

THE ELITE NETWORK BLOCKING PAKISTAN'S PROGRESS



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Few months ago, I went on a trip to Lahore with my friends and like many of the nouveau travellers to Lahore, we went to many of the stereotypical local spots such as Badshahi mosque and Shalimar Garden. To travel to these spots, we took the most popular option of going on the Orange Line bus, which gave us quite a peripheral view of Lahore. Looking outside from the bus, there was an array of an endless collection of small and shabby-looking houses lined up together with narrow streets. This scene would continue for some time until we would reach our destinations. Keeping this in view, on the last day, we had decided to visit a small and popular neighborhood in DHA. Indeed, many of the popular societies such as DHA and Bahria town are drastically way better than what we had seen from the bus, however, many of my friends and I were not ready to see what awaited us in this area called "Defence Raya". It is an area that has been famously compared to Dubai. As we came out of our rented car, we started seeing an outpour of lavish cars from behind, ranging from Mercedes to Prados. This was in stark contrast with what I had seen on my arrival in Lahore from a local train. As I was there and kept looking around, I couldn't help but wonder, just like many people before, who were these people that were coming in these fancy cars? How have these elite people been able to create a separate world for themselves?

Before we can explore this, let's expand on who elites are.

Elites are simply those people who have more power and money than an average citizen. To further elaborate on it, Hashmat et al in their study "Roles of Elites in Pakistan" have described elites as citizens who are superior to the rest of the population in terms of power, authority, and capability, wielding significant influence and playing a crucial role in any state or community. They play a significant part in practically every civilization¹⁰. These sorts of elites exist in all segments and parts of Pakistan. They can be your professor, manager and simply anyone who is higher up in the hierarchy and has influence over you.

In Pakistan where corruption is so ripe, many of the elites have the upper hand in formulating policies in Pakistan in such a way that it benefits them. PIDE has described elite capture as elites formulating systems and policies that are for their gain instead of the development for everyone¹¹.

¹⁰ Khan, H. U., Rahman, F. U., Khan, T. A., & Rahman, G. (2018). Role of elites in Pakistan. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326985062_Role_of_Elites_in_Pakistan

¹¹2 Talib, A. (2023, November 19). Understanding elite capture. PIDE. <https://pide.org.pk/research/understanding-elite-capture/>

And this is very much visible in the unending credentials and approvals that are required to start a legal and profitable business in Pakistan. To have a profitable legal business in Pakistan, you require a lot of capital and time before it starts to make a profit. By creating these systems where everything is so regulated, it makes sense that the whole of Pakistan does not reflect “Defense Raya”. It is due to these heavy regulations that smart and talented people who have no resources have such a difficult time becoming part of the elites.

Regulations are necessary to preserve order, defend rights, provide safety, and promote societal well-being. They establish a framework in which individuals and corporations may function fairly and responsibly. However, these heavy regulations in Pakistan only hide the sinister intentions of the elites behind this facade and prevent creating an encouraging environment for businesses to thrive. Many of these regulations only encourage monopolies or oligopolies. In the case of oligopolies, cartels are formed where they create strategies to foster their growth and trump on the newcomers. It is with these calculated actions that elites can capture the resources and systems made for average citizens to benefit them. The government made to serve the people of the country mostly consists of elites. They influence and approve policies that are only in favor of them. Elites are indeed too bad for the region they belong to. In the case of Lahore, elites there have been able to exploit the poor for their own benefit. The city has drastically deteriorated over the years at large and has only kept a small proportion of the city livable and habitable.

In a country where the power can be with the few, why wouldn't they want to create a separate world for themselves? These elites don't care to fund and create systems where good education is available to everyone if their kids are well-educated. This has been best described in an article called “Hanging out with Pakistan's 1%”. The affluent do not need to enhance the educational system since they can send their children anywhere, they choose. Why should they enhance the healthcare system when they can travel to Dubai? It only becomes an issue when they believe they will not be voted into power. The elite understands this, although the middle class may be unaware¹².

In conclusion, Pakistan's elites have disproportionate power and money, influencing official policies and societal dynamics. They may be found in a variety of sectors of society, from academia to corporate management, and their positions of influence allow them to create systems that favour them despite widespread corruption. Current regulations highlight the enormous hurdles in starting lawful, lucrative enterprises as stringent laws prevent smart people with limited means from rising to elite rank. Although rules are supposed to preserve order, protect rights, ensure safety, and promote social well-being, in Pakistan, they often serve to entrench the power of the elite, promoting monopolies and oligopolies while inhibiting new entrants. The negative consequence of this privileged supremacy is also seen in Lahore, where the exploitation of the poor has resulted in considerable urban deterioration, benefiting only a small, affluent segment of the community. In a country where power is concentrated in the hands of a few, it is unsurprising that these elites aim to establish an exclusive world for themselves, prolonging inequality and suffocating overall socio-economic growth.

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¹²³ Tribune. (2023, March 5). Hanging out with Pakistan's 1%. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2404547/hanging-out-with-pakistans-1>