

Health of the Federation

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Can election results tell us something about the health of the federation? Two distinct questions need answering. First, are there parties that win support across the federating units? It would be a sign of good health if there were many parties that contested and won elections in all or most provinces. Second, how fragmented are federating units in terms of their political preferences? If some federating units consistently and overwhelmingly voted for parties that did not have wider support bases in other provinces there would be the danger of political fragmentation.

The period from 1947 till 1971 was manifestly one when the federation's health failed until it collapsed with the separation of East Pakistan. The 1970 elections only confirmed something that had been widely suspected for many years - that the two wings of the country were of different political minds. There were no parties that won significant numbers of seats across the provinces, and there were provinces whose politics were entirely self-contained. How are we doing now?

Table 1: Distribution of NA Seats Won by Party and Province – 1988 to 2002

	Islamabad	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Balochistan	FATA	
ANP				21			21
BNM					2		2
BNP					4		4
JUI(F)/MMA	1	3	6	36	14		60
JWP					7		7
MQM			53				53
Muslim League	3	388	26	45	10		472
PKMAP					5		5
PPP	2	151	132	20	4		309
IND		51	23	8	6	44	132
AOP		15	5	9	6		35
	6	608	245	139	58	44	1100

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Election results' data from the past five general elections tell us a story (Table 1). In all, 1100 National Assembly seats were contested in these elections: 608 in Punjab, 245 in Sindh, 139 in NWFP, 58 in Balochistan, 44 in FATA, and 6 in the federal capital. The Muslim League in all of its various guises (including C, J, N, and Q) won 472 out of the 1100, or 43 per cent of all seats contested in this period. Pir Pagara's faction historically, and Farooq Leghari's group in 2002 acted like independents and are treated as such for present purposes. In fact, it might be argued that the Muslim League actually operated like a unified party – rather than an ad hoc election-driven gathering of independents - only in 1993 and 1997. One reason for analysing the Muslim League as a single entity, despite the intense rivalry between “N” and “Q” is that it would be impossible to track the progress of any particular faction over time, given the high turnover of candidates between factions. Another reason for regarding the Muslim League as a “party” is the reasonable assumption that – political differences notwithstanding -- the various Muslim League factions have represented similar regional and socio-economic constituencies.

The PPP was the next largest party with 309 NA wins, followed after a long margin by JUI(F)/MMA, MQM and ANP respectively. There were clear provincial patterns in party positions. Some of the smaller parties were exclusively provincial. The ANP won all of its 21 NA victories between 1988 and 2002 in the NWFP, and the MQM only won seats in Sindh. The same was true of the various nationalist parties in Balochistan.

The PPP was the only party with a relatively diverse provincial profile of NA seats across provinces. Less than half of all its NA seats over the years came from Punjab, and another 42 per cent were from Sindh. Surprisingly, the only party that matched the PPP in terms of cross-provincial support base was JUI(F)/MMA which won 55 and 25 per cent of its seats respectively from NWFP and Balochistan. By contrast, a massive 82 per cent of the Muslim League victories were in Punjab alone. It was also the most successful party in the NWFP with the largest number of seats won by any party over the 1988-2002 period. But the large weight of support in Punjab meant that the party could succeed at the national level without necessarily needing support in the smaller provinces.

Quite apart from questions about the unified nature of the Muslim League – as opposed to the view that it was an umbrella over disparate local interests – its large electoral endowment in Punjab meant that it had weaker incentives to engage in inter-provincial accommodation. The PPP, on the other hand, was constrained by its reliance on Punjab as well as Sindh, to tow a more federalist line. The different approaches of the parties to sensitive inter-provincial issues such as the Kalabagh dam, could be understood with reference to electoral arithmetic. On the surface, JUI(F)/MMA appeared to be in a similar position vis-a-vis NWFP and Balochistan. A more precise view is available, however, if we examine party positions not just with reference to provincial boundaries but also in relation to ethnicity. This will be done in the second part of this article.

Inter-provincial politics are sometimes seen as a proxy for inter-ethnic relations in Pakistan. But all four provinces are actually multi-ethnic entities, and there are important intra and cross-provincial ethnic political patterns that influence political outcomes. Using data on language from the 1998 Population Census, it was possible to assign NA seats to particular “ethnic segments” (Table 2). A segment roughly corresponds to a district, and a segment with 60 per cent or more of the population reporting a particular language, say Pushto, is classified as being a predominantly Pushto-speaking segment. Any segment where no single language accounts for 60 per cent of the population is classified as “heterogeneous”.

As Table 2 shows, there can be different ethnic segments within a province – for example there are Balochi, Pushto and heterogeneous segments in Balochistan – and ethnic segments can cut across provincial boundaries - for example there are Seraiki segments in Punjab as well as NWFP. The Hindko segment of NWFP (former Hazara division) is often seen to be an intermediate cultural region between northern Punjab and the Pushto-speaking heartland. The entries in Table 2 correspond with the number of NA 2008 seats within a particular ethnic segment of any given province. For example, there were 36 NA seats in Sindhi-speaking segments in Sindh, compared

with 5 seats in predominantly Urdu-speaking segments and 20 seats in heterogeneous segments where no one language accounted for 60 per cent of the population. Nationally, around 18 per cent of the NA seats were in heterogeneous segments.

Table 2: Distribution of 2008 NA Seats by Province and Ethnic Segment

	Islamabad	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	FATA	Balochistan	Pakistan
Punjabi	2	105					107
Pushto				25	12	4	41
Sindhi			36				36
Seraiki		18		2			20
Hindko				7			7
Balochi						7	7
Urdu			5				5
Heterogeneous		25	20			3	48
Other				1			1
ALL	2	148	61	35	12	14	272

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

What was the state of the health of inter-ethnic politics in Pakistan? Namely, are there many parties that straddle ethnic boundaries, and is there persistence of parochial electoral outcomes within particular ethnic segments? The former would denote a high level of political integration across ethnic boundaries, while the latter would signal inter-ethnic fragmentation.

Shifting the focus from provinces to ethnic segments throws up a number of interesting observations (Table 3). Muslim League's position is even more dominant in the Punjabi-speaking segments than in Punjab as a whole. In the Seraiki and heterogeneous segments the gap between the Muslim League and the PPP was less glaring. Similarly, the PPP's position was far more dominant in the Sindhi-speaking segments than in Sindh as a whole. In fact, there was a virtual MQM monopoly of the Urdu-speaking segments in Sindh - the only seats conceded were in 1993 when the party boycotted the national assembly vote. The MQM also won seats in heterogeneous segments of Sindh, but in these segments it contended with other parties who also had successes.

Interestingly, the only ethnic segments to match the level of party consolidation of the Urdu-speaking segments are the Hindko segments of the NWFP, where the Muslim League has won nearly three-fourths of NA seats since 1988. The Hindko segments appear to be closer to the Punjabi-speaking segments than their Pushto-speaking neighbours in the NWFP. It is possible that the greater within-segment consolidation in the "minority" ethnic segments in Sindh and NWFP respectively was a reaction to the "majority" politics in the province.

Another somewhat surprising result is the extent of fragmentation within Pushto (across NWFP, Balochistan and FATA) and Balochi-speaking segments (Balochistan). Unlike the Punjabi, Seraiki and Sindhi-speaking segments – where it is possible to discern stable two-party competition – the Pushto and Balochi segments had multiple contenders. Despite their strong presence and ideological influence, nationalist parties have not been very successful in consolidating their electoral

positions. In the Pushto-speaking segments independents are an important factor due to the peculiar conditions that prevail in FATA. Even after discounting the independents, however, the main nationalist party (ANP) was well behind the JUI(F)/MMA in terms of NA seats won - though JUI(F)/MMA predominance was entirely due to its unprecedented performance in the 2002 elections. The focus on ethnicity in place of province reveals that the predominant position of the Muslim League in the NWFP was largely due to its solid base in the Hindko-speaking segment. Among the Pashtuns the ANP, Muslim League and PPP are roughly equal contenders.

Table 3: Distribution of NA Seats Won by Party and Ethnic Segment – 1988 to 2002

	Punjabi	Pushto	Sindhi	Seraiki	Hindko	Balochi	Urdu	Heterogeneous	Other	Total
ANP		21								21
BNM						2				2
BNP						4				4
JUI(F)/MMA	4	34		3	5	4		9	1	60
JWP						7				7
MQM			1				14	38		53
Muslim League	298	21	17	33	24	4	2	71	2	472
PKMAP		4						1		5
PPP	105	19	108	21		1		54	1	309
IND	27	46	23	13	6	4		13		132
AOP	5	8	3	6		5	1	6	1	35
All	439	153	152	76	35	31	17	192	5	1100

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

In Balochistan, the dissipation of the nationalist vote between several parties during 1988-2002 may be a contributor to the rise of more militant expressions of nationalist sentiment. If state agencies played a role in disrupting the consolidation of Baloch parties, as some have argued, their interventions might have been counter-productive. Ethnic analysis reveals that the JUI(F)/MMA's position as a cross-provincial party of NWFP and Balochistan was mostly due to its preeminence among the Pushto-speaking segments of Balochistan. In the Balochi-speaking segments the JUI(F)/MMA was a relatively unimportant player.

Judging by election outcomes between 1988 and 2002, the four most populous ethnic segments in Pakistan (Punjabi, Pushto, Sindhi and Seraiki) pass the two health checks posed at the beginning. There are parties – namely the PPP and the Muslim League – that have maintained a presence across these segments, and these segments have not decisively settled into monopolistic parochial politics.

Table 4 shows respective party positions of the PPP and the Muslim League in elections with a PPP “wave” (1988 and 1993) and those with a Muslim League “wave” (1990, 1997, 2002). PPP election wins have been historically premised on a far more diversified ethnic base compared with Muslim League victories. Even when it has won the general elections, the PPP has had to place greater reliance on constituencies across these ethnic segments than a victorious Muslim League. Conversely, a PPP “wave” appears to reduce the Muslim League to a Punjabi party, and a Muslim League “wave” restricts the PPP mostly to Sindhi-speaking segments.

It is instructive, however, that a restricted PPP still retains a presence in Punjabi and Seraiki segments, whereas a restricted Muslim League virtually disappears from Sindhi-speaking segments.

Table 4: Distribution of NA Seats by Party and Ethnic Segment – PPP versus PML “Wave

	Punjabi	Pushto	Sindhi	Seraiki	All others	TOTAL
PPP “wave”: 1988 and 1993						
PPP	74	15	51	11	33	184
Muslim League	82	8	3	8	33	134
All others	10	33	4	9	40	96
TOTAL	166	56	58	28	106	414
Muslim League wave: 1990, 1997, 2002						
PPP	31	4	57	10	23	125
Muslim League	216	13	14	25	60	338
All others	26	80	23	13	81	223
TOTAL	273	97	94	48	174	686

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

To the extent that some of the Muslim League “waves” in Pakistani elections have been connected with the activities of “wave-makers” – as evidenced by post-retirement admissions – it ought to be a matter of concern that the health of the federation might be put at risk in the pursuit of short-term goals. Delivering Muslim League victories through an overwhelming reliance on Punjab or Punjab-speaking segments, and restricting other parties to correspondingly narrow ethnic segments is a prescription for future disasters.