

## **General Elections 2008**

### **Policy Commitments of Political Parties**

#### **Freedom of Information and Transparency**

Freedom of information (FOI) is a basic human right, and a pre-requisite for good governance and transparency in both public and private sectors. The Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, does not provide a separate constitutional provision for FOI, but enshrines it implicitly in freedom of expression under Article 19, as one cannot express unless necessary information is accessible. Over the last six years, significant steps have been taken to put in place laws for guaranteeing the right to information. At the Federal level, Freedom of Information Ordinance was promulgated in 2002. This law entitles all citizens of Pakistan to access information from Federal government bodies, subject to certain exemptions. At the Provincial level, only Balochistan and Sindh have enacted FOI laws in 2005 and 2006 respectively, that too with a large number of exemptions. At the Local level, there are a number of provisions in the Local Government Ordinance, 2001, which provide for public participation in meetings and disclosure of information by local government bodies. None of these laws applies to private sector.

On the implementation side, however, no progress worth name has been achieved. Designation of officers for processing of information complaints, indexing and computerization of records, awareness raising and budgetary allocations are some of the steps, which are missing. As a result, the potential impact of these laws on reduction in corruption, maladministration, and inefficiency in public and private sectors is still invisible. Take the example of corruption in government departments. According to Transparency International, Pakistan has been ranked 42nd corrupt country among 184 countries of the world, scoring 2.4 points on Corruption Perception Index. Punjab is the most corrupt province of the country and police is the most corrupt department followed by Revenue and Education Departments. Although, Pakistan has shown gradual improvement in its score from 2.2 to 2.4 points, but it still needs sincere efforts for achieving the goal of reducing corruption. The government, which shall come into power after the forthcoming general elections, will need to take serious steps for effective implementation of FOI laws for coping with the challenges of corruption and maladministration.

The table provided below identifies some of the major challenges in freedom of information, policy actions needed to address these challenge, and commitment of political parties whether they will implement the policy actions, if voted to power, after forthcoming general elections.

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Policy Actions Needed</b>	<b>Political Party's Response</b>
<b>1</b>	Under the Federal and provincial FOI laws, every public body is required to designate an officer to facilitate citizens' access to information. However, many public bodies still have not designated such officers.	Will your political party designate officers in all public bodies under the FOI laws?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
<b>2</b>	The fee for photocopy of public records under the FOI Ordinance, 2002, is Rs.5 per page, which is too high as compared to other countries.	Will your political party reduce this fee to Rs. 1 per page?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____ _____
<b>3</b>	There is no FOI law in two provinces, namely Punjab and NWFP.	Will your political party enact and implement FOI laws in these two provinces?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
<b>4</b>	The Local Government Ordinance, 2001, does not provide detailed rules and procedures for accessing information from the local representatives and local bodies.	Will your political party frame and implement rules and procedures for accessing information from local government bodies?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Policy Actions Needed</b>	<b>Political Party's Response</b>
<b>5</b>	Indexing and computerization of records is a pre-requisite for effective implementation of FOI laws. Many government departments complain about lack of funds for indexing and computerization of records.	Will your political party make budgetary allocations for indexing and computerization of records for implementation of FOI laws?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
<b>6</b>	Consumers in Pakistan are not available with accurate and comparative information about products and services. Most often, companies do not provide information even on request, whereas the existing FOI laws do not apply to the private sector.	Will your political party extend the jurisdiction of FOI laws to the private sector as well?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
<b>7</b>	The first FOI law came into force in 2002 in Pakistan. Since then, no review has been undertaken to see whether the legislation is making the desired impact. A good practice adopted by a number of countries is review of the progress in implementation of FOI laws after every five years.	Will your political party undertake a detailed review of the status of FOI in Pakistan, and set a precedent for 5-year review by the subsequent governments?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____
<b>8</b>	There is no whistleblower protection law for protection of those government officers who want to disclose information about corruption within the offices. As a result, corruption is thriving in the government sector.	Will your political party enact and implement a Whistleblower Protection law in Pakistan?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other response: _____ _____ _____