**Conduct of elections**

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September 24, 2021

It is an unfortunate reality that contesting parties have invariably refused to accept the results of general elections, hurling allegations of rigging and using it as a pretext to destabilise the government thus formed, which sometimes has resulted in the derailment of the democratic process. In the backdrop of this recurring phenomenon, the insistence of the PTI government regarding reforming the electoral system and the mode of voting to make the process transparent and fair has great merit. However, notwithstanding the fact that the opposition parties also subscribe to the idea of electoral reforms, they are not prepared for any engagement with the government to settle this festering issue due to the persistent ambience of confrontation.

Electoral reforms is a political issue which needs to be resolved by evolving consensus between the government and opposition parties on changing the relevant laws and the mode of casting votes. If the government is sincere with regards to its stated objective of making elections transparent and fair and controversy-free, which I believe it is, then it should make all-out efforts to engage opposition parties at the appropriate level for holding serious deliberations and then legislating on agreed reforms. Going it alone and having the law pushed through the parliament on the basis of a majority is not going to resolve the core issue. Laws and decrees with regards to political issues have no meaning until and unless they are enacted through consensus of all stakeholders or at least the major players.

[Germans all set to vote for new parliament on Sunday](https://nation.com.pk/25-Sep-2021/germans-all-set-to-vote-for-new-parliament-on-sunday)

The government is adamant in using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in the next general elections whereas the opposition parties have their reservations on this mode of voting. The government is also engaged in a spat with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on the use of EVMs in the elections because of the objections raised by ECP on their possible use. Things should not have gone to the extent where they stand now. It was rather uncalled for to hurl allegations on the Election Commissioner of taking bribes from the opposition and speaking their language. One of the ministers also went to the extent of saying that such institutions should be burnt down. The ECP is a constitutional institution of the state and the Chief Election Commissioner was the nominee of PTI, appointed with the consensus of the opposition leader.

Democracy flourishes and gains strength when constitutional state institutions are given due respect and allowed to operate without any political pressure. The confrontation with the ECP on the use of EVMs, in my view, should not have happened in the first place. If we read the constitution, the ECP with regards to holding the elections, is bound to conduct them according to the law, which is an enactment of the parliament. Perhaps it would be pertinent to look at the duties of the ECP as enunciated in the constitution to understand the issue in a better way.

[Pakistan condemns extra judicial killings in IIOJK](https://nation.com.pk/25-Sep-2021/pakistan-condemns-extra-judicial-killings-in-iiojk)

Article 219 of the constitution stipulates the duties of the Election Commission with regards to the holding of elections to the National Assembly, provincial assemblies and local governments. According to clause (a) the commission is charged with preparing electoral rolls for election to the National Assembly, Provincial Assemblies and local governments and revising such rolls periodically to keep them up-to-date (b) organising and conducting elections to the Senate or to fill casual vacancies in a House of a provincial Assembly (c) appointing election Tribunals.

Article 218 (3) says “It shall be the duty of the Election Commission to organise and conduct the elections and to make such arrangements as are necessary to ensure that the election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law, and that corrupt practices are guarded against. Article 220 says “It shall be the duty of all executive authorities in the Federation and in the Provinces to assist the Commissioner and the Election Commission in the discharge of his or their functions.”

[PCMR urges ministry of religious affairs to show sympathy on forced conversions](https://nation.com.pk/24-Sep-2021/pcmr-urges-ministry-of-religious-affairs-to-show-sympathy-on-forced-conversions)

As is evident, the ECP is bound to perform its duties as per the powers conferred on it by law. If it is desired to change the mode of voting or bring any other reforms to be followed by the ECP, the foremost requirement is to build political consensus on it and then give it a legal configuration. Only an agreed reform agenda with regards to elections and the mode of voting can guarantee elections without controversy. My considered view is that the government should not have sought the opinion of the ECP with regards to use of EVMs, and should have rather tried to resolve the issue at the political level. If the opposition agrees to the use of EVMs it can be made a law foreclosing the possibility of the ECP or for that matter, any other institution raising any objections to it.

Reportedly, the government and the opposition have agreed on the formation of a committee on electoral reforms. The parliamentary representatives from the treasury and opposition met National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser on Tuesday and discussed with him issues related to electoral reforms. It was agreed that a committee comprising members from both houses would be constituted to work on various issues concerning electoral reforms. The speaker was authorised to nominate members of the Electoral Reforms Committee in consultation with parliamentary leaders following which motions would be moved in both houses for the formation of the proposed committee.

[Six terrorists killed in Balochistan IBO: ISPR](https://nation.com.pk/24-Sep-2021/six-terrorists-killed-in-balochistan-ibo-ispr)

It is an encouraging development and it is hoped that both the government as well as the opposition parties would avail this opportunity to make sincere efforts toward evolving consensus on electoral reforms, exhibiting flexibility, which is a hallmark of democratic norms. Personal egos and narrow political agendas should not be allowed to obstruct the process. It is an issue of supreme national interest and must be resolved once for all to ensure political stability in the country.