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US Congress adopts resolution seeking probe into general elections in Pakistan

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The United States (US) House of Representatives approved a resolution supporting democracy and human rights in Pakistan, urging an impartial investigation into claims of irregularities in the country's February 8 general elections. On Wednesday, a total of 368 members voted in favour of the resolution, calling for a "full and independent investigation of claims of interference or

irregularities in Pakistan's February 2024 election." The House Resolution 901 asked the representatives to vote if they wanted to "express support for democracy and human rights in Pakistan." The still image taken from the live stream of the US House of Representatives on June 26, 2024, shows the final results of the vote on a resolution calling for a

The still image taken from the live stream of the US House of Representatives on June 26, 2024, shows the final results of the vote on a resolution calling for a "full and independent investigation of claims of interference or irregularities in Pakistan's February 2024 election." (US House of Representatives)

Pakistan's February 8 general elections were plagued by a nationwide mobile internet shutdown on election day, arrests and violence during the lead-up, and unusually delayed results. These issues led to widespread accusations that the vote had been rigged. The resolution emphasised the need for Pakistani public participation in the democratic process, months after the general elections were contested as "rigged" and the outcome termed "delayed" by opposition parties. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is among those opposing the election results, citing significant obstacles faced by its candidates, leading them to run as independents without their iconic bat symbol due to a legal battle with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Following the elections, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) formed a coalition government, leaving PTI and other parties in opposition. The resolution condemns "attempts to

suppress the people of Pakistan's participation in their democracy, including through harassment, intimidation, violence, arbitrary detention, restrictions on access to the Internet and telecommunications, or any violation of their human, civil, or political rights." It also denounces "any effort to subvert the political, electoral, or judicial processes of Pakistan." Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at The Wilson Center, noted the significant margin of the vote. "85% of House members voted on it, and 98% voted in favour of the resolution. This is quite significant," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Kugelman added that the resolution is unlikely to significantly impact US policy towards Pakistan but noted that the Biden administration has also called for an investigation into the election irregularities. Shortly after the elections, the US State Department stated it was appropriate for Pakistan to investigate the rigging allegations. "We think that's an appropriate step to take. That's our response to questions of irregularities not just in Pakistan, but when we see them anywhere in the world," said Spokesperson Matthew Miller in February. Kugelman also speculated on potential future legislation concerning Pakistan in light of the House's vote. Expressing support for democracy and human rights in Pakistan. Whereas, on December 10, 1948, Pakistan became one of the original signatories to, and supported the creation of, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); Whereas, following the end of the most recent period of military rule in 2008, Pakistan completed its first peaceful transition of power

between civilian governments led by different political parties in 2013, but the military continues to exert undue influence on the politics of the country; Whereas, during previous elections, most recently in 2018, election monitors expressed concern about constraints on the freedom of expression and freedom of association and noted allegations of influence by the military-led establishment on the electoral process; Whereas the Department of State's Country Report on Human Rights Practices has often highlighted significant human rights issues in Pakistan across multiple years, including unlawful, arbitrary, and extrajudicial killings, forced disappearance and arbitrary detention by the state or its agents, the taking of political prisoners, serious restrictions on free expression and media, and substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; Whereas, on April 9, 2022, the National Assembly voted to remove Imran Khan as Prime Minister through a vote of no-confidence motion; Whereas, on August 10, 2023, President Arif Alvi dissolved Pakistan's National Assembly on the advice of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to allow for new elections, although the Election Commission of Pakistan subsequently announced the postponement of elections until February 2024 to redraw constituencies of the National Assembly to reflect the 2023 Census; Whereas, on September 1, 2023, caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said the Government was committed to safeguarding and upholding the rights of all its citizens, and that the Government would provide

constitutional continuity till the next general elections are held in the country; Whereas, on February 8, 2024, millions of Pakistanis participated in Pakistan's general election, with record numbers of women, youth, and members of religious and ethnic minority groups registered to vote; Whereas Pakistan's 2024 general election was marked by allegations by credible international and local observers of interference in the electoral process, including electoral violence, intimidation, arrest of political actors, restrictions to freedom of assembly, restrictions on freedom of expression, and restrictions on access to the internet and telecommunications; Whereas, on February 9, 2024, the Department of State noted that it shared the assessment of observers that the election included undue restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, condemned electoral violence as well as restrictions on the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and called for the full investigation of fraud or interference in Pakistan's general elections; Whereas the Constitution of Pakistan states that the Federal Government shall have control and command of the Armed Forces, and the oath taken by members of the Armed Forces swears they will uphold the Constitution and not engage in any political activities; Whereas an essential safeguard of democracy is civilian command and control of apolitical military and security forces; and Whereas democracy, development, rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually

reinforcing: Now, therefore, be it (1) affirms its strong support for democracy in Pakistan, including free and fair elections reflecting the will of the people of Pakistan; (2) calls on the President and the Secretary of State to strengthen engagement with the Government of Pakistan to ensure democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are upheld; (3) urges the Government of Pakistan to uphold democratic and electoral institutions, human rights, and the rule of law, and respect the fundamental guarantees of due process, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech of the people of Pakistan; (4) condemns attempts to suppress the people of Pakistan's participation in their democracy, including through harassment, intimidation, violence, arbitrary detention, restrictions on access to the internet and telecommunications, or any violation of their human, civil, or political rights; (5) condemns any effort to subvert the political, electoral, or judicial processes of Pakistan; and (6) urges the full and independent investigation of claims of interference or irregularities in Pakistan's February 2024 election.