceptional. Nor is the argument fatalistic. Structures, however entrenched, remain historical products and are therefore subject to change. The aim is diagnostic rather than deterministic: to identify the mechanisms through which loyalty without consent is produced so that those mechanisms might be reconsidered. A problem cannot be addressed until it is properly named.

The normative premise underlying this inquiry is modest. A state that demands loyalty from its citizens owes them

accountability in return. Authority divorced from responsibility inevitably degenerates into extraction. Democracy, if it is to mean anything beyond symbolism, requires that decisions affecting the public be open to public influence and review. When this reciprocity breaks down, the language of patriotism becomes hollow, for love of country cannot substitute indefinitely for fairness in governance. The objective is therefore not to diminish loyalty but to redirect it—from individuals and offices toward principles and institutions that demonstrably serve the common good.

The chapters that follow proceed from observation to explanation. They begin with ordinary scenes that reveal the lived experience of authority and then trace backward to the historical and structural forces that produced those scenes. The sequence is deliberate. Theory detached from experience risks abstraction; experience detached from structure risks anecdote. By integrating both, the book seeks to show how everyday submission and high-level governance are parts of the same system. The hope is that by making this system visible—by rendering explicit what has long been taken for granted—readers may reconsider assumptions that have come to appear natural.

Ultimately, the question at stake is not merely academic. It concerns the possibility of a different relationship between citizen and state, one grounded not in inherited obedience but in informed consent. Whether such a relationship can emerge depends on institutional reform, economic security, and cultural change alike. Yet the

first requirement is intellectual: an honest account of how the present condition came to be. Without that account, critique remains superficial and reform cosmetic. With it, even incremental changes acquire direction.

This introduction, therefore, serves as both thesis and invitation: thesis in that it outlines the argument that loyalty has been manufactured in the absence of genuine consent, and invitation in that it asks the reader to examine familiar realities with renewed skepticism. What appears permanent may in fact be constructed; what appears natural may in fact be historical. Once this distinction is recognized, the invisible government ceases to be fate and becomes, instead, a structure subject to understanding—and, potentially, to change.



# The Paradox of Loyalty

There exists, in nearly every city of Pakistan, a small but instructive ritual that reveals more about the structure of the state than any parliamentary debate or constitutional text could hope to explain. At some indeterminate moment in the afternoon the flow of traffic, which until then has belonged indiscriminately to rickshaws, motorbikes, buses, pedestrians, and vendors, is abruptly interrupted; without formal announcement the road clears itself, as though guided by an instinct older than law, and ordinary citizens withdraw to the margins with a docility so complete that it seems rehearsed. A convoy of black vehicles then advances at speed, windows darkened, sirens brief but authoritative, guards leaning outward with an ease that suggests not danger but ownership. The procession neither slows nor acknowledges the existence of those who have surrendered the street. For half a minute the city ceases to belong to its inhabitants and belongs instead to an office, to a title, to an abstraction clothed in metal and glass. When the vehicles pass, traffic resumes, conversations continue, and the interruption is absorbed into daily life without comment. Yet in that small episode an entire political arrangement is laid bare: those who pay for the state must step aside for those who possess it.

It would be easy to interpret such obedience as fear, but fear alone cannot explain the expression that accompanies it. The faces are not hostile or even resentful; they are frequently neutral, sometimes admiring, occasionally deferential. One observes not merely compliance but a peculiar form of respect, as though authority carried a moral weight independent of its conduct. The same men who complain bitterly about inflation, unpaid wages, failing hospitals, and erratic electricity will nevertheless speak of ministers and officials with a language that borders on reverence. They may curse corruption in private yet defend “the government” in public argument. They will acknowledge that wealth accumulates mysteriously around those in office, yet they will continue to vote for them, celebrate their visits, and treat their privileges as inevitable. What is most striking, therefore, is not that inequality exists— inequality exists everywhere—but that inequality has been naturalized to the point where it no longer provokes sustained moral outrage. The puzzle is not exploitation itself but the loyalty of the exploited.

This loyalty cannot credibly be attributed to ignorance, for the ordinary citizen possesses an acute, almost forensic awareness of how the system operates. The mechanic knows which department demands payment before issuing a permit; the contractor knows which project will be awarded to which relative; the small trader can calculate, with weary precision, the informal costs required to move a document from one desk to another. Information circulates freely in markets and tea stalls. Corruption is neither hidden nor mysterious; it is

discussed with the familiarity of weather. Yet knowledge has not produced rebellion. Instead it has produced accommodation. The citizen learns not to challenge the system but to navigate it, not to dismantle the machinery but to survive within its gears. This distinction, subtle but decisive, marks the difference between a society that demands rights and one that requests favors. Once rights are no longer expected, gratitude replaces entitlement, and the moral foundation of citizenship quietly erodes.

To understand how such a disposition could become widespread, one must examine not merely contemporary politics but the historical inheritance embedded at the very birth of the state. When Pakistan emerged in 1947, it did not construct a new administrative order from first principles; it inherited, almost intact, the bureaucratic apparatus of a colonial regime whose primary purpose had been revenue extraction and population control rather than democratic participation. The laws, procedures, district offices, and hierarchical ethos of that system were preserved because they were immediately functional, and in times of uncertainty functionality is often mistaken for legitimacy. Thus independence altered the nationality of rulers but not the grammar of rule. Citizens who had once stood outside colonial offices now stood outside national ones; the language of command changed, yet the direction of command remained the same. Authority continued to flow downward, responsibility upward, and the distance between decision and consequence remained vast. The state, in short, became local without becoming accessible.

Over the decades this inherited machinery acquired a permanence that political leadership never possessed. Governments changed through elections, dismissals, or interventions, yet the administrative structure endured with remarkable continuity. Ministers arrived with promises and departed with scandals, but the file, the stamp, and the desk persisted. It gradually became evident that the visible theatre of politics—campaigns, speeches, manifestos—was only a surface disturbance upon a deeper and more stable body of power lodged within permanent offices. The average citizen learned, through repeated experience, that altering the names at the top rarely altered the behavior below. The same delays, the same informal payments, the same procedural labyrinths reappeared regardless of which party claimed victory. From this repetition emerged a quiet fatalism: elections might replace personalities, but they did not replace the system itself.

The everyday encounter with this system typically occurs in places devoid of grandeur: cramped rooms, flickering fans, counters crowded with papers. Here the citizen confronts the state not as an ideal but as a clerk. He requests a certificate, a license, a registration, and is informed that something is missing—a signature, a copy, an approval from another department. He returns multiple times, each visit consuming wages and patience, until an intermediary suggests that the process can be “facilitated.” A small sum is exchanged; the obstacle dissolves. What is remarkable is not merely that such transactions occur but that they are accepted as normal. The citizen does not feel robbed; he feels relieved. He

thanks the official. In that moment the moral order is inverted: the state, which has obstructed him, receives gratitude for ceasing to obstruct. Corruption thus ceases to appear as theft and begins to resemble service. When this pattern is repeated across millions of interactions, the concept of public right fades, replaced by a culture of negotiated access.

Under conditions of scarcity this accommodation acquires a certain logic. A family dependent on a modest income cannot afford confrontation with those who control permits, employment, or protection. Loyalty becomes a form of insurance. One remains respectful, avoids criticism, and seeks patronage where possible. What begins as prudence gradually hardens into belief. Children are advised not to “create trouble.” Schools emphasize respect for authority more than scrutiny of institutions. Public language celebrates sacrifice, patience, and endurance. In time, obedience is no longer a strategy but a virtue. Citizens come to regard submission not as weakness but as patriotism. A population thus educated will defend the state even when the state fails them, because loyalty has become part of their moral identity.

Occasionally, events occur that might be expected to rupture this identity. Scandals surface revealing vast sums of wealth accumulated by political elites, properties purchased abroad, accounts maintained beyond public oversight. Investigations are announced, court cases televised, judgments delivered with solemn rhetoric. One such episode, triggered by the international

disclosures commonly known as the Panama Papers, exposed offshore companies linked to the family of then prime minister Nawaz Sharif and eventually led to his disqualification by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. By conventional democratic reasoning, such revelations should have produced a decisive break between rulers and ruled. Yet the anticipated rupture failed to materialize. Supporters defended their leader, opponents defended theirs, and the deeper structure of governance remained unexamined. The scandal was interpreted not as evidence of systemic failure but as ammunition in partisan conflict. Thus even proof of elite enrichment did not dissolve loyalty; it merely redistributed it.

This persistence of allegiance in the face of contradiction suggests that the bond between citizen and state is not primarily rational. It is emotional and symbolic. Where material benefits are scarce, symbols become substitutes: flags, speeches, ceremonies, motorcades, uniforms. Spectacle compensates for substance. The presence of visible authority reassures people that order exists, even if that order does not serve them well. To criticize authority then feels akin to criticizing the nation itself. The state becomes less a provider of services than an object of identification. One belongs to it much as one belongs to a family—aware of its flaws yet unwilling to repudiate it. In this way loyalty survives conditions that would otherwise produce rebellion.

The consequence of this arrangement is not dramatic collapse but gradual stagnation. Inequality becomes routine, inefficiency habitual, and corruption

unremarkable. Citizens adjust their expectations downward until minimal functioning appears satisfactory. What might elsewhere provoke collective action here produces only private complaint. The tragedy is quiet and therefore easily overlooked: a society learns to live below its possibilities because it has internalized the limits imposed upon it. No overt coercion is required. The discipline has migrated inward. People police themselves.

The purpose of this book is to examine how such a condition came into being and why it has proven so durable. It seeks not to catalogue individual scandals but to analyze the structure that renders them predictable; not to condemn citizens but to understand the historical and psychological forces that shape their responses. The central question is simple yet disquieting: how did loyalty, which ought to bind a state to the welfare of its people, become instead the mechanism by which the people defend their own marginalization? To answer this, one must move backward in time, to the formative years of independence, and trace the gradual consolidation of an invisible government whose authority persists irrespective of elections. Only by understanding that origin can one comprehend the present, and only by comprehending the present can one imagine a different future.

## Freedom Without Structural Change (1947-1958)

If the paradox of loyalty described in the previous chapter appears mysterious in the present, it becomes less so when one returns to the beginning and examines the peculiar nature of the country's birth, for nations, like institutions, often preserve the logic of their origins long after the rhetoric of their creation has faded. The state that emerged in 1947 under the name of Pakistan was celebrated as a rupture with the past, a sovereign homeland carved out of empire and animated by the promise of self-rule, yet in its administrative anatomy it bore far greater resemblance to its colonial predecessor than to the democratic aspirations proclaimed at independence. The flags changed, the anthems changed, the portraits on the walls changed, but the deeper structure of governance—the laws, the offices, the procedures, and most importantly the habits of command—remained largely intact, as though the old machinery had merely been repainted rather than dismantled. It is this continuity, quiet and technical but immensely consequential, that would shape the character of the state far more decisively than any speech or manifesto delivered at the moment of freedom.

The British colonial system in India had not been designed to cultivate citizenship; it had been designed to maintain order across a vast and potentially unruly population while extracting revenue with minimal resistance. Its administrative philosophy was therefore paternal rather than participatory, centralized rather than representative, and bureaucratic rather than deliberative. Authority flowed downward from district commissioners and civil servants who were trained to regard the population not as partners in governance but as subjects to be managed. Decisions were made in offices insulated from public scrutiny, and obedience was expected as a matter of routine. When independence arrived, this apparatus did not disappear. On the contrary, it appeared indispensable. The new state faced partition, mass migration, violence, and administrative chaos; under such conditions, the temptation to retain an already functioning system was overwhelming. Expediency triumphed over redesign. The colonial skeleton became the national body.

Thus, the early governments inherited a civil service that was not only intact but extraordinarily powerful. The officers of what had once been the Indian Civil Service, and later became Pakistan's Civil Service, possessed continuity, expertise, and institutional memory that elected politicians lacked. Ministers could be dismissed or replaced; bureaucrats remained. Files outlived governments. Procedures outlived constitutions. In practice, the permanent official often wielded more effective authority than the temporary representative, for he controlled the information, drafted the policies, and

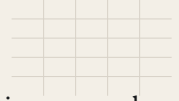
implemented the orders. The citizen, encountering the state at the local office, did not meet an elected figure but a career functionary whose position was secured by hierarchy rather than consent. It was here, in this quiet displacement of power from ballot to desk, that the foundations of the “invisible government” were laid.

The consequences of this arrangement were subtle but far-reaching. Because the administrative class perceived itself as the guardian of stability rather than the servant of popular will, it developed a paternal attitude toward society, treating political demands as disturbances to be contained rather than expressions to be negotiated. Public participation appeared messy and unpredictable; centralized control appeared rational and efficient. Gradually, governance came to resemble management rather than representation. Policies were devised from above and communicated downward with minimal consultation. The citizen was expected to comply, not to deliberate. In such an environment, democracy became procedural rather than substantive: elections might occur, assemblies might convene, but the real decisions continued to originate within a closed circle of officials. The language of consent existed; the practice of consent did not.

Compounding this structural inheritance was the fragility of the political leadership during the first decade of independence. The early death of founding figures, internal rivalries, regional tensions, and constitutional uncertainty prevented the emergence of stable democratic norms. Cabinets changed frequently,

alliances collapsed, and administrative authority drifted increasingly toward those institutions that promised continuity—namely the civil service and the military. Each political crisis strengthened the argument that elected representatives were unreliable while permanent institutions were dependable. The logic was circular but persuasive: because politicians were unstable, bureaucrats had to intervene; because bureaucrats intervened, politicians became weaker still. By the mid- 1950s, it was widely assumed among the governing elite that the masses were not yet “ready” for full democracy, a phrase that disguised paternalism as prudence and converted distrust of the public into a principle of governance.

This tendency culminated in 1958 with the first direct military intervention in politics under Ayub Khan, whose takeover was justified in the language of order, discipline, and national rescue. Yet the coup did not represent a sharp break from the past; it merely formalized what had already been implicit. Power had long been concentrated in unelected institutions; the military simply replaced civilian bureaucrats at the apex of the same hierarchical structure. The administrative philosophy remained unchanged: decisions would be made centrally, dissent would be treated as disorder, and the public would be governed for its own good. The promise of efficiency was offered in exchange for participation. Many citizens, weary of political instability, accepted this bargain with surprising ease, thereby demonstrating once again that the desire for stability often outweighs the desire for liberty when material conditions are uncertain. Loyalty



shifted from constitutional ideals to institutional authority.

During this formative period, an important psychological transformation occurred. Because the state presented itself not as a negotiable contract between citizens but as an overriding guardian of national survival, obedience acquired a moral dimension. To question authority began to resemble disloyalty to the nation itself. The language of governance merged subtly with the language of patriotism. Criticism could be portrayed as sabotage, and compliance as virtue. Schools, official media, and public ceremonies reinforced this conflation until it appeared natural. The citizen was encouraged to love the state rather than to scrutinize it. Once love replaces scrutiny, accountability becomes difficult to sustain. The government is no longer an arrangement to be evaluated; it is an identity to be defended.

At the same time, the economic functions of the state increasingly reflected its extractive heritage. Taxation, licensing, and regulation were emphasized not as instruments of collective welfare but as mechanisms of control and revenue. Services remained limited, yet demands upon the population multiplied. For the poor, interaction with the state meant paperwork, delays, and informal payments rather than tangible benefits. Nevertheless, because these encounters were mediated through authority figures who appeared permanent and unchallengeable, resistance seemed futile. The rational response was adaptation. People learned how to navigate the system rather than how to reform it. In this way, the

early administrative order shaped not only institutions but habits of mind. Submission became practical; practicality became custom; custom hardened into culture.

Looking back, it is clear that the decisive events of those first eleven years were not the speeches or elections that filled the newspapers but the quieter decisions that preserved the colonial architecture of rule. By choosing continuity over reconstruction, the new state ensured that independence would be political in name yet administrative in form. The citizens inherited a government that spoke of democracy but functioned through hierarchy, that invoked consent but relied on command. From such beginnings, the later paradox of loyalty ceases to be surprising. A population raised within a system that never truly invited participation could hardly be expected to demand it instinctively. If people stepped aside for convoys decades later, it was partly because the road had never fully belonged to them in the first place.

The purpose of revisiting this period is not to assign blame to individuals but to illuminate the structural choices that shaped the trajectory of the nation. Once an administrative culture is established, it reproduces itself with remarkable tenacity. Officials train successors in the same habits; procedures harden into tradition; exceptions become impossible. By the time citizens recognize the limitations of the system, those limitations have already become embedded in everyday life. Thus the invisible government, whose outlines were barely

perceptible in 1947, had by the end of the 1950s acquired both permanence and legitimacy. It no longer appeared as a remnant of colonialism but as the natural order of things.

In this sense, the tragedy of the early years lies not in dramatic failures but in quiet acquiescence. A rare historical moment that might have been used to redesign the relationship between state and citizen was instead used to preserve an existing hierarchy. The opportunity for structural transformation slipped away amid the urgency of survival. What remained was a state that expected loyalty without offering proportional accountability. The habits formed in that decade would echo through every subsequent crisis, shaping how citizens responded to authority, how leaders justified power, and how the machinery of governance continued to operate regardless of who claimed to control it.

Having traced these origins, one can now understand how the invisible government acquired its enduring strength and why later generations encountered it not as a historical artifact but as an unquestioned reality. The next chapter must therefore examine how this early concentration of administrative and military authority evolved into a more explicit alliance, and how, in the decades that followed, the language of security and development further entrenched a system that governed from above while speaking in the name of the people below.

## The Rise of the Invisible Government: Permanence, Uniform, and File (1958-1977)

By the close of the first decade after independence, the essential character of the state in Pakistan had already been decided, though few would have recognized it at the time, for structural transformations rarely announce themselves with spectacle and are instead accomplished through the slow sedimentation of habits. What appeared to many citizens as a sequence of political crises—the dismissal of ministries, the drafting and redrafting of constitutions, the language of emergency and rescue— was in fact the consolidation of a more durable arrangement in which power migrated steadily away from elected representation toward permanent institutions. The earlier inheritance of colonial bureaucracy had prepared the ground; the instability of civilian politics provided the justification; and the entry of the military into governance supplied the final mechanism through which authority could be centralized without apology. By the time the first coup was accepted as a solution rather than a rupture, the invisible government had ceased to be an abstraction and had become the operative reality of the state.

The takeover led by Ayub Khan in 1958 was presented publicly as an unfortunate necessity, a corrective measure required to restore order to what was described as parliamentary chaos. The official language emphasized efficiency, discipline, and national survival, suggesting that democratic procedure had become a luxury the country could not afford. Yet beneath these assurances lay a more consequential shift: governance would henceforth be justified not by consent but by performance. If elections produced disorder, then elections could be suspended; if debate slowed decisions, then debate could be curtailed. Authority would derive from the claim to competence rather than from the mandate of the people. This argument, pragmatic on the surface, subtly redefined the citizen's role. No longer the source of legitimacy, he became the beneficiary of administrative benevolence, expected to accept decisions made on his behalf by those presumed to know better. In this formulation, the state resembled a guardian and the public a ward, and the relationship between them was paternal rather than contractual.

What followed was not merely a change in leadership but a change in political psychology. Under Ayub Khan's system of "Basic Democracies," representation was filtered through multiple layers of controlled local bodies, each designed less to empower citizens than to manage them. Participation was permitted in limited, supervised forms, sufficient to create the appearance of inclusion but insufficient to influence substantive policy. Elections became procedural exercises whose outcomes were predictable, while real authority remained

concentrated at the center. The arrangement had a certain administrative elegance: dissent was diluted, responsibility diffused, and control maintained without overt repression. Yet its deeper effect was to train the population in a new kind of political modesty. People learned that their role was to select intermediaries, not to shape decisions; to request improvements, not to demand rights. The habit of deference, already cultivated under colonial rule, now acquired national sanction.

At the same time, the alliance between bureaucracy and military matured into a governing partnership that would define the state for decades. The bureaucrat supplied continuity and technical knowledge; the officer supplied coercive capacity and institutional cohesion. Together they formed a class of permanent managers whose tenure outlasted every elected government. Files moved across desks; orders moved down chains of command; and policies were executed with a uniformity that rendered political change largely symbolic. The citizen, encountering the state in daily life, rarely distinguished between civilian and military authority, for both appeared equally distant and equally insulated. Whether the directive bore the signature of a secretary or a general mattered little; its origin remained inaccessible. Thus the distinction between civil and military governance blurred into a single experience of hierarchy.

It would be misleading, however, to portray this consolidation solely as repression. Much of its strength derived from the fact that it promised stability in a society fatigued by uncertainty. For many citizens, the

memory of early political turmoil made centralized order appear preferable to argumentative freedom. Roads were built, industries promoted, statistics improved; the language of development replaced the language of democracy. The government spoke increasingly of growth rates and five-year plans, as though economic indicators could substitute for political accountability. This technocratic vocabulary proved persuasive because it seemed rational and modern. Yet it also encouraged the belief that governance was a specialized craft best left to experts rather than a collective endeavor requiring public judgment. When politics is recast as engineering, citizens become spectators. They may admire the project, but they no longer imagine themselves as its authors.

The events of 1971, culminating in the secession of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, might have prompted a thorough reconsideration of this centralized model, for they exposed the catastrophic consequences of ignoring regional grievances and suppressing political expression. Instead, the lesson drawn by many within the establishment was that unity required even firmer control. The tragedy, rather than delegitimizing the invisible government, often strengthened its resolve. Security concerns multiplied; surveillance expanded; and suspicion of popular mobilization deepened. Once again, the argument of necessity overrode the argument of consent. The state must survive, it was said, even if the forms of democracy had to be temporarily restrained. Temporariness, however, has a way of becoming permanent when embedded within institutions that benefit from it.

The civilian interlude under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced new rhetoric and genuine popular energy, yet even this period revealed the tenacity of inherited structures. Bhutto's government spoke the language of socialism and mass participation, but it relied heavily on the same bureaucratic machinery to implement its policies and the same centralized methods to suppress opposition. Nationalization, regulation, and administrative expansion increased the reach of the state without necessarily increasing its accountability. In many respects the citizen encountered not liberation but additional layers of control. The paradox was instructive: even leaders who rose on promises of empowerment found themselves governing through the very apparatus they had criticized. The structure absorbed the reformer. Personalities changed; procedures endured.

By the mid-1970s, therefore, the invisible government had acquired a peculiar resilience. It could accommodate generals or civilians, technocrats or populists, without fundamentally altering its mode of operation. Like a deep current beneath the surface of political life, it carried events along regardless of the storms above. Citizens sensed this continuity intuitively. They might invest hope in new leaders, yet their expectations were cautious, shaped by experience. They had seen too many changes that changed nothing. The practical conclusion was adaptation rather than engagement. If real power lay elsewhere, then survival required negotiation with that unseen power, not confrontation with it. Bribes, favors, and personal connections became rational strategies within a system that offered little formal recourse. Thus

everyday corruption was not an aberration but a logical consequence of structural distance between authority and accountability.

It is during this period that the psychology described in the first chapter—the peculiar mixture of resentment and loyalty—became firmly embedded. Citizens complained incessantly about officials yet treated the institution of authority with near-sacred respect. They might distrust individuals but rarely questioned the legitimacy of the hierarchy itself. The uniform and the office acquired symbolic prestige independent of performance. To challenge them felt not merely risky but improper. This emotional deference, cultivated over years of centralized governance, proved more effective than any overt censorship. A population that polices its own dissent requires little external control. The invisible government, having secured both administrative dominance and psychological acceptance, could now operate with minimal resistance.

When the next military intervention occurred under Zia- ul-Haq in 1977, it therefore did not represent a dramatic departure from precedent but the continuation of an established pattern. Once again the language of salvation was invoked; once again democracy was portrayed as disorderly and authority as corrective. The cycle repeated with a familiarity that bordered on routine. What should have been extraordinary became ordinary. Each intervention reinforced the lesson that sovereignty ultimately resided not with voters but with institutions capable of asserting permanence. Over time, citizens

internalized this lesson so thoroughly that many ceased to imagine alternatives.

In retrospect, the years between 1958 and 1977 appear less as a series of discrete regimes and more as the maturation of a single governing logic. Bureaucracy and military authority fused into a durable system that could outlast ideology, absorb opposition, and present itself as indispensable. The state ceased to be a negotiable arrangement and became an environment—something one lived within rather than participated in shaping. Once politics is experienced as environment rather than agency, loyalty becomes easier to cultivate than resistance. People adjust to climates; they rarely attempt to redesign them.

The significance of this era, therefore, lies not merely in coups or constitutions but in the normalization of permanence. The citizen learned that governments may fall, but the system remains; leaders may be disgraced, but the offices endure. From this recognition emerged the quiet fatalism that would later define public life. If the structure cannot be altered, one might as well accommodate it. If accommodation becomes habitual, loyalty soon follows. The invisible government, having secured both the means of coercion and the habits of consent, entered the next decades not as a temporary expedient but as the unquestioned foundation of the state.

The chapters that follow must now examine how this foundation shaped economic policy, social hierarchy, and cultural narratives, and how the language of

development, religion, and patriotism was deployed to legitimize a system that governed from above while claiming to represent those below. Only by tracing these interlocking mechanisms can one understand how loyalty to authority became so deeply embedded that even evidence of exploitation fails to dislodge it.

density so the book remains stylistically uniform.



## Democracy as Theatre: Elections, Patronage, and the Illusion of Consent (1977-1999)

By the late 1970s the structure of power in Pakistan had already settled into a form that was at once paradoxical and remarkably stable: authority was concentrated in permanent institutions while legitimacy continued to be sought through the language of democracy. This duality—rule without genuine consent combined with periodic performances of consent—created a political culture in which elections persisted not as instruments of accountability but as rituals of reassurance. The ballot survived, but its function subtly changed. Instead of determining power, it came to decorate it. The people were invited to participate, yet the range of consequences attached to their participation narrowed steadily until voting became less a mechanism of decision than a ceremony through which the existing order renewed itself. In such a system the appearance of democracy was not a contradiction of control but one of its most effective techniques.

The military government established under Zia-ul-Haq understood this principle with considerable clarity. Having suspended formal politics in the name of stability,

it nevertheless recognized that prolonged naked authority risks exhaustion and resentment. A regime that relies exclusively on coercion must expend enormous energy to sustain itself, whereas a regime that manufactures a sense of participation can secure obedience at a fraction of the cost. The solution was therefore not to abolish democratic forms but to domesticate them. Controlled elections, carefully managed assemblies, and selective consultations were introduced in such a way that citizens could feel represented without actually influencing the architecture of decision-making. Participation was permitted, but only within boundaries drawn from above. The result resembled consultation more than sovereignty.

During this period the vocabulary of governance acquired an almost theatrical quality. Public meetings, referendums, and local bodies were staged with considerable ceremony, yet the outcomes rarely threatened the underlying hierarchy. Speeches spoke incessantly of the “will of the people,” even as policy continued to originate within closed circles of administrators and security officials. Newspapers carried photographs of queues at polling stations, offering visual proof of popular engagement, while the deeper processes of budget allocation, security policy, and administrative control remained insulated from public scrutiny. Democracy thus became aesthetic rather than functional: something to be displayed rather than exercised. It satisfied the emotional expectation that citizens ought to be consulted without conceding the practical risk that they might demand change.

At the same time, another mechanism of control matured quietly but decisively: patronage. Where formal institutions are weak or unresponsive, personal connections assume disproportionate importance. Jobs, contracts, permits, and protections are distributed not through transparent criteria but through networks of loyalty. The citizen quickly learns that advancement depends less on rights than on relationships. One must know the local party worker, the district officer, the intermediary who can “put in a word.” In this environment politics ceases to be ideological and becomes transactional. Votes are exchanged for favors, attendance at rallies for promises of employment, silence for small privileges. The language of citizenship gives way to the language of access. Instead of asking what the state owes him, the individual asks whom he must approach.

Patronage systems possess a peculiar advantage for those in power: they fragment society. Each citizen negotiates privately for his own benefit rather than organizing collectively for structural reform. The man seeking a government job hesitates to criticize the minister who might approve it; the contractor hoping for a tender avoids antagonizing the official who controls the file. In this manner dependence reproduces itself. People who might otherwise unite around shared grievances find themselves competing for individual favors. The state appears not as a common institution but as a resource to be tapped through proximity. Loyalty, under these conditions, is not merely emotional but practical. To

oppose the system is to risk exclusion from the network upon which one's livelihood depends.

The elections of the late 1980s and 1990s, which restored formal civilian rule after years of military dominance, did little to disturb this arrangement. Power alternated between rival parties, most prominently those associated with Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, yet the oscillation produced surprisingly little structural change. Governments fell amid allegations of corruption, only to be replaced by opponents accused of similar practices. Each administration promised accountability and delivered continuity. The same bureaucratic cadres implemented policy; the same patronage networks distributed benefits; the same economic burdens persisted. To the ordinary citizen the difference between parties appeared largely rhetorical. Prices rose regardless of who ruled. Offices behaved the same. The invisible government, entrenched beneath partisan competition, remained untouched.

It was during these years that the theatrical nature of democracy became most evident. Campaign seasons were loud, colorful, and emotionally charged. Posters covered walls, loudspeakers blared slogans, and leaders addressed crowds with promises of transformation. For a brief interval the citizen felt courted, even powerful. Yet once the ballots were counted, the distance between ruler and ruled reasserted itself almost immediately. Decisions migrated back into ministries and cantonments, where they were shaped by considerations far removed from public debate. The energy of the campaign dissolved into

the inertia of administration. The contrast between pre- election rhetoric and post-election reality grew so familiar that it ceased to surprise. Cynicism replaced expectation. People voted because voting was expected of them, not because they believed it would alter the trajectory of their lives.

This cynicism, however, did not produce rebellion. Instead it coexisted with a curious form of loyalty. Citizens might mock politicians in private, yet they continued to treat the offices those politicians occupied with respect. The state, abstract and paternal, remained an object of attachment even when its representatives disappointed them. Part of this attachment derived from fear of instability; memories of coups and unrest made many people prefer flawed continuity to uncertain change. Part derived from habit; generations raised within hierarchical systems tend to regard authority as natural. And part derived from the simple psychological need to believe that someone, somewhere, is in control. Even ineffective authority can be comforting if the alternative appears chaotic.

Thus democracy in Pakistan during these decades operated less as a method of governing than as a method of managing perception. It allowed the population to express preferences without challenging fundamentals. It offered rotation without redistribution. It created the impression of voice while preserving the substance of silence. In doing so it performed a function similar to that of the convoy described in the opening chapter: it displayed power in a form that could be observed and

even celebrated, while leaving the underlying structures of privilege intact. Citizens participated in the spectacle and mistook participation for influence.

The long-term effect of this arrangement was the internalization of limits. When repeated experience teaches that political engagement yields negligible results, people gradually reduce their expectations. They cease to demand structural reform and settle for incremental favors. A repaired road, a temporary subsidy, a personal recommendation—these become sufficient causes for gratitude. The horizon of possibility contracts until modest improvements appear generous. Under such conditions the idea of collective transformation seems unrealistic, even naïve. Loyalty becomes easier than aspiration.

By the end of the 1990s, therefore, the country possessed all the formal attributes of democracy—elections, parties, assemblies—yet lacked its essential substance: the capacity of citizens to shape the direction of the state. The invisible government, fortified by decades of bureaucratic continuity and patronage networks, remained the ultimate arbiter of outcomes. Civilian leaders governed at its pleasure and were removed when they strayed too far from its expectations. The public, accustomed to cycles of hope and disappointment, adapted by lowering its ambitions further. Democracy had not disappeared; it had been hollowed out, converted into a performance whose chief function was to legitimize decisions made elsewhere.

Understanding this theatricalization of consent is essential to understanding the paradox of loyalty. A population repeatedly invited to vote but rarely empowered to decide will eventually treat voting as ritual rather than responsibility. Rituals do not demand scrutiny; they demand participation. Once politics becomes ritualized, criticism appears disruptive, even impolite. The citizen stands in line, casts a ballot, and returns home with the quiet sense that he has done his duty. What happens afterward seems beyond his reach. Responsibility dissolves upward. Authority remains intact.

The chapters that follow must now examine how this entrenched system of managed democracy intersected with economic policy and social inequality, producing an economy of extraction that deepened dependence even as it promised development. For it is one thing to restrict political voice; it is another to combine that restriction with financial burdens that fall most heavily on those least able to bear them. Only by tracing this convergence of politics and economics can we fully understand how loyalty survived not despite hardship but alongside it, and why the structures described thus far proved so resistant to reform.



## The Economy of Extraction: Taxes, Debt, Corruption, and the Upward Flow of Wealth

If the preceding chapters have described how authority in Pakistan became insulated from genuine consent, the present chapter must examine the material consequences of that insulation, for political arrangements that distance rulers from the ruled seldom remain merely procedural; they almost inevitably reshape the economy in ways that favor those who control the machinery of decision. Where accountability is weak, public finance ceases to function as a social contract and begins instead to resemble an extraction system. Taxes are collected without proportional service, debt accumulates without corresponding investment, and the wealth generated by millions flows steadily upward toward a narrow administrative and commercial elite. The citizen senses this imbalance instinctively, even if he lacks the vocabulary to describe it, for he experiences the state less as a provider than as a collector, less as a guarantor of welfare than as an authority that demands payment. The relationship resembles that between tenant and landlord rather than between citizen and government.

In theory, taxation in a modern state is justified as a reciprocal arrangement: the public contributes resources in exchange for security, infrastructure, education, and health. In practice, this reciprocity depends upon trust. Citizens must believe that what they surrender returns to them in some tangible form. Where such belief exists, compliance appears rational. Where it does not, taxation begins to feel indistinguishable from loss. Pakistan's fiscal history has been marked by precisely this erosion of trust. The tax base has remained narrow, concentrated disproportionately on salaried classes and consumption, while large segments of wealth—particularly landholdings and certain forms of commercial income— have escaped effective assessment. Those with political influence often shape the rules to minimize their own liabilities, leaving the burden to be borne by those least capable of resisting it. Thus the structure of taxation mirrors the structure of power: diffuse at the bottom, selective at the top.

For the ordinary citizen the evidence of this imbalance accumulates through mundane encounters. Sales taxes raise the price of essential goods; utility bills climb steadily; small businesses face fees, licenses, and inspections that seem designed less to regulate than to extract. Meanwhile the public services ostensibly financed by these payments remain unreliable. Hospitals lack equipment, schools lack teachers, and municipal systems falter under predictable strain. The citizen therefore confronts a peculiar paradox: he pays more each year yet receives little that is visibly improved. From his perspective the debt of the state appears infinite,

but the debt of the state to him appears nonexistent. Under such conditions resentment is inevitable, but because the mechanisms of finance are distant and opaque, resentment rarely crystallizes into collective action. It dissipates instead into private complaint, muttered in queues and markets, never fully coalescing into organized demand.

Compounding this frustration is the steady accumulation of public debt, which operates as a kind of invisible taxation upon future generations. Governments that cannot raise sufficient revenue through equitable means often resort to borrowing, presenting loans as development while postponing the cost. Yet debt, unlike rhetoric, does not disappear with speeches. Interest payments consume increasing portions of the budget, leaving fewer resources for social investment. The result is a cycle in which the state borrows to cover deficits created partly by previous borrowing, while the citizen continues to fund repayments through indirect taxes and inflation. The burden is dispersed so widely that it appears abstract, yet its effects are concrete: stagnant wages, reduced services, and periodic crises that justify further austerity. Responsibility for this condition is rarely assigned clearly, for the language of finance obscures agency behind technical terms. What might be called extraction is instead called adjustment.

At the same time, corruption operates not merely as isolated theft but as an informal tax layered atop the formal one. To obtain a connection, a permit, or a contract, the citizen must pay twice—once officially and

once unofficially. These payments are seldom recorded, yet they constitute a substantial transfer of wealth from the many to the few. Over years and decades, the cumulative effect rivals that of formal taxation. What distinguishes corruption from ordinary taxation, however, is not only its illegality but its arbitrariness. There is no predictable rate, no transparent schedule, only negotiation. The official becomes both gatekeeper and beneficiary. The citizen cannot appeal to law because the transaction exists outside it. Thus economic life becomes personalized and precarious, dependent less on rules than on relationships. Markets distort accordingly: efficiency yields to favoritism, competence to proximity. Those with access prosper; those without stagnate.

From time to time, glimpses of the scale of elite accumulation surface through scandals that briefly penetrate the public imagination. Offshore accounts, foreign properties, and unexplained assets reveal that substantial sums have left the country entirely, converted into security elsewhere. The symbolism of such revelations is as important as their monetary value. When political leaders or their families are shown to maintain wealth abroad, it communicates, intentionally or not, a lack of confidence in the very state they govern. The message to the ordinary citizen is unmistakable: the system demands loyalty from you but seeks safety for itself elsewhere. Episodes such as the Panama Papers investigations, which implicated figures including Nawaz Sharif, offered rare documentary evidence of this outward flow of wealth. Yet even these disclosures, dramatic as they were, produced surprisingly limited

structural reform. Individuals were disgraced, but the channels through which money escaped remained largely intact. The spectacle of accountability substituted for the practice of prevention.

It is important to recognize that this upward flow of resources does not require grand conspiracies. It emerges naturally from a system where oversight is weak and power concentrated. Contracts are awarded to associates; regulations are written with exemptions; enforcement is selective. Each decision appears minor in isolation, yet collectively they direct enormous value toward those already privileged. Over time a small class accumulates disproportionate influence, enabling it to shape policy further in its favor. The process resembles erosion more than theft: gradual, persistent, difficult to detect until the landscape has changed entirely. By the time citizens notice the widening gap, it appears structural and therefore inevitable.

The most striking feature of this economic order, however, is not merely inequality but the psychological accommodation it generates. Faced with a system that seems impermeable, many citizens adjust their ambitions downward. Instead of demanding universal services, they seek private alternatives where possible—private schools, private clinics, private security—thereby withdrawing further from the public sphere. Those who cannot afford such alternatives rely increasingly on patronage or charity. In both cases the idea of collective entitlement weakens. The state ceases to be a common enterprise and becomes either an obstacle or a benefactor.

Once again loyalty replaces accountability. One thanks the official who secures a hospital bed, even though the bed should have been available as a right. Gratitude substitutes for justice.

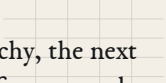
This adaptation has a profound political consequence. A population fragmented into private strategies cannot easily mount collective resistance. Each individual negotiates separately for survival, leaving the broader structure untouched. The small trader seeks tax relief for himself; the employee seeks a transfer through connections; the contractor seeks a contract through loyalty. None have the incentive to challenge the system that might tomorrow favor them. Thus extraction persists not solely because of force but because of dispersed hope. Everyone imagines that proximity to power might yield advantage. The possibility of becoming beneficiary softens the reality of being victim.

From a distance, therefore, the economy of extraction appears stable, even functional. Revenues are collected, debts serviced, projects announced. Yet beneath this surface lies a chronic deficit of trust that corrodes civic life. Citizens who suspect that their contributions are misused inevitably reduce compliance where possible, further shrinking the tax base and justifying heavier burdens on those who remain visible. The cycle reinforces itself. Informality breeds informality. Corruption justifies further corruption. The state becomes simultaneously overbearing and ineffective: powerful enough to demand payment, too weak to provide service. It is precisely this combination that

fosters the peculiar blend of resentment and loyalty described earlier. People complain bitterly about the system yet hesitate to abandon it, for they cannot imagine any alternative structure capable of functioning at all.

In this sense the economy of extraction does more than impoverish; it educates. It teaches citizens that fairness is unlikely, that access matters more than law, and that survival depends on accommodation rather than reform. These lessons accumulate across generations until they appear self-evident. Young people entering adulthood assume that influence is necessary to succeed, that rules are negotiable, that public institutions are inherently unreliable. Cynicism becomes common sense. Once cynicism hardens into culture, demands for systemic change appear naïve. The invisible government, sustained by both administrative control and economic dependence, encounters little organized resistance.

The argument of this chapter, therefore, is not simply that wealth has been misallocated but that misallocation has shaped consciousness. Extraction has material and psychological dimensions. It removes resources from the many while simultaneously convincing them that resistance is futile or even dangerous. The poor pay more than they receive and yet continue to salute the symbols of authority, not because they approve of the arrangement but because they have learned to regard it as unavoidable. The state appears less as a contract that can be renegotiated than as a landscape that must be endured.



Having examined how economic mechanisms reinforce political hierarchy, the next step is to consider the institutions that cultivate these habits of thought from an early age. For loyalty is not produced by economics alone; it is also taught, rehearsed, and moralized through education, religion, and public narrative. To understand why citizens accept extraction as destiny, one must study how they are trained to interpret obedience as virtue and questioning as risk. The next chapter will therefore turn to the formation of the compliant citizen and the subtle pedagogies through which submission becomes common sense.

long-paragraph structure, same intellectual density.

# Education, Religion, and the Manufacture of Obedience

If the economy of extraction described in the previous chapter explains how material dependence is created and sustained, it does not fully account for the peculiar durability of loyalty that characterizes public life in Pakistan. Economic pressure alone can produce resentment as easily as submission; deprivation, if unaccompanied by justification, often leads to revolt. The more decisive factor is therefore not merely what citizens experience but how they are taught to interpret those experiences. Systems of power endure most effectively when they succeed in shaping perception itself, when obedience appears not as a concession forced by circumstance but as a moral choice consistent with virtue. Such moralization rarely occurs spontaneously. It is cultivated patiently through institutions that precede political awareness—schools, homes, places of worship, and the everyday narratives through which society explains itself to its young. By the time an individual first encounters the bureaucracy or the tax collector, the essential habits of deference have often already been formed.

The modern school, in principle, is meant to produce independent judgment and civic responsibility. In practice, however, educational systems frequently mirror the hierarchies of the societies that create them. In Pakistan, schooling has long emphasized discipline over inquiry, memorization over analysis, and respect for authority over scrutiny of institutions. The classroom is structured less as a forum for discussion than as a chain of command: the teacher speaks, the student repeats, the textbook dictates. Knowledge is treated as something received rather than discovered. Under such conditions, the ability to question becomes not a skill to be cultivated but a risk to be avoided. Students learn early that advancement depends on reproducing approved answers rather than challenging premises. By the time they enter adulthood, many have internalized the notion that intellectual safety lies in conformity. This pedagogical style, though rarely described in political terms, performs an unmistakably political function. It trains citizens to accept given frameworks rather than to interrogate them.

The content of education reinforces this tendency. Official histories often foreground heroic personalities, founding myths, and narratives of external threat while devoting comparatively little attention to institutional analysis or civic mechanics. Leaders are celebrated; systems are seldom dissected. The student is encouraged to admire rather than to evaluate. The effect is subtle but cumulative. When history is presented as a sequence of great men and existential dangers, the idea that ordinary citizens might shape policy appears almost irrelevant.

Politics becomes the domain of exceptional figures, not collective deliberation. Responsibility for national outcomes is transferred upward, away from the public. The citizen's role is reduced to loyalty and endurance. If hardship occurs, it is explained as sacrifice for the nation rather than as a failure of governance.

Parallel to formal education runs the influence of religious and moral instruction, which in itself need not produce submission but often does so when intertwined with state narratives. Concepts such as patience, obedience, respect for elders, and acceptance of destiny possess deep ethical value within personal life, yet when translated uncritically into political behavior they can discourage legitimate dissent. The line between spiritual humility and civic passivity becomes blurred. Sermons and public discourse sometimes portray authority as inherently sacred, equating criticism with ingratitude or disorder. In such a climate the act of questioning policy risks being interpreted not merely as disagreement but as moral transgression. The vocabulary of virtue—sacrifice, loyalty, discipline—migrates from private ethics to public politics, where it serves to protect institutions from scrutiny. Citizens are encouraged to endure rather than to demand.

It would be inaccurate to claim that this moral framing is imposed solely from above; it also reflects the understandable desire of families to shield their children from harm. In societies where confrontation with authority can carry real risks, parents teach caution as a survival strategy. Phrases such as “do not create trouble”

or “keep your head down” are offered not as ideology but as practical advice. Yet repeated across generations, such counsel acquires the force of cultural law. What begins as prudence hardens into habit; habit into character. By adulthood many individuals instinctively avoid political engagement not because they have weighed alternatives and chosen compliance but because compliance feels natural. The boundaries of permissible action have been internalized long before any conscious decision occurs. The system is thus maintained not only through external enforcement but through self-regulation.

Mass media, too, participates in this quiet pedagogy. News coverage tends to focus on personalities, scandals, and episodic controversies while leaving structural analysis largely unexplored. The citizen is invited to follow politics as spectacle rather than as process. Television debates substitute noise for explanation; dramatic confrontations replace careful examination of policy. The result is a public conversation rich in accusation but poor in understanding. Viewers become accustomed to treating politics as entertainment— something to be watched and discussed rather than shaped. This orientation reinforces passivity. One argues about leaders much as one might argue about sports teams, yet rarely considers the underlying rules of the game. By obscuring systemic issues, media inadvertently protects the system itself.

Over time these various influences converge to produce what might be called the compliant citizen: not a person devoid of intelligence or feeling, but one whose

expectations have been carefully moderated. He has learned that authority is permanent, that resistance is risky, and that improvement comes through proximity to power rather than collective action. He may criticize corruption privately, yet he hesitates to challenge it publicly. He values stability above change because change appears unpredictable and therefore dangerous. When confronted with evidence of elite misconduct, he interprets it as unfortunate but unsurprising, something to be endured rather than corrected. Loyalty, in this context, is less an expression of enthusiasm than an adaptation to perceived inevitability.

The most effective feature of this conditioning is its invisibility. No single institution appears responsible. The school claims merely to teach facts; the family merely to protect; the cleric merely to guide; the media merely to report. Each contribution seems benign. Yet together they form a comprehensive environment in which obedience is continually reinforced. By the time citizens reach voting age, many have already accepted the fundamental premises of the invisible government: that authority lies elsewhere, that participation is limited, and that personal survival depends on accommodation. Elections, taxes, and bureaucratic obstacles are encountered within this mental framework, which predisposes individuals toward compliance. The system's durability, therefore, owes as much to culture as to coercion.

It is important to emphasize that such conditioning does not eliminate dissatisfaction. On the contrary, complaint

is ubiquitous. People speak openly about injustice and inefficiency. What is absent is not awareness but confidence. Citizens do not believe that collective action will succeed. They doubt the efficacy of protest, suspect the futility of reform, and fear the consequences of visibility. This combination of knowledge and resignation is precisely what sustains the status quo. A population that neither trusts institutions nor trusts its own capacity to change them will oscillate between cynicism and loyalty, criticizing loudly yet complying quietly. From the perspective of those in power, this is an ideal equilibrium.

Thus the manufacture of obedience completes the work begun by political centralization and economic extraction. The former limits formal participation; the latter constrains material independence; education and culture shape interpretation so that both limitations appear natural. The citizen does not perceive himself as oppressed but as realistic. He tells himself that “this is how things are.” Once such realism becomes common sense, alternatives fade from imagination. The invisible government no longer needs to justify itself. It is simply there, like weather.

The argument of this chapter is therefore not that education or religion are inherently oppressive, but that within a hierarchical state they are easily appropriated to reinforce hierarchy. When critical thinking is replaced by memorization, when moral virtue is equated with obedience, and when media emphasizes spectacle over structure, the result is a society predisposed toward

compliance. Loyalty emerges not as an act of devotion but as the default setting of civic life. People do not consciously choose submission; they inherit it.

If the paradox of loyalty is to be understood in full, one must now observe how these conditioned citizens interact with the state in their daily routines—how they navigate offices, negotiate favors, and adapt behavior to bureaucratic expectations. It is in these small, repetitive encounters that abstract structures acquire concrete form. The next chapter will therefore descend from institutions to everyday life, examining the ordinary transactions through which the invisible government is reproduced each day by those who appear to suffer under it.

## Everyday Life Under the System: Files, Favors, and the Routine of Submission

The typical day of a citizen dealing with government business rarely contains overt confrontation. There are no dramatic threats, no explicit declarations of

superiority. Instead there is the slow erosion of time. A form must be filled, then refilled. A signature is missing. A document requires attestation. Another office must be visited. Hours accumulate into days. Each return visit requires transport costs and lost wages. The process is not violent, yet it produces a fatigue that is often more effective than force. By the third or fourth attempt the individual begins to feel not anger but resignation. The problem appears less political than personal, as though the delay were a matter of unfortunate circumstance rather than deliberate design. It is at this moment that the intermediary appears—the “agent,” the acquaintance, the man who knows someone inside. He offers assistance for a fee. Payment is made. The obstacle dissolves. What could not be achieved through right is achieved through favor.

Such transactions, repeated millions of times, constitute the daily grammar of governance. They teach a lesson more persuasive than any speech: that formal equality is illusory and that proximity to authority matters more than legality. The citizen learns that rules are flexible for those with connections and rigid for those without. He internalizes the idea that success depends on negotiation rather than entitlement. Importantly, this lesson is not presented as injustice but as practicality. Friends advise one another to “find a reference” or “talk to someone inside,” as though these strategies were simply common sense. Over time the abnormal becomes ordinary. Corruption ceases to appear exceptional and becomes procedural. One no longer asks why the system functions this way; one asks only how to navigate it efficiently.

The psychological consequences of this routine are profound. When individuals depend on favors to secure basic services, they hesitate to antagonize those who dispense them. The police officer who might otherwise be criticized becomes someone whose goodwill is necessary. The local official who processes permits becomes a potential benefactor. Gratitude replaces scrutiny. Even when citizens recognize that they have effectively paid twice—once officially, once unofficially—they often express relief rather than indignation. The immediate benefit overshadows the structural injustice. This preference for short-term resolution over long-term reform is understandable, particularly among those whose livelihoods are precarious. Yet it reinforces the system's permanence. Each private accommodation weakens the possibility of collective resistance.

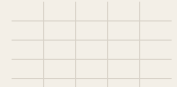
Hospitals offer another instructive example. In principle, public healthcare exists as a right of citizenship. In practice, access frequently depends on influence. Beds are scarce, medicines unavailable, staff overburdened. Families seeking treatment quickly discover that knowing an employee or local representative can accelerate admission. A phone call achieves what waiting cannot. The patient's relatives therefore thank the intermediary profusely, even though the service should never have required mediation. The transaction produces loyalty where there should have been expectation. The state appears benevolent for providing what it was already obliged to provide. This inversion of

logic—gratitude for rights—is one of the most subtle mechanisms through which obedience is reproduced.

The police station, too, illustrates the same pattern. For many citizens, contact with law enforcement is less a matter of protection than of negotiation. Complaints may be ignored unless accompanied by recommendation; minor infractions can be settled informally; disputes are mediated through influence rather than statute. The officer becomes not an impartial agent of law but a discretionary authority whose mood and relationships determine outcomes. Under such conditions the concept of equal justice recedes. People seek patrons rather than principles. The law is treated not as a universal framework but as a resource to be accessed through proximity. Once again, the individual adjusts behavior accordingly, cultivating relationships rather than demanding transparency.

These everyday adaptations might appear trivial when considered individually, yet collectively they constitute a comprehensive education in submission. Each interaction reinforces the same message: that authority is personal, not institutional; that access depends on loyalty; and that challenging the system risks exclusion. Over years this message settles into intuition. Citizens cease to imagine alternative arrangements. They assume that every society must function through connections and favors. Structural injustice becomes naturalized, explained away as cultural inevitability rather than historical contingency. The possibility that governance

could operate through predictable rules seems remote, almost utopian.



What makes this process particularly resilient is that it rarely feels oppressive in a dramatic sense. There are frustrations, certainly, but they are dispersed. No single incident appears severe enough to justify rebellion. Instead there is a constant low-level inconvenience that people learn to tolerate. The system exhausts rather than terrifies. Exhaustion is politically advantageous because tired individuals rarely organize. They focus on immediate problems, not structural ones. By the time they secure the necessary signature or payment, their energy for protest has dissipated. Life resumes. The next difficulty is approached with the same cautious pragmatism. In this way the routine of submission perpetuates itself without requiring explicit coercion.

At the same time, these practices create a peculiar intimacy between citizens and the very system that disadvantages them. Because so many interactions occur through personal negotiation, people develop relationships within the bureaucracy. The clerk who expedites a file becomes “our man.” The officer who overlooks a violation becomes “helpful.” These micro- alliances blur the boundary between victim and beneficiary. The state no longer appears monolithic but fragmented into individual actors, some hostile, some friendly. Criticism is diffused. One hesitates to condemn the whole because parts of it have occasionally assisted. Loyalty attaches itself not to justice but to familiarity.

This intimacy explains, in part, why large-scale corruption scandals often fail to provoke sustained outrage. Citizens accustomed to daily negotiation view elite misconduct as merely a larger version of the same practice. If minor officials accept small payments, it seems unsurprising that major officials accept large ones. The moral distinction between survival and enrichment blurs. Resignation replaces anger. People conclude that “everyone does it,” thereby transforming systemic abuse into an unfortunate but universal fact of life. Such cynicism, though understandable, serves the interests of those who benefit most. A population that expects corruption will not mobilize effectively against it.

Thus everyday life under the system completes the circle traced in earlier chapters. Historical continuity created centralized authority; managed democracy preserved its appearance; economic extraction fostered dependence; education normalized obedience; and daily routines rehearsed submission until it became instinctive. Each element reinforces the others. The citizen who has learned to rely on favors, distrust institutions, and lower expectations is unlikely to demand structural change. He navigates rather than challenges. He complains yet complies. The invisible government, meanwhile, persists precisely because it is encountered not as a single oppressive force but as a thousand minor inconveniences.

The tragedy of this arrangement is not merely material but imaginative. When people cease to conceive of alternatives, reform becomes inconceivable. The habits formed in offices and waiting rooms shape political

horizons as effectively as any law. A society that experiences the state primarily as obstruction will struggle to imagine it as a collective instrument of welfare. Loyalty endures not because the system inspires devotion but because it has trained citizens to treat submission as normal. The cage, once internalized, requires no guard.

Having observed how the invisible government reproduces itself through everyday transactions, the next step is to examine the narratives that justify these conditions at a national scale—stories of security, destiny, and external threat that convert structural problems into patriotic necessity. For even the most entrenched system benefits from an ideology that explains why it must exist. The following chapter will therefore analyze how language itself—through media, politics, and public myth—serves to rationalize authority and deflect criticism, completing the moral architecture of obedience.



## Language, Security, and the Politics of Fear: How Narratives Justify Authority

Power rarely sustains itself through force alone. Even the most entrenched administrative structures, however efficient their mechanisms of control, eventually require an accompanying explanation, a story that renders their dominance not merely unavoidable but desirable. Coercion may secure obedience for a time, but narrative secures consent for generations. It is through language—through the careful selection of words, slogans, and metaphors—that authority is moralized and criticism made to appear dangerous or irresponsible. In Pakistan, where the historical accumulation of bureaucratic permanence, economic extraction, and everyday submission has already limited the practical space for dissent, this narrative layer performs a decisive function. It transforms what might otherwise be seen as structural failure into patriotic necessity. It persuades citizens that the very institutions constraining them are also the only institutions capable of protecting them. In doing so, it converts dependence into virtue.

The most effective political language is seldom dramatic. It does not announce itself as propaganda. On the contrary, it adopts the tone of common sense. It presents

its assumptions as self-evident truths that no reasonable person would question. Over decades, certain phrases recur with such frequency in public discourse that they acquire the authority of natural law: national interest, stability, security, sacrifice, discipline, unity. Each term appears benign in isolation. Yet together they construct a moral framework within which dissent can be reinterpreted as threat. To demand accountability becomes to “weaken the state.” To question budgets becomes to “create instability.” To protest injustice becomes to “serve hostile forces.” The shift is subtle but decisive. Debate is no longer a normal feature of civic life but a risk to collective survival.

This vocabulary has particular potency in a country whose history has included wars, regional conflict, terrorism, and political fragmentation. Genuine security concerns provide fertile ground for the expansion of authority. When citizens feel vulnerable, they are more willing to trade liberty for reassurance. Governments understand this instinct well. The language of emergency, once introduced, tends to persist long after the immediate crisis has passed. Temporary measures become permanent habits. Extraordinary powers become routine. Surveillance, censorship, and centralized decision-making are justified as protective rather than restrictive. Because the threat is described as constant, the suspension of normal accountability also becomes constant. The state presents itself not as one institution among many but as the final barrier between society and chaos.

Under such conditions, criticism acquires a stigma. The citizen who questions policy risks being portrayed as naïve at best and disloyal at worst. Public discussion shifts from evaluating outcomes to affirming intentions. It becomes more important to demonstrate patriotism than to demonstrate effectiveness. Officials are judged not by results but by the fervor with which they invoke national interest. This inversion allows incompetence to survive indefinitely so long as it is wrapped in the appropriate rhetoric. Failure can always be explained as the price of vigilance. The language of security thus shields the state from scrutiny while demanding ever greater trust.

Media plays a central role in disseminating and normalizing this vocabulary. News cycles emphasize external dangers, dramatic confrontations, and sensational conflicts, often at the expense of sober analysis of structural issues. Complex policy questions are compressed into slogans. Television debates reward volume rather than clarity. The citizen, exposed to a constant stream of urgent but shallow narratives, begins to experience politics as a sequence of crises rather than as a set of solvable problems. Anxiety replaces reflection. In an anxious public, calls for strong authority sound reassuring. The demand for order overwhelms the demand for reform. Gradually, the idea that the system itself might be responsible for persistent dysfunction becomes difficult to articulate, for attention is always directed elsewhere—toward enemies, conspiracies, and emergencies.

Another feature of political language during this period is its reliance on abstraction. Words such as development, reform, transformation, and accountability are used frequently but rarely defined. They function as promises without content, capable of accommodating any outcome. A failed project can still be described as progress; a budget cut can be framed as efficiency. Because the terms lack precise meaning, they cannot be falsified. Citizens hear assurances but struggle to measure results. This ambiguity benefits those in power, for it allows them to claim success regardless of evidence. The language floats free of reality, and policy floats free of responsibility. Over time the public grows accustomed to statements that signify nothing concrete. Skepticism deepens, yet paradoxically so does passivity, for when words lose meaning, argument loses direction.

Religious and moral vocabulary, as noted in earlier chapters, often intertwines with these political narratives. Concepts such as sacrifice and endurance are invoked to explain shortages and hardships that might otherwise provoke protest. Inflation becomes a test of patience; inadequate services become opportunities for gratitude; suffering becomes evidence of loyalty. In this way material problems are spiritualized. The citizen is encouraged to view economic deprivation not as administrative failure but as moral trial. Such framing can be profoundly disarming. It discourages demands for reform by reinterpreting injustice as destiny. If hardship is divinely ordained or nationally necessary, then resistance appears both futile and improper.

The cumulative effect of these linguistic habits is the narrowing of imagination. When only certain questions are considered legitimate, alternatives gradually disappear from thought. Citizens learn to argue within predefined boundaries. They debate which leader is more patriotic rather than whether the structure of power itself requires alteration. They dispute personalities rather than policies. Language, which ought to clarify reality, instead obscures it. As George Orwell observed in another context, political speech often “makes lies sound truthful and murder respectable.” In the present case, it makes stagnation sound prudent and obedience sound noble. The distortion is less violent but equally consequential.

It is important to note that many who repeat these narratives do so sincerely. Teachers, journalists, and officials may genuinely believe that emphasizing unity and security serves the public good. The problem is not individual malice but systemic incentive. Institutions that benefit from centralized authority naturally promote language that legitimizes it. Over time, the rhetoric becomes habitual. People speak of “stability” without considering whose stability is protected, or of “national interest” without asking who defines it. The terms operate as linguistic shortcuts that bypass critical thought. Once embedded in everyday conversation, they become nearly invisible, shaping perception without attracting attention.

Thus the politics of fear and abstraction completes the architecture of obedience. Historical inheritance

established centralized control; administrative permanence preserved it; economic extraction enforced dependence; education normalized deference; daily routines rehearsed submission; and language supplied moral justification. Each element alone might have been insufficient. Together they form a coherent system in which authority appears both necessary and inevitable. Citizens may complain, even cynically, yet the conceptual tools required to challenge the structure itself have been blunted. When every criticism can be reframed as disloyalty, silence becomes safer than speech.

The paradox described at the beginning of this book— why the poor defend the system that disadvantages them—now appears less mysterious. Loyalty is not simply emotional attachment; it is the product of sustained narrative conditioning. People defend the state because they have been taught that the state defends them, even when evidence suggests otherwise. They accept restrictions because they have been told that restriction equals protection. They tolerate inefficiency because they have been assured that instability would be worse. In this way language performs the quiet labor that force alone could never accomplish.

Having examined how narratives legitimize authority at a national scale, the remaining task is to consider whether this cycle is immutable or whether conditions exist under which genuine consent might re-emerge. For even the most entrenched systems contain contradictions. The very inequalities they produce generate pressures

that cannot be indefinitely suppressed. The final chapters must therefore explore both the limits of the existing order and the possibilities of an alternative—what a state governed by accountability rather than authority might require, and what psychological transformation would be necessary for citizens to move from loyalty born of fear to loyalty grounded in shared ownership.



## Cracks in the Structure: Resistance, Disillusionment, and the Limits of Control

No system of authority, however carefully constructed, is entirely immune to contradiction. Even arrangements that appear permanent reveal, upon closer inspection, small fissures where their internal logic strains against lived reality. The invisible government described in the preceding chapters—sustained by bureaucratic continuity, economic extraction, social conditioning, and legitimizing narratives—derives much of its strength from the appearance of inevitability. It persuades citizens that it has always existed and will always exist, that its shortcomings are unfortunate but natural, and that alternatives are either dangerous or impractical. Yet inevitability is not a property of institutions; it is a belief about them. When that belief weakens, even slightly, the structure begins to show signs of fragility. Compliance that once seemed instinctive becomes hesitant. Loyalty that once appeared moral begins to feel burdensome. What had long been tolerated quietly starts to attract open complaint. The cracks rarely announce themselves dramatically. They accumulate slowly, almost imperceptibly, until the surface of permanence begins to look less solid than it once did.

In Pakistan, these cracks have appeared repeatedly, though seldom in a form capable of sustained transformation. Periodic protests, movements for judicial independence, student demonstrations, labor strikes, and civil society campaigns have surfaced across decades, each expressing in different language the same underlying frustration: that decisions affecting millions are made without meaningful consultation, and that the burdens of governance fall disproportionately on those least able to bear them. Such episodes reveal that resignation is not universal and that the instinct for dignity persists even under prolonged conditioning. Citizens who have learned to navigate the system pragmatically nevertheless retain an awareness of injustice. When specific events concentrate this awareness—an egregious court decision, a conspicuous scandal, an economic shock—the latent discontent briefly becomes visible. For a moment the habits of deference loosen, and the possibility of collective action re-enters public imagination.

Yet these moments often dissipate as quickly as they arise, not because grievances vanish but because the structural environment described earlier remains intact. Protesters must still contend with the same bureaucratic inertia, the same patronage networks, the same narratives of instability and disloyalty. Without durable organizational support, isolated resistance struggles to translate into institutional reform. Fatigue returns. Individuals, confronted with immediate personal obligations, retreat once more into private strategies of survival. The system proves adept at absorbing shocks.

Concessions are offered selectively, rhetoric adjusted, personalities replaced. The underlying architecture, however, remains largely unchanged. In this way the invisible government demonstrates a quality common to entrenched institutions: resilience through adaptation rather than through rigidity. It bends enough to avoid breaking.

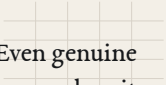
Disillusionment, paradoxically, plays a dual role in this process. On one hand, repeated disappointments weaken faith in official narratives. Citizens who have witnessed successive promises fail grow skeptical of grand claims. They become less easily persuaded by slogans of reform or development. This skepticism represents a potential opening for critical thought. On the other hand, the same experiences can foster cynicism rather than engagement. When every attempt at change appears to end in compromise or co-optation, people may conclude not that reform is necessary but that reform is impossible. Cynicism then becomes a substitute for analysis. The citizen shrugs and says that “nothing will ever change,” thereby converting disappointment into passivity. The system benefits equally from naïve trust and exhausted disbelief. Both inhibit sustained participation.

Generational shifts introduce additional tension. Younger citizens, exposed to global information networks and comparative examples of governance, often display lower tolerance for inefficiency and arbitrary authority than their predecessors. They see, sometimes for the first time, that the conditions they have accepted as natural are in fact contingent. Access to

alternative narratives undermines the monopoly of official language. Expectations rise accordingly. Yet rising expectations without corresponding institutional avenues can produce frustration rather than reform. When energetic demands encounter immovable structures, the result may be either emigration or apathy. The loss is not only economic but civic. A society that repeatedly discourages its most ambitious members risks hollowing out its own future.

Economic strain amplifies these pressures. Periods of inflation, unemployment, or fiscal crisis expose the limits of the state's ability to maintain legitimacy through narrative alone. When basic necessities become unaffordable, appeals to patience and sacrifice lose persuasive force. Material hardship has a way of clarifying abstractions. Citizens who might otherwise tolerate inefficiency begin to question priorities more directly. Why, they ask, do resources appear abundant for convoys and offices but scarce for schools and clinics? Why are debts socialized while profits are privatized? Such questions, once voiced collectively, challenge the moral foundation of authority. They reframe the issue from unfortunate circumstance to structural choice. At this point the language of inevitability begins to falter.

Nevertheless, it would be mistaken to interpret these pressures as guaranteeing transformation. Systems that have evolved over decades possess numerous defenses. Legal restrictions, bureaucratic delays, and selective enforcement can fragment movements before they consolidate. Patronage networks can co-opt emerging



leaders. Media narratives can redirect attention toward external threats. Even genuine reforms may be implemented in ways that preserve core hierarchies. Change, when it occurs, is often cosmetic. The public is offered new terminology and revised procedures while the distribution of power remains substantially the same. Citizens, accustomed to disappointment, accept partial measures as the best available outcome. Thus the cycle continues.

What emerges from this pattern is a peculiar equilibrium between control and frustration. The state never fully satisfies its citizens, yet it never loses their compliance entirely. Resistance surfaces but seldom sustains itself long enough to alter fundamentals. The invisible government persists not because it is universally loved but because it has mastered the art of surviving discontent. It allows just enough expression to relieve pressure while preventing the formation of enduring alternatives. In doing so it maintains the central paradox of loyalty: people who recognize injustice yet continue to operate within its framework.

The significance of these cracks lies less in their immediate effects than in what they reveal about possibility. They demonstrate that obedience is not innate and that conditioning, however thorough, is not irreversible. Moments of collective action show that citizens can imagine different arrangements when circumstances compel them to do so. The challenge is not the absence of awareness but the absence of structures capable of converting awareness into durable

reform. Without such structures, each episode of resistance remains isolated, and the system resets to its previous state. The task, therefore, is not merely to criticize authority but to construct forms of participation that outlast the crisis that produced them.

As this book approaches its conclusion, the question shifts from diagnosis to implication. Having traced the historical inheritance of centralized control, the economic mechanisms of extraction, the social manufacture of obedience, and the linguistic justifications of authority, we must now ask what genuine consent would require in practice. If loyalty born of fear and habit sustains the present order, what kind of loyalty might arise from shared ownership and accountability? What institutional changes would be necessary for citizens to experience the state not as an obstacle or patron but as a collective instrument? These questions cannot be answered through rhetoric alone. They demand careful consideration of structure, law, and culture alike.

The final chapter will therefore turn toward this problem directly. It will not offer utopian promises, for history warns against easy solutions, but it will attempt to delineate the minimal conditions under which a government might genuinely reflect the will of its people. Only by articulating such conditions can the invisible government be rendered visible—and therefore contestable. Without that clarity, the cycle of loyalty and extraction will continue indefinitely, and the cracks

observed here will remain merely symptoms rather than catalysts of change.



## Beyond Loyalty: Consent, Accountability, and the Possibility of a Different State

If the preceding chapters have demonstrated anything with sufficient clarity, it is that the condition described throughout this book is neither accidental nor the product of individual moral failure. The persistent gap between ruler and ruled in Pakistan is not primarily the result of a few corrupt politicians, nor of temporary crises, nor of cultural deficiency among the poor. It is structural. It is the cumulative outcome of administrative inheritance, centralized authority, managed democracy, economic extraction, social conditioning, linguistic justification, and the quiet habits of everyday submission. Each component reinforces the others, producing a system that appears natural precisely because it has been present for so long. The tragedy is therefore not that the state occasionally fails its citizens, but that failure has been normalized to such an extent that many citizens no longer expect anything different. Loyalty persists not because the system works but because imagination has been narrowed to the point where alternatives seem unrealistic. The question that remains is whether this narrowing is permanent, or whether the habits of

obedience described thus far can be replaced by habits of consent.

To speak of consent seriously requires abandoning the theatrical understanding of democracy that has prevailed for decades. Consent cannot be reduced to periodic voting, nor to symbolic participation in rituals that leave substantive decisions untouched. A ballot cast in ignorance of how power actually operates is not consent; it is ceremony. Genuine consent presupposes knowledge, access, and consequence. Citizens must know how decisions are made, must have practical means to influence those decisions, and must be able to remove those who misuse authority. Without these conditions, elections serve merely to legitimize structures that remain insulated from the public. The first requirement of reform, therefore, is not a new slogan or party but transparency. Power must be visible before it can be accountable. Files, budgets, contracts, and procedures must cease to be the private property of offices and become accessible instruments of public scrutiny. What cannot be examined cannot be governed democratically.

This emphasis on visibility may appear technical, yet it strikes at the heart of the invisible government. For decades, authority has survived precisely because it operated behind layers of procedure and classification, distant from ordinary experience. Decisions taken in closed rooms acquire an aura of inevitability. When citizens cannot trace responsibility, they cannot assign blame, and when they cannot assign blame, they cannot demand change. Transparency disrupts this cycle. It

converts abstractions into names, timelines, and numbers. It transforms “policy” into identifiable choices made by identifiable actors. Once this transformation occurs, criticism becomes specific rather than diffuse. Anger directed at fate becomes accountability directed at institutions. In this sense, transparency is less about information than about restoring the moral relationship between action and consequence.

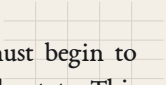
Yet visibility alone is insufficient if economic dependence continues to bind citizens to patronage. A population forced to negotiate favors for survival will hesitate to challenge those who dispense them. Consent requires a minimum of material security. Education, healthcare, and basic services must function as rights rather than privileges. When access to these necessities depends on influence, loyalty inevitably attaches itself to individuals rather than to principles. Only when citizens can rely on predictable provision without personal mediation can they afford to speak openly. Economic reform, therefore, is not merely a matter of growth rates or fiscal balance; it is a prerequisite for political freedom. A society perpetually anxious about subsistence cannot sustain democratic courage. Security in livelihood underwrites independence in thought.

Equally essential is a transformation in education and public discourse. If schools continue to reward memorization over inquiry and media continues to prioritize spectacle over analysis, the habits of deference described earlier will simply reproduce themselves under new management. Consent depends upon citizens

capable of critical judgment, not merely technical competence. This requires pedagogy that treats questioning as strength rather than insolence, history as structure rather than myth, and authority as contingent rather than sacred. The aim is not to cultivate perpetual opposition but informed participation. A citizen who understands how institutions function is better equipped to improve them. Without such understanding, democracy degenerates into emotional allegiance to personalities, the very condition that has repeatedly sustained the existing order.

Institutional design must also address the problem of permanence that has characterized the bureaucracy and allied establishments since independence. No office should be so insulated that it survives indefinitely without review. Tenure and expertise are valuable, but they must be balanced by mechanisms that prevent the consolidation of unaccountable power. Rotation, oversight, and independent auditing are not administrative inconveniences; they are safeguards against stagnation. The goal is not to weaken the state but to align it more closely with those it serves. A government that cannot be questioned will eventually cease to listen; a government that must answer regularly will adapt. Accountability is therefore not an obstacle to efficiency but its condition.

None of these measures, however, can succeed without a corresponding psychological shift. Structures may be redesigned, yet if citizens continue to approach authority with inherited deference, the old patterns will reassert



themselves. The most difficult reform is therefore internal. People must begin to regard themselves not as petitioners before power but as co-owners of the state. This change is subtle but profound. A petitioner asks for favors; an owner demands standards. A petitioner feels grateful for partial relief; an owner expects fulfillment of obligation. The transition from one mentality to the other cannot be legislated, but it can be encouraged through consistent experience of fairness. When institutions behave predictably and transparently, trust grows. Trust, in turn, fosters participation. Participation strengthens accountability. Over time the cycle reverses: loyalty attaches not to personalities but to procedures that prove reliable.

It is important to acknowledge that such transformation will not occur suddenly. Systems shaped over seventy years cannot be undone in a single reform or election. Nor is there any guarantee that progress, once achieved, will be permanent. History offers many examples of societies that oscillate between openness and control. The purpose of articulating these conditions is therefore not to promise immediate redemption but to clarify direction. Without clarity, criticism degenerates into nostalgia or anger. With clarity, even incremental steps acquire meaning. Each measure that increases transparency, reduces dependence, or expands critical capacity moves the system marginally closer to genuine consent. Each measure that concentrates power or obscures responsibility moves it further away.

The ultimate argument of this book has been that loyalty, when detached from accountability, becomes a tool of exploitation. Yet loyalty itself is not inherently misguided. A healthy polity requires attachment, shared identity, and commitment to common institutions. The problem arises only when loyalty is demanded without reciprocation, when the state expects devotion while offering little responsibility in return. The task, then, is not to abolish loyalty but to redefine it. Loyalty should attach to the principles of fairness, legality, and participation rather than to individuals or offices. Citizens ought to feel allegiance to the rule of law, not to the personalities who temporarily administer it. Such loyalty is not submissive but vigilant. It protects institutions precisely by insisting that they meet their obligations.

In the end, the invisible government persists because it has convinced citizens that they have no alternative but accommodation. To render it visible is to challenge that conviction. Once people recognize that the structure is historical rather than natural, contingent rather than inevitable, the psychological barrier begins to weaken. They may still choose caution, but they will do so consciously rather than instinctively. Awareness itself becomes a form of freedom. From that point onward, loyalty ceases to be reflex and becomes choice.

This book began with the image of citizens stepping aside for a convoy that claimed the road without explanation. It ends with a quieter image: the same citizens standing their ground, not in defiance but in

ownership, regarding the road as theirs by right rather than by permission. Such a scene may appear distant, perhaps even improbable, yet it represents nothing more radical than the ordinary meaning of democracy. The challenge is not to invent a new system but to realize the promise implicit in the old one—that government derives legitimacy from the governed, and not the other way around. Whether that promise is fulfilled depends less on leaders than on citizens themselves, and on their willingness to replace inherited loyalty with informed consent.

Only then can authority cease to be something endured and become something shared.

# On Dignity, Memory, and the Possibility of Refusal

Political systems rarely collapse because they are unjust. Injustice, by itself, is remarkably sustainable. History shows that societies can endure astonishing degrees of inequality, inefficiency, and humiliation without fundamental change. What they cannot endure indefinitely is the quiet erosion of dignity. There comes a point, difficult to measure and impossible to predict, at which the ordinary accommodations of daily life begin to feel less like prudence and more like surrender. It is at that point, rather than at any formal crisis, that the foundations of authority begin to loosen. The subject of this book has been the long acceptance of things in Pakistan—the habits of loyalty, the rituals of obedience, the careful negotiations with power that allow life to proceed under imperfect conditions. Yet beneath these accommodations there has always existed something more stubborn: the human reluctance to live permanently as a petitioner.

For most of the people described in these pages, submission has not been ideological. It has not arisen from admiration of rulers or belief in their superiority. It has been practical. One waits in line because there is work to be done. One pays the informal fee because the document is needed today, not in some abstract future.

One votes without expectation because abstention changes nothing. These decisions are rational within their context. They represent strategies of survival. The tragedy lies not in the choices themselves but in their accumulation. When an entire society is forced into small compromises each day, the sum of those compromises becomes a political order. The system does not oppress dramatically; it exhausts gradually. It does not demand worship; it requests compliance. And compliance, repeated often enough, begins to resemble loyalty even when the heart is not in it.

The argument advanced throughout this book has been that such loyalty is manufactured rather than natural. It is produced by institutions that concentrate authority, by economies that create dependence, by schools that discourage questioning, and by language that equates obedience with virtue. Yet if loyalty can be manufactured, it can also be unlearned. Habits, however entrenched, are not destiny. They are memories carried forward from one generation to the next. What has been learned can, slowly and with effort, be reconsidered. The most durable structures of power depend less on force than on the belief that no alternative exists. Once that belief weakens, even slightly, authority begins to look less inevitable.

It is worth remembering that the state, despite its imposing appearance, is ultimately an abstraction. It has no existence independent of the people who operate it and the people who tolerate it. Offices, procedures, and laws possess power only because citizens collectively

treat them as legitimate. When that legitimacy is withdrawn—quietly, stubbornly, persistently—the most elaborate systems discover their limits. History contains many examples of governments that appeared immovable until, almost suddenly, they were not. The change did not always arrive through revolution or spectacle. Often it began with something simpler: the gradual refusal of ordinary people to accept humiliation as normal.

Such refusal need not be dramatic. It may consist merely in small shifts of expectation. A citizen who once asked for a favor begins instead to demand a right. A parent who once taught silence begins to teach questioning. A clerk who once delayed a file out of habit begins to process it promptly out of principle. These gestures appear trivial in isolation, yet collectively they alter the moral atmosphere in which institutions operate. Systems designed for compliant subjects struggle when confronted with self-respecting citizens. The transition from one condition to the other is slow and uneven, but it is not impossible. Dignity, once recognized, has a tendency to spread.

The difficulty, of course, is that dignity requires courage, and courage is costly where security is uncertain. It is easier to endure inconvenience than to risk retaliation. For this reason no transformation can rely solely on individual virtue. Structures must change alongside attitudes. Transparency must replace secrecy, rights must replace favors, and accountability must replace patronage. Without such reforms, even the most

determined citizens will eventually retreat into caution. The burden cannot rest entirely on the governed. A state that genuinely seeks loyalty must first prove itself worthy of trust. Respect cannot be commanded; it must be earned through consistent fairness.

Yet even structural reform begins with imagination. Before a society can build a more accountable system, it must first believe that such a system is possible. This belief is perhaps the rarest resource in environments long accustomed to disappointment. Cynicism presents itself as wisdom. People say that nothing will ever change, that corruption is permanent, that obedience is safer. Such statements, repeated often enough, become self-fulfilling. The invisible government depends upon them. To doubt inevitability is therefore a political act. It reopens space for thought. It allows citizens to see that what exists today was constructed yesterday and can, in principle, be reconstructed tomorrow.

The purpose of this book has not been to prescribe a blueprint or to promise redemption. It has been to make visible what has too long been treated as natural: the structures through which loyalty is extracted rather than earned. Once visible, these structures lose some of their mystique. They appear less like fate and more like design. And design, unlike fate, invites revision. The hope is modest. It is not that injustice will disappear, but that it will cease to be accepted quietly. Not that conflict will end, but that disagreement will no longer be equated with betrayal. Not that loyalty will vanish, but that it will

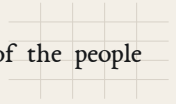
be redirected—from individuals and offices toward principles that safeguard dignity for all.

Perhaps the simplest measure of progress would be this: a day when the ordinary citizen no longer steps aside automatically for power, not out of defiance but out of confidence that the road belongs equally to everyone. Such a moment would not signify the collapse of the state but its maturation. Authority would no longer need spectacle to command respect. It would rest instead on routine fairness. The convoy would lose its symbolism because privilege itself would have diminished. What now appears exceptional would become ordinary: a government that functions without demanding submission.

Until then, the habits described in these pages will continue to shape public life. But habits are not immutable. They change as memories change. Each generation inherits both the compromises and the possibilities of the previous one. If it chooses, it can preserve the former or cultivate the latter. The choice is rarely dramatic. It occurs in small acts of expectation, in the quiet insistence that institutions behave as they ought to behave. Such insistence may seem insignificant, yet history suggests that it is the beginning of every durable reform.

In the end, the question is not whether citizens are loyal. They always are, to something. The question is what they choose to be loyal to: to the comfort of familiarity, or to the harder demand of dignity. The answer will

determine not only the character of the state but the character of the people themselves.



# Acknowledgements



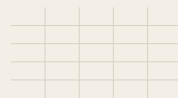
This book is the result of many quiet acts of support, encouragement, and shared reflection. Above all, I thank God for the strength and guidance that sustained me throughout this journey.

I am deeply grateful to my father and mother, whose sacrifices and faith in education shaped both my character and purpose. My sincere thanks also go to Walia and Orkhan for their understanding during the long months of writing.

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Any shortcomings in this book remain solely my own.

# Notes

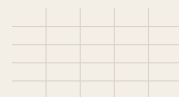


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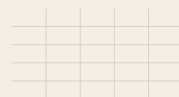
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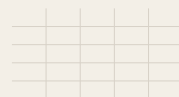
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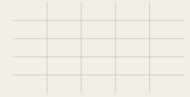
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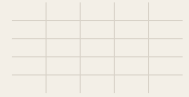
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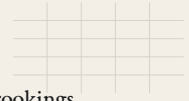
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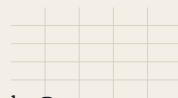
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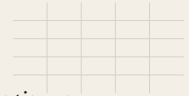
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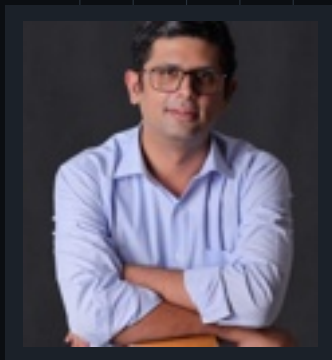
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# About the Author

Hesham Sultan Ijaz specialises in economics, consultancy, law and strategy, working across public and private institutions in sectors including technology, infrastructure, agriculture, revenue systems and private enterprise.

His professional experience has placed him at the intersection of government, markets and organisations, providing a practical vantage point from which to observe how institutions, incentives and authority operate beyond their formal descriptions.



HESHAM SULTAN IJAZ

With an academic background spanning economics, law, econometrics and predictive modelling, his interests extend across political economy, institutional behaviour, international relations, economic policy and the changing architecture of global power.

His writing draws deliberately from the intersection of observation and analysis. Rather than approaching institutions only through theory, Sultan writes with an experiential dimension: beginning with ordinary encounters, behaviours and contradictions, and following them outward into the structures that produce them.

In *Rule Without Consent*, he examines Pakistan not principally through individual governments or personalities, but through the deeper systems that persist beneath them - law, bureaucracy, economic dependence, social conditioning and the everyday habits through which authority becomes normal. The book ultimately confronts a more difficult question: why societies so often learn to accommodate the very structures and policies they recognise as unequal.