[Farhan Bokhari](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/farhan-bokhari)

February 10, 2021

**After the fight?**

As Prime Minister Imran Khan and his PTI square off with the country’s opposition parties in the lead up to this year's Senate polls, the two sides face the risk of eventually facing an increasingly sceptical public.

The contestants have joined the race to the Senate, crossing swords over the rules of the game. For ordinary Pakistanis, the debate over voting either in secret or through a publicly verifiable show of hands is a baffling one.

Logically and notably in the background of Pakistan’s controversy stricken past elections, publicly verifiable voting through show of hands must be seen as the best assurance of a free and transparent process. And yet, the manner used by Khan and his PTI to back a change to a show of hands, has obviously raised questions over the permissibility of the move under Pakistan’s constitution.

At the very least, can the president of Pakistan simply issue an ordinance or a decree as he has done recently to make the change happen? That central question will fuel debate after debate between political rivals in the lead up to the senate elections and beyond.

In the meantime, however, Pakistan’s political rivals seem to have done little to respond to real-life issues. These range from pressing matters like the state of education, healthcare and basic housing to the sources of subsistence for Pakistan’s mainstream population. Together, these daily life challenges along with others that surround mainstream Pakistan will decide the country’s policy direction and fate in the years to come.

Going forward, Pakistan’s political rivals need to step back from just fighting fights for the sake of more big fights. Political parties must return to the drawing board and address the public’s expectations from their political leaders.

Tragically, for the moment it seems that neither the government nor the opposition are either able or willing to make the change. In recent months, Pakistan’s opposition parties working under the banner of the Pakistan Democratic Movement have redoubled their calls for fresh elections.

They have done so on the grounds that the 2018 elections which brought Khan to power were indeed manipulated to ensure his victory. And yet, beyond calls for fresh national polls, there has been little by way of an alternative view of the world or indeed a blueprint from the opposition outlining exactly how Pakistan will change for the better under their rule.

Indeed, a complicating matter has been the performance of Khan’s government during its maiden tenure. Elected for the first time in 2018, a Khan-led PTI was widely expected to set the course for a qualitative uplift to the way Pakistan was run. But roughly having completed half of its tenure, the PTI remains distant from establishing a ‘naya’ or new Pakistan.

Though the PTI’s journey in office was partially upset by the fallout from Covid-19, there was much more that could have been done to come up to the expectations of the Pakistani public. Across Pakistan today, the most audible lament among low and middle income households is just one: the matter of sharply rising prices of essential commodities notably food grains, vegetables and medicines.

Delivering affordability on these fronts remains a formidable challenge. At the same time, reviving economic growth across Pakistan has become central to the way Khan will be judged by the Pakistani electorate when the country goes to polls next in 2023.

Though Khan still has the opportunity to lift his sagging political credentials if he chooses a mid-term course correction, the matter of correcting course is much easier said than done. Notwithstanding the writing on the wall suggesting a robust push to revitalize Pakistan’s agriculture, little has been done so far in this sector beyond lip service. Meanwhile, other choices like Khan’s already announced package of incentives to revive Pakistan’s construction industry for now appears to have done little for an overall revival of the national economy.

As Pakistan’s political foes intensify their battle ahead of the senate elections, there is a palpable sense of quiet, popular disapproval all around. Unless rival politicians urgently sense the mood on the streets of Pakistan, their battles for gaining control of the corridors of power will remain meaningless.

The writer is an Islamabad-based journalist who writes on political and economic affairs.

Email: farhanbokhari@gmail.com