**The Current Political Landscape**

**The only way out from the otherwise continuous loop of the establishment’s lap-sitting is the parties’ political cooperation.**

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Not to anyone’s astonish­ment, the General Elec­tions 2024 in Pakistan were no short of any political and social mayhem. Just like every other event in this country, these elections too sparked grievous concerns in national and international me­dia about the credibili­ty of our political process in general and the establish­ment’s engineering of the elec­toral process in particular.

Who to blame is the question. The answers, perhaps, are too many. The loudest, which by de­fault are the populists, voices would sound enthusiastically to call the establishment as the only criminal. But is it the complete story? We shall dissect.

In Pakistan, interestingly, there are three phases of the voting process. The first phase is the pre-ballot day phase. This phase is usually won by the party with the strongest PR team and vocal voic­es which in these elections was PTI. The second phase is the vot­ing day stage, the winner of which is decided a) by the party’s vot­ers turnout, and b) by the one’s counting the votes. To decide the winner of this phase is the most contentious, especially where “selection”, and not elections, is under process. The final and de­layed phase is when the actual player of the process intervenes and decides who it wants to work with this time around; the pro­cess currently underway, charac­terized by closed door meetings and changing allegiances.

[PPP entrusts mandate to PML-N for Govt formation](https://www.nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2024/ppp-entrusts-mandate-to-pml-n-for-govt-formation)

This is by now beyond the shadow of any doubt that PTI emerged as the most successful party, almost across the coun­try, especially in its strongholds despite being brutally victim­ized. PML-N, the one supposedly backed by the establishment this time around, performed rath­er poorly than they would have anticipated which their supre­mo Nawaz Sharif in his recent address admitted. PPP, the third largest party, on the other hand is also expecting some major roles if a coalition is to be formed. De­spite the disputed results, includ­ing the 18 NA seats challenged by the PTI leadership, the criteria to win elections is still the old one i.e the better the party “cooper­ates” with the establishment, the greater their chances.

By this logic, the PTI’s position currently is the weakest and has to be the last one to be expected to assume the premiership of the country and the other important seats. In 2018, it was the oppo­site with PTI almost on the same page with the establishment and getting all the highly contested seats. They too know this criteria and, once the tides favor again, they will be happily re-engaging and “cooperating” with the es­tablishment as they did in their post 2018 tenure.

[Pakistan, Turkiye reaffirm commitment to forge deeper strategic ties in defence sector](https://www.nation.com.pk/15-Feb-2024/pakistan-turkiye-reaffirm-commitment-to-forge-deeper-strategic-ties-in-defence-sector)

This criteria of “selection” has been adopted by all the three major parties one after the oth­er since 2008 which reflects that our political progress has barely evolved. The masses, partly due to the enthusiastic oratory and partly due to ignorance, vote in a party’s favor without even asking for their party’s manifestos for example. This makes manipula­tion easier and exploitation eas­ily accessible.

The only way out from the oth­erwise continuous loop of the es­tablishment’s lap-sitting is the parties’ political cooperation. With political divisions stooping so low to target the personal lives of the politicians and becoming a stage of personal vendetta, the establishment’s process is only made easier to exploit the divi­sions and keep the king making powers within itself. It is the in­dispensable need of the hour that all the political actors come out of their petty politics and put a full stop to the participation of the non-political forces in the electoral process which is only possible by not allowing their po­litical divisions so easily exploit­able by the non-political actors and keeping the national interest ahead of the personal.