**Democracy, Military Rules, Elections and Level Playing Field**

**In Pakistan, democracy has nurtured the establishment and fostering of influential interest groups.**

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It has been nearly seven decades since our beloved nation achieved independence. However, it remains a poignant irony that many countries that gained independence after us have made significant strides in development, while we find ourselves trailing behind. One of the key factors contributing to our lag in the development race is the absence of a genuine democratic system.

In a genuine democracy, the government is formed solely through the collective will of the people, designed to serve their interests. Political parties compete for votes based on their track record and commitment to public welfare, and the people exercise their right to vote without coercion. There exists an equitable and fair opportunity for representation, with any voter, regardless of economic status, having the option to stand for election. There is an element of simplicity in election campaigns, and the financial burden of running for office, particularly for less affluent candidates, is assumed by their political parties. Furthermore, there are limitations on excessive election expenses, and the personal history, character, and assets of candidates are open for public scrutiny. In the aftermath of an election, the losing party gracefully accepts the outcome.

[At least 30 people killed in IIOJK bus crash](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/at-least-30-people-killed-in-iiojk-bus-crash)

Once in office, an elected government is dedicated to fulfilling its promises as outlined in its manifesto, utilising taxpayers’ funds for the betterment of society through the provision of healthcare, education, clean water, employment opportunities, and essential infrastructure, rather than catering to the luxuries of the ruling elite. Protocols and expenses associated with public officials and representatives are kept to a minimum. Elected representatives remain accessible to the public even after the elections. Government affairs and policies are characterised by transparency, and all processes are open to scrutiny by the public and an independent media. Furthermore, a robust system of proportional representation is a hallmark of a genuine democracy.

In Pakistan, democracy has nurtured the establishment and fostering of influential interest groups. Those with close connections to politicians frequently benefit while those without resources find themselves without opportunities. Educated young people remain unemployed while those with influential connections and financial resources secure lucrative positions. When assessing the performance of political parties, there appears to be a paucity of tangible accomplishments that could justify their appeal to voters. They have made grandiose promises but, in practice, have achieved little, except for their own enrichment and a penchant for vilifying and targeting their opponents. The military’s intervention in Pakistan is, in part, attributed to the perceived failure of our democratic systems and our politicians.

[Fog/smog likely to develop in plain areas of country:PMD](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/fog-smog-likely-to-develop-in-plain-areas-of-country-pmd)

On the other side of the spectrum, we have military regimes that have delivered considerable benefits to the populace. Pakistan, a nation that has witnessed several intervals of military rule since its inception in 1947, observed substantial progress during these periods. While military interventions are frequently subject to criticism for their potential impact on democratic processes and civil liberties, it is imperative to delve into the multifaceted legacy of development under military rule in Pakistan.

Military governments in Pakistan have consistently accorded paramount importance to infrastructure development. During Ayub Khan’s tenure in the 1960s, pivotal projects like the construction of major dams, highways, and industrial zones formed the bedrock for subsequent economic growth. Similarly, under the leadership of General Musharraf, Pakistan experienced a surge in infrastructure projects, including the development of telecom sector and a modernised transport network. At times, military regimes have demonstrated an ability to stabilise the economy and achieve noteworthy growth rates. The “Green Revolution” during General Zia-ul-Haq’s rule, for instance, enhanced agricultural productivity, while the era of General Musharraf witnessed economic liberalisation that attracted foreign investment and bolstered GDP growth.

[Threat from sand and dust storms spreading: UN](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/threat-from-sand-and-dust-storms-spreading-un)

Transitioning to another point, with the announcement of election dates in Pakistan, there have been calls from certain quarters to ensure a level playing field for all participants. The concept of a “level playing field” metaphorically describes a scenario where every contender enjoys an equitable opportunity for success. This principle is foundational in diverse facets of life, extending from sports to economics and politics.

A level playing field fundamentally represents a scenario where all participants or competitors are subject to the same set of rules, conditions, and opportunities, ensuring that success is determined solely by individual skills, capabilities, and exertions rather than any external advantages or disadvantages. The concept of a level playing field holds pivotal importance in promoting equitable competition. It guarantees that every participant commences their journey with identical chances, thus diminishing the influence of external factors that might otherwise grant some contestants an unjust advantage.

[DCs told to enforce polls’ code of conduct](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/dcs-told-to-enforce-polls-code-of-conduct)

However, the establishment and maintenance of a level playing field are not without their challenges. These processes necessitate the formulation of comprehensive regulations, diligent monitoring, and resolute enforcement. In many instances, they also require the transformation of societal attitudes and values to address deeply entrenched systemic inequalities. Furthermore, creating and sustaining a level playing field is an ongoing endeavor, given that new disparities and advantages may emerge over time. Therefore, it mandates continuous vigilance and adaptability to address the evolving challenges it may encounter.

It’s quite intriguing to witness the call for a level playing field in the upcoming elections. The question arises: should we provide equal rights and opportunities to individuals associated with terrorism, riots, corruption, and looting, or even those who targeted our military and civilian installations on May 9? Is it justifiable not to hold them accountable for their actions and instead allow them to freely influence a select group of people to launch further attacks on these installations? Should these elements be permitted to return to positions of power without facing consequences for their crimes against our nation, security, and institutions? Should we extend a level playing field to them at the expense of the emotions and well-being of the families of our martyrs?

[Educational institutions, offices to remain closed on Saturday](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/educational-institutions-offices-to-remain-closed-on-saturday)

Readers, considering these aspects, there is an immediate necessity to take measures for the revitalisation of our democratic system, redefining it in alignment with its genuine essence. Certainly, a level playing field should be granted, but solely to those individuals who have not been convicted of crimes and who uphold principles of honesty and fairness. If there are still advocates for providing a level playing field to all, including wrongdoers and terrorists, it raises a fundamental question: how can we prioritise democracy over military rule in Pakistan? I leave these questions to the discerning judgment of the readers.