**The Coming Fascism**

**Violence and its threats are a constant theme for fascists.**

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Pakistani fascism began to pull it­self together in last week’s elec­tion. A putative groundswell of one-third of votes polled for ‘indepen­dents’ supported by a cult that has spread callous lies indiscrimi­nately; rejected the legitima­cy of political opponents; de­monised its critics in foul language; attacked free me­dia; and claimed that the will of the people justifies violence, at­tacks on police, and burning of ani­mals and public buildings.

The alleged groundswell collaps­es into a geographical hodge-podge. It pulses in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, disap­pears in north Punjab, waxes in cen­tral Punjab, wanes in South Punjab, and peters out completely in Baluchistan and Sind. There was thus no national groundswell; mere regional irruptions.

One also cannot pick and choose where the election was fair. If the elec­tion was fair in one province for one particular party, it was free every­where. If it was not fair in one region, it was not fair nationwide. No party can claim that the elections were fair only in the province or constituencies where it won, and was unfair where it lost.

[Thousands in Gaza suffering 'cruelty of hunger and malnutrition': UN](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/thousands-in-gaza-suffering-cruelty-of-hunger-and-malnutrition-un)

Controversy over the groundswell has obscured the principal question: what did the vote say? Was it an en­tirely negative vote against older par­ties? An expression of anti-establish­ment hatred or, as a foreign newspaper reported, simply to spite the establish­ment? Protest against the former PM’s jailing and convictions? Was it a protest against the inflation that shows no sign of abating since its beginning in 2021 but the public blames the most recent PDM government?

The most logical answer to the ques­tion ‘what was the vote for?’ is also the most alarming as it presages support for fascism. The vote in part affirmed the insurrection and seditious conspir­acy by the former ruling party on 9 May 2023. Grim portents of violence are vis­ible. Two defeated candidates from La­hore and Sargodha respectively who had the grace to congratulate their op­ponents suffered firing, attacks, and as­saults on their homes and offices.

[18 students held in Punjab University clash](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/18-students-held-in-punjab-university-clash)

Violence and its threats are a constant theme for fascists. The insurrection on 9 May had a direct antecedent in the 2014 dharna and the 2016 assault on Islamabad. Baton-armed militants who ransacked Pakistan Television in 2014 burned down Radio Pakistan Pesha­war and Jinnah House Lahore in 2023; those who demolished the fence of Par­liament in 2014 ended up demolishing gates of GHQ in 2023; those who beat up hundreds of Police troops and offi­cer in Islamabad in 2014 hurled petrol bombs on Lahore police in 2023; those who attacked the capital and fought a pitched battle with Islamabad police on Attock bridge in 2016 ended up trash­ing most of the country’s cities in 2023.

In his masterwork The Anatomy of Fascism, Robert Paxton cautions us to judge fascists more from their actions rather than their words. He concludes that fascists are identifiable most of all by a style of political behaviour that em­phasises crude grievances; worships the cult of leadership; relies on mass-based violence; represses democratic liberties; uses violence as a political tool; delegit­imises political opponents and demon­ises critics; is hostile to intellectualism and attacks a free press; and peddles a distressed sense of victimhood.

[Two killed in petrol agency fire incident](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/two-killed-in-petrol-agency-fire-incident)

“All fascism is indigenous,” warns Sar­ah Churchwell. In Pakistan’s case, in­sights into the insurrection also explain the vote on 8 February. An emergent middle-class, writes Adnan Rafiq, “has a visceral hatred towards the aristo­cratic and industrial elites that still dominate the parliament… hurt and re­sentment accumulated during decades spent being lorded over by those who, in their view, plundered the wealth of the nation with both hands.”

The 8 February vote expresses, as per Dr. Rafiq, “a feeling of vengeance, a feeling of finally being equal. This feel­ing is valuable in its own right, never mind a rational evaluation of compar­ative economic performance. Power, a sense of empowerment, even at the cost of violence and economic turmoil, is worth it. The confluence of agitated middle and lower classes can plunge the country into anarchy.”

[Pneumonia claims five more lives in 24 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/pneumonia-claims-five-more-lives-in-24-hours)

Some part of Pakistan’s electorate voted for fascism as the cure for mili­tary dictatorship. They are grievously misguided. A direct confrontation be­tween political militants and the armed forces is a recipe for anarchy, which acts as a midwife to fascism. Another 9 May will be a catastrophe for the republic.

Is anarchy Pakistan’s fate? History tolls a grim warning. Exactly one hun­dred years before the May 9 insurrec­tion in Pakistan, Germany’s National Socialist (Nazi) party led by Adolf Hit­ler staged the 1923 “Beer Hall Putsch”, a failed insurrection against Bavaria’s government. Hitler landed in jail but was treated leniently by the German ju­diciary, served only nine months of the five-year sentence, and launched his political campaign.

Deteriorating economy under the Weimar Republic vitiated by constant Nazi violence and Nazis’ consummate propaganda machine increased Par­ty’s vote in from under 3% in 1928 to 43.9% in 1933, making Hitler Chan­cellor and plunging Germany into a re­pressive, genocidal fascism that ended in the country’s destruction.

[LHC orders one period per week for raising awareness about environmental issues](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/lhc-orders-one-period-per-week-for-raising-awareness-about-environmental-issues)

Unless Pakistan’s political parties forge a consensus with the armed forc­es and the judiciary to resolutely defeat the fascism precipitated by the recent elections, the Pakistani people will only face more economic misery, lawless­ness, and spreading anarchy that might crush Pakistani democracy. The work is cut out for the coming federal and pro­vincial governments.

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