



# DISCONTENT WITH GOVERNANCE NOT DEMOCRACY

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A Household Survey<sup>1</sup> conducted by the Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability (TDEA), 'State of Governance in Pakistan 2022; Household Survey Report' (SSGP), collected citizens' 'views from the ground up' about democracy and governance in Pakistan. The SSGP is based on a sampled survey of heads of 6,400 households<sup>2</sup> across 111 districts from the four provinces and the federal capital. It is representative of all but 20 of the country's 131 districts. Some select empirical findings are analysed below;

The first is that, a majority of Pakistanis (57%) prefer parliamentary representative democracy as the appropriate form of governance while a disturbing 16% still feel dictatorship is preferable and some 11% favour a theocratic

leadership. This consensus should put to rest repeat proposals for a presidential system or faith in some individual cult-like leadership.

Neither is this some academic preference, since the second important finding is that respondents are clear about the pragmatic goals of the political apparatus, with nearly 50% respondents recognizing democracy as the rule of elected officials who are responsible for the management of public services and resources. Another 30% expect democracy to deliver basic services like food and shelter, and 9% consider it responsible for economic growth.

However, overwhelmingly, respondents report that they are

<sup>1</sup>[www.tdea.pk](http://www.tdea.pk)

<sup>2</sup>The caveat with most HH surveys is that they collect data from respondents who are self-appointed 'heads of households' and who are inevitably men. This results in gender biased data. This notion and praxis needs to officially end.

completely and largely dissatisfied with the performance and service delivery of governments at all tiers - the highest mistrust is reserved for the federal (67%) and provincial governments (65%), followed by half the respondents lacking trust in local governments (52%). The largest percentage of respondents (81%) that reported frustration with the performance of their government representatives reside in the province of Sindh, with Punjab featuring 52% dissatisfaction with their legislators.

Neither is the discontent limited to elected representatives - the trust deficit extends to the state institutions. The lack of confidence in the ability of 6 listed institutions (parliament, judiciary, Election Commission Pakistan (ECP), the federal, provincial and local governments) to deliver public goods is concerning. Some 27% of respondents reported full distrust in Parliament (26% trusted it to some extent and only 12% completely); 26% distrust the judiciary (34% trusted it and only 14% completely); 30% do not trust in the ECP (21% trust it, only 8% completely); 33% are mistrustful of the federal (15% trust it, only 4% completely) and provincial governments (13% trust these and only 3% completely), and 32% do not trust their local governments.

The notion of kinship as the driver of voting decisions also requires closer study. The Survey shows variation across provinces but overall, that the manifestos and party affiliation of candidates is the main factor for voters; 66% of respondents vote for candidates on the basis of the political party they represent and 56% on the basis of personal affiliation/-clientalism. A competitive percentage (46%) say they vote on the basis of the personality of the candidate, while a high 35% say they vote based on the religious identity of the candidate; 23% vote according to kinship (baradari); 10% were predisposed to vote according to the sect or gender of the candidate.

## WHO SHOULD DELIVER?

The expectations of service delivery are clearly hinged not on local municipal officials but parliamentarians. Clearly, constituents know power lies with funds. It is not surprising that 87% never contact their local government but then, 94% don't even contact parliamentarians to resolve their service issues - sewerage, water, garbage, etc. In other words, even misplaced expectations do not convert into civic relationships.

This makes sense, since, in times of crisis (financial, humanitarian, security/conflict) most respondents (37%) report that people turn to elders in the family or tribal/community leaders for assistance or resolution<sup>3</sup>, and only 4% contact their representatives for either routine issues or in emergencies.

The SSGP reveals that respondents' suggestion for improving representative governance was fairly equally divided in that, 27% felt that more 'commoners' or the average (wo)man should serve as representatives in Parliament, while 24% identified the need to improve local government structures/administration, and 23% felt strict accountability of all representatives was imperative, while 19% felt improvement was possible if serving representatives were to conscientiously fulfil their responsibilities.

The SSGP was conducted prior to the climate-induced devastating floods of August 2022, and at the time, 99% of the respondents reported that the biggest challenge in their lives was inflation in prices, while 88% considered inflation combined with lack of income opportunity as the most critical issue in their contexts. Only 10% associated the current inflation with the Covid-19 pandemic and only 2% thought the reason was low yield/production.

Asked about their understanding of the reason for inflation, a high majority (87%) identified governance failures as the cause (in particular, 64% specified this to be due to the government's incompetence, 14% reasoned that this was due to corruption, while 9% held profiteers/market manipulators as responsible). This finding contravenes the political rhetoric weaponized about corruption rather than incompetence, as the source of failed governance.

## ON CONSTITUTIONALISM

Specifics about checks and balance of power between institutions - the military and constitutional courts - are vague in the Constitution (there is no specific curtailment of the military's power enshrined in it) and many observers feel that only formal incremental reforms will allow for the military to stay out of governance.

The constitution is an important shield against regressive turns in Pakistan's political history - but political crises have been managed by the adventurous judicial interpretations of the constitution and recently, use of contempt powers. This means that two unelected institutions - the armed forces and the constitutional courts - continue to jostle for tutelary roles in governance.

One example of a direct destabilizing effect rising from institutional collisions is with reference to the Islamic piety clause set by Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution by military ruler, General Zia ul Haq, which has been termed a "draconian law" since it carries the penalty of a lifetime disqualification if a parliamentarian is found to not meet its subjective and abstract standards - of righteousness, sagacity and honesty.

Legal experts point out that the penalty's duration is not part of the constitutional article but was read into its meaning by a Supreme Court bench when some politicians, including [former Prime Minister] Nawaz Sharif, faced Article 62(1)(f) in 2018. That judgement is now being tested as the former PM, Imran Khan, faces cases that could possibly invoke the same clause and risk disqualification.

<sup>3</sup>Nationally, only 5% reported approaching the formal courts for dispute resolution (the majority of these was for purposes of family disputes and then criminal cases).

## GENDER

A gendered lens is critical for understanding the opportunity cost of gender-blind governance. Disaggregated data yields important political information such as voting patterns in the last general election (of 2018) revealed increasing deviation in the way women vote compared to male voters in several constituencies. An analysis of the evidence shows that neglecting women's electoral agency is a direct and consequential disadvantage for political parties. It also suggests that undervaluing rather than expanding women's electoral concerns is a losing strategy.

Regarding gender dynamics, one survey<sup>5</sup> finds that women prioritize service provision issues differently from men. This was the case for electricity (8% higher), sanitation (6% higher) and gas (12% higher) in the top three issues, compared to male family members. Women vote in lower numbers as they feel politicians are not targeting them, and politicians are not targeting them because they do not see women as visible constituents.

## KEY OBSTACLES IN THE REFORM OF REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS

Rather than strengthening democratic levers, policy reform tends to gravitate towards militarisation and policing voting behaviour, and judicial overreach undermines representative credibility.

The notion of a corrupt political class dominates the narrative and is common currency used by political opponents which enables and justifies interventions and interruptions by other state institutions, and the vicious cycle spins on.

The collective interests of the rural poor are not projected upwards in national politics. While negotiations between voters, local leaders and politicians do meet voter demands on an ad hoc basis, voter interests never become the subject of public policy that can respond to their needs as a whole. So, policy is not being derived bottom-up.

The current model forces Pakistan's political parties to compete by attracting "electable" politicians – who are pliant to non-elected institutions and come together not to strengthen their parties but to win elections. Some 200 families get elected to Parliament (often, multiple ones from just one extended family/dan) making it impossible for new entrants. Candidates are eligible to stand from multiple constituencies. Further, parties are not well-defined in law and there are over 150 registered with the ECP; almost none of them hold internal elections – and the ECP overlooks this. Imran Khan is not the first populist leader in Pakistan; the efficacy and legitimacy of parties are limited to the personality and resources of the leader/founder. Parties are preoccupied with surviving mil-juridical pressures, rather than building core support amongst their own voters.

Another important finding is the reliance on media as the main source for information (for 72% respondents) is television, followed by social media/internet (47%), but this

means that government representatives are preoccupied with performing politics rather than delivering governance.

Reform in governance would require purging some of the amendments introduced by military rulers; expanding democratic freedoms and gender equality within state institutions and policies and specifying check and balance mechanisms while limiting the role of the military and judiciary and regulating their powers, perks and privileges. Shifting generational modes of praxis should encourage more digitization of executive functions - for the delivery of economic and fundamental rights of citizens, particularly the working classes, women, marginalized genders and ethnic groups, religious minorities and the marginalized.



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<sup>4</sup>Ali Cheema, Sarah Khan, Shandana Khan Mohmand and Asad Liaqat (February 2019), 'Invisible Citizens: Why More Women in Pakistan Do Not Vote,' IDS working paper, Volume 2019, No 524, Institute of Development Studies, UK.

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