**Repercussions of Delayed Elections**

[Owais Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/owais-khan/)

December 20, 2023

There is ongoing conjecture about the possibility of delaying the general elections. As a result, the Pakistani Election Commission released a “clarification,” calling the allegations of an election postponement “absolutely unfounded and misleading.”

It stated that the election process was proceeding as planned and that the February 8, 2024 polls would occur as scheduled. Also anticipated this week from the ECP is the election schedule. Public scepticism persists, though. In a statement, the Pakistan Human Rights Commission mentioned “continuous rumours of probable delays” as the cause of the “air of uncertainty” in the nation last week.

Rivals in several political parties have allegedly claimed that they want to postpone elections. Even though elections have historically occurred in February, one of them went so far as to request a postponement, citing the winter weather.

The government had set aside cash for the election, and rumours circulated that the ECP had not received them and had called the finance secretary to clarify this. It further fueled speculation. After that, the funds were released.

The electorate wants an elected government to tackle the nation’s issues.

The security situation was significantly worse in the two previous elections, which took place in 2008 and 2013, with the aftermath of the ongoing war in Afghanistan being an enormous problem at the time. There were two significant terror incidents in KP in 2008, right before the election, marking the height of the militant struggle. The situation became much more delicate after the unfortunate killing of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007.

Resultantly protests broke out, and there were multiple instances of damage to public and private property, including ECP offices in Sindh’s interior. The election was moved from January 8 to February 18, slightly over a month later. Terrorist bombing by the TTP, which specifically targeted the Awami National Party and included an attack on a JUI-F gathering in KP, occurred ahead of the 2013 election. However, the election proceeded according to plan.

The electorate wants an elected government to tackle the nation’s issues and REVIVES the economy.

In any case, elections in “sensitive” constituencies may be postponed and conducted as by-elections if some regions of KP are susceptible to terrorist activity. The amount would be tiny and have no bearing on the final result. There is no security threat in Punjab or Sindh, the two biggest provinces in the nation, with respective voter populations of about 72 million and 26 million (or almost 100 million out of a total electorate of 127 million). Much of KP and Balochistan don’t either.

There would be constitutional, political, security and economic ramifications to any delay. There are no constitutional justifications for postponing elections. Postponing the elections now would be a clear violation of the constitution. Politically speaking, this kind of action might exacerbate polarization, create political instability, and lay the ground for unrest across the nation.

Moreover, opposing the delay, all three major political parties currently amid an election would file a judicial challenge, throwing the nation into a constitutional crisis. In March, there will be elections for half of the Senate. The government will be left with a reduced Upper House, chosen by national and local assembly members if elections are not held before then. That, too, would be a recipe for disarray within the constitution.

Uncertainty would seriously jeopardize the nation’s chances for economic stability, which would have a significant financial cost. The government barely avoided a financial default a few months ago by getting an IMF Stand-by Arrangement (SBA). Thus, the economy is still on life support. The bailout is merely a stopgap measure that allowed confidence to return. Also an elected government with a new mandate and authority can implement a new IMF program.

The economy is still stuck on a low-growth trajectory where most long-term choices await elections and a legitimate administration’s installation, investment is still restrained, and economic activity is muted. The budgetary situation has stabilized, but the foreign exchange reserve position is still precarious because debt servicing payments gradually deplete reserves.

The economy will only suffer more from uncertainty. It will keep destroying the atmosphere for investment, causing volatility in the capital market, and promoting capital flight. Major economic choices that have clear implications for the nation have already had to wait due to a caretaker arrangement that has lasted longer than the 90 days required by the constitution to be in place.

According to opinion polls and informal evidence, people want elections as soon as possible. They want a legitimate, elected government to take charge of the nation’s affairs and address its numerous problems, mainly repairing the economy to lessen the public’s increasingly dire financial situation.

*The writer is a Research Scholar at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). He can be reached at ok94404@gmail.com.*