

Pakistan's most rigged general elections

Monday 30 July 2018, by [KHAN Lal](#), [TARIO Farooq](#) (Date first published: 28 July 2018).

ON 26 July 2018, in his election victory speech, Imran Khan gave a sober talk contrary to his very violent language used throughout the election campaign. He has "won" 116 seats of the 342 seats National Assembly of which 278 seats are contested directly on First Past The Post (FPTP) system. He is short of the 137 seats needed for the majority in the parliament. However, there are plenty of parliamentarians elected as "independents" who would either join his party or would vote for him.

Demonstrations in several cities have taken place against the post poll rigging. The majority of several dozen candidates has been turned into minority votes overnight by "unknown hands" These unknowns are known to everyone but if you write with the right name, you may disappear for this crime. Almost all the commercial media is under control by these "unknowns".

The media is instructed on daily basis by these "unknowns", all this to get a favourable mandate for their loved one "The great Imran Khan" who once was captain of the most popular game, the cricket, and won a world cup for Pakistan in 1992. Imran Khan is a conservative politician who had developed in recent years his magic love for the army generals and is keeping a kind heart for religious fanatics.

This was the most rigged election in the history of Pakistan. From Pre poll period until today on 28th July, all efforts were made to ensure that Imran Khan would get a simple majority. Prior to the elections, there were consistent attacks on Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, the ruling party, by the judiciary on the question of accountability.

The PMLN has fallen apart from the military and judicial establishment on mainly two issues. The most important was the supremacy of civilians over the military. The second was the relationship with India. PMLN wanted more trade with India and no war.

Mian Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister and a right wing politician, has to pay a heavy price for his insistence that as PM, he rules Pakistan and not the army. He was ousted by the Supreme Court, disqualified for life and now serving a ten years sentence along with his daughter at a Rawalpindi jail.

When the election date was announced, the media portrayed Imran Khan as the cleanest politician with a plan to curtail corruption. His main election slogans were "change" and "a new Pakistan". Billions of rupees were spent on advertising by his billionaires party men. The richest always smells the changing directions of power and they accordingly change their political affiliations. Most of these are called "electable", a politician who could spend billions on elections and buy votes. Imran Khan Party, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (Justice Movement), saw an influx of these "electable" who changed their party from PNLN to PTI without a hint of shame. They always did the same at the election times.

When PMLN gave tickets (nominations) to their probable candidates, phone calls were made by these "unknowns" to those nominated and were asked to return the tickets at the eleventh hour and

contest elections as independent. Those who refused were beaten up physically in their offices and homes. Threats and intimidations worked and around 40 of those who were nominated by PMLN returned their tickets and announced to contest as independent.

During the election campaign, several PMLN nominees were arrested and some disqualified for life and sent to jail on pretext of corruption. All these measures gave a general impression that military and judicial establishment want Imran Khan to win the general elections at any cost. Imran Khan has already created a myth among the youth that we need a change and a corruption free government. There was euphoria among a large section of youth in Pakistan that Imran Khan is not corrupt and that he needs "electable" to win an overall majority.

The two banned outfits of religious fanatics were allowed to contest elections by the Election Commission. The strategy was if the extreme right would contest elections, they will reduce the PMLN votes who were favoured by these religious groups in the past. One religious group Tehreek Labaik became the third largest party in terms of fielding candidates all around Pakistan after PTI and PMLN.

Over 300,000 military men were deployed in all the polling stations with a judicial power to military officers on the "request" of the Election Commission to ensure a complete security. This was aided by the religious terrorists who carried out suicidal attacks on public meeting during election campaign killing hundreds including the candidates. In one unfortunate incident, over 150 were killed in Mastung district of Balochistan province including the candidate.

Most of the human rights groups in Pakistan including Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) criticized this gross pre poll rigging through press conferences and termed these extraordinary measures to favour a certain political party.

On the Election Day, the polling went smoothly and military presence was at everywhere. However, the rigging work started after 10 pm, four hours after the counting started. Suddenly most of the results of the constituencies where the difference was between 1000-5000 were stopped. Then, there was an almost blackout of the counting, it remerged early in the morning, those winning elections at night time were losing and PTI candidates were always the winners.

The final results were delayed for over 72 hours, it never happened earlier.

The results showed PTI with 116 seats, PMLN 63 and PPP with 43 seats at the national parliament. PPP under the young leadership of Bilawal Bhutto improved from their previous devastating results of 28 seats. PPP kept control of Sindh assembly with more seats than they held previously, Khaiber Pukhton Khwa saw PTI "land slide". In Punjab, PMLN kept it majority with a drastic reduction of seats and PTI now vowing to form the government in Punjab also with the help of the elected "independents".

The two religious fanatic groups who contested got no national assembly seat but one of them Tehreek Labaik got two Sindh assembly seats. They did not do badly. In almost every constituency, they got from 1-10 percent of the votes and in some they got over 20 percent votes. This is quite alarming situation.

The Left contested almost 50 national and provincial seats from all over Pakistan. However, one Wazeer Ali from The Struggle group who is part of Left Democratic Front won a national assembly seat from former federally administered area called FATA. The area is dominated by religious fanatics. However Ali Wazeer comfortable majority of 16000 votes had given a new hope the forces of the Left in Pakistan. Ali Wazeer contested as independent candidate. He was leader of Pashtun

Tahafaz Movement which organized this year mass public rallies across Pakistan for compensation of those victims of “war on terror”.

In my home constituency of Toba Tek Singh, where I contested elections for Punjab Assembly in 2013 elections, AWP candidate Mohammed Zubair came on third position with 4586 votes leaving behind the candidates of the religious fanatic parties and Pakistan People’s Party. I did not take part in the elections as candidate because of health issues, however, campaigned for our candidate with two mass rallies in the constituency.

Almost all political parties except PTI has termed this general election as the most rigged. They have rejected the results. PTI who launched a three year long movement against the rigging during 2013 elections termed this election as the most free and fair in history of Pakistan, the only party to say so.

The new government is in the making. It is quite obvious that Imran Khan will become the new prime minister. This new government will be a weak one and would have to face a severe economic crisis. The designated finance minister of PTI has already hinted to turn to IMF for a new loan. One of the main issues that PTI campaigned on was the massive foreign loans obtained during PMLN five years from China. Now they have no shame to say even before taking over power that they have to turn to IMF.

The government would try to improve the tax base in the initial period and that would bring them into contradiction with strong traders lobby who have no habit of paying taxes. Imran Khan hinted to have friendly relationship with India. This would not be done. With an open support of the army generals, it is out of question that there will be improved relationship between Pakistan and India.

Religious fundamentalism will grow in the next period as Imran Khan has already pledged to “negotiate” with Taliban and he had always a soft attitude towards religious fanatics. He has supported some known Madarasas associated with Taliban with state subsidies while he controlled KP government during 2013-18.

The opposition parties have announced agitation against the election results and have demanded fresh elections. However, they might not succeed in launching a successful agitation. Interesting times ahead.

Farooq Tariq

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Pakistan: Imran Khan’s Pyrrhic Victory

As the PTI (Pakistan Justice Movement) emerged with the largest number of seats in the national assembly there were widespread jubilations, mainly amongst the petit bourgeois youth. However, the enthusiasm seems to have been somewhat muted and its echoes in society limited. It was tainted by accusations of blatant pre-poll rigging by the establishment that had come into conflict with Nawaz Sharif, on issues ranging from Sharif’s quest for improving business relations with India, the granting of contracts in the CPEC and other major projects and civilian supremacy, trying to take

control on security issues, the dealings by the military with the so-called “good Taliban”, and the independence of the civilian government. In a controversial verdict, few legal experts agree upon, the Supreme Court ultimately ousted Sharif from the prime ministership last July.

However, it's not only due to the manipulations and intimidations of the deep state's pre-poll rigging that the PML and other parties lost the elections. There was a genuine PTI vote bank, based on disillusioned youth suffering from the curse of unemployment and social neglect. Imran Khan's main political rhetoric has been to 'end corruption' – something that he portrays as the fundamental cause of all the ills affecting Pakistan. He has used it to create hatred against his obscenely wealthy rivals within the ruling class – targeting only the Sharif clan.

And yet there is no dearth of billionaires, corrupt land grabbers and Mafiosi in his own party, the PTI. With the full involvement of the corrupt barons of the corporate media linked to the bosses of Gig economy, the media stirred a malicious campaign against the Sharif and his meteorically rising daughter Maryam. Those sections of the deep state that Nawaz Sharif had dared to defy backed his campaign with a vengeance. This discourse was also intended to push into political oblivion those seething issues tormenting the masses, from poverty to unemployment and from deprivation to lack of health care and education. It was an elections campaign sans the real issues. The reality is that with two-thirds of Pakistan's economy operating as a “gig” or black economy, corruption is an indispensable ingredient of Pakistan's economic existence; Pakistani capitalism survives and breeds on corruption. It's the main component of the buffer that protects it from total collapse.

Although the PML (N) government did largely end the traumatising power blackouts and carried out several reforms, the limitations of Pakistan's debt-ridden capitalist economy and the rottenness of the system could not bring any significant development or prosperity for the masses. When the repression came the PML's dynastic leadership seemed to be divided on what line of action to take. Nawaz and Maryam were using a radical rhetoric of defiance but were very careful not to touch on the class question, as they were themselves ultimately representatives of the bourgeoisie and were unwilling to infringe their class base by raising the class contradictions. At the same time, Nawaz's heir and younger brother Shahbaz wanted to reach some sort of a deal with the military. Being at the helm of the party, with Nawaz and Maryam incarcerated he actually put in jeopardy the mass procession in Lahore to welcome and support of Sharif and Maryam against their conviction, which many people thought was an act of revenge for their defiance of the powers that be. Shahbaz wanted to play the 'development' card – something that didn't have much appeal, since the lives of ordinary people under the shadows of the huge monuments he had built in Lahore didn't bring them much relief from the miseries inflicted under capitalist rule. Similarly, Nawaz Sharif's narrative of the “sanctity of the vote” and “democracy” didn't fire much mass enthusiasm amongst the oppressed classes.

The uneven and fragile growth in the last five years brought more social discontent rather than any satisfaction or improvement in the conditions of the oppressed masses in the country. Imran Khan's victory is analogous with the wave of right-wing populism that we are witnessing worldwide, from the electoral triumphs of Duterte in the Philippines, Donald Trump in the USA, and to a certain extent the emergence of Narendra Modi in India, Erdogan in Turkey, Orban in Hungary and similar demagogues playing on the deprivations and grievances of the masses with their populist rhetoric promising development and an end to corruption. Imran Khan also whipped up support using anti-India rhetoric and Pakistani chauvinism to appeal the reactionary sentiments of the frustrated petty-bourgeois youth, the middle class and primitive sections of the population. He also combined a queer hybrid of liberalism and Islamic fundamentalist rhetoric to reach sections of these strata of society.

However, now the chickens have come home to roost. The achievement of Imran Khan's desperate yearning to be prime minister is just days away. The PTI is a right-wing bourgeois, or rather a

“lumpen-bourgeois” party, with a social base in the liberal and religious petit bourgeois and a leader who has strong Bonapartist tendencies, in some ways more right-wing than the current PML(N)’s Sharif/ Maryam faction. His ideology is an amalgamation of contradictions; no one has yet defined what it really is.

After his victory in Wednesday’s election, Khan made a televised address which was a sort of rehearsal for his inaugural speech as prime minister. Once in office he vowed to improve the lives of the poor, fight corruption, plant ten billion trees, issue health and education cards, create ten million jobs in the next five years, build half a million houses... and several other tall promises. Even if all these were ever fulfilled, they will fall far short of the needs of society, considering the existing levels of deprivation. The macro-economy is in a catastrophic state. There is no new plan to fix it apart from the age-old solution of borrowing from imperialist financial institutions. One of the first challenges he’ll need to tackle is easing a foreign-reserves crunch. The country’s buffers have been steadily dwindling as a result of surging imports and debt, forcing the central bank to devalue the currency four times since December. All of that comes against a global backdrop of higher oil prices, trade war tensions and an emerging-market sell-off. Asad Umar, the PTI’s shadow finance minister, says no option will be ruled out as a way out of a severe economic crisis, including knocking on the doors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Pakistan’s reserves have dropped at the fastest rate in Asia to \$9.1 billion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Reserves are now below the level reached when the country approached the IMF for a bailout on the last two occasions. Bloomberg wrote [\[1\]](#): “The IMF will not be that easy this time around. Lots of structural reforms were delayed or not done last time. They will be much tougher in the enforcement process, whether it’s privatization program, revamping the tax infrastructure, or widening the tax net. It’s not going to be easy on the ground level.” The economy is already expected to slow down for the first time in six years to 5.2 per cent or even less this year.

Like most populists, Imran Khan’s ‘easy’ solution to raise finances is to increase the tax base. While Pakistan has increased its tax-to-GDP ratio in recent years to 12.5 per cent in the year through June, that’s still among the lowest in Asia and globally. Most of the government’s tax revenue comes from indirect levies, and there’s a huge pool of untaxed money that can be tapped in real estate and savings instruments, as well as non-declaration of income. Pakistan’s bourgeois cannot exist as such if they pay their taxes and stop plundering the exchequer. Foreign investors only bring in their money on harsh conditions, including tax reliefs on their profits and their smooth and unhindered transfers to their headquarters. That leaves almost no room for the PTI government to raise the funds needed to pay the interest on loans and reduce the deficits in the trade, budget and fiscal sectors. In fact, Pakistan faces a mammoth task in this fiscal year alone: to arrange around \$11 billion to fill its external financing gap. The deficit is higher than Pakistan’s gross official foreign currency reserves, which currently stand at \$9 billion. Experts say that even the IMF cannot fill this gap. Its last bailout in 2013 brought Pakistan over \$6 billion spread across three years.

The Ministry of Finance, the IMF and independent economists have assessed Pakistan’s gross external financing needs for 2018-19 to fall in the range of \$23 billion to \$28 billion. In any case, it will not be that easy to seek an IMF package. The lender will impose certain politically unpopular actions, including privatisation of state-owned enterprises, severe cuts, price hikes through indirect taxation and other stringent austerity measures that will squeeze the working classes and play havoc with the lives of the already impoverished masses.

With this level of dependence on the IMF and other imperialist institutions, Imran Khan won’t have much say in economic affairs. The IMF will call the shots, and this government will have no option but to carry out imperialist demands that will have drastic impacts on society. Like all its predecessors, the PTI government will not be able to touch the largest chunk of the country’s GDP: imperialist (Western or Eastern) debt servicing. Similarly, it would be considered a sin to even think

of cutting military expenditure. More than two-thirds of the budget is spent on these two sectors, while the rest is mostly spent on the functioning of the state. The funds raised by turning government rest houses into hotels and other tourism projects will not be able to raise even a trickle towards the massive debts and deficits that have to be paid back and filled. As for health and education, it will yet again be the private sector that will suck the blood of poor patients and parents, as neither the system's ideology nor its near-bankrupt financial condition have much to offer in terms of human development. Imran's assertion of turning the prime minister and Governor's houses into public places is cheap gimmickry borrowed from Gandhi and other Indian elite politicians. It will not solve any of the agonising problems inflicted upon the masses.

Imran may be the blue-eyed boy of his country's masters, but still he will not be allowed to dabble in the domain of foreign affairs or security issues. His powers will be no greater than those of Sharif or any previous civilian prime ministers. Despite his macho imaging, he will remain subservient to the state in all the crucial policies of the country, including relations with India. His utopian promises will soon be exposed, and his honeymoon period could be much shorter than he envisages. The current crisis will only worsen, exacerbating the problems of the economy and the resulting social and political turbulence.

Illusions in Imran Khan's 'new Pakistan' will inevitably evaporate much sooner than most experts think. There is no room for any reforms that will improve the plight of the masses. The astrologers' predictions so dear to Imran will fail as the excruciating material conditions of life sweep away superstition, and the socio-economic contradictions will explode, creating even greater instability and turmoil. However, the reality of Imran Khan's 'change' can prove a qualitative breaking point for social consciousness.

Lenin described this controlled democracy long ago when he wrote; "Bourgeois democracy is the democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, exuberant promises and the high-sounding slogans of freedom and equality. But, in fact, it screens the non-freedom and inferiority of women, the non-freedom and inferiority of the toilers and exploited." The masses of Pakistan have voted in this moneyed democracy so many times and yet their plight only worsened. Now a time is coming when these working classes will, in Lenin's words, "vote with their feet." The oppressed classes shall enter the arena of history, not to change the faces or methods of governance but to challenge and overthrow this obsolete and inhuman capitalist system through a revolutionary insurrection.

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Lal Khan

- <http://www.marxistreview.asia/pakistan-imran-khans-pyrrhic-victory/>

Footnotes

- [1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-26/an-economic-crisis-awaits-pakistan-s-new-leader-imran-khan>