

TRENDS: The Real Verdict

Ali Cheema, Haris Gazdar, Mohammad Farooq Naseer and Asad Sayeed

Even before the results of the 2008 elections were fully known, commentators had already started speculating about what the electorate had mandated. That it was a vote against the incumbents and for the opposition was broadly clear. Since President Musharraf had himself stated that he would regard a vote for his allies as an endorsement of his policies, the rout of the PML(Q) can be interpreted as the electorate's verdict on the president. Beyond that, however, there can be many different ways of spinning a story.

Did the electorate support the lawyer's movement by giving so many more seats to the PML(N) which associated itself closely with the cause of the deposed judges? But did it also reject that movement's tactics by dismissing the boycott campaign and increasing the turnout? Did the PPP gain from a sympathy wave, or were its gains against the Q-League simply reflection of an anti-incumbency mood? Did the people signal opposition to the "war against terrorism" by rewarding the PML(N) which had called for its redefinition, or did the rout of the MMA imply a call for an even more robust response to Islamic extremism? Did the rise of the ANP mean that ethnic nationalism was on the ascent, or did the taking of Balochistan by the federalist PML(Q) and PPP signal the exact opposite?

Table 1: Party Vote and Seat Shares 2008 (per cent)

	Number of seats won 2008	Share of seats 2008	Share of vote 2008	Share of vote 2002	Change
ANP	9	3.4	2.0	1.0	+1.0
MMA	6	2.3	2.1	11.4	-9.3
MQM	19	7.3	7.5	3.3	+4.3
PML(N)	67	25.6	19.7	11.7	+8.0
PML(Q)	40	15.3	23.0	31.4	-8.4
PPP	87	33.2	31.0	26.0	+5.0
OTH	13	3.1	3.7	5.9	-2.2
IND	24	9.9	10.7	9.3	+1.4
Total	262	100	100	100	

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Note: All analysis of 2008 elections here is based on the results of the 262 NA constituencies that had been made available by the Election Commission at the time of writing

In Pakistan's constituency-based first-past-the-post system there is always the possibility that a party's bag of seats may not reflect its share of the vote. Table 1 shows that in the 2008 National Assembly elections there was a fair correspondence between the share of seats and vote shares. ANP won a higher proportion of seats than its share of the votes, as did the PML(N). PML(Q) was the main "victim" in this regard, as its 23 per cent vote share translated into just 15 per cent of the seats. For other parties the ratios of seats and votes were broadly in agreement. The decline in MMA seats and the rise of PPP seats compared with 2002 roughly corresponded with changes in their respective shares of the popular vote.

But who gained from whom, and who lost to whom? Table 2 shows the position of the main parties in 2008 (columns) with respect to their positions in 2002 (rows). The table provides a graphic illustration of the changes between the two elections. Each column gives the number of seats that a party won in 2008, by the previous holder of the seat. For example, out of the PML(N)'s 67 seats in 2008, 5 were previously held by MMA, 11 by PML(N) itself, 29 by PML(Q), 14 by PPP, 1 by others, and 7 by independents. In other words, PML(N) held on to 11 of its 2002 seats, and also took seats from MMA, PML(Q), PPP, other parties, and independents. Each row gives the number of seats held by a party in 2002, by the present holder of the seat. For example, of the MMA's 43 seats in the 2002 elections, 8 were captured by ANP, 5 were retained, 5 were taken by MQM, 5 by PML(N), 5 by PML(Q), 13 by PPP and 2 by independents.

The shaded diagonal in the table shows seats held by a party in 2002 that were retained in 2008. Out of the 262 seats for which results were known for 2008, 111 (or 42 per cent) were on the diagonal, or retained by the incumbent. This shows a remarkable level of seat turnover – 58 per cent of all seats changed hands between parties. Table 2 confirms that the MMA and PML(Q) were the main losers, but it also shows up patterns of change.

The main beneficiary of the MMA collapse was not any other right-of-centre party, but the left-of-centre PPP. The second largest beneficiary was also the left-of-centre ANP. MQM also gained from the MMA, and this too might be interpreted as a rejection of Islamic extremism. In all, “secular” parties took 26 seats away from the MMA, while the two Muslim Leagues (which might be considered right-of-centre) took 10 seats from the religious alliance.

The PML(Q) lost seats in roughly equal numbers to the PML(N) and the PPP. Interesting, it also gained 3 seats each from these two challengers. On balance it made a net loss of 51 seats – or more than half of its total 2002 strength -- to the other two parties. The PML(N) strong showing in 2008, however, was not only at the PML(Q)'s expense. It also took 14 seats previously held by the PPP, while conceding none to the latter. The pro-Nawaz Sharif wave, ascribed by some to the lawyer's movement in Punjab, clearly overwhelmed the PPP sympathy wave in these elections.

Table 2: Change in Party Seat Position, Pakistan

PAKISTAN		NA Seats - Elections 2008								
		ANP	MMA	MQM	PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	ANP									0
	MMA	8	5	5	5	5	13		2	43
	MQM			13						13
	PML(N)				11	3				14
	PML(Q)				29	25	28	3	8	93
	PPP				14	3	42		3	62
	Others	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	2	13
	Indep				7	3	2	1	11	24
Total		9	6	19	67	40	87	8	26	262

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

There were also interesting provincial and regional contrasts in turnover between 2002 and 2008. The turnover was virtually complete in NWFP and Balochistan (Tables 3 and 4 respectively). Six out of 33 seats (18 per cent) were retained in the former, and only 2 out of 14 (14 per cent) were held in Balochistan. In both these provinces the main factor in the turnover was the collapse of the MMA vote. It is possible that the Baloch nationalist might have bagged some seats at the expense of the MMA and others.

Table 3: Change in Party Seat Position, NWFP

NWFP		NA Seats - Elections 2008							
		ANP	MMA	PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	
NA Seats Elections 2002	ANP								0
	MMA	8	4	1	4	9		1	27
	PML(N)								0
	PML(Q)			3	1				4
	PPP								0
	Others	1					1		2
	Indep								0
	Total	9	4	4	5	9	1	1	33

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Table 4: Change in Party Seat Position, Balochistan

Balochistan		NA Seats - Elections 2008						
		MMA	PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	MMA	1		1	3		1	6
	PML(N)			1				1
	PML(Q)			1	1		1	3
	PPP							0
	Others	1		1			1	3
	Indep						1	1
	Total	2	0	4	4	1	3	14

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

In Sindh (Table 5), however, 48 out of the 60 seats for which results were known, or 80 per cent of all seats, were retained by the sitting party. The PPP picked up 4 extra seats, and the MQM increased its tally by 6 seats – neither party conceded any seat. The two main parties consolidated their respective positions, but due to different factors. MQM benefited from the MMA collapse, while the PPP gained from the sympathy wave. The MQM alongwith the PML(Q) in Balochistan bucked the general national trend of an anti-incumbent vote.

Punjab (Table 6) stood between the two smaller provinces and Sindh in terms of turnover. Out of the 145 seats, 47 (32 per cent) were retained, while 68 per cent changed hands. The PML(N) swept northern Punjab at the expense of all other parties. In central Punjab too, it emerged as the largest party, with 38 out of 83 seats, and took seats from the PML(Q) and the PPP. The PPP nevertheless improved its tally over 2002 at the expense of PML(Q), and was the second largest party in the region. In southern Punjab the PPP was the main beneficiary of the collapse of PML(Q). Here too, the PPP lost some seats to PML(N), but nevertheless emerged as the largest party in the region.

Table 5: Change in Party Seat Position, Sindh

Sindh		NA Seats - Elections 2008						
		MMA	MQM	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	MMA		5		1			6
	MQM		13					13
	PML(Q)			5	2	2		9
	PPP				26			26
	Others		1		1	3		5
	Indep						1	1
	Total		0	19	5	30	5	1

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

There is a view that the contest between the PML(N) and PML(Q) was partly a dispute about who would be the real “Muslim League”. The PML(N) clearly won that bout. How did the hypothetical “Muslim League” – the PML(N) and PML(Q) combined – fare? Table 7 shows that the “Muslim League” overall position hardly changed at all. While all of the PPP’s net gain of nine seats was from the Muslim League, the latter reduced its net losses to three seats by making net gains of 3 seats each from MMA and independents.

Table 6: Change in Party Seat Position, Punjab

Punjab		NA Seats - Elections 2008						
		MMA	PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	MMA		3					3
	PML(N)		11	2				13
	PML(Q)		26	18	25	1	7	77
	PPP		13	3	16		3	35
	Others		1		1		1	3
	Indep		7	3	2		2	14
	Total		0	61	26	44	1	13

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Beyond the general statement that the 2008 elections signaled popular discontent with President Musharraf’s rule – a judgment that he paradoxically invited upon himself – many different things happened across the country. They ranged from not much changing in Sindh, to virtually everything being upturned in NWPF and Balochistan. The change in Punjab could be seen as being highly dramatic, in terms of the rise of the PML(N) from its devastation in 2002. Taking the “Muslim League” as a whole, however, the turnover in Punjab was relatively less stark, with a small change overall in favour of the PPP. Given the complexity in interpreting the “mandate” it is best to take a nuanced view – the electorate probably voted out the systemic arbitrariness of military rule in favour of the chaotic negotiation that civilian government entails.

Table 7: Change in Party Seats, Punjab with notional "Muslim League"

Punjab		NA Seats - Elections 2008					
		MMA	ML	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	MMA		3				3
	"Muslim League"		57	25	1	7	90
	PPP		16	16		3	35
	Others		1	1		1	3
	Indep		10	2		2	14
	Total		0	87	44	1	13

Table 8: Change in Party Seat Position, Northern Punjab

Northern Punjab		NA Seats - Elections 2008				
		PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	PML(N)	2				2
	PML(Q)	3	1	1		5
	PPP	2		1		3
	Indep	4				4
	Total	11	1	2	0	14

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Table 9: Change in Party Seat Position, Central Punjab

Central Punjab		NA Seats - Elections 2008						
		MMA	PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	MMA		3					3
	PML(N)		8	1				9
	PML(Q)		17	10	12		7	46
	PPP		6	1	7		2	16
	Others		1				1	2
	Indep		3	2			2	7
	Total		0	38	14	19	0	12

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Table 10: Change in Party Seat Position, Southern Punjab

Southern Punjab		NA Seats - Elections 2008					
		PML(N)	PML(Q)	PPP	Others	Indep	Total
NA Seats Elections 2002	PML(N)	1	1				2
	PML(Q)	6	7	12	1		26
	PPP	5	2	8		1	16
	Others			1			1
	Indep		1	2			3
	Total	12	11	23	1	1	48

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data