Elections 1977 and 2018: A comparison

[Dr Farid A Malik](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/dr-farid-a-malik)

August 08, 2018

I have the honour and privilege of voting in all national elections since 1977. During my study period in USA, my father the Tehrik-e-Pakistan Gold Medallist ensured that my name was included in the voters list. He then collected the polling station details instructing me to plan my trip accordingly. As we lived in Shadman Colony, Lahore College for Women was usually the centre. In the 1970 elections I did not vote, being under age, but the family voted at Lucie Garrison High School on Warris Road. As Pakistan was envisioned as a constitutional democracy by the founding fathers, the exercise of vote was taken very seriously in our household

After the 1977 elections people came on the streets as results did not match the voter expectations. In the 2018 electoral exercise the results were as predicted by various surveys. There has been a technological failure not electoral manipulation. Most rigged elections result in absolute majority as was seen in 1977, 1997, and 2013. In 1977, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) the architect of the 1973 constitution desired control of the parliament to amend the original document. Mian Nawaz Sharif (MNS) desired the same. In 1997, he pulled the stunt to become Amir-ul-Momineen (Khalifa), fortunately the move was blocked by the Senate. Again the 2013 legislature passed bills to protect convicted individuals under the slogan of ‘Vote ki Izzat’. Manipulated ballots insult the voter as has been the case in the last forty years (1977 to 2017). I tend to agree with Mian Shahbaz Sharif (MSS) that the recent electoral contest has taken us back by three decades as the era of loot and plunder spearheaded by GHQ sponsored corrupt to the core politicians, like Sharif brothers, is coming to an end. Even the myth of electables has been shattered as they had to bite the dust in 2018.

Despite the fact that my electoral mandate was stolen ten times, I went to vote for the eleventh. Living in DHA, I was required to vote in Government High School located at Chung Kurd a low end neighbourhood on the waste water drain that overflows with rain. The centre was very peaceful; the infamous Punjab Police was confined to the outer gate. There was one uniformed soldier who ensured peace, the process was handled by staff from various government.

Management of technology continues to be our biggest shortcoming. In 2013 the magnetic ink was defective, in 2018 the electoral process was smooth but the Results Transmission System did not work as planned. Now it is between ECP and NADRA to investigate why the system did not function but it should have minimum impact on the outcome of the electoral exercise. PTI unlike PML(N) in 2013 is willing to open all constituencies where there is doubt. Kaptaan only demanded opening of only four areas which was denied and delayed through stays, resulting in the 2014 Dharna. The opposition protest now is to save the old system of corruption and exploitation. Kaptaan is right, morally this is the weakest opposition ever, now it is up to him to deny executive authority to the rogue elements within his own party by leaving them behind in the parliament to complete the numbers.

The role of PPP in the combined opposition is indeed interesting. Despite poor performance there vote bank has improved. With 43 national assembly seats the party was able to defy the surveys, which is why it was unwilling to boycott the parliament. PML(N) is on its way out as it as it is an unnatural political entity conceived and launched by the third dictator to neutralise PPP. Despite all the establishment support and manipulation PML(N) was unable to knock out PPP. Bhutto’s party has been damaged more from within by the likes of Asif Zardari. Bilawal is now trying to revive his grandfather’s mission while PPP under new leadership is resurgent, PML(N) is in the decline.

In early 1977 ZAB the elected, anti-establishment Prime Minister (PM) was trapped into holding early elections. The day the assemblies were dissolved a nine party alliance called PNA (Pakistan National Alliance) emerged. ZAB was a clear favourite to win the elections but the total control of the parliament was not acceptable to the voters or the restored establishment. During elections, ZAB was incumbent, in power. The Chief Election Commissioner was appointed by him. He had complete executive authority during the electoral process together with the use of state apparatus.

By contrast all appointments in 2018 were made by the party in power and the opposition (PML-N, PPP). Both the commission and the judiciary are now acting independently as mandated by the constitution. Political role of the establishment is on the decline, in 1977 their role was negative, and whose after effects we continue to suffer till today. Fearing PPP victory Zia came up with the doctrine of ‘Positive Results’ which seriously eroded the rule of the ballot. PML-N is a product of this botched operation. This era is now coming to an end and there are no soft corners to preserve it. Zia’s dark ages (1977 – 2017) have seriously damaged the country and its institutions. As a political entity PPP was able to survive. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was formed in 1996 to challenge the status-quo. It has taken Kaptaan over two decades to enter the corridors of power. Both PPP and PTI are genuine political outfits not launched by the establishment. For the sake of democracy there should a negotiated way forward to end the dark ages forever.

The writer is Ex-Chairman Pakistan Science Foundation.

fmaliks@hotmail.com