**Election Droll**

[Ali Imran Atta](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/ali-imran-atta/)

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The economically marginalized group in our society is feeling the burden of uncertainty as the election date of February 8 approaches. The Election Commission of Pakistan has issued the list of contestants. It has been revealed that, in a battle that is less than a week away, an unprecedented number of candidates – nearly 18,000 – are vying for 1,125 constituencies in the National Assembly (NA) and the four provinces’ legislatures.

Similar political figures lead them again at the scene. Numerous candidates competing as independents are well-known figures. The election campaign’s lack of issues is also nothing new that can be marked as confusion at large.

Who will be the winners and losers in 2024? Many people say that while the election outcome is unpredictable, who will make the government is unknown to all and sundries.

However, since the US may tie polls to a crucial new IMF loan, the reason might anyone try to stall the results if a predictable is certain? Thus, absent a national emergency, polls on February 8 are inevitable yet a few days beyond the law. Still, there is uncertainty. Even in the US, confusion persists despite reliable opinions and surveys.

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According to a recent survey, both the PTI and PML-N are closely matched in Punjab. So how trustworthy are our opinion surveys? Both the ones from 2013 and 2018 were so. Instead of using constituency samples, these surveys use national or provincial ones. As a result, they can forecast party vote shares but not seat totals.

According to surveys of a renowned civil society activist cum think tank, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, (SDPI) survey throughout the first two months of the 2018 elections showed that the PTI, PML-N, and PPP received 28.3 percent, 27.5 percent, and 16.5 percent of the vote, respectively. True percentages were 31.8, 24.4, and thirteen. That means that, even in the US, their deviation of the actual ratios was less than 4 per cent. However, averages from 2013 showed that the PML-N, PPP, and PTI received 36 per cent, 15.5 percent, and 16 per cent of the votes, respectively. These figures were even nearer to the actual ratios of 33 per cent, 15 percent, and 17 percent. Therefore, despite the numerous obstacles to conducting reliable surveys in Pakistan, the surveys conducted by these companies cannot be categorically dismissed as biased or unscientific.

However, what was the seat-to-vote ratio after the elections? With the greatest real vote ratio, the PTI received 43 percent more votes in 2018 and the PML-N 46 per cent more seats in 2013, but the PPP received only two percent more seats in 2008.

In 2024, what can we predict? This time, Gallup has not released the national results. However, a recent poll in all crucial Punjab constituencies puts the PTI at 34 percent and the PML-N at 32 percent – a close result to the national election of 2018. There, the PTI might win 40-45 percent of the seats per statistics from 2013 and 2018.

In KPK, the PTI received 45 per cent of the vote (the PML-N and JUI-F combined received 24 percent), while in Sindh, the PPP received 42 percent. It would recommend setting up the PTI on a national scale and in Punjabi and KP, a PPP one in Sindh, with Baluchistan unclear.

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The most significant warning is that PTI was unjustly eliminated from the polls due to the party’s symbol case ruling. The Pakistani Election Commission is not allowed by law to reject parties’ poll results. But with the PTI, it did so twice. Acts allow the ECP, which is not a judicial authority, to resolve national poll disputes through judge-led tribunals. The ECP may have removed the PTI’s party polls in the absence of legislation and ability. Although it’s unclear if there is legislation requiring PTI horses to run as independents, they must.

Owing to illiteracy, party symbols are given out during elections even though they don’t reflect their registration.

PTI is still registered with the ECP, according to them. Thus, even in cases when the PTI’s symbol is absent from the ballot box, its winners will nonetheless be regarded as its legislative representatives and be bound by party loyalty requirements.

Making them run as independents might potentially mislead voters and, more importantly, expose PTI winners to snooping by others with snooping nets. Everything seems to have been planned. It comes after rally prohibitions, forced desertion, and the incarceration of the PTI’s key leaders. There might be more creative ways to undermine the party both before and after polls.

For all this, polls in 2024 might be even more manipulated than those conducted in 2018 and the 1990s, and comparable to those conducted by illegitimate regimes in 1985 and 2002. It appears that similar rigging is still possible under constitutional law.

This could lead to a weak and incompetent PML-N government that depends more on minor parties than on the Imran in 2018. We continue to have an incompetent setup with tense relationships with all significant internal and external actors, even if the PTI triumphs by magic.

Keeping the statists and popular perceptions in view, the election might result in a certain amount of unpredictability and ambiguity. This is in contrast to the widely held belief that the outcome is already known and can be predicted with ease.

The only chance for success is if the victor is allowed to name a capable cabinet, allowing the Sharifs or Imran Khan to be selected to lead the parties, if not, the masses will be the losers even if the outcomes are uncertain.

*The writer is a freelance columnist.*