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## United States Senate

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

February 21, 2024

Ambassador Asad Majeed Khan  
Embassy of Pakistan  
3517 International Court, NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
United States

Dear Ambassador Khan,

I applaud the millions of Pakistanis who voted on February 8 in your country's elections. The significant turnout of Pakistani people from around the country and every walk of life speaks to the fundamental role elections play in democracies around the world. Unfortunately, these elections were marred by political violence, allegations of unfair restrictions on political expression, and accusations of vote rigging. I join my colleague from Maryland Senator Cardin in sending my condolences to the victims and their families of the terrible attacks at election campaign offices in Balochistan.

I also wish to add my voice to the many observers raising serious concerns with the way in which Pakistani authorities conducted the electoral process. The State Department agreed with international and local election observers' assessment that "these elections included undue restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly."<sup>[1]</sup> White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby also expressed concerns about intimidation and voter suppression.<sup>[2]</sup> Months prior to the February 8 vote, which was originally scheduled for November 2023, independent election observers made allegations of biased redistricting.<sup>[3]</sup> On February 8, Pakistani authorities shut down mobile telecommunications ostensibly as a security measure.<sup>[4]</sup> Following the elections, a senior administrative official in Punjab Province stated publicly that he participated in fraud "converting losers into winners" and changing the results for 13 national parliament seats.<sup>[5]</sup> Taken together these electoral irregularities paint a damning picture of efforts aimed at preventing free and fair participation by all political parties, all candidates, and all eligible voters in the February 8<sup>th</sup> elections.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Elections in Pakistan, State Department, February 8, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/elections-in-pakistan/>.

<sup>[3]</sup> "Pakistan Election Commission Accused of Changing Voting Map to Favour Ex-PM," *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/29/pakistan-election-commission-accused-of-changing-voting-map-to-favour-ex-pm>

<sup>[4]</sup> "Pakistan Elections 2024: Polls Close in Vote Marred by Mobile Shutdown," *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68226228>

<sup>[5]</sup> "Senior Pakistani Official Admits to Helping Rig the Vote," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/18/world/asia/pakistan-election.html>

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Pakistani authorities must fully investigate the allegations of fraud and electoral interference. Without a credible investigation, a new government will struggle to bring the Pakistani people together. Pakistan's current economic and security challenges require a strong government with the backing of the Pakistani people to make the difficult but necessary decisions. Respecting the decision of the Pakistani people, expressed through their votes, is the only way a new government will be empowered to tackle issues facing Pakistan such as negotiating a new IMF agreement or investing to mitigate future floods.

Pakistan and the United States share many interests, including addressing climate change and ensuring a secure, stable, and prosperous South Asia. We also share an interest in supporting democratic processes and respecting the will of the people through fair elections. As the negotiations around forming a new government in Pakistan continue, I look forward to engaging with you and others who want to see Pakistan succeed on these and other vital issues.

Sincerely,  
Chris Van Hollen

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Van Hollen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" being the most prominent part.