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An Analysis of 2018 General Elections in Pakistan

Abstract

This paper examines certain new trends which the electorate in Pakistan came across in the 2018 general elections. Slogans have come to occupy an important place in elections as people have little interest in manifestos of political parties. Slogans such as 'Tabdeli (change)', 'Do nahi, aik Pakistan (not two but one Pakistan) of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), 'Vote ko ezzat do (give sanctity to vote) of Pakistan Muslim League (N) had become popular among the masses in 2018 general elections in Pakistan. Lota- a term used for those who take no time in switching sides merely for personal gains now called 'Electables' was heard for the first time. The emergence of a new religious party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) is a new trend in the 2018 elections. The paper seeks to examine the role of electables, slogans and new trends in the general elections of 2018.

Key Words: Pakistan, Elections 2018, Electable, Slogans, Trends.

Introduction

General elections on the basis of adult franchise were conducted for the first time in 1971 which unfortunately, led to the political chaos and dismemberment of the country. It was the non-elected executives, unrepresentative civilians, civil and military bureaucracy whose policies brought this new state to an unbearable loss.¹ Pakistan's experience is not very good in the conduct of general elections as in almost all elections, the allegation of rigging, unfairness and manipulation at the highest levels are always raised against the winner by the losing one.

Democracy in Pakistan is a myth in real sense as it never allowed growing in true spirit.² As the government final year started, all political parties started political campaign for the new election. An environment of big rallies and new enthusiasm in workers of all political parties we can see in big or small cities. The speeches of leaders are heard by workers and the leaders charged them with big claims for

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their victory in the election. They always criticized the opponent of their misdeed but have no contribution on their part.

Before the elections in 2018, the different surveys projected PML (N) as the largest party and PTI the runner up in the coming elections but there were many developments took place which hinder the performance of the PML(N) as becoming the largest party in the elections. The Dawn Leaks which deteriorated relations between the Establishment and PML(N) government, as a result, the Information Minister resigned. The Panama Leaks was the turning point for the PML(N), as the result, the PML(N) Leader and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ousted from power by the Supreme Court (in its July 28, 2017) judgment and sent him to jail by the NAB court. These were the reasons which have not only damaged the campaign and performance of the PML(N) in the elections but even the strength of the party was weakened.

There were different trends before general elections in 2018 which have also shaped some unexpected results. These trends were the outcome of some developments in the past few years. Such trends also attracted pretty large number of youth and women to participate in the elections. Even the constituencies like district Dir and the tribal Bajaur districts where in the previous general elections women were barred, this time the women contested elctions and also showed full zeal as voters.

Trends

South Punjab Province

Pakistan as home of many ethnic groups that work as double-edged sword cementing the relations among them while at one time, it also endanger the federation on the other. Ethnic politics in Pakistan³ is always a cherished job for politicians for their own interest. To make the federal government in Pakistan through election, the Punjab province is the most important factor for it because in the National Assembly 272 general seats, it has 148 seats. 65 per cent of Punjab area is rural.⁴ The of creation of Seraiki province is long standing issue raised by many political parties from time to time to get the sympathy of the masses and pressurized the sitting government from time to time. Junoobi Punjab Sooba Mahaz(JPSM- South Punjab Province Front) was formed in April 2018 when eight members of Parliament and Punjab Provincial Assembly resigned from their seats and PML(N) party, merged it into PTI for the election 2018.⁵ It is important that the leaders of JPSM were the defectors from PML(N) and has benefit the PTI strength because the agenda of the two is similar-to defeat the PML(N).⁶ The ‘Siraiki’ word is now replaced by the South Punjab Province which showed the division on the basis of administration not on ethnic one.⁷ Some support the idea

of new province in the one province while opposed those demands in their own province is interesting and confusing. If the aim of creation of new province is to resolve the issues of masses, so it is okay, but if it is to weakened the role of a party or divided the strength of a party then instead of solution it will multiply their problems.

Social Media

Social media today is a powerful instrument in the hands of politicians and the activists are very active on this front in Pakistan. Most of the issues raised in the social media are relevant to governance issues too. Even the Supreme Court took suo moto notices on many issues (like, honour killing, hospital issues or some videos of beating of poor people by the police) when raised on the social media. The use of social media by a large number of Pakistani in favour of their political parties is reflected from their campaign. Those parties which are more active on social media front and frequently used it, have gained more votes and better results in the popular elections. According to an estimate, around 44 million Pakistanis are using Facebook.⁸ There are thousands of fake IDs in Pakistan which may use in election campaign against the opponent in a bad manner. The use of social media against the other political leaders is very negative; character assassination, false documentary proof, false statements are in a variety of way that the genuine and fake news are not recognizable. It is unfortunate that the social media is not social in present situation especially in the election.

Woman participation

Women in Pakistan as like in most of the developing countries are denied of their basic rights. The leaders or even some of the political parties denied women to cast vote in their favorite candidate. Besides, standing of women in the long queue is also considered as contrary to the traditions peculiarly in the rural areas. In the past elections, the candidates usually sign an agreement to bar the women of casting votes. The Elections Act 2017 prescribes that if the turnout of women is less than 10 % of the total votes casted in a constituency, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will declare that elections null and void.⁹ Such kinds of legislation have encouraged the women participation in the electoral process as women constitute half of the total population of the country.

Pakistani society is male dominated society so like the politics. Women participation in the electoral process is seen in the reserved seats in the National Assembly. Nomination of women for reserved seats is the discretion of the leaders which gave them the opportunity to select his own family members or very influential one. It is interesting to note the women participation in the PTI rallies is very encouraging and now most of the parties seek their participation in their

rallies. Even the religious parties have encouraged the women to cast vote. The female electorate will determine the future of our politics.¹⁰ Around 800 women¹¹ contested elections in 2013 as against 16,000 male. Gender discrimination, harassment and violence are the reason of low participation of women in politics in Pakistan.

Muthahida Majlis-e-Aamal (MMA) Revival

The alliance of six religious parties in 2002 successfully exploited anti-US sentiments and got votes in the two border provinces.¹² Religious parties main focused in the election is the narrative of Islamization of state laws and to curb unethical values from society. The vote bank of the MMA in KP was 26.3% which was further decline up to 20.38% in 2013 general elections in KP especially while the total voters turn out in KP increased from 34.02% in 2002 to 44.64% in 2013.¹³ There is now the PTI as the largest political party in the KP which has won the 2013 general elections and also got majority seats in the KP in 2018 election. The vacuum developed by the weak performance of the PPP and ANP government in KP in 2008-2013 was not filled by the religious parties but by PTI. The religious parties have strong 'street power' and they can change the government through agitation but they lack voters in their favour.

There is a halfhearted attempt to revive the MMA in December 2017 once again as it is very difficult to capture victory as like in the 2002 elections.¹⁴ The MMA did not developed new narrative in the election and could not motivate the masses in their favour at large. The JUI(S) faction joined the PTI in alliance which has divided the MMA strength in KP and a setback for their alliance.¹⁵ It was also a fact that JUI(F) was part of the Nawaz government at the centre from 2013-2018 on the one hand and the JI was part of the PTI in KP on the other hand. Both were reluctant to raised questions and criticized the respective governments which have also confused the masses about their agendas. The other reason of the weak performance of MMA in the general election was the revival of other religious parties like TLP or MML in the country.¹⁶ The divergent opinion of JUI(F) and JI on the issue of Tribal Areas merger was also part of confusion between the two on national issues.¹⁷ The MMA was revived but the victory like 2002 was only a dream in the present prevailing situation in the country.

Tahree-e- Labbaik Pakisatn(TLP)

The new development and even surprising for Pakistani is the entry of new religious party 'Tahreek-e-LabbaiK Ya Rasool Allah-TLYR or Tahree-e- Labbaik Pakisatn(TLP)' in Pakistan Politics as Barelvi sect of Islam. Khadim Rizvi highlighted the revival of the group and got popular support in the recent years on some religious issues.¹⁸ After the death of Mumtaz Qadri, the TLP became more

vocal on national issues. It was registered with Election Commission of Pakistan in September 2017 to contest the coming elections.¹⁹ Islamabad Dharna (sit in) in 2017 has boosted the morale and strength of the party in a way that the government has surrendered before it. To commit violence in the name of religion is easy in Pakistan where there is wide spread poverty, ignorance, unemployment and where rational approach is lacking and unacceptable.²⁰

Role of electables in winning elections

‘Electable’ is a term used by the PTI in the present scenario for those who know well the prevailing situation in the country prior to election. The present electables phenomena in Pakistan are on rise because of the lack of principles and morality in our political culture.²¹ They got contacted with different political parties for their tickets of Parliament or provincial assemblies and even for their portfolio in case the candidate is in strong position and well aware of his victory in the election. They gave weight to the expert views and advice but do not ignore their own assessment of the masses sentiments or *Hawa*.²² Some politicians never want to be on the opposition side and stay out of power. They jump the ship when see that will have the chance to form the government.²³ Every party know it that the ‘Electables’ are important for them to win the seat as winning seat is the first priority in the present state of politics. The electables are also called *Fasli Parende* (Seasonal birds) as they see the favourite season for their victory; they quickly turned to the other side of the game. The PTI has also accepted that trend despite the fact that it stood for change and corruption free Pakistan.²⁴ The PTI used another terminology ‘Wicket gira de-fall the wicket’²⁵ used for the electable as they switch over their loyalty to them. This is a very gentle word used for it. In the past it was called *lotacracy* (a tool used by many personal use) in the 1990s politics. Such kinds of dealing were called ‘Horse Trading’ buying the votes of the other parties at the highest level.

The basic reason for the strong role of electables in election is the weak political parties and lack of organizational structure.²⁶ The other reason of giving tickets to electables is the wealthy position of the candidate. It is obvious that money and strong financial positions are the most important aspect of our political culture. Without money, a political worker would not get a higher position in the party. In the election campaign, the candidate spent millions of rupees and this is the reason that the party gave tickets to those who have strong financial position. In the race of attracting electables, the PTI got the persons from PPP, PML(N) in large numbers before election. The statics showed that the PTI was the largest party in the country in the 2018 general election which awarded more than 100 tickets to the so-called electables. This was the reasons that a tussle between the ideological workers and those who came through an ‘Umbrella’. The ticket awarding process was so controversial that a satisfactory decision was very difficult for the board. In

Balochistan, the entire PML(N) parliamentary party resigned and formed a new party, Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). Punjab was the hub of electables who left the PML(N) for PTI.²⁷ It was also a fact that most of the electables have their bases in rural areas of the country²⁸ because they have strong families and influence at the local level. The one reason of strong electables in politics is that most of the masses did not know the manifestos and programmes of the political parties. It was a time that majority of the political parties were relied on electables and to contest election by masses were a myth.

Slogan

Major political parties in Pakistan have developed some narratives before the election, very close to each other but against each one too. The present stance of ‘change’ of PTI is seem to be anti-Nawaz PML(N) and PPP.²⁹ PML(N) is doing politics on the basis of anti-establishment narrative while PPP is on the basis of new leadership in the country and anti-Nawaz.

Tabdeli (Change)

It was the PTI which has developed new ideas and introduced new slogans in Pakistan in the electoral politics. ‘Change’ was the first slogan of PTI in 2011 campaign and motivated youth and women at large. The change slogan was basically an anti-status quo stand Imran Khan and against the prevailing political environment of the country. He was strong critical of the PPP and PLM(N) and were considered responsible for the misery of the poor people in Pakistan.

Do nahi Aik Pakistan (Not two, one Pakistan) was the new slogan of PTI for the 2018 election. The struggle against corruption and status quo were also the main theme of the PTI electoral politics. There will be no discrimination between the elite and masses, no protocol for the elite and equal treatment of all people before law. *Tabdeli agai hai (Change has come)* was the electoral slogan as the people opinion have changed towards PTI and the outcome of the long struggle by the PTI in politics. The PTI stance on ‘one education system’³⁰ was also highly appreciated among the masses.

Vote ko ezzat do (sanctity to Vote)

Soon after disqualified by Supreme Court, Nawaz Sharif raised a new narrative for the masses ‘Vote ko ezzat do’-Sanctity of Vote” in an attempt to gain support of masses. Sanctity of vote, according to Sharif was that the voters in Pakistan were never heed their due respect. The establishment always ousted the elected representatives on unconstitutional ground. ‘Sanctity of vote’ was often disrespected in the past by martial laws and not given respect to the mandate.³¹ The Sharif narrative was a clear stance of anti-establishment³² narrative in the

country and it was the first time in Pakistan's political history that such a narrative was chalked out in the Punjab. Basically, such ideas and narratives were more popular in the military regime where civilian or politicians were not allowed to work. They strongly opposed the military dictators and gain support of the masses for their political gains. Good governance and institutions building are part of sanctity of vote.³³ On the other hand, his brother Shabaz Sharif's narrative was based on performance and 'development' while Nawaz was on the path of 'resistance' has also confused the PML(N) voters in the country. However, his stance has attracted his workers in Punjab.

Pakistan's electoral history is replete with the manipulation and rigging of the elections by state institute from time to time. The famous Asghar Khan case has showed that how the IJI was formed in the 1990s against PPP and distributed money among the politicians.³⁴ There were also some words or phrases used in the 2018 general elections. The PML(N) leader Nawaz Sharif said that the *Khalai Makhlook*(Aliens) has ousted me from politics and his contest is not with the PTI but with the *Khalai Makhlook*. Prime Minister, Shahid Khakan also stated in a rally that the role of *Khalai Makhlook* is important in the upcoming election in the country. The notion of *Khalai Makhlook* remained at debate among the political leaders and have interesting comments and views were shared by them. It was the ousted Nawaz Sharif who blamed the establishment for his misery at the present time.³⁵ Elections only be fair if *Farashtoo ne vote nahi dala-* (the angels have not voted in the elections) said by ANP leader Asfandyar Wali, was a sign towards establishment role in the elections. Pre-poll rigging, *Khalai Makhlook*, and engineered elections are some of the words used for interference in the elections in the country. Even the PTI used the *30 puncture* –an allegation of rigging on 30 constituencies in Punjab by PML(N) in 2013 election. Such kinds of allegations are raised by those who lost power and people rejected them in the general elections. The PTI leader Imran Khan always referred to the *Third Umpire finger* in the Pakistan politics during long *Dharana* (sit-in) against the Sharif government. Many observers and politicians have the opinion that the reference towards third umpire was seeking the role of the Establishment in deciding the future politics in the country.

Results

Except the MMA and a less popular alliance in Sindh, all political parties have contested elections on solo flight. At the local level, the seat adjustments were took place by the candidates but not at the national level. The PTI got majority seats in the National Assembly. The second largest political party is PML(N) despite a strong resistance of the establishment and was not provided a level playing field in the elections and the PPP got the third position. The PTI got tremendous victory in KP, formed its own government there without any partner.

The PTI formed coalition governments in Baluchistan and Punjab with other political Parties. The PPP got majority seats in Sindh and formed its own government.

The most important development in election was the MMA poor performance in KP and other parts of the country has reflected the new trends in the country. On the other hand, the TLP got the fifth largest votes in the country was very surprising for all Pakistanis. The victory of PTI is also a new development in the political process of Pakistan. Despite the strong resistance from the many quarters, PLM(N) has performed well and in a very narrow margin lost the provincial government in Punjab. It was very surprising for many that the top leader of PML(N), Nawaz Sharif was in the prison but still his party was intact and no major split was took place in the party.

Conclusion

It is the first time in the history of Pakistan that political Process continued for the last ten years with the encouraging trends to believe in democracy. Two democratic governments have completed their five year terms despite the fact that they lost two prime ministers during this period. Despite the high level of allegations of rigging and unfairness in the 2018 general elections by almost all political parties at all level, the political parties also gave a chance to the PTI to form government and continue the process of democracy in the country. It is maturity of the political leaders who believe in democratic process in Pakistan. The role of social media has given impetus to the political socialization at the grass root level in Pakistan. The electronic and print media have also played very important role in awareness of the masses of the country. The youth and women participation are the most important developments in Pakistan. This will strengthened institutions in the country too. Only fair and transparent elections would strengthen the democratic process in Pakistan otherwise the people will lost confidence in the democratic process and institutions.

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