

The Rise of King Khan

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An analysis in this column last week looked at the importance of Punjab in Imran Khan conquering it and Shahbaz Sharif holding the fort. The election results clearly indicate that PTI is making significant electoral inroads into Punjab, thereby forming a strong claim to the national throne in Islamabad.

there significant trends that one could identify in the 2018 elections? Is Pakistan in the way to become a stable democracy with three elections since 2008 on a row since 2008? Or, does the 2018 elections raise a few questions as well on the future of democratic process?

could identify the following five major trends in the 2018 elections.

1. Rise of PTI, across the Provinces

Without a doubt, 2018 elections belong to the PTI and Imran Khan. The party may not have achieved a simple majority in the elections at the national level. Outside the KP provincial assembly, the party does not have a simple majority either at the national or the provincial levels. However, its electoral rise is phenomenal.

the following facts. In 2002 elections, the party could not even secure one percentage of the total votes polled. It could obtain only one seat for the National Assembly. Imran Khan from Mianwali won the lone seat. In the previous elections in 1997, Imran Khan contested from seven seats and could not gain from any of them.

the elections took place in 2008, the confidence was so low, that the party could not even contest. The change started with the 2013 elections. It was the turning point. More than the seats it won for the Parliament in the 2013 elections, what was significant was it became the main opposition. It also formed the government in KP. There was no turning back ever since.

elections, has catapulted the PTI to the next level. Look at the numbers. It has secured more seats (116 in the Parliament) at the national level than the PML-N (64), and PPP (43) put together. PTI may still not

have a simple majority to form the government, yet, it is electorally the largest party.

, the PTI not only has got more number of seats than the PML-N and PPP put together, but it has also got from all the four provinces. Consider the numbers again and compare it with the other political parties. PML-N and PPP seats for the National Assembly come predominantly from Punjab and Sindh respectively. Whereas, the PTI has won substantial seats from all the four provinces.

, the percentage of the votes that the PTI polled in comparison with the other parties. The PTI has polled more than 30 per cent of the total votes at the national level. Compare it with the PML-N's 24 per cent and the PPP's 13. In the 2013 elections, these three parties – PTI, PML-N and PPP secured 31, 16 and 15 per cent respectively. Though the PPP has more or less retained the percentage of the votes it had polled, the PTI has leapt forward at the cost of the PML-N and a few other regional parties.

, the most critical aspect of the PTI's rise – its performance in Punjab – the heartland of Pakistan, and the backyard of the PML-N. Not only for the seats for the Parliament from Punjab, even to form the provincial government in Lahore – the PTI's performance is phenomenal. Ten years ago, in 2008, even Imran Khan would not have dreamt that his party would be in a position to consider forming the government at Punjab provincial assembly in 2018.

the PML-N remains the largest party for the provincial assembly of Punjab, the PTI is only a few seats behind. If the independents join the PTI (as one could witness during the last couple of days), the PTI may even become the largest party in Punjab!

2013 elections, the PML-N could secure more than 300 seats for the Punjab provincial assembly; it was a complete sweep. The PTI managed only 30 seats. In 2018, the PTI has increased its seats share by four-fold in the provincial assembly by securing more than 120, mostly at the cost of PML-N.

providing an alternative to the PML factions in Punjab should be one of its most significant achievements of the 2018 elections.

of the National Parties

The second significant trend one could trace in the 2018 elections is the regionalisation of two major political parties that have formed the government during the 1990s. Today, the PML-N has become a regional party with most of its seats for the National Assembly coming from Punjab, with a few exceptions from KP and Balochistan. The PPP has become another regional party with most of its seats for the national assembly coming from Sindh.

the provincial assemblies, though the PPP still has a strong presence to form a government in Sindh, for the PML-N, it would be a herculean task to do so in Punjab.

MMA could secure only 12 seats for the national assembly, and get around four per cent of the total

votes polled. Most of the seats that the MMA could achieve come from KP and Balochistan.

of Regional Parties

The third significant trend in the 2018 elections is the rout of regional parties at the national level. Though parties like MQM, BNP, PkMAP, ANP etc. have a strong local presence in Sindh, Balochistan and KP respectively, in 2018 elections their bases have further eroded.

the MQM for example. In 2013 elections, the MQM was the fourth largest party, winning eleven seats from Sindh (mostly from Karachi) and capturing more than five per cent of the total votes polled. In 2018, the MQM could win only six seats, and achieve less than two per cent of the votes polled. Today, the PTI has got more seats from Karachi, the MQM heartland!

While the ANP could secure a lone seat for the National Assembly in 2018, the PkMAP could not get that even. The ANP has lost its space substantially to the PTI in KP and Sindh. So has the PkMAP in Balochistan.

only consolation to the above trend is Balochistan National Party (BNP) and the newly formed Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). The BNP has got more seats in 2018 (3) at for the Parliament, than in 2013 (1). The newly formed BAP has won four seats from Balochistan for the National Assembly.

decline of the Right, but the rise of Extreme Right

A curious trend in the 2018 elections has been the decline of the religious, political parties that contested under the MMA banner, but the substantial rise of the far right – led by the Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP).

2013 elections the JUI led by Fazlur Rehman could secure 11 seats and was the fifth largest party at the national level. The Jamaat-e-Islami won two seats; both the JUI-F and JI alone had polled close to 5.5 per cent of the total votes in 2013.

2018 elections, the religious parties revived the MMA and contested together under one banner. Despite that, it could secure only 4.8 per cent of the total votes polled, and win 12 seats. On the other hand, the TLP, which was formed within the last one year, though have not secured a single seat for the national assembly has polled more than four per cent of the total votes!

TLP represents the far right in Pakistan today. The party came to prominence with openly supporting Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of Salman Taseer, then the Governor of Punjab. Ever since its electoral rise and its street power has become substantial. Though it has neither won a single seat in the 2018 elections nor in those bye-elections in Punjab and KP earlier during 2017-18, the TLP has become a political force.

PTI, Stronger Opposition

The last trend one could identify in the 2018 elections is the emergence of the PTI as the single largest party in the Parliament. But still, the party does not have a simple majority in Islamabad.

PML-N and the PTI along with the MMA have decided to sit in the opposition. This would mean, a stronger opposition in Parliament to the PTI led government. Though there have been talks about the boycott of the Parliament and not accepting the electoral results, it appears that the opposition parties are likely to pursue the Parliamentary course.

case in Punjab provincial assembly will also be the same. Whether the PTI succeeds in forming the government, or the PML-N retaining it, the opposition is going to be strong and play a dominant role in Lahore.

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