**Election Results And Way Forward**

[Malik Muhammad Ashraf](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/malik-muhammad-ashraf/)

February 13, 2024

First of all, I would like to appreciate the role of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies in ensuring the conduct of elections by ECP in spite of serious security challenges and efforts by enemies of the country to sabotage them through acts of terrorism. The armed forces and law enforcement agencies in particular deserve the gratitude of the nation for making the election possible in a fear-free environment.

With regard to the election results, I have two observations to make. First is that they represent a slap on the face of those political elements who were persistently trying to rub in the notion during the election campaign that the establishment was trying to catapult a particular party to the corridors of power. They also constitute a snub for the section of the media which not only bought that argument but also left no stone unturned in reinforcing the impression propagated by some political elements.

The second observation is that the results provide a ranting testimony to the fact that there was no intervention by any state institution in regard to manipulating the results. Had it been so then there would not have been a split mandate. It has also proven wrong the apprehensions by some quarters that in the permeating circumstances PTI may not be given the level playing field. The way the PTI supporters thronged the polling stations and voted for the PTI-backed independents falsified all such notions.

In a political dispensation, it is the right of the political parties to look for possible partners in case of a split mandate to form the government.

I also feel that during the elections some media outlets and media wizards played a very negative role by disseminating wrong and premature information to the masses regarding which party was winning notwithstanding the fact that it was too early in the evening and hardly 10-15 percent results had poured in unofficially. The PTI claimed that it had won 150 seats and taking cue from those unsubstantiated claims there was a mad race to establish their veracity and calling the election by the media outlets. That is irresponsible journalism. The results ultimately proved them wrong. I am sure nobody would ever accept that their conduct was wrong and apologize to the public for the unethical and non-professional attitude.

World history is replete with examples where media outlets have gotten it wrong by calling the elections early. The rush to predict an outcome or to call the election quickly sometimes leads to embarrassing situations for the media by producing surprise results. The history of US presidential elections is full of events running counter to the expectations and proclamations of the media which offer a reminder that things are often less certain than they appear.

In 1948, the Chicago Daily Tribune famously plastered “Dewey Defeats Truman” across the front page of its first edition when early numbers made it look like Thomas Dewey was ahead. But the tide turned, and President Harry S. Truman defied pollsters by scoring an upset victory.

In 2000, the major TV networks and the AP called Florida for Democrat Al Gore, relying largely on Election Day polling. When the votes were counted everyone reversed course. The networks declared that Republican George W. Bush had carried the state, only to later retract that decision, too. The AP held off on making the second call, deeming the race too close. More than a month later, a 5-4 US Supreme Court stopped a recount and locked in Bush’s narrow victory.

In the case of our election, the results defied and negated the early calling of elections by the media. So the lesson for the media is that do not rush the outcomes until and unless the ultimate results are announced by the authority responsible for conducting, compiling and announcing the results.

One very positive thing about this election was that the percentage of votes cast was more than 50% and PTI supporters came out in good numbers to express their will which is quite evident from the seats won by the PTI-backed independents.

The election has produced a split mandate and the most likely scenario would be the formation of a coalition government. With the elections over the parties and stakeholders are already vying to consider their options in regards to their likely partners. It is hoped that the political parties would show a better sense of responsibility by giving preference to national interests over their narrow political agendas. The country has been enduring political instability for nearly three years now which has badly affected its economic fiber.

The COAS General Asim Munir was right on the money to say that Pakistan’s diverse polity and pluralism would be well-represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbibed with national purpose. Elections and democracy are means to serve the people of Pakistan and not end in themselves. Nobody in his right mind can take issue with his observation that the nation needed stable hands and a healing touch to move on from politics of anarchy and polarization which did not suit a progressive country of 250 million.

Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Elections are the only means to win the public franchise and rule the country on their behalf. The foremost consideration for the political parties should be how to best serve the people and show respect for their mandate. In a situation where elections give a split mandate, it is incumbent upon all the political parties to respect the people’s mandate. In a political dispensation, it is the right of the political parties to look for possible partners in case of a split mandate to form the government. However, it is imperative that all such manoeuvres are undertaken in accordance with the internationally recognized norms and principles of political behaviour. The party which is unable to stitch a coalition must sit in the opposition playing a constructive role in promoting national causes.

In the backdrop of the results a few political parties like in the past are complaining about rigging and some have also already challenged results in certain constituencies in the High Courts. A political party has also threatened to launch country protests against the results. I think they should refrain from disruptive machinations and get redress of their grievance through the legal channels available in this regard. First of all, they should go to the respective elections tribunals, then the ECP and finally to the court in case they are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaints. The High Courts are also well-advised not to entertain electoral complaints directly bypassing the ECP.

*The writer is a former diplomat and freelance columnist*