



Unveiling the Democratic Divide: Assessing the First Past the Post System in Pakistan and Paving the Path to Inclusivity with Proportional Representation

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ABSTRACT

In the quest for a more robust and representative democratic process, this study delves into the shortcomings of the First Past the Post (FPTP) system in Pakistan. Going through the scrutiny of the 2018 election data, it has been revealed how the FPTP system can lead to the exclusion of a significant proportion of the electorate, with as many as 86 percent of votes remaining unrepresented in a case examined during the research. Through an in-depth analysis of winning candidates who secured a mere 14 percent of the votes, we shed light on the alarming lack of representation that plagues the FPTP system. Responding to these blatant discrepancies, an alternative path of the Proportional Representation (PR) system is proposed toward a more equitable and inclusive democracy. By presenting the potential advantages of PR, this paper highlights how the PR system can bridge the gap between voters and their representatives, ensuring that every vote count and segment of society finds its voice in the legislative process.

This paper not only serves as a critique of the FPTP system but also advocates for a fundamental transformation of Pakistan's electoral landscape. By implementing the Proportional Representation system, the Pakistani nation has the opportunity to forge a more representative and harmonious political framework, fostering unity, empowerment, and good governance among its citizens.

Keywords: Proportional Representation System, First Past the Post System, Electoral Reforms, SDG-16, Governance.

1. Introduction

Free, fair, and impartial elections are considered sine quo non to democracy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided the right to every citizen of a country to take part in government in his / her country either directly or through elected representatives (IDEA, 2005). Strong democratic countries are rooted in free, fair, impartial, and accepted elections. The hue and cry of rigging after election results are common problems in developing countries. Democracy has been discussed as the most trusted system of governance that truly represents the wishes of the people (Hashim et al., 2022). Approximately 41% of democracies in the world use a bicameral parliamentary system (Rahat, 2023).

The science of translating votes into representation is known as the Electoral System (Mitchell 2005). According to Sustainable Development Goal 16, UN Member States have agreed to promote responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making. The reason for this is to establish and build accountable, effective, and transparent institutions at all levels of governance. Similarly, democracy is meant to grant power to people to control their governments through representatives, so that every person in the constituency is equally represented (Maia Sapp, 2023). Thus, elections are one of the key components of SDG 16 (Mourad 2020). An electoral system has been seen as an important part of governance and policy decision-making by increasing contestability and inclusiveness in the election process (Khubaib et al., 2022). A common problem in the credibility of elections is imperfectly administered elections in unreformed systems (Lehoucq, 2003).

The World has seen changes from the FPTP system to other electoral systems. Itlay changed its electoral system by introducing mixed-member proportional representation (MMPR) in 1993, which was followed by 26 other countries (IDEA, 2005). The FPTP system has always been criticized for excluding fair representation of votes and minorities from fair representation (IDEA, 2005). The literature has been extensively found to criticize FPTP, as a fair translation of votes has not been achieved through FPTP (Akhtar et al., 2020).

To provide a fruitful replacement to this issue, this research is being carried out to determine whether the FPTP suits Pakistani politics or whether there is some potential to change the status quo to give proper representation to each polled vote in elections by changing the electoral system design by

introducing the PR System. This article will first analyze the FPTP system concerning the general elections 2018 held in Pakistan; thereafter, the PR system will be discussed and how it is fruitful in developed countries.

1.2 Methodology

A qualitative research design is used to conduct a descriptive analysis of official data on elections of 2018 published by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

1.3. Existing Electoral System in Pakistan

The electoral system translates polled votes in favor of a candidate or party into the seats. This system includes a process of conducting elections, from the delimitation of constituencies to the final publication of election results. All of these processes are defined in the constitution and electoral laws of the respective country. According to the IDEA, there are 12 major global electoral systems. These systems come under the following major systems:

- i. Majority/Plurality System.
- ii. Mixed System
- iii. Proportional Representation.

Each system has specific advantages and disadvantages and is subject to betterment, as no system is perfect for use. Similarly, these electoral systems are distinguished by differences in the type of voting, counting of results, and translating them into seats won. These systems are best defined graphically.

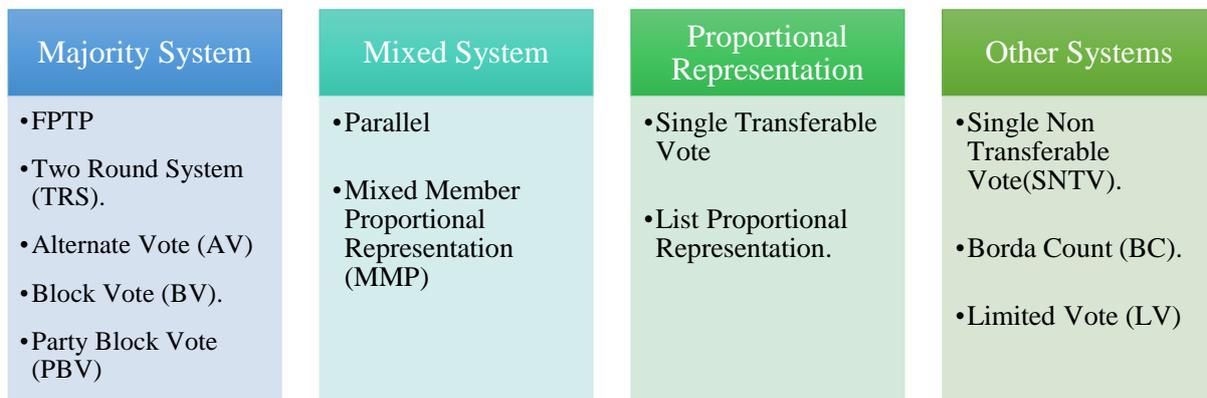


Fig 1: Electoral Systems Across the World¹

2.1 First Past the Post System

The word FPTP was taken from horse racing wherein the winning horse gets all the money. This system in elections is based on the winner taking all bases in which the winning candidate, either securing two votes, is elected as a member of the respective assembly. According to IDEA International, the FPTP system is the simplest method of the majority/plurality system, in which districts are divided into constituencies and candidate-centered voting is performed. In the FPTP, a candidate scoring the most votes is elected as a member of a respective legislative body. The purest form of the FPTP is implemented in Canada, India, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States.

2.2 An Overview of Pakistan

In 1973, a bicameral parliamentary system was introduced in Pakistan in the both houses, the National Assembly and the Senate. Since then, elections to the National Assembly have been held through a parallel system using the FPTP and PR systems. It uses a parallel system in the shape of an FPTP for 80 percent of the seats and proportional representation for 20 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. Elections to the Upper House, that is, Senate, are held through a system of proportional representation (PR), specifically through a Single Transferable Vote (STV).

2.3 Problem with the Current FPTP System

In the 2018 General Elections, 31.1 million polled votes did not get any representation, which became 57% of polled votes (FAFEN, 2019). This percentage reached its highest after 2002, making it possible for policymakers to think about a 360-degree shift in electoral reforms by exploring new avenues to properly represent each vote cast.

¹ Researchers Primary Research

To get a better knowledge of the problem with FPTP, the results of 272 constituencies where 31.1 million votes were not translated into representation were analyzed to address the problem. Balochistan is at the top of the list with 70.53 percent of votes that were not translated into representation, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) with 60.40 percent of votes not being represented (FAFEN, 2019). The graphical representation in fig-2 of these votes, not translated into representation, can be explained in a better way.

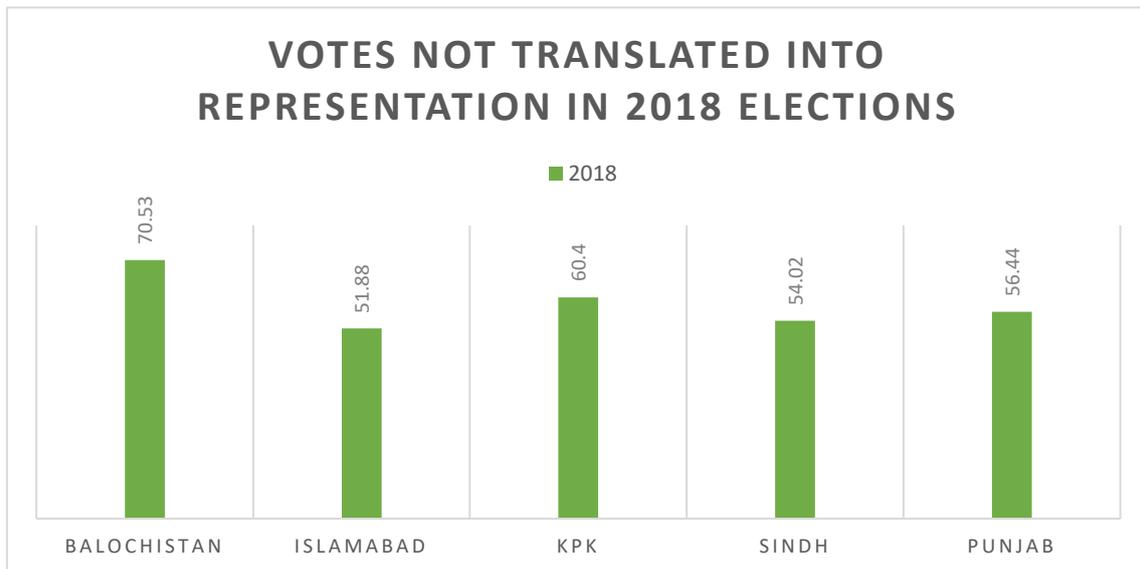


Fig-2: Votes Not Translated into Representation During 2018 Elections²

If we compare this with previous elections, this ratio increased in the case of Balochistan from 57 percent to 65 percent in 2013 and to 70 percent in 2018. Similarly, the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) surged from 55 percent to 56 percent in 2013 and declined to 51 percent in 2018. KPK surged from 59 percent to 62 percent in 2013 and a minor decline to 60 percent in 2018. Punjab got declined from 54 percent to 51 percent in 2013 and surged to 56 percent in 2018. In 2013, Sindh was seen in an ideal situation as compared to other regions, with 30 percent of votes not translated into representation; however, two recent elections gave a surge of 41 percent in 2013 and 54 percent in 2018.

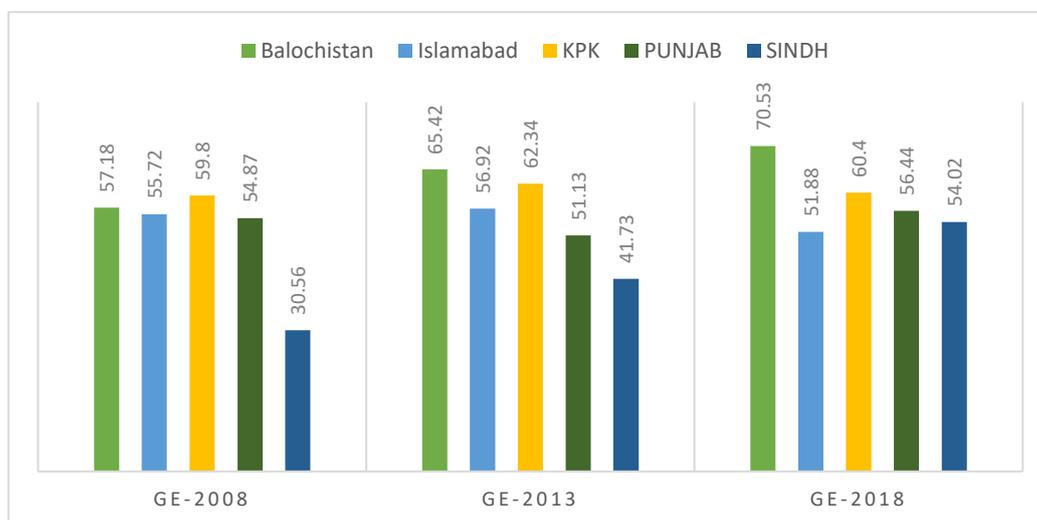


Fig-3: Region-wise comparison of Votes Not Translated into Representation³

Here, another fact requires attention: winning candidates received 11 percent excessive votes required to win the election, putting no effect on the outcome of the elections (FAFEN, 2019).

The results of the National Assembly constituencies were examined for the 2018 general elections to provide a deep analysis of the system in vogue.

² Researcher Primary data

³ FAFEN General Election Observations 2018.

Table-1: Comparison of Votes and Seats Secured by Political Parties in GE-2018⁴

| Party | Percentage of Votes Polled | Seats Won | Percentage of Seats Won |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf | 31.82 | 116 | 42.6 |
| Pakistan Muslim League (N) | 24.35 | 64 | 23.5 |
| Pakistan Peoples Party | 13.03 | 43 | 15.8 |
| Independents | 11.46 | 13 | 4.7 |
| Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal | 4.85 | 12 | 4.4 |
| Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan | 4.21 | 0 | 0 |
| Grand Democratic Alliance | 2.37 | 2 | 0.7 |
| Awami National Party | 1.54 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Muttahida Qaumi Movement – Pakistan | 1.38 | 6 | 2.2 |
| Pakistan Muslim League (Q) | 0.97 | 4 | 1.4 |
| Balochistan Awami Party | 0.60 | 4 | 1.4 |
| Balochistan National Party (Mengal) | 0.45 | 3 | 1.1 |
| Awami Muslim League | 0.22 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Jamhoori Wattan Party | 0.04 | 1 | 0.3 |
| Other 10 Parties | 1.85 | 0 | 0 |

The analysis of the above results shows that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf got 31.82 percent votes and secured 42.6 percent of seats in the National Assembly. Similarly, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) received 4.85 percent votes and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) got 4.21 votes however, the seats won by them were 12 and 0, respectively. Similarly, a comparison of the votes of the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) and TLP shows that GDA won two seats; however, TLP did not win any seats. On the other hand, the Jamhoori Wattan Party (JWP) took 0.04% of the votes and secured one seat.

To go deeper into the votes not translated into representation, the results of 272 constituencies of National Assembly for 2018 elections were analyzed. We have further shortlisted the constituencies where obtained votes were less than 21 percent of the polled votes. The results of top five constituencies are tabulated as below for better understandings:

| Constituency | Total Cast Votes | Percentage of votes obtained by Returned Candidate | Unrepresented Voters |
|--|------------------|--|----------------------|
| NA-259 Dera Bugti-cum-Kohlu-cum-Barkhan-cum-Sibi-cum-Lehri | 159,966 | 14.24 | 85.75 |
| NA-44 Tribal Area-V | 67607 | 18.60 | 81.39 |
| NA-270 Panjgur-cum-Washuk-cum-Awaran | 95515 | 19.60 | 80.39 |
| NA-47 Tribal Area-VIII | 56063 | 20.55 | 79.44 |
| NA-49 Tribal Area-X | 37158 | 20.93 | 79.06 |

Table-2: Constituencies with the least maximum number of unrepresented voters⁵

From the above analysis, it is clear that more than 85 percent of voters remained unrepresented in the National Assembly from the Constituency NA-259. Similarly, 81 percent of voters received no representation in the National Assembly from constituency NA-44. The same is the case with NA-270, where 80 percent of voters received no representation. For NA-47 and NA-49, this percentage was 79.

All of the above disparities with the electorate lead to no true representation of voters' will (Haque, 2023). The FPTP system is accompanied by a plethora of problems that require an optimal solution in the form of a PR system (Maia Sapp, 2023).

3. Alternate method: Proportional Representation System

In the PR system, the division of votes is proportionally performed to translate votes into seats more accurately. (Mill, 1861). For example, if a party receives 40 percent of votes in a province, it will get 40% of the seats of that province in the assembly (ACE, 2014). The PR system is used in 70 out of 199 countries, which is the major electoral system in the world (Idea, 2005). Currently, there are two PR systems in the field, as discussed in the next section.

⁴ Researchers primary research

⁵ Researchers primary research

3.1 List PR System

The List PR system provides a way for political parties or groups to access a list of candidates or parties, allowing electorates to select parties or candidates from the list.

- i. Closed List
- ii. Open List.
- iii. Free List

In a closed-list PR system, electorates are not given full authority to choose the candidate of their choice; however, they can only vote for the party of their choice. Candidates are selected through a preferred list given by the party (Idea, 2005). On the other hand, in the Open List PR system, electorate chooses the party to vote for as well as the candidates of their choice given by the Political Party. The free list allows the electorate to cast as many votes as the number of seats to be filled.

Open List PR system above is considered an optimal system allowing the voter to choose the candidate of their choice, however, it may create a conflict within the party.

3.2 Single Transferable Vote (STV) System

This system is in the field since the 19th Century having multiple names like “choice voting”, “Hare-Clark System”, etc. The most widely used name is Single Transferable Vote (STV). The STV system uses multi-member districts, wherein voters cast votes by giving preference to candidates. Although this system provides several choices to the electorate, however, this system is more sophisticated and complicated than other systems. This system uses a quota system, and candidates surpassing the quota are elected, and a few of them are eliminated after a number of rounds. This system also includes the transfer of excessive votes from winning candidates to the next preference, which makes this system more complicated.

3.3 Why is the PR System an Alternative?

Pakistan's elections since the nineties remained questionable due to the chants of rigging by opposition parties. As a result, the role of Government and Opposition remained uncondusive for democratization and institutionalism in the country (Akter & Nazma, 2021). Proportional Representation is seen as a reasonable alternative because it best translates votes cast into seats. Similarly, several other reasons can strengthen the democratic government and achieve Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is now the need of the hour to introduce electoral reforms specifically relating to changing from FPTP to the PR system to provide the real essence of democracy and good governance to the people of Pakistan. The reasons for introducing the PR system as the best alternative are elaborated based on the extensive analysis of data and literature.

3.3.1 Nationalism

The PR system supports nationalism instead of regionalism due to the distribution of seats based on the votes gained. The main cause of the disintegration of Pakistan into two in 1971 was the poor electoral system (Hashim et al., 2022). To promote nationalism and unite the politically fragmented nation, it is best to bring the PR system into an electoral system in Pakistan.

3.3.2 Inclusiveness Through Women and Minorities Representation

Pakistan's present electoral system provides only 17 percent representation to women and almost 3 percent representation to minorities in the National Assembly through the quota system. The Election Commission of Pakistan has bounded political parties to give a 5 percent representation to women while nominating candidates for elections to the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) and Provincial Assembly (ECP, 2017). However, the FPTP system does not confirm whether these 5 percent will become winners. The PR system allows the Political Party to provide a list of candidates for multi-member districts, allowing the party to provide a good representation of women in the assembly.

3.3.3 Lessen Wasted Votes

The votes cast in the cause of candidate loss are termed wasted votes (Akhter et al., 2020). If we take the example of NA-259, 86 percent of votes were cast in losing cause and counted as wasted votes. The PR system contributes to party votes, and the phenomenon of wasted votes is eliminated.

3.3.4 Representation of Smaller Political Parties

Table-2 shows that Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan gained 1.4 percent votes, but did not secure a single seat in the National Assembly. This ugly side of the FPTP system does not promote smaller parties at the national level, which will be addressed in the PR system.

3.3.5 Less Monopoly of Smaller Parties in Policy Making

In most elections in Pakistan, political parties with few seats play a vital role in government formation. A political party with a good margin of seats requires the help of small parties and is blackmailed during major policy formulation. PR system equally translates votes into seats resulting in less monopoly of smaller parties resultantly, it will strengthen the governance and policy formulation at the national level

4. Conclusion

Through a comprehensive examination of the 2018 election results, an effort was made to shed light on the deficiencies of the FPTP system in Pakistan. After an extensive analysis of election results, some disheartening truth has been revealed regarding FPTP systems' failure to provide an accurate representation of electorate choices, leaving a large chunk of the population unrepresented in the Assemblies.

This is a particularly alarming disparity between the votes received and the seats secured by a party and winning candidates. The research shows that a candidate with only 14 percent of total casted votes in a constituency can claim a victory that underscores the flaws of the field electoral system, leaving the majority of the electorate without a voice in the corridors of power, fueling disillusionment, and eroding trust in the democratic process.

To provide a solution to these revelations, the proportional representation (PR) system has emerged as a suitable alternative with the potential to revitalize Pakistan's democracy. By ensuring that seats in the legislative body are allocated proportionally based on the total votes gained by each party, PR rectifies the distortions of FPTP and fosters a more equitable representation of the electorate's will.

The PR system provides equal weightage for every vote, encourages broader political engagement, and fosters a multi-party democratic system. This research recognizes that the implementation of a PR system will require careful consideration and a grand dialogue among all stakeholders. The analysis of the 2018 election results revealed the immediate need for reforms due to inadequacies, exemplified by the disproportionate allocation of seats and unrepresentative victories. The PR system is a compelling solution to all challenges of the FPTP system and provides a path toward vibrant and inclusive democracy.

4. Recommendations

Based on the analysis made in this study, the following recommendations are hereby made for consideration by policymakers to eliminate the discrimination made by the FPTP system:

- To address the aforementioned drawbacks of the FPTP system, the government may initiate a phased transition toward proportional representation, resulting in a fairer electoral framework empowering the votes of the public.

This transition requires the following steps:

- a) Public Awareness and Education regarding the drawbacks of the FPTP system and the working and impact of PR systems.
- b) Formulation of an Expert Committee Formation comprising representatives from diverse political parties, legal experts, and academics to study the intricacies of the PR system and propose an implementation plan tailored to the country's needs.
- c) Pilot Projects and Simulations in a phased manner in selected constituencies to test the viability and effectiveness of the PR system.
- d) Initiate Constitutional Amendments required to pave the way for the implementation of the PR system by engaging all stakeholders in inclusive consultations
- e) Initiate Capacity building of the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure a seamless transition of the proposed system.
- f) Establish a robust Monitoring & Evaluation mechanism to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the PR system and propose the areas requiring improvement.

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