



Pre-election Analysis

PAKISTAN Legislative elections May 2013

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A number of recent developments make the 11 May elections currently under preparation in Pakistan a historic occasion. For the first time in its history, a government has managed to complete its term. It has taken 66 years for a government elected at the ballot box to do so – though not without constant fears of direct or indirect military intervention. Ever since the United States linked payment of 7.5 billion dollars of aid (through the Kerry-Lugar Act) to the condition that the military must remain subordinate to the civilian government, the former has resorted to myriad forms of indirect intervention. Regardless of the fact that not all the aid has been disbursed, the Obama administration's new stance has contributed to changing the visibility of the military and intelligence services' room for manoeuvre, albeit without any modification to these groups' interests or strategic objectives. Even less so when foreign troops are expected to be withdrawn from neighbouring Afghanistan in 2014.

Over the last five years, parliamentary democracy has evolved positively. More legislation has been passed in this time than in all Pakistan's history. Among other measures, an unprecedented two amendments to the constitution (the 18th and 20th) have been adopted. For the first time ever, a president has voluntarily relinquished his broad powers to Parliament, which in turn, has managed to remain united, conscious of the importance of the circumstances. In 521 sessions of parliament, 134 new laws have been passed – including laws against domestic violence and harassment in the workplace – and the 1973 constitution (considered the country's most democratic) has been restored. Provincial autonomy has been strengthened, helping conciliate the country's federal units, while the colonial names North-West Frontier Province was changed to Kyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Northern Areas to Gilgit Baltistan. Parliament appointed on a consensual basis a five-member Election Commission of Pakistan, with the goal of consolidating the democratic transition and guaranteeing the neutrality of the body in charge of overseeing the transparency of the electoral process. What is relevant here, is that the government has resisted, in spite of a Judiciary that many perceive to have been exploited by the military. The judges have taken a stance against corruption, albeit a selective one, given that they have devoted particular attention to cases involving members of the ruling party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Among the negative aspects, corruption and governmental inefficiency have been the norm. Among the more neglected serious problems were the abuses committed against religious minorities, terrorism and the refusal to widen the tax collection base to include agriculture and industry. Lack of concern for the population's basic needs, the perception of insecurity, power cuts, the lack of a gas and fuel supply, price increases on basic products, unemployment, natural catastrophes such as the 2011 floods, the crisis of internally displaced citizens provoked by anti-militant offensives and terrorism are all but a sample of the grave state of domestic politics (for all that, these problems have generally been underemphasised in the current election campaign).

In this transition there have been three key players. What is unusual, is that none of the three belong to the two dominant parties, the PPP or Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The first to emerge was Imran Khan, the former cricket star turned leader of the Pakistan Movement for Justice (*Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf*, PTI). His previous failures not having dampened his

determination to provoke a popular 'tsunami' against corruption, his rhetoric is populist and rooted in anti-Americanism, and as such, is akin to the military's. His passion for defending civilian victims of drone attacks stands in contrast to his silence about the victims of sectarian and terrorist attacks, especially those against religious minorities. His criticism of corrupt practices are aimed chiefly at the PPP. His main voter mobilisation capacity is among young urbanites of different social backgrounds across the country, although his media appeal and rhetoric register more in Punjab than anywhere else. Having positioned his party on the extreme right - on the PML-N and Jamaat-e-Islami's (JI) turf – it is estimated that Khan could take more votes away from these parties than anyone else.

The second newcomer (as of January 2013) is Tahir ul-Qadri, the founder of Minhaj-ul-Quran. Practically unknown at home, this dual national of Pakistan and Canada's return to Pakistan was managed by the Pakistani diaspora. Although his rhetoric has been legitimate, his methods have been totally off-target. After an apocalyptic-style advertising campaign over several months and an injudicious belief that he would be able to create a Tahrir Square effect in the centre of Islamabad, Qadri has resurfaced on the Pakistani political scene organising a popular demonstration in Lahore and Islamabad. This demonstration was hardly spontaneous; in fact, it was orchestrated via a multi-million dollar marketing campaign. Qadri's theme has been a demand to dissolve both houses of parliament, even giving the government deadlines to obey his orders. But such demands are not the result of his legitimacy as a representative of the will of the people. Rather, they are those of yet another Pakistani political visionary with delusions of grandeur. In fact, like Khan, Qadri's prior electoral experiences have been failures. The armed vehicle in which he moves about and from which he communicates with the masses – a bullet and bomb-proof vessel the likes of which are unfamiliar even to Pakistan's strongest politicians – has symbolised his action. The rumours that Qadri is backed by the military have been strengthened by the arrest warrant issued by the Supreme Court against the second prime minister, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, during one of his demonstration's in Islamabad. The tandem formed by the military and the judiciary is in need of like-minded politicians, and Qadri seems to be one of those.

The third and final player is the former general and former president Pervez Musharraf. At the head of his All Pakistan Muslim League Party, he returned from exile in London to "save the country". Of the three constituencies he sought to stand in, he was accepted on the ballot in Chitral. Even if his electoral strength is thought to be minimal, his hopes were ended by the Supreme Court in Peshawar, which disqualified him from electoral politics for life.

The randomness with which candidates have been accepted or barred from running has raised suspicions that this is another form of intervention. The use of articles 62 and 63 of the constitution, questioning candidates for instance, on their ability to recite suras from the Koran at the request of the on-duty secretary of the electoral commission, has served to discriminate randomly against certain candidates.

To conclude this analysis, one worrying aspect of the election campaign is the violence against candidates from liberal parties. Terrorist attacks against the leaders, staff and followers of the PPP, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)

and the Awami National Party (ANP), have caused more than 70 deaths and over a hundred injuries. The Pakistani Taliban Movement (*Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan*, TTP) has declared that democracy is un-Islamic and accordingly banned Pakistanis from voting, especially for these parties. The PTI, JI and PML-N have been conspicuously silent in condemning the attacks. Pakistani politics in general is gripped by fear of terrorist violence, both sectarian and against minorities.

All of these events presage 'lively', sharply-contested and historic elections.