

Vision:

To have democratic and just society where all people enjoy equal economic, political, socio-cultural and religious right, equitable opportunities and benefits of development process without any discrimination.

Mission:

PATTAN is committed to mainstreaming marginalized and isolated communities, groups and women into political and economic decision-making processes at all levels through mobilization, networking, capacity-building and advocacy for structural and policy change.

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PRESS RELEASE

Civil society rejects amendments in the Elections Act 2017 as they will deepen political uncertainty and cause chaos in Pakistan

Islamabad, 12 July: “Introducing more than 150 amendments in the Elections Act 2017 just four weeks before the end of the tenure of the National Assembly in the garb of electoral reforms has seriously damaged trust of people and civil society in state institutions and future of democratic polity in Pakistan. No wonder, there is a consensus in the country against the proposed amendments. An act which had been passed through consensus by all the parliamentary parties of the time through a prolonged negotiations can’t be amended in haste and without creating a consensus” said a press statement issued today by PATTAN and Coalition38.

The statement also said that “amending the act without having informed input of scholars, think-tanks, and civil society on more than 150 sections in less than four weeks was impossible. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the hidden purpose of the proposed amendments was not to ‘improve quality of future election’ but to manipulate them.

PATTAN and C38 statement further said that the “proposed recommendations for legislative changes to improve quality of election process” though provide justification of each amendment, it did not elaborate how they would improve quality of electoral processes and good governance. For instance, the act defines almost all the terms used in the act but does not define the most important terms like free and fairness of elections.”

Pakistan is one of the few countries where voter turnout remains lowest (less than 50%) in more than 80% of constituencies of national and provincial constituencies. Proposed recommendation 9(1) shall empower ECP to declare poll void and call for reelection if turnout will be less than 50%, or winner has failed to achieve 50% of the polled votes, or an independent candidate joins a party. PATTAN and C38 have a “firm belief that the proposed amendments were dangerous recipe (1) to prolong life of caretaker setup, (2) to deepen political uncertainty and cause chaos, and, (3) to strengthen stranglehold of undemocratic forces.”

Proposed recommendations regarding delimitation of constituencies and result management system deserved thorough discussion before they are adopted, as they could create huge room for gerrymandering and tempering of results.

Therefore, we appeal to civil society including lawyers, media, think-tanks, and scholars to build pressure on the ruling coalition to shelf the idea of amendments at this stage and leave it to the next parliament.

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