Electoral Challenges and Reforms in Pakistan

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Fair elections are the foundation of a successful democratic society. They ensure that the will of the common folk is properly represented in government. Pakistan is a country that faces many challenges in this regard. As an independent country, it faced many challenges such as military dictatorship. In this essay, I want to explore the challenges this country is facing and what reforms need to be made to ensure fair and transparent elections.

"The first thing that I want to tell you is this, that you should not be influenced by any political pressure, by any political party or individual politician. If you want to raise the prestige and greatness of Pakistan, you must not fall victim to any pressure, but do your duty as servants to the people and the State, fearlessly and honestly." ([1]Ref. Part of Quaid-e-Azam's speech uploaded on Election Commission of Pakistan official website: [Message From The Founder](#)) The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhamad Ali Jinnah, emphasized that the people of Pakistan should not join any political party for the wrong reasons such as family ties or being intimidated by the party.

Regardless of the above mentioned quote, one of the biggest challenges facing the country is Electoral Violence. Political parties and candidates often use violent tactics to protect their interests, which can alienate the general electorate and undermine the credibility of the election process. The proliferation of armed political groups in some regions further complicates the issue. For example, after a quiet start, the 2018 general elections in Pakistan were followed by a

deadly suicide bomb blast in the Balochistan province that killed 149 people. ([2]Ref. [A Report by the United States Institute of Peace](#)).

To address this challenge, Pakistan must implement measures to prevent and punish electoral violence. These include the deployment of law enforcement agencies at sensitive polling stations and the creation of a special election court to deal with complaints and crimes especially in areas like Karachi, which has a record of electoral violence, but still managed to have low reported political and criminal violence in the 2018 general election due to government military forces. In addition, it is important to promote a culture of peaceful political competition through education and awareness campaigns.

Now comes the issue of community integrity. Voter fraud and manipulation, including ballot box stuffing, vote buying, and the issuing of fake voter ID cards, is a serious problem in Pakistan's elections. These actions distort the reality of public opinion. We can see the 2008 General Election Report:**"The official documents, copies of which are available with The Express Tribune, reveal serious flaws in the electoral system used in the 2008 general election. Among the 81.2 million voters registered, 37 million were either ghost voters, multiple entries or the voter was registered without any authentic proof of identity."** ([3]Ref. [Express Tribune's Article](#)).

One of the most effective measures to combat voter fraud is the introduction of a biometric voter verification system. **"In early 2021, the government unveiled a prototype of an EVM machine it aimed to roll out for the 2023 national polls."** ([4]Ref. [Article By Geo News](#)). Biometrics, such as fingerprint or iris scanners, can help by linking a voter's biometric data to their identity and reduce the possibility of a false identity. Deploying this technology requires

significant investment in infrastructure that Pakistan cannot afford in its current economic climate, but it is an investment that must be made sooner or later.

Then there is Military intervention, which is a sensitive issue. Although the country has transitioned to a civilian-led government in recent years, concerns about the military in general elections remain. The military plays an important role in providing security during the elections. Critics say the military shirked its security role and manipulated the election in various ways. For example, the New York Times reported in 2018: **"Pakistan's largest television network says it has been forced off the air by cable operators in most parts of the country, in a move widely seen as being forced by the military as it flexes its authority over civilian institutions."** ([5]Ref. [Article by The New York Times](#) and [6] [Pakistan Election 2018 and How the Army Swung It](#)). This report is a perfect example of the media censorship by the military which can erode public trust in the electoral system and the fairness of the outcomes.

Addressing military interference in Pakistan's elections requires a multi-pronged approach that balances the need for security and stability with democracy and civilian control of the government. We must ensure media freedom and encourage journalism that provides fair coverage of political events and candidates. A legal framework to hold individuals and institutions accountable for obstructing the electoral process should be strengthened in conjunction with civil society organizations such as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

It should also create voter awareness. Apps can help citizens vote during elections, which can help reduce the impact of misinformation. This includes educating the public about the electoral process, the importance of voting, and critical evaluation of political candidates. This program

can be implemented in schools and through media campaigns. In addition, efforts should be made to ensure that citizens have access to reliable information about candidates, parties, and election-related topics. An informed electorate is essential to the success of any democracy.

In conclusion, Pakistan faces significant electoral challenges that prevent fair and transparent elections. Addressing these challenges requires joint efforts by political actors, civil society, and government. By strengthening electoral institutions, preventing violence and intimidation, ensuring voter verification, increasing campaign finance transparency, implementing electoral reforms, and improving civic education, Pakistan can take important steps that reflect the will of the people and strengthen its democracy. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to prioritize these reforms and work together to create a more transparent and accountable electoral system in Pakistan.

References:

[1] Message From The Founder

[2] A Report by the United States Institute of Peace

[3] Express Tribune's Article

[4] Article By Geo News

[5] Article by The New York Times

[6] Pakistan Election 2018 and How the Army Swung It)