



Return of the Democrats Pakistan After Elections

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Finally the name of the new PM for Pakistan - Syed Raza Gilani, has been announced and a PPP led government at the national level is the new reality. How did Pakistan vote on 18 February? What does that mean? And what are the challenges facing the new government?

ELECTION RESULTS: THE NUMBERS

The National Assembly

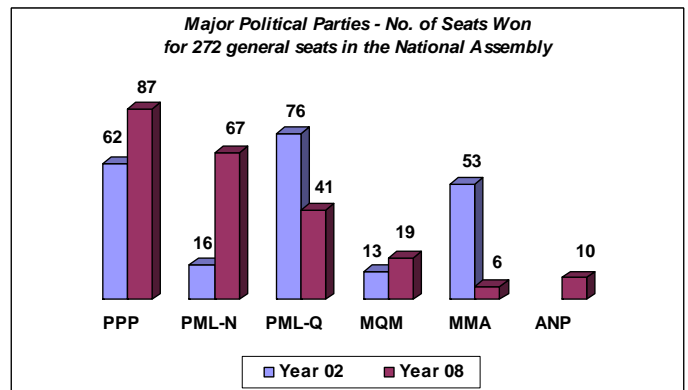
The PPP emerged as the most successful party in the 2008 elections, winning 87 seats for the National Assembly. Pre-election analysis, though had predicted 50 per cent vote for the PPP, the final tally perhaps for the PPP was lesser than expected. Especially when there was a widespread belief that the assassination of Benazir Bhutto would play an important role on deciding the outcome in favour of the PPP.

The PML-N has emerged the second most successful party after the PPP. From a mere 16 in 2002 elections, the share of PML-N has rocketed to 67 in 2008. More importantly, the PML-N has emerged as the biggest party in Punjab, winning 67 general seats in the NA.

The biggest losers are the PML-Q and the MMA. The PML-Q, which ruled Pakistan since 2002, could secure only 41 seats for the National Assembly.

For the MMA, which ruled two of the four provinces since 2002, the 2008 elections has crippled the party with no federal or provincial standing. The MMA has barely managed to survive securing just 7 seats in the National

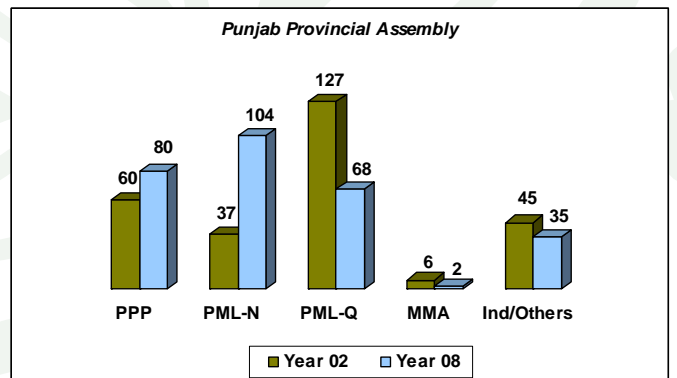
Assembly marking this as a mighty fall from the 59 NA seats it had in 2002.



The MQM retained its position, with neither a big gain nor loss with 19 general seats in the NA. The ANP (Awami National Party) emerged as the largest party in NWFP winning 31 seats in province and securing 14 NA seats.

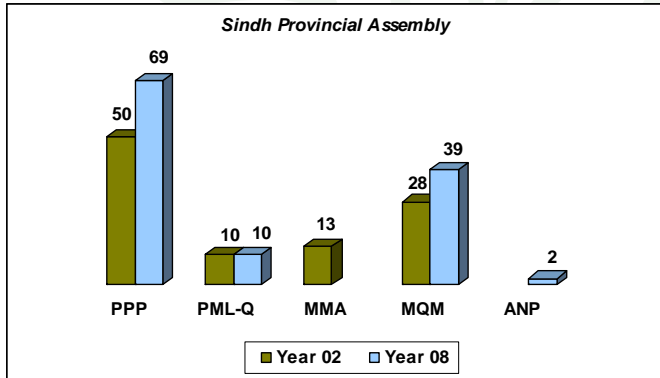
The Provincial Assemblies

In Punjab, it was PML-N all the way. It secured 104 seats in Punjab assembly compared to the 37 provincial assembly seats it won in 2002. The PPP



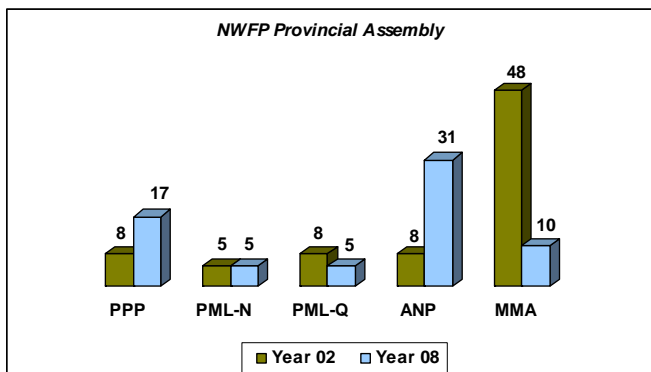
secured 80 seats while the PML-Q won 68 seats.

The PPP secured 60 seats, while the PML-Q dropped from 127 in 2002 to 68. PML-N's strategy of fiercely opposing the establishment and calling for the reinstatement of the judges dismissed by the Musharraf government attracted huge votes in the most populous province.



In Sindh, the PPP swept through winning 69 provincial assembly seats, a feat that was expected following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. MQM followed with 39 seats while the PML-Q had to be content with just 10 seats. The ANP won 2 seats and the PML-N failed to get their counting started in the province. The MQM dominated Karachi and Hyderabad winning 17 out of 20 NA seats and 35 out of 42 PS (provincial assembly Sindh) seats in Karachi.

The PPP won the most National Assembly seats in the Sindh province with 29 seats while the MQM secured 19 National Assembly seats from the province. The MMA failed to register its presence in the province while it had 13 seats in the 2002 elections

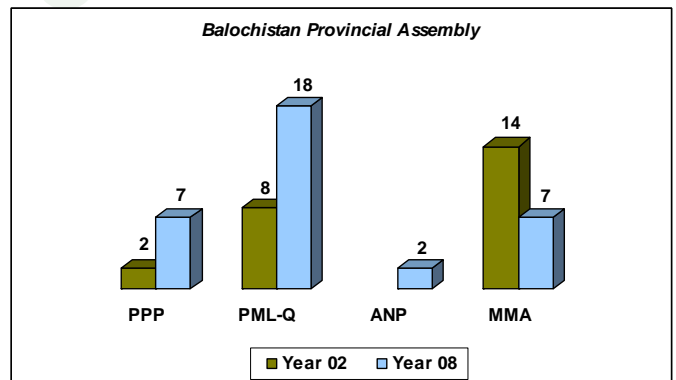


In the NWFP, the MMA, which secured 48 provincial seats in 2002, managed to win only 10 seats in 2008. The ANP waltzed its way to a comeback in the province securing 31 seats and so did the PPP winning 17 assembly seats. The ANP

was resurrected from 8 seats in 2002 while the PPP rose from 8 seats in 2002, thereby emerging as the second largest party in the province. The PML-N and PML-Q managed to secure 5 seats while the independents emerged as the second largest group in the assembly with 21 seats

In Balochistan, the Pashtun nationalist party of the province, the Pakhtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) and the representative party of the Baloch, the National Party (NP) boycotted the elections leaving much of 14 seats in Balochistan to the PML-Q.

The PML-Q's dismal performance in other provinces was made up in Balochistan where it won 18 seats. The MMA was reduced to 7 seats from 14 in 2002. The PPP, on the other hand, gained 5 seats from its previous performance of 2 seats in the province. The election boycott had its



strongest impact in Balochistan besides the split in JUI. As such with just 14 seats out of 272 in the National Assembly, Balochistan remains an insignificant voice in the parliament

II READING THE RESULTS

Five major results could be identified from the 2008 elections at the national and provincial levels. First, more than a pro-PPP or pro-PML-N wave, the election results clearly show an anti-Musharraf and anti-PML-Q sentiments. To an extent, one could interpret the election results as anti-Musharraf wave, transforming into votes against those parties that fought against President Musharraf and his political cronies in the National and provincial assemblies.

An understanding of this aspect is extremely important for President Musharraf, the military, and

the US, if the latter still believe that 'there is no alternative' to him. The people have voted against him favouring political parties and democratic politics.

Second, the people have also rejected the religious political parties. The fall from grace for the MMA is dramatic, when compared to the fact it has secured more than 50 seats for the National Assembly in 2002 elections and ruled two provinces - the NWFP and Balochistan.

True, the split within the MMA played a significant role in deciding the outcome 2008 elections. The decision of the Jamaat-e-Islami led by Qazi Hussain Ahmed, not to contest in the elections did affect the fortunes of the MMA. However, even if the Jamaat had participated in the elections, it is highly unlikely that the results would have been different for the MMA. The fact that the JUI-F lost considerably in the NWFP and in Balochistan, considered to be its strongholds, both in terms of number of seats and number of votes polled in 2008, would reveal that the people, especially in those two provinces have rejected the exploitation of religion for political reasons.

Third, the return of PPP to power with a thumping majority in Sindh province and a decent performance at national level since 1993 results show the salience of PPP at grass roots level. Benazir Bhutto, the assassinated leader was successful in keeping her party intact despite the fact she was not in Pakistan almost for a decade.

In retrospect, it is clear that there was a sympathy wave for the PPP, but was limited primarily to Sindh. Had she been alive, the PPP would have still emerged victorious in the elections.

More importantly, as mentioned earlier, the success of PPP has an important role to play in keeping the federation in tact. Since the PPP is perceived as a non-Punjabi party, the provincial leaders from Balochistan, Sindh and the NWFP are psychologically likely to have a better understanding of Islamabad. Psychological perceptions of Islamabad by the smaller provinces have always played an important role in alienating them, as much as actual policies pursued by the federal government.

Fourth, the re-emergence of the PML-N at national

level and in Punjab province, should be considered as the most important outcome of 2008 elections. While there was an widespread expectation that the PPP would emerge victorious, not many believed that the PML-N would perform the way it did. The fact was, before elections, Musharraf was more hostile to Nawaz Sharif than Benazir Bhutto. During mid-2007, many believed that Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto had reached an understanding on power sharing and her return to Pakistan had the approval of Musharraf and the Establishment. On the contrary, there was no such understanding between Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif. Musharraf has made it clear that the return of Sharif brothers was not welcome.

Given the fact Sharif did not have any such understanding with Musharraf and there was no sympathy wave for the party, the performance of the PML-N has been incredible. It has won maximum number of seats in Punjab, to form the government on its own in Punjab province.

Lastly, the responses of the smaller provinces needs to be understood, while appreciating the final results to the National Assembly. Sindh, though has voted in favor of PPP, its urban population, especially in Karachi has voted in favour of MQM. The MQM is the only party, that has withstood the anti-Musharraf and anti-incumbent waves that swept on 18 February. In fact, it secured two seats more than what it did in 2002.

Since the PPP is perceived as a non-Punjabi party, the provincial leaders from Balochistan, Sindh and the NWFP are psychologically likely to have a better understanding of Islamabad, thus strengthening the federal structure of Pakistan

In the NWFP, the re-emergence of the ANP is as important as that of the PPP at national level. Both are secular parties and believe in democratic politics. The fact that the ANP and PPP have routed the MMA from NWFP, may be the most important political

development in the province hit by violence since 2002.

Elections in Balochistan was marked by low voter turn out, as the leading regional parties—Pashtun and Balochi, boycotted the elections. Thus, if there was a wave in Balochistan, it was anti-Islamabad, which should be understood by the new rulers in framing the policies towards the largest province in Pakistan.

Finally, the equation between the government and military would be the greatest challenge in the immediate future. Removal of the president and the reinstatement of sacked judges - both these issues are likely to test Gen Kayani's response.

MMA is due to non-participation of these regional parties and to an extent pre-poll rigging.

III CHALLENGES AHEAD

Now in the third week of March 2008, almost one month after the elections, PPP is all set to form the government in Islamabad with support from PML-N, ANP and JUI-F. There are numerous challenges facing the new government. In fact, governing Pakistan is a much more challenging task for the PPP than contesting and winning the elections.

First, the major challenge arise from re-democratizing the institutions and making them accountable to elected political leaders. From golf clubs to foreign policies, the military's involvement has been all pervasive since the coup in 1999.

Second, two provinces - Balochistan and NWFP have been boiling with violence since 2002 with separatist and radical influences. More importantly, the radical violence in NWFP has spread into other provinces of Pakistan, as the recent suicide attacks would amplify. This violence also has cross-border implications with Afghanistan. Thus, what needs to be done in

NWFP demands - provincial, national and international attention. The presence of domestic actors in terms of pahstuns of Pakistan, international actors in terms of the US and Afghanistan and non-State actors in terms of al Qaeda and Taliban - pose a serious challenge to the PPP government.

The apology tendered by the PPP, after the elections, for the violence in Balochistan is a good beginning. However, bringing the separatists to mainstream would require a larger national plan - economic and political.

Third, foreign policy towards India, US and Afghanistan would also be a challenge to the PPP led government in Islamabad. Indian pressure on broadening the peace process and American pressure on a deeper involvement by Pakistan on War against Terrorism would require larger diplomatic skills and patience. While there is general understanding at the popular level against the use of jihad as an instrument of national and foreign policy, how much freedom would the PPP have in conducting its own policy vis-à-vis US and India?

Also vis-à-vis Kabul, Islamabad policies over the last three decades need to be revamped. The presence of US troops, increasing the Indian presence, fear of losing "strategic depth" in Afghanistan - are important factors likely to shape Pakistan's Afghan policy.

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