# DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE
# Pakistan

UNDP

# CHOOSING DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL SERVICES

GENDER EQUALITY

CLIMATE CHANGE

ECONOMIC GROWTH

GOVERNANCE

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

# DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE
# Pakistan

VOLUME 10 / ISSUE 2  |  AUGUST 2023

© AFP


© NationalAssembly.gov.pk

## Editorial Board

# Contents

© Pexels/ Ekaterina Bolovtsova

www.facebook.com/undppakistan

www.twitter.com/undp_pakistan

www.instagram.com/undp_pakistan

www.undp.org/pakistan

# Politics in Development

## How can election platforms speak to Pakistan's most pressing sustainable development needs, and what's at stake?

On 14 August 2023, Pakistan commemorates 76 years of independence, coming at an important crossroads in the history of the country. Still impacted, one year on, by the 2022 floods, an economic shock and a heavy debt burden, the country will now choose its representatives in a general election – representatives whose task will be to return Pakistan to a resilient, sustainable, and prosperous development pathway.

Over the last fifteen years of continued parliamentary democracy, Pakistan has experienced rigorous elections campaigning by political parties comprising public rallying, animated public discourse and intense stakeholder engagement on key policy issues. This election year is already witnessing increased political activity and debate, especially on the subjects of accountability, transparency, economic stability and poverty alleviation.

These subjects were particularly vivid in the 2023 Pakistan Governance Forum recently convened in Islamabad by the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, where senior policymakers, civil society, youth representatives, academics and more explored how stable, transparent, agile, and responsible governance strengthens state-society relations and

protects the social contract. So, alongside governance issues, and as political parties seek re-election in 2023, they will be expected to meaningfully address in their election platforms the most pressing public concerns in contemporary Pakistan.

How can election platforms speak to Pakistan's most pressing sustainable development needs, and what's at stake?

Historically, election years have served as an important milestone in shaping the country's multi-year governance agendas and policies. The 2023 election offers another opportunity to the country's political, parliamentary, and governance stakeholders to present viable policy visions to the people. Pakistan needs sustained policy commitments and clear pathways for macroeconomic stabilization and inclusive growth; equitable resource allocation down to the local government tiers; improved governance; and access to justice. Political and policy commitments made in the coming elections will need to put a premium on informed and inclusive engagement with constituencies and stakeholders to generate a broad-based consensus on development priorities.

At the top of the priority list is the country's development trajectory,

By

## Dr. Samuel Rizk
Resident Representative,
UNDP Pakistan

which has been incremental. Alongside impressive policy gains undertaken to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Pakistan has shown modest progress of an overall SDGs index score improvement by 19.5 percent from the baseline of 2015. With a recent disruption in its growth trajectory and increased debt burden, the fiscal space for adequate development expenditure in Pakistan has decreased even further.

The UNDP global Human Development Report 2022 shows Pakistan's Human Development Index (HDI) rank experiencing no positive change, and remaining fixed at the 161st place globally in 2021, 2020 and 2019. The UNDP Pakistan National Human Development Report on Inequality 2020 detailed how the country's allocation on education, health services, and social protection programmes is lower than its neighbouring countries, which spend a higher share of their GDP on human development and consequently have higher HDI rankings. One-third of human development achievements in Pakistan are lost due to inequality.

And, although the economy is projected by the World Bank to grow modestly at 0.4 percent in 2023, it is difficult to have any impactful growth when faced with the multidimensional challenges and crises like the 2022 floods and global inflation that have impacted every individual, especially the most vulnerable. Despite the addition to the already-heavy debt burden, the IMF package agreed in June 2023 provided timely relief to the economy. The country needs to annually spend 16 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) until 2030 to achieve the SDGs, with an annual financing gap for the SDGs at US$3.72 billion for 2020-2030.

How, where and with whom this expenditure takes place will be critical for policy- and decision-makers following the election. More than a decade after the passage of the 18th constitutional amendment (2010), the provincial governments are picking up pace for devolved development. However, governance systems in Pakistan still face structural challenges, including procedural, legal, capacity and resource constraints.

Addressing issues of human capital and technology gaps will also be critical for recalibrating development prospects in the country. Women constitute 48.5 percent of the population of Pakistan (per the last census of 2017), but the country is ranked in the bottom five countries of the world (142 out of 146) on the Global Gender Gap Index 2023. Pakistan has experienced significant growth in information and communications technology, but only 45 percent of the population own mobile phones, and only 17 percent have access to the internet. In its latest report on Human Capital Index (HCI), the World Bank has recorded Pakistan's HCI value at 0.41 -- lower than the South Asia average of 0.48 and more comparable to those in Sub-Saharan Africa at an average HCI value of 0.40.

By prioritising sustainable economic growth, livelihood creation and resilience, investments in health, education and digitization, and social safety nets, political parties can ensure that the dividends of development reach Pakistan's most vulnerable population segments. Political parties and

© UNDP Pakistan

institutions also need to challenge the country's biased gender norms and support comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategies to ensure no women are left behind. Finally, they need to commit to sustainable environmental policies, including promoting renewable energy sources, conservation of forests and water resources, and measures to mitigate climate change.

A tall order? Yes, it is, but not out of reach if principles of equality, inclusion, transparency, risk management and mitigation are the bedrock for development policy and programming.

January 2023 marked the start of a new 5-year Country Programme signed between UNDP and the Government of Pakistan, aligned with the UN system's Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Over the next five years, we will work on governance, sustainable/green/inclusive economic transformation, climate resilience, and gender equality. Elected leaders and representatives will be our partners for this programming period -- a partnership, alongside many development actors in the UN system and beyond, that will frame our development action for the people of Pakistan ahead of the 2030 milestone.

So, on the occasion of Pakistan's Independence Day and the forthcoming election, this 10th anniversary edition of DAP intends to enrich the national policy discussion by focusing on the theme of 'Politics in Development'. It offers a space that represents a broad spectrum of ideas and perspectives, although not exhaustive. Political parties and their elected representatives committing to sustainable and inclusive development targets in election platforms as well as their progress tracking can significantly bridge the public trust deficit, aid in public-private and citizens' solutions, and help Pakistan navigate its path towards a resilient and equitable future.

# From Promises to Progress:

# Rethinking Political Party Manifestos

Enhancing election manifestos requires a multifaceted approach that includes incorporating grassroots insights, adopting transparency and specificity, and undertaking robust research to suggest evidence-based policies.

By

**Ahmed Bilal Mehboob**

President and CEO, PILDAT

4

> Hardly any political party in Pakistan involves its grassroots organizations and workers in identifying the key policy issues which need to be addressed, and in which manner, in their election manifestos.

---

The current National Assembly is set to complete its five-year term on the 12th of August, with the General Election to the National and four Provincial Assemblies scheduled to take place two months after the assembly completes its term. The election date may be extended by another month if the assembly is dissolved even a day before the scheduled completion of term. In any case, whether the election takes place in October or November this year, the election season is already upon us, and, although the political narrative is currently dominated by the after-shocks of the events of 9th May, political parties will soon start unveiling their election manifestos.

The three largest political parties of Pakistan – PTI, PML-N, and PPP - unveiled their election manifestos just 16, 20, and 27 days ahead of the polling day in the 2018 General Election. PTI may, however, be credited with producing a document called 'Imran Khan's first 100 Days' Agenda' a little over two months before Polling Day. Although one political party, Jamat-e-Islami, has already unveiled its election manifesto in anticipation of provincial assembly elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, most parties are expected to follow the same pattern of announcing their manifestos as they did in 2018.

Political parties' election manifestos in Pakistan suffer from four key weaknesses. The first is the non-inclusive process of preparing the election manifesto. Hardly any political party in Pakistan involves its grassroots organizations and workers in identifying the key policy issues which need to be addressed, and in which manner, in their election manifestos. Mainstream British political parties, the Conservatives, and the Labour Party have established systems of holding policy forums at various levels starting from the grassroots right up to the National Forum and finally seeking endorsements at their annual party meetings. The Conservative Policy Forum website indicates that at least half the election manifesto consists of recommendations made by policy forums at various levels.

In Pakistan, political parties with very few exceptions constitute a committee consisting of 20 to 50 persons about 2 to 3 months before Polling Day. This committee, after deliberations among themselves and with limited consultation outside of itself, comes out with a draft manifesto which the senior leadership approves with or without modifications. The process indicates that the election manifesto is a mere formality rather than the result of a proper structured system of consultations at various levels.

The second weakness of the election manifesto process is that it is usually based on whims and not proper research. Although there is increasing tendency in political parties to commission and use public opinion polls, the general focus of such an effort is on gauging the popularity of various leaders rather than the identification of issues. The use of public opinion polls based on a carefully crafted questionnaire can significantly enhance the quality of the election manifesto. In-depth research should feed into the solutions proposed in the manifestos. Instead of identifying issues and proposing their solutions from the perspective of the party, political parties tend to craft catchy slogans because the general public responds much better to slogans than robust analysis and well-considered policy positions. 'Roti, kapra, aur makan' (bread, clothing, and shelter) proved to be a very popular slogan for PPP in the 1970 General Election. 'Nizam-e-Mustafa' (System of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or an Islamic System) helped IJI to gain popularity in the 1977 Election. The slogan of 'Tabdeeli' or change proved successful for PTI in 2018. As long as people do not demand well considered solutions to the problems faced by them and allow themselves to be swayed by mere slogans, the parties are not likely to devote serious attention to the formulation of an election manifesto. Political or civic education amongst the electorate is, therefore, also needed.

Almost all election manifestos in Pakistan are mere wish-lists without any serious back-end working on how the resources will either be mobilized or diverted from other programmes to implement the programmes promised in the manifesto. For a resource-constrained country like Pakistan, trade-offs are a natural phenomenon while undertaking serious planning on policies and programmes. The election manifestoes should, therefore, present the party's proposed trade-offs and funding ideas.

The British Labour Party's election manifestos of 2017 and 2019 could serve as good models as these carried separate detailed documents explaining how each promised programme would be funded. The Labour Manifesto in 2017 was named 'For the many, not the few', and its accompanying 7-page document had the title

© UNDP, Pakistan

## 30 percent of respondents identified 'development' as the reason why they voted for a party or a candidate in the 2018 election.

'Funding Britain's Future'. The 2019 Labour Manifesto carried an even more detailed 40-page document with the title 'Funding the Real Change'. Both these funding documents were produced by a team headed by the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, equivalent to a Shadow Minister of Finance in our parlance, if we had the system of Shadow Cabinets in our Opposition.

Another major weakness relates to the lack of attention to the status of implementation of the election manifesto by a party once it comes to power. It seems that parties almost forget about their manifestos after coming into power. A system of regular monitoring of the status of implementation by the party in power will not only help the party and its government to improve the extent of implementation, but will enhance public trust in the party and its government. PTI, after coming into power in 2018, tried to monitor the status of implementation of Imran Khan's first 100 Days Agenda and shared the results online, but the party abandoned the commendable initiative even before the expiry of the first 100 days in the government. The party did not make any effort to monitor the implementation of its election manifesto. Political parties in the opposition, as well as civil society organisations, should also undertake serious monitoring of the implementation of the manifestos of parties in power.

Pakistan is a federal state and a lot of ministries and divisions have been devolved to the provinces. A party may not be in power both at the centre and in all the four provinces at the same time. The parties should prepare separate manifestos for the federation and each province. Jamat-e-Islami has recently unveiled a separate election manifesto specifically for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Other parties may also consider doing the same.

Usually, 'development' is a major part of the election manifestos of Pakistani political parties, and it makes sense because 'development' has consistently been the number one reason why a voter votes for a political party or a candidate, as discovered through the exit polls conducted by Gallup Pakistan in the past eight General Elections. For example, 30 percent (the highest number) of respondents identified 'development' as the reason why they voted for a party or a candidate in the 2018 election. It is important that both the parties and the voters define 'development' not just as bricks and mortar but rather encompassing a wider scope, including quality education, safe drinking water, robust health systems, equity, and more.

Enhancing election manifestos requires a multifaceted approach that includes incorporating grassroots insights, adopting transparency and specificity, and undertaking robust research to suggest evidence-based policies. This can empower voters, strengthen democratic processes, and hold political parties accountable to their promises.

# A Political Pathway for Inclusive and Resilient Development

Democracy, wealth redistribution, women's inclusion, and the realignment of administrative units must be the cornerstone on which 'a political pathway for inclusive and resilient sustainable development' for Pakistan can be built.

By

**Dr. S. Akbar Zaidi**

Executive Director,
Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi

8

Political leaders will need to take numerous hard decisions
to ensure that redistribution rather than accumulation
becomes the main pillar of economic policy.

While there are numerous forms of politics, political pathways, and possibilities open to countries and their rulers, ranging from extreme authoritarianism usually by the military or even by civilians, the general liberal mode of governance prefers some form of elected representation in order to have a more responsive and inclusive polity.

This is not because democratic and civilian governments and representatives are necessarily better at bringing about sustainable development, for many times they themselves are responsible for the destruction of societies and their economies and are the reason for dismal failure. Moreover, authoritarian governments have been particularly successful at reducing and even eliminating poverty, ensuring high growth over many decades, and taking impoverished and uneducated populations to impressive heights seldom seen in a matter of a few decades. Democratic and inclusive governance is not necessary for sustainable development, but has become the norm in the literature and in the practice determined by the hegemony of Western liberal political thought. This is often hypocritical, and contradictory manifestations as represented by Western governments and powers are quite noticeable. Western powers have multiple and duplicitous standards at deciding what constitutes electoral and democratic practices, yet these powers have normalised democracy as the only form acceptable to them. Hence, in their current manifestation, the framing of the notion of a 'political pathway' would imply electoral and democratic representation for Pakistan, knowing full well that not all democratic governments have been effective in bringing about sustainable development.


© The Commonwealth

In Pakistan's current political dispensation, the basic and minimum premise for an elected government would need to be free and fair elections, without any interference, a mandate to complete five years, again without any interference by unelected institutions, and an economic and social plan which addresses issues of development including economic, social, climate and political issues. Some key themes which must be non-negotiable, would include the following:

## Dismissing neoliberalism as a policy choice

Many years after capitalist exploitation under the name of neoliberal economics, the electorate, in many countries, has shunted out governments who supported and endorsed such policies. Sadly, not so in Pakistan. Moreover, the 'one-policy-fits-all' approach does not succeed, precisely because not all countries are alike. Pakistan is a good example of this, where after 22 IMF programmes, every government insists on starting a new one, with another programme expected by whichever new government comes to power after the elections this year. This is a failure of every Pakistani government, of the IMF especially, and of neoliberal economics' generalisations which are supposedly applicable to all, or most, countries.

While Pakistan cannot opt out of the globalised world's capitalist system, it can adopt and promote numerous policies which focus more on local needs and priorities rather than those of global capital. Political leaders will need to take numerous hard decisions to ensure that redistribution rather than accumulation becomes the main pillar of economic policy.  Key components for such an economic policy would need to include issues related to: taxation of all incomes regardless of source, taxation which is highly progressive and based on direct taxes rather than indirect taxes, doing away with most tax exemptions and benefits which favour only the elite and the private sector corporations, and similar issues. A thorough review is necessary, of expenditure and perks to public sector employees and interests, including the military, that cut access to and protect privilege.

Income and wealth inequality, with extremes visible, has become a clear manifestation of every economic policy followed under the guise of neoliberalism in Pakistan. UNDP's National Human Development Report 2020 on Inequality found that 'the richest 20 percent of Pakistanis hold 49.6 percent of the national income, compared with the poorest 20 percent, who hold just seven percent'. At times of economic crises, as Pakistan faces currently and into the future, such inequality manifests itself as the worst form of discrimination. These policies must change. Trickle-down econom-

© w4.org

**It is indisputable that without the participation, promotion, and incorporation of women into every activity, countries will not progress, let alone grow.**

ics does not work. Land reforms – both urban and rural – and better, focused, distributive policies, all need to be implemented to include the poor and marginalised. Distributional consequences need to be factored into every decision taken.

## Putting women first

It is indisputable that without the participation, promotion, and incorporation of women into every activity, countries will not progress, let alone grow. Women are central to the economic, social and cultural constituents of society and all things which intersect accordingly. Every policy in Pakistan must put women first. From literacy and education to public safety and making transport available, to ensuring economic rights and opportunities, to providing their equal inheritance rights, and their rights to choose a spouse or the number of children they want – these demands are the bare minimum of any collective measures required for women, and hence, for Pakistan, to progress and prosper. At the minimum, equity and egalitarianism in every development and social project needs to be gender-based. Analysis of all economic and social issues needs to be based on a clear gendered perspective.

## Service delivery must be at the level of the public

Without effective local government, public service delivery does not work effectively. Macro 'national' projects are required in many cases, but most services are utilised at the local level, however defined. Pakistan needs to revive its local government systems and structures as soon as the general elections take place. The reason why local elections are not held is a flattering testament to their efficacy. Provincial government and provincial representatives (Members of the Provincial Assembly) are the biggest losers, and hence, the biggest impediment to effective and successful elected local government, since they compete for the same resources at the same constituencies. Without a substantial renegotiation in the mandate, terms, and power at the provincial government level, it is unlikely that effective and elected local governments will be constituted.

Given Pakistan's current political structure, the possibility of an effective and elected local government which works with citizens at the delivery level seems improbable. Hence, the need is to rethink Pakistan's administrative structures and systems. The four provinces

# Without effective local government, public service delivery does not work effectively.

which exist, need to be replaced by at least a dozen other, smaller, provinces. The current provinces carved out of colonial India, often without much thought, need to be realigned in terms of what works best in the third decade of the twenty-first century. Pakistan has retained its large and ungovernable four provinces for 75 years, yet India has moved from 14 states in 1956 to 29 today, ensuring that delivery and needs can be better matched. Pakistan needs to learn from its neighbour.

## Conclusions

A secular decline in Pakistan's key social and economic indicators is a clear example of the damage done to Pakistan by its elite, military, civilian, and political groups. Unlike other comparable countries, also ruled and misruled by their own elite, in many important ways, they have not only improved the social, economic and developmental profile of their people, but have also out-shone Pakistan in key indices.

Democracy, wealth redistribution, women's inclusion, and the realignment of administrative units must be the cornerstone on which 'a political pathway for inclusive and resilient sustainable


© Wolfgang Gressmann

development' for Pakistan can be built. Having built and lived with tried and tested models for 75 years and failed, it is time to rethink Pakistan's development strategy and try to do things differently.


© Akhtar Soomro/ Reuters

# Who's Voting in Pakistan?

**Total Registered Voters**

## 126,066,874

**54%** Male    **46%** Female
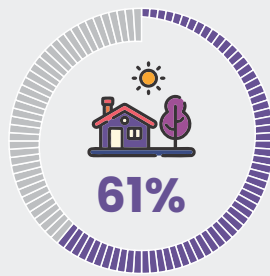
**61%**
Population Resides
in Rural Areas

**39%**
Population Resides
in Urban Areas

Transgender
Community

Registered: **3,029**

People with Disabilities
(PwDs)

Registered: **439,204**

## Age Groups Registered to Vote (2023)

| Age Group | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| 66 and above | 10% |
| 56-65 | 9% |
| 46-55 | 14% |
| 36-45 | 22% |
| 26-35 | 26% |
| 18-25 | 19% |
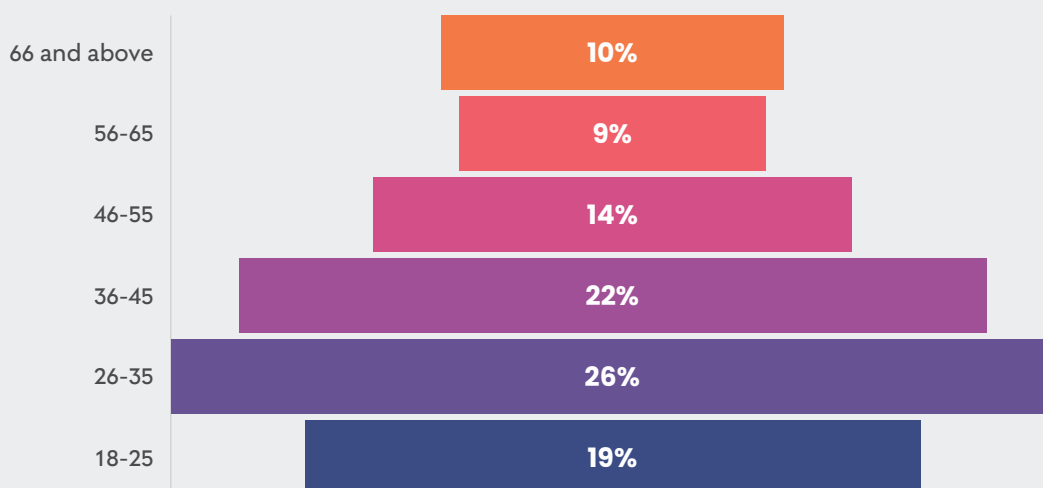
Sources:

• Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). 2023. Retrieved from https://ecp.gov.pk/electoral-rolls

• Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). 2023. Retrieved from https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/Pakistan.pdf

• ECP figures as received by UNDP Pakistan on 1st August 2023.

## Provincial Breakdown (2023)

**Islamabad**
**1,035,387**
■ Male 53%
■ Female 47%

**Sindh**
**26,529,136**
■ Male 54%
■ Female 46%

**Balochistan**
**5,274,761**
■ Male 56%
■ Female 44%

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**
**21,621,211**
■ Male 55%
■ Female 45%

**Punjab**
**71,606,379**
■ Male 54%
■ Female 46%
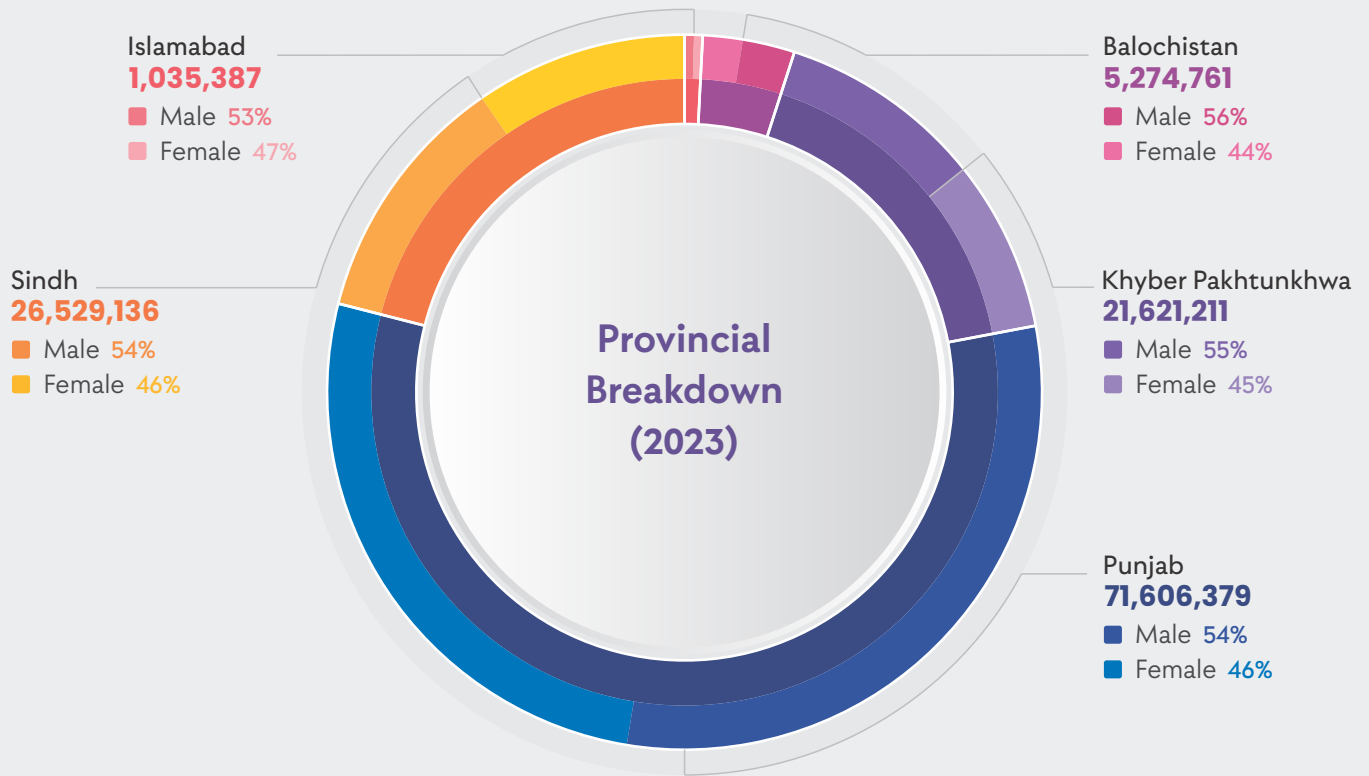
## Voter Turnout Over the Years

| Year | Total Voter Turnout | Youth Voter Turnout (18-29 years) |
|------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2002 | 42% | 28% |
| 2008 | 44% | 27% |
| 2013 | 54% | 26% |
| 2018 | 52% | 37% |

■ Total Voter Turnout   ■ Youth Voter Turnout (18-29 years)

\* Total Registered Voters
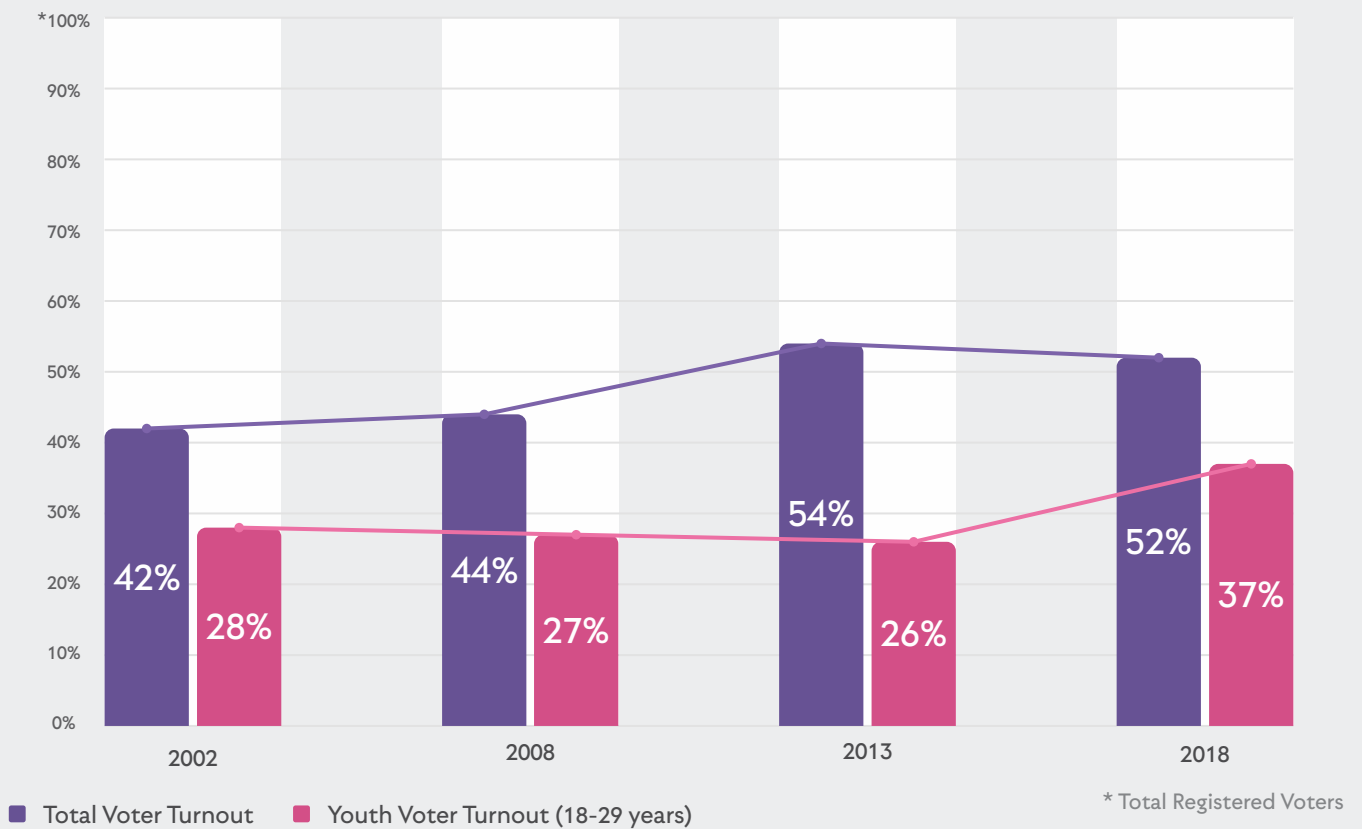
Source:
• PILDAT. 2021. Abysmal Voter Turnout in Youth Must Be Changed: PILDAT . Retrieved from https://pildat.org/youth1/abysmal-voter-turnout-in-youth-must-be-changed-pildat

# Composition of National and Provincial Assemblies in Pakistan*

## National Assembly Members by Seat and Age

**336**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| General Seats | Reserved for Women | Reserved for Religious Minorities |
| **266** | **60** | **10** |
| **79%** | **18%** | **3%** |

- Male
- Female

| Age | % |
|---|---|
| 81-90 | **1%** |
| 71-80 | **6%** |
| 61-70 | **20%** |
| 51-60 | **26%** |
| 46-50 | **15%** |
| 41-45 | **18%** |
| 31-40 | **12%** |
| 21-30 | **3%** |

This breakdown is for the current parliament

### Punjab

18%    2%

**371**

80%
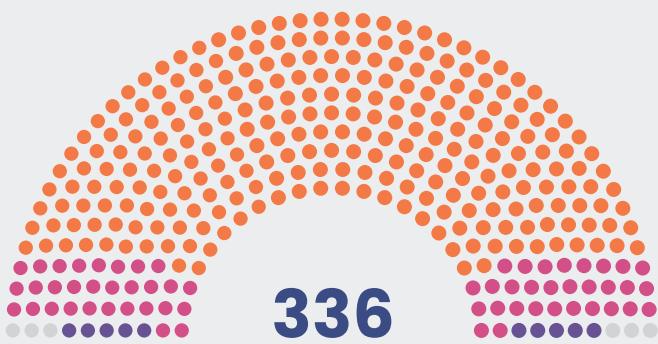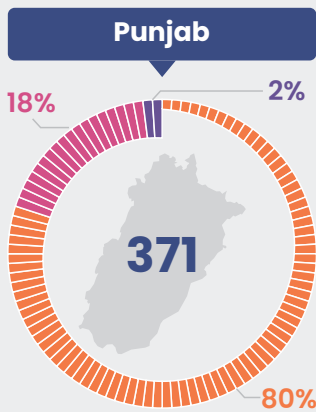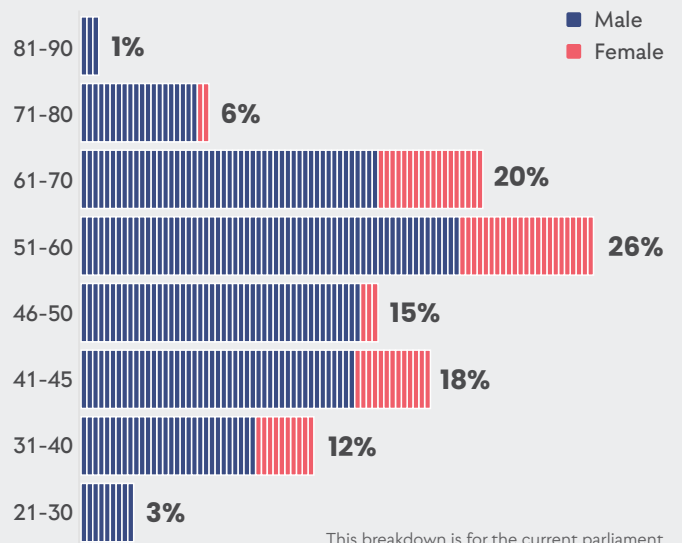
| | |
|---|---|
| **297** | General Seats |
| **66** | Reserved for Women |
| **8** | Reserved for Religious Minorities |

### Sindh

17%    5%

**168**

77%
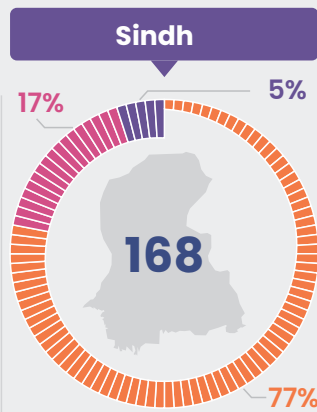
| | |
|---|---|
| **130** | General Seats |
| **29** | Reserved for Women |
| **9** | Reserved for Religious Minorities |

### Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

18%    3%

**145**

79%
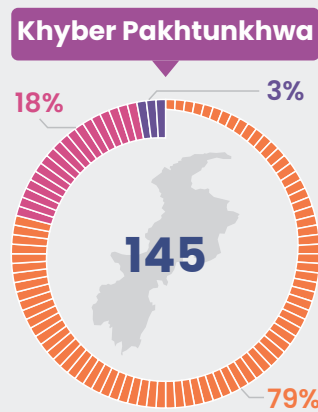
| | |
|---|---|
| **115** | General Seats |
| **26** | Reserved for Women |
| **4** | Reserved for Religious Minorities |

### Balochistan

17%    5%

**65**

78%
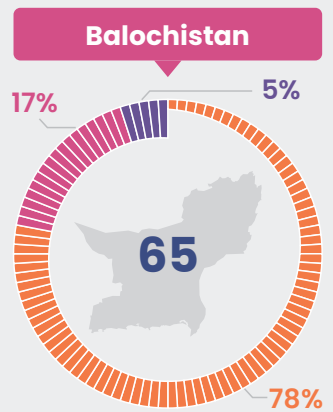
| | |
|---|---|
| **51** | General Seats |
| **11** | Reserved for Women |
| **3** | Reserved for Religious Minorities |

# A History of General Elections in Pakistan

1970* → 1977 → 1984 Referendum → 1985** → 1988

2002 Referendum ← 2002 ← 1997 ← 1993 ← 1990

2008 → 2013 → 2018
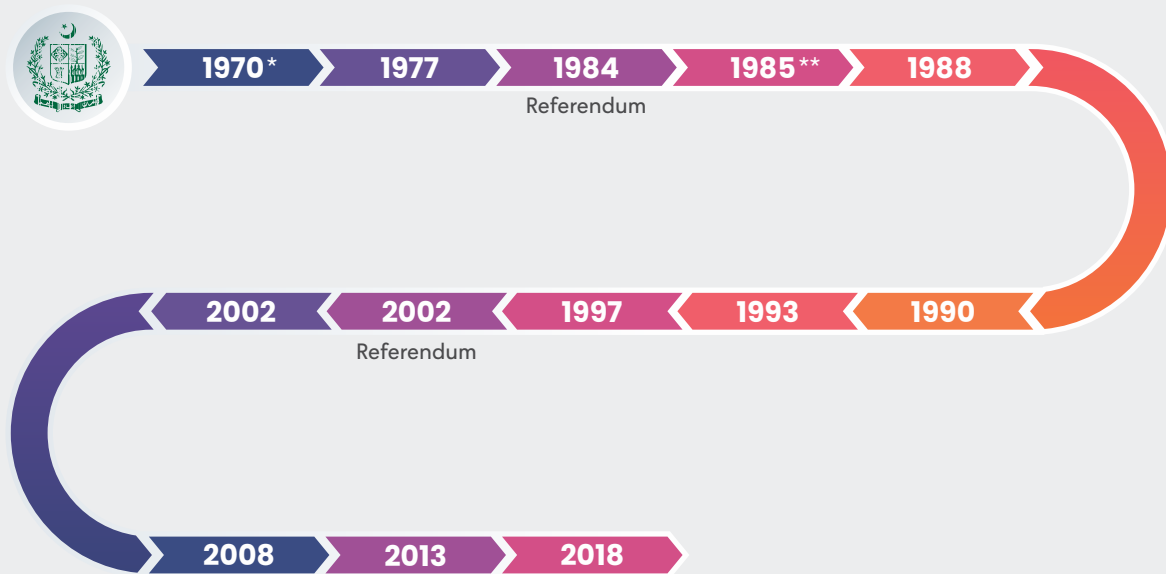
# A Selection of Election Commission of Pakistan's Code of Conduct for Political Parties

1 — Uphold the rights and freedom of people, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

2 — Abide by all directions and regulations issued by the Election Commission.

3 — Not indulge in offering gifts or gratifications to anyone to contest or not contest elections.

4 — Extend cooperation to law enforcement for ensuring people's safety and security.

5 — Provide equal opportunity to qualified men and women to participate in electoral processes.

6 — Discourage arrangements debarring people from exercising their right to vote.

7 — Dissuade their workers from destroying election material.

8 — Not solicit support from public officials to promote or hinder the elections.

9 — Avoid incitement to violence by contesting candidates and their supporters.

10 — Include any expenses incurred by any person or political party on behalf of the candidate within their official election expenses

*    First direct general election.
**   Non-partisan election.
**Note:** The full, unabridged version of ECP's Code of Conduct can be found at: https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections-2023-2

# Fighting Fire with Facts:
## Combatting Misinformation in Elections

In a context where misinformation can serve as a significant challenge to the democratic process, the responsibility of the media to address inaccuracies is crucial if we are to safeguard the integrity of our elections.

By
## Asma Shirazi

Journalist

Smear campaigns, viral videos, unsubstantiated allegations, character assassination, and fake news – the 2018 elections were an eye-opener for observers back then, and continue to be even today, four years later. It was a time when social media boomed, with campaigns aimed to brainwash, redirect, and swing votes in favor of certain parties, while proclaiming those dissenting as corrupt, disdainful, sellouts, and traitors. This new agenda-setting mechanism had substantial support from the power brokers that umpired a fixed match to sideline all others and materialize the dream of a hybrid regime.

Unfortunately, some media outlets also stepped in as avid executors of this plan, dedicating most of their broadcast time to favor one party. Election campaigns were designed and guided on the national media for one party, from empty grounds to the full houses, while portraying other parties negatively through news coverage.

On the day of election, the electables already selected to change the political fabric were well-positioned, but still, the job was not done. Ultimately, the 'Result Transmission System' (RTS) had to face a shut down, and the results started getting delayed and swinging in their favor. The media management orchestrated by powerful circles did the rest. Keyboard warriors were plugged in, while social media influencers, trolls, campaigners, and journalists-turned-propagandists became mere mouthpieces, all working tirelessly to serve the interests of launching the hybrid regime and discrediting credible voices.

In the last five years, the tables have turned. The hybrid regime has failed, support for the establishment has waned, the flawed fifth-generation warfare mantra has flopped, and keyboard warriors have lost their influence after the events of 9th May, 2023. Other political parties have also established their parallel social media setups to secure their space. The challenge

> ## The pre-election training of journalists is crucial in order to facilitate the dissemination of credible information.

---

is now much bigger for the upcoming elections.

We are entering into a situation where the unverified flow of information is streaming in without robust fact checks. Numerous biased social media platforms have emerged, which support just one party. Their target audience is the 18 million new voters who are not interested in watching TV and are more inclined to get updates from social media platforms. A psychological synopsis of target area voters is being carried out via Artificial Intelligence, and religious sentiments and social justice issues are being leveraged as tools to manipulate the psychological mindset of voters.

Some parties have a much stronger grasp on social media platforms than others. Disinformation campaigns are promoted in minutes to

dent the credibility of certain parties. Fake news, doctored pictures, and artificially-crafted content is aired within minutes, often while dragging political leaders into these campaigns.

So what can be done to fight fire with facts and uphold the credibility of elections?

There is a need to have credible fact checking platforms to counter the disinformation that is rampant during elections. Media organizations should initiate fact-checking mechanisms within their own structures, employing specialized teams to analyze unverified information. This will not only help prevent dissemination of fake news, but also allow for the prompt exposure of counter-facts before they go viral.



© AFP via Getty Images

© mocah.org

**Fact checking platforms established by government bodies, institutions, the Election Commission, and political parties can also help combat the spread of propaganda by presenting factual information.**

Media organizations must also exercise strong editorial control over content, led by professional journalists who can discern news and perform editorial checks before endorsing unverified information. Implementing a robust accountability system would further ensure the responsible handling of content that aims to misguide and misinform.

The pre-election training of journalists is crucial in order to facilitate the dissemination of credible information. Special attention should be given to Out Station Reporters (OSRs), stationed in cities where media houses lack main bureaus. Journalists in the field receive a plethora of information from various sources, and strengthening their editorial skills will enable them to counteract fake news by conducting on the spot fact-checks.

Fact checking platforms established by government bodies, institutions, the Election Commission, and political parties can also help combat the spread of propaganda by presenting factual information. Easy access to correct information can effectively dispel negative propaganda. Institutions like the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) can also support the self-regulation of media houses, acting as a productive influencer.

Of course, opinions may vary, but facts must be accurate. Dealing with media bias during election campaigns and ensuring neutrality in reporting is a challenge that professional editors need to address. The Association of Media Editors and New Directors (AMEND) can play a leading role to brainstorm against challenges and find ways to promote neutrality, thus adding credibility towards the election process.

The most significant challenge on election day lies in the announcement of results, which must be made more transparent. Delays in result announcements lead to the spread of disinformation and can impact the credibility of the election process in a particular constituency, potentially leading to larger issues. The timely declaration of results will help the Election Commission achieve its objective of making the election process more credible.

In a context where misinformation can serve as a significant challenge to the democratic process, the responsibility of the media to address inaccuracies is crucial if we are to safeguard the integrity of our elections.

# The Youth Vote:
## A New Era of Sociopolitical Cohesion

**With targeted interventions, the upcoming general elections can herald a new dawn of youth political participation, nudging Pakistan closer to being a truly representative democracy.**

By

**Amna Kausar**

Senior Projects Manager, PILDAT

Manager/Coordinator,
Youth Parliament Pakistan®

Pakistan - the world's fifth most youthful country - emerges from a rich tapestry of culture, traditions, and histories. With a staggering 56 percent of the population under the age of 30 years, and 29 percent between the ages of 15 and 29, the country is a cradle of blossoming potential. Pakistan's median age of 20.4 years paints an even more youthful picture. The stage is perfectly set for the youth of our nation to step forward in shaping its future, as this population is projected to rise until at least 2050. Yet, this optimistic tableau is marred by an unsettling contrast; the political circuit remains largely and disappointingly muted where there should be a vibrant chorus of youthful voices.

The issue goes beyond the simple computation of youth's representation in our population. A systemic void is unveiled, more aptly described as a democratic lacuna, wherein, the participation of youth is more of an exception than a norm. As of March 2023, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) reported that over 44 percent of all registered voters are between the ages of 18 and 35 years. In an ideal situation, these figures should translate into electoral results that reflect the youthful demographic of Pakistan, but this is far from reality. The average youth voter turnout stands at around 31 percent over the last 8 elections held in Pakistan, trailing the overall voter turnout of 44 percent by a stark 13 percentage points. Not only is the youth of Pakistan sidelined from the critical narrative-building process, but the low youth voter turnout tremendously diminishes the vitality of the nation's democracy.

The stark disparity in the political engagement of youth in Pakistan has manifold implications. The negligible youth-centric initiatives and policies reflect the prevailing political exclusion of youth from policymaking in the country. Provincial-level youth policies and programmes are long forgotten by

22

# The youth of Pakistan are intentionally parting themselves from traditional party politics and voicing their discontent in the digital world.

the concerned authorities. Pakistan's socio-political twin and neighbour, India, on the other hand, shows a contrasting image when it comes to youth's political participation or engagement. Comparison of data provided by Gallup Pakistan and Lokniti India[1] reveals how actively the youth of India participate in the electoral process. The average voter turnout of the past five elections for India is 61.6 percent, while the youth voter turnout for the same period in India is 60 percent. The voting gap turns out to be a negligible 1.6 percentage points. In fact, the youth voter turnout in the past two Indian Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and 2019 had exceeded the overall voter turnout by 2 and 3 percentage points respectively.

To rectify this situation and decode the riddle, in-depth analysis and studies into the causes behind this outstanding discrepancy are critical. Learning and understanding the efficacious techniques in India and other democracies, such as effective and meaningful youth participation efforts, and research on our young electorate, can serve as a strategy map for political and other stakeholders in Pakistan.

Sociopolitical cohesion is being redefined in the 21st century by the youth not just in Pakistan, but globally. However, in Pakistan, the youth is pivoting from the conventional modes of sociopolitical engagement to alternative forms of engagement. Casting their vote, opting to join a political party, or contesting an election do not seem to be their preferred route towards engagement.

The youth of Pakistan are intentionally parting themselves from traditional party politics and voicing their discontent in the digital world.[2] Three in five Pakistani youth use the internet, and practically all internet users are on social media. Nearly half of all young people regularly post on political issues on social media, and over half have regular discussions with their friends on political issues, with internet users being more active.[3] PILDAT's Voice of Youth (opinion surveys) conducted throughout 2022 have shown deep-seated disillusionment with politics. The majority of youth feel there is a need to get them more involved in the system by mainstreaming their role in politics and society, and providing them with a platform where they can unite and share their

concerns. It is strongly expressed that leadership in the country needs to mentor the youth to bring about change in their social behaviour, thereby contributing to their empowerment. Some also express that there is no orientation and training of youth for participating in politics within the family and other social spheres. Being involved in politics is not perceived as a positive activity. Many opined that this had resulted in the polarization of youth from the state. There is a silver lining, though, in the form of Local Governments that offer a forum for direct political engagement to youth through reserved seats.

Over 81 percent of PILDAT's 17th Youth Parliament Pakistan supported the restoration of student unions in public and private universities through a bill, reflecting a yearning for being involved. An overwhelming majority also passed an amendment with the revival of student unions which said that unions will not affiliate themselves with any political parties. This is another powerful testament to a growing sense of disillusionment with traditional politics among the youth. Instead of being influenced by established political entities, they seek platforms for freedom of expression, non-partisan representation, and implementation of policies and solutions that directly address their needs and concerns, such as higher education and unemployment. They aspire to create student unions that address student welfare and empowerment over political agendas.

The strengthening of political party structures, platforms, and candidates can encourage youth engagement. This is particularly important because in 2018, only 19 percent of the 3606 candidates that contested elections could be classified as young - aged 35 or below. It is rather ironic that political parties are not acknowledging or tapping into this considerable resource despite this segment's thirst to engage, activism on social media, and even just their sheer numbers. It is an oversight by political parties - or perhaps an unwillingness - which needs to be addressed urgently to avoid risking further alienation. As we inch towards the General Election 2023, political parties should champion the cause of youth, and mobilize and attract them to the ballot boxes. Many political parties talk about shifting the political winds. If they really want change, this one asset of Pakistan might just be

---

1. The Lokniti Programme for Comparative Democracy is a research programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), an autonomous social science research institute in Delhi. It is dedicated to studying and understanding the democratic and electoral politics of India and its neighborhood https://www.lokniti.org/lok-sabha-election

2. British Council Next Gen Report. 2023. https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/british_council_-_next_gen_research_report_2023.pdf

3. Ibid

© DAWN

**Instead of being influenced by established political entities, the youth of Pakistan seek platforms for freedom of expression, non-partisan representation, and implementation of policies and solutions that directly address their needs.**

their last hope, if effectively galvanized. This can be done by offering more party tickets to youth, including youth in Manifesto Committees and all policy forums, organizing membership drives to attract youth, legislating to make civic education compulsory in schools, ensuring effective implementation of the Civic Education Law, and supporting student unions' restoration.

On the other hand, the Election Commission of Pakistan needs to work on:

(i)   Compiling lists of voters, candidates, and elected members in the 18-29, 30-35, and 36-40 age groups;

(ii)  Conduct multiple Voters' Feedback Surveys to ascertain the level of youth voter turnout and other feedback;

(iii) Hold Focus Group Discussions and research on reasons for low youth voter turnout;

(iv)  Update the ECP Strategic Plan 2018-2023 to include strategic actions aimed at youth voter turnout;

(v)   Include 'Youth Mainstreaming' as a key component in the next Strategic Plan; and

(vi)  Designate a wing or focal person on Youth Participation in Electoral Process within ECP.

Creating a new chapter of sociopolitical cohesion in Pakistan rests on effectively channeling the untapped potential of the youth. And as for a message for the youth: Turn out to vote! Organize campaigns to come out to vote, use party manifestos for informed decision-making, and collaborate with the ECP to mobilize voters in your villages, towns, cities, tehsils, and districts. With targeted interventions, the upcoming general elections can herald a new dawn of youth political participation, nudging Pakistan closer to being a truly representative democracy.

# Towards a New Path of Development

In order to pull out of the pattern of recurrent economic crises and place Pakistan on the path of sustained economic growth, a fundamental change in the policy framework is required.

By

**Dr. Akmal Hussain**

Distinguished Professor, Beaconhouse National University

There is little doubt that Pakistan is facing an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Per capita income growth has become negative, with unemployment and poverty rising at an alarming rate. The inflation rate has reached the highest level in the country's history, while food inflation is even higher. Consequently, goods and services essential to sustain a dignified life are rapidly going beyond the grasp of most people. On the external front, the stock of foreign debt has become unsustainable as the government is obliged to seek fresh loans in order to be able to service past debts. Due to the growing current account deficit and declining foreign capital inflows, State Bank of Pakistan reserves have declined sharply, creating a precipitous depreciation in the exchange rate that is pushing the economy towards hyperinflation. As hundreds of millions of people face misery, the government is financially incapable of providing succour. Widespread economic deprivation and the growing gap between the rich and the poor are placing a stress on the polity and fraying the fabric of society.

What makes the situation graver still is that the dire state of the economy is situated within a multifaceted crisis of state, politics, and society. Major organs of the state, such as the executive and parliament on the one hand, and the judiciary on the other, are contending to preserve or enlarge their respective domains of authority. Similarly, elements within the political structure appear resentful of military leadership, as the May 9th events indicate. This contention has reached a point where it has become personalised. As individuals come into play in this intra-state battle, egos, distrust, and insecurity create the possibility of dangerous miscalculations that could threaten the balance within the edifice of the state. Under these circum-stances, the ability of the state to address a national crisis is weakened: This is because the legitimate exercise of state power requires state organs to act in concert within a balanced state structure, which only a functioning constitution ensures.

The constraints of research-based rational economic policy-making are

Widespread economic deprivation and the growing gap between the rich and the poor is placing a stress on the polity and fraying the fabric of society.

# We must change the structure of the economy from one that works essentially for an elite coalition and Pakistan's foreign creditors, to one that works for the people.

defined by two considerations. First, a modicum of political stability, with an underlying stability in the constitutional order, has to be achieved. Second, the adoption of economically rational policies is often prevented if these policies work against the short-term economic interests of the ruling elite coalition.

The time has come for the ruling elite to realise that in the long run, the pursuit of their economic interests can only be conducted within the framework of a constitutional order. A look into the depths of Pakistan's complex crisis reveals that the elite coalition has to look beyond its short-term interests to address the desperation of the people and the threats to national integrity.

In case free and fair general elections are held in the foreseeable future and a representative government comes into power, it would face three strategic challenges on the economic front.

First, changing the economic structure of the economy from one that works essentially for an elite coalition and Pakistan's

foreign creditors, to one that works for the people. This would require changes in the institutional framework of the economy and the necessary policy initiatives that could sustain economic growth through developing the capabilities of the people and harnessing their productive potential.

Second, the orthodox idea underlying economic policy-making has been that economic growth requires inequality in the distribution of income. This is based on the flawed assumption that only the rich can save and invest, and hence by making the rich richer, a higher rate of savings and investment can be achieved for generating high economic growth.[1] New research has now challenged this orthodox notion that inequality can be an instrument of achieving higher economic growth. For example, the econometric study by Galor and Ziera has provided evidence to show that high inequality in income and wealth has a negative effect on economic growth. We have argued in our recent book that underlying this relationship between inequality and growth is the fact of a narrow base of investment and human and physical capital that inequality induces.[2] Similarly, Berg et. al. have shown that inequality is a key constraint to long-term



© Arif Ali/AFP via Getty Images

1.    O. Galor and J. Zeira, Income Distribution in Macroeconomics, The Review of Economic Studies, Volume 60, Number 1, pages 35-52, 1993.
2.    Akmal Hussain, Pakistan, Institutional Instability and Underdevelopment, State, People, and Consciousness, Folio Books, 2023, Chapter 11

© Business Recorder

economic growth in low income countries. In such countries, the evidence shows that the occasional spurts of economic growth occur in periods when there is greater equality in the distribution of income.[3] Alesina and Rodrik have explored the negative effect of inequality on growth through political instability. They showed that political (and hence social) instability accentuates the negative effect of inequality on economic growth.[4]

Charting a new course of sustained economic growth requires replacing the policy framework of unequal growth with a new development strategy which provides equality of opportunity to all citizens (not just the elite) to develop their capabilities. These would be brought to bear to improve their own lives and thereby generate sustained development based on equality.

Third, the strategic constraint to sustainability of per capita income is the fact that Pakistan's export growth and export earnings are inadequate to finance the import requirements of high GDP growth. This is why each time there is a spurt of growth, Pakistan hits into a Balance of Payments' crisis, which is typically handled by attempting to sharply reduce import expenditures through slowing down the GDP growth.[5]

The inability to achieve sustained per capita income growth is rooted in the persistent slow export growth. This is because Pakistan's export structure is oriented towards low value-added, low knowledge-intensive goods. Such goods still constitute 82% of Pakistan's exports, while high-tech exports account for less than 2% of total exports. Recent empirical research has shown that export diversification towards knowledge intensive goods and services is a key determinant of long-term economic growth. For example, the UNCTAD study by Basu and Das of 88 developing countries shows that the higher the percentage of export sales from knowledge-intensive products, the higher the long-term rate of per capita income growth.[6]

We have argued elsewhere that diversification towards knowledge-intensive exports requires a knowledge infra-structure in Pakistan consisting of world class universities, research institutes, and a public school system that meets the highest international standards. The main feature of such an educational system would be that the faculties conduct cutting edge research in various disciplines and the students are trained to engage in critical thinking. At university, students should learn how to do fundamental research in their chosen field of endeavour. Hausmann et. al. in a landmark study have shown that export diversification is based on the capacity of a country to bring together a wide range of specialisations through universities, coordinating networks in public organisations, and markets.[7]

In order to pull out of the pattern of recurrent economic crises and place Pakistan on the path of sustained economic growth, a fundamental change in the policy framework is required.  Economic progress will have to be based on providing equal opportunities to actualise Pakistan's great human potential. This would involve redesigning the economy such that it is driven by the talents and enterprise of the people. National integrity and state sovereignty

3.    Andrew Berg, Jonathan D. Ostry and Jeromin Zettelmeyer, What Makes Growth Sustained? Journal of Development Economics, Volume 98, Number 2, pages 149-166,2012.

4.    A. Alesina and D. Rodrik, Distributive Politics and Economic Growth, The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Volume 109, Number 2, pages 465-490,1994.

5.    Akmal Hussain, Op. Cit. Chapter 11.

6.    Basu Sudip Ranjan and Das Monica, Export and Economic Performance in Developing Countries: Evidence from Nonparametric Methodology, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2011.

7.    R. Hausmann, C. Hidalgo, S. Bustos, M.Coscia, S. Chung, J. Jimenez, A. Simoes, M. Yildrim, The Atlas of Economic Complexity: Mapping Paths to Prosperity, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

# Local Government for National Impact

By understanding the intertwined political, administrative, and social aspects of local governance and addressing them with courage and clarity, Pakistan can create a future where the government is not just about power but about empowerment.



By

## Ahmad Iqbal Chaudhary

Local Government Expert

Founder, Dehleez

## Current Situation of Local Governments (LGs) in Pakistan

Local Governments are the heartbeat of thriving societies. They play an important role in fostering an inclusive, democratic, and efficient governance system. However, the historical trajectory of Local Governments in Pakistan has been marred by challenges that continue to hinder their effectiveness. The political and social landscape of Pakistan is changing rapidly, with high rates of urbanization and a large segment of the population living in under-developed rural areas. These challenges demand a responsive and robust local governance approach that caters to the most critical needs of citizens across provinces and regions.

Despite the urgency to address these pressing challenges, successive political governments have been reluctant to empower Local Governments, resulting in the severe fragmentation of governance and

service delivery. As a result, Pakistan has failed to demonstrate progress on key areas that govern the quality of life of its citizens. With 2030 fast approaching, Pakistan's progress on attaining the Sustainable Development Goals goals remains elusive. According to the SDGs Index, Pakistan is ranked 128 out of 166 countries. One of the reasons that Pakistan is not able to keep up is because of a lack of recognition of Local Governments as both implementers of the development agenda and catalysts of change.

The latest Mouza Census conducted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics paints a very stark picture of the consequences of feeble or non-existent LGs. For instance, more than 21,000 villages lack basic street cleaning facilities, 90 percent of the rural populace lacks basic sewage facilities, and almost 4,000 villages do not have access to clean drinking water. The absence of Local Governments, their lack of continuity, and irregular elections have also contributed to the

Defining LGs' powers and responsibilities unambiguously through constitutional amendments will pave the way for financial, administrative, and political devolution.

weakness of local governance structures, impacting citizens' quality of life.

After the passing of the 18th Amendment, the growth of LGs has ironically been disappointingly inadequate. Article 140A, the governing framework for LGs, has fallen short, resulting in dismal scores for elected Local Governments. In the last 13 years, Local Governments have remained largely absent in all four provinces as well as the Federal Capital of Pakistan. Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan, is the worst perform-ing province with regards to LG empowerment. In the past ten years, it has only conducted LG elections once. That tenure was also cut short due to political interference from provincial governments, as they were dismissed prematurely by the provincial government. Although Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have fulfilled the formality of holding Local Government elections twice, elected Local Governments have remained largely weak or dormant because they have not been given their rightful powers by the provinces.

Pakistan is now falling behind its regional peers, with the

World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI) being particularly worrisome. Pakistan trails behind neighbouring Afghanistan, with the country being closer to Sub-Saharan Africa than South Asia.

## 2010-2023 Chronology of Elected LGs



Source: Dehleez

**Elected LGs**
**Elections**
**Administrators**

* Elected LGs were functional for 5 years in Sindh and Balochistan, 4 years in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 3 years in ICT, and 2 years in Punjab.
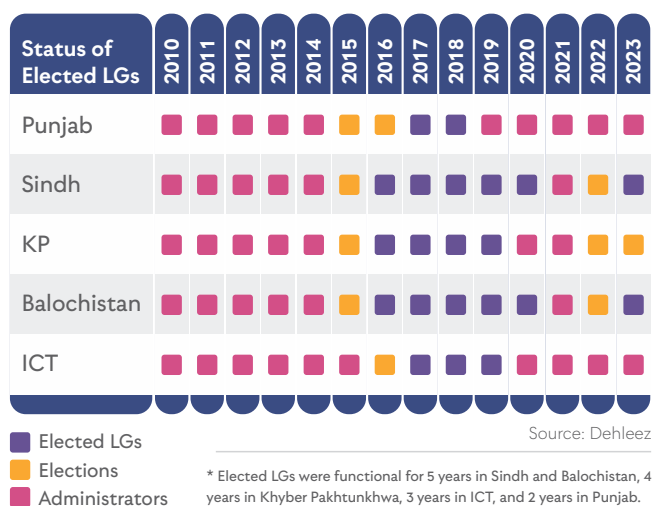
## Table: Pakistan's Human Capital Index Value Compares Poorly with Other Regions

| Indicator | East Asia & Pacific | Europe & Central Asia | Latin America & Caribbean | Middle East & North Africa | North America | South Asia | Sub-Saharan Africa | Pakistan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HCI Component 1: Survival** | | | | | | | | |
| Probability of Survival to age 5 | 0.98 | 0.99 | 0.98 | 0.98 | 0.99 | 0.96 | 0.93 | 0.93 |
| **HCI Component 2: Education** | | | | | | | | |
| Expected years of school | 11.9 | 13.1 | 12.1 | 11.6 | 13.3 | 10.8 | 8.2 | 9.4 |
| Harmonized test scores | 432 | 179 | 405 | 407 | 523 | 374 | 374 | 339 |
| **HCI Component 3: Health** | | | | | | | | |
| Survival rate, from age 15 to 60 | 0.86 | 0.90 | 0.86 | 0.91 | 0.9 | 0.84 | 0.74 | 0.85 |
| Fraction of children under 5 not stunted | 0.76 | 0.90 | 0.85 | 0.82 | - | 0.69 | 0.69 | 0.62 |
| **Human Capital Index (HCI)** | **0.59** | **0.69** | **0.56** | **0.57** | **0.75** | **0.48** | **0.40** | **0.41** |

© Wikipedia/Commons

## Challenges Faced by Local Governments in Pakistan

### Political challenges

The historical experiences of local governance in Pakistan can be characterized by spurts of growth and abandonment, leaving lasting apprehensions and scepticism.

During Ayub Khan's era, bureaucracy took precedence over elected local officials, eroding confidence in genuine representation. Similarly, General Musharraf's rule saw the Local Government Ordinance providing significant decentralization, but it led to the unfair empowerment of pliant politicians, further deepening doubts about the viability of Local Governments in the eyes of the political parties.

The bitter experiences of the past have shaped attitudes towards Local Governments by political forces in Pakistan, with many viewing them with suspicion. The fear of political opponents being unfairly empowered and the question of whether LGs can genuinely represent the populace continue to dominate debates on the subject.

### Technical challenges

Pakistan's bureaucratic system carries a colonial legacy that hampers local administrative efficacy. Stereotypes of local politicians being inherently corrupt have added to the

reluctance in empowering Local Governments. However, corruption exists across various professional levels and is not limited to elected representatives alone. In fact, lack of elected local institutions leave little room for accountability and transparency and weaken the spirit of citizenry in the society.

Fiscal and administrative reforms are essential to empower Local Governments effectively. Earmarking specific funds for local projects and ensuring financial autonomy would lead to a more responsive and responsible system. Additionally, a long-list of provincial government-run parallel local authorities have left very little space for elected institutions in key terms of urban planning and improving service delivery at the city-wide level. Different authorities, such as the Lahore Development Authority and Ravi Urban Development Authority, hinder efficient governance and service delivery, causing failures in essential services and resulting in exclusionary sprawling urban growth.

## The Way Forward for Strengthening Local Governments

To strengthen Local Governments in Pakistan, a paradigm shift in the governance model is imperative. Championed by political parties, a collective minimum agenda must be forged, prioritizing fundamental functions like urban planning, clean water, sanitation, waste management, robust infrastructure, local economic development, low-cost housing, public transport, and vibrant public spaces. The

# Fiscal and administrative reforms are essential to empower Local Governments effectively.

empowerment of LGs should rest in the hands of democratic forces, steering clear of non-democratic influences or unelected institutions.

## Political will

Shifting cultural perceptions of local-level elected representatives and demonstrating political will to implement the proposed constitutional amendment are essential elements in creating a truly empowered Local Government system.

The Charter of Democracy (2006), a poignant reminder of unfinished LG empowerment, highlights the imperative importance of grassroots democracy. In a bid to revitalize LGs, all political parties must rally together, embracing a unified agenda that empowers Local Governments to deliver essential services, meeting citizens' diverse needs with efficacy and compassion.

Defining LGs' powers and responsibilities unambiguously through constitutional amendments will pave the way for financial, administrative, and political devolution, fostering an accountable and dynamic local governance ecosystem.

## Fiscal and administrative reforms

Financial obstacles faced by LGs demand resolution. Fulfilling LGs' constitutional mandate to levy taxes on immovable property will furnish them with the requisite resources to deliver indispensable services. Moreover, equitable distribution of resources to union councils will ensure effective and tailored solutions for local populations. Administrative devolution calls for streamlining discretionary powers granted to provincial government authorities, Local Government commissions, and LG secretaries, fostering accountability and efficient functionality. Additionally, property tax is a significantly under-utilized tax instrument in Punjab, accounting for only six percent of the total provincial tax. With a population of over 100 million, all of Punjab collects less urban property tax than the city of Chennai in India - home to about ten million people.



© Umair Ali Rajput, Dawn

© Rehan Khan/ EPA

LGs can unlock a new array of financial resources:

i.    Municipal Bonds (in line with Federal & Provincial frameworks).

ii.   Land Value Capture.

iii.  Creating Business Improvement Districts / Neighbourhood Improvement Districts.

iv.   Tax Increment Financing.

**Inclusivity and empowerment**

Representation of marginalized groups is crucial for inclusive governance. The proposed amendment should enable direct elections for minority groups and women, ensuring that every voice is heard and every perspective is considered in the decision-making process.

In conclusion, strengthening Local Government in Pakistan is vital for achieving national impact. By understanding the intertwined political, administrative, and social aspects of local governance and addressing them with courage and clarity, Pakistan can create a future where the government is not just about power but about empowerment , not just about politics but about the people. Through political will, fiscal and administrative reforms, and inclusivity, Pakistan can establish a robust Local Government system that resonates at the national level, fostering sustainable development and progress for all citizens.

# Voting Green:

# Putting Climate on the Election Agenda

**This is a time for citizens to make informed choices that take into account the social, ecological, and economic cost of their future quality of life by electing representatives who can walk the tightrope without falling or failing people and the planet.**

By
**Aisha Khan**

Chief Executive, Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change

In classical patterns of voting, citizens look at past service delivery to evaluate performance and use evidence to gauge political competence. This behaviour incentivises politicians to keep a tab on the pulse of the nation and build manifestoes that resonate with citizen needs and reflect the aspirations of the majority. Theoretical arguments however do not always translate into expected electoral response. The political culture of a nation and social sub-culture play a pivotal role in shaping opinions and developing narratives that strike a resonating chord with people.

Crises and emergency situations, depending on the nature and scope of the calamity, can serve both as a binding force to coalesce disparate groups or fuel strife and create divisions to trigger conflict. Democracy is often

seen as the best vehicle for navigating through troubled times, but turmoil also tests democracy and its ability to balance actions in ways that maintain the sanctity of institutions and the rights of people. The uptick in populism and hybrid trends in democracy are creating new models of governance within democracies that will play an increasingly important role in shaping future voting patterns.

Global warming, a rapidly changing climate, and the increasing intensity of climate-induced disasters are likely to provide political parties with greater opportunity to attract voters with the lure of security, (albeit false) promises of plenty, and inward-looking policies that pull back from multilateralism and promote isolationist thinking. This free but unfair trend in illiberal democracy, happening at a time when the warming

Consistently voting green offers a better
chance of ensuring continuity in policy.

## The best way forward is going green, rewilding nature and looking at nature-based solutions to aim for a 'net zero emission' world by 2050.

planet is going to throw challenges that are existential in scale and scope, is going to place a critical responsibility on voters.

There is ample scientific evidence to support projections of disruptions in all life systems. From food, water, and energy to health, biodiversity and ecological collapse, nothing remains outside the ambit of climate change. The cumulative impact of multi-sector disasters has all the ingredients of volatility in its social and economic outfall for triggering a full-fledged planetary threat to human and national security. This is a time for citizens to make informed choices that take into account the social, ecological, and economic cost of their future quality of life by electing representatives who can walk the tightrope without falling or failing people and the planet.

The 2022 flooding in Pakistan is a stark indicator of the clear and present threat of climate change. The trending 420 Parts Per Million (PPM) of Green House Gases (GHG) in the atmosphere poses a challenge to the signatories of the Paris Agreement to staying below the global warming threshold of 1.5°C. That threshold is set to be breached in this decade.

The best way forward is going green, rewilding nature and looking at nature-based solutions to aim for a 'net zero emission' world by 2050.

For Pakistan, a country that is routinely high on the vulnerability index, it is critical to plot a trajectory that holds within it a long-term strategy for human and national security. Keeping both mitigation and adaptation as key drivers for innovation and investment in peace, security and stabilization, voters need to think beyond the existing political narratives to create demand for a green new narrative for a safe future.

Governing systems that allow civil society participation, free flow of information, and processes of assessment and evaluation are better equipped to respond to issues of higher complexity. This citizen-centric approach carries with it a greater responsibility for generating pressure for strong sustainable development policy responses at local, regional, and global levels. Living in a world where human and social systems are going to face severe stress, it is important to recognize the threats confronting fragile and flawed



© samaaenglish.tv

© UNICEF Pakistan-2011/ Warrick Page

While the lure of populism with embellished rhetorical promises and dogmatic approaches may appear attractive in uncertain times, it is important to prioritize choices and maintain a healthy balance between climate security, individual freedoms, and a common safe future.

democracies and evaluate risks carefully. This also requires taking into account the short-term focus of democratic decision-making and the inherent weakness of a system that is limited by time and space to address a threat like climate change that runs across generations and borders. Consistently voting green offers a better chance of ensuring continuity in policy.

Scarcities generate fear and fear can easily be exploited by hybrid regimes that demonstrate all the characteristics of democracy but have weak respect for the civil and political rights of citizens. In already politically unstable countries with declining economic indicators and growing income gaps, the risk of political discourse getting hijacked by charismatic pseudo-democrats offering simplified solutions is high.

The economic cost of disasters to Pakistan is in the range of USD 3.8 billion annually. Mismanagement and maladaptation are going to increase this cost. The right to vote offers citizens a chance to choose their future. While the lure of populism with embellished rhetorical promises and dogmatic

approaches may appear attractive in uncertain times, it is important to prioritize choices and maintain a healthy balance between climate security, individual freedoms, and a common safe future.



© Rehan Khan/EPA

# Buttons to Ballots:
## Technology and Pakistan's Elections

By leveraging technological advancements, Pakistan can overcome geographical barriers, streamline election administration, bolster security measures, and foster public trust in the democratic system.

By

**Tariq Malik**

Former Chairman, NADRA

Former Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP

The essence of democracy shines through inclusion, participation, and accountability. It is the basis for empowerment, equality, and collective growth. In a global era where democratic discontent is rising, new digital technologies can help us restore faith in participatory democracy and strengthen the state-society relationship. In fact, if harnessed well, the new digital frontier can yield a democratic dividend.

Democracy is the beating heart of an ethnically diverse polity, fueling its progress and uniting its people in a shared vision for a brighter future. Through the power of democratic elections, Pakistanis exercise their constitutional right to choose the course of their destiny. Transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are the pillars upon which democracy stands, holding those in power responsible,

dismantling barriers, and amplifying the voices of all citizens. With democracy as its guiding light, Pakistan strides forward in hope, resilience, and unity, where the aspirations of its people thrive and the nation flourishes.

It is a sombre reality that while electoral democracy is fast expanding in the world, the integrity of elections is declining.[1] I believe that using digital technology can enhance electoral integrity. In Pakistan, the integration of technology into electoral politics holds tremendous potential for enhancing access, efficiency, security, and integrity in the electoral process. By leveraging technological advancements, Pakistan can overcome geographical barriers, streamline election administration, bolster security measures, and foster public trust in the democratic system. However, to effectively harness these

1. Sources: based on Center for Systemic Peace, Policy IV (Databases) various years (for number of electoral democracies) and Bishop and Hoeffer. 2014 (for free and fair elections)
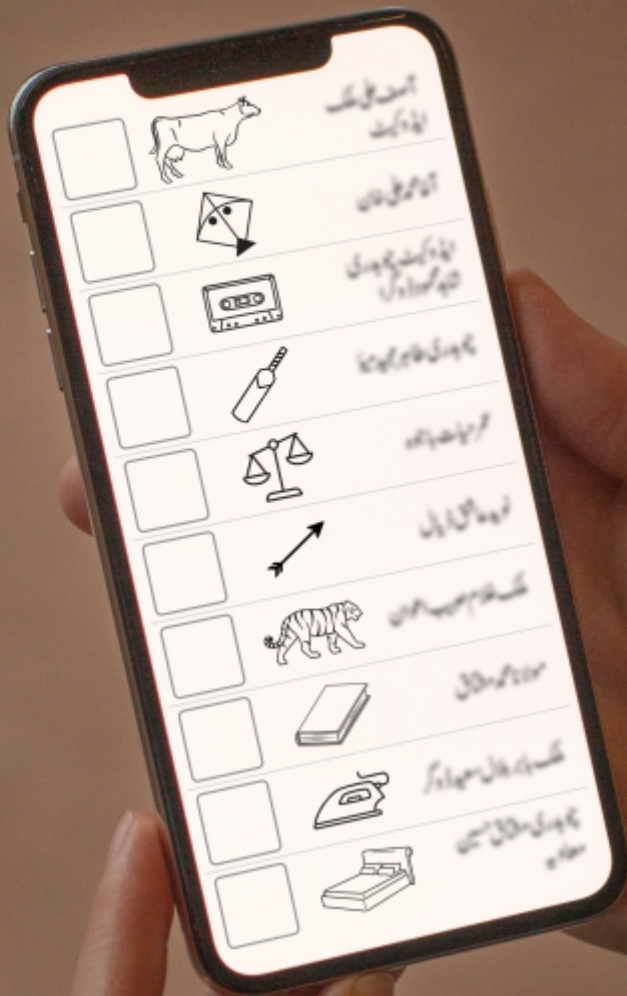
> "Technology does not stand still, and nor should democracy. We have to act fast, because digital advances could be just the start of a slippery slope leading to an Orwellian world."
>
> - Kofi Annan

benefits, it is crucial to establish appropriate legal frameworks and invest in institutional capacity building.

A key benefit of technology in Pakistan was to enhance access to the electoral process. A higher degree of transparency was achieved through the preparation of electoral rolls on the basis of National Identity Cards issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). This set the principle of "One CNIC – One Vote". This initiative alone addressed the majority of inclusion and exclusion errors, otherwise found commonly in the electoral rolls of most countries. In the context of a geographically diverse population, high levels of illiteracy, and lack of information, technology bridged the gap between voters and polling stations. Online voter information portals facilitated convenience, empowering a larger number of people to participate in elections. Additionally, mobile applications and SMS-based platforms disseminated critical election-related information, including polling station locations, candidate profiles, and voting procedures, making it easier for citizens to engage with the democratic process.

The integration of technology also promises to significantly increase the efficiency of elections in Pakistan. Biometric voter authentication systems can expedite the identification process, leading to smoother and faster voting procedures. Furthermore, automating data collection and management can enhance efficiency in election administration, facilitating


© UNDP Pakistan

the verification of voter lists, monitoring campaign finances, and ensuring compliance with electoral regulations. By embracing technology-driven solutions, Pakistan can promote transparency, accountability, and timely electoral outcomes.

As a service provider of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), NADRA has extended assistance in achieving transparency and accountability through digitalization. Embracing the transformative power of digital technology, the ECP can revolutionize the electoral landscape, paving the way for a more accessible and streamlined voting experience. With advanced security measures in place, the sanctity of each vote can be protected, ensuring that the voice of the people resonates with clarity and certainty. In this sense, the digitalization of electoral processes can reduce the trust deficit between voters and institutions.

In terms of security and integrity, technology can play a crucial role in fortifying Pakistan's electoral system. Implementing robust cybersecurity measures, encryption protocols, and secure communication channels can minimize the risk of tampering with voter data, results, and critical election infrastructure. The adoption of blockchain technology, known for its decentralized and transparent nature, can further enhance the security and integrity of the electoral process. This technology creates an immutable record of votes, making it nearly impossible to manipulate or alter election outcomes. By prioritizing these security measures, Pakistan can instill confidence in the integrity of its electoral system, strengthening public trust in the democratic process.

However, to effectively utilize technology in electoral politics, Pakistan must establish appropriate legal frameworks and invest in institutional capacity building. Legal frameworks should address concerns such as data protection, privacy, cybersecurity, and ensure transparency in the procurement and deployment of technology to avoid conflicts of interest. Additionally, institutional capacity building is crucial for training electoral staff, polling agents, and political party leadership in the use of technology. By building a skilled workforce capable of handling digital tools and processes, Pakistan can ensure the effective implementation and utilization of technology in the electoral system. Collaboration between the Election Commission, govern-

© Pexels/ Edmond Dantès

**Implementing robust cybersecurity measures, encryption protocols, and secure communication channels can minimize the risk of tampering with voter data, results, and critical election infrastructure.**

ment agencies, and technology experts is vital to develop a robust institutional framework that supports the seamless integration of technology in electoral politics, safeguarding the democratic process in Pakistan.

Given the overpowering reactions against some radical reforms in the past, a transitional approach with vertical integration of technology in electoral processes seems to be a more viable option in Pakistan. By striking a balance between technological advancements and democratic principles of consensus-based progression, we can unlock the full potential of technology, and ensure the integrity and credibility of our electoral systems through consistent implementation and continuous evaluation.

With foundational blocks like computerized electoral rolls and the digital census already in place, the process can be furthered by exploiting more innovative options to cover every aspect of the electoral cycle, such as the effective use of data analytics for predictive analysis, real-time monitoring through video surveillance systems, education and aware-

ness through online platforms, mobile applications, and social media campaigns, among others. Thus, from improving voter registration for streamlining the voting process and enhancing transparency, technology can address several challenges that hinder free and fair elections, and help Pakistan strengthen its democratic foundation to pave the way for a more inclusive and vibrant political system.

## Political parties and the digital frontier

Political parties in Pakistan have a unique opportunity to embrace a digital vision and revolutionize the electoral landscape in their upcoming manifestos. By placing technology at the forefront, parties can usher in a new era of governance that is efficient, transparent, and citizen-centric. First and foremost, parties should emphasize the development of a robust digital infrastructure across the country. This entails ensuring widespread access to reliable internet connectivity, bridging the digital divide, and empowering citizens from all corners of Pakistan to participate in the digital age. By focusing on expanding digital access, parties

By striking a balance between technological advancements and democratic principles of consensus-based progression, we can unlock the full potential of technology, and ensure the integrity and credibility of our electoral systems through consistent implementation and continuous evaluation.

---

can lay the foundation for a technologically inclusive society, where every citizen has the opportunity to harness the power of information and communication technologies.

Furthermore, political parties can prioritize e-governance and digital service delivery as key pillars of their digital vision. Implementing user-friendly online portals for citizen services, such as applications for official documents, tax filing, and utility bill payments, can streamline bureaucratic processes and reduce red tape. Embracing digital payment systems and electronic signatures can enhance convenience and efficiency in transactions, making government services more accessible and responsive to the needs of the people. By championing e-governance, parties can promise a future where citizens interact with the government seamlessly, fostering transparency and accountability.

In the realm of education, parties can advocate for the integration of technology into the education system.

Promoting the adoption of digital learning platforms, online resources, and e-libraries can enhance access to quality education, particularly in remote areas. Emphasizing the importance of digital literacy programs for students and teachers can equip the next generation with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly digitized world. By prioritizing technology-driven education, political parties can pave the way for a knowledge-based society that embraces innovation and prepares its youth for the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

In the context of healthcare, parties can champion the use of technology to improve access and quality of medical services. Proposals for telemedicine initiatives, where patients can consult with doctors remotely, can overcome geographic barriers and bring healthcare services to underserved areas. Advocating for the digitization of medical records and the development of health information systems can streamline healthcare delivery, reduce paperwork, and


© Social News

© The Commonwealth

## By placing technology at the forefront, political parties can usher in a new era of governance that is efficient, transparent, and citizen-centric.

improve patient care.  By integrating a digital vision into healthcare, political parties can contribute to building a healthier Pakistan, where technology becomes a catalyst for improved healthcare outcomes.

Most importantly, political parties should highlight the importance of data protection, privacy, and cybersecurity in their digital vision. Ensuring robust regulatory frameworks and institutions that safeguard citizen data and protect against cyber threats is essential. Political parties can propose the establishment of data protection laws, privacy regulations, and cybersecurity frameworks that empower citizens and safeguard their digital rights. By prioritizing data security and privacy, parties can build trust among citizens, encouraging them to fully embrace the digital transformation. Even as technology offers us new means to empower citizens, the growing control of governments and companies over the private data of citizens can pose new challenges. In their recent book, Power and Progress, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson highlight the risks of such centralized control and emphasize the need for democratic oversight. Underlining

the challenges of a digital age, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a similar warning at the Munich Security Conference in 2018: "Technology does not stand still, and nor should democracy. We have to act fast, because digital advances could be just the start of a slippery slope leading to an Orwellian world controlled by Big Brother, where millions of sensors in our smartphones and other devices collect data and make us vulnerable to manipulation."

Integrating a digital vision into their manifestos presents an unprecedented opportunity for political parties in Pakistan to shape the future of governance. By focusing on digital infrastructure, e-governance, education, healthcare, and data protection, parties can demonstrate their commitment to an inclusive society. Embracing the digital age is not just a matter of progress; it is a fundamental step towards empowering citizens, fostering transparency, and building a prosperous Pakistan for generations to come.

# Powering Democracy:
## The Transformative Potential of Election Technology

The benefits of election technology have been well documented over the decades. Systems like digital voter lists, automated redistricting tools, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and results transmission systems automate critical election processes, which can significantly simplify election administration tasks and dramatically slash the operational costs of elections.

By

**Dr. Taha Ali**

Associate Professor, School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (SEECS), NUST

By reducing human engagement in elections, technology can counter various rigging practices and enable new forms of transparency.

For developing countries, these benefits can be transformative. Like all truly good things, however, these benefits are not guaranteed, and come with lots of caveats. Several countries have deployed election technology with underwhelming, disappointing, and in some cases, even catastrophic results. African countries like Kenya feature prominently on this list.

Over the last decade, Pakistan itself undertook four major failed experiments with election technology. In 2013, we used magnetic ink to enhance voter verification, but there were numerous setbacks to these checks. In 2018, a result transmission system was deployed which inexplicably failed on election night, delaying elections results by several hours. An internet voting system was developed for overseas citizens, which was effortlessly hacked by an auditing team. This system was then fixed and piloted in the by-elections in 2018. A foreign firm then audited the improved system and declared it unfit for use in democratic elections. These experiments not only wasted hundreds of millions of Rupees, but also cast a heavy cloud of suspicion on elections results and democratic processes.

The fundamental lesson here is that election technology is not just an IT matter - it has critical human determinants. There are certain ground rules to using election technology successfully. For instance:

- We must resist the urge to fetishize election technology.

Over the last decade, Pakistan itself undertook four major failed experiments with election technology, such as magnetic ink in 2013.

## We urgently need to set up forums and consultative processes to govern the study and use of technology in our elections.

Technology is not magic. It fixes certain problems but can create new ones. A system that works in one country may not work in another. We need comprehensive cost-benefit studies and pilots to determine which technology components work for us and which do not.

- Technology does not operate within a vacuum; it requires supporting infrastructure and processes. In many cases, the overall ecosystem can end up costing more than the technology itself. We need to take a holistic view of election technology.

- Election technology is most successful when it is

introduced in a transparent and democratic manner. We urgently need to set up forums and consultative processes to govern the study and use of technology in our elections.

- The use of technology should start small and scale up. Instead of large-scale one-shot deployments, we need to start with proof-of-concepts and demos, develop prototypes, then scale up to pilots, and gradually build up to nation-wide deployments.

These rules are standard best practices in the field; they are detailed in almost every set of international guidelines. They are also clearly documented in many of our own local reports,


© EPP

© Narinder Nanu/ AFP

Technology is not magic. It fixes certain problems but can create new ones.

submissions, and policy papers. However, we have yet to internalize these simple ideas. They are not part of our mainstream discourse on election technology, and our stakeholders are not aware of them. Ironically, if there is one key lesson we should learn from our own history of failures, it is that we ignore these rules at our peril. Pakistan is not a wealthy country; we cannot afford the luxury of repeating the mistakes of other countries.

This is the fundamental challenge we face. We think it is simply a matter of picking the right machine to buy, whereas election technology requires that we fundamentally change the way we do things. We need to develop technical expertise, and build capacity for independent research and development. We need a sense of humility and statesman-ship to engage with dissenting views. We need to do our homework, and to commit to due diligence - to excellence, even.

Ultimately, we can no longer rely on business-as-usual. At the end of the day, what we need most is a strong and authentic vision for elections and democracy in Pakistan.

# Women at the Helm:
## Empowering Tharparkar's Women through Local Governance

By

**Erum Fareed**
Communications Officer,
UN Women Pakistan

**Shadab Memoon Zaman**
Program Officer, Women Political
Participation, UN Women Pakistan

**Kamla Bheel is the first woman in Tharparkar to become District Vice Chairperson in the local government. In a society where women were often pushed to the sidelines, she fought against prevailing beliefs and resistance, both within her family, and in the broader community.**

"Women in my caste are a minority within a minority. Being a woman from a minority in politics means breaking barriers with every step, and shattering glass ceilings that were never meant to be broken," says Kamla Bheel, General Secretary of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Women Wing, Mirpurkhas Division, Sindh.

Born into the Bheel community, a scheduled caste in the city of Mithi, Sindh, Kamla experienced, first-hand, the hurdles faced by women in her community. In a society where women were often pushed to the sidelines, she fought against prevailing beliefs and resistance, both within her family, and in the broader community.

"Even within my own family, I faced resistance. The prevailing belief was that daughters should focus on getting married rather than pursuing academic aspirations," she reveals. "My father's belief in the importance of education played a crucial role in my own educational journey and fueled my determination to make a difference for other women in our community." Kamla pursued her intermediate studies and later earned a Bachelor's degree privately, defying cultural norms and setting a powerful example for future generations.

Realizing that representation in the public sphere is crucial for marginalized communities, Kamla recognized the transformative impact she could have. Kamla envisioned initiatives that could specifically overcome the obstacles hindering women from the Bheel community, particularly in the field of education. In 2003, she joined the Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP). This chapter of her life with TRDP marked a nine-year journey to stirring waves of change within marginalized communities. Through her advocacy and initiatives, Kamla strived to challenge and guarantee access to education for every girl in Sindh's Tharparkar district.

Kamla understood that women's voices need to be heard, their perspectives valued, and their experiences taken into account in policymaking and decision-making processes. Kamla joined politics and became part of PPP at the community level. Initially, she played the role of an observer, quietly accompanying her father to political gatherings.

# Women's voices need to be heard, their perspectives valued, and their experiences taken into account in policymaking and decision-making processes.

However, with time, she found her own voice and embraced the path to political activism.

The active involvement of women in politics brings significant advantages to the overall development and welfare of a community. Extensive research indicates that when women participate in political processes, it enhances the successful implementation of social welfare programs leading to poverty reduction, improved health systems, and strengthened social cohesion. Additionally, the inclusion of women in decision-making ensures the consideration of diverse perspectives, resulting in the formulation of comprehensive and inclusive policies that benefit society as a whole.

To empower women like Kamla, UN Women takes a leading role in Pakistan by initiating efforts to encourage women's political participation and equipping them with the necessary tools to become effective leaders. Recognizing the profound connection between women's socioeconomic progress and their involvement in politics, UN Women adopts a comprehensive approach to address the underlying causes of gender inequality across various domains. This approach aims to create an enabling environment where women like Kamla can actively engage in public and political life.

One of the key strategies employed by UN Women is to enhance the capacity of influential organizations that support women's political engagement. Collaborating with groups such as the Women's Parliamentary Caucuses (WPCs), Election Commission of Pakistan, and National/Provincial Commissions on the Status of Women (N/PCSW), UN Women facilitates in creating an enabling environment that fosters women's active participation in politics and decision-making. By strengthening these partnerships, UN Women aims to empower women like Kamla to overcome barriers and fully participate in shaping policies and processes that affect their lives.



© Satesh Malani



© Satesh Malani

Kamla emerged as an active participant in forums that championed women's voices. Her involvement in these platforms led to a new era of dialogue and engagement, marking her entry into the political landscape. Her resolute spirit and unwavering dedication eventually saw her assume the mantle of the Vice Chairperson of Tharparkar in the local government, a role she leveraged to bridge the gap between the people and district leaders in her area. She is the first ever woman in Tharparkar to become District Vice Chairperson in the local government. As a champion for her community, she addressed pressing challenges in education, water, healthcare, and job creation.

Kamla's future goals echo her community-centric ethos. She envisages comprehensive needs assessments to diagnose the hurdles faced by women in her community and plans to empower them with technical training. Moreover, she holds a bold ambition - a seat in the National Assembly. A daring goal indeed, but a necessary step for Kamla. This would not just be a personal triumph, but a beacon of inspiration for the young girls of Tharparkar, encouraging them to step into the realm of politics and bring about transformative change.

Kamla's unwavering commitment to her community, her tireless efforts to uplift marginalized individuals, and her relentless advocacy for women's empowerment have solidified her as a powerful catalyst for change.

# Sindh in Focus:
## Politics of the 2022 Floods

By

### Naseer Memon
Consultant Climate Change, Disaster Management, Livelihoods and Resettlement

**Considering the scale and diversity of climatic risks in Sindh, achieving long-term resilience merits more strategic interventions rather than a focus on political optics.**

The 2022 floods have served as a rude awakening to the political leadership of Pakistan, especially in Sindh. This disaster of unprecedented proportions has impacted the social fabric and rural infrastructure in Sindh, reversing the meagre development gains accrued over the last 75 years.

Over two million houses were partially or fully damaged in areas where some estimates put katcha houses at over 60 percent before the disaster. Rural areas of flood affected districts such as Qambar Shahdadkot, Jamshoro, Mirpur Khas, Naushahro Feroz, Khairpur, Umerkot, Sanghar, Badin, and Sujawal are victims of abject multidimensional poverty. The UNDP's MPI depicts 50 to 84 percent of households are multidimensionally poor in these districts. The poor have been adversely impacted, owing to a chronic 'resilience deficit'. Such stark social disparities make a large number of people extremely vulnerable to even milder climate shocks.

The Government of Sindh moved swiftly for recovery and rehabilitation of flood battered areas. It was able to mobilise a sizeable funding of approximately USD 2 billion from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to repair critical public infrastructure, reconstruct houses, and restore livelihoods. Though procedural pre-requisites are testing the patience of flood affected people, things are moving in the right direction.

The budget of Sindh's Annual Development Plan of 2023-2024 is dotted with numerous flood rehabilitation schemes of roads, irrigation channels, drains, pumping stations, schools, and health centres. This discernable budgetary tilt towards the flood rehabilitation portfolio will harvest political dividends for the ruling party in Sindh. These schemes


© Reuters

provide a unique outreach opportunity to positively impact millions of households in the province. The government will be seen doing something in most villages affected by the floods. If executed properly, these projects will bring a political boon for local representatives of the ruling party at the grassroots level.

Nonetheless, these short-term interventions can be likened to first-aid, not a long-term cure. Considering the scale and diversity of climatic risks in the province, achieving long-term resilience merits more strategic interventions rather than a focus on political optics. Storm drains, cleared waterways, resilient public infrastructure, effective early warning systems, and building the socioeconomic tenacity of communities must be emphasized. For this, a major paradigm shift is required, as the 'business as usual' approach will not alter the fate of the millions of people exposed to the perils of climate change.

# Balochistan in Focus:
## Politics of the 2022 Floods

By

## Amjad Rasheed
CEO, Taraqee Foundation and Chairperson,
Balochistan Development Network (BDN)

The devastating floods of 2022 in Pakistan had a profound impact on the nation, particularly in Balochistan. These floods highlighted existing structural inequalities and their differential impact on marginalized communities. The responses of political parties varied, with some focusing on immediate relief efforts and others recognizing the need for sustainable development and climate resilience. However, there is a lack of political vision, capacity, and transparency in disaster management, and manifestos rarely address these critical issues. As Pakistan approaches its next elections, the floods should serve as a catalyst for political action to ensure a climate-resilient future in Balochistan.

Throughout the world, all issues related to commoners and particularly the community are addressed only through local governance, whether it is a county or a *panchayat*. Unfortunately, even after the 18th amendment, governance remains highly centralized, with development work being under the control of the political elite at the federal and provincial levels. Moreover, these groups lack the capacity, vision, and will to bring prosperity and positive change to the lives of the poor masses. For this reason, meritocracy and strengthening local bodies for accountability must be prioritized. All political parties must clearly spell out their commitment to holding local body elections on a regular basis and divert financial and technical resources to the district and union council level to reduce the burden of the people.

At the same time, to ensure a climate-resilient future in Balochistan, political parties should prioritize the following actions:

- **Strengthen infrastructure**, including drainage systems, flood-resistant housing, and improved irrigation networks.
- **Promote sustainable development** through resilient agriculture, renewable energy, and environmentally friendly industries.

- **Empower marginalized communities** through education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, strengthened by local body governance.
- **Invest in disaster preparedness and early warning systems**, including training in early recovery, to reduce the impact of future floods.
- **Translate and implement SDGs at UC and village level:** This can be done through introducing Model SDG villages in our federal and provincial PSDPs, and in development partner planning.
- **Strengthen District Disaster Management Structures:** This will bring efficient, transparent, and inclusive disaster response - pivotal to achieving development.

The 2022 floods in Balochistan emphasize the urgent need for political action in Pakistan. Recognizing the differential impact on vulnerable populations and addressing structural inequalities are essential steps towards a climate-resilient future. By prioritizing sustainable development, infrastructure strengthening, community empowerment, and disaster preparedness, political parties can shape a more equitable and resilient Balochistan. The upcoming elections must reflect the lessons learned and pave the way for a sustainable, transparent, and prosperous future for Balochistan.



© Muneer Marri

# An International Perspective on Pakistan's Elections

**The United States has reinforced its commitment to democratic values and rule of law through blanket statements and undoubtedly is having stronger private conversations.**

By

**Emily Ashbridge**

Managing Editor, South Asian Voices, The Stimson Center

In the lead up to Pakistan's elections this fall, the U.S. engagement with Pakistan remains carefully calibrated, focusing more on floods assistance and some development assistance in the security and trade sectors. While the United States has advocated for free and fair elections in years past, Pakistan's evolving political situation following the ousting of former Prime Minister Imran Khan last year has received little response from the Biden administration. As Pakistani journalists and analysts criticize Washington's muted position to ongoing political turmoil, Washington appears unlikely to do more.

The U.S. position is driven by two factors. First, the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan has given way to Washington's pivot to the Indo-Pacific, wherein Pakistan's role is relatively limited for the United States.

Second, geopolitical alignments that brought the United States and Pakistan together since the Cold War have fundamentally shifted. As the U.S. strategically competes with China, and courts India to help it do so, Pakistan's geopolitical crossroads presents more complexities than opportunities to Washington. With policymakers focused on competition with China, little bandwidth is left to tease out nuances in Pakistan's foreign policy and take a stronger stance on its politics.

While shifting national security interests explain Washington's muted position in part, a second factor is at play. In the lead up to elections, the United States does not want to be dragged into Pakistan's domestic politics. While the United States remains committed to democratic principles and free and fair elections, statements con-

demning the Pakistani government could be construed as support for the opposition.

Further, the United States sees value in maintaining workable relations with Pakistan's military. The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and a resurgence of terror attacks against Pakistan present significant security concerns to both countries. The United States does not want to get dragged into Pakistan's domestic politics, but it also does not want to alienate its government. Security relations are far from a driving force in explaining Washington's muted position towards Pakistan's politics, but they are a factor against a stronger U.S. stance.

Although Washington has taken a muted position, the lack of public response does not mean that the United States endorses Pakistan's political infighting and democratic backsliding. The United States has reinforced its commitment to democratic values and rule of law through blanket statements and undoubtedly is having stronger private conversations. In fact, the U.S. response may reflect a growing awareness in Washington that public statements have a limited ability to effect change on human rights outcomes in South Asia.

With both Pakistan and India, Washington has increasingly favored private diplomacy to convey concerns over human rights violations and democratic decline. Although a quieter U.S. position has garnered critique from civil society and rights groups, this approach may provide greater room for Washington to pressure governments to act without capitals receiving backlash for caving to U.S. demands. Regardless, Washington appears decided that the most effective way to address Pakistan's political turmoil without becoming a player in it is through private diplomacy versus strong public statements condemning the actions of various political actors.

In the lead up to elections, the U.S. stance is likely to remain the same. As Pakistan's political environment heats up, the potential for the U.S. to get dragged into domestic politics cannot be ruled out. Hence, Washington may choose to absorb the reputational risks of having "no stance" on Pakistan's human rights violations in hopes that private diplomacy proves effective and its credibility in the Indo-Pacific is not harmed by rumors of political interference and electioneering. This decision may be a strategic one by Washington, but it also reflects a growing awareness regarding the limited potential of public criticisms to effect change in Pakistan.

# Beyond the Status Quo:
## Innovating Governance for People and Planet

By

**Aleida Ferreyra**

UNDP's Global Lead on Democratic Institutions and Processes in a Digital Era

**Valdemar Satoshi Rojle Christensen**

UNDP's Policy Electoral Analyst

**Effective, inclusive, and accountable governance arrangements are central to generating the right policies and the collective action required to generate the transformation that people need today and tomorrow.**

In today's global landscape, democratic governance systems face numerous challenges.

Trust and social contracts are fraying from a wide range of issues – from economic contractions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a growing debt crisis – to the rapid pace of technological change, and people's growing dissatisfaction with the status quo – including the (real or perceived) "underperformance" of their governments.

These pressures, coupled with the erosion of trust in institutions, call for a reimagining and reinvigoration of political systems worldwide. They call for public spheres that are truly inclusive and open. And they call for an emphasis on the critical importance of local governance systems and their linkages to national institutions. They also call for ambitious and innovative reforms that are able to deliver the development outcomes that the world so desperately needs.

Even if there are no magical solutions, principles of inclusivity, effectiveness and accountability should guide our efforts to improve our democratic governance institutions and processes. Why? Because effective, inclusive, and accountable governance arrangements are central to generating the right policies and the collective action required to generate the transformation that people need today and tomorrow. They are essential to effectively create the governance arrangements necessary to manage the use of natural resources, the energy transition, the effects of the climate crisis and address our old problems of poverty and inequality.

We need governance institutions and processes that are effective and able to respond to the needs of all actors, not a few, and can produce equitable outcomes. This is only possible through the inclusion and participation of different actors and sectors in public and political life. Moreover, it is essential to change democratic systems so that asymmetries of power between the various actors are not amplified and inequalities are not reproduced. What is needed is a more representative and balanced public space, which in-

© Twitter/ @Electionwatch22

cludes all who are currently excluded, discriminated against, and left behind.

We also need to do things differently for the deep governance transformations required. We need to use the power of technology and innovation to increase political inclusion and people's ability to exercise their voice and agency in the public sphere. We also need to address issues of information pollution and freedom of expression, which are essential for creating the enabling environment and the trust for democratic governance to thrive.

The good news is that there are experiences, efforts, and knowledge around the globe trying to do this, especially at the local level.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recognizes the significance of inclusive, accountable, and effective governance in achieving sustainable development. We work with national stakeholders to support governance arrangements and development policies that work for people and for the planet. Through our electoral assistance work, for example, UNDP aims to foster democratic principles such as inclusion, accountability, and transparency. Working together with national stakeholders and other development partners, UNDP provides strategic electoral assistance to approximately 40-50 countries annually throughout the electoral cycle, including many in fragile and post conflict settings. Our work involves a wide range of areas – from supporting national electoral institutions on operations and training, supporting civic and voter education to enhance the participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups, and more recently, supporting infor-

mation integrity efforts to combat disinformation and hate speech during elections. We partner with local, regional and global stakeholders to support the innovative governance solutions needed. For example, in Gambia, ahead of the local elections in May 2023, UNDP supported the Independent Electoral Commission and other stakeholders in promoting the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, among other areas, and supported political dialogue through a national stakeholders' forum where parties contesting the presidential election signed a peace pledge and committed to abstain from incendiary language and hate speech, which carried over to subsequent elections. In Lebanon, Libya, and Peru, UNDP supported electoral supervisory or management bodies as well as civil society organizations to provide accurate information to voters and design data-driven interventions by monitoring and analysing millions of posts and tweets and fact-checking around ten thousand online articles.

By emphasizing governance principles such as inclusion, accountability, and transparency in our electoral assistance work, UNDP seeks to ensure that elections are inclusive, credible, peaceful, and transparent. At the same time, we recognize that respect for human rights, gender equality, vibrant civic spaces, free media, and effective institutions are essential components of democratic governance. Through our electoral assistance and broader governance support, UNDP aims to contribute to the global efforts needed to reimagine and strengthen political systems, creating an enabling environment for sustainable development, and achieving a resilient social contract for the benefit of all, people and planet.

# Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais

Professor of Political Science,

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, LUMS

Excerpts from interview

**The civil society must play a much more assertive role well before the election campaign kicks in, in aggressively demanding inclusive development for all sectors of society.**

**How can voters be educated and mobilised better in Pakistan?**

Pakistani voters have been through electoral exercises many times before, and are therefore already educated. However, more can be done through social media and mainstream electronic media messaging campaigns. Mobilization is primarily the function of party candidates, but much depends on the political environment within which elections are conducted.

**How can political parties prioritize development agendas in their manifestos and election campaigns?**

They must listen to party-ticket holders and accommodate their voices on development issues. The candidates contesting elections are close to the people in the constituencies and are often sensitive to their complaints. The problem is prioritizing access to quality education, gender equity, healthcare, family planning, sports, recreation, parks, and sustainable agricultural practices over mundane issues of individual concerns. The parties need to engage with civil society groups, intellectuals, and local journalists

to get some ideas while writing their manifestoes. They need to learn from the experience of other South Asian countries with comparable histories, and cultural and social backgrounds to set their priorities right.

I believe the civil society must play a much more assertive role well before the election campaign kicks in, in aggressively demanding inclusive development for all sectors of society and for projects of common good with a focus on education, health, environment, and sustainable use of natural resources.

The media at the national level requires some exposure on how it can leverage its national reach and power to do some advocacy for social development during election campaigns using the UNDP Human Development Index for South Asia, and explore why Pakistan's performance happens to be among the lowest, second only to Afghanistan.

**What challenges do political parties face in translating development promises into actions after winning elections and forming government?**

# The media at the national level requires some exposure on how it can leverage its national reach and power to do some advocacy for social development during election campaigns.

There are three kinds of challenges. The foremost is the resource crunch, the low development expenditures, and the even lower attention paid to the vast rural communities and their social development and infrastructural needs.

The second is an unholy connection between different layers of bureaucracy, contractors, and the district members of the Provincial and National Assemblies. Allegedly, a good part of the funds for any development project are siphoned off by the trio. This compromises the quality of the project. For that reason, you can see broken roads in rural areas, non-functional sewerage mechanisms, and crumbling government buildings. Pakistan requires not only bureaucratic reforms but also a disconnect between the implementation of the development projects and the public representative. However, the problem is a structural one. It is the requirement of the parliamentary system to create majorities to form the executives at the provincial and national level. The members demand 'development funds' and discretion in order to be able to compete with rivals. Every effort to disassociate the MNAs and MPAs from this process have failed in the environment of a very intense numbers game among rival political parties.

Finally, we have a weak party-system, although political parties' vote bank seems to have increased. Further progress may weaken the strong individual as a winning factor, and thus give the political parties control over the development process.

**What best practices can governments employ to measure the effectiveness of their development manifestos in driving economic growth and social development?**

I think the five-year development plans model that Pakistan had implemented in the 1960s can serve as an experience and guide. It had problems of inclusiveness and equity, but these can be addressed in the new environment of the country. Second, the role of the Planning Commission of Pakistan requires a fundamental rethinking from crunching numbers to strategizing development, and developing a mechanism for monitoring the pace and quality of social and economic development projects. In a partisan political and bureaucratic culture, third-party evaluation, professional media, and civil society scrutiny can also play a role. The real issue is the accountability process—the laws, institutions, and political system—that ends up being the cause of bad governance. One way out can be attaching 'best governance practices' to loans, grants, and development assistance to the Government of Pakistan, and holding it accountable for its obligation to world bodies and donor agencies.



© NationalAssembly.gov.pk

**United Nations Development Programme Pakistan**

4th Floor, Serena Business Complex,
Khayaban-e-Suharwardy,  Sector G-5/1,
P. O. Box 1051, Islamabad, Pakistan