

The Need for Reforms in the Light of 2013 Report of the Election Commission of Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Pakistan has struggled to develop a legitimate and stable constitutional order since it gained independence from British rule. An important aspect of this problem has been the persistent inability of Pakistani governments to conduct elections that are sufficiently fair at the procedural level so that the losing parties concede the legitimacy of the outcome. Since 2008, Pakistan has experienced two election cycles (2013/2018) and has witnessed the promising development of periodic change of civilian leadership through the ballot box. In spite of this, however, each election cycle has brought with it allegations of pre-poll and poll-day rigging, maladministration of the electoral process, and a refusal to accept the outcome as legitimate on part of the losing parties. The result is that the electoral process in Pakistan generally fails to produce the required sense of democratic legitimacy and the government is beset by challenges to the authenticity of its mandate. This paper contends that the 2013 elections and the subsequent report of the Election Commission of Pakistan lays bare the relationship between civilian administrative failure and the highly problematic conduct of elections. Unless this failure is addressed mere repetition of the electoral exercise will not produce a greater degree of democratic legitimacy for the winners.

Introduction

Since the first elections on the basis of universal suffrage were held in the Punjab in 1951, allegations of systematic and widespread abuse of the electoral process have undermined Pakistan's efforts to build a stable constitutional democracy. The 1956 Electoral Reforms Commission estimated that administrative interference in the 1951 elections in the Punjab proved critical in securing Muslim League victories in about fifty constituencies (Electoral Reform Commission, 1956). Under military regimes open

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manipulation of the elections or questionable referendums designed to ensure strongmen some democratic legitimacy have been the norms. Under civilian dispensations, expectations of fairness being greater, and the administrative capacity of such governments being weaker, elections have time and again proven controversial. These controversies have repeatedly brought down, or threatened to bring down, elected governments and greatly strengthened non-democratic forces, including the military, in Pakistan's politics. Expectations were that a freer electronic and print media, a louder and more assertive civil society, and Pakistan's breathtaking telecommunications revolution, all of which are legacies of General Musharraf's modernist military regime (Oct. 1999-Aug. 2008), combined with the major political parties agreeing to a Charter of Democracy (2006) to avoid the mistakes of the 1980s and 1990s, would yield more credible elections. These expectations were disappointed in the May 2013 General Elections, which, while they saw through Pakistan's first ever democratic transfer of power from one civilian government to another, were marred by allegations of rigging and electoral malpractice by the second most popular party, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan. The PTI had emerged as an alternative to the dynastic mainstream parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), promising to empower the educated middleclass, end the traditional nexus of patronage, nepotism, and corruption that had come to characterize other political parties, and build a sovereign, dynamic, and economically progressive "New Pakistan". Much hype was created about the political "tsunami" that would wash away the old world and enable a democratic revolution to take place in Pakistan.

The results of the May 2013 exercise proved disappointing for the PTI. The PML-N retained control of the Punjab and gained control of the federal government as it emerged as the single largest party with a simple majority. The PML-N won 129 general seats, secured the allegiance of 19 independent Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), and managed to nominate 6 minorities representatives and 35 women's representations, for a total of 189 seats out of 342. The PPP secured a total of 46 seats in the National Assembly, while the PTI managed only 34. (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013) The PPP, having performed worse than any elected government in Pakistan's history, lost the center but managed to keep control of its traditional power base – the province of Sindh. In Balochistan, an assortment of nationalist and centrist parties and independents were elected. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the PTI emerged as the single largest party but had to form a coalition with the fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) to get enough seats to form a government. Adding injury to injury, while the PTI secured the second largest share of the popular vote, it came it at third position in terms of the number of seats won in the National Assembly. This was because Pakistan has a First

Past the Post (FPTP) system in which the candidate with the single largest number of votes in a constituency wins the seat. This means that it is not necessary for a party to win the majority of votes to secure victory in any given constituency. It also means that parties that get edged out, sometimes by a few thousand votes, end up with no representation in a winner-take-all system. Thus, in the 2013 General Elections, the PML-N received 14.87 million votes and bagged 189 seats, while the PTI received 7.7 million votes and secured 27 contested seats, and the PPP got 6.9 million votes but got 37 contested seats. (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013). This meant that the PPP's Khurshid Shah became the leader of the opposition enabling the alleged PML-PPP bargain to continue only slightly impeded by the PTI's bluster.

The PTI's response was predictable. It pointed out numerous irregularities in the elections. And it asked for the votes cast in just four constituencies to be recounted/investigated arguing that if no irregularity was demonstrated it would stand down but that if its allegations proved correct the audit would have to be extended to other constituencies. The PML-N government, just as predictably, ignored these demands or executed procedural and legal maneuvers to delay the PTI calculating that eventually the allegations would fade into oblivion. And for a year the PML-N strategy succeeded – by June 2014, it appeared that the PTI was running out of options and that the strategy of delay was working for the ruling party. Then, on June 17, 2014, activists of the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT)/Minhaj-ul-Quran were gunned down by the Punjab Police in the context of the return of their leader, Tahir-ul-Qadri, from Canada. Tahir-ul-Qadri had earlier made waves in 2013 when he staged a sit-down (*dharna*) in the heart of Islamabad's commercial district demanding revolutionary changes to the political system. This attempt was handled deftly by the PPP, which let him protest to his heart's content from the safety and warmth of a luxury container while his followers languished in the January cold. Qadri, however, vowed to return and decided to do so in June 2014. The Model Town Massacre energized not only the Pakistan Awami Tehreek, but also gave the PTI's campaign a new lease of life. The two parties combined forces, threatened a march on the capital unless their demands were met, and then proceeded to carry out this threat when the government refused to take them seriously. The crisis that followed, with protests, marches, and sit-ins in the heart of Islamabad's government district that dragged on for months, gravely weakened the government by once again enabling the military to play a decisive role as arbiter. The PML-N went from ignoring the PTI and PAT to trying to physically prevent them from reaching Islamabad and much fun was made of the government's deployment of a ring of containers around the capital and in the Red Zone that houses the federal secretariat and other key official buildings. In the end, the expectations of the PAT and PTI that some sort of soft coup and fresh elections would secure for

them vengeance and a chance to form the next government were thwarted by the unwillingness of their leaderships to march on the Prime Minister's House and force a showdown that would have entailed loss of life. Pakistan's educated middleclass turned out to want a revolution without behaving like real revolutionaries. By November 2014, the crisis had abated with promises of a judicial commission to probe the May 2013 elections. With this, the PML-N was able to feel confident that it would complete its tenure in government (even the prime minister's ouster, in 2017, due to the Panama Leaks and subsequent judicial process, did not lead to early elections).

While the PTI's attacks on the PML-N and PPP got immense coverage and provided easy pickings for a ratings-crazed media, developments on the local government front have ended up discrediting Pakistan's would be reformers. Practically all media channels gave the sits 24/7 coverage, with prime-time programming focused on speeches by the PTI leader Imran Khan and the PAT's Tahir-ul Qadri. Local bodies elections held in KP in 2015 were marred by irregularities and the provincial opposition parties formed an alliance against the PTI. Embarrassingly for the PTI leadership, its coalition partner, the JI, also joined the chorus of criticism. While Pakistan's central government no doubt enjoyed the spectacle of the PTI being criticized for rigging and/or mismanaging elections, the experience of election administration over the past decade in Pakistan has raised serious doubts about the credibility of Pakistan's democracy and the viability of Pakistan's civilian dispensation. It should also be noted that the results of the 2018 elections, which produced a PTI victory, saw a role reversal, whereby the PML-N and PPP cried foul and declared Imran Khan to be the "Selected", as opposed to elected, prime minister. Just as predictably, the winning party deemed the electoral process satisfactory.

Given the amount of rhetoric involved from all sides, it is important that some evidentiary basis be established for determining the extent and pattern of rigging in 2013 and what it means for Pakistan's democracy. Here the barrage and counter-barrage of testimony and opinions leaves the researcher with very few credible sources. Of these sources, however, the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) internal report on the 2013 elections, which was ready by December 2013 but only released by the government in September 2014 under pressure from the PTI and PAT protestors, helps establish some basic facts about what went wrong in 2013. The credibility of the report can be gauged by the fact that it was written by a committee of civil servants chaired by Additional Secretary Syed Sher Afghan and that these civil servants had absolutely no reason to be unnecessarily critical of the government. Indeed, under Pakistan's arbitrary governance civil servants have every incentive to help the government cover up scandals and shortcomings. The credibility of this report is further augmented by the PTI's

belief that it supports its view on the 2013 elections. While the report does not endorse the view of any political party it does establish the fact of widespread irregularities, which, the PTI was eager to interpret as evidence of a conspiracy hatched by the PML-N. The report also incorporates the views of observer missions and local civil society organizations that were engaged in monitoring the elections.

While the PTI was keen on treating any examination of the 2013 elections as a matter of fixing blame for a conspiracy, what is far more troubling is that the ECP report establishes *the inability of the Pakistani state to conduct elections in a manner consistent with constitutional provisions requiring them to be free and fair*. This inability is not the result of any particular master plan to hijack elections but the consequence of Pakistan's administrative decay and the depletion of civilian capacity to the point where sheer incompetence trumps everything else. Unless Pakistan takes urgent and decisive steps to rehabilitate its civil service it won't be able to conduct credible elections and the civilian set-up will remain vulnerable to disruption and crises of legitimacy. After all, democratic stability comes only when the parties losing elections accept the result as fair and consequently bide their time in opposition till the next electoral contest. The fact that Pakistan's political parties were, and are, divided into two broad camps, with the winners calling the elections acceptable and the losers saying that they were rigged hardly inspires confidence in the viability of democracy in Pakistan. What is alarming is that no party in Pakistan has shown any real interest, once it is in power, to bring about meaningful improvement of the electoral process or broader positive reform of the civil service structure especially by way of making it more autonomous of the political leadership. Most recently, the attempt of the ruling PTI to compel the Chief Election Commissioner to accept the nominations of two members of the Election Commission who had been approved without consulting the leader of the opposition has led to a renewed standoff. (*Dawn*, August 24, 2019) Even if the government is forced to back down, it betrays a lack of understanding of how important it is for its own legitimacy to build credible electoral processes and institutions.

The Apparatus of the 2013 Elections

The Election Commission of Pakistan acts the central secretariat of the election process and was responsible for the organization, deployment, and reporting, of 650,000 election staff distributed across 70,000 polling stations in May 2013. (Election Commission of Pakistan: 2013). To place this figure in some context, the Pakistan armed forces are, all services included, approximately 700,000 strong, meaning that for the duration of the elections the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) commands (or is supposed to

command) a civilian apparatus almost as large as Pakistan's military. The number of election staff per polling station averaged 9.30, meaning that that unlike the military, which is deployed in concentrated large formations, the ECP has to manage a dispersed deployment, something requiring far greater administrative skill than that needed by the armed services chiefs. The vast majority of the staff is taken on loan from the local/provincial administration, with schools and colleges typically converted into polling centers. As education is, even by Pakistani standards, considered a weak department in administrative and professional terms and is highly politicized, training such a large number of persons is problematic, and discipline is weak. The scale of the polling exercise makes it impossible to effectively deploy sufficient security forces to ensure that the election staff has more firepower to draw upon than local political figures, which often have dozens of armed followers at their beck and call. The total strength of the Pakistan police, which is subdivided into regional police forces, was about 500,000, the paramilitary Pakistan Rangers numbered about 25,000, while the Frontier Corps and Frontier Constabulary numbered about 110,000. What this means is that if Pakistan were to deploy all of its policemen and paramilitaries to ensure the security of polling stations then the average force deployed per polling station would be 9.10. Almost any important politician running for a provincial seat or national assembly seat could muster more than 10 armed supporters – indeed, clout is often measured by how many licensed AK-47s are in the possession of a candidate's supports (unlicensed arms are another story).

Adding to the ECP's woes were its lack of senior officers – one Secretary, one Additional Secretary, two Directors-General, one Joint Secretary, and six Additional Directors-General, plus the four provincial election commissioners, were its administrative leadership. Imagine trying to command a conscripted military force of 650,000 personnel with about 15 staff officers with more than colonel rank. Now imagine that the force is divided at the time of operation into units of 10. And add to this the fact that none of the senior officers are specialists in the organization and administration of elections and are drawn from other services, such as the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) or the judiciary or even the army. Commanding such a large and dispersed force with a small central team is always going to be difficult but can be managed if the local administration is sufficiently cowed by the prestige and authority of the center to behave in an evenhanded manner at least in the casting and counting of votes and the announcement of results. In Pakistan, the police and provincial civil servants have generally more to fear from local influential figures than they do from the ECP or even their own bureaucratic hierarchies at election time. In Karachi, for instance, the deployment of Rangers was unable to stop the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which dominated Pakistan's largest city for decades, from openly obstructing the conduct of

elections in the upscale Defense Housing Authority (DHA) locality where many voters had turned pro-PTI. A re-poll was ordered but on its eve the PTI Sindh Chapter Vice President was murdered – allegedly by the MQM. If on the election day, the ECP and the administration could not stop the MQM from openly using coercion in the glare of the national media in DHA Karachi, it could not possibly have the ability to stop similar occurrences in less privileged areas of Karachi, or in rural Sindh where the PPP had, between 2008-2013, issued more than 400,000 arms licenses to its supporters. (*Dawn*, November 27, 2012).

Pakistan's election apparatus thus presents a very sorry picture. Too large and unwieldy to be effectively controlled by the center, too dispersed to be able to resist local pressures, lacking effective administrative control, and devoid of moral authority owing to earlier mismanaged and compromised elections, the instrument of electoral democracy was not up to the task of handling elections even in normal circumstances. Pakistan's circumstances, of course, were (and often are) far from normalcy.

The Election Apparatus of 2013 in Context

Conducting elections in Pakistan, where the state has lost/relinquished its monopoly on the organized means of use of force, places the election machinery and those contesting elections in great danger. In 2013, between the Pakistani Taliban, the MQM, the PPP, ethnic militias in Balochistan, sectarian outfits, and agents of land, drugs, and racketeering mafias, the ECP faced a daunting challenge. In parts of the country, such as KP, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) the Baloch-majority areas of Balochistan, and Karachi, the use of violence or threat of violence, effectively impeded the conduct of the election campaign. Compounding this difficulty was the unwillingness of political forces to adhere to the code of conduct and spending limits because of lax enforcement and the unwillingness of administrative officers to antagonize the party they thought likely to win. In this way election perceptions or the apparent strength of party presence might have turned into self-fulfilling prophecies (i.e. MQM will hold on to Karachi, PPP to rural Sindh, PML-N will triumph in the Punjab, Awami National Party (ANP) will lose in KP, etc.) as election administrators turned a blind eye to what was going on. Thus the PTI's conciliation of the Taliban gave it relative immunity while the ANP and PPP were unable to run effective campaigns in KP due to threats and attacks.

Then, there are more mundane problems, such as low levels of computer literacy, which hampers attempts at "smart" solutions to election problems. The civilian machinery moves slowly, if at all, even at the best of times, and delays in each little step (such as printing enough forms) can cumulatively

undermine efforts to make sure the material requirements for elections are in place. The lack of training in election procedures, the absence of a proper service to manage elections, and the difficulty of getting enough qualified personnel for more technical operations (like data entry) all mean that it would take at least a year to have a chance to organize a credible election. In actuality, the time frame is about 60 days from the end of the government's term to the next election. During this period an interim government takes over but it has to hit the ground running and simply doesn't have the political strength to oppose parties that are likely to be returned to power or have the ability to coerce voters.

The general trend of administrative decline and demoralization also emboldens elements set on abusing the electoral process. There is little reason for a young field officer to take on a PML-N leader in the Punjab or a PPP oligarch in rural Sindh given that he or she may soon be serving under their government. Elections require executives on the ground that are willing to take a stand on matters of integrity and take risks to ensure that the process is fair.

The 2013 Post-Election Report Findings

The Post-Election Report reveals that serious lapses took place at all levels of the election machinery. Without assigning blame, for its purpose was reformative and not punitive, the Report indicates that the election process was compromised by multiple administrative failures. In focusing on the administration of elections the Report remains neutral in its outlook towards political actors. Several of the findings merit further discussion on account of their importance to the viability of Pakistan's democracy.

First, at the central ECP a committee comprising members from accountability and financial institutions was responsible for scrutinizing the nominations filed by candidates. The inability of these same institutions to provide information and feedback in a timely manner created a bottleneck at the center that impeded processing further down the line. Returning Officers (ROs) "waited for information and could not proceed with their work, even though the deadline for submission of nomination papers was extended. The cell provided information after the scrutiny period was over." (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 20) The central ECP was also responsible for organizing the training of the election staff, particularly the Returning Officers. Here the Report states that not only were the necessary handbooks and training materials provided very late, but the trainers were "incompetent", and could not answer technical questions. (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 20) Thus, the Returning Officers were not trained in basic procedures and spent their entire training period (a mere two

days) listening to lectures on theory. In what can only be described as a serious lapse, the Returning Officers were not provided travel and daily allowances for the training days – an omission that would produce a deleterious effect on morale. The polling personnel did not know how to fill out the vital Form XIV and Form XV, which provide the final vote count and the final ballot count, respectively. On top of this, there wasn't a proper attendance list of those that needed to be trained with the result that the wrong people ended up in training sessions and many did not attend at all. Receiving their notifications a mere 15 days before the polls, polling staff were not provided transportation and as they had not been trained in groups organized by polling station didn't know or trust one another. As the list of polling stations was often outdated it enabled "influential candidates" to "have small buildings allocated as polling stations where they [feared] defeat; this way, the turnout is reduced at that polling station." (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 20) The link between the central ECP and the polling stations was to be provided by monitoring teams. These teams were supposed to inspect the polling arrangements and ensure that no violations took place. There were a few hitches though. One was "no resources were provided" to the monitoring teams, while another was that they were required to cover only 20% of their inspection zones and report in only once a week. (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 20) This rapidly turned the monitoring effort into a farce – practically no one adhered to campaign spending limits and inspection teams were accused of partiality whenever they tried to do their job.

Second, there were serious security lapses owing to poor coordination and vital information was not made available. The military's security plan for the election was not shared with those conducting the elections while the intelligence agencies did not carry out a single briefing of the election staff. Completely in the dark about real or potential threats, the police and paramilitary forces were stretched thin for "there was quite a crowd at polling stations and the numbers of security personnel assigned to each polling station were not sufficient to manage the crowd." (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 21)

Third, materials and resources needed by the polling staff were not provided in a timely and effective manner. The administration was unable to make basic arrangements for the polling staff. The funds provided to cover the election expenses were insufficient meaning the administrators had to improvise and cut corners. Even on the polling day "No food arrangements were made for the polling personnel". (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 22) Getting the documents and stationery needed by the polling staff proved too great a logistical feat for the Pakistani state to perform:

The cloth bags provided for storing ballot papers were too small and of poor quality. Similarly, most stationery items were of inferior quality... Form XIV was short of space for candidate names, so ROs had to develop their own forms. Bulk breaking took a long time because there was a lack of workers; ROs had only two [Assistant]ROs to help him/her. Transport arrangements for the delivery of election material to the polling stations and retrieval were problematic... There was a shortage of tamper evident bags, Form XIV and envelopes. Ballot papers were abnormally large in some constituencies, due to which, a shortage of ballot boxes was felt at some locations. (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, pp. 22-23)

Fourth, came the crisis situation on polling day itself. Without trained staff, the electronic Results Management System (RMS) installed with the help of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) caused unnecessary delay. Returning Officers were not told that polling had been extended till 6 PM leading to chaos and polling stations were closed to the public at 5 PM. Form XIV and XV were not properly filled out, and the combination of limited Internet access, inept data entry staff, and power cuts, left the RMS smart solution in disarray. To add to the confusion, ROs were first told to scan and feed the results into the RMS, and then told to submit the results manually. The Report observes, "RMS was slow in terms of communication with HQ. RMS was revised and reinstalled twice, which created confusion for the DEOs and ROs" which was hardly surprising given that it "did not function properly from the very first day of its installation". (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013 pp. 16, 35) Even as the electronic media was announcing winners on the basis of unofficial 1 percent vote counts, the breakdown of the RMS meant "no result was received during entire first night after poll in respect of Sindh Province. The DROs/ROs informed that result [was] being delayed as RMS system ran very slow." (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013, p. 15) Years after the 2013 elections, there is still no verified vote count, nor is it likely that there ever will be one.

The evidence provided by the ECP's own *Post-Election Report* makes it abundantly clear that there was administrative failure at nearly every level. The central command did not have control over the field units. The field units lacked resources, manpower, and even clear instructions. Training was hopelessly inadequate, logistics problematic, and the vote counting process basically broke down leaving an entire province (Sindh) with no official results being communicated for 24 hours after polls closed, and much of the rest of the country mired in controversy and recriminations over alleged wrongdoing.

The Report, to its credit, provides a list of 316 specific recommendations/reforms needed to improve the ECP's performance in time for the next elections. Practically all of the reforms are of an administrative nature, which

underscores the introspective orientation of the Report and its focus on improving the executive function in relation to elections. Since May 2013, however, no serious reform of the ECP or the broader civil service structure upon it necessarily depends, has been attempted and the 316 recommendations have remained largely on paper. (Election Commission of Pakistan: 2013) What has happened instead is that in place of improving the election machinery, Pakistan's political parties continue to try and score rhetorical points against each other enabling other actors, like the judiciary or military, to inject themselves into the political process. Indeed, in the 2018 General Elections the armed forces were actually called out to ensure security within polling stations. In essence, Pakistan's arbitrary democrats had, and have, no inclination to improve the conduct of elections and continue to bank on the weakness of the system to benefit themselves. The problem was that as the old PML-N/PPP status quo became increasingly untenable with the emergence of a political alternative in the form of the PTI, the inadequacy of the election machinery posed grave risks to democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

Implications of Refusing to Improve the Election Machinery

The 2015 experience with local government elections, which also generated controversy and allegations of abuse of power by the provincial ruling parties and the national government, indicated that Pakistan's ability to manage electoral processes needs considerable and sustained improvement. At the same time, the pliability of the electoral machinery and the vulnerability of civil servants to political pressure serve the short-term interests of ruling and opposition politicians. Complain as they might against each other, Pakistan's political class has little real interest in meaningful reform of the election system. The consequences of failing to reform, however, may well fall on the political class as a whole and a badly flawed election process is a serious liability for all actors interested in democratic consolidation and constitutional stability in Pakistan.

A democratic election can be said to be successful only when all the major parties, winners and losers, accept the legitimacy of the outcome. The winners go on to form the government, while the losers go into opposition and wait till the next opportunity at the polls. In Pakistan the first democratic national elections was held in 1970 and the losing party (the PPP) refused to accept the mandate of the victorious Awami League (AL). This facilitated Yahya Khan's military regime in its bid to hang on to power by exploiting differences between civilian leaders, but ended in civil war and the separation of East Pakistan. In March 1977, the opposition alliance refused to accept the outcome in favor of the PPP and restored to agitation. This enabled the

military takeover in July 1977, led to the overthrow of the PPP, and the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's first democratically elected premier. When military rule ended in 1988, the PPP and PML-N took turns bringing down each other's governments often dragging in the military to serve their ends and encouraging presidents to wield the Zia-era axe of Article 58(2)b of the Constitution and dismiss their opponents from office. Even after that Article was repealed, political persecution and instability culminated in General Musharraf's coup in October 1999. The next election held under civilian auspices took place in 2013, and produced a result that the second most popular party refuses to accept as legitimate, and no one, except the PML-N, was willing to defend as truly credible. The inability of civilian leaders to work out ways to bring about real improvement in the quality of the election machinery meant that the 2018 election cycle also became controversial. The ECP stood helplessly by as, according to the PML-N and PPP, the media was muzzled and the military brought in to ensure security at polling stations. This put a question mark on the election outcome, which favored the PTI. Since then, the PML-N and PPP have heaped scorn on the 2018 elections while the PTI has defended the result, with everyone unwilling to actually reform the electoral system.

Serious problems with the administration of elections undermine the procedural legitimacy that the elections ought to confer on the winning parties and encourage disillusionment with democratic methods. It is no surprise that survey after survey has found that Pakistan's young people, who account for 70% of its population, have little to no confidence in democratic institutions while they have very high regard for the military and religious institutions. Social mobility in Pakistan is enabled primarily by state service and the civilian bureaucracy, which also bears the brunt of the political leadership's appetite for patronage and arbitrariness, is an easy and almost natural ally of anti-democratic forces. While Pakistan's political class pats itself on the back for achieving democratic stability, they are, in structural terms, snow covering a volcano. The volcano will erupt if election cycles continue to pass without real change for the better for that would encourage the use of more aggressive approaches by parties seeking power and discourage the opposition from waiting till the end of the regular tenure to challenge the ruling party. This, in turn, will force the ruling party to continue to spend much of its energy on simply trying to complete its tenure. The surest way to manage to survive a full tenure is to avoid making difficult decisions while buying off the opposition and also to make no attempt to assert civilian supremacy over the defense forces and their role in determining Pakistan's foreign, defense, intelligence, and financial policies.

This leads to the performance problem. Without making difficult decisions it won't be possible to get Pakistan on track to the 7% per year

economic growth rate it needs to absorb the 35-40 million young people expected to enter the workforce over the next 10 years. It also won't be possible to raise literacy, ensure immunization programs succeed, implement population planning, and see to it that the tax net is equitably restructured. If democratic stability in Pakistan translates into governments that define success in terms of completing their tenure without performing while the country's demographic, economic, and environmental conditions continue to deteriorate, then that is a recipe for violent upheaval and collapse.

Pakistan seeks democracy while lacking the ability to manage elections in a professional and tolerably honest manner. The December 2013 *Post-Election Report* and the aftermath of the 2013 elections clearly demonstrate that administrative failures can undermine the validity of constitutional democracy in Pakistan. While it is in the collective interest of all democratic and constitutionalist forces to ensure that elections are as free and as fair as possible so that the legitimacy of the result is accepted across the political spectrum, cynical and self-serving calculations by the PML-N, the PPP, and now, it seems, also the PTI, have turned proposals for reform into little more than pious exhortations. It suits the wealthier and more powerful that the state's writ has become so weak that it cannot stop local notables and power brokers from breaking the rules of the game at will. What we are witnessing in Pakistan is the de-institutionalization of democratic processes due to the withering away of the state machinery. It doesn't really matter then if there was a conspiracy in 2013 or in 2018 because the civilian state machinery cannot stop anyone with a few dozen armed men and a few millions in extra cash from subverting the election process, while the ECP does not have the strength to punish deviations from democratic norms. If a reform agenda were to be adopted it will have to deal with both specific reforms of the election apparatus as well as broader reforms of the civilian state machinery. The net result of such reforms would be to reduce the ability of politicians to abuse the civilian state apparatus and treat civil servants whimsically while gradually professionalizing the apparatus over a the next generation. For that very reason, Pakistan's political class, desperate to preserve what it mistakenly believes to be the substance of power, i.e. the ability to interfere arbitrarily in the day-to-day civil administration, is unwilling to undertake reforms that may make democracy more stable in the long-term and actually set the stage for the gradual restoration of civilian supremacy.

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