

Elections are the only Solution to Multi-pronged problems in Pakistan

Outline:

A- Introduction

Problems of Pakistan are quite complex that demand multifaceted approach, especially the timely elections. Election ensures the stability in all sectors of the country. Democratic expression of people endeavours to confront problems of Pakistan.

B- A Brief review of Election Situation and unrest in Country

C- How Election can be the only Solution to Problems of Pakistan

1- Ensure Political stability.

2- Eradicate unrest in society

i- Put an end to protests and demonstrations

ii- 3200 rioters arrested in Punjab alone last year.

3- Policy ^{continuity} change and stability

i- New government backed by public mandate will efficiently implant policies

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- 4- Guarantee financial stability
 - i- Former Minister Sheikh Rasheed say, elections are only solution to avert default threat
- 5- Democratic expression of people
 - i- Voting gives opportunity to have their say
- 6- Accountability of elected representatives
 - i- Elected representatives will be bound to act as promised.
- 7- Sustained foreign policy
 - i- Newly elected government will attain international trust.
- 8- End to judicial fussle
- 9- Step towards women empowerment
 - i- 3139 women are participating in 2024 elections, their numbers are double than 2018 elections.
- 10- Inclusive decision making
 - i- Elections make sure all voices are heard.

D- Election is an Overrated Panacea to Problems of Pakistan

- 1- Promoting national unity is beyond electoral process
 - i- Elections alone cannot end indifferences and blindness of factions.
- 2- Dynastic politics of Pakistan challenge democracy
 - i- Hegemony of 22 families in economic and political sphere of the country

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- 3- Institutional strengthening does not solely rely on elections.
- i- Police, judiciary, health, education are among ~~the~~ top corrupt sectors in transparency Intl. survey.
- 4- Elections cannot solve the challenges ~~are~~ faced due to regional dimensions.

E- Conclusion

ESSAY

"I believe in democracy and the only way to end instability in the country is fresh elections", says former Prime Minister 'Imran Khan'. Not just him, all the political parties and stakeholders have consensus on this statement. The country is currently entangled in crisis, and it is facing multi-pronged problems. Elections are being considered as viable solution for all the woes of the country.

Raja Parvez Ashraf, another former Prime Minister, is of the remarks that:

"In a bid to seek economic and political stability in the country, there is a dire need to hold polls immediately". Elections will ensure political stability in the country, and end the unrest in society. Stability in

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policy can only be ensured by elected government. This will be helpful in achieving economic growth. Election makes sure the democratic expression of the people possible. They can hold the elected representatives accountable for their policies. A government securing public mandate has international recognition, which helps in sustained foreign policy. Elections will put the ongoing judicial tussle to an end. Elections guarantee the inclusive decision making, especially the participation of women. But, to some critics, election is an overrated panacea for all the problems of the country. Credibility of elections have always been challenged in Pakistan. The dilemma of the country is absence of democratic ethos, which cannot be ensured by elections. Therefore, problems of Pakistan are quite complex that demands multiFaceted esp approach, especially the timely elections. Elections ensure stability in all sectors of the country. Democratic expression of people endeavours to confront the problems of Pakistan.

General elections were expected to be held in 2023. The constitution of Pakistan clearly stipulates the holding of elections within 90 days of dissolution of assemblies. But Election

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Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declared that, elections could not be possible at prescribed times. There are various reasons for delaying the polls, majorly the surge in terrorist attacks, and digital consensus of 2023. Last year, the country witnessed more than six hundred terrorist attacks, 60 per cent more than 2022. About 93 per cent of these attacks were carried out in provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Election Commission while monitoring the situation, announced the date of elections, which are scheduled to be held on 8 February. Speculation persists over whether general elections might be postponed. This prompted the Election Commission of Pakistan to issue a clarification, rejecting reports about a delay in elections as completely baseless and misleading. Hence, the election question has become dilemma in Pakistan.

Elections are being seen in Pakistan as the only possible solution to counter all the problems of the country. It is due to many reasons, mainly elections ensure political stability in Pakistan. Recent few months have seen ubiquitous political instability in the country. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan was impeached by vote

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of no confidence, which consequently led to coalition government of Pakistan Democratic Movement in office. This change deteriorated the political sphere of the country. Blame game of politicians and making and breaking of political parties have been witnessed. Elections are being regarded as only solution to end this instability. Senior politician and Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed says, "a fair and transparent election after establishing the rules of the games is the only solution to all political crisis of Pakistan". Elections will result in new elected government. This will suppress the political instability in the country.

Political instability triggers unrest in society, which can be tackled by timely elections. Mass protests and demonstrations have caused disturbance in society. The riots of May 9 further exacerbated the irritation in society. Attacks on national buildings and violence resulted in a major controversy. As an attack on state, 9 May was declared 'black day' in the history of country. Senior Politician Ahsan Iqbal says, "May 9 riots were Pakistan's 9/11 attack on its national interest". In result, about 3200 rioters

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were arrested in Punjab province. For political cause or any other mass protests and violence is fatal for the peace of the country. Only the elections can put this chaos to an end. Election provides people, the power of vote instead to show power by violence. Thus, the elections are only possible solution to terminate the agitation.

Also, elections indirectly cause stability in policies. Election follows the transfer of power to legitimate government, which has security of public mandate. Such government can better deduce reforms and strategies. These strategies include, social, political, and economic. A government backed by people efficiently acts upon policies, as little room for criticism and confrontation has is left. Policies at level of state and country require long term planning, which elected governments often focus on. It contributes to stability by implementing measures that align with their electoral promises. The smooth transition of power by elections, allows for policy continuity and preventing abrupt changes that may destabilise the country. So, elections are necessary for policy continuity and

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stability.

The continuity in policy guarantees financial stability, which can be acquired by elections only. Economic reforms also demands stable policy and long term planning. Recent few months have witnessed country under serious threat of default. Former Minister of Interior Sheikh Rasheed says, "fresh elections are the only solution to prevent the country from default". Economic fog has taken over the country, which could disappear through fresh elections. The lastly acquired 'Stand-by-Agreement' with IMF is ending in March, which further complicate the situation. Maleeha Lodhi, in this regard says, "external financing requirements of Pakistan are too much. It now needs larger, long-term plan; only government with fresh mandate can do this". So, elections are only solution to put economy back on track.

Moreover, elections manifest democratic expression of people. Where the electoral process is competitive and forces candidates or parties to expose their records and future intentions to popular scrutiny, election serve as forums for discussion of public issues and facilitate the expression of public opinion. Elections thus provide

provide political education for citizens and ensure the responsiveness of democratic governments to the will of the people. Elections serve a self-actualizing purpose by confirming the worth and dignity of individual citizens as human beings; Voting gives people an opportunity to have their say and, through expressing partisanship, to satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging. Thus, the elections certify the role and inclusion of people.

Also, elections assure the accountability of elected representatives. The candidates emphasize their election manifestos and make promises with people before election. After their success, they are bind to act upon as promised, because they do not want to lose public trust and support.

In amidst previous government tenure, political unrest that resulted in regime change, in ~~the~~ which left people in anarchic situation. Change of premier and his cabinet do not result in change in situation. Rather it put the public in a dilemma of whom to make accountable for perilous situation of the country. Elections will result

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in fresh candidates assuming the charge, and people can hold them accountable. Therefore, the problem of accountability and transparency can be sought by elections only. Furthermore, elections will sustain the foreign policy of Pakistan. Free and fair elections are the only way to attain ~~public~~ international trust, and recognition. The ongoing political unrest has caused the foreign policy of country in doldrums. The allegations of American involvement in regime change in Pakistan has raised many speculations at global image of Pakistan. The new government elected through a democratic process gain legitimacy both domestically and internationally. This legitimacy can enhance the credibility of Pakistan's foreign policy decisions on the global stage. Elections provide a mechanism for adjusting foreign policy in response to changing circumstances. Democratic systems are generally more accepted in the international community, especially in develop countries. Having a democratic foundation can positively influence diplomatic relations with other nations of the world. Hence, elections are only choice for better and desired foreign policy.

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Besides that, elections will be helpful to end the ongoing judicial tussle in Pakistan. In the wake of elections, the courts of Pakistan get filled with applications regarding the problems of constituency boundaries, electoral symbols problems, and rejection of nomination papers. These disputes in any way are harmful for the country, mainly because the credibility of judicial institution of country get questioned, and due to these political disputes, judiciary cannot fulfil its duties properly. The decisions of lower courts always challenge in Supreme Court. The Apex Court from previous few days is busy only in hearing of political disputes. This compelled the Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa to say, "Supreme Court of Pakistan cannot do the tasks of Election Commission of Pakistan". Thus, elections alone can finish this judicial rivalry.

In addition to that, elections are a step towards women empowerment. As discussed, elections allow democratic expression of people, voices of women can be better heard via elections. This can be visualised from shrinking electoral gender gap in Pakistan every year.

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According to figures provided by the Election Commission of Pakistan, "In this election 3139 women are participating, they are about double in numbers than 1687 women participated in 2018 election". As far as electoral gender gap is concerned, it has shrunk to below 10 million. Election provide basis to break gender and cultural norms. "Doctor Saveera Parkash is the first woman from Buner to contest upcoming elections from general seat". So, elections are helpful to empower women in Pakistani society. Not just women, elections ensure ~~at~~ inclusive decision making. At its core, democracy aims to empower the people and make sure that their voices are heard through the process of electing representatives to serve their interests. Elections enable citizens to participate in decision-making and allow a smooth transfer of power through free and fair elections. Few factions of the country feel marginalized and regard their voices as unheard, Elections like the question of Baloch nationals from province of Balochistan. Elections provide them basis to partake in assemblies and other decision-making

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institutions. This involves ^{appointing} including the individuals based on merit, not on political affiliations. It encourages the greater political engagement and participation from citizens of all backgrounds can help create a more diverse and representative political landscape. Therefore, elections are essential to include all voices in decision-making of the country.

In the above paragraphs, we have discussed the importance of elections, and how elections can be the only solution for multi-pronged problems of Pakistan. But some critics think it the oversimplification of problems. According to them, elections cannot be proved that red pill, which cures all the diseases. In the following paragraph, we will discuss about, how election is considered as an overrated panacea to all woes of Pakistan.

Firstly, the problem of national unity and inclusivity is vital, which is beyond electoral process. Efforts to bridge ethnic, cultural and religious divides require continuous attention, going beyond the jurisdiction of elections. Sectarian divisions and conflicts are ubiquitous in Pakistan. These are not limited to any particular

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region or class of people, but omnipresent in society, all around, posing a threat to national unity. The regions of Gilgit-Baltistan, Hangu and Parachinar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Southern districts of Punjab and northern region of Balochistan are invulnerable to these situations. The major cause of these divisions is indifference. As James Baldwin said; "neither love nor terror makes one blind: indifference makes one blind". Only elections cannot eradicate these indifferences. These problems existed from very long, and many elections have happened, but these conflicts were prone to elections. A multifaceted approach is required to tackle the issues of factions and ensure national unity. But, in reality elections are mandatory to curb these divisions. Elections include representatives from every nook of the country. The newly elected representatives backed by public support deduce better reforms and strategies to counter problems of all. This effectiveness is shown only by newly elected members, with vigour and vision. Hence, elections have distinctive role in attaining national unity.

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Secondly, dynastic politics and democracy challenge each other. The political structure of Pakistan is dynastic, which fosters nepotism and favouritism. In about all the major political parties of Pakistan fathers precede son and son precedes grandson. Mehboob-ul-Haq, a senior economist in 1960s stated that, "only 22 families have hegemony in economic, social and political structure of Pakistan". Many critics still consider the hold of these few families. They do not let the new people come to light. This dynastic culture in politics triggers the feudalism, especially in the rural areas of the country. This is against the spirit of democracy. The same feudal lords and aristocrats will participate in elections, and in such cases results mostly remain the same as previous. In such situations, elections does not end these inequalities, rather it contributes to foster and encouragement of dynastic politics. Thus, change in political structure cannot be made possible only by elections. But it is one side of picture. In reality, elections always bring new

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faces to limelight, making their way to assembly floors. The culture of dynastic politics is true to some extent, but not omnipresent altogether. Every election, many new aspiring candidates take part in electoral process. According to data of Election Commission of Pakistan, "in general election of 2024, 17800 candidates have submitted nomination paper, quite more in numbers than 11855 in 2018 general elections". Thus, elections furnish the condition for ambitious candidates to challenge dynastic political structure.

Thirdly, focusing solely on elections may neglect the importance of strengthening institutions. The governance institutions of Pakistan depict the picture of paralysed force. They have potential to be efficient, but are crippled by many problems. This can be understood from the survey conducted by Transparency International on Pakistan's National Corruption in 2023. It perceived the top corrupt sector as, "police at top, followed by judiciary, tendering department; judiciary at 3rd; education and health at 4th and 5th respectively". There problem is not

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related with elections. The efficiency and output of institutions have been very low from long time, while many elections happened in the period. Thus, elections alone cannot be the solution for institutional strengthening. But, elections and institutional strengthening are related somehow. State institutions are used by political authorities for their personal gains. They deteriorate the institutional imbalance. Once political situation get stable, and a new representative government comes to office, they can help stable the institutions. A fresh government backed by public mandate can better implant policies to revolutionise the institutions. Thus, elections are essential for strengthening the institutions. Lastly, elections alone cannot solve the challenges faced due to regional dimensions. Regional challenges have always been there for Pakistan, since its birth. Kashmir has been bone of contention between Pakistan and India. Both countries have fought three big wars on this issue, along with various skirmishes at line of control. With passage of time, and change of many governments, the

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issue remained it is. The situation is approximately same at western border. Relations with Afghanistan have never been so good. Afghanistan refused to accept Pakistan, as independent country after its birth. The relations were not good during period of war on terror. The relations have further deteriorated by evacuation of United States from Afghanistan. This situation has also remained same in amidst many governments and elections. A new clash with Iran has emerged, due to exchange of missile firing. Also ties between two neighbours have been uneasy even at best of the times. The challenges of regional dynamics at different border fronts cannot be solved by elections only. Despite of severity of these challenges, only elections can be the viable solution to eliminate these tensions. A concerted foreign policy and effective diplomacy is required to establish peace with all neighbours. This all can be acquired by fresh governments. Since all the plans and efforts of diplomatic approach have not brought the desired results. A change is

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required in deducing foreign policy. Pakistan's former ambassador to United Nations, Maleeh Lodhi says: "The next government faces an array of imposing foreign policy issues, but it alone can address these problems". Thus, elections are important to deal with challenges of regional dynamics.

In a nutshell, one may say that, although problems of country are all-pervasive and multi-pronged, but free and fair elections can best address them. Elections will eradicate protests, demonstrations, the ongoing judicial tussle, and blame game of politicians. This is necessary for policy continuity, economic stability and better foreign policy and diplomacy. Elections are also an agent for people to participate and have their say. Elections are best expression of democratic norms that include all the voices from every nook of the country. People made their representative responsible for their performance. It is also best mechanism to include women in policy making and legislation. This is evident from women's increased proportion

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in political sphere, approximately double nominations than last elections. But some critics think otherwise, they regards elections as an overrated panacea for all woes of the country. Elections alone cannot bear end the indifferences of different factions and ensure national unity. Hegemony of few families do not let new faces in assemblies and policy making platforms to make a change. Institutional challenges existed from very start of country, and they still exist, independent of elections. Challenges of regional dynamics also cannot be addressed by elections only. But elections are more important, as many of the problems are directly or indirectly linked with elections.