**Revolution or Rhetoric?**

**PTI has framed the protest as a fight for democracy, and the charged rhetoric may provoke unrest, raising concerns about a repeat of the May 9 clashes.**

[Ryma Uzair](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/ryma-uzair)

November 26, 2024

Imran Khan’s call for a massive protest on November 24, 2024, marks the latest chapter in Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s (PTI) ongoing struggle with the political establishment. With three primary demands—regaining what it calls the “stolen mandate,” reversing the controversial 26th Constitutional Amendment, and securing the release of political prisoners—the protest aims to put significant pressure on the government. However, as PTI prepares for what it calls the “final call,” questions arise about the likelihood of its success. Drawing lessons from previous protests, it becomes clear that while PTI has a history of large-scale mobilisations, turning this event into a political victory will be far more complicated.

To evaluate the likelihood of success for PTI’s forthcoming protest, it’s essential to consider the party’s historical record with large-scale mobilisations. While PTI has proven adept at organising substantial protests, not all have culminated in achieving their political objectives. The 2014 Islamabad dharna remains a defining moment. PTI’s massive sit-in outside Parliament House, which lasted for months, was a direct challenge to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, accusing him of election rigging. Despite substantial public support and media attention, the protest ultimately failed to force Sharif’s resignation. Similarly, protests after the 2018 elections, alleging voter manipulation, garnered large-scale participation but ultimately failed to challenge the political system effectively. Despite these protests, Imran Khan ascended to power, which only further emphasised PTI’s recurring difficulty in translating public discontent into real political change. The May 9, 2023, protests, sparked by Imran Khan’s arrest, were another pivotal moment. However, violent clashes between protesters and security forces, along with the mass arrests of PTI leaders, led to internal discord and fractured the movement. The heavy-handed government response crushed the momentum of the protests and fragmented PTI’s unity, making it difficult for the party to leverage these demonstrations for political gain. Ultimately, while PTI’s skill in mobilising large crowds is indisputable, the key challenge remains converting this momentum into substantive political outcomes. The party’s history suggests that while its ability to mobilise is formidable, sustaining momentum and achieving concrete change through protests is far from assured.

As PTI gears up for its November 24 protest, it faces significant internal and external hurdles. One major challenge is the party’s fractured internal dynamics. Previous protests have exposed frustrations with leadership’s failure to deliver concrete results and fuelled divisions. The risk of violence and instability, as seen in past clashes with security forces, looms large. Some party leaders have been accused of abandoning supporters, exacerbating disillusionment among workers. Organising a large-scale protest in such a volatile environment presents logistical difficulties. PTI’s leadership has issued stern warnings to lawmakers to bring supporters or risk losing their positions. While this ensures participation, it mayalienate potential protesters and foster dissatisfaction within the ranks. This pressure could push members to more extreme actions, escalating tensions. However, PTI has adapted its strategy by appointing regional leaders, like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, to mobilise regional protests before converging on Islamabad. The party is also securing funding for logistical support to ensure smooth operations. Whether these efforts will overcome internal divisions and external pressures remains uncertain, but PTI’s ability to manage its internal unity and maintain discipline will determine the protest’s success.

In response to PTI’s November 24 protest, the government has mobilised significant security forces, including containers, anti-riot equipment, and the extension of Section 144 to prevent public gatherings. While these measures are intended to maintain order, they risk alienating the public and could inadvertently strengthen PTI’s cause, as heavy-handed tactics in the past have often bolstered support for the protesters. However, the government’s actions are not without justification, considering the potential for violence. PTI has framed the protest as a fight for democracy, and the charged rhetoric may provoke unrest, raising concerns about a repeat of the May 9 clashes that left a lasting impact on Pakistan’s political landscape.

**Ryma Uzair**  
The writer is a student of laws at LUMS.