**[Hybrid rule 3.0?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815937/hybrid-rule-30)**

[Zahid Hussain](https://www.dawn.com/authors/10698/zahid-hussain) Published February 21, 2024 Updated 2 days ago

IT is a right royal mess that is hard to clean up. A hung parliament through a controversial election has pushed the country deeper into the mire.

It has been almost two weeks since the general elections were held on Feb 8, but as yet, there is no sign of a new dispensation taking shape. A thick cloud of uncertainty continues to hang over the country’s political landscape.

While the PTI is still not out of the race, the two other major political parties — the PML-N and PPP — are engaged in [hard bargaining](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815638) for the formation of a [new coalition arrangement](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815907/consensus-at-midnight-paves-way-for-pdm-20), amid [widespread protests](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815641/four-party-alliance-to-expand-protests-against-rigging-in-balochistan) against alleged poll rigging. The [confession](https://www.dawn.com/news/1814959) of the Rawalpindi commissioner, who resigned from his post, about his role in vote manipulation has raised more questions about the legitimacy of the entire electoral process.

It is certainly not the outcome of the long-awaited polls one wanted to see. It is the unravelling of the entire political power structure. But re-engineering work is on to prop up the old order already rejected by the electorate. The intermittent shutdown of social media seems to be a part of the effort to stifle opposition voices. One is, however, not sure whether these efforts will bring any political stability to a country in deep turmoil.

With the official result of the elections now almost fully compiled, the PTI-supported independent bloc is clearly ahead of the other political parties in the next National Assembly, despite the alleged electoral manipulation.

The PTI’s [latest decision to merge](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815352/pti-strikes-alliance-with-sic-vows-to-form-govt) its parliamentary party with the Sunni Ittehad Council in the House is supposed to be part of its tactics to get its share of some 70 reserve seats, thus keeping the group in the race to form the new government.

Re-engineering work is on to prop up the old order already rejected by the electorate.

Moreover, the PTI leadership also seems hopeful of snatching some more seats by [challenging](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815648) some controversial results in court. But it will still be difficult for the party to get the required number to form the government at the centre on its own. The party has already declared it will not enter into any power-sharing arrangement with the PML-N and PPP.

Yet its formidable presence in the National Assembly could present a constant challenge to a prospective PML-N-led coalition government. The PTI’s decision to stay in the game seems to have frustrated the plan that aimed to completely sideline the party.

Notwithstanding the alleged manipulations, the elections have changed the country’s political dynamics making it extremely hard for the ubiquitous security establishment to set its own rules. Its leadership seems to have come out bruised in the process.

It has been a vote against the military’s role in the political powerplay as well as its overarching presence in almost all aspects of state. Yet there is no indication of the generals taking a back seat. Instead, the meddling of the security establishment in politics is likely to be enhanced, given the fragmented electoral mandate. Its reported role in pushing the PML-N and PPP to reach an agreement on the formation of a coalition government has not been denied.

While there appears to be consensus among the PPP and smaller parties to support Shehbaz Sharif, the PML-N nominee for prime minister, there is no agreement yet on the power-sharing formula.

The PPP, whose support is crucial for any future set-up, is playing hard to get on the issue of joining the cabinet, while bargaining for key constitutional positions, including the post of president. The PPP has [maintained its control](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815619/murad-tipped-as-cm-as-ppp-set-to-rule-sindh-for-fourth-time-in-a-row) over Sindh and is also poised to lead a coalition government in Balochistan, raising its stakes in the power game.

Past master in the politics of wheeling and dealing, Asif Ali Zardari is trying to [extract maximum advantage](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815257/bilawal-says-zardari-to-be-ppps-candidate-for-president) for his party before finally agreeing to the PPP joining the government. The party has already made it public that Zardari will be a candidate for president. The issue seems to be a sticking point in the ongoing negotiations between the two parties.

Meanwhile, there also seems to be establishment pressure on the party to be a part of the incoming administration rather than supporting it from the outside. If a deal is struck, the future ruling coalition will not be different from the previous Shehbaz Sharif-led hybrid administration, with the security establishment having a significant role in all policy matters.

Most interesting, however, is Nawaz Sharif’s decision to stand down as candidate for prime minister. In fact, the party’s entire election campaign had revolved around his return to power. It seems that his party’s failure to achieve even a simple majority was the main reason for the withdrawal of his candidature. It is apparent that he didn’t want to lead a coalition government that would include the PPP.

So, Shehbaz Sharif, who has worked well with the military as well as other political parties in the past, is considered the right choice to lead the future coalition government. Nawaz Sharif has, however, made sure that the mantle of Punjab chief minister will go to his daughter and heir apparent Maryam Nawaz.

Being the largest single party in the Punjab Assembly, the PML-N may not have any difficulty in forming the government in the province, with the support of some independents not associated with the PTI. Some of them have already jumped onto the PML-N’s bandwagon. Maryam Nawaz’s nomination marks the continuation of the dynastic control of the Sharif family over Punjab.

What is most problematic, however, is the issue of different political parties ruling the provinces. While the Sindh government, led by the PPP, can coexist with the ruling coalition at the centre, it will not be easy for the PTI government in KP to work with the PML-N administration in Islamabad.

These inherent problems would make it extre­mely difficult for a minority government at the center to deliver on the critical problems related to governance, economy and internal security. There is no way the system can work in this atmosphere of confrontation. The future doesn’t look that good for the country, post-election.

*The writer is an author and journalist.*

[zhussain100@yahoo.com](http://zhussain100@yahoo.com)

*X:* [*@hidhussain*](https://twitter.com/hidhussain)

*Published in Dawn, February 21st, 2024*