

Pakistan Elections: The People's Verdict

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As the Chinese proverb goes, "May you live in interesting time".

It really feels as if the Chinese were speaking about the contemporary predicament of Pakistan.

Pakistan has just undergone arguably the most exhilarating elections in the country's history.

What made these elections the most gripping was the fact that the country's most popular politician not only was not permitted to contest in the elections but also has been the victim of vengeful campaign by the elites that he opposed. We are, of course, referring to the former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

As has been asserted by politicians of all ideological stripes, the elections seemed to be marred from the beginning. Once state interventions including shutting down of mobile and internet services across the country, it was well understood that these elections would be far from being free and fair. A fundamental feature of today's politics in Pakistan is popular distrust of the traditional kleptocratic, dynastic political parties —principally the House of Shareef and the House of Zardari. In addition, such mistrust extends to the mainstream corporate media as well. Countries of the Global South, including Pakistan, are constantly lectured by the mantra of being more democratic.

However, the problem arises when such nations make the wrong choices in their democratic dispensation. Such is the explanatory framework that helps us understand what has been happening in Pakistan over the past several decades. The democracy that Pakistanis have experienced has been severely constrained by the very limited political choices. Elementary freedoms have been suppressed irrespective whether it's been civilian or military rule.

The context of these elections has been the incredibly harsh repression, including the imprisonment of workers and politicians associated with Khan’s political party, the PTI (Pakistan Therik-e-Insaf) as well as of Khan himself.

Nevertheless, the PTI’s robust performance in these elections has surprised most political analysts. One significant attribute contributing to the outstanding performance of PTI has been its popularity among the overwhelming majority of the youths.

What this indicates is that there is a great degree of trust in a political party that has broken the duopoly of the two most powerful political parties. However, PTI’s success has been foiled to facilitate the false victories of the traditional political elites.

The elections were delayed in the first place and now that they have been held, the elections results have also been delayed to assist the favored candidates to win. In particular, the leader of PML(N), former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, had clearly lost to the deeply respected PTI candidate, Doctor Yasim Rashid. But the undemocratic forces had somehow changed the election result so that Mr. Sharif became victorious.

The public’s verdict must be respected by all without qualifications or limitations. The state should not falter or fail the people at this critical juncture. The delay of election results has made the situation more precarious. The people have spoken. The undemocratic forces must back off gracefully for once. The state cannot afford more experiments. Not accepting the people’s will exacerbate the existing political instability in the country. Political stability in a healthy democratic setup is the only guarantor of successfully tackling the myriad social and economic malaise afflicting the country.

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