

# Pakistan General Election 2018



*VIF Brief – July 2018*

## Issues and Trends

- **Challenges to PML-N**
- **Imran Khan Factor**
- **Role of Pakistan Army**
- **Mainstreaming extremist parties**
- **Revival of Muttahida Majlis e Amal**
- **Debating the role of ethnic parties**

# CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>Pre-election Engineering: Balochistan, Senate Elections, Media Intimidation, Mainstreaming Terrorists</b>	5
Balochistan Setback	5
2018 Senate Elections: Dry Run for Establishment's Agenda?	6
Media Intimidation	7
Mainstreaming Extremist Parties: TLP and Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek	8
<b>Election Process: Election Act Controversies</b>	10
Elections Act 2017: Controversies	10
Overall Seat Adjustment	13
<b>Political Parties I: Wrangling over Seats; Developments in South Punjab, Karachi, Resurfacing of the MMA</b>	13
South Punjab Defections	13
Cracks in MQM and Impact on the Karachi Mandate	14
Revival of MMA: Prospects and Challenges	15
<b>Political Parties II: Developments in the PML-N (Nawaz factor and differences among leadership, Nisar Ali etc.) and the PTI</b>	16
PML-N: Intra Party Dynamics	16
PTI: Warming up to the Army and the Dilemma of 'Elect-ables'	17
<b>Situation in Sindh and KPK</b>	18
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	18
Sindh	19
<b>X Factors/Surprises: Rise of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and Impact on Pakhtun Votes in KPK and Karachi</b>	19
Understanding the Rise of PTM	19
Pakhtun Factor in Karachi: Does it Count?	20
<b>Conclusion</b>	21

## Acknowledgements

The General Elections in Pakistan are being held on 25<sup>th</sup> July. The elections are being held in the backdrop of Nawaz Sharif’s arrest, the rise of Imran Khan and the entry of Jihadi outfits in the electoral fray. Vivekananda International Foundation had invited a group of experts to monitor and analyse the developments in the period leading up to the elections. Shri Tilak Devasher, consultant, VIF Pakistan Project and the author of two celebrated books “Pakistan: Courting the Abyss” and “Pakistan: At the Helm” led these efforts. This report has been prepared after several rounds of discussions by Vivekananda International Foundation’s Pakistan Project, which comprises of the following members:

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It remains to be seen whether this election will lessen the political uncertainty and the prevailing sense of gloom. I have a great pleasure in publishing the report titled “Pakistan General Elections 2018: Issues and Trends”.

Dr. Arvind Gupta  
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## Introduction

Pakistan's electoral contest on 25th July 2018 has been billed as being between Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) - even though he is debarred from contesting or holding a party office – and Imran's Khan Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). A major achievement for Pakistan is that this would be the third election to be conducted after the revival of the democratic processes in 2008. However, the democratic transition would be under the shadow of the fact that in its seven decade long history, no elected prime minister has been able to complete a full five-year term. The latest victim was Nawaz Sharif who was ousted by the Supreme Court in July 2017 for not being '*sadiq*' and '*ameen*' and later held ineligible to hold elective office for life. On 06 July 2018, an Accountability court ordered his and his daughter Maryam's arrest for ten and seven years respectively along with a \$ 8 million and \$ 2 million fine in the Avenfield reference case. Both, constitutional as well as institutional provisions which have ensnared Nawaz were formulated under dictators, with the present form of Article 62 and 63 being added to the constitution under the Zia regime, and the National Accountability Bureau being a product of the Musharraf era. Despite the opportunity, Nawaz did not make any effort to repeal them.

What sealed Nawaz's fate and turned the army against him was the 'Dawnleaks', an alleged confrontation between the civilian and the military establishments leaked by Dawn in October, 2016. The army perceived these leaks as a deliberate attempt by Nawaz to malign the army both internally and externally as being supporters of the *jihadis*. The army is trying to fill the political vacuum by propping up Imran Khan, as the establishment's preferred choice. It has adopted several strategies including encouraging defections in the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to bolster Imran.

An additional development in these elections is the electoral rise of the hardline right wing parties of the Bareilvi, Ahle Hadis and Deobandi sects. A radical Bareilvi party, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) emerged from the Khadim Hussain Rizvi's Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYRA) that was created following the anger against the government's decision to execute Salman Taseer's murderer Mumtaz Qadri. Hafiz Saeed, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)/Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) supremo was allowed to set up his own political party, the Milli Muslim League (MML). The third entrant is the rabidly anti-Shia Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ). The electoral rise of these parties would choke the space of a plural society while eating into the PML-N's right wing vote bank in Punjab. Similarly, the ethnic equations, especially regarding the Mohajirs and the Pakhtuns would add further complexities to the elections.

In the run up to the elections, even though the campaigning was initially low key, political wrangling surrounding Nawaz's conviction and return to Pakistan has pushed critical issues regarding Pakistan's well-being, including the economy and mounting debt, into the

background. Even China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) related issues have been sidelined.

The challenges to PML-N notwithstanding, the gallop poll in April put the party ahead with 36% in favour, followed by 24% for the PTI and 17% for Pakistan People's Party (PPP). As legal troubles deepened for Nawaz and the game-plan of the establishment to discredit the PML-N became apparent, another recent poll by the Jang group showed support for the PML-N substantially coming down to 27%, and put the PTI in the leading position at 30%, and PPP at 17%. Further, the "unexplained" factors throw several challenges as the recent gallop poll reported such swing votes to be around 20%, which could substantially alter electoral trends.

While, the PTI is seen as the PML-N's main contender, matters have become complicated in its bastion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) with the revival of the Majlis Muttahida-e-Amal (MMA) headed by Jamait Ulema-e-Islam-F (JUI-F) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman. The MMA is trying to repeat the electoral success it had during the 2002 elections. While it is doubtful if the MMA will repeat its performance, it would pose challenges for the PTI in KPK. Therefore, with multiple factors complicating the upcoming elections, the aim of the booklet is to identify and analyze the key issues and trends that would shape these elections. These include:-

- i. Role of the army in pre-election engineering;
- ii. Challenges to the PML-N;
- iii. Mainstreaming of extremist parties;
- iv. Revival of MMA;
- v. Role of ethnic parties.

## **Pre-election Engineering: Balochistan, Senate Elections, Media Intimidation, Mainstreaming Terrorists**

### **Balochistan Setback**

The PML-N's first political setback in 2018 came with an internal rebellion within the party's elected members from Balochistan Assembly, with only six months to go for the elections. A faction consisting of PML-N dissidents (along with the PML-Quaid legislators) removed Chief Minister (CM) Sanaullah Zehri and appointed PML-Q's Abdul Quddus Bizenjo as the new CM. That Bizenjo - who was elected from Awaran constituency with only 544 votes (which has more than 57000 voters who boycotted elections) - had been made the CM made a mockery of Baloch politics.

Earlier dominated by Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) and the PML-N, the assembly stood divided into two camps, namely one front led by Sanaullah Zehri and his supporters, PkMAP and Hasil Bizenjo's National Party (the two parties jointly having 25 assembly seats), and the second led by PML-N dissidents, who later went on to form the Balochi-

stan Awami Party (BAP). These disturbances, suspected to have been deliberately engineered by the army were detrimental for the performance of the PML-N in the senate elections in Balochistan. Fissures in the PML-N continued well after the senate elections, as Members of National Assembly (NA) continued to desert PML-N and PML-Q to join the BAP, taking the tally of defecting legislators to 24. The defection of former Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali (who held the position during Musharraf era from 2002 to 2004 before joining the PML-N) to the PTI in June 2018 was also a big setback to PML-N's prospects in Balochistan. Therefore, the emergence of the avowedly pro-establishment BAP as a third force in Balochistan could have direct implications on both the PML-N and PkMAP.

### **2018 Senate Elections: Dry Run for Establishment's Agenda?**

In March 2018, Pakistan's upper house witnessed elections to fill in the vacancies for 52 outgoing senators. Senate elections are not really critical to government formation or stability, but the political wrangling's that took place with a nod from the establishment, made it clear that these elections were a dry run to keep the PML-N out of power.

Since the Supreme Court had nullified all official party decisions taken by Nawaz Sharif after his ouster, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declared the PML-N senate nominees as independent candidates. The party nevertheless bagged 15 seats taking its tally from 26 to 33, winning 11 of Punjab's 12 seats, losing one to the PTI, due to alleged horse-trading.

Interestingly till 2013, efforts were directed at getting the nationalist groups from the smaller provinces into the mainstream (especially parties like Awami National Party (ANP) and PkMAP from KPK and Balochistan respectively). However, the recent senate elections signaled that the establishment does not want such politicians anymore. Rather, candidates having no strong political background are being preferred, as seen with the election of Balochistan's Sadiq Sanjrani as the Senate chairman. Ethnic nationalist parties seem to have been snubbed by the establishment this time.

Further evidence of the establishment's engineering during the senate elections was that the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) could win only one seat despite having 37 seats in the Sindh assembly. This was three less than the last election. The void was filled by the PPP that is trying to get a foothold in urban Sindh. Taking advantage of the MQM's inability to control infighting among MQM's PIB faction (led by Sattar) and Bahadurabad factions (led by Khalid Maqbool and Amir Khan) over selection of nominees, even a marginal party like PML-Functional, with only nine seats in the provincial assembly managed to win one senate seat (due to last minute support lent by cross-voting MQM assembly members). Irrespective of the factional infighting, MQM-Pakistan (the Farooq Sattar led faction which broke away from Altaf Hussain linked MQM in 2016) alleged the poor performance to threats and bribery of its elected representatives.

PPP, despite the net loss of seven seats (with its strength reduced to 20) outperformed its own expectations by winning 10 out of the 12 seats in Sindh through last moment political maneuvering, especially at a time when its existence was being debated in Pakistan's political arena. By election of Krishna Kohli, a Hindu, the PPP tried to portray itself as a party working for even the downtrodden section within the Hindu community.

The PTI, on the other hand, gained 6 more senators, increasing its tally to 13 seats. However, its failure to get Maulana Sami-ul Haq, known as the father of the Taliban, elected to the senate cost it a potential alliance with JUI-Sami (JUI-S). It may be recalled that in 2017, both the parties were in talks over a possible alliance, and PTI's overtures to Sami-ul Haq were evident with the KPK government's allocation of \$2.8 million worth of funds for his seminary at Akora Khattak.

Despite its gains, PML-N suffered majorly in its bid to elect its own nominees as the chairman and deputy chairman of the senate. These positions were begged by Sadiq Sanjrani, an independent senator from Balochistan (but backed by the PPP and the PTI for chairman position) and PPP's Salim Mandvivala respectively. In Balochistan, the dramatic emergence of the dissident block from within the PML-N as discussed above, that managed to win six senate seats played a critical role in denying the party its choice of senate chairman and deputy chairman.

The broad picture that emerged from the senate elections showed the PML-N in the lead, though short of a majority, a not so weak PPP and the PTI being the net gainer. Such a scenario, if replicated during the general elections would present an ideal situation for the establishment. It would prefer pulling the strings to decide the arithmetic for cobbling a majority.

## **Media Intimidation**

The emergence of a vibrant media following General Musharraf's decision to open the private sector participation continues to have frequent run-ins with the military establishment, wherein talk shows and editorials critical of the military often invite hostilities. As elections near, such a trend has intensified. While intimidation of journalists and media channels is not new, the frequency has reportedly increased as increasing number journalists have been critically discussing the army's role on the domestic as well as the external front.

This March/April, popular news channel Geo TV was forced to go off the air in as much as 80% of Pakistan. The channel's critical coverage on Pakistan's position on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) issue, the "Bajwa doctrine" and its relatively pro-Nawaz (and anti-Imran Khan) reports is said to have irked the agencies. Even as the then interior minister Ahsan Iqbal clarified that neither the information ministry nor the the media regulatory body (PEMRA) was behind the ban, along with PEMRA notifying cable operators to not disrupt the channel's broadcast, all doubts zoomed on the military's role behind the unan-

nounced crackdown.<sup>1</sup> It may be recalled that Geo channel is known for its uneasy relationship with the army as in past its license had been suspended temporarily after Hamid Mir indirectly accused the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of plotting to assassinate him.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern of intimidation was evident from the Dawn leaks issue of 2016 following which the journalist Cyril Almeida who broke the story, was briefly put under the Exit Control List. From May 2018 onwards, the paper has faced disruptions in distribution throughout the country. A report in the Dawn explained how the newspaper distributors were being subjected to harassment and threats. The process is not new, and the paper was made unavailable in Balochistan last year.<sup>3</sup>

The Pakhtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), despite generating global headlines, remained grossly under reported in Pakistan. One reason for this was that its key demand revolved around fixing accountability over the death and disappearance of thousands of Pakhtuns in the army's operations, especially in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The issue of missing persons has acted as a uniting factor mobilizing the grievances particularly among the Baloch, Mohajir and Sindhi activists. This was evidenced in the massive outpour of sympathizers welcoming PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen during his Karachi rally. Facing an unofficial media boycott, the PTM relied solely on social media networks to mobilize support. Even the Facebook transmissions of PTM rallies would face disruptions while being live streamed.

Besides routine intimidation of Pakhtun activists, the brief abduction of veteran journalist Gul Bukhari (a prominent critic of the army) in Lahore did convey the establishment's unease with PTM. Sanna Ejaz, renowned news anchor from PTV, who was fired for being actively involved with the PTM, maintained the channel was "helpless as orders pertaining to her termination have come from above".<sup>4</sup>

The establishment has tried to ensure that no such developments are brought in the public domain that might affect the voting pattern in favour of the politicians not preferred by it.

### **Mainstreaming Extremist Parties: TLP and Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek**

The rise of extremist parties in these elections may pose a stiff challenge to the Sharifs. In the National Assembly (NA)-120 Lahore by-election held in September 2017 the TLP and Milli Muslim League (MML) came into the lime light after their candidates got 11% of the total votes polled (around 13,000 votes). The seat had become vacant due to Nawaz's disqualification. It was won by his wife Kulsoom Nawaz.

The aggressive campaigning by these parties and the revival of shrines and mosques as bases for aggressive electioneering do pose risks to traditional parties. Breaking<sup>5</sup> away from their erstwhile political patrons, these parties are attempting to sharply divide the electorate into

Deobandi, Barelvi and Ahle Hadis, with newest additions being the parties representing the latter two sects.

Coincidentally, growing instances of street mobilisation by extremist parties across the ideological spectrum and their decision to contest elections may have a direct bearing on traditional vote banks. There is need to watch the performance of parties, namely the TLP, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat's Rah-e-Haq Party, MML's Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek (and to some extent Majlis-e-Wahadat-ul-Muslimeen and Sunni Tehreek).

The mobilisation of Barelvi sentiment being attempted by Khadim Hussain Rizvi's TLYRA could also be witnessed during November 2017 blockade of the Islamabad-Rawalpindi intersection. This was done as a reaction over the election oath controversy. It also drew upon the existing anger with the government's decision to hang Mumtaz Qadri, who had murdered Punjab Governor Salman Taseer over latter's support for a Christian woman accused of blasphemy. As Islamabad faced a blockade, the government's helplessness was evident from its dependence on the army to broker a compromise with Rizvi. In March, the minister was shot at by a TLP loyalist. TLP's rise has put other Barelvi parties like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP) in the shade. The TLP would be able to wean away votes and cadres from these parties with its uncompromising stand on the issue of blasphemy and Mumtaz Qadri.

Hafiz Saeed's MML (now contesting on the platform of the Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek) was established in August 2017. Denied registration by the Election Commission of Pakistan the MML was able to exploit a technical loophole by contesting on the "dormant but registered" Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek, wherein it decided to contest on 265 seats (NA and Provincial Assembly seats) out of 300 seats Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek would be contesting on.<sup>6</sup>

The erstwhile support by Saeed's followers to the PML-N has eroded after Saeed accused the Sharif government of being soft on India (even calling Sharif a traitor) and pursuing a liberal agenda. As journalist Sohail Warraich explained, Saeed's difference with Nawaz grew after government's decision to lodge a FIR against the some of his confidantes accused in the Pathankot incident as well as his own house arrest last year by the Punjab government, because he expected a Masood Azhar type treatment.<sup>7</sup>

Over and above its vote base from Ahle Hadis followers (which form somewhere between 5 to 10% of Pakistani citizenry), much of MML's success would hinge on whether the beneficiaries of its charity wing the Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation's extensive philanthropic networks (including its efforts for minority communities as well) translate their support into votes. MML has surplus funds available which it is using to match the campaigning of mainstream parties like the PML-N and the PPP. Yet, it must be noted that MML is one among the seven major Ahle Hadis groups (with Sajid Mir's Jamiat Ahle Hadith deciding to join the MMA) of Pakistan and to what extent their supporters are influenced by the MML remains uncertain. . In Punjab, it would be worth watching MML's performance specifically

in Lahore, Kasur, Gujranwala and Sheikupura, where Ahle Hadis followers form a strong constituency.

It would be interesting to look at the number of votes these parties get, and whether their votes exceed the difference between the winners and the runners up; which will determine the swing factor.

## **Election Process: Election Act Controversies**

### **Elections Act 2017: Controversies**

Equality of vote in any democracy is essential for an evolving and healthy democracy. Periodic delimitation of constituencies is one such method that factors in population increases and other factors like migration, emerging urban clusters etc. To allow for delimitation ahead of the 2018 elections, the parliament passed a constitutional amendment in December 2017 enabling the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to use provisional data of Census 2017. As a result of this the constituencies were delimited.

In the same pursuit the Election Act 2017 was introduced which aimed at more political participation of women by stipulating that least 5% of the tickets were assigned to women candidates in the general seats. Other initiatives included providing more powers to the ECP in terms of finance and to make election rules and procedure easier. The Act also empowers the ECP to declare election results null and void where women's turnout is equal to or less than 10%. With increased transparency in terms of annual reports and publication of results on website and counting votes through electronics result management system, the Act seems promising.

Pakistan started its pursuit of equality in vote from the 1970 elections during Yahya Khan's dictatorship. A Delimitation Commission was formed for the 1970 general elections due to the new legal framework order.<sup>8</sup> The report gave consideration to representation of refugees in cities like Karachi, Multan, Faisalabad and Dhaka to ensure contiguity and keep the settlers colonies intact. The 1974 Act left the commission with autonomous powers to make rules for delimiting constituencies. (Act no. XXXIV of 1974). The Delimitation of Constituencies (Amendment) Act, 2015 was the latest effort with powers ceded to ECP.

The first controversy pertained to changes in declaration of Khatam-e-Nabuwat, or finality of the Prophethood, in the election laws. This led to protesters from TLYRA and other Sunni religious leaders demanding a change the wording. In the earlier version of the form, a candidate had to "solemnly declare" which was replaced by "declare" which was seen as diluting the provisions. The same change was in the title of the form which was changed from "Declaration and Oath by Nominated Candidate" to "Declaration by the Candidate"; this slight alteration had legal as well as religious overtones. A recent report by senator Raja Zafarul Haq hinted that these changes were part of efforts to bring in Qadianis into the mainstream.<sup>9</sup>



**DECLARATION AND OATH BY THE PERSON NOMINATED**

1. I, the above mentioned candidate, hereby declare on oath that,—
- (i) I have consented to the above nomination and that I fulfill the qualifications specified in Article 62 of the Constitution and I am not subject to any of the dis-qualifications specified in Article 63 of the Constitution or any other law for the time being in force for being elected as a member of the National Assembly/Provincial Assembly.
- \* (ii) I belong to .....and a certificate from  
(Name of political party)  
that political party showing that I am a party candidate from the above said constituency is attached.
- OR**
- I do not belong to any political party.
2. I, the above mentioned candidate, solemnly swear that,—
- \*\* (i) I believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the last of the prophets and that I am not the follower of any one who claims to be a Prophet in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever after Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and that I do not recognize such a claimant to be Prophet or a religious reformer, nor do I belong to the Qadiani group or the Lahori group or call myself an Ahmadi.
- (ii) I will be faithful to the declaration made by the Founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, that Pakistan would be a democratic state based on Islamic principles of social justice. I will bear true faith and allegiance to Pakistan and uphold the sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan and that I will strive to preserve the Islamic Ideology which is the basis for the creation of Pakistan.
3. I hereby solemnly declare to the best of my knowledge and belief that,—
- (i) no loan for an amount of two million rupees or more obtained from any bank, financial institution, cooperative society or corporate body in my own name or in the name of my spouse or any of my dependents, or any business concern mainly owned by me or the aforesaid, stands unpaid for more than one year from the due date, or has got such loan written off; and
- (ii) I, my spouse or any of my dependents or a business concern mainly owned by me or the aforesaid, is not in default in payment of government dues or utility charges, including telephone, electricity, gas and water charges of an amount in excess of ten thousand rupees, for over six months, at the time of filing of nomination paper.

*Note:* \*Strike off the words not applicable.

\*\*For Muslim candidates only.

*Figure 2 Old Candidate Form*

Politically the most significant section of the Act pertained to the ineligibility of a person to be head of a political party being done away. This paved the way for Nawaz Sharif to head PML-N even though he had been disqualified to hold an elective office. The issue became controversial when it was pointed out that powers vested in the chief of a political party under article 63 (A) of constitution of Pakistan meant that he could affect parliamentary business and disqualify legislators of his/her party. The Supreme Court in February 2018 disqualified Nawaz Sharif to hold party office and all his orders were held null and void. This led to the PML-N candidates contest the senate elections as independents.

### **Overall Seat Adjustment**

After delimitation, the total number of seats for the National Assembly still remain the same. In a house of 342 members, 272 are directly elected. There are 60 reserved seats for women and 10 for minorities. The reserved seats are filled by proportional representation in which Punjab has 141 seats after losing seven seats to other provinces. Sindh's share of seats has remained the same, that is 61; KPK has gained four seats and its tally in the seat share is 39 seats; FATA, which is under the process of being merged with KPK has retained its share of twelve seats' Balochistan has gained two seats and its seat share has risen to 16 seats; lastly Islamabad Capital territory after gaining one seat will have 3 NA seats now.

## **Political Parties I: Wrangling over Seats; Developments in South Punjab, Karachi, Resurfacing of the MMA**

### **South Punjab Defections**

Long considered a bastion of the Sharif family and the PML-N, not all is well in Punjab. The situation in south Punjab (having 46 of Punjab's 141 NA seats) especially has changed for the worse for the PML-N. While the periodic rise in the Seraiki sentiment in south Punjab is not new and has typically surfaced at the time of elections, the challenge for the PML-N stems from the open rebellion it is confronted with this time.

Divided into three divisions (Bahawalpur, Multan and Rahim Yar Khan) and having a population of 35 million (almost one third of Punjab's total population), south Punjab has 48 seats in the NA. The limited seats that the PPP has won in Punjab have been largely from this area. With the PPP in disarray, Imran Khan senses an opportunity to make inroads here (as well as in Karachi). In early April, six Members of NA and two of Provincial Assembly broke up from the PML-N and formed the Janoobi Punjab Suba Mahaz (JPSM) with the main plank of campaigning for a separate Seraiki province. This was followed by further defections subsequently. "The size of South Punjab is almost the same as KPK. We have 46 members in the [National] Assembly at the moment and yet they gave us just one seat in Senate", stated Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar, the sitting Member of NA from Rahim Yar Khan who led the JPSM defectors.<sup>10</sup> In past, Bakhtiar had served as advisor to CM Shahbaz Sharif between 1997 and 1999 and later defected to PML-Q following the Musharraf coup only to come back

to support PML-N in 2013.<sup>11</sup> Later the JPSM merged into the PTI after latter backed JPSM's demands for a separate province on administrative basis.<sup>12,13</sup>

How much impact the demand for a Seraiki province will make electorally is not clear as yet. PPP tried this in 2013 but it didn't win them support. Imran is trying to exploit PMLN's fault lines by raking up this issue. The establishment has chipped in by picking 'elect-ables' who are popular in south Punjab and are in army's control. This is not a separatist movement but would definitely be a challenge to central Punjab's monopoly over power and resources. Shah Mehmood Qureshi, a PTI leader from south Punjab has been attempting to leverage the Seraiki cause and even Imran Khan, in his Lahore rally was seen vociferously supporting the cause.

The other player, PPP has relied on the region's influential Pir families (since south Punjab happens to have the highest number of heredity leaders of shrines in the province) and political heavyweights. Some of the notable names for Member of NA seats include Makhdooms (descendants of Pirs) like senior PPP functionary Pir Haider Zaman Qureshi from Khanewal, two sons of former Punjab governor Makhdoom Mehmood Ahmed from Rahim Yar Khan and former Makhdoom Shahabuddin from Muzaffargarh.

### **Cracks in MQM and Impact on the Karachi Mandate**

So far, Karachi remains Pakistan's most diverse city, housing all ethnicities of Pakistan, though it is dominated by the Mohajirs. The dominance has shrunk from 50% fifty years ago to around 40%, opening space for non-Mohajir parties. This, coupled with growing divisions within the MQM could cost the party even its traditional Mohajir vote bank.

The trouble for the MQM dates back to the massive crackdown that began in Karachi following Altaf Hussain's controversial "anti-Pakistan" speech on August 22nd 2016. The impact of that has damaged the party's readiness for the polls. Beginning with the forced detachment of Pakistan based MQM (rechristened MQM-Pakistan) from MQM-London, factionalism, defections, and intimidation has literally threatened its existence. The same old pattern of establishment-induced defections is at play (just as what happened in case of MQM-Haqiqi). The party, besides the traditional opposition, would be facing the Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP) led by former MQM leader Mustafa Kamal. It was created in 2016 to facilitate MQM members' defections. The establishment's idea behind the PSP's formation has been to absorb jailed MQM leaders/workers, after they are released on the condition of severing ties with the MQM and joining the PSP. Both Farooq Sattar led MQM and Kamal led PSP made a last ditch efforts to unite last November through a joint press conference, but the proposed alliance fell apart in less than 24 hours over Sattar's disagreement to change party's name.

Incidentally, even the TLP's performance in Karachi would be worth watching as it could gain from MQM's weakened position. It must be noted that the Barelvi JUP had won three seats in 1970 and 1977 polls, but lost out to the rising Mohajir sentiment with the emer-

gence of the MQM in 1980s.<sup>14</sup> Already, some Bareilvi outfits from Karachi such as the Jamat Ahle Sunnat and Milad committees have decided to back the TLP. Journalist Zia-ur Rehman notes that it TLP's role in "old city area, Lyari, Keamari, Mehmoodabad, Korangi, Liaquatabad and New Karachi" is likely to play a spoiler for the older contenders, where it is looking to tap votes from "lower-income Mohajir areas as well as the affluent Memon and Kutchhi communities."<sup>15</sup>

Lately, even the PPP has been engaged in expanding its footprint in Karachi voters following the MQM infighting and even reportedly reached out to senior MQM functionaries looking for potential defectors. Its efforts were bolstered by the Census report that showed growth in the non-Urdu speaking population, particularly in Western Karachi. PPP is trying to tap into this.

### **Revival of MMA: Prospects and Challenges**

The alliance was crafted by Musharraf in 2002 in his bid to present the US with the option of choosing between him or the extreme right. Musharraf was able to tap into the reaction of the Islamists against the American-led Afghan invasion. The alliance won 68 of 124 seats in the provincial assembly and over 60 seats in the national assembly after PPP, making it the second largest opposition party during that time. After the departure of Musharraf, the alliance could not sustain itself and splintered by the time 2008 elections arrived. Now, a decade later the MMA witnessed a revival last December, after five religious parties joined hands, namely the Fazlur Rehman led JUI-F, Shah Noorani faction of JUP, Allama Sajid Mir led Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH) and Allama Sajid Naqvi led Tehreek-i-Islam. Maulana Sami-ul Haq of the JUI-S, however has decided to go alone, terming MMA as an un-Islamic alliance.

The political situation today is radically different from 2002 when strong anti-American sentiment and Musharraf's backing had led these parties towards victory. At present, strong challenge posed by PTI's populism and an active ANP has threatened the electoral existence of these parties even in their home bases. PTI's growing popularity in JUI-F's bastions (especially Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bannu, Swat and Shangla districts) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) stronghold areas (Lower and Upper Dir, and Buner) is a strong explanatory factor behind the alliance.

Nevertheless, some infighting has been reported among both the parties over choice of candidates, since Fazlur Rehman is reportedly controlling the ticket distribution by the virtue of JUI-F being the larger party. As a result, the JI cadres have been unhappy over this. Such infighting might affect MMA's overall performance.

On the national front, the alliance would look to tap into the religious vote bank. However, it is likely to face greater challenges from the hardline religious parties contesting elections, chiefly the TLP, Pakistan Rah-e Haq Party (PRHP) and the Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek. The PRHP, a party floated by the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat (previously Sipah-e Sahaba) has

lately been found gaining inroads in KPK, especially with establishment of new offices and fielding candidates in KPK by-polls, over and above traditional support base in Punjab (mainly Central Punjab) and Karachi. It must be noted PRHP's central leader Aurangzeb Farooqi lost NA election in 2013 from Karachi by a narrow margin of 202 votes to an MQM candidate.<sup>16</sup>

In FATA however, the MMA parties have decided to contest independently owing to strong differences.

## **Political Parties II: Developments in the PML-N (Nawaz factor and differences among leadership, Nisar Ali etc.) and the PTI**

### **PML-N: Intra Party Dynamics**

While PML-N's victory in the Lahore last September and Lodhran NA by-elections this February reiterated the party's dominance in Punjab, not all was reportedly well within the party after Nawaz's ouster. Immediately after Nawaz Sharif had appointed Shahbaz as his successor last year, rumors of Hamza Shahbaz being considered as the Punjab CM went viral, only to be denied later. Later, it was reported the decision was stalled after Nawaz's refusal and that this had increased friction between the Sharif brothers since Nawaz wanted to ensure there were no potential rivals hindering Maryam's political ambitions. Comparisons have become evident as the two happen to be PML's next generation, with Hamza Shahbaz being known for his mature handling of the party's internal issues and strong linkages with grass-roots level workers and Maryam on the other hand being groomed as party's new emerging face.<sup>17</sup> The comparison however subsided after the Supreme Court ordered Maryam's arrest on 6<sup>th</sup> July.

In the larger picture, Nawaz has appeared to be successful in selling his narrative that he has been victimised. He would be banking on his traditional vote bank and sympathisers. However, he will have to contend with the internal challenges in the party, apart from the rifts in the family. Senior PML-N leader, former interior minister and a strong candidate from Rawalpindi, Chaudhry Nisar Ali, who had been part of Nawaz Sharif's close circles ever since his Islami Jamhoori Ittehad days in the 1980s parted ways with PML-N and decided to contest as an independent candidate. Nisar, who has continuously won from the Chakri constituency in Rawalpindi since 1985, was reportedly unhappy over being left out of the PML-N core decision making owing to Sharif's greater reliance on other senior members like Ishaq Dar and the fact that Khwaja Asif's conspiracies against him went unacknowledged by Sharif.<sup>18</sup> PML-N, in an unexpected turn of events decided to field candidates against him.

Despite the internal rifts the prospects of the PML-N remain good. The arrest of Nawaz and Maryam would further bolster the party's chances as the public consciousness grows over his victimhood.

## **PTI: Warming up to the Army and the Dilemma of ‘Elect-ables’**

As the army’s pre-election engineering comes into the open as the polls approach, it is Imran Khan who expects to gain the most from perceived political vacuum after Nawaz’s ouster. His latest statements leave no doubt of his alignment with the army, including his claim that PML-N owed its 2013 victory to army’s intervention, and has gone even to the extent of criticising the civilian setup.<sup>19</sup> This is not the Imran Khan of past, who once criticised army operations against the Pakistani Taliban. The party, by rallying behind the army, expects to win big in the NA.

As Imran Khan stated: “And if you [referring civilian establishment] don’t have moral authority, then those who have the physical authority assert themselves. In my opinion, it is the Pakistan Army and not an enemy army. I will carry the army with me.”<sup>20</sup> The view was corroborated by Hassan Askari Rizvi (who later became Punjab’s caretaker CM) that “Imran has realised that if you want to run Pakistan, you have to work with the military because of the internal and external challenges”.<sup>21</sup>

The strategy has worked. This however would not automatically mean the party has full backing of the army. Imran will be supported to an extent but it will be ensured that he remains unstable. He is unlikely to have an absolute majority, even though he has stretched itself, making alliances wherever it saw the scope. With the establishment’s efforts the PTI emerge could emerge with significant numbers but short of a majority. It would have to rely on the army to get the support of other parties for a majority.

Like the PML-N the PTI too has been beset with internal problems over ticket distribution and the open fight between two of its stalwarts, Shah Mehmood and Jehangir Tareen. The issue of ‘elect-ables’ has come to haunt the PTI with the party’s decision to grant tickets to newly joining defectors and popular personalities in Imran’s desperation to win the elections. In a recent interview, he admitted that it was impossible to win elections without turncoats and money and that the party would “adopt every strategy that will help [it] defeat PML-N”.<sup>22</sup> To some extent, it also demonstrates Imran’s pragmatic understanding of the nature of Pakistani politics, where even campaigns obsessed with the promise of development and better promises do not guarantee victories.

Some of the popular faces the PTI has roped in include senior PPP leaders like former interior minister Firdaus Awan, former senator Babar Awan, Mumtaz Bhutto, former federal minister and a strong face from Central Punjab Nazar Gondal and PPP Punjab president Imtiaz Warraich. The same has been the case for some PML-N leaders who switched sides, especially from South Punjab. Former Senator Zafar Ali Shah, minority leader Ramesh Kumar, former Sindh CM Faarooq Jatoi and several others are some of them.

The party has welcomed such personalities with open arms, irrespective of any background check, which did raise questions on the policy, especially with the party’ decision to

admit Farooq Bandial, who had been charged with raping a popular actress in past. While on one hand, senior leaders from different parties making a beeline to join the PTI shows their positive hopes about the party's potential performance, yet ignoring the old leaders and party workers on the other hand risks losing votes and many candidates who were denied tickets would be contesting as independent candidates.

### **Situation in Sindh and KPK**

The situation in Punjab and Balochistan has been discussed above, where religious parties (in case of Punjab), defections and subversion by agencies would turn out to be the defining variables influencing the electoral outcomes. The last section takes a look at situation in Sindh and KPK, considering the factors endemic to the respective politics of these provinces.

### **KPK**

KPK provincial election will be a litmus test for the PTI. The province has the reputation of not returning an incumbent government. Apart from the incumbency factor, the party also faces the newly revived MMA (with erstwhile ally JI now with the alliance). JI and JUI got a combined total of 1.1 million votes in 2013 provincial polls and bagged 23 seats (securing 20.3 percent compared to PTI's 18.99). This strengthens their hope of doing well since they are united as MMA.<sup>23</sup> The PTI would be banking on its development work, especially reforms in KP's health and education sectors. These reforms have been notable, have benefitted millions of people, and have been acknowledged nationwide.

The PPP has a thin presence in the province, having only four MPAs. PML-N with 15 seats and the third largest voter base in 2013 elections retains its hold on the "Hazara [division], besides having pockets of support in Malakand division, Mardan, Swabi and southern districts", where it can finish on a strong second position, next to PTI.<sup>24,25</sup>

Unlike in 2013 when apart from the PTI the other parties were handicapped in campaigning due to the threat of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, in 2018, the threat factor is much less. This can help the ANP's campaign, though at the time of writing the ANP has lost a prominent politician Haroon Bilour (son of slain Bashir Bilour and a provincial assembly contestant) to a Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) suicide bomber on 10<sup>th</sup> July. His father had met a similar fate in 2012. The massive gathering of mourners, along with PTM's support was apparent during his last rites. This could influence the electoral mood in at least in Peshawar valley in favour of ANP.

While MMA seeks to capture FATA, the role of PTM supported candidates is crucial; since the movement's critical support base comes from Waziristan, including its leader Manzoor Pashteen.

## **Sindh**

Analysts predict that the PPP would be the winner for the third consecutive time in the provincial polls. However, ground reports indicate this still would not be easy. While the PPP continues to enjoy strong popularity in rural Sindh, the main challenge is from the PML-Functional led Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) which has now joined hands with the PTI. The contest would primarily be held among the prominent Pir families, with Hur Jamat (led by Pir Sibghatullah or the Pir of Pagara) and Ghausia Jamaat (led by Shah Mehmood Qureshi) contesting against the Sarwari Jamaat (which has supported PPP). The intention is to retain the areas where the respective Jamaats have influence. Mumtaz Bhutto, once the chief minister and governor of Sindh who later parted ways with PPP in 1980s, has joined hands with the PTI, though this is not expected to cause significant damage to the party.

While MQM's recent downslide opens up opportunity for the PPP, the emergence of the PSP, aggressive campaigns by hardline religious parties like the TLP, MMA and Deobandi parties and PTI's inroads into Karachi's Pakhtun population would be strong challenges to look at in Karachi. PPP still has a chance to retain its stronghold in the Lyari area and certain pockets where Sindhis outnumber the Mohajirs.<sup>26</sup> There are 21 National Assembly seats in Karachi and three in Hyderabad. The new delimitation has given 18 seats in constituencies with substantial population of Mohajirs, whereas on the other 4 seats, a multipronged contest is likely and non-Mohajir votes would be the deciding factors. The challenge for the MQM-P would be that due to Altaf Hussain's call for a boycott, the supporters of the party may not turn out to vote.

Overall, unlike the multifaceted contests in KPK or Punjab the PPP could have the advantage of not being challenged on the same scale, at least in the rural areas.

## **X Factors/Surprises: Rise of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and Impact on Pakhtun Votes in KPK and Karachi**

### **Understanding the Rise of PTM**

The Pakhtun protests were triggered by the killing of Naqeebullah Mehsud, a Karachi based aspiring model. This opened up a large space for the Pakhtuns to vent their grievances. There is a lot of alienation in the tribal areas. Entire towns and villages have been wiped out. The manner in which the Pakhtuns have been treated in other parts of Pakistan has led to huge resentment. The Pakhtun parties - ANP and PkMAP - have become mainstream establishment parties and have been unable to articulate the alienation among the Pakhtuns. The leader of the movement Manzoor Pashteen is very young, yet he has successfully tapped into the grass-roots alienation. The issues raised have had an immediate resonance. Also, the highlighting the ill-treatment meted out to Pakhtuns in Punjab and Karachi has given them a voice.

Manzoor Pashteen has accused Pakistani agencies for being responsible for the condition of Pakhtuns. However, he expanded the agenda from demanding accountability in

the Naqeeb murder case to articulating Pakhtun nationalism. The movement has generated a lot of support in all sections of the Pakhtun community and even from Afghanistan. The movement opened a floodgate for public criticism against the military. As a result there was a clampdown and several FIRs have been filed against the movement's leaders.

The moot question is whether Pakhtun protests would get traction electorally? Pashteen has been able to mobilise people like no other old Pakhtun leader. The present wave of Pakhtun nationalism is different from the old Pakhtun nationalism in that it is articulating current Pakhtun issues rather than ideological concepts. Though the movement is in its early days, it has gained a foothold at the grassroots level and enthused the Pakhtun community across the board. Even mainstream Pakhtun parties like the JUI-F, ANP, and even the PTI have been trying to tap into the movement for their respective agendas and votes.

The extent of this movement's success can be gauged by the fact that the welcome they got in Swat was more than in Lahore. The biggest dividing factor among the Pakhtuns are tribal divisions. The PTM appears to have bridged tribal divisions. Despite Swat being a Yusufzai area the movement led by Mehsuds, Wazirs and Dawars has become a success there. At one time tribal divisions ran so deep that each of the these tribes could not even be controlled by the TTP. The PTM has been able to breach the tribal divide with the common refrain that Pakhtun blood was cheap and that they have been exploited by the Army.

A few members of the PTM would be contesting the elections. These include Ali Wazir from Wana, Mohsin Dawar from North Waziristan and Ismat Shahjahan from Islamabad. In the 2013 elections Ali Wazir had lost by only 150 votes with allegations of rigging in favour of a PML-N candidate. It would be interesting to see what kind of inroads the PTM candidates make into the vote share of the ANP.

### **Pakhtun Factor in Karachi: Does it Count?**

Despite Karachi being home to three million Pakhtuns (also the city's third largest ethnic group), no single party has been successful in tapping into the Pakhtun vote bank.<sup>27</sup> The Pakhtun vote has traditionally been divided among the mainstream parties. Only twice in the past did the Pakhtuns come together: the first time against the Pakistan National Alliance movement of 1977 and then against the MQM in 1980s when ethnic rivalry was at its peak.<sup>28</sup> Even the ANP's nascent inroads into Karachi were thwarted by the operations of the Rangers following its involvement in ethnic disturbances, after which its supporters switched to other parties.

The Pakhtuns seem to have come together again during the PTM rally held in Karachi in May. While the anger among Karachi's over the killing of Naqeebullah Masud is still fresh, PTM's official decision to stay away from elections could prevent such anger from being channelised into bloc voting. What is still to be seen is whether the ANP could exploit the PTM support factor in Karachi and at least win a few provincial assembly seats.

## Conclusion

Till a few months ago, opinion polls (though their credibility is suspect) put the PML-N on the winning side, getting enough seats to form the government. With time, the public opinion has swung partially in PTI's favour.

Given the significant number of undecided voters there still remains a potential window for the PML-N and the PTI to win them over as the elections moves into its last few days. The key factor here would be how the voting public factors in Nawaz's decision to return to Pakistan and face imprisonment. Though there was initial hesitation on Nawaz's part to announce a definite date for his return to Pakistan following the court verdict on 06 July, his subsequent decision to return did boost his image. The prison factor could be an important component to leverage public emotions in the run up to 25<sup>th</sup> July.

The problems for the traditional parties have been exacerbated by the appearance of the hardline religious parties who could play the role of spoilers in Punjab, Karachi and parts of KPK. The entry of even a handful of their members in the national assembly and the provincial assemblies would be enough to choke whatever little is left of a pluralist society in Pakistan.

Overall, at the time of writing, Pakistan seems to be headed for a fractured mandate. No wave is evident for or against any party. Such a verdict would be just what the establishment wants. They can then cobble together a coalition to suit their needs.

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