

Monitoring the Democratic Transition: Pakistan's 2013 Elections

Yaqoob Khan Bangash

Information Technology University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Mian Sarmad Hussain

Information Technology University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Abstract

This article is based on election monitoring by the authors during the 2013 General Elections in Pakistan in the national assembly constituency of NA 145 and the corresponding provincial assembly seat of PP 186. The paper identifies several lacunas in the electoral process which prevents the smooth conduct of elections in Pakistan. The article argues that the processes of election day need to be reformed before an overhaul of the election system is contemplated in the country.

Keywords: Elections 2013, Election Commission of Pakistan, Rigging, Election Day.

Introduction

A free and fair election sets the stage for individuals to get elected as the real representatives of the people and then legislate for them. The regular conduct of elections is also an important sign in the democratic trajectory of a country. If a country has elections at set intervals, not earlier or later, then it is generally believed that the democratic process is working in the country.

In the context of Pakistan, elections have always been an important marker in an analysis of the progress of democracy. In the words of Andrew Wilder, 'there are few countries in the world where elections have played as critical a role in the establishment and subsequent political history of a country as they have in Pakistan.' (Wilder, 1999, p. 1). Most elections in Pakistan—from its first general election in 1970, which led to the vivisection of the country, to the latest in 2013, have been fraught with violence, boycotts and general allegations of rigging. Most analyses of the elections therefore have focused on the aforementioned issues, but in doing so have failed to assess them through the local dimension of the elections. Also, while a lot of literature is present on the democratic and political implications of a particular election, as well as determinants of voting patterns in

different areas of the country, little academic work has been undertaken on the actual electoral process on the election day itself.

Most academic work on elections in Pakistan has taken the long view. Craig Baxter, writing on the 1970 elections, mostly focused on the history of elections and different political parties, beginning from the League's victory in 1945-46 till the rise of Pakistan People's Party (Baxter, 1971). With regards to the 1970 elections, he delved into the details about prominent candidates and campaigning, but only briefly mentioned the election day process before moving to an analysis of the results. M.G. Weinbaum's article "The March 1977 Elections in Pakistan: Where Everyone Lost" also focused largely on the macro level irregularities in the whole procedure (Weinbaum, 1977). The title of the article itself gives a fair idea of the conclusion drawn by Weinbaum after analysing the rigging, violence and farcical conduct of the elections. Shahid Javed Burki and Sharif ul Mujahid, among others, have also written about the 1977 elections and its impact on a nascent democracy as well as the discrepancies, which largely marred Bhutto's era.

Rasul Baksh Rais's analyses of the non-party elections of 1985 showed that the lack of political parties in the 1985 elections meant that politicians, for once, focused more on the local issues than they would have had in case of party allegiances, but that also meant that the impact of factors like caste and family lineage was larger than ever (Rais, 1985). The recent book by Syeda Abida Hussain, *Power Failure: Political Odyssey of a Pakistani Woman*, also mentions how the 1985 elections were different from others due to their non-party nature, which ensured that local issues came to the fore (Hussain, 2015). She, in fact, got elected due to the locally focused nature of the elections.

Andrew Wilder (1999) in his seminal work mentioned earlier, has looked greatly into the comparison of political and social determinants of voting behaviour in rural and urban Punjab. However, he has also largely evaded the role of Election Commission and the transiently involved bodies like the judiciary and education departments in the holding of the general elections and the micro level logistical irregularities, which occur on the election day itself. Mohammed Waseem's work on the 2002 elections is a very informative book, but is largely theoretical and draws references from colonial times to analyse the development of institutions and society, and the impact it has had on the elections. (Waseem, 2006). Here again the processes of the election day itself are overlooked.

The only book, which analyses the role of the Election Commission of Pakistan, is *Election Commission of Pakistan: Role in Politics*, by Tahir Kamran. In this work Kamran gives a broad overview of the formation of the Election Commission and its role from British India times to about 2008, giving an overview of how the Election Commission 'failed recurrently to assert its legal and moral authority vis-à-vis bureaucracy and military whenever elections are held in Pakistan' (Kamran, 2009). Here while Kamran argues for the strengthening of the Election Commission, as we do, he does not actually go through the realities of

election day or the process it entails, and mainly focuses on the political aspects of the working of the Election Commission. The literature on elections in Pakistan therefore ignores the importance and impact of what actually happens on election day, and hence an analysis needs to be undertaken of the dynamics of election day so as to better understand the processes and their relation to the electoral process and democracy in the country.

The general elections 2013 were especially significant in several ways. First, it was the first time a democratic government was to pass on the baton to another democratically elected government in Pakistan. Secondly, the number of voters was 86 million, making it the biggest election till date according to the Post Election Review Report 2013 published by the Election Commission of Pakistan (2013, p. 5). Thirdly, in terms of the political parties too, the lead up was fiercely contested with three so-called big parties participating country-wide instead of the usual two. The post election euphoria has also distinguished these elections from the earlier ones and therefore academic research on the elections has become particularly important.

This paper is primarily based on election monitoring by the authors in the National Assembly seat of NA 145, Okara II, and the corresponding Punjab Provincial Assembly seat of PP-186. The district of Okara is in central Punjab and is a semi-urban area. With a mix of urban and rural areas, this constituency was a good choice for election monitoring since it enabled the authors to understand the election process both in the urban and rural milieus. The constituency had a total number of 230 polling stations spread over three sub-divisions namely Okara, Renala Khurd and Depalpur, making it a geographically large and varied area (The Gazette of Pakistan, 2013). The last two elections, 2002 and 2008, in the constituency had yielded interesting results with the winner, on each occasion, winning by a clear majority (Punjab Lok Sujag, 2012). This election monitoring was also different from other such teams as the authors had unprecedented access to the returning officer and his staff and were therefore able to assess the election from that vantage point.

This article argues that in order to organize a successful election it is the technicalities of the electoral process that needs to be streamlined first. The 2013 elections were mired with allegations of rigging, which still continue in one form or another, and a number of these would not have been raised if the election had been conducted in a better manner on the day itself. Improving the conduct of elections itself, the authors believe, is a major step in the democratic process in Pakistan. During their monitoring the authors identified several areas of concern, which are discussed below, followed by policy recommendations which stem from these areas of concern, which, if implemented, will substantially improve the electoral process in Pakistan.

Areas of Concern

I Pre-Election Screening

Elections were scheduled for May 11, 2013 but the screening for the aspirants of candidature in front of the additional district and sessions judges, the designated reporting officers, began weeks before that as they were to meet the conditions laid down in Article 62 and 63 of the Constitution of Pakistan. These yardsticks, as often is the case, were not standardized. In some constituencies candidates had to recite verses from the Holy Quran and in some they had to answer general knowledge questions usually asked from 5th graders.

Due to extensive public interest in these ‘mini trials’ for eligibility and subsequent media coverage, ludicrous scenes were reported at several places where candidates read the wrong verse or could not answer really simple 5th grade questions. In NA 145, candidates were trying to knock the opposition out even before the election day. Lawyers were hired to question the eligibility of the candidates citing their foreign/dual nationality, old court cases, and fake degrees, among others. The returning officer at NA 145 though did not disqualify anyone except one with a British citizenship who could not produce sufficient documents to indicate that he had applied for the revocation of his foreign citizenship. During the scrutiny, the trial room was full of people, a major portion being that of the general public and the people present seemed to enjoy seeing the usually powerful people having to prove their innocence in the witness box.

II Election set-up

One of the first things which became clear during the monitoring process was that there were no clear rules and checks on the selection of a polling station or booth. In the 2013 elections, the local district and sessions judge was made the returning officer contrary to the promise in the National Judicial Policy 2009 (Law and Justice Commission, 2009, p. 10). Assisting him were the sub-ordinate additional district and sessions judges and the presiding officers of polling stations were to be gazetted government officers appointed by the returning officer’s team in collaboration with the heads of other government departments. With no time specially set aside for elections work, most judges did not get any time to focus on the election preparations. The aforementioned National Judicial Policy 2009 also focused on the disposal of old cases and one of its consequences seen thus far is that workload of the district judiciary had increased manifold and therefore little time could be spared for election work before the day itself. According to the information gathered, the process for selecting a polling station was that the returning officer would call the local revenue officer who in turn would ring the local police station to check up on a proposed polling station. No one from the returning officer’s office would go to re-check the choice of the station. The returning officer said: ‘According to the instructions of the Election Commission of Pakistan we had to go and check the condition of the polling stations but due to

the lack of time and the meagre resources (Rs 10,000 petrol budget for the entire elections) it was not possible to check all the 200 plus polling stations' (Returning Officer NA 145, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Hence, the decision was based on trusting that both the revenue officials and the local police honestly completed their duties. The reality, of course, was quite different.

The presiding officer's duty was to collect the required stationery and allocated cash from the returning officer's office and take it to the polling station. They were given Rs. 1850 in which they had to arrange a labourer to carry the election day apparatus to the polling station, a peon to do the cleaning, and water for the staff at the polling station (Returning Officer NA 145, personal communication, May 12, 2013). A presiding officer, who was the District Forest Officer, a very significant position, stated that his polling station was a government primary school and that when he 'reached there, there was no one to receive me. Since the school's boundary wall was not that high, I climbed over it. There were two rooms in the school. In one of the rooms the ceiling had caved in, while in the other there was a dead cow.' The officer was so incensed by the arrangements that he vowed never to consent to this duty again. 'I will resign before doing this again,' he exclaimed (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 197, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Infrastructure issues affected many polling stations and adversely affected the smooth running of the election. With the election officers restless and tense [most presiding officers went to their stations the night before the elections], their ability to manage an election was automatically compromised. Most election officers complained that they did not have electricity, fans, beds, proper toilet facilities, and other such basic amenities especially in the remote polling stations. One interesting observation was that the female presiding officers, mostly from the education department, had brought their relatives to help them out in what seemed to them as an impossible task. One female presiding officer, originally from Lahore, was accompanied by her mother, and she avowed: 'I have troubled my entire family for the past two days and would never even think of doing this duty again and next time I would not turn up even if it means the lodging of an inquiry against me' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 151, personal communication, May 12, 2013). With most presiding officers unhappy with the conditions they were working in, with not even the basic facilities present in most polling stations, the proper conduct of an election was already compromised.

III Selection of Presiding Officers

As the Election Commission of Pakistan does not have its own staff to conduct elections, it relies on government employees to conduct the elections. Most of these employees are chosen at random for election 'duty' and are usually not allowed the option of refusal. In 2013, due to previous experience, most government officers were reluctant to perform this additional duty. The returning officer in the NA 145 constituency noted: 'The selection of presiding officers was

South Asian Studies 30 (2)

particularly tough and we received dozens of recommendations every day from all sorts of quarters requesting us to drop the name of a certain officer. Therefore, education being the least resourceful of departments provided the biggest work force' (Returning Officer NA 145, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The returning officer further opined that more than 80% of those interviewed were extremely unhappy that they had to do this 'duty.' For example, the presiding officer from polling station No. 73 said that 'the duty was too demanding. I am an old man with diabetes, and cannot do such work' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 73, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Similarly, the presiding officer from polling station No. 137 said that 'I had to deal with non-cooperative staff, the experience was awful, I will never do it again' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 137, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Another woman presiding officer from polling station No. 110 said: 'It was a horrible experience. There is no chance of my doing it again' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 110, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The presiding officer of polling station No. 34 also noted: 'It is a very difficult job. I would never do it voluntarily' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 34, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Repeatedly we heard from the presiding officers that they had the worst experience of their lives mainly due to the harsh conditions, security, and voter behaviour but also because a number of them never wanted to do this duty in the first place.

IV Law and Order

In Pakistan elections are a significant law and order issue. Violence during the election campaign and on voting day is a usual feature. Therefore, routinely the police, paramilitary forces, rangers, and even the army, are called in to protect the process. During the election day we also interviewed a deputy superintendent of police [DSP] about the security plan for the elections. The DSP stated that it was very difficult to make a fool proof security plan for any constituency because 'there are about 800 police personnel in the district, whereas the number of polling stations is around 1110' (DSP Renala Khurd, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Therefore he said that it was extremely difficult for the police to provide adequate security to all polling stations, as they do not even have the strength to deploy one policeman per polling station. He also noted that during the election period the resources of the district police are automatically stretched beyond reasonable bounds, and so providing security to all the polling areas is almost impossible. Reflecting on how the security could improve he suggested that, 'perhaps polling should be done in phases, so that the police could be redeployed within the district depending on where the election is being held' (DSP Renala Khurd, personal communication, May 12, 2013).

The above interview explains why the army and paramilitary were involved in the election process, they were called in simply because the police did not have the capacity to provide security to all polling areas. This meant that, in a way, army

involvement, and hence interference, was mandated by the fact that the whole election process was carried out on the same day, which overwhelmed the capacity of the local police, leading to the involvement of the army. There was an army cantonment in Okara and young captains were leading the mobile escorts, which were in constant contact with the returning officer's office. 'All went fine and I am happy that we did not have a major security problem in a widely stretched constituency,' remarked a young captain, in charge of NA- 145 area (Army Captain In charge NA 145, personal communication, May 12, 2013).

V Impression of Female Voters

Before assessing the general behaviour of the voters, it is essential to separately discuss the impression the election monitors and the presiding officers of female voters. One of the most interesting incidents was reported by the presiding officer of polling station No. 203, where she mentioned that the women voters were so uninformed that they put their stamp on the goat instead of the lion [which they had publicly declared they were voting for] simply because they could not differentiate between the pictures. The presiding officer noted: 'I am all for democracy, but how can such clueless people vote? What does this mean for democracy?' she retorted (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 203, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The female presiding officer from polling station No. 110 noted that in her station women voters were very rowdy, something that started at 11am and got to a peak around 4pm when they began to openly fight amongst each other. 'There should be combined polling stations for men and women. Stand alone polling station for women are extremely hard to manage,' the presiding officer contended (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 110, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The presiding officer of polling station No. 84 also echoed the same remarks, and added that while polling booths could be separate, both men and women should vote within the same area. Similarly, the presiding officers at polling stations No. 126, 151, and 74 reported continuous trouble with female voters.

When the impressions of the presiding officers were further investigated it became clear that almost all problems with female voters occurred in the rural parts of the constituency. In the urban areas, female voting passed with little incident. It appeared that men [polling agents, family member or relatives] in the rural parts of the constituency were bringing in bus loads of women to the polling station and directing them to vote for a particular person. Since the women did not know who the person was they would simply direct them to stamp the 'sher'—'lion' or 'balla'—bat—representing the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz and the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf respectively. The behaviour of these women during the voting process clearly showed how uninformed and distant they were from the election process and how they were simply following orders of their menfolk. Since women voters formed a substantial part of even just the rural vote, this behaviour raises serious questions about the election process.

VI General Comments on Voters

Since the presiding officers interacted with the voters through practically over twelve hours, their impressions of the voters and their behaviour was stronger than the election monitors. Almost all presiding officers had similar views about the voters, making their assessment significant. For example the presiding officer of polling station No. 137 noted that most voters at his station did not know anything about voting. He remarked: 'they did not seem interested in voting, but were looking around to pick a fight' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 137, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The presiding officer complained that with a large number of fights, and several breaking out in front of him, he could not ascertain the real reason or motive behind them. He seemed to think that either it was a previous quarrel which was being sorted out at the election station or that they simply 'liked' to fight. A woman presiding officer complained that in her polling station a police officer who had come in to stop a fight among a group of women was in fact beaten up and stripped by the women. Another woman presiding officer complained that polling agents [representatives of the candidates at the station] used the opportunity to tease female voters, which usually led to a fight. This of course adversely affected security and the ease with which women could vote.

Throughout the interviews of the presiding officers it was clear that a vast majority of them considered the voters as 'jungle,' 'illiterate,' 'uninformed,' and with a 'mob mentality.' These views, together with the fact that it was clear to the presiding officers that the people were voting according to 'biradari' [clan], made a number of them question the whole exercise itself. In short, as Wilder concluded for the voter behaviour in the Punjab in 1993, the political and the sociological determinants were the main reasons of voting in the 2013 elections too, including the mixed rural-urban constituencies of NA 145 and PP 186.

VII Post Poll Processes

After an extraordinarily hectic day, the presiding officers had the most important task of taking the result back to the office of the returning officer for the final vote count. The returning officer with the help of his team comprising of fellow judges and lower staff of the court had divided amongst themselves the duties of collection of feedback from the presiding officers and counting the result.

The compilation of results, which the authors witnessed from the office of the returning officer himself, also threw open many questions. Most presiding officers were too tired at the end of the day to properly count the votes and then submit them to the returning officer's office. 'I was really tired and didn't have the physical or the mental strength to bring the results back to the RO Office, so I called my husband for help' (Presiding Officer Polling Station No. 121, personal communication, May 12, 2013). Some presiding officers just came and dumped their results in the front office of the returning officer and simply left. Others were so helpless in their remote polling station that they returned just before the

morning prayers of the next day resulting in a delay in the official pronouncement of results. There was simply no process through which the compilation of results and the safeguarding of the ballot papers was to be done, it was all adhoc and dependant on the mood of the staff.

After the final, though unofficial, result of the constituency, the victorious candidate from the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz celebrated within the court premises [something which was illegal] and the runner ups [from the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf and the Pakistan Peoples Party] congratulated the winner. At the national level too, both the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf greeted Nawaz Sharif as the winner of the elections(Boone, 2013). But this proverbial sportsmanship did not remain for long.

Policy Recommendations

Stemming from the elections monitoring several important policy recommendations can be made. All of these recommendations are critical if the process of elections—the bedrock of democracy—is to be made credible and sustainable. Democracy will never prosper in Pakistan unless the basics of the electoral process are streamlined.

First, the Election Commission needs to be made into a permanent body, which operates year round. At the moment it is a body which only comes into action near the elections; outside the elections it is mostly dormant. Here one can take the example of the Election Commission of India which is operational year round(Quraishi, 2014). The fact that there are always some state level elections in India every year means that the Commission remains active throughout the year and has current experience and memory of the conduct of elections. This factor gives it continuous experience and opportunity to upgrade its expertise and methods and also takes away the gaps in institutional memory through the transfer and retirement of officers. In Pakistan, provincial elections are usually tied to national elections, which further limits the activity of the Election Commission beyond a small period. The advent of local bodies elections, which are being held at different time periods in each of the provinces, will enable the Commission to remain active beyond the general election, but the practice of an active Election Commission needs to be enshrined in its rules of business and actualized.

Secondly, the Election Commission of Pakistan needs to be completely independent and should have full and ultimate control over government functionaries during the election period. This factor will enable it to organise the elections according to its own assessments. For example, not only is the Election Commission the ultimate authority in election matters in India, it also controls the bureaucracy for the election period. S. Y. Quraishi, the former Chief Election Commissioner of India noted in an interview: ‘The courts can’t intervene in our working in any manner. The constitution guarantees this non-interference that many subsequent court rulings have further reinforced. That gives us the required agility...Then we assume total control over bureaucracy, cutting its links with the

South Asian Studies 30 (2)

political governments completely. We purge the entire state machinery of political bias by ordering transfers and postings following our own assessments of each individual functionary or in response to complaints...'(Dawn, 2014). This measure of independence means that the Election Commission and its orders are taken seriously and the officials under its authority, even for a short time, are careful and cognizant of its power.

Thirdly, the Election Commission should itself scrutinize the candidates for elections through clear and transparent criteria. The current process, based on two articles of the constitution gives a lot of leverage to the returning officer. If the returning officer does not like a particular candidate or wants to humiliate him or her, it is easily possible. Therefore a clear interpretation of the said articles of the constitution needs to be sought through the Supreme Court of Pakistan and then that judgment applied on all cases so that personal biases and frivolous objections could be dealt with. Getting rid of your opponents is a way of pre-poll rigging and the standardization of this process will lead it to become more fair and transparent.

Fourthly, the Election Commission should recruit a permanent voluntary corps of presiding officers and other staff which are required for the election day process. Drafting people to do this 'duty' against their will prevents a smooth conduct of elections since these officers are simply concerned with the day passing by rather than working for the improvement of the electoral experience. This voluntary corps needs to be recruited, updated, trained and maintained every year so that current knowledge and expertise and new people are brought in periodically. This will ensure that the election officers are only those who are actually interested in the process and will happily, and energetically, aid the smooth running of the elections. The indifferent attitude of several returning officers was certainly the cause of several delays and minor irregularities, issues which could have been easily avoided if only interested personnel were inducted for election day duty. Further, the continuation of this process will also reduce the chances of politically motivated and influenced election officials from being inducted, since lists would be kept and updated outside election time where politicking by politicians among officials is at a minimum.

Fifthly, the election staff should be adequately and properly trained in election procedures. Several presiding officers complained about the lack of training, both for them and for other staff. This training should begin at least two weeks before the start of the election so that any last minute queries can be answered and arrangements made. Almost all election staff was given only a short briefing the day before the election leaving little time for any questions and further arrangements. All staff should be appointed and trained a fortnight beforehand, together with a visit of the proposed polling station so that they are acquainted with their surroundings, and even suggest improvements etc, well before the election day.

Sixthly, a more pro-active Election Commission with its own staff should select and verify polling stations. The staff of the Election Commission itself

should maintain a list of all viable polling stations and visit them personally to ensure the basics. The maintenance of a permanent list, which should be updated yearly, would ensure that at the time of the next election this process will not begin anew and with periodic verification of the facilities at each polling station the chances of a substandard station would be hugely minimized. With election staff at times required to stay overnight at these places, efforts need to be made so that at least the basics are available at each polling station and that presiding officers do not have to battle mosquitoes, dead cows and unsanitary conditions. A welcoming, clean, and properly equipped polling station will not only improve the environment of the station itself—something which several presiding officers complained about—but will also aid a more peaceful conduct of the election.

Seventhly, the elections must be held in phases. This will ensure that adequate security personnel are deployed at each polling station as well as properly trained staff. Almost all security personnel the authors spoke to pointed out their inability to provide security to most polling stations due to a lack of resources and personnel. If the elections are held in phases, then redeployment of the police within a district or division would be easily possible and more personnel would be able to aid in the security of the process. Furthermore, phased elections would also mean a limited use of the army and other paramilitary forces, thus stemming their actual interference in at least the electoral process. Phased elections are already the norm in India and have proved to be less violence and confusion prone, and therefore need to be introduced in Pakistan.

And eighthly, the post election processes need to be strengthened. In this regard, the polling agents of the all the candidates need to certify that they were satisfied with the conduct of the election at their polling station or be allowed to file an immediate complaint. One of the main problems with the allegations of rigging in Pakistan is that they are made much later than the election day. This means that no one questions the fact that very few polling agents—the men of the candidate on the ground, ever made such allegations. Taking the example of NA 145 and its corresponding provincial assembly seat PP 186, not a single polling agent from either the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf or any other political party made any allegation of rigging on election day—they were made weeks later. The timely reporting of allegations, if any, and most importantly the signing off of all polling agents on the conduct of elections in a particular polling station, will help not only in the better carrying out of the election itself, but also stem the later allegations of rigging. A similar process of reporting must also be introduced for the presiding officers so that they could also officially report their experience and file any complaints. As it was, most presiding officers were too tired after compiling the results and just wanted to go home after handing them in. If they are given 48 hours to file a one-page report on their polling station it would facilitate proper monitoring, assessment, and future improvement of the process. It would also aid in investigation, if any allegations of rigging are filed for that polling station or constituency. Furthermore a more organized process needs to be developed for the reception of the voting numbers at the returning officers' office as well the safety

of the bags of votes. A well-labelled storeroom with dedicated staff and record would certainly help in this endeavour. A number of rigging allegations stemmed from post poll processes and so they need to be streamlined and made more transparent.

Conclusion

Elections are ultimately about the choice the voters make. Though there were a few shocking results in 2013, like the loss of the local religious leader and an ex-minister from his home polling station which covered an area which included his ancestral shrine, these exceptions were too few and far in between. This election monitoring clearly showed how in a majority of cases voters did not have the option of making an ‘informed choice.’ Voters either blindly voted on the basis of their caste [as several scholars have already shown] or, as evident in the case of several women polling stations, on whatever their menfolk told them. The concept of a free and informed choice did not exist in these areas. Hence the nature of the 2013 elections and the changes, if any, in terms of voting patterns and voting behaviour needs to be further examined.

Furthermore, the claims of rigging on the basis of the lacunas in the set up may be difficult to prove and blown out of proportion by a single political party, but that should not deviate one’s attention from the lacunas itself. The delay in the working of appeal tribunals and the ten-month delay in the recently published Election Commission of Pakistan’s review report create doubts among the masses (Post Election Review Report, 2013). While the allegations of rigging only surfaced months after the elections, their effect on the economy of Pakistan let alone the political milieu has been considerable, especially through the campaigns started by the Pakistan Tekrik-e-Insaf. While the authors saw little credibility in the rigging allegations post-hoc in the NA 145 and PP 186 constituencies, the election day process itself needs to dramatically improve for such allegations to be addressed at an early stage completely. Pakistan has had very few free and fair elections and hardly any ‘credible’ elections where voters can make a free and informed choice. They should be backed up by sustainable electoral reforms, including and beyond those suggested above, which would ensure that the ‘free and informed choice’ does not come under the scanner for legitimacy due to local irregularities in the conduct of the elections. Pakistan’s democratic transition will never be complete unless these critical and primary changes take place.

References

- Baxter, Craig. (1971) “Pakistan Votes—1970,” *Asian Affairs* 11: 197-218.
- Boone, J. (2013, May 13). Pakistan elections: PTI’s Imran Khan fails to make expected gains. *The Guardian*.
- Dawn. (2014, May 14). Why is the election commission effective in India. *Dawn epaper*.
- Election Commission of Pakistan. (2013) *Post Election Review Report 2013*. Government Report, Islamabad: Election Commission of Pakistan.

- Government of Pakistan. (2013) *The Gazette of Pakistan 2013*. Islamabad: Authority.
- Hussain, S. A. (2015). *Power Failure: The Political Odyssey of a Pakistani Woman*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Kamran, T. (2009). *Election Commission of Pakistan: Role in Politics*. Lahore : South Asia Partnership.
- Law and Justice Commission. (2009) *National Judicial Policy 2009*. Islamabad: Secretariat, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan.
- National Judicial Policy 2009* (2009) Islamabad: Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan
- Post Election Review Report*. (2013) Islamabad: Election Commission of Pakistan.
- Punjab Lok Sujag. (2012). *The Pakistan Election Compendium 2002-2008*. Lahore: Punjab Lok Sujag.
- Quraishi, S. (2014). *An Undocumented Wonder*. New Delhi : Rupa.
- Rais, R. B. (1985). Elections in Pakistan: Is Democracy Winning. *Asian Affairs* , 43-61.
- Waseem, M. (2006). *Democratization in Pakistan: A study of 2002 Elections*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Weinbaum, M.G. (1977). The March 1977 Elections in Pakistan: Where Everyone Lost. *Asian Affairs*, 599-618.
- Wilder, Andrew. (1999) *The Pakistan Voter: Electoral Behaviour in the Punjab*. Karachi : Oxford University Press.

Biographical Note

Dr. Yaqoob Khan Bangash Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences and Director of the Centre for Governance and Policy, IT University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Mian Sarmad Hussain Research Associate at the Centre for Governance and Policy, IT University of the Punjab, Lahore.
