

Super Election Year: Cases of 7 Asian Countries

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"Super Election Year: Cases of 7 Asian Countries"

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Preface

The year 2024 is a ‘super year’ for elections, with 3.7 billion voters in 72 countries having already cast or scheduled to cast their ballots. The Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN) invited 7 experts from member institutions to provide their views on each of 7 Asian countries that held elections by the first half of this year. I requested that they evaluate the electoral integrity, salient issues and notable features, as well as the impact of the elections on democracy. One individual’s perspective on electoral processes and outcomes may lack sufficient objectivity to be considered fully scientific. Nevertheless, these scholars are experts in this field and their analyses are aligned with existing election studies of the given country. The concise format of these essays offers a comprehensive overview of the current status of elections in Asian countries.

In light of the challenges facing electoral democracies, including corruption, populism, and poor management, there has been a growing skepticism about the ability of elections to effect meaningful change in political outcomes. It is true that elections can be utilized to legitimize an autocracy, or newly elected leaders may be more problematic than their predecessors. Nevertheless, it is only through winning an electoral competition that any individual or entity in a position of authority can claim legitimacy. Therefore, politicians, scholars, and civil society leaders persist in their efforts to ensure that elections work for a genuine democracy.

In the seven Asian countries under consideration, two conducted elections under a new electoral system, while the remaining five held elections in accordance with the existing rules. In Mongolia, the legislative elections introduced proportional ballots for the first time. The combination of simple majority constituency votes with newly arranged proportional votes is assessed to increase political inclusivity and inter-party collaboration. The opportunity for people to select their senators away from the military hands in Thailand, even if candidacies were limited to categorized occupational groups and the process is confusingly complex, is a significant progress to the country’s democratic development. The most notable election results would be the legislative election in India. In contradiction with the prevailing popular view, the

ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was unable to secure a majority of seats. The unexpected election results have fostered optimism for checking the Modi government's autocratization and facilitating democratic reforms. Additionally, in Pakistan, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supported independents secured the largest number of seats, despite harassment from intervening security establishment against the party. The electoral processes in India and Pakistan demonstrate that the outcome of elections matter even their process is flawed.

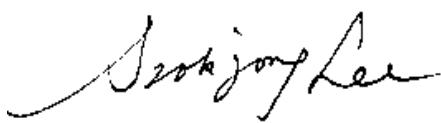
The Indonesian elections were marred by controversy surrounding the qualification of Vice-President Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the son of incumbent President Joko Widodo. Despite the comfortable victory of the Prabowo-Gibran tickets in the presidential and vice-presidential elections, the return of deep-rooted dynastic politics is regarded as a contributing factor to the democratic backlash. As the ruling coalition grows in size, it is anticipated that parliamentary checks on executive power will become more challenging to implement. The elections in South Korea and Taiwan seem to have been less dramatic, given that they had been conducted under the same severe political polarization for some time. The legislative elections in South Korea constituted a mid-term referendum on the incumbent President Yoon Suk Yeol. As a result of the ruling party's significant defeat, which saw it retain only approximately one-third of the seats, the party and the Yoon government lost their ability to control the policy agenda. This has led to an intensification of the already contentious political environment. In the case of Taiwan, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidential elections but could not gain the majority in the legislature. Consequently, the newly elected President Lai Ching-te is confronted with a divided government and a legislature that is unable to function effectively, which has resulted in the postponement of crucial legislation that affects the people's lives.

In terms of electoral cleanness, as evidenced by the V-Dem index (see Appendix 2), both South Korea and Taiwan are highly clean with fair and transparent management of election process by a capable election commission, and no vote buying due to higher penalties. Indonesia, Mongolia, and India are situated in the middle range. On the other hand, the elections in Thailand and Pakistan have been perceived as highly corrupted, characterized by the purchase of votes, electoral fraud, the infiltration of electoral processes by those in power, and even the rejection of electoral outcomes.

As for election issues, all authors point out that economic policy issues were not a prominent feature except in India, whereas political issues were dominant. The political issues that arise are primarily focused on personal attacks and accusations rather than on more substantive political policies, such as electoral reform, anti-corruption measures, or other significant matters. Current elections have been captured by exaggerated images and extreme (also fabricated) narratives. This dangerous symptom diverts voters' attention from crucial choice issues that have the potential to influence their lives. The impact of disinformation varies considerably across countries. India has a pervasive presence of disinformation during election periods. On the other hand, disinformation in South Korea and Taiwan did not play a significant role in influencing voters' decisions, although disinformation from China was a notable factor in Taiwan.

The summary tables of the seven essays (see Appendix 1) are provided in this report for readers' convenience. ADRN will continue to publish timely regional and comparative studies that are crucial for understanding the current status of Asian democracies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sook Jong Lee', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sook Jong Lee

Representative of ADRN

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Case 1: South Korea

Pernicious Polarization and a Divided Government: South Korea's 2024 Legislative Elections

Jung Kim

Associate Professor, University of North Korean Studies



South Korea's 2024 legislative elections reproduced a divided government situation in which President Yoon Suk Yeol and his conservative governing party would face the National Assembly controlled by the progressive opposition party. For President Yoon, the electoral results were virtually a midterm verdict of the voters on his unimpressive job performance that had overshadowed all other policy issues during the campaign period. The legislative confrontation between President Yoon, with negative agenda control power, and the opposition party, with positive agenda control power, has engendered a political stalemate that would usher in pernicious polarization between the conservatives and progressives. As one of the most likely consequences, democratic backsliding may kick in later during the remaining incumbent president's term in South Korea.

"The legislative confrontation ... has engendered a political stalemate that would usher in pernicious polarization between the conservatives and progressives."

1. The 2024 Midterm Elections: Opposition's Landslide

On April 10, 2024, South Korea held the National Assembly elections, electing 254 constituency-based seats under the first-past-the-post rule and 46 proportional seats. The progressive opposition party, the Democratic Party of Korea (DPK), won 176 seats out of 300, with the addition of its partner, the Democratic Alliance of Korea (DAK), in the proportional seats. On the other hand, the conservative governing party, the People Power Party (PPP), and its partner, the People Future Party (PFP), secured only 108 seats. The other smaller parties, including the Rebuilding Korea Party (RKP) with 12 seats, the New Reform Party (NRP) with 3, and the New Future Party with 1, were generally perceived as unfavorable to President Yoon and his party. DPK gained 51.2% of votes in constituency-based elections and DAK 26.7% in proportional ones. PPP had 45.7% in constituency-based elections and PFP 36.7% in proportional ones. RKP gained 24.3% in proportional elections.¹

“The electoral results reproduced a divided government situation, which endowed the governing party with negative agenda control power and the opposition coalition with positive agenda control power.”

The popular verdict invested the DPK and anti-Yoon smaller parties with a three-fifths supermajority that enabled the opposition coalition to prevent a legislative filibuster and to introduce the fast-track legislation for any ordinary bills even though its seat share fell short of a two-thirds veto-proof supermajority. It still allowed the governing party to sustain presidential veto power to kill ordinary bills passed in the opposition-controlled legislature and to preclude constitutional amendments and presidential impeachment from being initiated by the opposition coalition. The

electoral results reproduced a divided government situation, which endowed the governing party with negative agenda control power to keep items off the legislative timetable and the opposition coalition with positive agenda control power to ensure items on the legislative timetable are prone to produce a pernicious political stalemate in the National Assembly (Cha et al. 2024).

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_South_Korean_legislative_election (Accessed August 18, 2024).

Considering the low job approval rating of President Yoon Suk Yeol during the campaign period, the electoral defeat of the governing party was largely expected. However, it was a little surprising to see that DPK won a landslide victory over PPP.

2. High Quality Electoral Integrity

Few have questioned that the elections were free, fair, and democratically held. No serious vote-buying or other forms of electoral fraud have been reported. As indicated in International IDEA's credible elections score thus far, the election's integrity would be higher than 0.7, which shows a high performance among democracies (Spinelli 2024; Kang 2023).

Out of 44,280,011 registered voters, 29,654,450 cast ballots, which results in a 66.97% voter turnout rate. The turnout rate is higher than that of 2020 (66.21%) and the highest in the last thirty years (IFES 2024).

In addition, the political disinformation during the electoral campaign comes mainly from domestic sources rather than foreign ones, such as from China or North Korea. Unlike other democracies influenced by political problems from the outside, most disinformation originated from partisan social media in South Korea, be it conservative or progressive. Due to such unique characteristics, the impacts of disinformation largely depended on the partisan orientations of individual voters. In other words, extreme voters were strongly affected by partisan disinformation, while moderate voters were not (Yun 2024).

“Most disinformation originated from partisan social media in South Korea, be it conservative or progressive.”

3. Discontent over the President's Governance and Decisions on Policy Issues

The elections took place in the middle of President Yoon's term and were, in effect, a midterm election. Victory by the opposition coalition is a clear sign of strong punishment against him. The public sentiment expressed in the voting behavior was

“The public sentiment expressed in the voting behavior was ... rather an emotional reaction toward the president’s leadership performance.”

not an act to perform checks and balances on government policies but rather an emotional reaction toward the president’s leadership performance.

Policy conflicts between the two major parties were never a significant issue during the campaign period. When the President’s Office made controversial decisions, however, the approval ratings of both parties began to reverse. For example,

he appointed former Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup as ambassador to Australia, vetoed the special counsel bill to probe into the death of a Marine during a flood rescue operation, and rejected the special counsel bill to investigate the alleged luxury gift case involving first lady Kim Keon Hee, all of which drew public criticism (Yeo 2024).

4. Pernicious Polarization and the Erosion of Democracy

For the last two years, President Yoon had almost squandered all the political support of the conservative core voters in the ‘non-battleground’ constituencies and that of the swing voters in the ‘battleground’ constituencies. By being driven into political insolvency, the strategy to go public will result in swing voters becoming further alienated without bringing sufficient conservative core voters into his political base as compensation. Likewise, the strategy of legislative bargaining will end up with a larger scale of disaffection of conservative core voters without attracting swing voters enough to reconstruct an electoral coalition for him. To put it simply, President Yoon has become more of a political liability than a political asset to the conservative party through the legislative election.

The post-election public opinion confirmed the electoral dealignment of President Yoon’s support base. Conservative core voters in the ‘non-battleground’ constituencies and the swing voters in the ‘battleground’ constituencies seemingly no longer expect something from him. For the three years to come in his remaining term, President Yoon will continue to be helpless against the positive agenda control power of the opposition coalition. Whenever he denies the policy proposals of the

opposition coalition by exercising presidential veto authority, the conservative party will lose the support of swing voters. Whenever he accommodates the legislative demands of the opposition coalition by forgoing the negative agenda control power given to the president, PPP will fail to win the support of conservative core voters. In a sense, the end of the 2024 legislative election is likely to be the beginning of a dead-duck president in South Korea.

At the same time, the progressive DPK will help erode South Korea's democracy through constitutional hardball or political behavior that broadly conforms to the letter of the law but deliberately undermines its spirit. The opposition coalition with the positive agenda control power can exercise its legal authority to push legislative items, such as special counsel bills. It virtually utilizes the legislative power as a political weapon. The danger is that any legislative act can be used to undermine democracy in ways that are technically legal, which is why DPK's constitutional hardball is so perilous (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023).

“The progressive DPK will help erode South Korea’s democracy through constitutional hardball or political behavior that broadly conforms to the letter of the law but deliberately undermines its spirit.”

In sum, it is not unreasonable to predict that the repeated confrontations between President Yoon, with negative agenda control power, and the opposition coalition, with positive agenda control power, will accumulate all the elements that engender ‘pernicious’ polarization, which likely results in another cycle of democratic erosion in South Korea.

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A blue-tinted background image showing a crowd of people. In the center, a man is waving his right hand. To his right, another man is wearing a white baseball cap. The image is partially obscured by text overlays.

Case 2: Taiwan

Divided Politics on National Sovereignty: Taiwan's 2024 Presidential and Legislative Elections

Chin-en Wu

Associate Research Fellow, Academia Sinica; Asian Barometer

1. DPP's Winning with Minority Government

The 2024 presidential and legislative elections took place in Taiwan on January 13. Taiwan adopted a semi-presidential system that grants the president the power to nominate and replace the premier. The president is elected through a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) selected Vice President Lai Ching-te as their candidate. The opposing Kuomintang (KMT) nominated the incumbent mayor of New Taipei, Hou Yu-ih, for the presidential candidacy. The Taiwan People's Party (TPP) chose its leader, former Taipei City mayor Ko Wen-je, as the presidential candidate. Despite initial plans for a joint ticket between KMT and TPP, a final agreement was not reached. Lai's victory marked a historic moment, representing the first time since the introduction of direct election in 1996 that a party has won more than two consecutive presidential terms.

“Lai's victory marked a historic moment, representing the first time since the introduction of direct election in 1996 that a party has won more than two consecutive presidential terms.”

Lai secured the presidency with 40% of the votes, followed by Hou with 34%, and Ko with 26% (Central Election Commission 2024).

The other part of the general election is the legislative election. The Legislative Yuan is the unicameral parliament in Taiwan, and its members are elected through a mixed-member majoritarian system. The Legislative Yuan, consisting of 113 members, includes 73 single-member seats, 34 party-list seats, and six aboriginal seats. The legislators in single-member districts are elected through a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. The candidate with the highest number of votes wins the seat. Each voter casts two ballots—one for the district seat and another for the party-list seats. The party-list seats are distributed based on each party's proportion of the overall popular vote. Parties submit lists of candidates for these at-large seats, and the seats are allocated to parties based on their proportion of the votes. DPP ultimately gained 51 out of 113 seats, thus losing its majority in the parliament. KMT won 52 seats and became the majority party (Central Election Commission 2024). TPP gained eight seats. The result made the new DPP government a minority government. The KMT was able to win the position of speaker.

2. Fair and Effective Elections but Facing Interferences from China

Elections in Taiwan are considered fair and transparent. The Election Commission, overseeing the electoral process, ensures that they adhere to legal standards and that the procedures are conducted openly and fairly. In addition, Taiwan's judiciary operates independently, as court rules regarding election disputes are largely unaffected by political influences. Second, Taiwan has an automatic registration system through which all citizens who live in Taiwan receive automatic election notification letters days before the election. Additionally, the election dates are scheduled on Saturdays. Therefore, the cost of voting is low. The turnout for 2024 was 72% (Central Election Commission 2024), which is about average after democratization. Because of concurrent elections, the presidential and legislative elections have very similar turnout. This situation also makes a unified government more likely to occur. Despite the divided government this time, the difference in the number of seats between the two leading parties is very close.

Like the small democracies neighboring authoritarian countries, such as the case of Ukraine facing Russia, Taiwan has faced threats from China, which regards Taiwan as one of its provinces. During the recent elections, China has employed direct and indirect methods to influence elections in Taiwan. Apart from official intimidation, China spreads misinformation through various channels. False news is disseminated on social media, often shared by Taiwanese netizens, aiming to discredit political parties critical of China. External forces also interfere in elections by inviting neighborhood representatives, residents, and civil organization staff to travel to China, often covering accommodation and dining costs (*Central Broadcasting Station* 2023-12-04). Another method is attempting to pay Taiwanese journalists to publish news that is biased in favor of China and to publish fake opinion polls. Moreover, Chinese money also flows to independent legislative candidates, even though the law forbids it. Despite these efforts, they did not appear to significantly influence voters' decisions, as the DPP and TPP, the central parties, still secured 66% of the votes combined.

“Apart from official intimidation, China spreads misinformation through various channels.”

3. Identity and Security Issues Prevailed

The issue of unification or independence is Taiwan's most significant political divide. On one end of the spectrum, there is a leaning towards pursuing Taiwan's independence, strengthening Taiwanese identity, and reducing economic and trade relations with China. On the other end, there is a leaning towards reunification, maintaining a greater Chinese identity with Taiwanese identity, and strengthening economic and trade ties with China. Among the three main presidential candidates, considering their stance on independence or reunification on a spectrum from the left to the right, the DPP is on the left, the People First Party (PFP) is in the center, and the KMT is on the right.

With China's rising threat of force over Taiwan came an opportunity for both parties to exploit the threat for their electoral gain. During the election campaign, the DPP candidate cast himself as the defender of Taiwan's sovereignty and claimed that if the opposition candidate were elected, Taiwan would surrender

to China, democracy would collapse, and Taiwan's sovereignty would weaken. DPP responds to numerous criticisms of its domestic policies by diverting them to Chinese interferences, such as the spread of fake news. The ongoing threat from China, coupled with the ruling party's exploitation of the existential threats, undoubtedly influenced the victory of the DPP in this election. However, the DPP received only 40% of the vote, indicating that the rhetoric of existential threat may not resonate strongly with the majority of Taiwanese voters. Some voters may prefer more dialogues with China, reducing the miscalculation and risk of military confrontation.

KMT also exploited the threats from China by presenting the election as a choice between war and peace. They claimed that DPP-nominated candidate Lai Ching-te's pro-Taiwan independence stance and confrontational approach were conducive to escalating conflict with China, where the young people would be forced to go to the battlefield if the conflict erupts into war. Lai Ching-te clarified several times that he would not change the Republic of China's official name and amend the constitution.

Despite the disputes over the China issue, all the primary candidates advocated for a close Taiwan-American alliance, increasing Taiwan's defense deterrence and engaging in dialogue with mainland China based on equality and dignity. U.S. academics and the media did not expect any significant changes in U.S.-China-Taiwan relations if any of the three candidates were to be elected. All candidates had visited the U.S., met with scholars from universities and think tanks, and held discussions with American officials, which ensured a clear understanding of their positions on the relationships. In essence, their security policies were not far off from one another (Gray 2023).

Compared to the last election, there was greater scrutiny of domestic issues, such as housing and energy policies, in this election (Yu 2023). However, candidates and the media in this election still focused primarily on the issues related to national defense, security, and sovereignty, with insufficient discussion on other public policy issues. The issue of sovereignty is deeply rooted in political identity and can effectively consolidate support from core

“The issue of sovereignty is deeply rooted in political identity and can effectively consolidate support from core supporters.”

supporters. Meanwhile, many important socio-economic issues facing Taiwan, such as the potential bankruptcy of the labor pension scheme, severe demographic challenges, global warming, labor shortages, and fiscal costs of energy subsidy, have not received sufficient attention and discussion. Instead, the three candidates and the media had primarily focused on attacking opponents about their China Policies and their minor flaws.

4. The Confrontational Politics Behind Delays in Legislation

In recent years, political parties and politicians have increasingly framed general elections as critical turning points for Taiwan, casting them as pivotal moments that could fundamentally impact the nation's democracy, sovereignty, and overall stability. This perception of high stakes amplifies the pressure on political actors to achieve victory, often leading them to prioritize electoral success over strict adherence to democratic norms and practices. The heightened sense of urgency tends to drive both major political parties, particularly the ruling party, and their supporters to adopt strategies that may sidestep or even violate established democratic procedures. Such actions not only undermine the integrity of these organizations but also erode public trust in the political process.

“The heightened sense of urgency tends to drive both major political parties ... and their supporters to adopt strategies that may sidestep or even violate established democratic procedures.”

Over the past few years, there have been instances where political actors have attempted to exert influence over non-political organizations, such as courts, the military, and the police, in attempts to intimidate their opponents and sway public opinion. By strategically elevating the significance of the election, the government provides itself with a justification for its actions. This situation undermines the level playing field. For example, several days before the election, China launched a satellite that passed high above the sky over Taiwan. The Defense Ministry issued an air raid alert, stating it was a Chinese missile test (*Central News Agency* 2024-01-09). This misinformation contributed to a heightened sense of national security threat and potentially boosted support for the ruling party. More

frequent government interventions involve directing prosecutors to investigate and prosecute political opponents for alleged misconduct both before and after elections as a strategy to secure electoral victory.

In the past few years, Taiwan has passed the Social Order Maintenance Act to tackle fake news and the Anti-Infiltration Act to counter Chinese influence in elections and politics. While China is known for engaging in cognitive warfare and infiltration, DPP also exploited this threat. Regarding fake news, criticizing the government or commenting on government policies may sometimes be deemed as cognitive warfare, leading to potential legal consequences and creating a chilling effect (Wu 2023). Additionally, the Ministry of Justice proposed enhanced scrutiny of new immigrants from China to counter foreign influence, sparking controversy due to its targeted focus on a specific group.

In addition, because of the divided government and narrow seat margin in the parliament, both party camps believe they have the mandate to decide the policy direction. In general, the DPP government often chooses not to work with the opposition parties to get bills passed, and the two main opposition parties, especially the KMT, strive to push through their own policy agendas. This situation significantly delays the progress of some important socioeconomic bills, causing fewer bills to be passed in the first legislative session after the general election than the previous ones (*Formosa News* 2024-07-18). Besides legislative bills, the DPP government also appears to have little appetite for power sharing regarding the composition of independent government organizations and committees.

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Case 3: Mongolia

Democratic Progress and Remaining Challenges: Mongolia's 2024 Legislative Elections under New Rules

Ganbat Damba

Chairman of Board, Academy of Political Education of Mongolia

1. Electoral Reform and the Results of the Recent Elections in Mongolia

Since the transition to democracy in early 1990, two nationwide elections have been introduced in Mongolia: parliamentary and presidential. This year, in 2024, Mongolia held the 9th parliamentary elections of State Great Khural (Assembly), which take place every four years. For the first time in Mongolia's history, 78 members of parliament (MPs) were elected from 13 majoritarian districts, with an additional 48 MPs elected through proportional representation in a nationwide constituency. The number of seats in the parliament was increased from 76 by approximately 40 percent to 126 seats. Since 1990, Mongolia's population has grown from 2.15 million to 3.5 million, an increase of about 40 percent. The increase in the number of parliamentary seats has reflected this population increase.

The 2024 elections witnessed the largest number of candidates to date, with the highest number of candidacies since the 1992 ratification of the democratic Constitution of Mongolia. The number of participating parties and independents has fluctuated over the years.

"The 2024 elections witnessed the largest number of candidates to date."

In the 2024 election, 372 individuals from 22 parties and coalitions contested through party lists, while 969 candidates ran in constituencies, bringing the total to 1,341 candidates, marking a record high.

The new parliament consists of 126 seats based on the constitutional amendments made in 2023. The election results saw the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) securing 68 seats, followed by the Democratic Party (DP) with 42 seats, the HUN Party with eight seats, and the National Alliance and the Civil Will-Green Party, each with four seats.

The MPP won 50 constituency seats and 18 from the party list, ensuring a majority presence in parliament alongside three other parties that surpassed the legal threshold for representation. According to the constitution, the party holding the majority of seats shall initiate government. The MPP announced its decision to establish a coalitional government with the DP and the HUN Party.

The government consists of 22 ministers, and the chief executive is from the MPP. Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai, who served as a prime minister in the previous government, will continue to lead the government as prime minister. The two deputy prime ministers are from the DP and the HUN Party. Other ministerial seats were composed of the three parties. In the sense of coalitional government, a positive expectation prevailed. Nevertheless, there is strong opposition to the coalition and critiques from liberal-minded groups. The main critiques are on the economic mismanagement by the MPP, which has ruled alone in the previous eight years (2016-2024).

2. Fair and Democratic Elections Despite Some Concerns

To observe the 2024 parliamentary elections, around 30,000 observers were registered by the General Election Committee of Mongolia. Among them, 29,000 are from political parties, 300 from civil society organizations, and 259 observers from 40 countries and 21 international organizations. Mongolia's Western partners, including the United States, expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the elections, emphasizing the country's commitment to democratic principles. The U.S. congratulated Mongolia on the successful completion of the electoral process and expressed readiness to collaborate with the newly elected members of the State

Great Khural and the incoming government.

Despite the positive outcomes of the elections, some concerns must be addressed. The International Election Observation Mission (EOM) by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the European Parliament reported that while the administration of the elections was deemed effective, concerns were raised about competitiveness due to an uneven playing field. While Mongolia's legal framework for democratic elections was deemed adequate, further alignment with international standards on fundamental rights and freedoms are recommended. Media coverage, although extensive, was criticized for biases favoring certain ruling parties, potentially limiting voters' ability to make informed decisions. On election day, while the polling process was generally smooth and transparent in reporting results, shortcomings in ballot reconciliation and verification procedures in some stations were noted, affecting the overall integrity of the process.

“Media coverage, although extensive, was criticized for biases favoring certain ruling parties, potentially limiting voters’ ability to make informed decisions.”

The voter turnout in Mongolia has steadily declined over the years, from a high of 95.6% in 1992 to 69.6% in 2024. While the turnout was consistently above 80% in the early years of Mongolia's democratic elections, it has dipped below this mark since 2008, reaching its lowest point in 2012 at 67.3%. Despite a slight recovery in 2016 and 2020, the 2024 turnout indicates a continuous downward trend. Female voter participation was remarkably high at 74.1%, compared to 65.9% among men. Among age groups, there was increased turnout among young adults in their 20s-30s born after the transition to democracy, with approximately 70% participation, and among those in their 30s-40s, turnout exceeded 70%.

While no significant election irregularities were reported, there were instances of distributing money and goods to influence voters and attempts to buy votes directly. So far, there have been no cases of these kinds of illegal activities being publicized or punished.

3. Issues in the Political System

In recent years, corruption has been one of the most prominent topics in public discourse.”

In recent years, corruption has been one of the most prominent topics in public discourse, with several new claims of misconduct of high-level officials. In April 2022, protests against corruption and the government’s perceived ineffectiveness were held. Larger protests occurred in December 2022 after a corruption scheme

related to coal exports was made public. In response, the authorities established a parliamentary investigative committee, arrested several high-level officials and members of parliament (MPs), and amended the criminal code with stricter sanctions for corruption offences. The particularly harsh winters of 2023 and 2024 exacerbated economic hardship for the rural herder population and those living in several economically and infrastructure-deprived areas of the capital. In April 2024, in an expedited manner, parliament adopted new legislation targeted towards the sustainable livestock industry.

Many ODIHR EOM interlocutors criticized the bypassing of the standard legislative process and the ruling party campaigners for using the new provisions to promote their party. Stakeholders’ concerns regarding the independence of the judiciary and pressure on journalists remain. Civil society organizations operate in a somewhat challenging environment, with limited financial and human resources, insufficient state support, and weak public participation.

Women remain underrepresented in politics and decision-making positions despite the legal provisions against discrimination. In the outgoing parliament, there are only 13 women (17 percent). Only three out of 22 ministers are women (14 percent). Additionally, there is only one female governor out of 22. According to most IEOM interlocutors, persistent gender stereotypes and limited resources continue to act as barriers for women entering politics.

4. The Impact of the 2024 Elections on Democracy

This year's legislative elections have yielded positive results. The first positive result is that in addition to the traditional two parties, a three-party coalition is expected to hold the majority of seats in parliament. A three-party coalition can contribute to collaboration among major parties and make more inclusive policies. At the same time, there is a concern that there can be no effective opposition from the Parliament (Ikh Khural) to check the executive power.

“This year’s legislative elections have yielded positive results: three-party coalition, enhanced female representation, and the entry of new politicians.”

The second positive result is the enhanced female representation in Mongolian politics. The composition of the parliament reflects diversity across age, gender, education, profession, and disability. In the election of 32 women as members, a significant milestone in gender representation was achieved. This increase follows the implementation of a new law in 2024 mandating gender parity on party candidate lists, ensuring 50% of female candidates. As a result, the proportion of female members in parliament rose from 17.1 percent in 2020 to 25.4 percent in 2024. Furthermore, for the first time in Mongolian history, a minority Kazakh woman was elected. The increased representation of women in the parliament underscores the effectiveness of gender quota-based party lists as the primary mechanism for increasing women's representation in parliament, contributing to Mongolia's progress in global gender parity rankings.

The third positive element is the entry of new politicians to the Mongolian Parliament. Based on the composition of the 126 MPs elected in the 2024 parliamentary elections, a significant majority, 80%, are newcomers to parliamentary service. This turnover highlights a shift towards new leadership and fresh perspectives within Mongolia's political landscape.

Despite these positive results, the latest amended election law still contains undue restrictions on voting rights and freedom of speech, alongside several gaps and vague provisions, including those relating to the restrictions on voting rights, limitations on freedom of speech and media freedoms, and the deadlines for the resolution of election-related cases by the judiciary. In particular, the new Law on

“Despite these positive results, the latest amended election law still contains undue restrictions on voting rights and freedom of speech, alongside several gaps and vague provisions.”

Political Parties, which came into force on January 1, 2024, contains some overly prescriptive provisions on the structure and internal organization of political parties and imposes restrictions on party membership, challenging the possibility of associating freely - at odds with international standards. It also does not foresee any legal remedy in case of denial of registration of a party by the Supreme Court.

In a nutshell, Mongolia’s 2024 parliamentary elections reflect both progress and challenges in its democratic evolution, emphasizing the importance of ongoing reforms to enhance electoral integrity, inclusivity, and representative governance.

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Case 4: Indonesia

Strengthened Dynastic and Oligarchic Politics: Indonesia's 2024 Presidential and Legislative Elections

Aisah Putri Budiatri

Researcher, National Research and Innovation Agency

1. The 2024 Elections and Their Results: Entrenchment of Dynastic and Oligarchic Politics

Amidst democratic backsliding, Indonesia held simultaneous elections for five key positions on the same day: president and vice president, members of the People's Representative Council (DPR), the Regional Representative Council (DPD), and the Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) at both provincial and district/city levels. The DPR election results, which reflect national political strength, showed that only eight of eighteen parties surpassed the 4% parliamentary threshold, with no new parties entering parliament.

The eight incumbents included all previous parties except for the United Development Party (PPP), which failed to re-enter parliament with only 3.87% of the vote. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) led with 16.72% of the vote, followed by the Party of Functional Group (Golkar) (15.25%), the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) (13.22%), the National Awakening Party (PKB) (10.61%), the National Democrats (Nasdem) Party (9.65%), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) (8.42%), the Democrat Party (7.43%), and the National Mandate

Party (PAN) (7.23%). Meanwhile, for the presidential election results, the election commission (KPU) declared Prabowo Subianto, the chairman of the Gerindra party, and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the current Mayor of Solo, as the winners with 58.6% of the vote. They defeated Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar (24.9%) and Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD (16.5%) (Farisa 2024a). This victory marks Prabowo's first

“This victory marks Prabowo’s first successful presidential bid after five attempts since 2004, achieved alongside Gibran, the eldest son of the current president, Joko Widodo.”

successful presidential bid after five attempts since 2004, achieved alongside Gibran, the eldest son of the current president, Joko Widodo (Jokowi).

The 2024 elections are pivotal for reinforcing Indonesia's democracy. Until 2019, the country's elections were recognized for upholding principles of competitiveness, fairness, and freedom. However, contrary to expectations, the process and results of the current elections seem to have exacerbated the weakening of Indonesia's democratic structures.

Discussions of President Jokowi's significant influence and his use of political power to support his successors dominate these elections. Such power dynamics undermine the fairness of the elections. The election results and Jokowi's actions in the post-election also highlight the entrenchment of dynastic and oligarchic politics, which, along with the diminishing presence of political opposition, further weakens Indonesian democracy.

2. Continuity vs. Reform: The Central Debate of Indonesia's 2024 Elections

As Jokowi approaches the end of his second term, he aims to preserve his political influence and continue his government initiatives. Although he initially considered extending the presidential term, party leaders rejected this proposal (Mietzner 2024; Tempo 2024). Consequently, Jokowi has focused on securing his successor's victory. After considering various political scenarios since 2022, Jokowi decided to support Prabowo, his rival in the 2014 and 2019 Presidential elections and his current Minister of Defense, along with his son in the 2024 presidential election (Mietzner 2024; Tempo 2024). To strengthen their position, parties within Jokowi's coalition, including Golkar and PAN, have aligned with Prabowo-Gibran. Most notably, Golkar Party

General Chair Airlangga Hartarto serves as Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, and PAN's General Chair Zulkifli Hasan is the Minister of Trade. Apart from Golkar, PAN, and Gerindra, there were the Democratic Party, PBB, PSI, Gelora Party, and Garuda Party which supported Prabowo-Gibran.

The presidential election campaign centered on debates over whether to continue or change Jokowi's policies. The Prabowo-Gibran team, seen as Jokowi's successors, committed to maintaining his policies, including developing the new National Capital City (IKN), infrastructure projects like toll roads, and the downstream of the mineral and mining industry. Additionally, they proposed new initiatives, notably a free lunch program, that garnered significant public attention. In contrast, Anies Baswedan, the former Governor of Jakarta, paired with Muhaimin Iskandar, Chairman of PKB and backed by PKB, Nasdem, PKS, and the Ummat Party, advocated for changes to Jokowi's policies. Throughout the campaign, Anies-Muhaimin criticized Jokowi's key policies and promised alternatives.

The last presidential candidates were Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD, supported by PDIP, PPP, Hanura, and Perindo. Ganjar, a PDIP presidential candidate, comes from the same party where Jokowi was a member from 2015 to 2023. Initially, it was expected that Jokowi would support Ganjar, but he ultimately backed his son in the election. During the campaign, Ganjar-Mahfud appeared uncertain about criticizing or continuing Jokowi's policies, though they eventually leaned more toward criticism. This ambiguity is influenced by the overlapping voter base between Jokowi, PDIP, and Ganjar, as Ganjar is cautious not to alienate Jokowi's loyal supporters.

Even as Jokowi's leadership ends in 2024, he continues to play a significant role in the election and its aftermath. The platforms of the presidential candidates, supported by their respective parties, revolve around whether to continue or reform Jokowi's policies. With Prabowo-Gibran's victory in the recent presidential election, it appears that Jokowi's policies, rather than conclude with his term, will instead be extended by the new government for the next five years.

“Even as Jokowi’s leadership ends in 2024, he continues to play a significant role in the election and its aftermath.”

3. The Influence of Jokowi's Political Power on the 2024 Elections

The quality of these elections has been questioned primarily due to the pervasive influence of incumbent President Jokowi on the election process. Compared to previous elections in Indonesia, the 2024 elections stand out as the most controversial. Notably, these elections have attracted significant criticism from an alliance of academics from various universities and a coalition of civil society groups (Farisa 2024b; *Kontras* 2024-02-09). While issues like vote buying, electoral fraud, high mortality among polling staff, and the massive spread of disinformation persisted, in addition to KPU commissioner ethics violations, they were not perceived as primary concerns this time. Instead, the main issue that academics and activists raised is the abuse of political power by the current president and state apparatus, which they argue undermines democratic principles (Farisa 2024b; *Kontras* 2024-02-09).

“Jokowi’s support for Prabowo-Gibran became contentious when he allegedly used presidential power in ways contrary to democratic principles.”

Jokowi’s support for Prabowo-Gibran became contentious when he allegedly used presidential power in ways contrary to democratic principles. Throughout the 2024 election cycle, state resources seemingly benefitted the Prabowo-Gibran candidacy and the parties supporting them, including Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, and the Democratic Party. Public suspicion grew over Jokowi’s role in the Constitutional Court’s decision to adjust candidacy requirements, allowing Gibran, at 36, to run despite the 40-year minimum age set by Law 7 of 2017 (Farisa 2024b). Gibran’s short experience as Mayor of Solo for only two years justified his eligibility. The decision was particularly controversial because Chief Justice Anwar Usman is Gibran’s uncle. Usman was later found guilty of ethical violations and dismissed as chairman.

Jokowi, who had expressed a willingness to “cawe-cawe pemilu” —meddle in the election— became visibly involved during the campaign period. This involvement drew criticism from academics and activists, who accused Jokowi of partisanship and using state assets to support Prabowo-Gibran (Farisa 2024b; *Kontras* 2024-02-09). His lack of neutrality was evident from his frequent public appearances at government events with Prabowo. Moreover, as revealed in various

studies and media investigative reports, Jokowi went all out in using his political power as president by deploying state apparatus, using public facilities and government programs, and violating the ethics of state institutions to benefit Prabowo-Gibran and the supporting coalition (Mietzner 2024; Tempo 2024).

Jokowi's influence, while not the sole factor, contributed significantly to Prabowo-Gibran's decisive victory and its supporting coalition. The duo secured the presidency in a single round, garnering over 58% of the vote, with support exceeding 20% in more than half of Indonesia's provinces. This result marks an increase of over 10% from Prabowo's previous performance in the 2014 and 2019 elections, where he received around 44-46% of the vote (KPU 2014a; KPU 2019a). Prabowo-Gibran outperformed other candidates in nearly all provinces except Aceh and West Sumatra (KPU 2024). Notably, they succeeded in Central Java, Papua, and Bali, where Prabowo had previously lost, and Jokowi had won with more than 60% of the vote in the 2014 and 2019 elections (KPU 2014b; KPU 2019b). Prabowo-Gibran's electoral success was mirrored by an increase in the vote share for the coalition parties that supported them. The Prabowo-Gibran coalition secured 43% of the votes in the legislative election, excluding the parties that failed to enter DPR, up from the 39% these parties received in the previous election.

4. The Impact of the 2024 Elections on the Erosion of Democracy in Indonesia

While elections are often seen as celebrations of democracy, the 2024 elections in Indonesia appear poised to weaken an already fragile democratic system. Rather than serving as a genuine opportunity for voters to select the best candidates for president, vice president, and parliament members, these elections are likely to be used by those in power to entrench their political dominance through undemocratic means. The 2024 elections mark a strengthening of dynastic and oligarchic politics alongside a diminishing presence of political opposition, threatening Indonesian democracy.

The 2024 elections mark a critical juncture for consolidating dynastic and oligarchic politics among Jokowi, Prabowo, and their elite allies. Gibran's rise to the vice presidency, despite his limited political experience, marks the strengthening of

“The 2024 elections ... mark a strengthening of dynastic and oligarchic politics alongside a diminishing presence of political opposition.”

the Jokowi dynasty in national politics, following his youngest son, Kaesang Pangarep, becoming General Chair of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) before the 2024 elections, and his son-in-law, Bobby Nasution, serving as mayor of Medan. Further, the victory of the Prabowo-Gibran highlights the growing consolidation of oligarchic

support around Jokowi and Prabowo. As Jokowi’s term nears its end, he reshuffled his cabinet, appointing key figures who support Prabowo-Gibran and are part of Prabowo’s political dynasty: Agus H. Yudhoyono, Chairman of the Democratic Party, as Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning; Thomas Djiwandono, Prabowo’s nephew, as Deputy Minister of Finance; Sudaryono, a Gerindra politician, as Deputy Minister of Agriculture; and Supratman Andi Agtas, a Gerindra politician, as Minister of Law and Human Rights.

After winning the election, Prabowo sought to consolidate political power by forming a dominant government coalition. He invited political parties not originally part of his supporting coalition to join. Within a month of the KPU’s decision, Nasdem, PKS, and PKB—parties that supported Anies-Muhaimin during the presidential election—had joined. If fully integrated, the Prabowo-Gibran coalition would control approximately 81% of parliamentary seats, leaving PDIP as the only potential opposition. However, until Prabowo’s inauguration in October, opportunities remain for PDIP to join the government. Negotiations between Prabowo and party elites, including those from PDIP, are ongoing. If it happens, there would be no formal opposition left in parliament.

The consolidation of dynastic politics, oligarchy, and the weakening of opposition power in parliament, as observed in the 2024 elections and their aftermath, pose a significant threat to Indonesian democracy. Concentrating political power among a few elites limits political participation and competition, allowing only those with substantial resources to influence the political process. The situation will worsen if this concentration of power solidifies within a dominant government coalition in parliament. Consequently, achieving checks and balances will be challenging, weakening parliamentary oversight and leading to underrepresentation of public interests. In the future, Indonesia’s weakened democracy is likely to deteriorate further.

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Case 5: Thailand

The Impact of the 2024 Senate Election under New Rules on Thai Politics and Democracy

Thawilwadee Bureekul

Deputy Secretary General, King Prajadhipok's Institute

1. Nature of the 2024 Senate Elections and the New Senate

Thailand had a new Senate election based on the 2017 Constitution in 2024. The Senate selection process in Thailand has been a contentious issue, especially after the 2014 military coup and the subsequent changes in the constitution. The new Senate, succeeding the junta-appointed chamber, comprises 200 members selected from 20 professional groups, with ten seats available for each group. This system is expected to change the Thai political landscape.

The most significant issue for this new Senate is that it does not participate in the prime minister (PM) vote. Nonetheless, it retains substantial power: enough to shape the course of the Thai political trajectory. Among them are (1) Voting (and vetoing) on constitutional amendment proposals. The proposal's first and third readings require an absolute majority of both houses, with at least one-third of the Senate to approve the proposal. In effect, this is equivalent to veto power by the Senate, a tactic that has been deployed many times in the past five years. (2) Endorsing candidates to independent agencies. The Senate holds the power to endorse and vote on candidates to independent agencies such as the Election Commission (EC), the

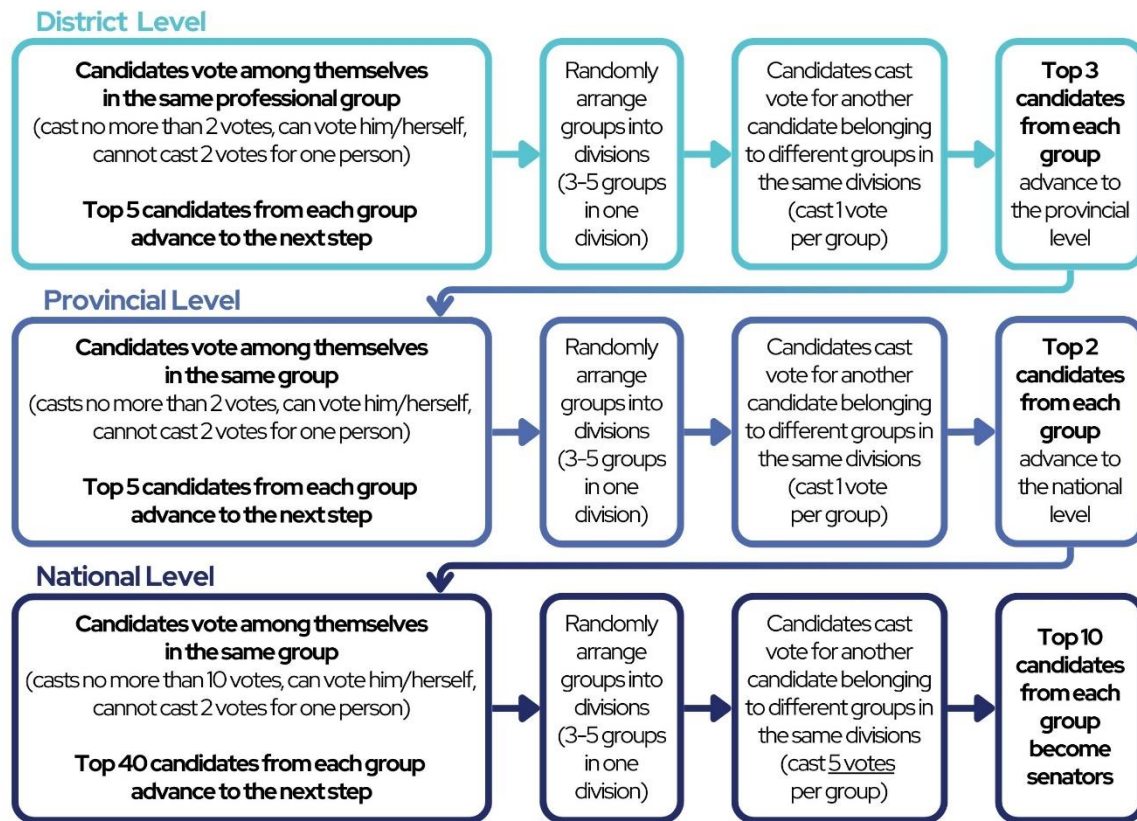
Constitutional Court, the National Anti-Corruption Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and the Ombudsman. (3) Legislative duties. An upper chamber, the Senate is a critical part of the legislative process. Any bill approved by the House of Representatives could be amended or delayed by the Senate. And (4) Check and balance. The Senate provides a system of checks and balances against the government, which includes interpellation or submitting the motion for a general debate on the performance of a minister or government's policy.

“The complex intra-group and inter-group voting method designed to prevent manipulation, the new Senate is expected to be a chamber of impartial experts in their respective fields.”

Since the senate is very important in Thai democracy, the new senate election is designed to get the representatives of different professional groups. The complex intra-group and inter-group voting method designed to prevent manipulation, the new Senate is expected to be a chamber of impartial experts in their respective fields. While the new system removes direct military intervention, it remains an indirect voting process, not open to individual citizens. The Senate election process is conducted in three phases, where candidates are chosen among themselves within and across professional groups at district, provincial, and national levels. The EC organizes and monitors this process.

The new Senate election marks a significant shift in Thai politics, promoting more inclusive representation in the Senate and requiring political parties and the lower house to work with the Senate.

Figure 1. The Senate Selection Process



Source: adapt from iLaw

2. Assessment of the New Election System and Issues Within

This paper assesses the Senate election process based on a literature review and in-depth interviews with Senate candidates, political scientists, and politicians before and after the Senate election. Considering this Senate election was conducted under a new system, most controversies surrounded the initial candidate selection process. Some issues in the Senate election process are outlined below.

The first issue concerns the number of candidates. For the new system to work, an estimate of at least 100,000 applicants must seek election, and each of the 20 groups must have a large number of candidates to compete against one another.

However, the recent Senate race attracted 48,117 candidates, much lower than the estimated number. After that, the Director-General of District Level Elections

“The recent Senate race attracted much lower than the estimated number ... for the new system to work.”

issued application forms to 48,117 people (on May 24, 2024), comprising 27,779 males and 20,338 females. Subsequently, the number of applicants selected by the District Level Election was announced on May 29, 2024, with 46,206 applicants meeting the qualifications after verification, including 26,727 males and 19,479 females. A total of 2,020 individuals (1,112 men and

908 women) could not run due to previously forgetting to exercise their voting rights or holding positions within political party administration without resigning. They also lost their application fees of 2,500 baht (approximately 71 USD) in being forfeited. On May 26, 2024, the final selection process ended with 200 names in the senator group and 100 in the reserved group.

The second issue is the lack of information on candidates. The provincial EC schedules candidates to collect their introduction documents, which contain information on all candidates in their respective professional groups across the district and allows candidates to review and prepare in advance, as opposed to receiving printed materials on-site. The introductory document is only a single page, including personal information, educational background, work history, work experience in the relevant professional group (limited to five lines), and a photograph of the candidate. The brief five-line professional background is insufficient to make an informed decision on whom to vote for.

“There were ‘inaccuracies in the qualification details,’ ... creating low trust in the candidate qualification checking system.”

The third issue is the ambiguity of the 20 occupational categories and flawed representation. There were “inaccuracies in the qualification details,” including incorrect group assignments, such as the placement of a salt farmer in the rice farming group, a gas station attendant representing the energy sector, and village health volunteers with 12 hours of training applying for the trained medical group with six years

of education. Additionally, female group leaders from different provinces were dressed similarly and photographed at the same studio, and chicken farmers were photographed at the same studio but were from different areas. Such situations

create low trust in the candidate qualification checking system. The EC issued a press release stating that the reports were “distorted from the truth.” It clarified that the selection of Senate candidates at the district, provincial, and national levels had not yet progressed to the voting stage. Therefore, these claims were speculative, baseless, and lacked evidence. The citizens who apply for selection must choose to do so by themselves. And when combined with the regulations and restrictions imposed by the EC, the result is as seen. In some districts, some applicants do not fit into any occupational groups, and some occupational groups have only a few applicants.

The fourth issue is that problems arise from the selection process, such as issues with the lottery system when scores are tied and cases where only one group of applicants exists in a district, leading to an automatic selection without a vote. They pointed out that these issues stem from legislative drafting, specifically the lack of provisions to address them adequately. As for transparency issues in the Senate selection process, it is worth noting that although the law requires visual recording of the selection process at the district, provincial, and national levels, audio recording is not mandated. This omission complicates the gathering of evidence for complaints about the selection process. Furthermore, it was observed that certain areas might have significant lobbying, such as those within political and religious networks, though not all areas experience this. They discussed the unique nature of the Senate selection process, designed to allow self-selection within professional groups, thus opening opportunities for various societal groups to share state power. However, the EC did not provide enough opportunities for candidates to introduce themselves, particularly during the final selection round, as the regulations are stringent and complex; however, efforts are being made to normalize situations. For example, the EC and those involved in the selection process must allow public observation and establish consistent selection processes across provinces to achieve the best possible progress.

The fifth issue is the poor management of the EC and integrity questions. In preparation to run the senate selection process, the EC reiterated that it had instructed its provincial offices to monitor the behavior of all Senate candidates. If any candidate were found to have committed an offense, or if there were credible reports with evidence of wrongdoing, the EC promised to take immediate legal action. There are still many questions about the EC’s integrity, for example, by claiming the existence of a “collusion list” of

“There are still many questions about the EC’s integrity.”

candidates allegedly pre-selected to advance through the district, provincial, and national levels effortlessly. However, there has been no visible response from the EC regarding investigations.

In addition, observers are not allowed to participate actively in the electoral process even though participation in elections is a basic right for citizens. In some districts, observers were barred from entering polling places despite wide-angle CCTV footage.

3. Impact of the Senate Election on the Future of Democracy

The outcome of the 2024 Senate election could significantly impact democracy in Thailand, as the Senate plays a crucial role in approving legislation and overseeing the government's actions. If the election results in a Senate dominated by a single political party or coalition, it could lead to a concentration of power and a lack of a system of checks and balances within the government, potentially undermining democratic principles and leading to authoritarian tendencies.

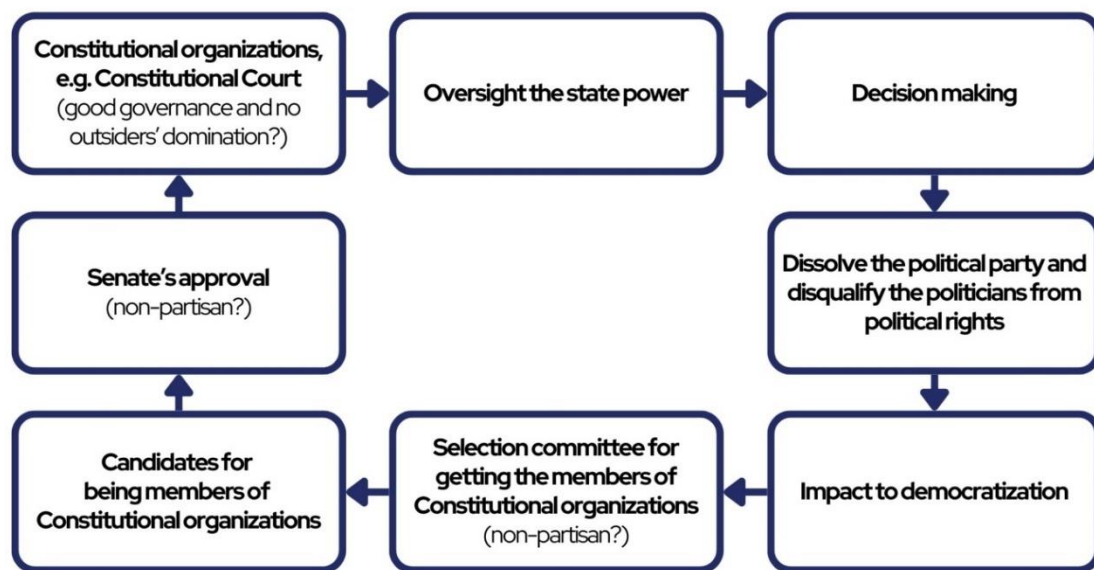
On the other hand, if the election results in a diverse and balanced Senate with representation from different interest groups, it could strengthen democracy in Thailand. A diverse Senate would likely hold the government accountable and ensure the representation of all citizens' interests in the legislative process.

However, the 2017 Constitution, drafted under the military junta (National Council for Peace and Order: NCPO), significantly altered the Senate's structure and selection process. Corruption scandals involving the Election Commission and the unfair process have raised concerns. Political party-oriented candidates also control the Senate, which may lead to problems in the checks and balances process within parliament. The expected nonpartisan nature of the Senate may not be achievable since the Senate's power includes approving members of constitutional or independent organizations, which are essential to balancing power. An example of this is that the Senate leader, elected by

“The expected nonpartisan nature of the Senate may not be achievable since the Senate’s power includes approving members of constitutional or independent organizations.”

Senate members on July 23, 2024, is considered to be supported and dominated by a political party. This dominance could influence the role of the Senate in overseeing and approving appointments to key institutions like the Constitutional Court, the National Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Election Commission. If the Senate becomes partisan, it could disrupt the balance of power in Thai democracy. The August 7, 2024, dissolution of the opposition party by the Constitutional Court based on politically motivated allegations underscores this concern. The dissolution of the Move Forward Party and the infringement on the political rights of its politicians (revoking or restricting their ability to participate in political activities such as voting, running for office, or holding a political position) seriously damages the country's return to genuine democratic rule.

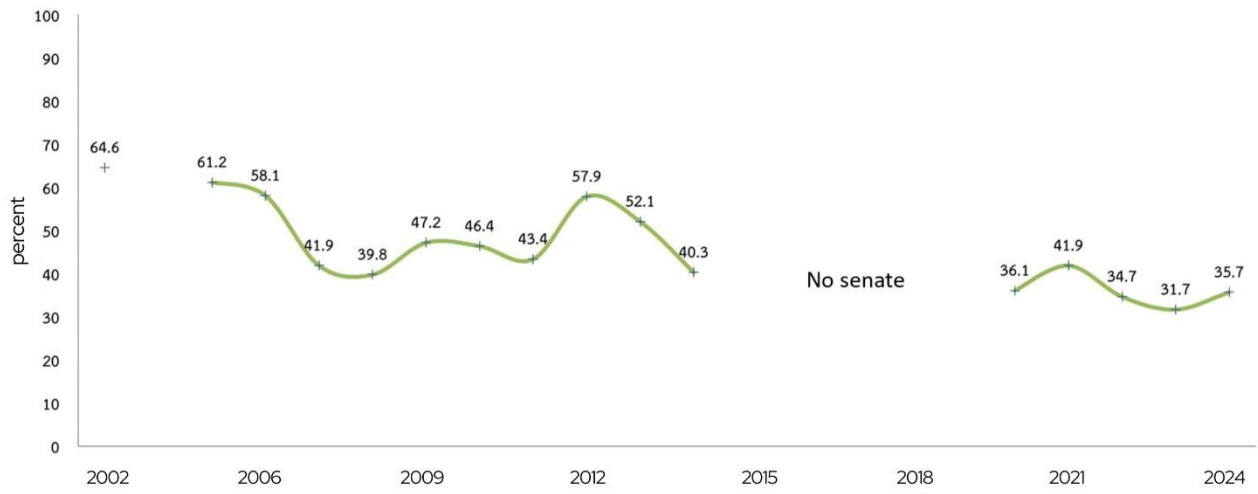
Figure 2. Senate Power and Impact on Thai Democracy



Furthermore, the new Senate has been described as “diverse but unequal,” with 45 female members, accounting for 22.5% (compared to 19.40% MPs). Under this system, 13 out of 77 provinces do not have any senators at all.

Finally, the Senate election result has led to low trust in political institutions within Thai society. According to King Prajadhipok’s Institute (2024), only one-third of Thai people reported trust in the Senate.

Figure 3. Trust in the Senate, 2002-2024



Source: King Prajadhipok's Institute

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Case 6: India

Following India's Recent Parliamentary Election: Hope for Democratic Rejuvenation

Niranjan Sahoo

Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

1. Ruling Party's Unexpected Narrow Win

India's 2024 parliamentary election billed as the biggest election in history. The 2024 election held to decide who would occupy the Lok Sabha or the lower House of the Indian Parliament. The mammoth exercise, in which nearly 980 million voters and more than 600 political parties were involved, participated in an electioneering process that stretched almost two months over seven phases. The first phase of the election was held on April 4, and the seventh and last phase was on June 1. The noteworthy fact about the mega-electoral exercise was that nearly the entire process was conducted through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), as a staggering 5.5 million EVMs were used to hold this mammoth election (*Business Standard* 2024-03-16). Most importantly, the 2024 polls were billed as the most expensive election in the world (Pradhan 2024), overtaking the United States (presidential) elections.

The election results, declared on June 4, were a huge shock for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Proving all pollsters and political commentators wrong, as most had predicted an easy third consecutive victory for the ruling party, the parliamentary election results denied a

majority for PM Modi's party, serving as a major boon for the opposition coalition, particularly the main opposition Indian National Congress (INC). While 272 out of a total of 543 seats are needed to win a simple majority in Lok Sabha, the ruling BJP won only 240 seats, thus requiring the support of coalition partners to form the government. Meanwhile, the Congress-led INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) bloc won 234 seats, in which INC nearly doubled (99 seats) its previous tally. Notably, the Hindu-right BJP faced major electoral setbacks in the

“The results of the 2024 election came as a big booster for the revival of the opposition and democratic space.”

heartlands by losing too many seats in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, among others (*The Hindu* 2024-06-04). In short, the results of the 2024 election came as a big booster for the revival of the opposition and democratic space, which was in complete disarray owing to the authoritarian streak of the ruling party that enjoyed a brute legislative majority starting in 2014.

2. Elections Sided with the Ruling Party

Low voter turnout marred the 2024 polls. Compared to previous elections, the 2024 polls saw lower voter turnout (65.7% vs 67.4% in 2019). Many analysts blamed this on voter fatigue (Jain and Jadhav 2024). There are some problems with electoral integrity. First, many voters doubted the accuracy of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Second, the Election Commission was perceived to be biased toward the ruling party by many. For instance, the Commission's unusual delay in uploading voter turnout figures raised eyebrows concerning its veracity. The controversy finally ended in the Supreme Court, where the judges sought the Commission's clarifications to douse the controversial fire. Many opposition leaders, civil society activists, and election watchdogs petitioned the highest court to intervene and ensure the electoral process was free from manipulation (particularly EVMs) by the ruling government. The matter was finally heard by the Supreme Court in the middle of the general election, which settled in favor of EVMs (Sahoo 2024a). Third and most important was the ruling party's widespread misuse of state machinery to deny the opposition a fair chance to compete in the election.

The high point of the 2024 polls was strong allegations about the ruling party making an all-out effort to deny the opposition parties a level playing field to compete in the elections. The ruling party used every instrument of the state to target and marginalize the key opposition parties. For example, the Income Tax Department froze the accounts of the main opposition party, INC, over allegations of funds diversions, and arrested two top leaders and chief ministers from the opposition-ruled state of Jharkhand and Delhi) over unproven corruption charges. These occurrences prompted some major Western governments, such as Germany and the United States, to raise concerns regarding the fairness of the electoral processes (Sahoo 2024a). While there may be a basis for such action, such measures in the middle of general elections hugely impact the ability of the opposition to put up a decent campaign and avail a fighting chance against the BJP behemoth (Tiwary 2022). In short, the 2024 polls were heavily sided with the ruling party.

“The ruling party used every instrument of the state to target and marginalize the key opposition parties. The 2024 polls were heavily sided with the ruling party.”

Lastly, there were major instances of vote buying (cash for votes) or parties and candidates bribing voters to secure their votes. As widely covered in the media, there was the rampant distribution of money/material goods, liquor (even drugs), jewelry, medical bills, etc., by candidates to woo the voters. The Election Commission, with its limited strength on the ground, was able to confiscate more than INR 10,000 crore over a two-month span of electioneering (*The Economic Times* 2024-06-03) in contrast to INR 3,477 crore seized by the Commission in 2019 polls.

3. Major Issues of the Elections: Economy, Populism, and Disinformation

While numerous issues dominated the elections, key concerns included stagnating income, increasing prices, rising unemployment, growing inequality, identity politics, rising inequality, and the unchecked spread of misinformation.

Economic Distress and Growing Inequality: The 2024 poll largely fought on economic issues and widespread dissatisfaction over stagnant income and

associated economic distress. A pre-poll survey conducted by the well-known CSDS in April found that stagnant income, unemployment, and inflation were the topmost complaints among average voters. Given the Modi government's lackluster performances regarding job creation, income redistribution, and sustained economic growth, the opposition launched energetic campaigns to put the ruling party in a tight spot. While the ruling BJP and PM Modi tried to skirt the key economic issues by aggressively deploying divisive and polarizing issues, such economic issues dominated the course of the campaigns.

Unemployment: Youth unemployment emerged as a burning topic during the elections, particularly in the Hindi-speaking Northern states. While the Indian economy continues to grow at an impressive pace among the large economies, it is not adding up many jobs. The recent International Labour Organization (ILO) noted, "In 2022, the share of unemployed youth in the total unemployed population was 82.9%." Further, among the unemployed, the proportion of educated youth, particularly those with secondary level education or higher, has nearly doubled to 65.7% from 35.2% in the 2000s (ILO 2024). It is no wonder that the 2024 national polls witnessed competitive promises by key parties on job creation. The National Congress, in its manifesto called "Nyay Patra," had promised to bring the Right to Apprenticeship Act, thereby ensuring a one-year apprenticeship to every degree holder or graduate (below the age of 25) with a stipend of INR 1 lakh (one hundred thousand). Not to be left out in the race, the ruling BJP's manifesto named "Sankalp Patra" had declared to create millions of jobs for youth and new schemes for women (Sahoo 2024a).

"The 2024 poll witnessed unprecedented promises by parties on welfare goods and populist schemes."

Competitive Populism: The 2024 poll witnessed unprecedented promises by parties on welfare goods and populist schemes. It is worth noting that a key pillar of PM Modi's consecutive victories was his government's track record of delivering welfare goods to broad swathes of citizens across the country. Public distribution of key welfare goods such as gas cylinders, electricity connections, toilets, and direct benefits transfer under New Welfarism has helped the Modi government to create a robust vote bank. For instance, data from recent surveys, especially the National Family Health Survey 2019-21, found an impressive rise in household goods and services, particularly electricity, flushed

toilets, gas connections, etc. (Vaishnav 2023). No wonder PM Modi in 2024 polls doubled down on welfare schemes (branding as “Modi Ki Guarantee”). Not to be lagging behind the ruling party, the opposition, the INC, in particular, promised an array of attractive welfare schemes to entice the voters. The party, which released a 46-page manifesto, had promised to provide universal healthcare and free education until Class XII to unveil an employment scheme for the urban poor, among others. Regional parties, too, announced numerous welfare schemes ranging from free rations to education to attract voters (Sahoo 2024a). In short, competitive populism took center stage in the campaign strategy of every party.

Reaping Dividends from Identity Politics: Since its electoral landslide in 2014, the right-wing BJP has been unleashing Hindu majoritarianism and polarizing messaging largely targeted towards religious minorities, particularly Muslims, to consolidate Hindu votes in its favor. It may be mentioned that the ruling BJP had greatly in reaped the electoral harvest from the polarizing and divisive campaigns in the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections. Thus, it was no surprise that the ruling party led by PM Modi did not miss any opportunity to launch communal or divisive campaigns and unleash hate speeches for electoral gains. Leading from the front, Prime Minister Modi taunted minorities as “infiltrators” and “traitors” and called main opponents “puppets,” “scammers,” “Pakistani stooges,” and so on (*Frontline* 2024-06-03). In short, the 2024 campaigns saw unprecedented levels of divisive rhetoric and hate speeches by the country’s top leaders.

The Threat of Fake News and Disinformation: High volumes of fake news and disinformation that significantly distorted voters’ choices marred the 2024 polls. While fake news and disinformation were already significant challenges in the 2019 polls, the major uptick in disruptive technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and deepfakes, suggests that the scales and intensities of these

“High volumes of fake news and disinformation that significantly distorted voters’ choices marred the 2024 polls.”

challenges greatly varied in the 2024 polls. With increasing access to the internet and cheap internet data, the 2024 elections were speculated to be on shaky ground concerning disinformation and electoral integrity. While most political parties and candidates did show alacrity in aggressively deploying digital and social media tools in their campaigns, the Election Commission issued guidelines and warnings to

parties and tech platforms to desist from spreading disinformation. Overall, disinformation (growing deployment of artificial intelligence and deep fakes) proved to be a daunting challenge as most parties struggled to counter hate messages and disinformation throughout the campaigns.

4. Checks on Autocratization and the Opportunity for Democratic Renewal

What does the election outcome portend for democracy in India? There are plenty of takeaways. One, it puts a pause on the steady autocratization of Indian democracy. Modi's party losing heavily in its bastions, failing to secure a simple majority, and

“The government would not find it easy to weaponize key state institutions against the opposition and other critics of the party and government.”

being forced to form a coalition government means the government would not find it easy to weaponize key state institutions against the opposition and other critics of the party and the government (Mehta 2024). Two, an impressive show by the opposition parties, the INC, in particular, serves well for India's democratic space. It would bring greater competition and accountability within the Parliament and other forums. Three, a weaker BJP would allow biased

media and paralyzed civil society to regain their voices on crucial governance issues. As time progresses, one would witness greater activism from key players, particularly the higher judiciary, on the issues of gross violation of civil liberties/illegal arrests, targeting of religious minorities, brazen misuse of state institutions by the government, and so on. Finally, the election outcomes greatly empower the regional/identity-based political parties, which can act as a check against the centralizing tendencies of the central government led by Prime Minister Modi.

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Case 7: Pakistan

Issues in the Electoral System and the Further Erosion of Democracy: Pakistan's 2024 Legislative Elections

Ahmed Bilal Mehboob

President,

Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency

1. Independent's Progress and Coalition Government

Pakistan organized its 12th General Election on February 8, 2024. The term 'general election' refers to the election to one or more directly elected legislatures as a whole, whereas a 'by-election' is confined to a few constituencies of a legislature. Pakistan has one directly elected national legislature called the National Assembly. The other national legislature is the Senate, which is elected indirectly by the members of the directly elected legislatures. Each of the four provinces has a directly elected Provincial Assembly. Although the constitution does not expressly require that the election to all legislatures is held simultaneously, over the past 12 general elections, the elections for all five of the directly elected legislatures have been held either on the same date or with a gap of 2-7 days.

The seats in each of the five legislatures are divided into two categories. The predominant 'general seats' are about 80% of the total seats in each legislature and are directly elected by the voters in each constituency. The remaining 20% are 'reserved seats' for women (about 17%) and non-Muslim minorities (About 3%), and the candidates for these seats are elected through a proportional representation

system using the priority list of candidates submitted by each political party prior to election. The election for the reserved seats takes place based on the total number of general seats secured by each political party from the province concerned, in the case of the women's reserved seats, and the entire country in the case of the reserved seats for non-Muslim minorities.

Pakistan has a population of about 241.5 million, and the total registered votes were over 128.6 million. Voter turnout in this election was around 48% - lower than 51.6% and 55% in the 2018 and 2013 elections, respectively. There are three major political parties in the country: The current ruling party, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (P ML-N), headed by former three-time Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif; Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), effectively led by former Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan; and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, son of current President Asif Ali Zardari and former Prime Minister, late Ms. Benazir Bhutto Due to a legal issue, PTI candidates were not allocated a common election symbol by the Election Commission and had to contest election as independent (non-aligned) candidates; however, their list was displayed on the PTI website so

“PTI-supported independents won the largest percentage of the votes polled ... PML-N formed the government with the support of PPP and other regional parties.”

that the party supporters may recognize the party's candidates. PTI-supported independents won the largest percentage (about 31%) of the votes polled and secured 80 out of 266 general seats in the National Assembly. PML-N polled second largest votes (About 23%) and secured 75 seats in the National Assembly. PPP received about 14% of the total votes and secured 54 seats in the National Assembly.

PTI also prevailed in the provincial assembly elections. It won the largest number of general seats (138 out of 297) in the Provincial Assembly of the largest province of Punjab, followed by PML-N, which won 137 seats, and PPP, which won 10 seats. In Sindh province, PPP dominated the Provincial Assembly by winning 84 out of 130 seats. PTI swept the election in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly by winning 87 out of 115 seats. The verdict was scattered in the Balochistan Provincial Assembly, but both PML-N and PPP led by winning ten seats each out of a total of 51 seats contested.

With these election results, at the national level, PML-N formed the government with the support of PPP and other regional parties. PML-N formed the government in Punjab and PPP in Sindh and Balochistan. PTI-supported independent members formed the government in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

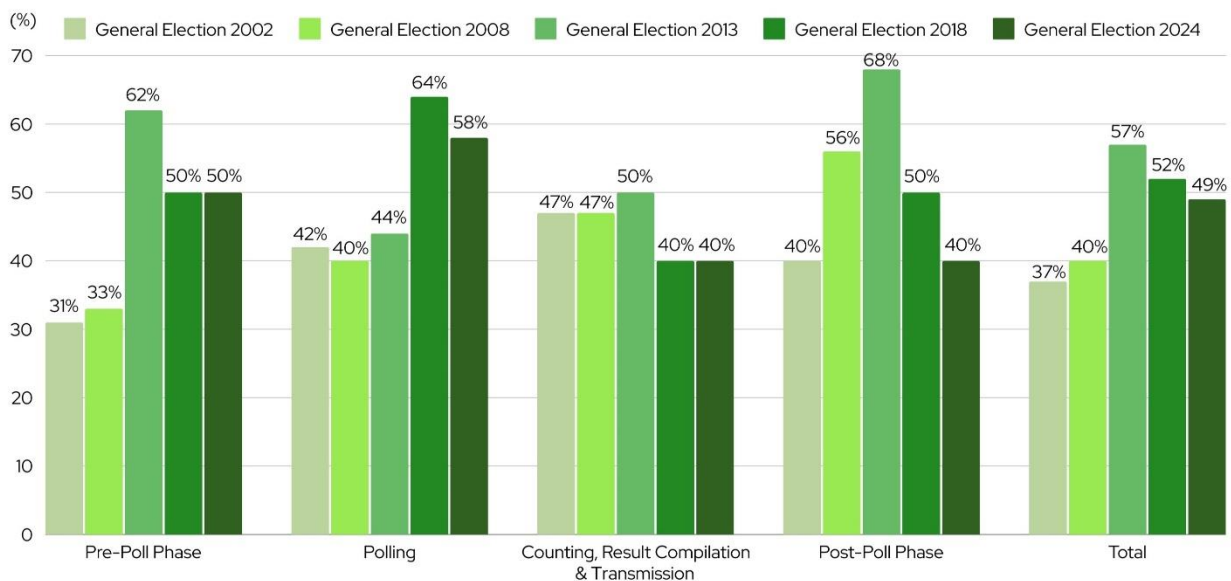
2. PILDAT Assessments of the Quality of Elections

In general, the elections in Pakistan are not perceived to be free and fair, with the degree of fairness fluctuating from election to election. Since the 1985 General Elections, pre-poll rigging has been the most common method of influencing election outcomes.

The 2024 General Elections are also generally believed to be unfair in all four phases of the electoral process, from pre-poll to post-poll. Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) has been carrying out the Assessment of the Quality of Elections since the 2002 General Elections. The comparative results of the Assessment of the General Elections in 2002, 2008, 2013, 2018, and 2024 are presented in the following figure.

“The elections in Pakistan are not perceived to be free and fair, with the degree of fairness fluctuating from election to election.”

Figure 1. Comparative Assessment of Quality of Elections, Segmented



These assessments were carried out by electoral experts within PILDAT and outside using a framework of 39 parameters covering all aspects of the electoral cycle. Based on these assessments, the 2024 General Election was the least fair of the three elections since 2013.¹

3. Issues in the 2024 Elections: Government Interference and Poor Management

Below are some of the key issues relating to the 2024 General Elections:

Interference: It is generally believed that the national security establishment interferes in the elections to ensure that its favorite party comes to power and the ‘undesirable’ party either loses the election or is at least not allowed to come to power. In April 2022, a vote of no confidence ousted the previous PTI government - about 18 months before it was to complete its 5-year term. It is a common belief

“It is a common belief that PTI was voted out of the Assembly because the military had stopped supporting the party, despite PTI coming into power in 2018 largely because of military support.”

that PTI was voted out of the Assembly because the military had stopped supporting the party, despite PTI coming into power in 2018 largely because of military support. Since PTI and its chairman, Imran Khan, had fallen out of the military’s favor, it is generally believed that the military played an important role through the Returning Officers (ROs) who belonged to the executive this time, unlike the previous elections when ROs were judicial officers not directly subordinate to the executive, in making PTI lose enough seats in the 2024 General Elections to become unable to form the government. However, something unprecedented

happened during the 2024 elections. Despite all the machinations allegedly orchestrated by the establishment, PTI emerged as the largest political party at the national level and in two provinces, Punjab and KP, in the general election.

Apparent Victimization of a Political Party: Although each political party is allocated a common election symbol, which makes it easy for voters to identify party candidates, PTI was denied a common symbol for its candidates by the

¹ Please see the complete Assessment of the Quality of General Election 2024 at <https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AssessmentoftheQualityofGeneralElection2024.pdf>

Election Commission. The symbols are important in the Pakistani context because a large segment of voters is illiterate and hence can identify a candidate by a symbol only. Due to the denial of a common election symbol, PTI candidates who won the election were branded as independent members, which meant that they were not able to claim the 77 reserved seats in the National and Provincial Assemblies, which would have been their due share had they been allowed to contest as PTI candidates.

The PTI Chairman was arrested before the electoral process kicked in and remained imprisoned throughout the electoral campaign. Many of the senior office-bearers of PTI were either put behind bars or had to go underground because of the fear of arrest. The PTI campaign suffered seriously because of these handicaps.

Poor Management of the Electoral Process: The federal government suspended the internet and cellular phone service on polling day, which made it extremely difficult for voters to search for their polling stations and candidates to complete last-minute canvassing and polling day arrangements. The suspension of internet and cell phone services also led to the collapse of the Election Management System of the ECP, which was launched with a lot of fanfare.

“The federal government suspended the internet and cellular phone service on polling day, which made it extremely difficult for voters to search for their polling stations and candidates to complete last-minute canvassing and polling day arrangements.”

Electoral laws in Pakistan require that all of the results of the elections in all constituencies be declared by 2:00 am following the day of the election. If, for any extraordinary situation, some of the results are delayed, the results should be declared by 10:00 am the next day, with Returning Officers submitting the reasons for the delay. The Election Commission, however, did not follow these deadlines, as it provided no reasonable explanation for the delay and strengthened doubts about the manipulation of the result by the executive.

The law requires that all polling stations provide vote-count statements (Form 45) and upload them to the ECP website within 14 days of the polling date. This process was also delayed, and the Forms were finally uploaded 13 days after the deadline passed. This unjustified delay further reinforced the suspicions about the fairness of the election.

There have been large-scale discrepancies between Form 45 and Form 47 (Consolidated constituency-wise statement of votes secured by each candidate), both uploaded on the ECP website. These discrepancies lend some credence to the allegations that Form 47 was manipulated.

The Elections Act paved the way for the appointment of only sitting High Court Judges as Election Tribunals; however, when the new government came into power after the controversial election, it amended the law to allow for the appointment of retired judges as Election Tribunals. This amendment seems to have strengthened the impression that the government would try to get a desired verdict from the tribunals consisting of retired judges, especially in the largest province, Punjab, which controls about 53% of the National Assembly constituencies. This fear is based on the general perception that retired judges are more vulnerable to pressures as they owe their appointment to ECP.

4. Impact of Elections on Democracy

Democracy Index: With the supposedly flawed 2024 General Elections, the state of democracy, which was already fragile, has further weakened. The score of Pakistan in the Democracy Index 2023, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2024, released on February 15, 2024, has registered the lowest value of 3.25 in the past 16 years since EIU started releasing Democracy Indexes. Additionally, the global democracy index rank of Pakistan decreased 11 places to 118 since the last Democracy Index was released in 2022, which resulted in its status downgrading from a ‘flawed democracy’ to an ‘authoritarian regime,’ which is the lowest category of democracy in the EIU Democracy Index. With the flawed recent elections, it is anticipated that the democracy index score and rank of Pakistan may further deteriorate.

Sympathy votes: The most negative impact of the repeatedly rigged elections and the removal of elected governments through undemocratic means is that people tend to vote in the subsequent election for the victimized party out of sympathy and for emotional reasons without considering the performance of the victim party while it was in government. This phenomenon has repeated itself several times in Pakistan.

In the 1988 General Election, people cast sympathy votes for the PPP because its Chairman, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was removed and later executed by the military regime of General Zia ul-Haq. In the 2024 election, people overwhelmingly voted for Imran Khan's PTI because they felt that he was removed as prime minister through a conspiracy supported by the establishment. The subsequent arrest of Imran Khan and the victimization of his party further strengthened this perception of victimhood and led to enhanced support for PTI. Despite this, the quality of governance by the Imran Khan-led government was not perceived to be good, and the popularity of PTI had plummeted, as reflected in defeat in most of the by-elections before the party was made to leave the government.

“People tend to vote in the subsequent election for the victimized party out of sympathy and for emotional reasons without considering the performance of the victim party while it was in government.”

Political parties losing the incentive to improve governance: Because of rigging in elections, political parties seldom work on improving their programs and the quality of governance when in power because it is ultimately the establishment that decides which party should be favored or sidelined. PML-N government's performance from 2013-2018 was one of the best. It was not rewarded in the 2018 election, however, because the establishment had constructed a narrative of PML-N corruption and exiled its leader, Nawaz Sharif. Parties, therefore, generally focus on securing support from the establishment rather than their performance.

Governments focus on short-term gains: In Pakistani history, none of the past prime ministers were able to complete their 5-years constitutional term as they were either removed through a military coup or made to leave through intrigues mostly supported by the establishment. The average term of a prime minister comes to less than two and a half years. Because of this ground reality, each prime minister focuses on short-term visible grand projects to impress voters even though these projects are generally expensive, funded through expensive loans with questionable real utility and disastrous consequences for the national economy. Therefore, political parties don't get the time and opportunity to plan and execute long-term institutional reforms.

Erosion of public trust in the electoral system: Because of the continuing manipulation of elections, public trust in the electoral process remains very weak, as

reflected in low voter turnout in each election. The average voter turnout of the past nine (9) elections has been a paltry 45%, one of the lowest in the world and the lowest in South Asia.

These factors are primarily responsible for the low and deteriorating quality of democracy in Pakistan.

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Appendix 1. Summary Table

	South Korea	Taiwan	Mongolia
Types of election	Legislative election	Presidential and legislative election	Legislative election under new rule
Voting rate	67% (slightly higher than the previous general election)	72% (usual range)	70% (gradual decline)
Free and fair competition	Highly free and fair	Highly free and fair	Highly free and relatively fair; but ruling party campaigners used new provisions to promote their party.
Election management (vote rigging, election commission)	Good run by the independent election commission	Good run by the independent election commission	Good run by the independent election commission
Vote buying	None	None	None
Disinformation	Partisan disinformation but not significant on voters' decision	China related disinformation but not significant on voters' decision	Ruling party used non confirmed criminal information against opposition

Indonesia

Presidential and legislative election

81%

Free but not fair due to the abuse of state power

Fairly good management despite ethical violations and tragic polling staff deaths

Prevalent

Prevalent

Thailand

Senate election under new rule

-

Free but complex occupational categories and three stage voting process making competition less transparent

Fairly good management despite some episodes

None or almost none?

Almost none?

India

Legislative election

66%

Highly unequal competition against the opposition parties, such as the ruling party deploying state institution to arrest key opposition leaders, tax probes, choking/freezing party accounts of main opposition, etc.

Doubts over possible manipulation of electronic voting machines, lack of trust on Election Commission's fairness

Widely prevalent as Election Commission captured a record INR 10,000 crore meant to be distributed among voters

Fake news, misinformation and disinformation including AI, deepfakes were widely used by parties and candidates

Pakistan

Legislative election

48%

Very unfair with intervention of national security establishment and suspension of mobile phone service and internet on the polling day, etc.

Poor by discrepancies between polling station vote count and delaying announcing election results

Not reported from anywhere

Pictures of other large public rallies were supplanted to claim large gatherings for their meetings, but not a major issue

Election results

South Korea

Progressive DPK won 176 seats while ruling conservative PPP only secured 108 seats in total 300 seats

Taiwan

DPP Vice President Lai Ching-te won with 40%, while KMT Hou Yu-ih defeated with 34%; but KMT took 52 seats while DPP received 51 seats in total 113 seats of Legislative Yuan.

Mongolia

New electoral system electing 78 simple majoritarian district seats and 48 proportional seats; MPP won 68 seats followed by DP securing 42 seats in total 126 seats.

Major issues

Governing style of President Yoon Suk Yeol; policy issues were not salient.

National identity and sovereignty issues prevailed over any policy related issues.

Corruption scandals of incumbents

Positive impact on democracy

None in particular

First election for the same party to win three consecutive presidential terms

More female MPs taking 32 seats and 80% seats for new comers

Negative impact on democracy

Loss of agenda control of executive body; Conflicts between opposition controlled National Assembly and the government; pernicious polarization in the end.

Divided government and collaborative governance between two major parties difficult so delaying or passing fewer bills.

None in particular, but rise of populism, misuse of social networks.

Indonesia

Prabowo-Gibran candidacy won 58% to become President and Vice-President; Among 18 parties, 8 entered parliament; 48% of parliamentary seats but grew to, at least, 72% after election.

Political issues overshadowed economic ones, driven by a divide over government policies and the abuse of state power in the election process.

None in particular

Dynastic and oligarchic politics are strengthening, with a growing ruling coalition and weak parliamentary opposition, limiting checks on executive power.

Thailand

Senator seats were reduced to 200 electing 10 from 20 occupational groups; party identification is loose while about two thirds of elected Senators had party affiliation.

Diverse representation of the Senate with no power in electing Prime Minister.

Bottom-up selection process is essentially democratic eradicating the previous 250 seat Senate of all members were appointed by the military controlled NCPO.

Complicated selection process is still opaque and women are not properly represented in the process.

India

Ruling BJP won 240 out of total 543 seats of Lok Sabha, missing the much expected the majority; INC led INDIA alliance won 231 to balance BJP.

Economic issues such as stagnating income, price rise, and job shortage; disinformation issues

Ruling BJP's autocratization tendency is checked by voters; Regaining opposition parties can open democratic space; media and civil society now can raise more voices; greater activism of the judiciary to check the executive aggrandizement.

All parties rely on welfare populism; vote buying still rampant.

Pakistan

Among the directly elected seats (80% of National Assembly), PTI supports independents won the largest 80 seats out of 266 seats while PML-N 75 seats and PPP 54 seats.

Political issues prevailed over economic ones such as denial of a common electoral symbol of PTI and oppression of PTI leaders.

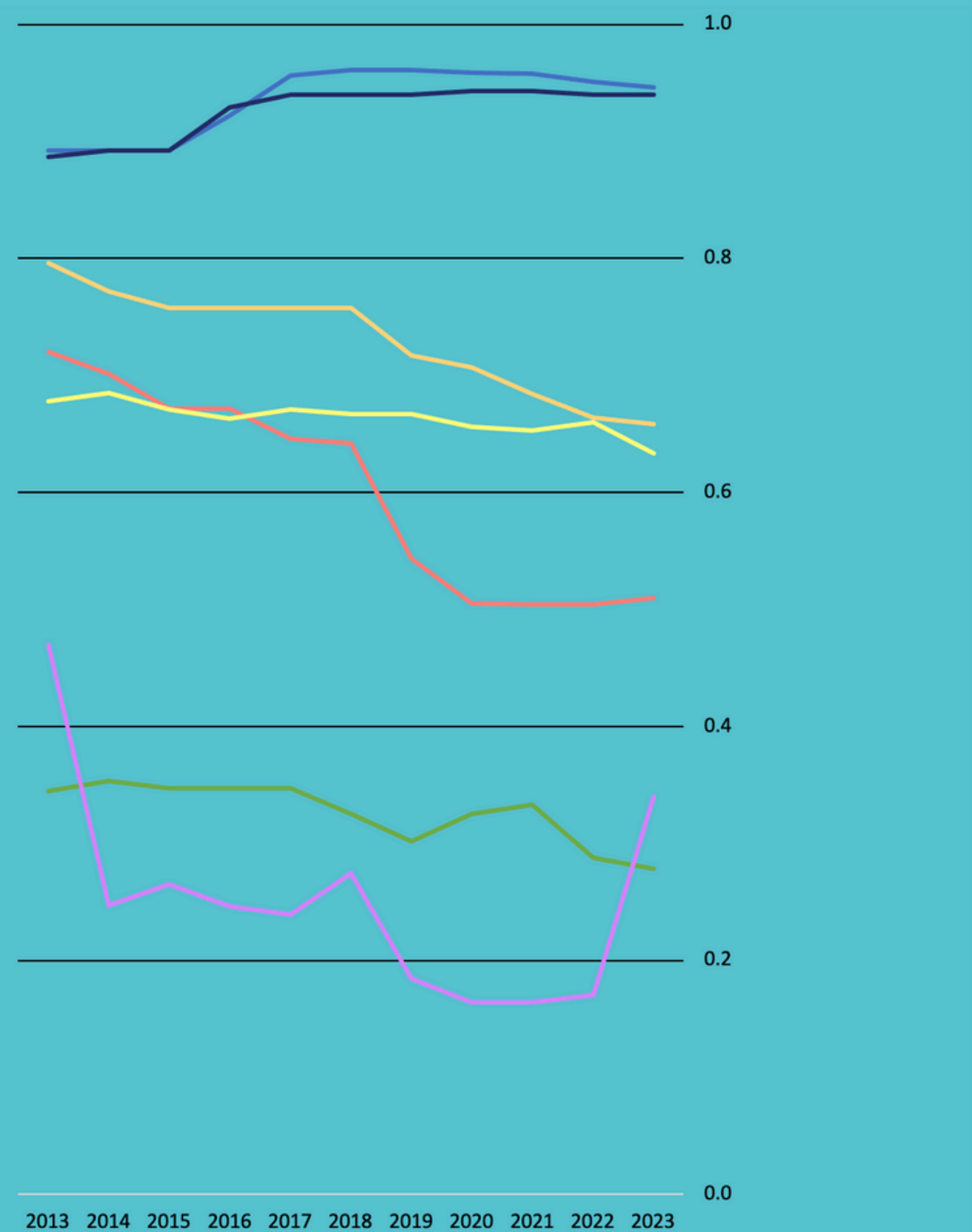
None in particular

Most flawed election downgrading Pakistan from a 'flawed democracy' to 'authoritarian regime.'

Appendix 2. Clean Elections Index 2003-2023



Source: V-Dem data version 14





Super Election Year:

Cases of 7 Asian Countries

Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN) is an independent network of democracy research institutions across Asia.

It analyzes challenges and tasks facing democracy in the region and expands the scope of action-oriented, policy-driven research that supports the advocacy activities of Asian civil society organizations in promoting, consolidating, and deepening democracy.

ADRN Secretariat

East Asia Institute

1 Sajik-ro 7-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03028, Republic of Korea