
Pakistan General Elections 1988: An Analytical Study on the 'Bipolarization' of the National Electorate

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The 1988 General Elections are an interesting episode of country's electoral history. As the 4th in the series, in an overall scenario when democracy could not work to the maximum in order to bring required fruit for what it is famous for, this revival of the party-based elections proved benefitting for its future. Moreover; it created a 'dichotomy' in the electorates at the national level which led to a two-party system contrary to autocratic or authoritarian one which at times proves harmful for third world democracies like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, etc. of the region and a number of such democracies can be quoted from Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. These inclinations and affiliations once nurtured in the 1980s Pakistan, still work and their effects on the national political scenario are deep and decisive. These elections also proved that the common public respected the political legacies and their confluence on differing as well extreme poles of affiliations was quite distinct and noticeable. A number of new political developments, trends and patterns at both national and provincial levels later shaped the course of electoral politics. It provides analytical chunks on the basis of authentic studies and documents regarding the main theme. Although much has been written on the country's electoral politics yet the theme under discussion has demanded more elaborations which have been highlighted in this research.

Key Words: Pakistan, party-based electoral Politics; bi-polarization; political trends; voting patterns

Background:

The very first Post-Zia General Elections were destined on the base of 'separate electorates', on the stipulated dates purely decided by Zia, and later retained the same by the Supreme Court in her decisions after Zia's accidental death. As per backdrop on 29 May 1988, General Zia dissolved the PM Muhammad Khan Junejo Government which came into existence on non-party based 1985 General Elections, arranged under his own umbrella. Zia showed his dissatisfaction and gave a number of reasons behind it mainly the law and order situation prevailed in Prime Minister's own province, Sindh. He, apparently, alleged Junejo administration for 'rampant corruption' and 'decline of public morality' and for slowing down the 'process of Islamization' of the society; but in reality, as the independent sources confirmed, he had felt that Junejo had adopted a different and independent policy line on both domestic and foreign fronts, and this situation, in near future, would turn averse for his own mainstay in power.¹ The national political scenario on the eve of 1988 General Elections was alarming and full of chaos and uncertainty. As per findings of renowned political expert Muhammad Waseem, there were at least six political groupings, identifiable with two broad categories; in the first category lay the PML and the PPP representing federalist politics from the right and left of the centre respectively, with the NPP as a poor third. In the second category, there were Sindhi nationalists of various persuasions. There was the *Jiye Sindh Mohaz* of the veteran Sindhi leader G.M. Syed who favoured the formation of an independent *Sindhu Desh*. He commanded a tiny but vocal base among the students. The Sindhi-Baloch-Pukhtun Front (SBPF) led by Mumtaz Bhutto and Abdul Hafiz Pirzada advocated for a new social contract to be established on the basis of the 1940 Lahore Resolution. On the other hand, the Sindh branch of the ANP under the leadership of Rasul Bux Paleejo, the leader of the erstwhile *Sindhi Awami Tehrik*, demanded full provincial autonomy based on the Leninist interpretation of the 'national question'.²

The use of violence in major fields of social conflict, especially student activity and tribal feuds, was alarming; the NWFP scene in the 1980s was characterized by politics of the bomb blasts. Hundreds of people were killed and wounded in bomb explosions, apparently carried out by the agents of Afghanistan's secret service, *Khidmat-i-Afghania Daulatia* (KHAD). More significantly, Pakistan's involvement in the war effort led to limited destabilization of the tribal area beyond Peshawar, emerging to a house of millions of Afghan refugees. The Junejo Government showed clear signs of exhaustion of its patience on the Afghan issue and thus developed differences with President Zia who remained committed to the cause of *Mujahideen*.³ So after a lengthy and tortuous process of negotiations at Geneva, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed the Afghan Accord, guaranteed by the USA and USSR, on 14 April 1988, giving way to non-interference in each other's country.⁴ The said accord was to ensure the departure of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and return of refugees to Afghanistan. However, it obviously failed to bring down the

tension within and between the Afghan resistance movement and the government in Kabul. This accord was greatly resented by the President Zia, as he felt increasingly insecure about his future role. The Prime Minister had gathered together various operational powers in his own hands. He dispensed with the services of certain military officers from various ministerial posts. It was feared that if he had gone ahead with holding the next elections in or before 1990 and had won them he would not have endorsed President Zia's re-election through the assemblies. Just four days before the signing of Geneva Accord, the Ojhri Camp (a missile reservoir) Explosion made the already worsened situation grimmer which affected the Capital and adjacent territories, causing a number of deaths and injuries.⁵ In May, the PM Junejo's announcement of an independent inquiry of the incident provided the immediate cause which claimed his rule.⁶ However; Zia had no solid, justifiable reason behind his move and it was embarrassing for him to justify his action in convincing terms. He hurled accusations of corruption on the Junejo Government and ordered an inquiry into the assets of the MNAs. However, the rising legitimacy crisis in the country continued to pose a grave challenge to the President's authority. He desperately did not try to bolster the image of his regime by issuing a *Shariah Ordinance*. Unfortunately for him, any of the major religious neither groups nor did the public at large take this ordinance seriously. Indeed, it was generally interpreted as a maneuver to avert public attention from the issue of elections which were required to be held within 90 days of the dissolution of the assemblies.⁷

Clearing the Pathways for Bipolarity:

An imminent result of Zia's arbitrary dismissal of the assemblies was the opening up of the political arena to the MRD parties which had been outside the system until 29 May. While elections drew near, the PPP emerged as the most likely winner. This party had already reversed its strategy of boycott and had participated in the local body election held in 1987. Prime Minister Junejo's dismissal had left the Muslim League in shambles, which indirectly boosted the electoral prospects of the PPP. In a parallel process, the Supreme Court gave its verdict on Ms Benazir Bhutto's petition challenging the amended section 3-B of the Political Parties Act.⁸ The Court declared such requirements as registration and submission of accounts for audit null and void, on the ground that they were inconsistent with the fundamental rights enshrined in the 1973 Constitution. The prevalent feeling among the MRD parties was that President Zia must not be let off the election hook and that elections should be held on a party basis. Finally, on 20 July 1988 Zia had to announce the fresh elections on the dates mentioned earlier, but contrary to the aspirations of MRD, on non-party basis. However, both media and top ranked politicians resented his unsubstantiated decision publicly.⁹ Keeping in view Zia's previous strategy and moves on political chess, some political elements took this announcement again with grain of salt and called it a delaying tactics. They, especially working with the MRD, were in favor of challenging the 'constitutional

validity' of this announcement at the higher courts. They were of the view that Zia had lost his credibility as he was using his last energies in trying to win an already lost battle and he was just managing time with the help of such announcements. In this situation of political uncertainty and confusion, the tragic incident of Zia's airplane crash on 17 August 1988, changed the total course of events.¹⁰

After Zia's death, in a high command meeting at Islamabad, it was decided to continue the democratic process on the previous pace without any delay or interruption. All the decisions like imposition of a new Martial Law were categorically rejected.¹¹

The General Elections 1988: Revival of the Party Based Electoral Politics and Polarization of the Country Electorate:

The new government reversed the policy of the Zia regime and as a first step all the ad hoc judges were made permanent restoring the confidence of judiciary.¹² The impending task before the judiciary, however, was the restoration of party based electoral process in the country. Earlier on 20 June 1988 the Supreme Court had given the verdict on the Political parties Act 1962, on the petition filed by Benazir Bhutto which declared the mandatory registration of the parties with the Election Commission null and void, enabling the political parties to take part in the elections.¹³ In continuation of this bearing the Supreme Court of Pakistan decided in favour of the party-based elections. This decision was important because now the country electorate had a fair choice in hand to elect their representatives that led to the formation of party-based governments after the election milieu. Elections were decided to be held on already announced dates in November 1988.

The Posture of Parties out in the Field: the PPP vs. Electoral Alliances

The main issue before the electorate was the next premiership. Political parties had many personalities to come to the aspiration of the electorate. However, the political parties regardless of their strength and worth flocked around the electoral alliances in order to secure a strong position on the assemblies. Hence, the political scene before the elections was marked by the following trends:

1. The Muslim League- Junejo made an alliance with the rightists as well as the Islamic Parties, the Tehrik-e- Istiqlal and the Jammiyyat-i- Ulema-i- Pakistan (JUP) named *Pakistan Awami Ittehad* (PAI) in order to counter the popularity of the PPP.
2. The PML-Junejo later deserted the PAI and joined a broader anti-PPP alliance called the Islamic Democratic Alliance- better known as the *Islami Jamhoori Ittehad* (IJI; established in October 1988) comprising the Jamat-Islami (JI), the JUI (Darkhwasti), The National People's Party (NPP), Markazi Jamm'iyat

Ahl-e-Hadith (MJAH), Jamm'iyat-ul-Mashaikh, Hizb-ul-Jihad, and the previous Speaker of National Assembly of Pakistan (1985-1986) Syed Fakhar Imam's Independent Group.

3. The PPP initially wanted to make an alliance with the other MRD parties but later it decided to go alone, relying on the mass appeal of its charismatic leadership in the shape of Benazir Bhutto.

However, the real fight among the political parties was over the issues with a definite list of priorities to attract the voters. The IJI and PPP- the mainstream political rivals advertised their electoral manifestos in order to get maximum attention of the public. Interestingly both had a number of commonalities in their manifestoes; however, with one exception that IJI pledged for continuation of Islamization of society on the lines drawn by Zia in 1980s and subsequent years. Their election campaigns, in spite of the scarcity of time for such ventures, were attended by considerable number of people. Many new developments regarding this campaign could be noticed; however, the following two need special mentioning:

1. Some political experts viewed this campaign as a 'personalized' fight between pro-Zia PML dominated IJI and the anti-Zia PPP (with some sympathies from the public on account of the past atrocities and inflictions posed by the previous Martial Law Administration). This was one of the main reasons behind the emerging trend of 'bipolar' politics which would definitely change the course of future political patterns and inclinations.¹⁴
2. For the first time, media agencies were hired to boost up the campaign. However, the side effects of this measure developed a bad taste when the Nusrat Bhutto, wife of deceased Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto (their daughter), the prospective candidate of Premiership were negatively targeted.¹⁵

Elections for both assemblies were held on stipulated dates in a peaceful manner and were regarded free and fair. Almost all political parties and international observers gave their positive gestures about its validity. However; a gradual decline in voters' turnout was observed that was less than 50 percent (42.7%). The figures of the previous elections show that there is a gradual decline in the voting percentage from 1970 to 1988 as 58 per cent in 1970, 55 per cent in 1977 and 53 per cent in 1985 general elections. The main reason behind the decline in the voting trends might be the losing confidence upon the parties and candidates failing to provide any relief to the people and their lust for attaining the power.

Above discussion shows a clear cleavage in the voter's minds and the results were an obvious bipolarization of the electorate giving way to a hung parliament.

Election Results- An Analysis:

PPP and IJI launched vigorous campaigns on the agendas of national progress and social uplift of the people. The pre-poll assessment of the election results, however, told a different story. The PPP experts as well as the US observers predicted that PPP would be able to secure 101 seats in the National Assembly just 8 running short to the absolute majority while the independent observers and national press after launching a number of surveys reached to a safe conclusion of securing 82 NA seats on PPP's while mere 61 on IJI's part.¹⁶

The election results in this context were quite surprising, demonstrating PPP's handsome NA scores of 93 and IJI was able to manage just its half (55 NA seats). An interesting feature of the elections was the defeat of many of the political stalwarts including Muhammad Khan Jonejo, the head of the formerly ruling Muslim League, *Pir* of Pagara an eminent spiritual leader popular among his Sindhi disciples, Asghar Khan head of the *Tehrik-i-Istiqlal*, Mairaj Muhammad Khan one of the founders of the PPP, Shah Ahmad Noorani, the head of the JUP, Sherbaz Mazari of PDP, etc. On the other hand, new faces like Benazir Bhutto (PPP), Nawaz Sharif (PML; IJI), Fazlur Rehman (IJI), and Mr. Altaf Hussain emerged as winners on the political scene. Interestingly, PPP's more than 80 percent strength was indebted to Punjab (52 NA seats) while PPP got 31 seats from its stronghold Sindh. Interestingly IJI could not manage to have even a single NA seat from Sindh. As far as the victory of PPP is concerned the Bhutto Factor played a significant role, especially in Sindh where Martial Law rule proved to be revengeful, oppressive, and arbitrary that created an element of permanent hatred for the establishment. IJI with pro-establishment bearing faced a disgraceful defeat. Even those personalities who favoured Martial Law regime had to lick the dust at the hand of PPP supporters. Another centre of polarization of electorate was Punjab where establishment backed Nawaz Sharif came on the forefront. Punjab, especially the rural areas had been in support of Zia's so called Islamization.¹⁷

A careful study of the election results shows the following trend and tendencies regarding the role of electorates:

1. The voting pattern in provincial elections held three days later provide political parties an opportunity to mobilize the electorate on local issues, to use every possible means to affect the opinion through bribery and coercion. However, the IJI managed to improve its position and image in Punjab and NWFP. Especially in the rural Punjab where Zia left a good impression through his program of Islamization and posture as a "soldier of Islam".¹⁸
2. Contrary to the prediction of the political analysts the PPP could not get a sweeping victory; its popularity was equaled by the presence of IJI. However, in Sindh the Bhutto factor remained overwhelming and helped in PPP's

emergence a largest single party in the centre. In Sindh all the pro-establishment elements faced a strong hatred; even those elements faced defeat that had been the part of the Martial Law regime like Muhammad Khan Jonejo and Pir of Pagaro, etc. Elimination of Bhutto from the political scene could not be succeeded rather than oppressive, vindictive, and arbitrary nature of the Martial Law created an element of consistent hatred among the Sindhis creating a rift in centre-province relations.¹⁹

3. Emergence of MQM proved fatal for the Sindhi nationalists, ethnic and local elements like Sindh National Alliance, *Jiye Sindh Mohaz*, and *Sindhi Baluch Pakhtun Front*. The role of MQM was counterbalance for PPP, helping indirectly by alienating of the Muhajirs from the Muslim League, the NPP, JI, and JUP from their respective organizations. The new trend patterns setting by the MQM voters reflected the secularization of political attitudes among the Muhajirs who previously voted for the religious parties. The MQM's stunning success was perhaps the most significant yet not surprising development of the 1988 elections. It showed dominance over the urban areas of Sindh, particularly in Karachi and Hyderabad by establishing a firm support base by its active involvement in the civic affairs starting from the October 1986 violent events that culminated in its winning in the November 1987 local bodies elections. The MQM's 13 NA seats were to play a vital role although this was rather a local victory.²⁰
4. A dichotomous pattern of voting was developed in Punjab, giving way to hostile and non-complementary elements i.e., PPP and IJI contradicting and challenging the legitimacy of one another and weakening their political stance. Moreover, PPP's performance as electoral force went diminished in comparison with its first polls which resulted into its 'sweeping victory'. On the other hand, the IJI gained from the maximum input of Martial Law regime in the form of developmental works in Punjab and Zia's bearing as "true soldier" of Islam popular in rural areas of Punjab. The IJI's strong hold was Punjab which had observed a wave of economic prosperity due to influx of money from the Gulf States and strengthening of the middle class in the province.²¹
5. Another factor that caused the split in the voter's minds was the "Nawaz Sharif Factor" which proved to be decisive one in IJI's campaign. Allegedly he as a chief minister went out to appeal to the PPP's potential voters among lower classes by taking up developmental projects shortly before the elections. PPP leadership ignored Punjab, considering it a power base for granted and thus lost some NA and PA seats.²²
6. One technical reason behind the 'low turnout' could be the compulsion of having 'ID card' on the polling day to get the ballot papers issued. So, a number of people, especially the rural
7. A large section of people were benefited from county's resources under Zia's Islamization programme, leading to the creation of an anti-PPP lobby that was not in favour of any change in the status quo. Moreover, this lobby was equally

- strengthened by the fears of the refugees from East Punjab, especially those from business community. For them another victory of PPP would augment a fresh wave of labor militancy in Punjab.²³
8. The PPP's lead over the IJI was reversed in Provincial Assembly elections in Punjab. The ratio of voting polled for both the sides remained almost same but internal shifts changed the results including the change in the local demographic composition in smaller constituencies, local influential affecting the PPP vote bloc under the anti-Sindh propaganda, etc.²⁴
 9. The NWFP for the first time showed its inclination towards mass politics in these elections. There was a gradual change of mind shifted from the regional, ethnic to mass politics. Earlier the NWFP politics revolved around the ethnic and Pakhtun nationalists bearing of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. However, during 1970s there was a shift in the brinks of NWFP especially in the districts of Bannu, Kohat, and Dera Ismail Khan where JUI under Maulana Mufti Mahmud largely affected the masses on the name of Islam. However, the urban educated centres of NWFP attracted towards the progressive programme of the PPP. The growing inter-provincial contacts, migration of Pathan youth to the industrial cities outside the NWFP increased more political sense. Taking an overall view, it can safely be concluded that the NWFP was mainstreamed to the national politics in and after the November Elections 1988.²⁵
 10. Baluchistan politics revolved around the three overwhelming factors i.e., the tribal chiefs, the religious leadership, and the ethnic movement. The tribal chiefs although not all were under the influence of centre while the old guard Student turned leadership had become less effective. On the other hand, JUI showed some penetration in the grass root politics. In the absence of political mobilization and gradual decline of tribal politics, Nawab Akbar Bugti provided an alternative leadership in 1988 forming the Baluch National Alliance (BNA) - a coalition of his kinsmen and followers. However, he could not win the sympathies of the centre in comparison with Mir Zafarullah Jamali, reliable in the eyes of both the PPP and the IJI leadership.²⁶
 11. Another political party that won the confidence of electorate in 1988 election was JUI (F) which drew its support from NWFP and Baluchistan by securing a total of 7 NA seats. However, it could play its vital role in power bargaining.²⁷
 12. The *Pakistan Awami Ittehad* (PAI), an alliance of two national parties, the TI and the JUP though stood third in filing 90 candidates after PPP (183) and IJI (172) on NA seats but in terms of successful candidates its tally (3) was nowhere near that of regional JUI (F) or local MQM phenomena.²⁸
 13. The Election 1988 threw up a large number of independent candidates (27) that were to be sought after and put to the phenomena of horse trading in the power game.²⁹

Conclusion:

The only difference in 1988 was that the elections were held on party basis and the complexion of the House was clear, making the choice of the Prime Minister easier for the President. However, the coalition government being weak in political understanding in the absence of democratic norms was to be under constant pulls and pressures, leading finally to confusion between both the political centers and exhausting themselves ultimately for the great arbiter to step in. The role of electorate in these elections was although not decisive yet it showed a clear political dichotomy into pro- and anti-Zia orientations which were previously on conservative-progressive lines emerged as the results of PPP's advent into power in 1970. This fact cannot be ruled out that these elections and their subsequent impact provided politicians another opportunity to strengthen the democratic norms and traditions in the country leading to the social and economic uplift of the common man.

End Notes and Bibliography

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2. Ibid
3. For the details on the effects of Afghan War (1979-1988) see General K.M. Arif, *Khaki Shadows: Pakistan 1947-1997*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001)
4. *The Daily Dawn*, Karachi, 15 April 1988
5. This incident was covered by national and international print and electronic media extensively and the Junejo left no option with him except the announcement of its inquiry.
6. *The Daily Dawn*, Karachi, 30 May 1988
7. Earlier, the President's address to the joint session of the two houses of parliament in April 1988 had been followed by the MNAs' negative reaction on the floor of the National Assembly. Indeed, it was suggested that the parliament should relieve the President of his military responsibilities. President Zia felt acutely insecure under these circumstances. Both Zia and Junejo had cooled off towards each other by the time the latter alighted from the plane after a tour of the Far East on 29 May 1988, only to face his dismissal. On the other hand, political quarters in general pointed to the fact that his real motive was to safeguard the interests of certain generals who had been subjected to the cabinet's enquiry into the *Ojheri Camp* Disaster. (*The Daily Muslim, Lahore*, 31 May 1988)
8. *The Daily Muslim, Lahore*, 17 June 1988
9. *The Daily Dawn*, Karachi, 2 August 1988
10. *Ibid*, 18 August 1988
11. On the confirmation of Zia's death, a meeting was held in Islamabad to decide the question of succession. Some participants like General Fazl-e-Haq, Chief Minister of NWFP, were in favour of the imposition of Martial Law. However, the idea was discarded by the military chiefs including Mirza Aslam Beg and supported the constitutional transition allowing the Chairman Senate to act as President. Hence, the then Chairman Senate Ghulam Ishaq Khan took over as acting President who in turn appointed General Mirza Aslam Beg as Chief of the Army Staff. General Beg assured that the army was to stay out of politics and the law-and-order situation would be maintained leading to the peaceful holding of the elections on 16 November 1988.
12. The full bench of the Lahore High Court declared Zia's order of Dissolution of National and Provincial Assemblies unconstitutional. However, the court did not restore the assemblies by using its discretionary

- powers under article 199 of the Constitution. (*The Daily Muslim, Lahore*, 26 August 1988)
13. *The Daily Dawn* 26 August 1988; *The Daily Muslim, Lahore*, 27 August 1988
 14. Several Parties contested General Elections 1988 while staying away from both PPP and the IJI. Some of these were JUI (F), JUP (Noorani), the NPP, the ANP, the TI, Pakhtun Khwa Milli Wami Party, PDP, JWP, PNP, the MQM, etc. (Dr. Hassan Askari Rizvi and Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani, *The First 10 General Elections of Pakistan: A Story of Pakistan's Transition from Democracy Above Rule of Law to Democracy Under Rule of Law*, (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, 2013), 19
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 20. *Ibid*, 707
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 22. *Ibid*, 430-431
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 27. *The Daily Muslim, Lahore*, 22 November 1988
 28. Muhammad Waseem, *op. cit.*, 438-39
 29. John Kaniyalil Sreedhar and Savita Pande, 83