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Political Analysis of Election Possibilities in Pakistan

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Yet Another Turning Point?

Every general election in Pakistan has been viewed with a mixture of trepidation and hope and hence invariably touted as a critical turning point in that country's history. While the 1970 elections did indeed live up to this apprehension by becoming the catalyst for the break-up of the country and the creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation, all other elections were more or less in the nature of an anti-climax, not only because they belied the hope that was attached to them but also because the doomsday scenarios that were feared never really manifest themselves. At the same time, every election since 1985 has failed to arrest the inexorable slide of Pakistan towards the edge of the precipice. Much like the 2008 elections, the forthcoming general elections, likely to be held in either the first or second quarter of 2013, are also being billed as a make or break moment in Pakistan's history. But if the past is any guide, then regardless of the outcome, these elections are unlikely to arrest the secular trend of Pakistan's descent into chaos and anarchy and institutional confusion, conflict and collapse.

Assuming that the elections do not become a casualty to any cataclysmic internal or external development – war, economic bankruptcy and debt default, a spectacular terror attack, political upheaval either as a result of institutional clash or in reaction to political manipulation – the next general elections will have to be held latest by mid May 2013. The term of the existing parliament expires in mid-March next and the incumbent regime will have to make way for a caretaker government which will have to hold the elections within 60 days. There is of course the possibility of elections being held earlier as a result of a pre-mature dissolution of the National Assembly, in which case elections will have to be held within 90 days of such dissolution. But this second possibility will be a political decision, that will be taken either as part of a political deal between the PPP-led ruling alliance and the main opposition party, PMLN, or else on the basis of the political calculation of the current dispensation to either maximise its political advantage or even minimise any loss it foresees if it delays the polls until the last day. In either case it doesn't seem likely that a caretaker set-up will be appointed before the end of this year, which means that the earliest elections can be held is around March next.

Needless to say, the PPP will try and stay in office until the very last day of its mandated term. The trump that the PPP holds is that if the PMLN is keen on an early election, then it will have to negotiate a deal on the caretaker PM and also caretaker CM in Punjab with the PPP. Unless the PMLN is willing to compromise, the PPP will have no real incentive to go in for an early election. A failure to strike a deal on the caretaker government suits the PPP as it will be able to complete its term in office, after which the Chief Election Commissioner will

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be entrusted with the responsibility of selecting the Caretaker PM. Given that the CEC isn't an inveterate opponent of the PPP, the ruling party will be justified in hoping that the caretaker nominated by the CEC will be unbiased and neutral. Conversely, if the PPP is unable to reach a consensus with the PMLN on a caretaker by the end of the year, then there will be no incentive left for the PMLN to strike a deal with the PPP on a caretaker. If anything, a situation in which there is no consensus candidate for the Caretaker PM, will help the PMLN avoid the charge of being a 'friendly opposition'. Such an insinuation, the PMLN fears, will prove damaging in the elections because of its potential to alienate the PMLN's vote bank that would go on the rebound to the PTI, widely regarded as the main challenger of the PMLN in its bastion, Punjab.

Other than the uncertainty over whether the polls will be held on schedule or a few months earlier, all the conspiracy theories about the polls being postponed by a year don't have much credibility. Quite simply, even if the incumbent regime wanted to delay the elections, the constellation of forces arraigned against them – judiciary, opposition parties, media organisations and to an extent even the military establishment – will make it impossible. Therefore, unless there is some extra constitutional intervention – the nature of such an intervention remains in the realm of speculation – the general elections will be held not later than June 2013.

Political and Electoral Battle-Lines

The massive burst of political energy that is released during a general election invariably leads to new political alignments. In order to maximise their political advantage and minimise their political risk, political parties as well as individual politicians seek new allies and/or cement old alliances. In other words, realignment and shifting alliances are par for the course both while going into polls as well as in the post-election phase.

On the face of it, Pakistan's politics revolves around two big parties – PPP and PMLN. But despite these two parties and the political formations led by them broadly constituting the two poles of politics in the country for the last almost three decades, the fact is also that over the years, politics has become far more variegated, fragmented and splintered between parties which even while espousing similar ideologies and taking similar positions, draw their support from very different sections of society. What is more, new parties and new formations have emerged that could change the political balance. For instance, the PTI of Imran Khan is widely being seen as a major player, some say even a third vertex, in the future political makeup in Pakistan.

Similarly, if the religious parties manage to get their act together then they too will pose a stiff challenge to the big political formations in some pockets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and even Punjab. It is also possible that despite an alliance of religious parties, the religious vote gets divided because divisions in their ranks. For instance, the political

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efforts of groups like the Barelvi Sunni Ittehad Council and the transformation of the Sunni Tehrik into a political party is likely to split the Barelvi vote. Another problem that an alliance of religious parties could face is that the conservative, right-wing voter might prefer parties like PMLN and PTI over the candidate of a rival sect holding the ticket of either a religious party or even of an alliance of religious parties.

Broadly, the likely pre-poll alliances and formations are as follows:

a) PPP-Led Alliance: this is expected to include the rump PMLQ (i.e. the faction led by the Chaudhry cousins, Shujaat Hussein and Pervez Elahi, of Gujrat), and perhaps either a seat adjustment or even a full-fledged pre-poll tie-up with ANP and MQM. This is pretty much the current ruling coalition. Some parties like the PMLF have distanced themselves from the PPP because of the Local Bodies law that has been pushed through in Sindh under pressure of the MQM. The ANP too is pretty cut up over this law but since its stakes in Sindh are not as high as they are in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is possible that it will keep the alliance with the PPP intact for now. But whether the ANP will fight elections in an alliance with the PPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is still an open question. For one, the PPP seems to be in political disarray in KPK with infighting and a vacuum in leadership at the provincial level. Secondly, the relationship between ANP and PPP workers at the grass-roots is hardly anything to write home about. Local PPP leaders have for long been complaining of being ignored by the ANP-led government. Third, the PPP has a huge image problem in KPK, partly because of its poor governance record, partly because it is seen as an American lackey, and partly because of its eroding presence at the local level (the party hardly seems to have any connect with its voters and its political activity remains lethargic and lacklustre).

While the ANP's image has also taken a beating (poor governance, rampant corruption etc.) it could try to get over this by tying up with the PMLN. The problem here is two-fold: one, the close ties between PPPs Asif Zardari and ANP chief Asfandyar Wali; two, the PMLN has a presence mainly in the Hazara belt, where it has suffered a setback because of infighting and because of the rise of the Hazara province movement as a reaction to PMLN agreeing to the renaming of NWFP as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. With the PMLN backing the movement for a Hazara province and the ANP opposed to a splitting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the chances of these two parties fighting the elections together appear somewhat bleak. The PMLN has made some inroads in the Swat region (Malakand division) with the induction of Amir Muqam. But how much difference Muqam can make to PMLNs electoral fortunes in the province remains an open question.

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With the promulgation of the Local Bodies ordinance in Sindh, the PPP has managed to keep the MQM on its side. But if the party is unable to control the negative fallout of this law on the its core support base in rural Sindh, then it could suffer major reverses. Already the nationalists and other political players in Sindh have started agitating over this law and calling it a conspiracy to break up Sindh. Although the nationalists are widely derided as 'Tonga Parties' and their ability to win elections is very suspect, they could tilt the balance against the PPP in a tight contest. Partly to offset the possible fallout of the Local Government law, the PPP has roped in some of its most bitter rivals. For instance, the induction of the Mahars of Ghotki and the Shirazis of Thatta has caused ripples in political circles in Sindh. While these new entrants are on the one hand expected to add strength to the PPP, on the other hand their entry in the party has riled the party old guard which has been fighting against them for decades. The blurring of the traditional groupings and alliances at the local level that has been caused by these political manoeuvres could disturb the cosy arithmetic that was behind the wooing of these locally influential politicians.

Conventional wisdom suggests that given the animosity between the Sindhi supporters of PPP and Mohajir vote bank of MQM, a post-poll tie-up with the MQM instead of a pre-poll alliance makes more sense for the PPP. But over the last four and a half years Asif Zardari has been completely un-conventional in his politics (for instance, roping in the PMLQ and keeping the MQM close to him) and profited from it. It therefore remains to be seen if he will be able to pull another rabbit from his hat by going into a pre-poll alliance with the MQM and whether this will pay dividends in the elections. As things stand, there are reports that the two parties have agreed to fight the elections together. But negotiations on seat sharing remain to be settled and could well prove to be a deal breaker, especially if the PPP demands more seats in Karachi and Hyderabad.

For its part, the MQM will have to weigh its political options on whether to fight the elections with the PPP or go it alone. Given that the MQM vote bank is fairly solid and apparently unshakeable, it really shouldn't make any difference to the party if it goes in for a pre-poll tie-up with PPP. But if the MQM thinks that its tie-up with PPP will lead to some erosion in its vote bank in favour of PTI, then it won't bat an eyelid before breaking with PPP. Of course, post-poll it could re-embrace PPP if the situation so demands.

In the Punjab, the PPP and PMLQ will most likely fight the polls together. The two parties have already been working on a formula for seat sharing and apart from a few areas where there could be conflicts on seat distribution (for instance, Gujrat) the two parties are likely to synergise their strengths. Although politically a tie-up

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with the PPP is a big liability in Central and perhaps even North Punjab, the reason why PMLQ doesn't seem too worried is because it is essentially a party of locally influential people who have the capability of winning their seats on their own strength regardless of their party affiliation. What is more, many of these people will not find any takers in either the PMLN or PTI, the two main contenders in Punjab. In South Punjab, the PPP-PMLQ alliance is arguably better placed, both because of their local alliances and networks as well as because they have been spearheading the demand for bifurcating Punjab and carving a new province in South Punjab.

b) PMLN-Led Formation: Compared to the PPP, the PMLN, despite being the second largest party and arguably the government in waiting, is relatively friendless. The party has practically no presence in Sindh and Balochistan and is limited to only the Hazara belt and to an extent in Malakand division in KPK. To get around this handicap of being labelled as a 'GT Road party', the PMLN has been reaching out and tying up with nationalists in Sindh. But the entry of Mumtaz Bhutto and a few other nationalists in the PMLN isn't expected to change the political dynamics in Sindh very much. PMLN is also trying to woo parties like the PMLF but this again will not make a very big difference to PMLN fortunes in Sindh. Attempts to tie-up with MQM have come a cropper so far because the latter used contacts with PMLN to get concessions from the PPP. In any case, there appears to be a lot of bad blood between the Punjabi chauvinists of PMLN and the Mohajir chauvinists of MQM for the two parties to have any sort of stable alliance. What is more, unlike Asif Zardari who was always ready to bend over backwards to appease the MQM, Nawaz Sharif is incapable of showing such flexibility and compromise. Therefore, even if the PMLN and MQM strike an alliance, it will not survive for very long.

In Punjab, the PMLN would not like to enter into any big alliance that robs it of its hold over the province. A sort of an informal tie-up has been struck with the 'likeminded' faction of PMLQ, but it has still not been formalised. The support that the PMLN government in Punjab received from another faction of PMLQ – Unification Bloc – has helped it to keep its majority in the provincial assembly. But in the next elections, chances are that the 'U Bloc' will merge into the PMLN. In order to bolster its presence in South Punjab, the PMLN did woo the Bahawalpur Suba movement but recent reports that Asif Zardari has promised the world to the erstwhile Nawab of Bahawalpur seems to left the PMLN at a loose end in the Bahawalpur region. Mindful of the likely challenge from the PTI in its stronghold of Central and North Punjab, the PMLN is not averse to entering into seat adjustments (even perhaps an alliance) with Islamist parties like the Jamaat Islami. So far however the Jamaat appears keen on a tie-up with PTI. Closer to elections, and if the Jamaat doesn't get a positive response from the PTI, it could enter into a tie-up with the

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PMLN. But the PMLN would be loath to share more than a couple of seats with the Jamaat Islami. The one religious party that has cast its lot with the PMLN is the Wahabi/Salafi party, Jamaat Ahle Hadith led by Sajid Mir. But this is a Tonga Party and will at best get the gift of one seat from PMLN. In South Punjab however there is every chance of the PMLN winning undeclared support of the Sunni extremist party, Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat (ASWJ), the new incarnation of the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan.

In KPK, the PMLNs influence is limited to the Hazara division and Malakand division. If the party wants to make major inroads in the Peshawar valley, then it will have to tie-up with either the ANP or smaller parties like the Qaumi Watan Party (formerly PPP-Sherpao) . As far as the ANP is concerned, we have already listed out the factors it will consider before it embraces the PMLN. For the latter the problem is that an alliance with ANP could very well subject it to the anti-incumbency vote against the ANP. As far as the QWP is concerned, it's influence is limited but Aftab Sherpao has lately been taking similar positions as the PMLN in Parliament and this could translate into some of pre-poll arrangement between them. Sherpao has also started playing the Pashtun nationalism card to attract many of ANP's supporters. The PMLN will also be open to seat sharing in KPK with the 'likeminded' faction of the PMLQ, especially 'electables' like the Saifullah clan. There has been some political flirtation between the JUIF and PMLN in the recent past, but an alliance between these two parties is a bit of a stretch for now. This is partly because the PMLN finds Maulana Fazlur Rehman quite a slippery character, and partly because the wily Maulana would prefer the revival of the erstwhile religious parties alliance, MMA, and is this is not possible, reach a hidden understanding with the PPP. Although Maulana Fazlur Rehman has managed to get four and a half of the erstwhile MMA partners together to resuscitate the MMA, it is the missing one and a half parties – the Jamaat Islami and the Samiul Haq led faction of JUI-S – that will make all the difference to the electoral prospects of the new MMA.

In Balochistan, the PMLN is not really a serious player as a party. Although it has managed to enrol tribal chieftains like Sanaullah Zehri, most of these characters have their own support base and don't depend on their parties for their election. In any case, Balochistan politics follows a very different trajectory than all other parts of Pakistan and whoever wins in Islamabad generally gets to form the government (at least nominally) in Quetta. While Nawaz Sharif has been trying to woo Baloch nationalists like the Mengals, he hasn't got much traction so far.

c) The PTI Front: Ever since the PTI has started being seen as a serious political player, there has been a lot of interest in the sort of alliances that it will strike going into elections. All available indications are that even if the PTI enters into any pre-poll

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seat adjustments or alliances, it will be with the smaller parties. Given that the PTI hopes to win big in Punjab and KPK, coupled with the strident stand taken by the party on issues like relations with the US, drone attacks, dialogue with the Taliban etc., there are clear pointers on who the PTI will not align with, namely, PMLN, PPP, ANP, MQM, JUIF and PMLQ. Although Imran Khan has practically ignored targeting PPP in his public speeches, this is more because he considers the PMLN as his main adversary and the PPP as already out of the race because of its maladministration and malfeasance.

Much of Imran Khan's ire is reserved for the PMLN and a bitter war of words has practically ruled out both a pre-poll, and more significantly, post-poll alliance between these two parties. For Imran Khan to join hands with the PMLN after so much bad-mouthing will require a huge U-turn, something that he seems incapable off. This is something that only a typical politician is adept at doing, which Imran Khan is quite clearly not. Imran Khan's other bête noire is the JUIF chief, Maulana Fazlur Rehman. While Imran has accused the Maulana of trading Islam for political benefit, the Maulana has called him a proxy for the Jewish lobby and raised unsavoury questions about his family life and the upbringing of his children. In recent weeks, there has been some softening of PTI's attitude towards the MQM. But since they will both compete for the same political constituency in Karachi, a pre-poll alliance can be safely ruled out. Post elections however there could be some deal between the PTI and MQM but it is highly unlikely if this arrangement will last very long. The reasons for this are the same as those that will operate in case there is a tie-up between the PMLN and MQM. The ANP is a clear no-no for PTI, partly for reasons of anti-incumbency, partly because of the ANPs stand on the War on Terror and talks with Taliban and partly because of the right-wing, pro-Taliban attitude of the PTI.

Even though Imran Khan has clearly and emphatically stated that the PTI will not enter into any alliance with any party, he hasn't ruled out seat adjustments with like-minded parties. Given the right-wing, Islamist-leaning, pro-Taliban leanings of Imran Khan, a natural ally of sorts for him is the Jamaat Islami, which too seems keen on a tie-up with PTI. But so far Imran Khan has been holding out on any announcement to this effect. His dalliance with the foul-mouthed Rawalpindi politician, Sheikh Rashid, also seems to have backfired and there is a lot of opposition from within PTI ranks to embracing Rashid. In all likelihood, therefore, the PTI could go into elections alone, confident of a 'tsunami' of support that will sweep it into power without the crutches of any alliance partner.

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A little analysis about the prospects of the PTI would perhaps be in order, especially since this party has only recently emerged as a serious player in Pakistani politics – it has been around for a decade and a half and until now had never managed to make a dent on the political scene. Broadly, there are three views regarding the performance of the PTI in the next elections: one, it will generate a 'tsunami' of public support which will sweep away all other parties; two, it will get a about 40-50 seats (may be even more) but that is where the wave will stop; finally, it will only get a handful of seats, and though its vote share will go up, the PTI will essentially end up damaging Nawaz Sharif.

A lot of analysts like to compare Imran Khan of 2012 with ZA Bhutto of 1970. But while both attracted the youth with promises of revolutionary change and stirring slogans, Bhutto was in his late 40's while Imran Khan for all his claims of being the icon of youth is in his early 60's. Like Bhutto, who was never given much of a chance in the 1970 elections – in fact everyone got the 1970 result wrong because no one expected Sheikh Mujib to win all but one seat in the erstwhile East Pakistan. Similarly, not many are willing to accept the possibility of Imran Khan winning the next general elections. But the big difference between Bhutto and Imran Khan is that the 1970 elections were really the first proper election in Pakistan and to an extent everyone was a new commodity in the poll arena. What is more, party organisation, local level groupings, experience in managing the constituency and cementing vote banks etc. had not been entrenched. None of this holds true today what with more than half a dozen general elections since the epochal 1970 polls.

Yet another similarity is that like Bhutto, Imran Khan too spouts the rhetoric of change but is also conscious of the need to rope in locally influential and electable politicians to win the elections. While Bhutto got most of the feudal and electable politicians on his side after he had won in West Pakistan in the 1970 polls, Imran Khan is trying to bring in this lot (which incidentally is the anti-thesis of his slogan of change) before winning the elections. In other words, Bhutto won without these people, while Imran Khan wants to win on the back of these people. The entry of these old style politicians has robbed Imran Khan of his ideological lustre even before the polling. And in recent weeks, these bell-weather politicians who had joined the PTI have started leaving the party and most are making a bee-line for the PMLN, which begs the question about PTI's winnability. Of course, like Bhutto, Imran Khan is also striking a chord with the people. Bhutto used Tashkent and India-baiting to become popular in Punjab; Imran Khan is using drone attacks, war on terror and anti-Americanism to raise his popularity graph in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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Issues and Factors That Will Play a Role in the Next Elections

Generally, unless there is any one issue that over-rides everything else or one party/politician who completely captures the imagination of the electorate, voting behaviour is determined by multiple factors. Individual preferences and those of communities (biradaris and tribes) and local alliances and groupings (Dhharas) are motivated by a combination of interests, grievances, rivalries, ideologies, and ethnic and other communal considerations like sectarian affiliations, tribal connections, class affinity etc. The outcome of the complex interplay of all these factors is what leads to victory or defeat for both a party at the macro level and a candidate at the constituency level. The party machinery and organisation, the candidate's strength at the local level, the motivation of cadres and the ability of the party and the candidate to hold their own against any shenanigan by rivals to use local administration and muscle and money power to tilt, if not steal, an election also play an extremely important role in determining the outcome of an election. Of course, here a caveat is in order. If there is a wave in favour of a candidate or a party, then the strength or otherwise of party organisation or of a candidate doesn't come into play as a critical factor.

This caveat becomes important in the context of analysing the prospects of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (PTI) in the next elections. One of the primary reasons why many analysts are not willing to give the TeI much of a chance in winning the next elections is precisely because the PTI doesn't have the party organisation that helps in winning elections. But if indeed there is a 'tsunami' of support in favour of PTI, then the lack of a party organisation is hardly going to matter. As things stand, there seems to be a groundswell in favour of the TeI among sections of the electorate in urban Punjab and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. But whether this will translate into votes during elections remains to be seen. It is entirely possible that while Imran Khan has got very high visible and vocal support, in absolute numbers this support won't be enough to win him the elections. Alternatively, it is also possible that there is a wave that he would ride into power, only the wave remains subterranean and will manifest itself in the results.

Other than a wave (which is currently not quite visible in favour of any of the parties), the factors which will play an important role in the elections are as follows:

a) **Ideological:** Over the years, the ideological battle-lines have both got blurred as well as turned on their heads. For instance, while the PPP continues to flaunt its anti-establishment credentials, it is the PMLN which has emerged as the anti-establishment party and PPP as a virtual yes-man of the establishment. The TeI makes revolutionary noises but is being supported by the military establishment, at least tacitly if not openly. At the same time, the military establishment is wary of PTI and sees it as a maverick in Pakistani politics. While the PPP has towed the Army's line faithfully, its governance record hasn't endeared it to the Army. The PMLN

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spooks the army, which fears that Nawaz Sharif could well try and emulate the Turks and Egyptians to fix the military brass. While the pro-democracy, civilian supremacy and anti-establishment line remains popular with a substantial section of the electorate, from the point of view of realpolitik, it doesn't yield much dividend.

Related to the anti-establishment posturing is the issue of whether Pakistan needs to remain a national security state or transform into a welfare state. Although all parties swear by the latter – Imran Khan talks of an Islamic Welfare State and holds up Scandinavian countries as his ideal, the PPP continues to mouth pro-poor and pro-people slogans and the PMLN too is in favour of dismantling the security state and diverting resources to the welfare of people – none of these parties have either a clear plan or program to make the switch and cut the army to size, both in terms of its political role as well as in terms of resource allocation.

Another fundamental ideological issue is the role of Islam in the country. It is now no longer a tussle between secularism (such as it was in the Pakistani context) and Islam because politics has moved so far to the right that talking of secularism is akin to flogging a dead horse. No political party (except perhaps for MQM) is comfortable with the appellation 'secular' attached to it. The use of labels like liberal, conservative and extremist is essentially in an Islamic and not in a secular context. The PPP's spinelessness against Islamism was on full display in the aftermath of the assassination of the former Punjab governor, Salman Taseer. Rather than confront the supporters of the murderer, the PPP preferred to not make an issue of the assassination so that it didn't suffer any loss of support (by appearing to side with a defender of a blasphemer) or get into the cross-hairs of Islamists. More conservative and Islam-pasand parties like the PMLN, PTI and other political and religious parties either took a very equivocal stand on the assassination, adding a lots of ifs, buts and riders to dilute their condemnation of the incident. In a sense, the Islamists now exercise not only a virtual veto on executive action and parliamentary legislation but also dominate the intellectual discourse and debate in the country and almost all national and provincial parties more or less toe the line set by the Islamists. The issue is no longer whether Islam will play a role in national life; it is how intrusive and extensive will such a role be.

The ideological factor will also come into play on the issue of how to combat religion-driven terrorism and extremism and how to deal with the Taliban. The conservative voter is more inclined to an accommodation with the Taliban and other religious extremists, a line which endorsed by the PMLN, PTI and religious parties like Jamaat Islami and JUIF. The PPP, MQM and ANP are however in favour of a more hard approach against the Taliban but are unable to push through with this partly

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because of a fear of backlash from the Islamists and partly because they are unsure of how far the quasi-Islamist Pakistan Army will back them in any action against the Taliban. Rule of thumb is that the conservative voter will go with parties like PMLN, PTI, Jamaat Islami and JUIF while the more moderate voter will prefer parties like PPP, MQM, and ANP.

b) Political: Although there will be an effort to politicise every small and not so small issue to gain advantage during the elections, there will be a few issues that will play an important role in helping voters make their choices. One such issue will be that of making new provinces. The PPP has certainly put a lot in store of its advocacy of bifurcating Punjab and carving out a new province in South Punjab. This area has been traditionally a stronghold of the PPP, though in recent years significant inroads have been made by rival parties to challenge the PPP's dominance. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the issue of Hazara province will play a role, at least in the Hazara division which has been the stronghold of the PMLN. Having lost a lot of ground in its bastion because of its endorsement of the change of name of NWFP to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the PMLN is supportive of the idea of a Hazara province. But it has been a little late in coming around to lending its support to the demand for a new Hazara province. Other players have jumped on to this bandwagon and made a big dent in the PMLN's hold in Hazara. The local government law in Sindh could also damage the PPP in rural Sindh and parties like the PMLF and Sindhi nationalists are trying to make the most of the situation that has emerged in rural Sindh. The PMLN is supporting nationalists and is trying to enter into a tie-up with PMLF to make an entry into Sindh. The issue of Balochistan and how to handle it will be important in not only Balochistan but also among a section of voters in rest of Pakistan. The PMLN is reportedly trying hard to rope in soft separatists like Akhtar Mengal and other pro-federation nationalists to make an entry into Balochistan.

Related to the issue of new provinces and policies of parties on restive provinces is the issue of ethnic nationalism, which remains a fairly potent political issue in Pakistan. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for instance, even though the ANP continues to espouse Pashtun nationalism as an article of faith, its credentials as a Pashtun nationalist force have lost a lot of their shine over the years. Trying to fill the vacuum is the Qaumi Watan Party, the new avatar of Aftab Sherpao's erstwhile PPP(S). Sherpao, who is a force to reckon with in at least the Peshawar valley and enjoys pockets of support in other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has tried to take on the mantle of Pashtun nationalism. Even religious parties like the JUIF are not averse to mixing Pashtun nationalism with religion. In fact, implicit in their support for the Taliban (both Pakistani and Afghan) is the element of Pashtun solidarity and the narrative of 'injustice against Pashtuns' is very much a part of their political

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propaganda. In a sense, the religious parties JUIF tend to mix class (most mullahs are from the lower middle class), ethnicity and religion to carve out a vote bank for themselves. In Sindh, the PPP has always tried to play the 'Sindh card' to maintain its dominance in the province. The MQM on the other hand, despite efforts to acquire a more pan-Pakistan image, gets the bulk of its support from the Mohajir community in Karachi, Hyderabad and some other cities of Sindh. The ANP plays the Pashtun card to get the backing of Pashtuns in Karachi, who are now estimated to be the second largest ethnic group after Mohajirs in the city. In Punjab, the PMLN is seen as the representative of Punjab and has tried to marshal support by pointing to the discrimination against Punjab and Punjabi under the current dispensation. While the PMLN has desisted from the 'jaag Punjabi jaag' slogan of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it has nevertheless tried in a somewhat understated manner to project itself as the defender of Punjab's interests.

Crucial among the political factors will be internal party coherence as well as the party's alliances with other parties and its skill in political management in terms of winning media support, ability in projecting (rather selling) its agenda to the electorate, and keeping its core constituency intact. All the three big parties are today facing internal dissent. Part of this dissent is normal, especially around the time of elections when politicians seek to better their chances by switching parties and changing loyalties. But if not handled, such dissent could end up grievously damaging a political party by sending out a signal of disarray within party ranks. The PMLN has been facing trouble in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and party stalwarts like Sardar Mehtab Abbasi from the Hazara belt were at one stage on the verge of leaving the party because of the political games being played by Nawaz Sharif's son-in-law. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there is also a tussle between new entrants like Amir Muqam (who was being backed by Nawaz's son-in-law) and the old party guard. The PTI too is having its share of problems. There are reports that former law minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi is getting restive. A number of other recent entrants who had been inducted on grounds that they were winnable candidates have exited from the party. A tussle is reportedly underway between the old guard (most of whom are considered un-winnable) and the new entrants. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are around half a dozen claimants for leading the party into elections. A large number of former bureaucrats and military officials, public intellectuals and businessmen have joined the party. These people give a high profile to the party but in terms of their public appeal and support, they are a big zero. In terms of alliances, so far the PMLN and PTI haven't really been able to make partnerships with any really strong parties. The PMLNs foray into Sindh has only resulted in the roping in of 'tonga' parties, burnt out politicians like Mumtaz Bhutto and small nationalist parties. The PTI is

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chary of any alliance for now and has declared that it won't enter into any alliance with the parties currently present in parliament.

Compared to the PMLN and PTI, the PPP has been quite successful in sewing up its alliances. But dissent within the party has been growing over the years and a number of old die-hard party 'jialas' have been distancing themselves from the party. Equally worrisome for the PPP will be the fact that in the last four and a half years its political activity in terms of connecting with the people has been next to nothing. Apart from a few big rallies in Sindh, most of the parties political programmes have been rather lacklustre. If anything, the only chord that the PPP seems to have struck with the people, especially in Balochistan, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and to an extent even in Sindh, has been a discordant note. Other than a few notable exceptions, most party legislators don't seem to have nurtured their vote banks. The party organisation in the provinces seems to be in disarray and provincial party heads have been changed so often that the party seems practically dysfunctional in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In addition, the PPP will also have to contend with the deluge of negative press it has got over the years from a very hostile and right-wing media. In most TV talk shows – Pakistan is probably the only country where prime time talk shows enjoy far higher viewership than entertainment programmes – the PPP seems to come out rather poorly. The proliferation of news channels and the popularity of news-related talk shows, coupled with the fact that the PPP gets consistently thrashed and trashed on the airwaves, could well prove to be a game-changer in the next elections.

To its credit, unlike the past, the PPP has shown remarkable tolerance for criticism. This is partly because it doesn't have a choice because of a highly activist judiciary which will immediately give relief to any news organisation suffering a crackdown from the government. But partly this is also the utter disdain with which Asif Zardari treats the media. Calling media persons 'political showmen', Zardari has simply ignored all the hostile and often unfair media campaign against him and his party's government. Perhaps the contempt with which he treats the media is the result of his confidence in the solidity of his vote bank. But the fact remains that the PPP has been damaged by the bad press, at least in urban areas of central and north Punjab and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Adding to the negative image portrayed by the media is the 'bunker' approach to politics of Zardari. Unlike his late and much lamented wife, who was not only charismatic but also connected with her voters through direct contact in the field, Zardari's public interaction is limited to holding meetings and conferences in the safe and secure environs of the Aiwan-e-Sadr in Islamabad, Governor house in Lahore and Bilawal House in Karachi. Other than a couple of public rallies that he addressed in Naudero (Larkana), he has simply refused to go

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out and pump flesh to connect with the people. This attitude appears to have rubbed off even on rest of the party leadership who seem to prefer the darbar and drawing room politics of Zardari to mass politics of ZA Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto. No doubt, Zardari is a master of personality based politics and the permutations and combinations required for cobbling together a winning formula, on paper at least. But whether this will be enough to win at the hustings remains an open question.

c) Governance Issues: Asif Zardari appears to be blasé not just over the media campaign but also on the issue of the governance record of the PPP-led coalition. It is almost as though Zardari is so sure of the unshakeable loyalty of the PPP voter that he doesn't consider governance, or the lack of it, as an election issue. He seems to have placed his faith in power politics and seems convinced that if the military establishment isn't inveterately opposed to him, he has got the biradaris and other local factors figured out correctly, is able to exploit emotional issues like new provinces, enjoys the support of the US, can benefit from the split in the conservative vote between PMLN and PTI, ropes in enough electable candidates, then he will have the elections stitched up even before the voting takes place.

But the fact remains that the governance record of the government is so terrible, that it is difficult to imagine that it won't have an impact on the elections. The PPP continues to crow about the passage of the 18th Amendment (which, among other things, devolved many powers to the provinces) and the National Finance Commission award which affected a massive shift in resources to the provinces from the centre. But critics point out that these achievements do not detract from the enormous damage that the drift in governance has caused. Almost all the public sector behemoths like Railways, PIA and Pakistan Steel Mills are making horrendous losses and have become unviable, the power and energy crisis has broken the back of trade and industry, terrorism and law and order have ravaged the country, institutional clash between the government and judiciary has had a telling affect on the conduct of governance, education, health and delivery of other public goods has suffered badly, corruption scandals and cronyism have been rampant, mismanagement of national resources has been legendary, the country has steadily been isolated diplomatically and aid flows have been reduced to a trickle, foreign investment has all but dried up – it is an endless list of failures.

And yet, if Asif Zardari thinks that the tumult of the last five years will not impact on the voting preferences of the people, and the PPP has a good chance of doing fairly all right in the next elections, then there is surely something seriously wrong in his appreciation of the situation. The only saving grace is that the governance record of the main opposition party, PMLN, in Punjab is hardly anything to write home about.

But considering that the PPP is ruling at both the Centre and in three provinces (in addition to the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir under Pakistan's illegal occupation, Gilgit-Baltistan and the euphemistically titled, 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir'), the PPP will find it difficult to deflect focus from its maladministration by pointing out to the record of the PMLN in Punjab.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the ANP is believed to have lost a lot of ground because of indifferent governance and hand over fist corruption. About Balochistan the less said the better and the situation has been aptly summed up by the Supreme Court which has said that governance has completely collapsed in that province, what with a chief minister who stays in Islamabad and only condescends to visit the province once in a while. Sindh too has suffered from bad governance with an ineffectual chief minister holding the reins of power. The bloodletting in Karachi where around 4000 people have become victims to the phenomenon of target killings resulting from political turf battles between the PPP, MQM and ANP (all partners in the provincial coalition government) in the last couple of years tells the sordid story of the failure of governance in the province.

d) Economic Factors: The sorry state of governance is also being reflected on the economy, which is on the brink of collapse. Apart from the crippling power and energy shortages (which has led to street protests and is often touted as one issue that has fuelled lot of outrage against the government) and the mismanagement of public sector undertakings, the economic crisis is manifesting itself in the doubling of national debt in the last four and half years, the collapse of both foreign and domestic investment, very anaemic growth (which has been ramped up through some imaginative accounting), rising population pressure, a massive balance of payments crisis which is staring the country in the face and which has been exacerbated by flight of capital, industry lay-offs and closures, rising cost of living – it is once again an endless list of bad numbers. Economic distress levels are rising and resulting in social and political unrest.

In the face of such terrible conditions, if the PPP remains sanguine (at least for public consumption) about its prospects, then it is because of a couple of measures it has taken, which it believes are enough to catapult it back to power and keep its core constituency on its side. These are 1) the Benazir Income Support Programme under which poor families receive a cash grant of Rs 1000 per month and 2) rise in support prices of agricultural products which has created a minor boom in the rural areas. Since the PPP views its core constituency as poor and rural, it is confident that it will not fare too badly in the polls. The calculation is that the PPP didn't stand much of a chance in urban areas of central and north Punjab in any case. In these areas, all that

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will happen is that the margin of defeat of PPP candidates will increase. But the party feels it will be able to hold its own in rural areas and among poor voters.

The other political parties like PMLN and PTI have come out with some sort of a half-baked economic programme which they claim will set things back on track. But somehow they haven't really managed to convince anyone that they have the answer to Pakistan's economic problems.

e) Local Factors: In many ways, micro level or constituency level politics is the real make or break factor in any election. Selection of candidates, sewing up local coalitions and getting the right configuration of biradaris, dhhara, thana-kutchery politics, the ability to bring supporters to come out and vote, the capacity to prevent rivals from stealing the election by having the right complement of polling agents in every polling station, the development record of the candidate and his party, all these issues play a vital role in any election. Clearly, the old parties like PPP, PMLN, MQM, ANP, JUIF etc. certainly enjoy a major advantage over the PTI in this area. But what the PTI lacks in organisational capacity, it is expected to make up in the commitment that its supporters have displayed so far. Whether this will be enough to win an election, and whether the PTI's high-octane visibility on airwaves, cyberspace and in public rallies is reflective of its mass support, remains to be seen.

f) Administrative Factors: Until the last election, the administrative support used to be a crucial factor in elections. The party that controlled the local administration and, more importantly, the caretaker government, enjoyed a big advantage over its rivals. The support of a pliable Election Commission and an equally pliable and compromise judiciary also was immensely useful. Finally, the role of the infamous intelligence agencies controlled by the 'deep state' was always important in deciding the outcome of any election. Along with district officials, the spook agencies have been known to change results even after preliminary results had been declared, helped candidates by forcing rivals to either withdraw or making things difficult for them in conducting their campaign, intimidating supporters of rival candidates, and many other innovative ways. There have also been instances when the intelligence agencies were instrumental in deciding the outcome of an election by adopting a hands-off approach (the 2002 poll is often held up as an example of this).

While there will still be a role that some of the above mentioned players will play in the next election, it is expected that such role will be marginal. The reason is that a neutral Election Commission has been constituted under a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of unimpeachable integrity. The electoral rolls have been revised and made transparent. The next caretaker government will be decided either

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by consensus between the government and opposition at both the federal and provincial levels, or else by the CEC. The military establishment has ostensibly at least adopted a completely neutral stand. The judiciary is also touted as a major factor that will ensure the fairness of the electoral process.

Of course, there is a big gap between theory and practise in Pakistan. The judiciary, for all its independence, appears to be biased against the PPP. The CEC, for all his integrity, is over 80 years old and questions are being raised over how effectively he will be able to control the election process. The judiciary has already refused a request by the EC to have judicial officials conducting elections. This means that district officials, many of whom are partisan, will be in charge and could make a difference, even if only on the margins, in the elections. And if it is a tight election, then the marginal difference will actually be quite significant. The caretaker government, if decided by consultation between the ruling party and opposition, could easily lead to a 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' kind of a deal with the PPP giving in to PMLN in Punjab and the PMLN giving in to PPP in the Centre. In Sindh and Balochistan, there is no effective opposition and the caretaker could very well be an appointee of the ruling dispensation. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a deal between the government and opposition cannot be ruled out.

And then there is the 'deep state' and the military establishment which might want an outcome with which it can live. The only problem for the military establishment is that none of the three front runners are a very palatable prospect for reasons that have been outlined above.

g) Foreign Policy: In a sense, foreign policy has always been closely linked to the ideological factor. Initially, India used to be the favourite whipping boy for the Pakistani politicians and the loyalty of political parties was judged on the basis of how much of a hard line they took on India. People like ZA Bhutto became popular leaders on the basis of India bashing. Ironically, his daughter was considered a 'security risk' because she was seen as being soft on India. Of course, the fact that she made hysterical anti-India speeches when the Pakistani sponsored terrorist violence erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in the late 1980's did not improve her credentials in the eyes of the 'deep state'. The ANP and at times even the MQM have been seen as being soft on India and hence untrustworthy. But things began to change around the mid 1990s, especially the 1997 election when for the first time India was not an election issue. One reason for this was that since every political party more or less took the same line on India meant that India-bashing did not yield any advantage. Post 9/11, things have turned full circle and almost all the political parties are today not averse to normalising relations with India. Of course, the terms

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and conditions on which such normalisation will take place is another matter altogether. Nevertheless, India as an election issue has lost traction.

In place of India, the new ogre in Pakistani politics is the US. Relations with the US and what role Pakistan should play in the War on Terror, coupled with the issue of Afghanistan has become a political hot potato in the elections. Right-wing, conservative and pro-Taliban parties like PTI, Jamaat Islami, JUIF and to a lesser extent, PMLN, seem to be taking a far more strident stance on issues like conducting military operations against Pakistani Taliban groups, the issue of drone strikes, cooperation with the US in fighting the terrorists, on the issue of holding a dialogue with the Pakistani Taliban etc. On the other hand, the ANP and PPP are more nuanced on the above mentioned issues. The MQM is perhaps the most emphatic in its opposition to the Taliban, though on issue of drone strikes and relations with the US, it too takes a more nuanced position. But the important thing is that with widespread anti-Americanism sweeping through Pakistan, advocating good relations with the US or being seen as being close to the Americans is nothing short of a political kiss of death.

Likely Results and Post-Election Scenarios

Predicting an election is always a hazardous task, more so under the prevailing conditions and circumstances and given the constellation of political forces and issues that exist in Pakistan. But on the basis of a few clear trends that are emerging, some scenarios can be built. Broadly, there are three possible scenarios that appear possible. Two of these scenarios are predicated on the expectation that there will be a hung parliament after the elections. The third scenario is based on the possibility of an electoral sweep (or at least a simple majority), either by the PTI or the PMLN. This third scenario is a bit of a long shot at this point in time. But in politics nothing can be ruled out. Which scenario actually plays out will depend crucially on whether the voting will take place on traditional lines, or whether the electorate will rise above everything else to bring in a government which they think can actually make a difference to their lives and at the same time take the country out of the morass it finds itself in.

If the voting takes place along traditional lines, then the way the cookie is likely to crumble is as follows: in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the verdict will be badly fragmented between the ANP, PPP, PMLN, JUIF, Jamaat Islami, PTI and QWP, both for the provincial as well as National Assembly. The margins of victory in most cases will be very small and local factors will play an important role in deciding winners in each constituency. No party will be close to getting a majority on its own and coalitions will have to be made to form a government. The JUIF is likely to win seats in the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with some seats going to the other parties. In the Swat/Malakand region, the PMLN could score some

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notable wins because of Amir Muqam. But all the other parties will also be contenders for seats and could win a few. The same story is likely to be repeated in the Hazara belt. The real battleground will be the Peshawar Valley, where all these parties have their strongholds. The grapevine however is that the ANP and PPP are likely to suffer major reverses in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the PTI is likely to emerge as a gainer in the province, especially in the all important Peshawar Valley.

In Punjab, there is expected to be a tough fight between the PTI and PMLN in central and north Punjab with the PPP and its ally PMLQ winning a smattering of seats in places like Gujrat. The PPP is however hopeful of a better verdict in south Punjab. But here too the PMLN has its pockets of support and will win a few seats. The PTI too is making inroads especially after the entry of electable politicians like Javed Hashmi and Shah Mehmood Qureshi in its ranks.

Sindh could throw up an interesting result if the anti-PPP forces manage to harness the sentiment in rural Sindh against the Local Government law. The PPP could lose quite a few seats, especially the marginal ones if its opponents put up a united front. In urban areas – Karachi and Hyderabad – the MQM could see a shift in favour of the PTI in some constituencies, but whether this shift will lead to MQM losing seats remains to be seen. A tightly monitored election and transparent electoral rolls could also reduce the MQMs margins of victory. At the same time, the fact that there has been no fresh delimitation in Karachi means that the dice will remain loaded in the MQMs favour and the steep rise in the number of Pashtuns voters will not make much difference to the MQMs fortunes in most of the Karachi constituencies.

The results in Balochistan will to a great extent depend on whether or not nationalist parties like the BNP-Mengal participate in the elections. In the Pashtun belt of Balochistan, the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party will enter the fray and the JUIF will have a real battle on its hands. In the Baloch belt, Mengal's entry into the fray could see the BNP-M emerge as the single largest party, provided there is no boycott of elections by pro-secession forces which leads to most voters not casting their ballot. The risk for the BNP-M will be that if it participates in the elections and this is taken as a sell-out by the people, it could well lead to a massive backlash against the party which it will find difficult to handle. By and large however the Balochistan verdict is expected to be fractured and tribal sardars are expected to retain their seats. In any case, party loyalties are completely fungible in the province and generally the highest bidder gets to form the government, especially if he enjoys the support of Islamabad and Rawalpindi i.e. Pakistan army.

As mentioned earlier, this entire analysis will become redundant if the voters decide rise above narrow community and personal considerations and vote for a higher purpose. In the event, the only two parties with a realistic chance of emerging winner are the PMLN and PTI. But if this doesn't happen then a hung assembly at the centre will be the most likely

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outcome. What remains to be seen is whether such an assembly will allow for the emergence of a relatively coherent and stable coalition or it will be so badly divided that no stable government is possible.

Back of the envelope calculations indicate that if voting takes place along traditional lines, the worst case scenario in the 342 seat National Assembly will be as follows: the PPP is ends up with anything between 60-80 seats; PMLN between 100-120 seats; PTI between 40-60; MQM 18-25; PMLQ 15-20; JUIF 6-10; ANP 6-10; Jamaat Islami 4-6 and the balance by smaller parties. Other variations of such a scenario will take a few seats from one of the parties and add to the tally of another party, without changing the strength and composition of the Assembly in any meaningful way. For instance, the ANP might not be able to even get 5 seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while the JUIF (contesting elections under the flag of MMA, may get around 10-15 seats. The MMA tally could even go up higher if closer to the elections the Jamaat Islami joins this alliance. For now the Jamaat is cocking a snook at Maulana Fazlur Rehman of JUIF by forging an alternate MMA with parties like JUI-ideological, a JUP faction, Maulana Samiul Haqs JUIS and the Sunni extremist avatar of the Sipah-e-Sahaba, the ASWJ. Another possibility is that the PPP suffers reverses in Sindh and its tally is reduced to around 35-45 seats with PMLF and PMLN (along with some nationalists) winning around a dozen seats in Sindh. Similarly, the PTI could cut into PMLN votes in Central and North Punjab and raise its tally to 70-75 and the PMLN could make up some of this loss at the expense of the PPP in South Punjab and PMLQ in Central Punjab.

In such an Assembly no stable and coherent coalition will be possible. The skill, suppleness, and if you will, spinelessness, that Asif Zardari displayed to keep his current disparate alliance partners together, is not something that either Nawaz Sharif or Imran Khan can emulate. Unless two of the big three parties get together, it will be impossible to run a coalition in this kind of a hung assembly. But the chances of either a PPP-PMLN alliance, or a PPP-PTI tie-up, or a PMLN-PTI arrangement are negligible. And for the PMLN or PTI to tie up with smaller parties to reach the magic number of 172 will involve pandering to all kinds of demands and tantrums which neither Imran Khan nor Nawaz Sharif will be able to tolerate for very long. The odds therefore are that if such an Assembly emerges, it will be a short-lived one and Pakistan could go in for another General Election in an year or so. Alternatively, Asif Zardari might pull a rabbit out of his hat and stitch up a coalition of all small parties and individual politicians to get another term for his party. This possibility will depend crucially on whether PMLN and PTI tally crosses the 172 mark. If it does, then a PPP-led coalition will not be possible. But if the combined PTI-PMLN tally falls short of the 172 mark by around 15-20 seats, then a PPP-led coalition will become a very real possibility, not in the least because of Zardari's considerable coalition building skills.

The second scenario in a hung assembly setting is that either the PMLN or PTI come quite close to the half-way mark i.e. get around 140-150 seats. This will allow them to enlist the support of smaller parties and independents who can be made pliable through a

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combination of arm-twisting, browbeating and bribery. While such a coalition will remain fragile, it is likely to have a longer shelf-life than an Assembly that is split three ways. But the big question will be whether the compromises that will inevitably be required in such a coalition, the government will be able to push through the rescuing reforms without which Pakistan will not be able to climb out of the hole in which it finds itself. Will not the pulls and pressures of coalition politics, not to mention a very powerful opposition, make such reforms very difficult? And will such a coalition be able to handle the political and social fallout of the pain that invariably accompanies rescuing reform? Interestingly, the military establishment will be quite comfortable with such a coalition because it will leave enough space for the 'deep state' to keep the government (whether led by PMLN or PTI) unsettled enough so that it doesn't get ideas about imposing civilian supremacy in the country. At the same time, a conflict between the government and the military establishment will be inherent in such a coalition because both Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan are quite clear that they will be their own bosses and not take 'dictation' from the generals. On issues like War on Terror, negotiating with or fighting the Pakistani Taliban, relations with Afghanistan, India and US, dealing with the disaffection and alienation in Balochistan etc. both the army and the civilian leadership will want to call the shots.

The third scenario is that either the PMLN or the PTI manage to get at least a simple majority and are able to form a government. On the face of it, this will give a stable government with the mandate to undertake reforms and make important policy changes. But since such a government will not be operating in a vacuum, it will face stiff resistance from the opposition and the military. Unlike Nawaz Sharif who religiously resisted the temptation of hobnobbing with the army against the PPP-led government, the PPP and other opposition parties might not be averse to conspiring with the military establishment to destabilise the government. What is more, in both the second and third scenarios, the attitude of the PMLN and PTI to the interventionism and activism of the judiciary in affairs of administration, legislation, taxation, and even politics might not be as craven as that of the PPP. This then will be another fault-line that will hold the potential for destabilising the government. Finally, the fact that for the first two years, i.e. till 2015, the PMLN and PTI will not enjoy a majority in the Senate (the latter will have zero representation) will make legislation very difficult.

Inherent Instability

In the final analysis, regardless of the results that the next elections throw up, political instability in Pakistan is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Consequently, the economy will continue to tank, adding to the domestic social and political pressures, which could well head in the direction of a breakdown. The ability and capacity of the next government to combat Islamist terror groups, both of the 'friendly' and 'unfriendly' variety is unlikely to improve. Confusion, compromises and complicity on the issue of terrorism is

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going to continue and this will have an impact both on the internal security situation (and along with it on the economy) as well as international relations. Institutional incoherence and conflict will get further entrenched into the system making governance difficult. Political and social disharmony will increase. In short, uncertainty about the future of the country will deepen and Pakistan will become even more ungovernable, unmanageable and unviable.

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The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non- partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media fields have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organization to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelize fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its establishment, VIF has successfully embarked on quality research and scholarship in an effort to highlight issues in governance and strengthen national security. This is being actualized through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive-dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of the VIF form the lasting deliverables of the organisation's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.

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