Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services
Dedicated to Parliamentary Excellence

Defining and Measuring Democracy for Parliament's Pro-People Initiatives and Reforms
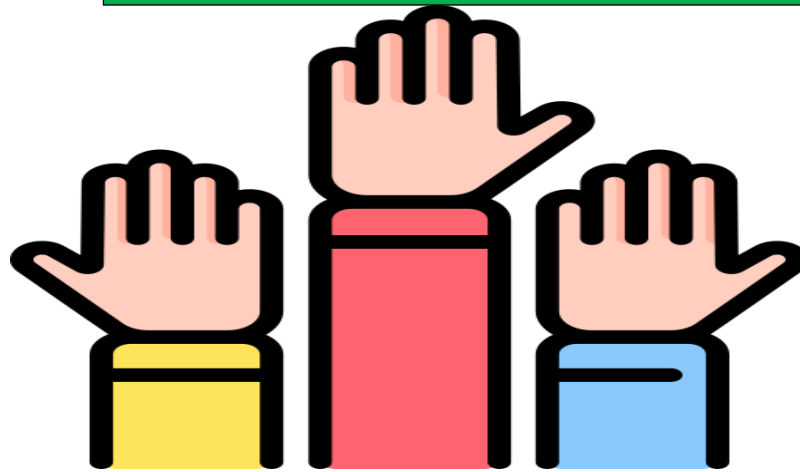
Summary

1. This paper outlines three internationally recognized standards of measuring democracy and ranking countries based on their performance
   i. freedoms
   ii. civil liberties and
   iii. human security
2. Members of Parliament, government and policy makers can utilize identified areas of improvement to undertake due reform

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Abstract

Democracy can be perceived as a set of principles and practices that institutionalize and ultimately protect freedom of the people. The word democracy derives from two Greek words, demos that means "the ordinary people," and the kratos refers "to rule." It is also conceived as a "form of regime that derives from popular sovereignty in which ordinary citizens are endowed with the right and ability to govern themselves. While there may not be consensus definition of democracy, we can identify democracy through key features that include i. government based on majority ii. as chosen by consent of the governed, iii. existence of free and fair elections; iv. the protection of minority rights and v. respect for basic human rights for all. Democracy presupposes equality before the law, due process and political pluralism. This paper discusses three internationally recognized standards of measuring democracy and ranking countries based on their performance viz a viz freedoms, civil liberties and human security. Members of Parliament, government and policy makers can utilize identified areas of improvement to undertake due reform.

Key Words: *Democracy, Political Freedoms, Democracy Index, Freedom Index, Human Development Index, Parliament and Human Security*

1. Democracy: Defining the Concept

1.1   Encyclopedia Brittanica defines democracy as "a system of government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of a state or other polity are directly or indirectly decided by the "people,"[1] which in contemporary sense manifests the will of the people as reflected in free and fair elections where all adults, men and women, are authorized to vote for electing their representatives, who are expected to perform key functions of law making, representation and oversight of the executive in the Parliament.

The People used to be a group historically constituted by only a minority of the population (e.g., all free adult males in ancient Athens or all sufficiently propertied adult males in 19th-century Britain) but generally understood since the mid-20th century to include all (or nearly all) adult citizens. States with democratic governments prevent rule by autocrats, guarantee fundamental individual rights, allow for a relatively high level of political equality, and rarely make war on each other. As compared with nondemocratic states, they also better foster human development as measured by indicators such as health and education, provide more prosperity for their citizens, and ensure a broader range of personal freedoms.

1.2   United Nations: Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, articulates the democratic values in following words:

> 1.   "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
> 2.   Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.
> 3.   The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures."[2]

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on 16th December 1966 in its article 25 defines that:

> Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen

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[1] Brittanica see at: https://www.britannica.com/question/Where-was-democracy-first-practiced
[2] "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Article 21.

representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.[3]

2. Shrinking Democracy: Challenges of Contemporary World

Democracy may not necessarily mean that the concerns of the marginalized strata in society will be considered in decision making yet there is always a clear intention for meaningful and informed participation of the people, which means that there should be freedom of expression and association as well as presence of an organized society based on rule of law. Democracy derives from universal acceptance that people must remain as the top priority and the soul of all progress and development as they act as the mediators and the ultimate beneficiaries of development. Therefore, democracy is all about meaningful public participation in day-to-day affairs of the country to ensure that their voice is heard loud and clear at all tiers of governance and politics in a society.

Globally in most recent times conflicts, natural and manmade disasters, pandemics and acutely scarce resources have undermined the status of democratic countries viz a viz people's authority and their freedoms and rights as less than 8% of total world population live in free democracies while 40% live under authoritarian regimes. Revival of geopolitics and civilizational fault lines across traditional adversaries, decade of populist leaderships in US, Turkey and Russia, and resurgence and success of right-wing fundamentalist parties and leaders in India and Israel in the shape of Narendra Modi and Netanyahu are posing an existential threat to pro-people focus of politics in wake of declining trust in government and wider sense of deprivation viz a viz socio-economic needs of the poor masses.

As a consequent, democratic states are pushed towards vicious cycle of power-politics of elites, arms races, conflicts and war. In this context, comparative politics becomes imperative to study the changing trends and challenges with regards to level and extent of democracy by seeing politics and government in different settings and countries. It is important to analyze the differences between democracy and authoritarian systems, differences across political systems i.e parliamentary, presidential or semi-presidential etc, extent and finally set of differences in ways of people's participation i.e electoral systems.

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[3] UN see at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights accessed March 26, 2024.

3. Measuring Democracy

As already identified analysts and social scientists define democracy either as a thin concept with few key features, or a thick more comprehensive set of values, principles and practices to gauge the extent and type of democracy enjoyed by the people.

3.1 Dahl's thin concept of Polyarchy (1970): It is one of the most influential yet thin definition as polyarchy, which can also be termed as the "electoral democracy," that has eight components or institutional requirements prevalent in the society including:

> i. All adult citizens have the right to vote,
>
> ii. Almost all citizens are eligible to hold public office,
>
> iii. Political leaders have the right to compete for votes,
>
> iv. Elections are free and fair,
>
> v. All citizens are free to form and join political parties and organizations,
>
> vi. All citizens are free to express their opinion on al political matters,
>
> vii. Diverse sources of information about politics exist and are protected by law,
>
> viii. Government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference by the general public. [4]

3.2 Freedom House definition of Political Freedom (1970): The Freedom House is a non-governmental organization based in the United States of America, which conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom as well as human rights. It produces an annual report called "Freedom in the World" that assesses the level of political rights and civil liberties in countries around the world. It measures a narrow concept, that of "electoral democracy," that is based on following set of criteria:

> i. A competitive multiparty political system.
>
> ii. Universal adult suffrage.
>
> iii. Regularly contested elections on the basis of secret ballots.
>
> iv. Significant pubic access of major political parties to the electorate/constituents through media and by open political campaigning.

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[4] Economist Intelligence Unit, Op. cit. p. 64.

At the end of 2015, 125 out of 193 countries were classified accordingly as electoral democracies, of these, only 89 met the stringent criteria to be classified as "free democracies. Thus, Freedom House pre dominantly focuses on political pluralism and electoral process and to a lesser extent the performance of the government and only few aspects of participation. The most recent World Freedom Report shares a bleak picture where for 18th consecutive year in 2023, there has been an extensive deterioration in freedom of people as political rights and civil liberties diminished in 52 countries and only 21 countries made improvements. Flawed elections and armed conflict contributed to the decline, endangering freedom and causing severe human suffering.[5]

3.3   Annual Democracy Index: The concept of Democracy Index given by the UK based Economist Intelligence Unit is a deeper concept that rests on five inter-related and categories of comparative analysis: i. electoral process and pluralism, ii. civil liberties, iii. functioning of the government; iv. political participation and v. political culture. The comprehensiveness of this approach gives imperativeness to how government has fared in provision of human rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, religion, press, speech and association; as well as the right to due judicial process for all as envisaged by most national Constitutions and international covenants adopted by the United Nations (Declaration of Human Rights 1948, ICCPR, UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act). As democracies attempt to go beyond the minimalist and thin electoral and civil liberties ambit to ensure provision of human rights to the people and try to securing a political culture, the advancement is termed as "liberal democracy," or "free democracy."

Accordingly, countries are ranked through public-survey based methodology using a dichotomous and a three point scoring system for 60 indicators in addition to, expert opinion, level of turn out in elections and strength of the legislative branches to hold executive accountable. The Democracy Index values are used to place countries within one of four types of regimes:

> i.   **Full Democracies**: Countries in which not only the basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected but gradually a political culture is secured where defeated parties accept verdict and mandate of the winners, which gives legitimacy to the system. Functioning of government follows rule of law and media is diverse and independent with balanced check and balance system. There are few problems as decisions by independent judiciary are enforced.
>
> ii.   **Flawed Democracies:** In these countries elections are largely free and fair while civil liberties as given in Constitution are respected. Yet there are certain problems such as infringements on freedom of media, issues of governance, still underdeveloped political culture and relatively low levels of participation.

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[5] Ibid.

iii. **Hybrid Regimes:** Elections have serious irregularities and similarly, there are serious weaknesses in governance as rule of law is weak and corruption is higher. Worst still judiciary is not independent, civil society is underdeveloped and media and opposition parties face threats and harassment. Political participation is inconsistently low and political culture yet to develop.

iv. **Authoritarian Regimes:** In such states, political pluralism is absent as elections, if they occur, are not free and fair. Media is state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. Infringements and abuse viz a viz civil liberties and political freedoms are ignored. Formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance.[6]

4. Human Security: Defining the Concept of Human Development Index (HDI)

As a concept, human security takes a holistic and humane view of security. Reputed scholars of international relations argue that the traditional notions of security that prioritize state security only in military terms often neglect the well-being and safety of individuals and communities.[7] The contemporary concept of human security encapsulates security at individual, community, country and earth levels. Economic, social and environmental fabrics are essential parts of it. The seven dimensions of human security were identified as:

i. Economic security,
ii. Food security,
iii. Health security,
iv. Environmental security,
v. Personal security,
vi. Community security and
vii. Political security.[8]

4.1 New Concept of "human security," in UNDP Human Development Report 1994 that equated security with people rather than territories, with development rather than arms. It unlike the anarchic nature of traditional concept of security limited to safety of geographical territories from external threats, examines both the national and the global concerns of human security. Pakistan's renowned economists Dr Mehbub ul Haq was instrumental in devising this approach of Human Development Index as a new parameter to focus people-centric state policies for socio economic growth and pro poor development.

> "Human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their

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[6] Economist Intelligence Unit, ibid. p. 66.

[7] Ken Booth, *Critical Security Studies and World Politics,* (Lynne Rienner Publishers: 2005).

[8] Pervez Tahir, "Of Human Security," *The Express Tribune*, November 03, 2017.

people." It calls for "people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people."[9]

The Human security aims to focus on the imperative central idea of prevention from conflicts by making all out endeavours to address root causes of threats and vulnerabilities by anticipating potential harm and preparing the local communities and the people well in advance to build resilient societies. Thus, human security help develop strong local communities and society by seeking public-private partnerships and a holistic synergy of government as well as non-governmental entities that join hand to formulate solution-oriented societies which are much socially united by ensuring provisions pertaining to basic human rights and well-being of the people especially the poor and the downtrodden.

4.2 Pakistan's framework of Human Rights: Pakistan's framework of Human Rights comprises of the vision of the founding fathers as reflected in the 1973 consensus Constitution that has a living five-prong nature: Islamic, Welfare, Federal and Parliamentary Democratic with an Independent Judiciary. The Country is also signatory to numerous International Human Rights covenants under the auspices of the United Nations, where Pakistan has ratified the International Covenant on Racial Discrimination in 1966, Convention on Rights of Children in 1990, Convention on Elimination of All kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2008. This implies that the country has assumed obligation and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights so it gradually pledges to create all policy, legislative and funding resources to implement the said right to all individuals in the society without any discrimination.

4.3 UNDP's Human Development Index: "The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development in lines with the broader context of a country's human rights framework that necessarily revolve around three core rights, that is: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. [10]

HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions:

    i.   Health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth,

    ii.   Education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and

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[9] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290.

[10] UNDP Human Development Index Reports, see at: https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

          expected years of schooling for children of school entering age.

iii.   Standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita.[11]

The HDI uses the logarithm of income, to reflect the diminishing importance of income with increasing Gross National Income (GNI). The scores for the three HDI dimension indices are then aggregated into a composite index using geometric mean. The figure below shows the HDI dimensions and indicators: [12]
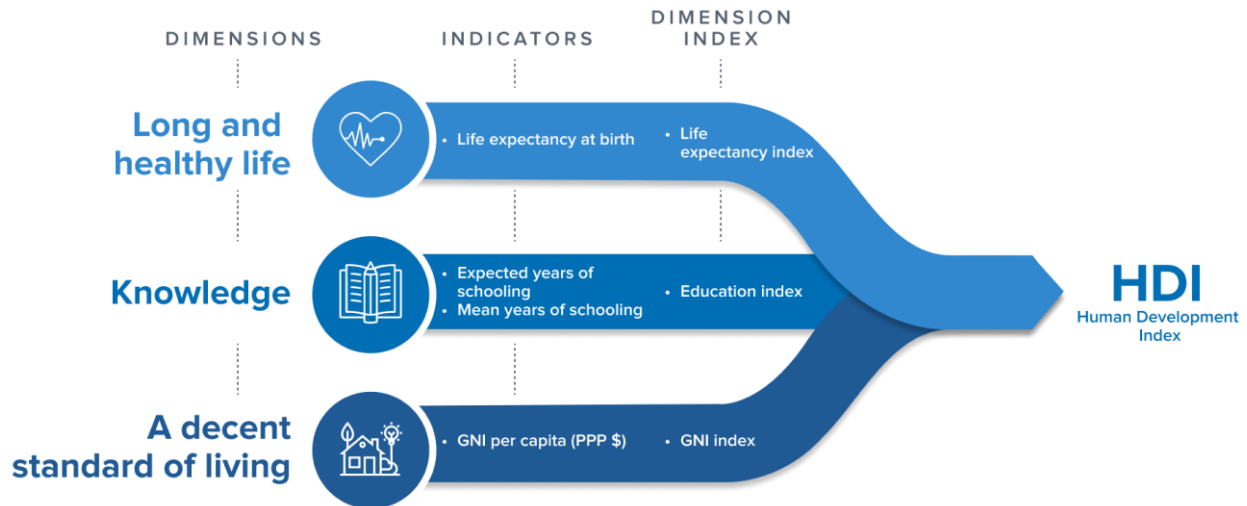
On Annual basis the UNDP issues the Global HDI Report that ranks 193 countries with regards to their performance on serving a pro people development paradigm that secures human security of masses especially the marginalized communities.

4.4   Pakistan's Human Security Challenge – Grave Numbers: The Parliament comprising of elected representatives of the people is expected to be custodian viz a viz meeting the basic amenities to the people including but not limited to food security, curbing inflation and unemployment, providing universal education, housing and primary health to all citizens. The Constitution of Pakistan emphasizes on fundamental rights of all without any discrimination, as it remains the linchpin for a peaceful and socio-politically stable society that then consolidates to empower its people by improved indicators of human security and gradual but focused capacity building of the population to become resilient population.

The following statistics give a dismal situation with regards to human security and thus,

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[11] Ibid

[12] UNDP, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI accessed 26th March, 2024.

desires responsive and affirmative action by individual Members of Parliament, standing committees catering for oversight of respective ministries and cross-party caucuses to advocate this challenge proactively not only with respective government agencies but private entities and the national as well as international partners of Pakistan to leave no one behind in this national cause:

Table 1: Human Security Situation in Pakistan

S No	Human Security Challenge	Statistics	Remarks (if any)
1.	Poverty Headcount	24% (a quarter) of total population of Pakistan under the poverty line	US Dollar 1.90 per day is the poverty line
2.	Multidimensional Poverty	39%	Low income,deprivation in health, education, living standards and social inclusion
3.	Population Growth Rate	2.4%	
4.	Stunting	44%	
5.	Food Insecurity	37%	10.5 million (29%) face acute food insecurity
6.	Unemployment Rate	6.3% in 2023	As per Economic Survey of Pakistan FY2023[13]
7.	CPI Headline Inflation	29.2% in 2023 as against 11% in 2022	-do-
8.	Urban Food Inflation	37.3%	-do-
9.	Rural Food Inflation	41% in FY2023	-do-
10.	Literacy Rate	62.8%	-do-
11.	Health Expenditures	1.4% of GDP in 2022 as against just 1% in 2021	-do-
12.	Out of School Children (OOSC)	26-30% (Girls OOS 37% and Boys OOS 27%)	-do-
13.	Immunization against diseases such as typhoid and TB control	92% and 94% vaccine coverage achieved	-do-
14.	Drinking Water in schools	67%	
15.	Labor Force	71.76 million total labor force with around 4.51 million unemployed	-do-

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[13] Government of Pakistan, Highlight of Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2022-23.

The contemporary world is marred by COVID-19 pandemic (2020-22), global climate change, Russia Ukraine War and the Israel-Palestine in addition to transnational threats such as terrorism, human trafficking and smuggling ranging from food, precious items, drugs and narcotics.

Natural and man-made disasters worsen the challenges. The 2022 floods in Pakistan caused due to global climate change killed 1,739 people and caused damage of Rs 3.2 trillion ($14.8 billion) with Rs 3.3 trillion ($15.2 billion) of economic losses in the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan exacerbated the impact of already feeble human security indicators. Being a country with a high population growth rate of 2.4%, Pakistan faces multidimensional poverty amongst 37% who have meagre incomes and they are deprived of appropriate health cover, education, standards of living and social inclusion. Worst still, no less than 10.5 million people (29% of total) face acute food insecurity. Consequently, such dismal human security situation instigates fragility and instability amongst the masses as societal stress reaches a critical level where violent extremism and internal polarization starts to challenge and seriously undermine country's social cohesion and internal security. Where social contracts are weak and services uneven, prolonged turbulence may arise, resulting in further polarization and potential radicalization and violent conflict.[14]

5. Parliament's Role in Strategic Reforms for Human Security

The Parliament with its mandated functions of representation, legislation and oversight of the executive, is expected to focus on securing good governance at the federal, provincial and local tiers so that socio economic growth and equity in ensured while the government also caters for strategic direction of the country towards setting up resilient and self-sufficient societies especially in a country like Pakistan that has a 60% youth population seeking to contribute in uplift of the nation provided given opportunities to excel. Democratic governance by an active Parliament is the ideal means of encouraging peacebuilding and conflict resolution amongst the low- and middle-income countries facing fragile human security indicators. The focus thus is gradual building and consolidation of resilient societies that can outlive crises. Resilience is not limited to anticipating and mitigating climate and natural disaster risks alone, but also human-induced pressures. While variously defined, it is fast becoming a central concept in government policy led by the elected Parliaments world over. [15]

The Members of Parliament in Pakistan continue to perform multiple roles that include a peace-negotiator amongst constituents, a legislator who conducts informed law making and last but not the least, a people's elected-monitor who holds executive accountable with regards to their performance, resources and execution of commitments on the floor of House as well as announced public policies, especially on the human security front, made

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[14] UNDP, *Building Inclusive Societies and Sustaining Peace through Democratic Governance and Conflict Prevention, An integrated Approach*, (UNDP, 2016), p. 9.

[15] Chandler, Resilience: *The Governance of Complexity*. (London: Routledge, 2013).

by the government from time to time. The Members of Parliament in individual capacity and as parliamentary leaders or members of committees and caucuses must persuade the executive to formulate a national strategy for cementing human security that remains bedrock of peace within a country. The foremost strategic reforms that MPs may take up with the government by parliamentary tools such as question hour, calling attention notices, adjournments motions, zero hour and committee business, include the following major aspects of human security:

i. **Pro Poor and Inclusive Economic Growth:** Parliamentarians must focus inHouse business and committee effectiveness towards persuading government to ensure pro-poor and inclusive economic growth that is a must to fulfill the key elements of human security. People must be given desired opportunities to earn respectable livelihoods that can provide them adequate resources for food security, shelter, education and health for the whole household.

ii. **Food Security:** Government's policy for food security must incorporate all its dimensions, i.e. food must be available for all; accessible to all with adequate purchasing power, marketing and distribution; and there must be facilities for healthcare, water and sanitation for the deprived. Government policies have a critical role to play in ensuring food security, which include the maintenance of buffer stocks, support price, land reform, management of the food distribution system etc. Supportive government policies are particularly important especially for those that suffer from disadvantages due to income, geographical location and/or natural calamities

iii. **Open and Transparent Merit**: Government policies must be based on the principle of equity and efficiency where transparency and meritocracy remain the top priority in all public functions. Members of Parliament as elected representatives, owe it to the people especially the youth, poor, women and people from minorities that an uncompromising system of transparent merit-based recruitment is followed without fail to give equitable opportunity to all and to develop a highly professional cadre of civil and military servants who are people of integrity, appointed on all tiers of government, to serve in public offices. It is imperative to curb the creeping despondency among the youth, which may push them in a vicious circle of intolerance, crimes and violent extremism rather than being catalyst of a vibrant tomorrow upon whom the resilient Pakistani society has to be built.

iv. **Inclusive Education for Egalitarian Society:** The purpose of education institutions must revolve around developing students' objective thinking that appreciates diversity and dialogue; understand and analyze situations to finally contribute by being part in the solution to challenges posed. Schools, colleges and universities must focus not only on developing ability and skills-set in different disciplines of study but imperatively in building a complete personality with character traits aimed at serving humanity and being part of solution towards a peaceful, tolerant and egalitarian society. State and legislature must engage with academia at university level to ensure that academics focus on

producing graduates who practise three core values besides their competency in respective discipline of study:

a. **Mutual respect and ability to listen and appreciate people with diverse point of views** based on democratic concept of we agree to disagree.

b. **Undertake evidence-based analysis** based on facts from authoritative sources rather than falling prey to conspiracy theories, stereo types, disinformation and misinformation, etc be it print, electronic or investigative data.

c. **Perpetual trait of pursuing the stance that is Constitutional and lawful** rather than based on bias in favour of person, party or school of thought.

v. **Rule of Law and Social Security Net for Well-being of All:** State is responsible to generate opportunities of equal progress and well-being of all members of the society. This implies a secure rule of law where all are equal in front of law and all institutions including policing follows the rules, quick and cost beneficial system of justice, a viable health cover and housing system for all as well as a perpetual system creating opportunities of work for as many people as possible. Social safety nets in Bangladesh and Brazil worked great deal as socio-economic shock-observers.[16] These social security nets have a far-reaching impact on economic security as they include: job opportunities, productive investment, shelter for aged, education support for poor, health facilities, fiscal space to the vulnerable, impact on poverty and food security and over all contribution to Human Resource Development.[17]

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[16] Ehsan Mehmood Khan, Human Security in Pakistan, Islamabad Narratives, 2013, p. 94.
[17] Ibid.

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