

Lessons on democracy?

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We are the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Jamat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan, Tehreek-e-Nifaz Fiq-e-Jaffria, Tehreek-e-Islam, Islam Public Party, Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadis, Jamaat Ahl-e-Sunat, Islami Siasi Tehreek, Islami Inqilab Party and Tehreek-e-Jaffria do not accept that we are Islamic.

Republic we truly are not. Republic is from Latin 'respublica'; 'res', thing and 'publicus', of the people. So, republic is a thing that belongs to the people. Other than the air that our rulers still allow us to breathe there is little else in Pakistan that is either done for the people or belongs to the people. Republic we truly are not.

Democracy, on the other hand, is from Greek 'demokratia'; 'demo' is public and 'kratia' is rule; so rule of the public. We truly are ruled by the army.

The other debate that goes on is whether democracy is appropriate for Pakistan or not. There are basically two ways to try and resolve the debate. First, an overall value judgment whereby an assessment is made that "reveals more about the value of the person making the assessment than about the reality of what is assessed". A value judgment is also a "proposition which cannot be reduced to an arguable statement of fact but which effectively asserts that something is good..." (like, for example, "dictatorship is good for Pakistan". We Pakistanis have always had an appetite for authoritarianism). The second way to resolve a debate is through empirical evidence extracted from the physical world around us.

I am going to restrain myself from making any value judgment on Pakistan and democracy. I'll just restrict myself to empirical evidence alone.

To begin with, let us take an account

of wars during the second half of the 20th century. In this 50-year period, there have been some three-dozen international conflicts including the Falkland Islands War, Iran-Iraq War, Vietnam War, Korean War, Indo-Pak War of 1965 and 1971, Yom Kippur War, Suez War, Rwanda-Burundi War, Bosnia-Herzegovina War and the Soviet-Afghan War. Then there have been several bloody civil wars including the one in Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique, Columbia, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

In the Falkland Islands War it was Argentina versus the United Kingdom. Democratically elected Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher versus Lieutenant-



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and Syria were backed by Iraq and Jordan and financed by Saudi Arabia). In the Suez War, it was Egypt's non-democratic leader Gamal Abdel Nasser against the democratically elected Prime Minister David Ben Gurion.

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General Leopoldo Galtieri who had captured the presidency by force. In the Iran-Iraq War neither of the combatants were democracies. Both the Vietnam War and the Korean War were a case of a democracy against non-democratic regimes.

In 1965, it was General Ayub Khan against the democratically elected Lal Bahadur Shastri. In 1971, it was General Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan on the one side and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on the other. In the Yom Kippur War, Israel, a democracy, was on one side while Egypt and Syria, both non-democratic, were on the other (Egypt

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Is there a connection between prosperity and democracy? Let me first introduce Freedom House. Freedom House is a non-profit, non-partisan, democracy-related research organisation. It has offices in Washington, New York, Belgrade, Bucharest, Budapest, Kyiv, Warsaw, Rabat, Slovakia and Tashkent. Since 1972, Freedom House has been ranking countries according to the degree of freedom in political rights and civil liberties. The highest degree of freedom is 1 and the lowest is 7.

In the year 2000, at least 11 coun-

tries achieved the highest rating both in political rights and civil liberties. They are: Luxembourg, the United States, Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Liechtenstein, Netherlands and New Zealand. Incidentally, Luxembourg is also the richest country (on the basis per capita income). The US is the second richest. Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium and Canada are respectively the 5th, 10th, 12th and the 15th richest countries on the face of the planet.

Is there a connection between poverty and democracy? In yet another classification, Freedom House has catalogued a total of 192 countries into nine categories. They are: Democracy; Restricted Democratic Practice; Constitutional Monarchy; Traditional Monarchy; Absolute Monarchy; Authoritarian Regime; Totalitarian Regime; Colonial Dependency and Protectorate.

In 1900, Pakistan was a Colonial Dependency. In 1950, Pakistan was catalogued as 'Restricted Democratic Practice'. In 2000, we were classified as an Authoritarian Regime (moving backwards!). Other Authoritarian Regimes included Algeria, Angola, Gambia, Guinea, Iran, Iraq, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Burma, Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Libya, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Singapore. Incidentally, almost all authoritarian regimes are pathetically poor (Iran, Iraq and Libya are large oil exporters. Singapore stands out as the only wealthy authoritarian regime).

The current rating for Pakistan is 6 on Political Rights and 5 on Civil Liberties. The best that Pakistan ever got was 3 on Political Rights, 3 on Civil Liberties and that was for the years 1988-89 and 1989-90 (Benazir's first tenure).

The certain, democracy is not on

absolute guarantee against human right abuses. Neither will democracy bring instant prosperity. Nor is democracy a solution to every problem that we as Pakistanis face today. In this country, once again, a tug-of-war is underway between the Pakistani people and governing ideologies. The world around us, however, seems to have settled most fundamental issues on governance.

In 1900, for instance, not a single nation-state could be judged as an electoral democracy (by the standard of "universal suffrage for competitive multiparty elections"). A hundred years ago, no more than two dozen countries allowed some sort of a restricted democratic practice. These two dozen accounted for under 13 percent of the world's population. In 1950, there were 22 democracies containing over 30 percent of the world's population. In 2000, there are 120 electoral democracies out of a total of 192 countries and these democracies cover over 60 percent of the world's population.

Do we want to be a democracy? Well, democracies don't fight with each other. When a democracy gets into a fight with a non-democratic country the democracy usually comes out a winner. Most liberal democracies are rich while most authoritarian regimes are miserably poor. To be sure, none of the above is a value judgment.

Are we going to get democracy? Here's Stephen Cohen's answer: "A truly democratic Pakistan is unlikely to emerge until the military and politicians broker some kind of grand accord. The mistrust by the former prevents them from giving the politicians a free hand, and the latter are so insecure that they instinctively turn to the armed forces for political support. Pakistan will continue as a state that hovers on the edge of democracy."