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ELECTORAL STUDIES

Election 2002 in NWFP and Balochistan: Reflections of the Dramatic Success of MMA

Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani

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Introduction

The 2002 elections in the NWFP and Balochistan were noticed with great interest because they produced a majority government of MMA, an alliance of Pakistan's leading Islamist parties in NWFP and a coalition government of MMA and Muslim League(Q) in Balochistan. While MMA's component parties had a history of doing well in previous elections in these two provinces, the level of success in 2002 was much more dramatic, especially in the NWFP Province. MMA's success in NWFP also enabled it to become a leading opposition bloc at the federal level in the National Assembly; and its leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman was subsequently appointed as leader of Opposition in the National Assembly.

As the current Parliament completes its term in 2007 and prospect for fresh elections are being discussed, it is quite natural to raise the issue: what factors were responsible for MMA's good performance in 2002, and is it poised to put up similar or different performance in 2007, should the elections be held in this year?

This paper addresses the above questions, by first explaining the 2002 election and then speculating about the forthcoming elections.

Part 1

Analysis of 2002 Elections in NWFP and Balochistan

We shall look at the following aspects of the 2002 elections:

1. Voter turn-out rates
2. Party share in votes in 2002
3. Party share of votes in previous elections(comparative analysis)
4. Party share in seats in the Assemblies and the formation of political alliances.

Voter Turn-out Rates

Voter turn-out rate in NWFP in 2002 was approximately 34%. This is not out of pattern with previous elections.

In Balochistan the voter turn-out was 30% in 2002. The range in previous elections was around the same.

One prominent question on voter turn-out in NWFP is the gender difference. Is the gap between the male and female turn-out rate in NWFP markedly different from other provinces? My previous research established an approximate 10% point difference between male and female voter turn-out rate on the average. The finding was based on a very extensive analysis of polling station level data in the 1990 elections. It has been corroborated by other evidence. Going by that reference point we come to the conclusion that while female voter turn-out might be severely curtailed in some constituencies, wherein competing candidates connive and contract to prevent all women from voting, the practice might be limited to certain pockets of NWFP.

The total voter turn-out in NWFP was around 6% point lower than the national level. This is consistent with previous elections in the province, and is perhaps partly attributable to lower female participation. However, if the practice of keeping all women out of voting was widely prevalent in the entire province, the difference in turn-out rates compared to national average would be even wider.

Party Share in Votes

NWFP:

In 2002 National Assembly elections the party share of total cast votes was approximately as follows:

MMA: 45%; PML(Q):13%; Independents: 10%, while others (See table) scored less than 10%.

BALUCHISTAN:

The party share of votes in Balochistan presented a very fragmented distribution. This has been quite characteristic of Balochistan in previous elections as well. Thus MMA received the single largest share at 19% of total polled votes, following by PML(Q) at 16%; BNM received 11%, while others (See table) received 10% or less of the polled votes.

Table 1

Province	Name of Party	Percentage of Polled votes	NA Seats	Number of Votes (Approx. Round off)
NWFP	MMA	45%	36	1.5 million
	PML(Q)	13%	4	426,000
	PPP(BB)	9%	1	303,000
	ANP	9%	-	294,000
	PML(N)	5%	-	155,000
	Independent	13%	5	441,000
	Others	6%	1	216,000
	Total	100%	47	3.3 million

Note: Slight discrepancy between this and total ahead due to rounding off of decimals

Table 2

Province	Name of Party	Percentage of Polled votes	NA Seats	Number of Votes (Approx. Round off)
Balochistan	MMA	19%	6	178,000
	PML(Q)	16%	2	152,000
	BNP	11%	-	103,000
	JWP	10%	1	94,000
	PPP(BB)	10%	-	90,000
	Independent	6%	1	59,000
	Others	27%	2	252,000
	Total	100%	12	929,000

Note: Slight discrepancy between this and total ahead due to rounding off of decimals.

Party Share of Votes in Previous Elections (Comparative time series data)

For the purpose of this section we shall primarily focus on the elections in NWFP where the change in political landscape appeared to be more dramatic than in Balochistan.

First the statistical data, in the form of the following table:

Table 3

Trends in Voting Shares

NWFP

Name of Party	2002	1997	1993	1990	1988
MMA	45%	-	-	-	-
JUI(F)	-	8%*	-	21%	9%
PML(N)/IJI	5%	37%	23%	24%	27%
PML(Q)	13%	-	-	-	-
PPP(BB)/PDA	9%	10%	11%	23%	23%
PPP(Sherpao)	3%	-	-	-	-
ANP	9%	19%	14%	15%	18%
Independent/Others	16%	26%	52%	18%	23%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*JI had boycotted the election in 1997

Table 4

Trends in Voting Shares (Balochistan)

Balochistan

Name of Party	2002	1997	1993	1990	1988
MMA	19%	-	-	-	-
JUI(F)	-	-	10%	19%	17%
PML(Q)	16%	-	-	-	-
PML(N)JI	1%	-	7%	12%	21%
PPP(BB)	10%	-	18%	15%	7%
JWP/BNP	10%	-	8%	19%	12%
BNP	7%	-	-	-	-
National Alliance	9%	-	-	-	-
PKMAP/PMAI	6%	-	14%	10%	7%
Independent/Others	22%	-	42%	26%	35%
Total	100%	-	99%	101	99%

Note: 1997 data not readily available. Will be provided later

The above table suggests that in 2002, MMA was able to rally behind it the traditional (which for want of better description one might call as rightist) vote of Muslim League and the Islamist parties, including JUI and JI. It might be appropriate to divide the historic voting blocs in NWFP into five groups, namely: Religious parties; Nationalists (ANP); PPP; Muslim League and Independents. The major loser group in 2002 elections seems to be the Nationalists (ANP) and Independents. Each one of them lost 10% points. PPP largely retained its share of votes, while the religious party and Muslim League vote was reshaped in a major way.

The success of MMA in the 2002 elections in NWFP owed itself partly to consolidating the traditional rightist vote which rallied behind it, and partly to the loss of vote by the nationalist bloc of ANP and the Independents.

The sequence of events turned out to be as follows:

MMA came closest to the voter sentiments on the crisis in Afghanistan and what the average Pakistani saw as objectionable policies of the United States. The sentiment was however captured by the religious party bloc rather than any individual party or leader. This put pressure on religious parties to form a common platform. The common platform of MMA helped them pool the existing votes of all Islamist parties and to possibly win more votes through the 'halo' effect of putting an effective group which showed signs of success at the polls.

This whole process was possibly further reinforced by what many analysts believed to be support by the establishment or some parts of it.

If one was to lump together the traditional rightist block, represented by MMA and Muslim League as one, PPP into a second and ANP/Independent as a third, it is quite evident that compared to 1997 elections, the **MMA/ML rightist bloc gained** 18% points in votes (up from 45% to 63%) while the **Nationalist ANP/Independent bloc lost** roughly equal number of votes (down from 45% to 25%). The PPP by and large retained its share: it had polled 10% in 1997 and obtained 12% in 2002(counting both PPPP and Sherpao Group). To summarize or even caricature one might say that the sentiment of Islamic Solidarity/Islamic nationalism superseded Pushtoon nationalism in the 2002 elections. Islamic solidarity replaced or produced a new variation on the traditional mass based, anti-empire pushtoon solidarity once shaped by the red shirts of Bacha Khan in the first half of last century.

LOOKING AHEAD

Given this background what would one expect from the next elections which are due in November 2007 when the current Parliament completes its 5 year term?

What factors would be most potent in determining the outcome of the next election? Will the performance of MMA in the NWFP Government be a major electoral issue and determine its outcome, or will other factors play a more vital role?

In my view three factors are likely to make substantial impact, namely: Rules of the Game and the Nature of Playing Field; Shape of Electoral Alliance; and Voters' Perception of the Performance of MMA government during 2002-2007. The importance of these factors may be in the same order of priority. Let me explain this, one by one.

Rules of the Game and Nature of Playing Field

The study of elections, both historically and contemporaneously, suggests that voters cast their vote with a strategic perspective to affect the outcome of the election and vest authority in a person or group that they find most appropriate to govern on the prevailing playing field. This is in contrast to the normative (some would say utopian) vision of an individual voter voting for a person or party whose programme or personality he or she admires the most and finds it to be closest to own world view and policy preferences.

Consequently when elections are held under colonial occupation it is not uncommon to find that voters occasionally vote for one of the most effective partner of the occupying forces. In the sub-continent it was witnessed in self government elections in India during the British rule. When and where colonial rule seemed entrenched and elections were seen as an exercise to produce the most appropriate managers of public affairs, majority of voters cast their votes in favour of one of the partners of the occupying powers. However, when politics turned its tide and 'transformation

politics' appeared as an electoral option, the tenor of voter behaviour underwent its own transformation. It was remarkable that the elections held during British rule in India produced results in the Punjab Province which moved from one end of the pendulum that is supportive of partners of colonial rule to the challengers of colonial rule within one decade.

In more recent times, the elections held in Afghanistan and Iraq produced results favorable to the foreign occupying military authorities. Were the voters endorsing foreign military occupation? Perhaps not. It is more likely that they saw elections as an exercise to choose one of the local partners to represent them in management team of the occupying forces. They had a specific perception about the nature of the playing field and thus made their strategic choice within that context.¹

Extending this discussion to the current Pakistani politics especially the next elections in NWFP, one would like to ponder on the likely perceptions of voters about the playing field of Pakistan politics. In other words do the voters in NWFP look upon the next five years as a playing field on which General Musharraf and the army will rule through various instruments of authority including the elected assemblies and governments, and elections would be an exercise to choose a team to assist General Musharraf and the army. To put it more bluntly: would elections be held to choose 'Rulers' or 'Managers'?

Should General Musharraf get himself elected from the sitting Parliament, it is highly likely that next elections will be interpreted as elections to choose Managers in the Musharraf team.

How would this affect voter's behaviour? The voter might take the 'low road' and favour a group which it expects to work harmoniously with Musharraf, or take the 'high road' and rebel against the rules of the game .

We might like to define the 'average line' of voter preferences and then speak about a 'low' and 'high' road with reference to it. The 'low' being a choice to look upon

¹ For a discussion about distinction between 'strategic' and 'sincere' voting and the application of 'second best choice' principle in voter behaviour see the work of Nobel laureate economist Kenneth Arrow.

elections as means to choose '**managers**' in the Musharraf set up and 'high' meaning elections to choose new '**rulers**'.

For sake of simplicity, it might be fair to assume the 1997 election results² as the average base line of voter preferences, and analyze the possible variations from it in subsequent years depending upon voter perceptions about the playing field.

The outcome of the next elections, according to this argument, is highly dependent on whether or not General Musharraf can get himself re-elected before the elections and make a convincing case that next five years should be treated as a period where the law of necessity requires a sharp departure from both the letter and spirit of the Constitution. Under normal circumstances the Prime Minister, chosen through the popular electoral process, should serve as the Chief Executive and Parliament should be the body to both produce and oversee executive leadership. This is not the case in Musharraf set up and his rules for playing field for the next elections. The voter had given a tacit acquiescence to this arrangement during the prevailing term. The future is nevertheless uncertain. Until that uncertainty gets cleared through the fate of Musharraf Presidency and the uniform issue, any assessment about the likely outcome of next elections is not very meaningful.

² The reader should, however, keep in view that Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) had boycotted the 1997 elections. That is a slight complication in taking those elections as the 'average' reference point.

Some General Reflections on the Role of Elections in Democratic Governance

At the end I would like to make a slight departure to reflect upon the broader issue of role of elections in democratic governance. While Pakistan essentially provides the perspective for my remarks, these reflections are not limited to it.

Elections are conceived as a means to determine the 'will of the people' with reference to choosing representative who can then rule over people by way of governance in a given political entity. Now when the political entity is a '**sovereign State**', elections produce '**popular rule**'. But to the extent that states lose their sovereignty or that their sovereignty gets circumscribed, elections produce a different outcome. In the extreme case when a political entity is under military (or foreign) occupation, elections produce 'managers' who partner with the occupation rulers to provide governance in the political entity. Empirically studies of electoral behaviour suggest that voter behaviour can change very dramatically depending on their perceptions about the degree of sovereignty in a political entity. The dynamics of elections in sovereign states or sovereign conditions are very different.

As it now appears sovereignty is being lost by all political entities including the countries of the so-called first world and mature democracies, as well as the marginalized states of the world of economic underdevelopment and poverty. It is being lost to forces of globalization everywhere. Driven by complexity of government, sovereignty in mature democracies sneaks away to various forms of national and regional technocratic elites. In the poor world, especially many Muslim lands sovereignty is being lost to local and foreign military rule. The loss of sovereignty is a matter of degree and hence a spectrum of '**quasi-sovereign**' conditions needs to be spelled out. As all sovereign conditions are partial, we need to develop the concept of "degrees of sovereignty", and specify indicators which can be operationalized.

The main argument of this paper suggests that the deeper structure of voting patterns is strongly correlated with voters' perception about the "degrees of sovereignty" in a political entity.