

Pakistan General Elections: A Vote Against IMF Policies and State Repression

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The general elections held on February 8th in Pakistan resulted in a split vote, with no party securing a clear majority at the national level. Voting occurred for 366 national assembly seats and for the four provincial assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The vote was divided among various right-wing parties, indicating a significant shift in political dynamics.

The centrist right-wing party Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), which had the backing of the military establishment, failed to resonate with voters. Initial results suggest that Pakistan has voted against IMF policies and state repression.

While PML-N retained its majority in the Punjab Assembly and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) secured a sweeping victory in the Sindh assembly seats, the Balochistan assembly witnessed a split vote among several nationalist and federal parties. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf-supported "independent" candidates dominated.

Despite facing obstacles such as the Election Commission of Pakistan's refusal to allow the use of its election symbol due to alleged unfair internal elections, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI)-supported "independents" emerged as the single largest political group at the national assembly.

The overall vote reflects a stance against IMF policies, which have led to an unprecedented price hike in Pakistan. These elections serve as a clear repudiation of the implementers of IMF policies and those responsible for inflation and state coercion, particularly the conservative Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, which has been in power for 16 months before the elections.

Furthermore, the vote signifies opposition to state repression, particularly targeting PTI led by Imran Khan, who faced several politically motivated convictions in the days leading up to the general election. This perceived victimization of Imran Khan mobilized voters against the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, strategically orchestrated by the military establishment. The return of three-time Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif from self-imposed exile in the UK and the swift dismissal of all cases against him underscore this collusion.

The religious political parties experienced setbacks in these elections, with only Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam making notable gains. Tehreek Labeek secured 5 to 7 percent of votes in each constituency, while Jamaat-e-Islami's independent campaign failed to yield significant results.

The elections, delayed unconstitutionally for several months by the caretaker government that assumed power in August 2023, were evidently orchestrated to favor the Muslim League-N.

The left-wing suffered from the popularity of Tehreek Insaaf, with most anti-military establishment and anti-IMF policy votes going to PTI. Left-wing candidates, including those from Haqooq Khalq

Party, Awami Workers Party, and Brabri Party, failed to secure significant support or win any seats. Notably, a national assembly seat held by Marxist Ali Wazir during the 2018 general elections was lost this time.

The elections were marred by widespread corruption, with all major political parties spending exorbitant sums to buy votes. The open sale of votes for up to 5000 Rupees (\$18) further undermined the democratic process. Campaigns lacked substantive discussion on issues, with PTI focusing on condemning Imran Khan's sentencing, PML-N rallying around the slogan "Give Nawaz to Pakistan," and PPP presenting Bilawal Bhutto as a national savior.

The outcome underscores the dominance of right-wing ideologies, though the vote lacked revolutionary fervor and was primarily a reaction to intra-right-wing conflicts rather than a clear division between left and right. This was not solely an anti-establishment vote, as PTI's anti-establishment stance remains temporary and selective in its opposition to state oppression.

Unfortunately, the elections offer little hope for positive change, as the incoming government is poised to fast-track neoliberal policies, privatize state institutions, and deepen class exploitation.

The potential government under Nawaz Sharif's leadership is expected to cozy up to the IMF and World Bank, prioritizing corporate interests over public welfare. The rise of corporate farming, facilitated by PML-N and caretaker governments, is likely to exacerbate economic inequality and fail to address the needs of small farmers.

Although the left-wing participated to some extent, their influence was limited, with fewer than 40 candidates contesting. Despite this setback, parties like Haqooq Khalq vow to continue strengthening their base among the working class through parliamentary intervention.

The incoming government will undoubtedly be capitalist and right-wing, focused on counter-reforms rather than radical change. The Left is committed to intensifying the movement of the working class, small farmers, and common people against this oppressive regime.

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P.S.

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