**Controversial elections**

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Recently Shahid Khaqan Abbasi an Ex-Prime Minister and stalwart of PML-N has been talking about ‘controversial elections’, interestingly of which his party is a product itself. In my entire innings of political activism, two incidents haunted me the most. First, the offer by Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, the then Chief Minister (CM) of Punjab to get the fourth usurper elected the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan while still in uniform. The entire thought was so outrageous that I decided to either contest myself or leave the country in protest. Even the mighty Ayub Khan was forced to relinquish his self-proclaimed rank of Field Marshal before contesting the 1965 Presidential Elections.

A writ had been prepared to challenge his military credentials, fearing embarrassment he stepped down but then promoted himself back again. Only small minds operate in this mode and most dictators expose themselves by such shallow acts. The second was the disqualification of my friend Sardar Ayaz Sadiq for election irregularities. Instead of tendering an apology to the nation in remorse, he decided to contest again and got re-elected using the same old controversial tactics and was back as Speaker in a triumphant comeback. He managed to win again from his home constituency of Lahore from where he was de-seated in the 2013 electoral contest.

[US ends sanctions, visa restrictions against International Criminal Court personnel](https://nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2021/us-ends-sanctions-visa-restrictions-against-international-criminal-court-personnel)

The Muslim League House located at 33 Davis Road, Lahore is the ‘Freemasons Lodge of Democracy’ which has been the incubator of ‘controversial politicians’ who then indulge in election irregularities. In the only free and fair elections of 1970, the big losers were establishment parties like the PML (Convention) and the Jamaat-e-Islami while the winners were Awami League and the People’s Party, both genuine political entities. Bhutto and some of his comrades spent a short time at the Muslim League House but then decided to launch their own party after parting ways with the dictator. Election reforms do not suit ‘controversial politicians’ as they themself are a product of controversy. While the world is moving in the direction of technology, Abbasi Sahib came out with a strange logic that if people can be hijacked, the machines can also be taken away. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are being used all over the world to ensure the credibility of the ballot. Only bonafide voters can cast their vote, which is then logged into a central device to be counted. Even if the EVM is whisked away, it can have a minimal impact on the election as stuffing ballot boxes will not be possible in this scenario.

[Biden vows US backing for Ukraine as Russia amasses](https://nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2021/biden-vows-us-backing-for-ukraine-as-russia-amasses)

The recent Senate elections are another big blot on our democratic order. There were credible intelligence reports that massive voter buyout had been planned by the opposition. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is now headed for the first time by a bureaucrat after the passage of the 1973 constitution; it was expected that the entire process would be conducted smoothly, but it was not despite repeated warnings of foul play. In the Daska by-elections, the Supreme Court has asked a very pertinent question about the deployment of Punjab Police instead of armed forces personnel. Every election since 1977 has been disputed with credible allegations of massive rigging with PML-N being a major beneficiary of this foul play, yet they have never been caught or punished for their misdeeds except for the three disqualifications after the 2013 elections. Ayaz Sadiq, Khawaja Saad Rafiq, and Jahangir Tareen’s opponent in Lodhran were all unseated by the election tribunals while Khawaja Asif survived on technical grounds.

[PIA decides to operate additional flights for UK till April 7](https://nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2021/pia-decides-to-operate-additional-flights-for-uk-till-april-7)

For democracy to flourish in the republic, credible elections are needed whose results are acceptable to all stakeholders. The legislature can then take its business seriously. After the July 1977 takeover, the focus was on neutralising grassroots support of Bhutto’s Peoples Party as it had delivered for the common man. Legislatures were filled with ‘democratic distortions’ like the Sharifs of Lahore and the Altaf Hussains of Karachi whose sole purpose was to derail the democratic order. Zia, the usurper openly talked about ‘positive results’ and his disrespect of the unanimously agreed constitution. Now his political heirs talk about running the country under the same document that they were created to flout. These double standards are mind boggling.

While the PML-N claims that the elections in 2018 were rigged to ensure PTI’s victory, they defend the 2013 contest in which they were able to get an absolute majority despite spontaneous protests that erupted that very day. Asif Zardari termed it as the election of the Returning Officers but when Kaptaan’s Long March in August 2014 knocked at the doors of the parliament, Mr Zardari came to save the system. The elections in 2018 were very peaceful as the Police were kept away from polling stations. The lawlessness in the recent by-elections were a result of the historical failure of the totally politicised civilian law enforcement agencies that have a history of backing PML-N.

[PDM decides to issue show-cause notice to ANP, PPP: sources](https://nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2021/pdm-decides-to-issue-show-cause-notice-to-anp-ppp-sources)

The government has taken the lead by forming parliamentary committees for electoral and accountability reforms. It is the prime responsibility of the legislature to restore its credibility which has been missing since 1985. Benazir tried, but her efforts were repeatedly thwarted by the forces of ‘democratic distortions’ led by the Sharifs of Lahore and the Chaudhrys of Gujrat. These distortions have to be removed for democracy to flourish. No more ‘controversial elections’. Neutral umpires are required for the contest to be free and fair. Daska NA-75 should be the last episode of the era of controversies as it hurts democracy.

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