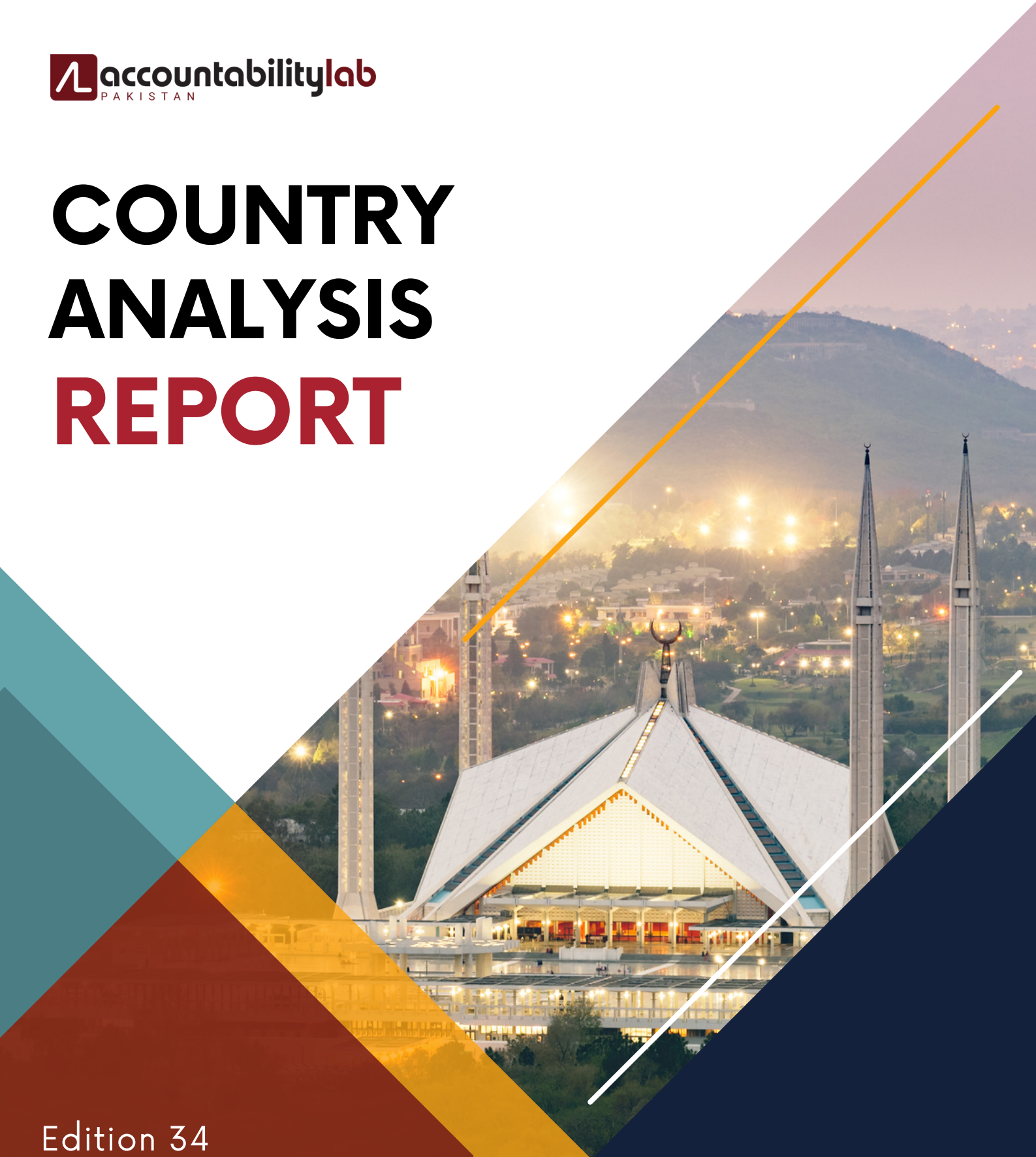
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PAKISTAN

COUNTRY ANALYSIS REPORT



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Only for Members

SUMMARY

The Country Analysis Report covering the period from February 1st to February 19th discusses the February 8th elections in Pakistan and the ensuing uncertainty. It also addresses nationwide protests, fatal bombings in Baluchistan ahead of the elections, and highlights from the EIU Report, which point to Pakistan's democratic regression due to authorities influence and electoral challenges. Furthermore, the report also discusses the HRCP report that raises alarming concerns about the integrity of Pakistan's February elections.

POLITICAL UPDATES

The February 8th elections were a beacon of hope for Pakistan, offering a chance to emerge from persistent economic and political turmoil. Pakistanis turned out in defiance to uphold democracy in their country with a voter turnout of 47.8% with 2.3 million more women voter turnout than 2018 - an unprecedented turnout.

However, what followed were the reports that revealed widespread allegations of mass rigging, with candidates who were defeated the night before suddenly declared as winners the following morning. Additionally, in some areas, the number of accepted votes exceeded the total number of votes cast, this generated a debate around the fairness of the electoral process.



Picture Source: France 24

Electoral Upheaval: Allegations of Manipulation Mar Pakistan's Election Results:

As the polls closed on 8th February, early indications of a sweeping victory for Imran Khan's significant NA-128 constituency, Salman Akram Raja, a senior lawyer and PTI-supported candidate, the initial numbers showed him winning from a majority of polling stations with a substantial margin. By 9th February, his lead had vanished, placing him 13,522 votes behind his opponent, despite the numbers from individual polling stations not aligning with the final tally reported by the election commission. Raja successfully petitioned the higparty sent shockwaves through Pakistan, defying expectations set against him due to his imprisonment and alleged efforts by the authorities to influence the election outcome.

However, the tide turned unexpectedly in several pivotal contests, amid prolonged and unexplained delays in the announcement of results. In the court for an injunction to halt the declaration of a winner, sparking a series of legal challenges by other PTI candidates.



Picture Source: Geo News

Salman Akram Raja decried the handling of the election results as a direct attack on Pakistani democracy, citing the creation of fraudulent Forms 47 that bore no relation to the actual votes cast on February 8th. He accused certain state officials of manipulating the election outcome through tampering and disposal of genuine Forms 47, alleging that fabricated results were produced for numerous National Assembly seats.

Raja warned that the integrity of Pakistan's elections is at stake if those entrusted with its protection are compromised, predicting dire consequences for the country's democratic fabric if these actions are not rectified. Echoing Raja's concerns, PTI Spokesman Raoof Hasan claimed a victory for his party in 177 National Assembly seats, pointing out discrepancies between the results on Forms 47 and 45. He highlighted significant variations in the vote counts for national and provincial seats, with the number of rejected votes surpassing the winning margin in several instances.

A New Political Landscape Emerges:

In the days following Pakistan's general election on February 8, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced the official results, unveiling a surprising turn of events. Contrary to the expectations of many political analysts and observers, independent candidates affiliated with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) secured the majority of seats on a national scale.

They were closely followed by Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM).

Without a clear majority for any single party to form a government independently, the political landscape is now riddled with uncertainty.

The final tally showed the PTI leading with 93 out of 266 available national seats, followed by the PML-N with 75 seats, the PPP with 54 seats, and the MQM with 17 seats. These results have sparked significant debate and speculation about the future direction of Pakistan's politics.

Nationwide Protests Erupt Over Election Rigging Allegations in Pakistan:

In a wave of unrest, supporters of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party took to the streets across Pakistan, following accusations of extensive vote manipulation aimed at the former prime minister's party and various nationalist factions in the recent general election. Despite the PTI securing the most seats, the lack of an outright majority winner pushed the nation into chaos, with multiple parties asserting their claims to form the government.

Protests sparked by these allegations, led to significant disruptions, with law enforcement deploying tear gas to disband PTI supporters in several cities. Lahore witnessed a substantial police presence, tasked with dispersing PTI demonstrators, some of whom were detained for protesting peacefully. Clashes in Rawalpindi, just south of Islamabad, saw police using tear gas against PTI crowds, while in Karachi, detentions were made as protesters resisted dispersal orders. Reports from local media indicated that the unrest had spread, affecting major urban and transport hubs.

The protests were not confined to PTI supporters alone; other major political entities, including the National Party, PPP, and JUI-F among others, have been vocal in their dissent, staging sit-ins and demanding vote recounts. This widespread dissatisfaction was also seen in Quetta and other key locations, shutting down crucial national highways and bringing parts of the country to a standstill.

Despite police warnings against unauthorized assemblies, the protests have persisted. One notable incident involved the arrest and subsequent release on personal bail of Barrister Salman Akram Raja, a prominent figure participating in a protest against the election's alleged rigging. His detention by Lahore Police further fueled the demonstrations, with PTI supporters vocalizing their opposition to police actions. This unrest highlights the deep divisions and political tensions within Pakistan, challenging the integrity of the electoral process and threatening the stability of the nation's democratic institutions.

Rawalpindi Commissioner Resigns, Admits to Electoral Fraud:

On 17th February, in a surprising development, the Commissioner of Rawalpindi Division, Liaqat Ali Chattha, resigned citing a “guilty conscience” for his role in facilitating widespread electoral fraud in the garrison city, sparking further political unrest in Pakistan.

During a press conference held at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Chattha announced his decision to resign, acknowledging his unfair actions toward the citizens of Rawalpindi. The division, which is a critical electoral region comprising 13 National Assembly seats—11 of which were claimed by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), one by an independent candidate, and one by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)—has become a focal point of controversy. Additionally, in the provincial assembly, PML-N secured 15 out of 27 seats, with independents winning 11.

In his unexpected public admission, Chattha took full responsibility for the electoral misconduct in Rawalpindi Division, claiming that his actions had altered the election outcomes significantly. "We turned the losers into winners by a margin of 50,000 votes," he disclosed, offering himself up for accountability. He implicated the chief election commissioner and the chief justice in the electoral fraud, extending his apologies to the division's returning officers and admitting the distress his orders had caused among his subordinates. Chattha even revealed that on the day of his announcement, fraudulent activities were still ongoing, with fake stamps being applied to ballot papers. Overwhelmed by guilt and the pressure, Chattha shared that he had attempted to take his own life that morning.

Despite his contributions to the city's development, he expressed deep regret over his actions, stating they had betrayed the nation and disturbed his peace of mind. He called for not only his own punishment but also for those he accused of being complicit in the fraud, dismissing the need for a re-election and suggesting that a review of Form 45 would reveal the true election outcomes.

It is to be noted,Chief Justice of Pakistan, Qazi Faez Isa, while addressing the recent allegations made by the Rawalpindi Commissioner, emphasizing the need for evidence to support any claims. He dismissed the accusations as baseless and urged the accuser to present concrete evidence. “Everyone has the right to accuse, but proof is essential,” Justice Isa stated, highlighting the importance of substantiating allegations with evidence.

SECURITY AND RULE OF LAW SITUATION

Fatal Bombings Strike Baluchistan Ahead of Pakistan Elections:

Two bombings shook Pakistan's Baluchistan province, claiming the lives of at least 28 people and injuring dozens more. The explosions occurred near election offices of political parties, just ahead of scheduled elections. These attacks, resulting in significant casualties, exacerbated tensions in the region. On election day itself, armed Baluch separatist factions, advocating for a boycott of the polls, targeted several polling stations with grenades and explosives, further disrupting the voting process.



Picture Source: CNN

The initial blast, which killed 16 individuals, targeted the election office of independent candidate Asfandyar Khan Kakar in Pishin district. Over 20 people were wounded in this attack.

Responsibility for the bombings was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who stated that their fighters detonated an explosives-laden motorcycle at an election gathering in Pishin district, and also claimed involvement in the Qilla Saifullah blast.

Following the attacks, Pakistan's foreign office announced the temporary closure of western border crossings with Iran and Afghanistan to enhance security measures during the election period.
UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the bombings, emphasizing the link to the electoral process and expressing concern over the violence occurring just prior to the elections.

SOCIAL SECTOR INDICATORS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Pakistan's Democratic Regression: EIU Report Highlights Electoral Challenges

In 2023, Pakistan witnessed a significant regression in its democratic status, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). The country's score dropped to 3.25, resulting in a downgrade from a "hybrid regime" to an "authoritarian regime" and an 11-place decline in the global ranking.

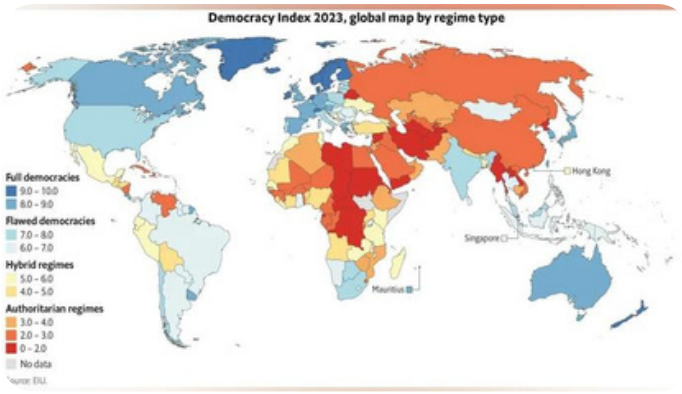
The EIU's report highlighted the outsized influence in Pakistani politics, noting that this influence undermined the electoral process, particularly in terms of fairness and competitiveness.

Despite Pakistan holding elections, the EIU pointed out that they failed to bring about meaningful change due to state repression faced by opposition forces. One of the key factors contributing to this decline, according to the EIU, is the institution's interference in political affairs. It noted that the military played a significant role in undermining the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party led by former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Khan himself faced legal troubles, including corruption charges and incarceration, which hampered his leadership abilities despite his popularity, especially among urban Pakistanis.

The report also highlighted instances of official harassment and intimidation of senior PTI members, leading to defections to the ruling party. Overall, the EIU painted a picture of Pakistan where democratic processes were compromised by authorities' influence, hindering the country's progress towards a more democratic system.

The drop in classification should raise concerns, urging stakeholders and the public to reflect. India, too, faces scrutiny as a flawed democracy due to minority marginalization, yet is commended for holding fair elections. This underscores the importance of robust electoral processes and safeguarding freedoms.



Picture Source: The News International

The EIU's report indicates a decline in democratic standards globally, attributed to wars, authoritarian crackdowns, and waning trust in mainstream political parties. This serves as a wake-up call for nations to address shortcomings promptly and resist undue influences.

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Election Turmoil: Challenges and Disputes in Pakistan's Democratic Process:

As Pakistan geared up for its general election, a series of troubling events cast a shadow over the electoral proceedings, raising doubts about the fairness and transparency of the process.

Leading up to the election, Baluchistan was rocked by two devastating suicide bombings outside political party offices, orchestrated by Islamic State militants.



Picture Source: Nikkei Asia

Adding to the turmoil, the government's decision to impose a nationwide suspension of mobile internet services on election day sparked controversy. While officials cited security concerns, critics, including opposition parties and human rights groups, interpreted the move as an attempt to manipulate the election, particularly amidst widespread allegations of military interference.

Reports of internet blackouts in various regions, as documented by NetBlocks, raised further concerns about censorship, particularly targeting political dissent. Amnesty International condemned the shutdown as a violation of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression and assembly.

In response to these developments, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party strongly condemned the mobile service shutdown, calling it as a direct assault on democracy. They accused those in power of attempting to suppress dissent and manipulate election outcomes, and curtail the rights of Pakistani citizens.

HRCP Report Raised Alarming Concerns Over Fairness of Pakistan's February Elections:

In a recent report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), significant concerns were raised regarding the integrity of the 8 February elections.

According to HRCP's observations, there were widespread disruptions to internet and cellular services on polling day, impacting voter accessibility, particularly for marginalized communities such as women with restricted mobility, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and low-income voters. These disruptions were compounded by arbitrary changes in polling information.

While the polling process itself was generally observed to be transparent and peaceful, issues emerged during the post-polling phase. Notably, in one-fifth of the observed polling stations, there was a lack of transparency in displaying vote counts. Moreover, discrepancies were reported between the counts provided by presiding officers and those announced by returning officers.

In response to these concerns, HRCP recommended an independent audit of the elections, emphasizing the importance of excluding security agencies from any involvement in electoral management to ensure impartiality and fairness. Additionally, HRCP called for the publication of key election forms and suggested ordering recounts in cases of close contests, especially where the number of rejected ballots exceeded the margin of victory.

The report also highlighted broader concerns regarding pressure from non-democratic sources leading up to the elections. HRCP emphasized the critical need for political dialogue among all stakeholders to uphold democratic values and ensure the protection of civil liberties.

The HRCP's report on Pakistan's February elections paints a troubling picture of compromised integrity and accessibility. While the polling process itself seemed transparent, widespread disruptions and discrepancies in vote counts raise serious concerns. Urgent action is needed to address these issues, including electoral reform and safeguarding civil liberties, to uphold the principles of democracy and ensure fair and credible elections in the future.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

US-Pak:

The US Department of State expressed anticipation for "timely, complete election results" from Pakistan reflecting the will of its people. In a statement, it mentioned preparedness to collaborate with the next Pakistani government, irrespective of political affiliation, to advance shared interests.

The US, UK, and EU all conveyed concerns about Pakistan's electoral process following a recent vote and called for an investigation into reported irregularities. They jointly emphasized the importance of addressing claims of interference, fraud, and irregularities.

The EU statement highlighted a perceived "lack of a level playing field," attributing it to limitations on political actors contesting the elections and constraints on freedoms of assembly, expression, and internet access.

The US State Department pointed out "undue restrictions" on freedoms of expression and assembly, along with incidents of violence and attacks on media personnel. Both the US and EU cited allegations of interference, including activist arrests, underscoring the need for thorough investigations into these claims.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Confusion reigns in Pakistan's rigged election, Published by The Economist
Link: Confusion reigns in Pakistan's rigged election (economist.com)

Edge of Escalation: Navigating the Fragile Peace Between Pakistan and Iran, Published by Gulf International Forum
Link: Edge of Escalation: Navigating the Fragile Peace Between Pakistan and Iran - Gulf International Forum (gulfif.org)

How millions of young people broke Pakistan's rules of politics, Published by The Washington Post
Link: Pakistan's youth supported Imran Khan, upending traditional politics - The Washington Post

Where democracy is most at risk, Published by The Economist
Link: Where democracy is most at risk (economist.com)

Pakistan is out of friends and out of money, Published by The Economist
Link: Pakistan is out of friends and out of money (economist.com)

A weak coalition government in Pakistan will find it hard to stabilize relations with its neighbours, Published by Chatham House
Link: A weak coalition government in Pakistan will find it hard to stabilize relations with its neighbours | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank

Independent Thinking: Is Pakistan's democracy on the brink?, Published by Chatham House
Link: Independent Thinking: Is Pakistan's democracy on the brink? | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank

Confusion reigns in Pakistan's rigged election, Published by The Economist
Link: Confusion reigns in Pakistan's rigged election (economist.com)