**[The right way?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1816177/the-right-way)**

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THIS is a tale of three lawyers and their post-election journeys. It is also a tale of numbers, of frustrations and concoctions but, in the end, and importantly, of figuring out the right way.

In the recent elections, there were these three successful lawyers, among others, who had decided to contest. They were the PTI-backed candidates. At the end of Feb 8, all three of them jubilantly waved a bunch of forms — Form-45s — reflecting that apparently the vast majority of votes in their respective constituencies had been cast in their favour.

But as the night of Feb 8 turned into the morning of Feb 9, the forms that were to show the consolidated results from all the polling stations in a particular constituency were initially withheld, without explanation, for quite some time. When those results came out later in the day on Feb 9, or later still, they were not consistent with the already handed out Form 45s. Something had gone terribly amiss in doing the basic arithmetic.

The first two, Mr Salman Akram Raja and Mr Taimur Malik, decided to engage with the system in good faith. If there were errors, the system must be capable of rectifying them. As Mr Raja, contesting from Lahore, for instance, was forcefully ousted while the Returning Officer (RO) prepared the provisional consolidated results, in a Form 47, he decided to raise the alarm. Mr Raja, as soon as he could, went to the high court. He had been deprived of his statutory right to be present during the consolidations, both provisional and final. Somebody had to take notice.

Going before ‘neutral arbiters’ seems pointless to citizens.

When the consolidated results came out, his lead, as he had rightly feared when he was removed from the consolidation process, had vanished. Someone else purportedly won. Meanwhile, there were no other set of Form 45s brought to counter the Form 45s that Mr Raja had with him. He has been raising the discrepancies before the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the high courts. But, until now, to no avail.

Similarly, Mr Malik, contesting from Multan, had the Form 45s in his favour, but the Form 47, issued a second time, had eventually displayed a difference of about 100 votes between the purportedly successful candidate and him. About 13,000 votes were rejected, a disproportionate number. Mr Malik sought a recount. He went to the RO, the ECP and the high court, ie, the usual drill. But, until now, nothing foreseeably seems to be giving way.

Both of them are now deeply embroiled in the legal mishmash, and despite being on their own turf as lawyers, they must be feeling what Kafka’s Joseph K. felt in The Trial. It appears as if they adopted the wrong way.

At least that is the message on display. Because the third lawyer, Mr Sher Afzal Marwat, contesting from Lakki Marwat, adopted another method. His consolidated Form-47 was being withheld too. He was aware that there were forces in play to distort the results of his election. But he did not make the mistake of filing an application before the RO, nor did he go to the high court or the ECP. Instead, he went to his people, told them that something was wrong, rallied them and headed for the office of the RO. After successfully retrieving the official result, in line with the issued Form 45s, he said, in a now viral clip online, that when the rounds of AK-47s reverberated in the air, Form 47, showing the accurate consolidated results, magically surfaced.

Mr Marwat got his duly earned seat in the National Assembly. The other two, Mr Raja and Mr Ma­­lik, meanwhile, have a long, arduous legal battle ahead of them, without any promise of them being successful.

The message for the onlookers and the yet-to-prove-themselves is just one: good faith engagement with the ‘system’ bears little to no reward. Going before the ‘neutral arbiters’ remains pointless — they are, essentially, neither neutral nor arbiters. It seems equally futile to expect the bureaucrats to grow a spine against the ruthlessness and brutality of another set of masked ‘neutrals’.

In response to the raw, rugged display of power, the need of the hour, it is perceived, is probably to meet it with a similar kind of power. When those wielding guns continue to dictate, holding hostage any effort to create a meaningful disruption, then the message to the citizens is this: that, probably, we may need to wield guns as well, and grant ourselves a right to bear arms in line with the Second Amendment of the US Constitution. The public becomes convinced that, in fighting heavy-handedness, with malleable rules of the game, there is only force and power that count, and that ‘we the people’ probably need to consider becoming more forceful and powerful.

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