



# PNA

Electoral Reforms in Pakistan in  
context of EVMs



# STUDY GUIDE

## **Topic: Electoral reforms in Pakistan in context of EVMs**

Pakistan's parliament has passed a bill allowing the use of electronic machines for voting.

Lawmakers also passed a bill to grant the right to vote for expats on Wednesday.

The opposition said the policy is an attempt to rig the next elections.

The opposition wants elections to continue under a decades-old system that features paper ballots and manual vote-counting.

In his speech before the bills were passed, the opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif said Prime Minister Imran Khan was trying to manipulate the results of the next parliamentary elections, in 2023.

## **Electoral Reforms in Pakistan**

State elections are believed to be the backbone of a democratic country's legislature, they give its citizens a legal chance to select their representatives through fair and free procedures within its constitutional and administrative frameworks. It has been further observed that political and democratic structures are always strengthened by ensuring receptive and comprehensive electoral processes. Under the Pakistani constitutional frame of work, elections are to be held after every 5 years. However, that is frequently not the case due to early elections either due to political instability or disqualification. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was formed in 1956 to function as an independent and autonomous federal institute, responsible for organizing and conducting state parliament, provincial legislatures, and local government elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) prepared and unveiled a 5-year strategic plan in 2010 to improve the election process as part of electoral reforms. Meeting international election standards, the framework consisted of a total of 129 objectives that are listed under 15 strategic goals. In a nationwide survey of 4,535 people by UNDP, 49 percent were not satisfied with the existing electoral system while 55 percent said new electoral reforms are necessary. In Pakistan, electoral reforms will count for very little unless the Election Commission is given full independence and sufficient resources. The eighteenth constitutional amendment, passed unanimously by parliament in 2010, in the specific context of elections, made the appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) more transparent and subject to parliamentary oversight.

## **Warning of election boycott**

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who leads the opposition Pakistan People's Party, warned of a

boycott of the next elections if electronic counting machines were used.

Khan, who was present in the parliament, has defended the legislation, saying he wanted to ensure free and fair elections.

Khan says millions of Pakistanis overseas should be given the right to vote for the candidates of their choice.

The latest legislation comes amid Khan's increasing unpopularity amid a sudden hike in food prices.

Now, after the passage of the Elections Second Amendment Bill, 2021, the Election Commission of Pakistan shall, with the technical assistance of National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) and any other authority or agency, enable overseas Pakistanis in the prescribed manner, subject to secrecy and security, to exercise their right to vote during the general elections

**Overseas voting rights:**

Prime Minister Imran Khan launched portal for the overseas Pakistanis to enabling them digitally verify their power of attorney which otherwise required them to travel to Pakistan.

Addressing the launching ceremony here on Thursday, the prime minister said that earlier, around 75,000 expatriates had to travel to Pakistan for the purpose and go through a cumbersome process of verifying the power of attorney.

He told the gathering that the process of developing the portal for digital verification of power of attorney was initiated after an overseas Pakistani from Greece highlighted the

issue. He also suggested the government to digitalise the process to make the lives of overseas Pakistanis easier, he added.

Secondly, he said the legislation on the use of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in elections was also made possible as NADRA made it easier to ensure election using the latest technology.

He recalled that the Election Commission in 2008 and a judicial commission in 2015 had also recommended the use of EVM to ensure holding a transparent election. He viewed that in fact those desiring to take advantage of old system would never let the change to come in.

### **The Issue of EVM**

The government appears determined that EVMs must become a part of the country's election system, in order, it says, to make it fairer and more transparent. It has already passed an ordinance authorising the ECP to purchase EVMs and enable overseas Pakistanis to vote. However, EVMs are a somewhat controversial matter. In some nations, they appear to have worked, and made voting more efficient and possibly more transparent. But in other nations, including India, and several Latin American countries, they have come under criticism. For this reason alone, it is necessary that the entire idea be debated in parliament, and a decision then taken incorporating the views of all parties so that there is no further controversy over the matter. We have already seen in the 2018 elections when the new result transmission system (RTS) generated a lot of ill will and the opposition cast apprehensions on its working. In a country where as simple a matter as Senate elections can be mishandled and even experienced and qualified parliamentarians get confused while casting their votes, the use of a new gadget by common people will be controversial, unless it has been tried and tested in several by-elections and the opposition reposes complete confidence in it. It is not only the parliamentarians but the people of Pakistan who need to have better information about this alteration in the system.

It is also disturbing that the PTI chooses to use ordinances instead of approaching parliament directly and going through the process necessary to put in place a new bill or a new rule of any kind. Such changes should not be the result of an ordinance or two; there have to be detailed debates about the merits and demerits of EVMs. As long as the opposition remains non-committal and people unfamiliar, such alterations are not advisable through the use of presidential ordinances that have almost become a fetish with the government. All reforms must come through a proper mechanism. A thorough dissection is called for in these matters. The countries where EVMs have worked properly have a fairly independent election process oversight – something Pakistan has as yet not experienced. The ECP must be directly involved in this discussion and ultimately it should be parliament that passes such reforms after getting

recommendations from the ECP. We need full clarity and transparency, otherwise there is a danger that the proposals on election reforms and the manner in which they are carried out will only create more problems rather than solving those that already exist.

**ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE COMMITTEE:**

EVM and it's feasibility

Change in the election process

Cause and effect of EVM

Right to vote for Overseas Pakistanis

Legitimacy of overseas Pakistanis vote

Use of ordinance instead of proper channel to legislate

How to improve the election process in PAKISTAN to make it Fair?

**NOTE: Come well researched and prepared for your debate. Best of luck!**

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