SUPPORT BASES: Through the Labyrinth of Ethnicity, Urbanity and Wealth

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The history of politics in South Asia bears testimony to the fact that different social, ethnic, linguistic and demographic groups in the region tend to differ in their political aspirations and demands. In the aftermath of the 2008 elections it is, therefore, important to analyze which political parties represent which ethnic and linguistic groups. We also ask which economic groups dominate the vote base of different political parties. This analysis allows us insights into how the mandate is divided between political parties and allows us to assess how broad based is the vote base of different political parties?

A number of presumptions, based on casual analysis of election results about whom various parties represent do the rounds. The PPP is a 'rural' and predominantly Sindhi party, the PML N is an urban party of the Punjab, the PML Q represents certain rural areas of the Sindh and Punjab, whereas the MQM is a party of Urdu-speaking urban Sindh.

Analyzing the underpinnings of representation in national assembly elections allow us to enquire into the how different ethnic, linguistic and economic groups in the country are represented in the various political parties. Asking this is important because different regional and socio-economic groups tend to give different mandates and vary in their support for the mainstream political parties. These questions can be answered with the help of the Dawn Election Cell data.

Table 1: Party Vote Shares by linguistic Segment
National Assembly Elections 2008

	ANP	MMA	MQM	PMLN	PMLQ	PPP	Others	Indep	Total Valid
Punjabi	0	0	0	33	28	27	0	10	100
Sindhi	0	1	1	1	21	56	16	4	100
Pushto	21	15	0	6	11	19	6	22	100
Saraiki	0	4	0	15	29	38	10	5	100
Balochi	0	7	0	0	30	15	16	31	100
Urdu	0	0	92	1	0	7	0	0	100
Others[1]	1	3	0	38	30	5	0	22	100
Heterogeneous	1	1	24	13	17	31	1	12	100
Total	2	2	8	20	23	31	4	11	100

Source: Dawn Election Cell
Note: (1) The 'others' category is dominated by Hindko speaking areas

Using Population Census 1998 data, we can classify national assembly constituencies into specific linguistic electoral segments if a 60 per cent plus majority of its adult population speaks the same mother tongue. If such a majority does not exist, we classify the segment as linguistically 'heterogeneous'. We also use the Census 1998 data to create urban, rural and peri-urban segments. An electoral segment is classified as 'urban'

or 'rural' if the majority of its adult population lives in urban or rural areas, otherwise constituencies are classified as 'peri-urban'. Finally, using the 1998 Census we create a wealth index by electoral segment based on literacy rates, proportion of mud houses and proportion of houses with electricity. This index is used to classify different electoral segments into the poorest, middle and richest wealth categories. This data reveals fascinating insights into the pattern of representation.

It shows that the PPP and the PMLQ have emerged as the two political parties with the broadest representation across linguistic segments. They have obtained very sizeable vote shares in every linguistic segment, except for the Urdu segment and the Hindko segment in the case of the PPP (Table 1). The PPP's vote share domination in the Sindhi, Saraiki and heterogeneous segments is self-evident and it is the second largest party in terms of vote shares in the Pushto segment. Clearly, these two political parties can claim to represent all ethnic and linguistic groups in the country barring the Urdu-speaking. Although, the PMLQ's claim that it has the highest vote share in Balochistan is clearly an aberration because of the impact of the electoral boycott by the Baloch nationalists.

The data also shows that the resurrection of the PMLN in the recent elections is confined to the Punjabi, Hindko and Saraiki segments. Its dominance in the Punjabi and Hindko segments is self-evident and it appears that these segments tend to vote similarly (Table 1). However, in the current elections the PMLN has failed to have any significant representation in the Balochi, Sindhi and Pushto segments.

The MQM monopolizes the vote share in the Urdu-speaking segment and the heterogeneous segments of Urban Sindh. In spite of its claims it has failed to break into non Urdu-speaking linguistic segments in the country.

The ANP is clearly a party that represents Pushto speakers (Table 1). Be it NWFP, Balochistan or Karachi the only linguistic segment it has reasonable representation in is the Pushto segment. In fact, it tends to dominate this segment. Its vote share in the Balochi segment is 0% and in the Hindko segment (represented by "others" in Table 1), the other important segment in the NWFP, it is merely 1%.

If the MMA bills itself as a national religious alliance, the data makes it clear that it has now emerged as a predominantly Pashtun party. The only linguistic segment in which it was able to acquire reasonable representation is the Pushto speaking segment, while its presence in all other ethnic segments was extremely low.

Do rural or urban voters dominate the vote base of different political parties? The vote base of the PPP and ANP is evenly split across rural, peri-urban and urban areas. However, PMLQ and MMA's vote base remains predominantly rural with much more than 65% of their votes coming from rural areas (Table 2). Although, the loss of the MMA vote base in urban areas is partly a result of the Jamat-i-Islami's election boycott. The MQM remains a party dominated by an urban vote base. Within the remaining parties PMLN has the largest urban vote base.

Table 2: Distribution of Party Vote by Rural-Urban Area
National Assembly Elections 2008

	ANP	MMA	MQM	PMLN	PMLQ	PPP	Others	Indep	Total Valid National Votes
Rural	52	71	1	45	65	48	51	60	50
Peri-Urban	26	21	1	24	26	29	41	27	25
Urban	22	8	98	31	10	23	8	13	25
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Dawn Election Cell

Voters from which wealth segment dominate the vote base of different political parties? The PPP's voter is evenly drawn from the poor, rich and middle wealth segments of the country (Table 3). The MMA and the PMLQ draw disproportionately less votes from the wealthier segments of the country. Interestingly, the bulk of the ANP vote comes from the middle wealth segments. As opposed to this, the vote base of the PMLN is largely drawn from the country's richest segments and the MQM's vote base is monopolized by these segments.

Table 3: Distribution of Party Vote by Wealth Ranking of Region
National Assembly Elections 2008

Wealth Rank	ANP	MMA	MQM	PMLN	PMLQ	PPP	IND	Total Valid National Votes
Poorest	16	49	1	14	36	33	42	29
Middle	67	44	9	29	37	34	42	34
Richest	18	7	90	57	27	33	16	37
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Putting this information together allows us to get interesting insights into the question: who represents whom? Lets us start with the smaller parties. The MQM's mandate comes from the Urdu-speaking electoral segments of the country, where it monopolizes representation. Its vote base is largely drawn from the urbanized and richest segments of Pakistan's electoral polity. The party's claim to speak for the poorest 98 per cent of the population has not yet translated into reality, as it attracts most of its support from the wealthy segments of the country.

The ANP's mandate comes from the Pushto speaking segments across the country and the majority of its vote base comes from the middle wealth segments, even though it draws even support from voters in rural, urban and peri-urban segments. The ANP's historical image as a pro-socialist and pro-poor party does not come across very clearly. In fact, the MMA can credibly claim to have a bigger representation of the poorest regions among its voters.

The MMA (which really means JUI(F) in the current elections) uses a competing ideology to contest the ANP for the Pushto speaking segments' mandate. Furthermore, its vote base is not centered in the urban and the richest segments.

What about the three national political parties? The PMLQ has representation among nearly all linguistic groups. However, like the MMA, its vote base is not drawn from the urban and the richest segments. Interestingly, in terms of vote share it only dominates the Balochi speaking segment.

The data suggests that the PMLN has emerged as a party representing the Punjabi- and Hindko-speaking segments, which draws its votes from the urban and the richest segments of the country. It is the mandate of a large proportion of voters from these segments that it represents.

The PPP is a party that not only has representation across different linguistic groups; its vote base is evenly drawn from rural, urban and peri-urban areas as well as all wealth categories. In this sense it could be argued that the PPP is, at present, the most representative party in the country with the broadest support base.

Do the 2008 elections tell us anything about future trends of political party support? We can assume that ethnic segments will retain their relevance, but that migration will increase the proportion of heterogeneous segments – or segments where no one group enjoys and 60 per cent majority. Similarly we can expect urbanization to continue, and for it come quite largely through the increase in the prevalence of peri-urban areas. Finally, even under conditions of economic growth it is likely that there will continue to be a high level of regional inequality in wealth and infrastructure development in Pakistan.

If the parties continue to maintain their current socio-economic bases, the changes outlined above will have a number of possible impacts on their future positions. All of the ethnic-based parties are likely gradually witness an erosion of their support bases if the Pakistani landscape becomes more ethnically heterogeneous. The PPP currently dominates heterogeneous ethnic segments, and on current patterns it is likely benefit from greater ethnic heterogeneity. Parties that rely very highly on specific ethnic segments – e.g. the MQM, ANP and PMLN – will need to reach out of their traditional ethnic base areas to a broader cross-ethnic constituency if they are to expand their shares of the national vote.

Urbanisation may lead to lower vote shares for the PMLQ, independents and the MMA. This is intuitive, since the former two are thought to rely on local patronage for support, and the latter has a very specific cleric-based religious appeal in remote rural areas. As society diversifies people in these areas are likely find alternative avenues of representation. The PPP has a high presence in the peri-urban areas, whereas the PMLN and MQM are strong in urban areas. As rural areas become peri-urban the PPP is likely retain and even expand its vote share. The growth of bigger towns and cities will favour

the PMLN and MQM – though some of this expansion in their support might be dampened if they are unable to diversify their ethnic support bases.