

Voting Green: Putting Climate on the Election Agenda

This is a time for citizens to make informed choices that take into account the social, ecological, and economic cost of their future quality of life by electing representatives who can walk the tightrope without falling or failing people and the planet.



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In classical patterns of voting, citizens look at past service delivery to evaluate performance and use evidence to gauge political competence. This behavior incentivises politicians to keep a tab on the pulse of the nation and build manifestoes that resonate with citizen needs and reflect the aspirations of the majority. Theoretical arguments however do not always translate into expected electoral response. The political culture of a nation and social sub-culture play a pivotal role in shaping opinions and developing narratives that strike a resonating chord with people.

Crises and emergency situations, depending on the nature and scope of the calamity, can serve both as a binding force to coalesce disparate groups or fuel strife and create divisions to trigger conflict. Democracy is often

seen as the best vehicle for navigating through troubled times, but turmoil also tests democracy and its ability to balance actions in ways that maintain the sanctity of institutions and rights of people. The uptick in populism and hybrid trends in democracy are creating new models of governance within democracies that will play an increasingly important role in shaping future voting patterns.

Global warming, a rapidly changing climate, and the increasing intensity of climate-induced disasters are likely to provide political parties with greater opportunity to seduce voters with the lure of security, (albeit false) promises of plenty, and inward-looking policies that pull back from multilateralism and promote isolationist thinking. This free but unfair trend in illiberal democracy, happening at a time when the warming



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planet is going to throw challenges that are existential in scale and scope, is going to place a critical responsibility on voters.

There is ample scientific evidence to support projections of disruptions in all life systems. From food, water, and energy to health, biodiversity and ecological collapse, nothing remains outside the ambit of climate change. The cumulative impact of multi-sector disasters has all the ingredients of volatility in its social and economic outfall for triggering a full-fledged planetary threat to human and national security. This is a time for citizens to make informed choices that take into account the social, ecological, and economic cost of their future quality of life by electing representatives who can walk the tightrope without falling or failing people and the planet.

The 2022 flooding in Pakistan is a stark indicator of the clear and present threat of climate change. The trending 420 Parts Per Million (PPM) of Green House Gases (GHG) in the atmosphere poses a challenge to the signatories of the Paris Agreement to staying below the global warming threshold of 1.5°C. That threshold is set to be breached in this decade.

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For Pakistan, a country that is routinely high on the vulnerability index, it is critical to plot a trajectory that holds within it a long-term strategy for human and national security. Keeping both mitigation and adaptation as key drivers for innovation and investment in peace, security and stabilization, voters need to think beyond the existing political narratives to create demand for a green new narrative for a safe future.

Governing systems that allow civil society participation, free flow of information, and processes of assessment and evaluation are better equipped to respond to issues of higher complexity. This citizen-centric approach carries with it a greater responsibility for generating pressure for strong sustainable development policy responses at local, regional, and global levels. Living in a world where human and social systems are going to face severe stress, it is important to recognize the threats confronting fragile and flawed



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democracies and evaluate risks carefully. This also requires taking into account the short-term focus of democratic decision-making and the inherent weakness of a system that is limited by time and space to address a threat like climate change that runs across generations and borders. Consistently voting green offers a better chance of ensuring continuity in policy.

Scarcities generate fear and fear can easily be exploited by hybrid regimes who demonstrate all the characteristics of democracy but have weak respect for civil and political rights of citizens. In already politically unstable countries with declining economic indicators and growing income gaps, the risk of political discourse getting hijacked by charismatic pseudo-democrats offering simplified solutions is high.

The economic cost of disasters to Pakistan is in the range of USD 3.8 billion annually. Mismanagement and maladaptation are going to increase this cost. The right to vote offers citizens a chance to choose their future. While the lure of populism with embellished rhetorical promises and dogmatic

approaches may appear attractive in uncertain times, it is important to prioritize choices and maintain a healthy balance between climate security, individual freedoms, and a common safe future.



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