**Lessons from the Joe Biden school of democracy**

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Even from so far away I could understand just why US President-Elect Joe Biden’s recent confirmation as winner of the American presidential election, despite all the legal hurdles put in place by outgoing President Donald Trump, was a seminal moment for not just US but also global democracy. As a member of the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL), I was fortunate enough to watch and hear him speak at the Democratic caucus in Iowa in February where he laid down his vision for reviving the power of the people and restoring the spirit of democracy.

ACYPL is a nonpartisan organisation now internationally recognised as the pre- eminent catalyst for introducing rising political and policy professionals to international affairs and to each other. Since 1966, it has provided aspiring leaders from other countries an in-depth exploration of governance, politics, policy-making, international relations, culture and geographic and political diversity of the United States. And it was through this program that someone like me got to meet someone like Joe Biden just when he was at the pinnacle of effecting a monumental, historic change that has now come full circle and will surely reverberate across the whole world.

Having seen him connect with the people first-hand before, I was not at all surprised to note that his speech, immediately after his Electoral College victory, dwelled on the very essence of democracy and how it was more important than ever for people to exercise the power of the vote with the utmost responsibility.

Despite all the restrictions of the pandemic and the economic downturn more Americans voted in this election than any other in their long history, he very rightly reminded everybody.

“Over 155 million Americans were determined to have their voices heard and their votes counted,” he said, and went on to explain why at this time, when the world’s sole superpower and the citadel of democracy was held hostage by a hyper-nationalist, extremist administration, it was necessary for the people to show once again that leaders in the developed world do not take power, rather they are given power by the people.

“Our democracy – pushed, tested, threatened – proved to be resilient, true and strong,” he added.

Joe Biden’s ascent to the American presidency does not mean just a change of guard in that particular country. Instead it shows that the global trend that saw people vote in populist leaders that spoke directly to xenophobic, nationalist circles and leaned right-of-centre, and this trend spread as far across the world as America, Turkey, India and indeed Pakistan, is now being rejected by the people themselves.

There is an important lesson in all this for countries like Pakistan. The Khan administration in Islamabad, just like the Modi administration in New Delhi, is also of the same mould as the Trump administration that is counting its last days in Washington. Under the convenient garb of nationalism and ‘our country’s interests first’, etc, they furthered isolationist, anti-globalist policies that made their countries stand out like sore thumbs over the last few years. And their foreign policy positions quickly led much of the world to reject them. We need look no further than our own country to understand how some of our time-tested and most loyal friends are now abandoning us.

I am certain that the cycle of change that has begun in the US will also sweep across our great country as it fights a battle for its own democratic soul. My direct exposure to the American presidential election has convinced me that it is time for people in my country to also remind those that run it that the power they enjoy is in fact granted by the grass root, it is not a privilege easily earned. That is precisely why my party, PML-N, has joined hands with 11 opposition parties with a one-point agenda of saving Pakistan by sending the PTI government, and those that selected and installed it, packing.

Joe Biden’s victory therefore sounds the death knell for the kind of politics of hatred that the likes of Modi, Imran and Trump typify. His political struggles are but an extension of the unspeakable hardships he has had to face all throughout his personal life. In 1972, only weeks after he created history for the first time by becoming the junior US senator from Delaware after running a campaign solely by mobilising people because it had no money, his wife and one-year-old daughter were killed in a horrible road accident. Years later, in 2015, his son Beau Biden, who became an Army Judge Advocate in Iraq and later Delaware Attorney General, also died of brain cancer, which left him completely devastated. Yet every time life knocked him down he displayed the courage and inner strength to rise again. And indeed he has risen, and in this great fight he has been helped by the people of his country, who turned out in record numbers to elect him president and pull America away from a very dangerous path.

As he now prepares for his formal inauguration before he can get down to work, I believe nothing would make this valuable lesson come home to young political workers like myself than the opportunity to be there when he delivers his inauguration speech.