**[Better democracy](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815935/better-democracy)**

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PAKISTAN’S electoral history is a tale of evolving political consciousness, as evidenced by voter turnout oscillations. The dismally low 44 per cent turnout in 2008, a manifestation of public scepticism, contrasted sharply with the more than 60pc turnout in 2024, indicating perhaps improved faith in electoral politics. Despite this progress, significant challenges persist, especially in transparency, trust, and inclusivity. Let’s explore the potential of proportional representation (PR) in local government (LG) elections.

Key issues in Pakistan’s elections include the transparency and trust crises. Allegations of rigging and doubts cast over the impartiality of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) erode public confidence, undermining democracy’s essence, limiting societal participation and putting the legitimacy of poll outcomes in question.

Pakistan faces daunting challenges, yet these are not entirely new. It is becoming increasingly urgent for us to adopt both emergency measures for immediate relief and long-term strategies for sustainable solutions. Pakistan can draw on experiences globally, tackling these difficulties with self-confidence and determination. Despite internal conflicts and power struggles, the strength of its Constitution provides hope. The document offers a comprehensive governance framework, emphasising the separation of powers between the legislature, executive, and judiciary, which allows for amendments and adaptations to meet evolving national needs. Key to overcoming these crises is adhering to the Constitution, in letter and spirit, and seeking solutions within its framework.

To improve governance in Pakistan electoral reform is necessary, with the introduction of the PR system as a first step. While on its own it won’t resolve all governance issues, it would still be a move in the right direction. Effective governance also hinges on undertaking simultaneous reforms, including judicial reforms for efficient justice, decentralisation of power, strengthening LG, and ensuring transparency and accountability in administrative processes. These reforms are vital for establishing a robust governance framework that can respond to the needs and challenges of modern Pakistan.

Diverse electoral systems provide helpful lessons.

Parliament’s role is crucial in these electoral reforms. Systemic change faces resistance from those benefiting from the status quo, but inclusive dialogue and consensus can pave the way. This prioritises governance improvement and fulfils democratic potential.

Globally, diverse electoral systems provide helpful lessons. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, in countries like the UK and India, can overlook minority voices but the PR system, popular in many European countries, ensures inclusive representation of minority and smaller parties. A dependable electoral system is key to fostering public trust. Pakistan’s frequent changes in electoral regulations have created confusion and distrust. Canada and Sweden, with their consistent and transparent electoral systems, exemplify public trust. Germany’s mixed-member PR model is compelling, for blending direct and PR votes to ensure local accountability and overall proportionality.

Strengthening LG elections is vital for grassroots democracy. India’s LG offers a commendable model. In Pakistan, a similar structure could bridge the gap between government and local communities, fostering a more direct and participatory approach to governance. Decentralisation could spur socioeconomic development.

Pakistan’s current electoral system, though efficient, often omits minority and smaller party voices. PR could ensure inclusivity and reduce unrest from underrepresentation. Critics fear fragmentation and unstable coalitions, but Pakistan’s political landscape might find stability in PR. Implementing PR requires consensus and constitutional recognition. A hybrid system, blending FPTP and PR, could suit Pakistan’s unique context, considering its political and demographic fabric.

Punjab, with its diverse population and intricate political dynamics, is an ideal candidate for testing PR in LG elections. A successful pilot model could lead to broader adoption nationwide, significantly contributing to democratic evolution and an effective electoral system. This initiative, drawn from successful international models will truly mirror the aspirations of the Pakistani people, fostering a more stable, inclusive, and prosperous democracy.

Fortifying Pakistan’s democracy entails overcoming electoral challenges and providing innovative solutions. Starting with PR in Punjab’s LG elections and strengthening the ECP can create a more participatory future — one that aligns with global practices and Pakistan’s political ethos, and promotes a representative, empowered democracy.

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