



RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of Election Commission in Strengthening Democracy System of Pakistan: An Analysis

Bushra Zeb Khan

Visiting Faculty Member, Department of Law, University of Malakand, KP, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** Khan.bushrazeb@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to examine the role of the Election Commission in strengthening the democracy system in Pakistan through a comparative analysis of electoral management systems in India, USA, and Pakistan. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of recent electoral reforms and recommend further improvements in the electoral process in Pakistan. A comparative analysis of electoral management systems in other countries can provide valuable insights and recommendations for Pakistan. The research methodology used in this research is a qualitative approach, including a review of existing literature, analysis of data from official reports, and interviews with key stakeholders. The study found that the Election Commission in Pakistan has faced challenges due to political interference, lack of resources, and inadequate use of technology. Comparatively, the Election Commissions in India and the USA have implemented best practice. The report suggests the following changes to improve Pakistan's voting system based on its results. The first step is to create a neutral Election Commission, followed by the use of technology, the promotion of voter education, the reform of campaign financing, and the avoidance of violence at polling places.

Keywords: Democracy, Election Commission, India, Pakistan, USA

Introduction

Election Commission plays a crucial role in ensuring free, fair and transparent elections in any democratic country. In Pakistan, the role of the Election Commission is particularly important given the country's history of political instability and frequent military interventions.

In recent years, the Election Commission of Pakistan has faced several challenges, including allegations of rigging and manipulation of electoral processes (Daly, 2020). In comparing the Election Commission of Pakistan with those of India and the USA, the research will highlight the similarities and differences in their legal frameworks, organizational structures, and functioning. It will also examine the best practices and innovations adopted by these countries to ensure free and fair elections. This study will examine the role of the Election Commission in strengthening the democracy system of Pakistan, and to compare its functioning with that of India and the USA.

Pakistan is a country with a long history of political instability and frequent military interventions. The country's democratic system has been tested repeatedly, with several instances of rigged elections and political violence (Ali, 2022). In this context, the role of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in ensuring free and fair elections is crucial for the country's democratic stability.

The ECP is an independent constitutional body responsible for conducting elections at the federal and provincial levels. Its functions include delimitation of constituencies, registration of voters, and organization of polling stations (Ali, 2012). However, the ECP has

faced several challenges in its efforts to ensure free and fair elections, including allegations of rigging and manipulation of electoral processes (Dixon, 2023).

In comparison, India and the USA have well-established democratic systems with robust Election Commissions. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is one of the oldest and most respected Election Commissions in the world, having conducted several free and fair elections since independence (Schuetze, 2019). Similarly, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in the USA is an independent body responsible for providing election management support to states and localities (Cullen, 2022). The study will provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the ECP and suggest measures for improving its functioning.

Literature review

Role of Election Commission in Strengthening Democracy

Elections are a cornerstone of democratic systems, and the role of the Election Commission is crucial in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections (Biswas, 2023). In Pakistan, the Election Commission plays an essential role in conducting elections and maintaining democratic stability. Given the country's history of political instability and military interventions, the Election Commission's impartiality, transparency, and effectiveness are critical for maintaining public trust in the democratic system (Ashraf, 2022).

The Election Commission is an independent constitutional body responsible for the conduct of elections at the federal and provincial levels. Its functions include the delimitation of constituencies, registration of voters, and organization of polling stations (Bajpai, 2022). However, the Election Commission has faced several challenges in its efforts to ensure free and fair elections, including allegations of rigging, manipulation of electoral processes, and violence.

Historical Background of Electoral Reforms in Pakistan

The history of electoral reforms in Pakistan dates back to the country's inception in 1947. The country's first general elections were held in 1970, which resulted in a split mandate between the two major political parties, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) (Ganty, 2023). However, the election was marred by allegations of rigging and manipulation, which led to political instability and eventually the separation of East Pakistan, now known as Bangladesh (Shrivastava, 2016).

Since then, Pakistan has witnessed several instances of rigged elections, political violence, and military interventions, which have hampered the country's democratic stability. In response, several electoral reforms have been introduced, including the establishment of the Election Commission of Pakistan in 1956, the introduction of electronic voting machines, and the delimitation of constituencies (Dann, 2021).

However, these reforms have been criticized for their limited effectiveness in addressing the challenges faced by the Election Commission in conducting free and fair elections. In recent years, there have been renewed calls for electoral reforms, including the introduction of biometric voting systems, transparent ballot boxes, and enhanced voter education programs.

Election Commission's Organizational Structure, Powers, and Functions

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is an independent constitutional body responsible for the conduct of elections at the federal and provincial levels. It comprises a Chief Election Commissioner and four members, appointed by the President of Pakistan (Kaushik, 2022). The Commission's organizational structure includes a Secretariat and Regional Election Commissioners responsible for overseeing the election process in their respective regions.

The ECP's powers and functions include the delimitation of constituencies, registration of voters, and organization of polling stations. The Commission is also responsible for ensuring compliance with election laws, investigating complaints of electoral irregularities, and announcing election results.

A comparative analysis of the Election Commissions in Pakistan, India, and the USA reveals significant differences in their organizational structure, powers, and functions (Qazi, 2020). For instance, the Election Commission of India has greater autonomy and powers than the ECP, while the US Federal Election Commission has a different organizational structure, with a board of six members appointed by the President (Islam, 2022).

Electoral Management Systems in India, USA, and Pakistan

Electoral management systems play a crucial role in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections. The electoral management systems of India, the USA, and Pakistan have evolved differently due to their unique political, legal, and cultural contexts (Dixon, 2023).

India has a well-established and highly-regarded electoral management system, with the Election Commission of India (ECI) playing a crucial role in the conduct of elections. The ECI enjoys significant autonomy and is responsible for the registration of voters, delimitation of constituencies, and the organization of polling stations.

In the USA, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) is responsible for overseeing the conduct of federal elections (Ganty, 2023). The FEC is a bipartisan body consisting of six members appointed by the President, with each member serving a six-year term (Hausing, 2022).

In Pakistan, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is responsible for the conduct of federal and provincial elections. However, the ECP has faced several challenges in ensuring free and fair elections due to allegations of electoral fraud and political interference (Wani, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Political interference on the effectiveness of the Election Commission in Pakistan

The effectiveness of the Election Commission in Pakistan is often hampered by political interference, which undermines the Commission's independence and credibility. Political interference can take many forms, including the appointment of partisan officials to the Commission, pressure to manipulate election results, and interference in the delimitation of constituencies.

One of the most significant examples of political interference in the Election Commission was during the 2013 general elections when the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government allegedly manipulated the results to secure its victory (Negi, 2021). The Election Commission's inability to address these allegations further eroded

public trust in the electoral process and the Commission's ability to ensure free and fair elections.

In addition, political interference in the appointment of Election Commission officials has also undermined the Commission's independence (Khan, 2021). The appointment of partisan officials can lead to conflicts of interest, compromised decision-making, and a lack of accountability.

Furthermore, political interference has also impacted the delimitation of constituencies, which can impact the outcome of elections (Khan, 2022). Political parties have often attempted to influence the delimitation process to ensure favorable results.

To address these challenges, there have been calls for greater transparency in the appointment process of Election Commission officials and for reforms to ensure the Commission's independence. The development of clear guidelines and rules for the delimitation process can also help reduce the impact of political interference.

Effectiveness of Recent Electoral Reforms in Pakistan

Pakistan has undergone several electoral reforms in recent years to improve the transparency, fairness, and accountability of the electoral process. The most significant reforms include the introduction of the Biometric Verification System (BVS), the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and the creation of the Result Transmission System (RTS).

The BVS was introduced in the 2013 general elections to verify the identity of voters using biometric data (Munir, 2021). This system has helped reduce the risk of voter impersonation and fraud, enhancing the integrity of the electoral process.

In addition, the EVMs were introduced in the 2018 general elections to improve the efficiency and accuracy of vote counting (Naseem, 2022). Although there were initial challenges in the deployment and use of EVMs, they have the potential to reduce the likelihood of errors and manipulation in vote counting.

The creation of the RTS was another significant reform, allowing for real-time transmission of election results from polling stations to the Election Commission. This system has helped reduce the time required to announce election results, increasing transparency and reducing the risk of manipulation.

However, despite these reforms, challenges persist in the electoral process in Pakistan. There have been allegations of vote rigging, political interference, and violence during the elections (Ullah, 2020). The Election Commission has also been criticized for its lack of effectiveness in addressing these challenges.

Electoral Reforms in Pakistan

While Pakistan has made significant strides in electoral reform, there is still much room for improvement to ensure free and fair elections.

Independent Election Commission

The Election Commission should be made completely independent from any political interference. A transparent and objective appointment process for the Commission officials can ensure that the Commission can perform its duties without any political pressure.

Electoral violence prevention: The government must take strict measures to prevent electoral violence (Singhal, 2015). The law enforcement agencies must be deployed at

polling stations to ensure a peaceful environment, and candidates and political parties should be held accountable for any violence or misconduct.

Voter Education

To enhance the effectiveness of the electoral process, voter education is crucial. The government should focus on providing voter education to the citizens to increase their knowledge about their voting rights and encourage them to participate in the electoral process.

Use of Technology

The government should explore the use of advanced technology to ensure free and fair elections. The deployment of EVMs and the RTS has helped reduce the likelihood of errors and manipulation in vote counting, and further technology can be explored to strengthen the electoral process (Syed, 2019).

Campaign Finance Reforms

There should be strict limits on campaign financing and transparency in the sources of funding. This will help reduce the influence of money in the electoral process and ensure that all candidates have a level playing field.

Best practices and innovations of Election Commissions in India, USA, and other countries

The Election Commissions in India and the United States are widely regarded as models of good practice, and there is much to learn from their successes.

Transparency and Accountability

The Election Commissions in both India and the United States are committed to transparency and accountability (Verma, 2023). The electoral process is open to scrutiny, and any irregularities are investigated and addressed.

Electoral dispute resolution

The Election Commissions in both India and the United States have the power to adjudicate disputes and impose penalties on violators of the electoral laws (Tariq, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has examined the role of the Election Commission in strengthening democracy in Pakistan, comparing it with India and the United States. The study finds that while Pakistan has made significant progress in electoral reforms, there is still much room for improvement to ensure free and fair elections.

The historical background of electoral reforms in Pakistan shows that there have been numerous attempts to improve the electoral process, but political interference, violence, and irregularities continue to pose a significant challenge to the electoral process (Smith, 2023). The comparative analysis of the Electoral Management Systems in India, USA, and Pakistan shows that there are similarities in the electoral processes, but there are significant differences in the level of transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Both India and the United States have strong independent Election Commissions and a well-established system for resolving electoral disputes. The use of technology, voter education, and

transparency and accountability measures are also critical components of their successful electoral process.

The discussion of the impact of political interference on the effectiveness of the Election Commission in Pakistan highlights that political interference is a significant challenge to the electoral process. To ensure free and fair elections, there is a need for an independent Election Commission and strict measures to prevent electoral violence (Shullman, 2022). The evaluation of the effectiveness of recent electoral reforms in Pakistan reveals that while there have been improvements in some areas, there is still much to be done to strengthen the electoral process. The lessons learned from the best practices and innovations of Election Commissions in India, USA, and other countries provide valuable insights into how Pakistan can strengthen its electoral process.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the critical importance of a free and fair electoral process for democracy in Pakistan. The government must take comprehensive steps to ensure an independent, transparent, and efficient electoral process to build public trust in the democratic system. The implementation of the recommendations outlined in this study, combined with best practices from other countries, can help strengthen the electoral process in Pakistan and ensure a vibrant and healthy democracy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are suggested to strengthen the electoral process in Pakistan:

Establishment of an independent Election Commission: To ensure a free and fair electoral process, there is a need for an independent and impartial Election Commission. The government should ensure that the Election Commission is free from political influence and has adequate resources to perform its duties effectively.

Use of technology: Technology-based initiatives like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and the Result Transmission System (RTS) should be implemented to improve the efficiency, accuracy, and transparency of the electoral process. The use of technology can also help prevent electoral fraud (Pattanaik, 2019).

Voter education: There is a need for comprehensive voter education programs to increase voter awareness and participation [29]. The government and civil society organizations should work together to provide voter education in schools, universities, and communities to increase civic engagement.

Campaign finance reform: To ensure a level playing field for all candidates, there should be strict regulations on campaign financing. The Election Commission should be empowered to enforce these regulations effectively.

Prevent electoral violence: The government should take strict measures to prevent electoral violence [8]. This can include the deployment of law enforcement agencies to ensure a peaceful electoral process.

By implementing these recommendations, Pakistan can strengthen its electoral process and ensure free and fair elections, which are essential for building public trust in the democratic system.

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