

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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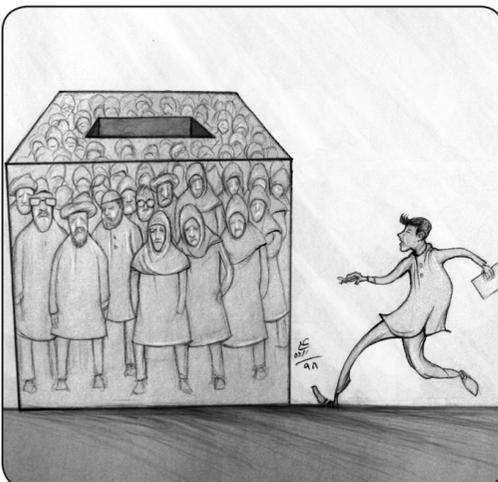
How to Prevent Electoral Violence

Elections is a golden opportunity for the political parties and politicians to take power in order to implement their policies and realize their goals. Any political party and politician works hard before elections and specially during the campaign to satisfy the people that their political policies are the best policies and can ensure the needs and expectations of the people if they are elected. However, it is impossible for all political parties and candidates to win. When these political parties or politicians lose, they react in different ways; some of them accept the results and some of them choose violence as a tactic to give them political leverage. In this case, if they do not gain what they look for, they will incite political unrests. Therefore, it is the duty of government and political leaders to reduce disadvantages of losing to avoid the violence that a winner-takes-all situation can trigger.

Regarding Afghanistan, there is a seeming paradox at work; democracy has established itself as the dominant political system; and as an integral part of this process, multi-party elections have emerged as the most legitimate route to political office in Afghanistan. Yet, in recent years' violence has increased in elections. It is a common issue in developing countries. As a result, Afghan politicians shall look for the best policy options that have been implemented in other developing countries in order to apply the most successful ones here.

I would like to mention 3 long term measures that can address this worrying trend. The first measure is to lower the stakes of elections. As power and resources are still largely concentrated at the center, it raises the stakes of elections. The winner usually takes it all, while the loser is left standing small. Therefore, the concerned government shall ensure the individuals have backed the right horse in the lead-up to elections to protect their interests. The second measure is supporting democratization beyond elections. This enables the losers to express their concerns and satisfy their supports that they have taken the legal measures to protect the rights of their supports. The third measure is addressing unresolved conflicts at local level. This is one of the main causes of conflicts in developing countries. If the concerned government wants to initiate state building and consequently nation building, it shall assess different causes of the local conflicts in order to find viable and applicable solutions for them.

Elections is an opportunity that enables the politicians to take power. As there are winners and losers in any election, the losers in any society, specially developing countries, may choose political violence as a tactic to get leverage. As a result, it is necessary to identify how electoral violence could be well managed. Managing electoral violence enables the concerned government to reach a consensus with the option parties to ensure them that they would not be marginalized from the power and will be given a fair share in the government.



Let's IECs Do their jobs

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Undoubtedly, the presidential election has only one winner but the current atmosphere seems as if everyone is winner. As soon as the presidential election ended, the atmosphere of social media networks has changed to a different color and status. With highlighting higher results and hiding the lower statistics, the supporters of each presidential nominee claimed victory of their favorite candidates. This issue has not only concerned the public opinion but also shows that no parties are ready to accept the outcome of the election, and this may consciously or unconsciously pave the way for a crisis in the near future. If all candidates think themselves victorious, it is natural that accepting the election result will be a challenge. However, Presidential candidates have right to be concerned about the transparency of the elections but through legal mechanism. Legally, it is the right time to collect evidences in order to increase the legitimacy or transparency of election through IECC.

According to Electoral Code, the only authority that can announce election results is the Independent Election Commission. Therefore, any kind of prejudice could be considered as disrespect to will of people and rule of law. It is high time to respect democracy and change our win-win mentality to rule of law and capacity of accepting defeat. In democratic countries, candidates have courage and readiness to congratulate the victory of his rival when IEC announce the election results. Unfortunately, the culture of accepting failure in democratic competition has not been institutionalized in mentality and behavior of our politicians.

Based on analysis of election observing bodies, any types of prejudice are against the electoral principles and can pave the way for crisis. For example, Youssef Rashid, executive director of the Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (FIFA), said the only power to universalize primary and final election results is the Independent Election Commission. According to him, the widespread advertisement through the visual and virtual media is putting "mental pressure" on the IEC to influence on its ultimate decisions and result announcement.

In response to the concerning issue, the United Nations, US and British embassies in Kabul has also issued separate statement urging all parts to remain calm after the election. This means that the dissemination of the statistics and reactions of those involved in the election has also raised concerns among the international community. According to UNAMA, the only authority that can announce election results is the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan. UNAMA also added that it had no comment on the level of turnout and was waiting for the announcement of the Afghan Independent Election Commission.

The British Embassy in Kabul also urged all parties involved in the elections to respect the rule of law in the process of gathering and counting votes. The British Embassy also called on two electoral commissions to carry out their responsibilities impartially and transparently. Thus, the US embassy in Kabul called on all parties involved in the elections to

remain calm unless formal announcement of the election outcome and stay committed to the rule of law.

However, predicting the results of the vote is common in old democracies as long as the candidates have a readiness for victory and failure, but it can cause political crisis in context of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the supporters of some candidates try to highlight the favorable votes and hide the unfavorable votes. As a result, the preconceptions of election victory in Afghanistan's nascent democracy can lead to unpleasant consequences. In addition to above mention issues, such prejudices may make a candidate's fans happy, but if proven wrong, they could seriously undermine the credibility and independence of election commissions.

The face-book users release different statistics while the IEC could not determine the voter ceiling yet. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has announced that the staffs of the commission have counted more than 2,196 million votes in 3736 polling stations across the country. The IEC officials told reporters late on Sunday that 2,196,436 voters cast ballots in 3,736 polling stations out of 5373 which were active during Saturday's presidential elections. The officials further added that the election commission expects to receive data regarding 786 polling stations in the near future.

According to a separate report, all the election results have not transmitted to the IEC headquarters due to the lack of telecommunications services in some provinces. Prior to that, however, Independent Election Commission Chairman, Hawa Alam Nuristani, had said they would announce the voter ceiling within two days after the election. Accordance with findings of election monitoring bodies, the telecommunications networks were cut off in 12 provinces on Election Day, making polling stations unable to contact provincial offices or the headquarters of the Independent Election Commission. However, some reports indicate that the process of transferring sensitive and non-sensitive election materials began from polling stations to provincial offices.

Based on the election calendar, the IEC is required to announce the preliminary results of the presidential election twenty days after polling day. Thus, the calendar also obliges the IEC to announce the final results of the presidential election about 40 days after Election Day. In accordance with the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, any kinds of prejudice about election result are against election law and called election offence. As quoted from 8am, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission spokeswoman told the Morning News that no candidate has the right to make baseless bias before announcing the final results. She further added that the pervasion of such prejudices is counted election offence and will have legal consequences in accordance with Article 98 of the Electoral Code.

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Saving Pacific Islanders from Geoengineering

By: François Martel

Geoengineering will save us from the climate crisis, its champions insist. By using technology either to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere or to deflect some solar radiation away from the Earth, they claim, we can undo the damage wrought by humanity's failure to reduce greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions. But while it certainly sounds like a convenient solution, there is no proof that it will work – and no telling what the side effects could be. In the view of Pacific islanders, it barely merits discussion.

Proponents of geoengineering are right about one thing: we are facing a climate emergency that demands radical and urgent action. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made that starkly apparent in October 2018, and reinforced the point last month, with its report on climate change and land.

Some major economies – including Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom – as well as regions and cities have now officially recognized the scale of the crisis. The question is whether this will translate into a commitment to take the necessary action.

That certainly did not happen at last year's UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland. Instead, leaders stuck to weak commitments that effectively allow for the continuation of business as usual – an outcome that was driven by countries in which fossil-fuel industries have tremendous political and economic clout. In most cases, they were the same countries that promote geoengineering solutions.

For Pacific islanders, who are on the frontlines of a climate crisis to which they have barely contributed, this persistently selfish and short-sighted approach has gone from disappointing to infuriating. The 14 sovereign Pacific island countries account for only about 0.02% of total global GHG emissions. Yet, with many either possessing low-lying islands or composed entirely of low-lying atolls, they are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, beginning with rising sea levels. But Pacific islanders know better than to succumb to the siren song of geoengineering. In fact, they have been used as guinea pigs for the testing of powerful and risky technologies before, including nuclear weapons in the 1940s and 1950s, and are still suffering the consequences. In the Marshall Islands, for example, the United States built (only in the 1980s) a massive concrete dome to house the deadly radioactive debris from such tests. But the structure was not built to last. As the dome degrades, the risks of radiation leaks are rising.

Geoengineering is not an entirely new topic to the Pacific. Governments in the region have already been targeted by researchers and proponents. At a 2013 workshop in Suva, Fiji – organized by University of the South Pacific's Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies – participants agreed that more research, broader awareness, and transparent debate on the topic were needed.

But, as participants emphasized, no climate engineering technology should be implemented unless it was proven to be a sufficiently safe option – and then only as a last resort. Even field testing should not take place without enforceable regulations and governance structures. Most

important, Pacific countries agreed that geoengineering technologies should not be regarded as a substitute to radical global mitigation efforts, including major emissions cuts.

Yet, six years later, the debate is entirely different. More geoengineering research projects, proposals for experiments, and commercial applications are on the agenda. At the same time, mitigation efforts are sorely lacking – specifically in those countries where governments are turning their attention to geoengineering as an excuse for inaction. In effect, responsibility for the climate crisis is being deferred to future generations, especially in the developing countries that have done the least to cause it. In light of this imbalance, the Pacific Islands Development Forum's position on geoengineering remains squarely in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity's 2010 call for a moratorium – agreed to by 196 governments – on all geoengineering activities until "a global, transparent, and effective control and regulatory mechanism" is put in place.

The IPCC has made clear that the only way to address the climate crisis is with "transformation pathways" that slash emissions and protect and restore ecosystems, including through what is effectively a land-use revolution. Such pathways are mapped out not only in IPCC reports, but also in the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

This means replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources. It also means making the most of our planet's natural capacity for carbon capture and storage, by protecting and expanding natural carbon sinks like forests, mangroves, and seagrass meadows. As the IPCC report on land specifies, measures like expanding local and indigenous communities' role in forest management would bring major benefits, as would a transformation of food systems to ensure sustainable agricultural practices and minimal food waste.

Most of the needed responses will contribute positively to sustainable development and other global goals. For starters, a healthier planet means healthier people: by causing respiratory illnesses, outdoor pollution results in around three million premature deaths per year.

Furthermore, the shift to renewable energy would help create large numbers of quality jobs – far more than the fossil-fuel industry offers. And this does not even account for the massive costs – associated, for example, with increasingly extreme and frequent weather events – that would be avoided if we mitigated climate change effectively.

The longer we delay, however, the more urgent the crisis becomes – and the higher the chances of reckless action. Already, the rapid escalation in the effects of climate change is being used to justify risky outdoor geoengineering experiments that could have devastating and unpredictable environmental consequences, and that could put the world on a slippery slope toward deployment, without the necessary safety assurances or regulatory structures.

We know what we have to do – indeed, we have known for years. If all countries fulfill their responsibilities, we can respond effectively to climate change. But to protect humanity – beginning with ultra-vulnerable Pacific islanders – we must act now.

François Martel is Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Development Forum.

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