

# PAKISTAN: VOTING UNDER MILITARY TUTELAGE

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Pakistan's 25 July 2018 parliamentary election brought to power the right-wing Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (Justice Party or PTI), headed by former cricket star Imran Khan. In theory, the vote marked a democratic turning point: It was a second peaceful turnover of power, which political scientists consider the minimum threshold for democratic consolidation.<sup>1</sup> While most major political parties in Pakistan seem committed to democracy as “the only game in town,” the country's ability to clear this lowest procedural bar should mislead no one into committing the “electoral fallacy”—the well-known error of seeing elections as the sole yardstick of democracy regardless of how fairly the vote was conducted and counted, or how autonomous the resulting government is from non-elected actors such as the military.<sup>2</sup>

Serious charges of fraud and manipulation marred the election. Independent observers reported that the military's intelligence arm, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), had interfered in the process to back Khan and to stop the center-right Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif from coming to power.<sup>3</sup> Sharif himself had been banned from running since July 2017, when the Supreme Court had forced him from office in a corruption inquiry linked to the Panama Papers scandal. Sharif's disqualification rested not on evidence but on a technicality—a requirement, written into the constitution by previous military ruler General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq (1977–88), that all members of Parliament must be “honest.”<sup>4</sup> The military's “menu of manipulation”<sup>5</sup> included coercing mainly PML-N members to defect; helping violent extremists to compete against the PML-N in the electoral arena;

mounting a sustained assault on media freedoms; using the courts to target the PML-N;<sup>6</sup> deploying troops inside polling places throughout the country; and possibly resorting to fraud, as suggested by the inordinate time it took to announce election results.

Despite the military's brazen efforts to put Khan over the top, the PTI managed to win only 116 of the 272 directly elected seats in the 342-member National Assembly (which includes in addition sixty seats reserved for women and ten for religious minorities). But for the first time, the PTI did emerge as the single largest party in Parliament. It received 31 percent of the vote—almost doubling the 16 percent it won in 2013—and crucially, it won seats in all four provinces. The PML-N came in a distant second with 64 seats, less than half the 148 seats that it had won in the previous election. Most of the PML-N's wins came in Punjab, Sharif's native province and electoral stronghold.<sup>7</sup> The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) bagged 43 seats, mostly in the rural parts of its traditional heartland province, Sindh (see Figure 1). To gain the 172 votes needed to form a government, Khan had to seek the backing of smaller parties, including the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM). To some observers, the PTI's rise signaled the disruption of the two-party system (PPP versus PML-N) that had emerged following the post-Zia transition to democracy in 1988.

Pakistan had another military ruler after Zia, General Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008), and then returned to formal parliamentary democracy again, with the 2018 voting preceded by multiparty elections in 2008 and 2013. Yet the country, although not fully authoritarian, is also not a democracy. Instead, it is a hybrid regime.<sup>8</sup> Elected officials and institutions are de jure accountable to the people, but in fact are hemmed in by the military. The generals' tutelage extends to crucial "reserve domains" such as the defense budget, nuclear weapons, intelligence gathering, and internal security. The military also runs vast commercial enterprises and has the final say in foreign affairs, especially when relations with archrival India are concerned.

Khan's victory fits with the trend of rising support for extremist populist leaders that has posed a challenge to liberal-democratic institutions and norms from the Asia-Pacific to Europe to the Americas. Like many populist leaders, Khan is not a traditional politician; he made his name in the field of international cricket. He also rails against political elites, presenting himself as a man of the people who can magically rid Pakistan of corruption. His rhetoric resonates with younger sections of the urban middle classes who repeatedly heard "politics" denounced under Musharraf, and who are tired of the traditional parties. Many of Khan's supporters idolize him as a selfless, honest, and independent leader who can make Pakistan great again. Yet Khan is not in reality a free agent. He formed the PTI in 1996, but won almost no races for years. He became a serious contender for power thanks in large part to his alliance

**TABLE—PAKISTAN’S 2018 GENERAL-ASSEMBLY ELECTION**

Party	Vote Share (%)	Seats	Change
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	31.82	149	+114
Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N)	24.35	82	-84
Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)	13.03	54	+12
Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)	4.85	15	-4
Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan	4.21	0	0
Grand Democratic Alliance	2.37	3	-4
Awami National Party	1.54	1	-2
Muhajir Qaumi Movement	1.38	7	-17
Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q)	0.97	5	+3
Baluchistan Awami Party	0.60	5	0
Baluchistan National Party (Mengal)	0.45	4	+3
Awami Muslim League	0.22	1	0
Jamhoori Wattan Party	0.04	1	+1
Independents	11.46	13	-14
Election Postponed	–	2	–
<b>Total Seats</b>	<b>97.78*</b>	<b>342</b>	

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan.

\*Vote-share figures do not sum to 100% because table reports only parties that won seats.

Note: The 2018 general-assembly election was the first contest for the Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan (formed in 2015) and the Baluchistan Awami Party (formed in 2018).

with the military, which he unabashedly refers to as an “umpire” capable of tossing his opponents from the match.

Khan is not an “antiestablishment” populist in the conventional sense, since in Pakistan the establishment means the military. Not surprisingly, Khan always omits Pakistan’s decidedly unaccountable military from his boasts about holding politicians accountable. During his days as an international sports star, Khan was not noted for fervent devotion to Sunni Islam. Since his involvement in politics, however, he has become something of a “born-again” Muslim, and his populism has a decidedly Islamist bent. For example, his decision to form a ruling coalition with an Islamist party in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) led to hundreds of millions of dollars flowing into the coffers of Darul Uloom Haqqania, a religious seminary in KPK that has known ties to the Taliban.

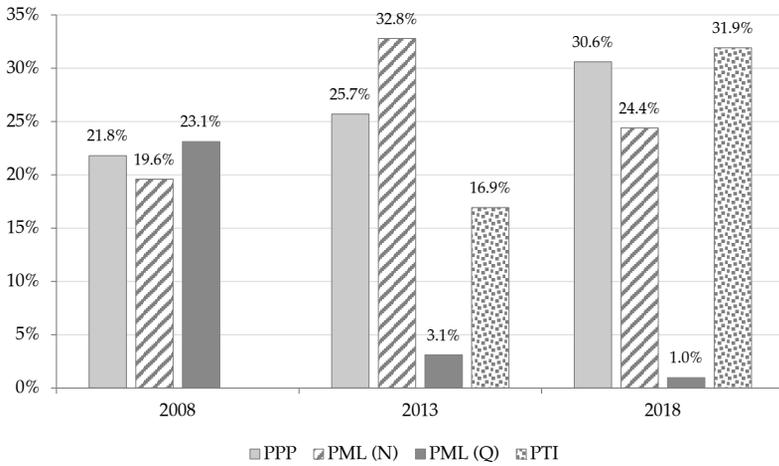
The reason for Khan’s pivot toward the military is no mystery: The generals offered him a path to power. But what is the military’s motive for holding up its end of the bargain? What does it get for backing Khan? After Zia’s death in a 1988 midair explosion, the military preserved its tutelary grip on politics by exploiting animosities between the PML-N and the center-left PPP of Benazir Bhutto. Efforts by the parties’ leaders to assert civilian supremacy and claim control of India policy thrice led the generals to induce the president to invoke his Article 58 powers and toss the civilians from office. The PPP was fired in 1988 and 1993,

while the PML-N found itself cashiered in 1990. For their part, the leaders of both parties were tainted by allegations of corruption and, when out of power, connived with (or encouraged) the military to thwart the rival party.

Taking stock of how their rivalry had played into General Musharraf's hands, Sharif and Bhutto signed a "Charter of Democracy" in May 2006. They pledged not to "solicit the support of the military to come into power or to dislodge a democratic government." Even after Bhutto's assassination in 2007, the two parties collaborated in passing the Eighteenth Amendment (2010) to the 1973 Constitution. This measure removed the president's Article 58 power and put the prime minister back in charge of naming provincial governors and military-service chiefs. The amendment also restored the original intent of constitutional federalism by handing substantial administrative and spending powers to the provinces. The military was pleased neither by the loss of what it saw as a needed presidential check on elected premiers, nor by the spreading around of the authority and fiscal resources that the generals believe should remain centralized if Pakistan is to be properly governed and the military's own rising budgetary desires easily satisfied. Seeing the two parties as corrupt and untrustworthy in matters of national security, the generals had been searching for a viable "third option." Their ideal was a clean, technocratic government, but they saw that at least a modicum of legitimacy was needed too. Khan fits this bill: He is a national sports hero who is personally unblemished. He has always presented himself as a political alternative. He clamors for technocratic experts to run the government, vocally supports military-backed jihadist groups such as the Afghan Taliban, espouses a virulent nationalism, and above all expresses deference to the military.

Khan also shares the military's antidemocratic impulses. In the past, his party's dismal performances at the polls have led him publicly to question the legitimacy of democratic elections. He has often demeaned Parliament as fake and ineffectual. He has positioned himself as a Pakistani nationalist who opposes U.S. intervention in the region. In fact, Khan gave his dormant political career a significant boost by stridently opposing the U.S. military presence in neighboring Afghanistan. Like many in Pakistan, including the military, Khan argues that U.S. operations in Afghanistan are to blame for rising militancy in the region. He vociferously opposed the U.S. use of armed drones along Pakistan's northwestern frontier, and condemned the PPP and PML-N for allowing the United States to violate Pakistani sovereignty. Before he came into office, he said that, as prime minister, he would order drones shot down.

Pakistan's military has been a habitual political offender. It has ruled the country directly for almost half the time since Pakistan was formed by the partition of British India in 1947. From the country's founding until 2012, not even once did an elected Pakistani government finish

**FIGURE—PARTY VOTE SHARE IN PAKISTAN’S PAST THREE ELECTIONS**

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan.

its term and peacefully transfer power to another elected government. Instead, coups or other autocratic dismissals of elected governments always intervened. And even when the army was not in power, the generals kept a strong tutelary grip on national politics from behind the scenes.

The latest bout of military rule ended in 2007 when Musharraf stepped down as army chief almost a decade after seizing power and driving Nawaz Sharif into exile. The subsequent elections, held in February 2008, brought a PPP win under Bhutto’s widower, Asif Ali Zardari. While the military outwardly expressed its loyalty to democracy, its retreat to the barracks had not stemmed from any commitment to democratic norms. Instead, the costs of military rule had risen in the face of a civil society mobilization led by a “lawyers’ movement” seeking to reinstate the chief justice whom Musharraf had sacked.<sup>9</sup> As before, the generals were prepared to tolerate democracy only so long as civilian governments “behaved.”

The PPP government achieved the rare feat of completing its five-year tenure. While it deserves credit for successfully pushing through significant legislation such as the Eighteenth Amendment, the government survived in power mostly by keeping the generals appeased. The military kept the political leadership on a short leash and periodically intervened to prevent unfavorable outcomes, as when the PPP government tried to place the ISI under civilian ministerial control in 2009. The next election, held in May 2013, brought a symbolic achievement: For the first time, a civilian government that had completed its regular term freely and peacefully handed power to a competitor that had won victory at the polls. The PPP stepped down according to law as Sharif’s PML-N

took office. The high turnout that year (55 percent of all registered voters) was another hopeful sign. It was up from 48 percent in 2008, and came despite the real threat of election-day violence from the Pakistani Taliban.

But Sharif, who has had a troubled history with the military, irked the generals by seeking to normalize relations with India and by trying to prosecute Musharraf for subverting the constitution. The military responded by backing Khan as he hurled accusations that the 2013 polling had been rigged. Insisting that the PTI had been cheated of victory, Khan urged his followers to march on Islamabad in August 2014. He demanded Sharif's resignation, to be followed by fresh elections run by a caretaker government acting under military oversight. The army denied that it supported the protesters, but soldiers tellingly stood by as Khan's marchers entered the capital's high-security "red zone," broke through the fence around Parliament House, and then forced their way into and ransacked the headquarters of the national television network.<sup>10</sup> The silver lining was that, unlike in the past when politicians would typically "knock on the barracks door" to settle political scores, the opposition PPP, the Pashtun-nationalist Awami National Party (ANP), and even the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) rallied behind the government. Sharif's cabinet survived the unrest.

Two years later, civil-military tensions rose again over the "Dawn leaks" scandal. In October 2016, Pakistan's newspaper of record, *Dawn*, published an account of a National Security Committee meeting in which Sharif had reportedly urged the ISI chief to stop supporting violent Islamist groups as a tool of national-security policy lest Pakistan find itself condemned to international isolation. The military reacted to this disclosure with rage. Its Public Information Directorate whipped the media into a frenzy against Sharif while the high command publicly vented its anger at the government for failing to guard national-security secrets. Under pressure to mollify the generals, Sharif reluctantly ordered an inquiry and scapegoated one of his key foreign-policy aides, but the military publicly rejected the inquiry as insufficient. Fortuitously for the generals and Khan, a trove of leaked Panamanian law-firm documents that had become public in April 2016 linked Sharif's children to offshore financial entities that owned upscale apartments in London. Sharif's own name was absent from the Panama Papers, but this did not stop Khan from demanding judicial investigations of Sharif and his family.

Over the decade since the lawyers' movement helped to secure the restoration of then-Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry to the Supreme Court, the judiciary has increasingly asserted its independence. On the whole, however, Pakistan's courts have been more of a hindrance than a help to the cause of democratic transition. Accustomed to severe and prolonged limits on their autonomy under military rule, the courts

have compiled an abysmal record when it comes to defending democracy against military interventions. Judges' rulings often reflect military preferences. And the presence of a few honorable dissenters on the high bench has never been enough to stop the Supreme Court from citing the doctrine of "necessity" to cover each successful military coup (1958, 1977, and 1999) with a veneer of legality.

Since Musharraf's exit, the newly empowered judges have been widely accused of selectively kowtowing to the military. In June 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani of the PPP was disqualified from continuing in office. He had been convicted of contempt for refusing a court order to reopen a dormant corruption inquiry against then-president Zardari. Civil-military tensions had intensified following the U.S. raid that killed Osama bin Laden in May 2011, and Gilani was put on the chopping block after he openly denounced the military for acting like "a state within a state" and allowing the terrorist leader to hide in Pakistan for six years.

The military also influenced the Supreme Court's July 2017 decision to oust Sharif. The ISI-run probe that became the basis for Sharif's dismissal had been discredited by serious charges that witnesses were being intimidated and having their phones illegally tapped.<sup>11</sup> The judges nonetheless ordered the country's top anticorruption agency, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), to use evidence from the probe to open a case against Sharif and his relatives. On 6 July 2018, just weeks before the election, Sharif was convicted in absentia (he was in London) to ten years in prison for owning assets disproportionate to his income. As the EU observer mission in Pakistan noted, Sharif's disqualification, conviction, and arrest upon his July 13 return "reshaped the political environment ahead of the election."<sup>12</sup> As if for good measure, the courts also banned the candidacies of several other PML-N leaders with corruption or contempt convictions. The EU observers described these moves as a "systematic effort to undermine the former ruling party."<sup>13</sup>

## Stealing an Election

The main focus of the military's electoral manipulation was Punjab. The most populous of Pakistan's four provinces, it is home to slightly more than half of the country's 213 million people and holds a like share (51.8 percent) of the 272 National Assembly seats. Sharif charged that ISI officials led by Major-General Faiz Hameed, the agency's counter-intelligence chief, spent the months before the vote using blackmail and intimidation to make PML-N candidates quit the party.<sup>14</sup> In Pakistan, caretaker governments assume control before elections. These interim administrations are supposed to be nonpartisan, but the one in Punjab was run by Hasan Askari Rizvi, who acted as a PTI ally by ordering police to detain thousands of PML-N workers. Senior PML-N leaders

found themselves charged with terrorism-related offenses for staging peaceful rallies to welcome Sharif upon his return from London to serve his jail term. In the end, thirty of the PML-N's candidates in the Punjab went over to the PTI or opted to run as independents, which according to EU observers "contributed to splitting the [party's] votes and influencing the results."<sup>15</sup>

The military also shored up the PTI by working with "electables"—opportunistic politicians who swing their reliable vote banks from party to party across elections as the military's favor shifts. In April 2018, a bloc of PML-N "electables" comprising both national and provincial legislators formed a new party that called for the southern part of Punjab to receive extra development funds—a longstanding demand that they claimed the PML-N had ignored. Less than a month later, this new party merged with the PTI when Khan said that he backed the new party's demand.

The military's tactics also included the "mainstreaming" of jihadist groups in an effort to recast them as political parties. This ploy had the dual benefit (in the military's eyes) of cutting further into Sharif's vote bank while also helping to ease international pressure on Pakistan to rein in terror groups operating on its soil.<sup>16</sup> For example, the Lashkar-e-Taiba front organization, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, rebranded itself as the Milli Muslim League to compete at the polls. Weeks before the vote, the Rizvi caretaker administration removed Sunni jihadist leader Maulana Ahmed Ludhianvi from the terror watch list, thus allowing him to run for office.

The extremist Barelvi Islamist group Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) also fielded candidates. The TLP takes as its inspiration Mumtaz Qadri, the police bodyguard who was hanged in 2016 for the murder five years earlier of his protectee, Punjab governor Salman Taseer. Qadri assassinated Taseer because the latter had criticized Pakistan's law against blasphemy; the TLP openly advocates the killing of anyone it deems guilty of blasphemy. The TLP's rise to national prominence was meteoric. The military's role in this ascent became apparent when it allowed the TLP to spend most of November 2017 blockading the main highway into Islamabad. The blockade was part of a controversy over a wording change to the elected officials' oath that the TLP claimed was tantamount to blasphemy. As Khan opportunistically blamed the government and backed the TLP, the military stayed conspicuously silent, refusing to offer the PML-N any support. The protests ended with a military-brokered agreement that forced the government to accept TLP demands.<sup>17</sup>

The military also undermined the election's integrity by systematically muzzling media outlets, particularly those it saw as sympathetic to Sharif. After the *Dawn* leaks episode, the military threatened the paper's distributors and intimidated cable-television operators into blocking its news channel. In the run-up to the 2018 election, military authorities publicly called several journalists and activists threats to national secu-

rity, illegally detained reporters, pressured editors, and cracked down on dissenting news channels (not only the one run by *Dawn*, but also Geo TV).<sup>18</sup> The resulting climate of fear bred widespread self-censorship. Few news organizations were brave enough to defy the generals and support democratic institutions.

In addition to suppressing unwanted coverage, the military also promoted its own narrative. Owing to reporting restrictions, little has been written or broadcast about gross human-rights abuses in Baluchistan, where Baluch nationalists have been waging a low-intensity insurgency in pursuit of provincial autonomy. Amid this silence the military has sought to exalt its own sacrifices in the cause of national security, using television and radio channels owned by its proxies, journalists whom it embeds in news organizations, and experts dispatched to dominate talk shows.<sup>19</sup>

### The Electoral Contest

As election day neared, opinion surveys revealed a two-way contest between the PML-N and the PTI, with the PPP in third place.<sup>20</sup> The PML-N's campaign centered on its achievements in office, including progress against electricity shortages (a chronic headache in Pakistan), highway and commuter-transit improvements, and the partly finished China-Pakistan Economic Corridor—a set of infrastructure projects costing US\$64 billion and designed to tie Pakistan into China's global Belt and Road Initiative. At large rallies in Punjab and the party's stronghold in the Hazara region of KPK, Nawaz Sharif and his daughter and heir-apparent, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, used the rallying cry of “vote ko izzat dau” (honor the vote) to remind their supporters that the former prime minister's ouster had been a direct assault on the sanctity of their ballots. Sharif urged his supporters to avenge the disrespect shown to their votes by returning him to office, there to continue his economic-development work while ending the domination of the “khalai makhlooq” (aliens), meaning military-intelligence officers prone to meddling in elections.

Khan, by contrast, predictably skirted the issue of civil-military relations. Instead, he ran on an “anticorruption” agenda popular among members of the urban middle classes, many of whom blame the country's poverty, heavy debt burden, and generally dire economic condition on the alleged corruption and failed policies of traditional politicians such as the Sharifs and the Bhuttos. To Pakistan's complex economic woes Khan offered simple but intuitive solutions—including the speedy recovery of \$200 billion that he said politicians were hiding in offshore accounts—calculated to appeal to voters desperate for change. Khan also sought to broaden his base by pledging that he would replace the corrupt political status quo with a revolutionary “Naya Pakistan” (New Pakistan) modeled on the seventh-century welfare state of Medina.

There, he promised, justice, the rule of law, and merit would prevail.

His reformist agenda also featured a heavy dose of nationalism. He vowed that he would restore the country's honor by ending its reliance on U.S. and other foreign aid. During the campaign, many PTI candidates weaponized blasphemy, saying that to vote for them would be to vote against the blasphemous PML-N. Khan drew criticism within his own party for relying on corrupt political turncoats, but he appealed to necessity, arguing that without numbers in Parliament his reform plans would fail.<sup>21</sup> The PTI's larger campaign was unimpressive, however, and Khan faced embarrassingly low attendance at some Punjab rallies. It was a sign, said his critics, that his party owed more to the military's "political engineering" than to genuine popularity.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) reported a registered-voter turnout of 52 percent, down from 55 percent in 2013. The lower figure was not surprising given the widespread perception that the military had already fixed the election. In fact, it was Pakistan's most militarized to date. The ECP asked the military to provide 350,000 troops for security. That was five times the number deployed in the last election—held in 2013, when security conditions were much worse. Accepting the ECP's request in order to ensure "free and fair" elections, the military ultimately dispatched 371,000 troops (including reservists and retired soldiers) to the 85,000 polling stations across the country. The ECP gave judicial powers to military personnel, who deployed inside polling stations against most parties' wishes.<sup>22</sup> Crucially, the military set up a parallel structure for vote management and counting that, as the EU observation mission put it, "negat[ed] the civilian ownership of the electoral process."<sup>23</sup> In many cases, soldiers denied local election observers and journalists entry to polling stations and evicted polling agents (party workers who, as mandated by law, observe the counting process). Especially in districts where races between the PTI and the PML-N were expected to be close, troops reportedly took full control of the counting.<sup>24</sup>

Although the army denied all allegations, opposition parties charged that massive rigging had taken place. An audit conducted by NGOs found that the official document for tabulating results at each polling station, known as Form 45, was in 95 percent of cases lacking the polling agent's signature required by law. This finding is consistent with the charge, made by at least six parties, that their polling agents had been expelled by army officers.<sup>25</sup> The EU observers lent credence to these claims, noting in their report that "during counting, security personnel recorded and transmitted the results, giving the impression of a parallel tabulation."<sup>26</sup> The observers themselves were hampered in their ability to properly observe the entire electoral process because Pakistani authorities had delayed the observers' official authorization to deploy.<sup>27</sup>

The announcement of provisional results came more than a day after

it was due under the 2017 Election Act, further fueling doubts about the fairness of the count. The ECP blamed the delay on a technical problem, saying that a malfunction of its electronic Results Transmission

System had slowed local election officials' efforts to upload results to the central ECP database. Credible media reports, however, suggested that the transmission system had never broken down, and that officials had deliberately stopped using it after receiving instructions from an "unknown caller," a well-known euphemism for a military-intelligence operative.<sup>28</sup>

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In addition to emerging as the National Assembly's largest single party, the PTI also made unusually strong

gains in provincial elections. Its 2013 plurality of provincial legislative seats in KPK, for instance, turned into a two-thirds majority five years later—in a province that has historically voted out incumbents. The ANP, which ruled the province from 2008 to 2013, managed to win just seven seats, a sign of its continuing electoral decline.

No less remarkable was the PTI's capture of 122 seats in the 371-seat Provincial Assembly of Punjab, the province that is Sharif's stronghold. This was just eight seats shy of the 130 seats that the PML-N won there. The close result left independents, who formed the legislature's third-largest bloc, with the deciding votes. In the end, the PTI was able to form a ruling coalition in Punjab with the support of 27 independents plus seven members of a minor party. This happened amid rumors that the ISI was blocking the PML-N's coalition-building efforts by threatening to target independent legislators with corruption cases.

In Karachi, the country's commercial hub and the capital of the province of Sindh, the PTI won 14 of the city's 21 National Assembly seats, dealing a fatal blow to the ethnic MQM, a party that claims to represent Urdu speakers who migrated from India at independence in 1947, and that has been Karachi's dominant electoral force since the late 1980s. With its leader, Altaf Hussain, in self-imposed exile, the party fragmented as a result of the divide-and-rule tactics of the Rangers (a paramilitary force nominally under the federal Interior Ministry's authority but in fact controlled by the army). The Rangers have been deployed in the city since 2013 to aid police in fighting crime and terrorism. The MQM has long been suspected of crimes such as extortion and murdering opponents and internal dissidents. In recent years, the Rangers and military intelligence targeted the party almost exclusively, raiding its offices, arresting its leaders on flimsy charges of abetting terrorism, and coercing them to join a breakaway faction.

The PPP also accused the ISI of trying to intimidate candidates into defecting. If such tactics were used against Sindh's long-dominant party, they were not enough to break its hold on the province: The PPP won a majority of Provincial Assembly seats and, for the third consecutive time, formed Sindh's government. The PTI won the second-largest seat share, and is now the main opposition party in Sindh. In Baluchistan, the military-backed Baluchistan Awami Party (BAP), created out of PML-N dissidents and other electables, won the most seats and formed a coalition with the PTI.

The Islamists generally fared poorly at the polls. Two of the newly "mainstreamed" parties failed to win any seats at both the national and provincial levels. Most top leaders of the more established Islamist parties lost, and their alliance, known as the MMA, won 4.85 percent of the vote and just a dozen National Assembly seats. The TLP, which joined no coalition, failed to win any National Assembly seats but did come in fifth among all parties in nationwide vote share, enough to make it the leading Islamist party in electoral terms. Its only legislative representation consists of two members of the Sindh Provincial Assembly, but it did crucial damage to the PML-N by winning 10 percent of the vote in Punjab, cutting into the conservative vote bank there. The TLP is now that province's third-largest party by vote share.

Analysts have argued that the election results expose the PML-N and PPP as merely regional parties, while the PTI emerges as the only party with truly nationwide appeal. But this view fails to acknowledge how badly the electoral field was tilted against the PML-N by the military's machinations and the incarceration of Nawaz Sharif shortly before the election. Khan and the PTI, conversely, drew a clear advantage from the way the army pulled strings on their behalf. As the Figure on page 132 shows, the party almost doubled its vote share (from 17 to 32 percent) between 2013 and 2018, a gain that reflects at least in part the large-scale defections from the PML-N to the PTI induced by the military. The PTI's mandate is therefore tainted by its opportunistic collusion with the military. Against the party's democratic legitimacy must be placed a question mark.

Soon after the results were announced, the general who acts as the military's official spokesperson tweeted a Koranic verse—"You honor who You will, and You humble who You will"—that seemed indirectly to confirm the military's backing of Khan. The opposition parties, including the PML-N, rejected the results and vowed to launch protests, which might have jeopardized the formation of the new government. While the smaller Pashtun ethnic and religious parties demanded a repeat election, the PML-N and the PPP ultimately decided to take their seats in Parliament, arguing that they would be in a better position to challenge the rigged results from inside rather than outside that body. In the case of the PML-N, the reversal of the decision to boycott the legis-

lature revealed not merely a split over tactics but also the party's lack of capacity for mass mobilization, especially without Sharif.

During his short time in office, Khan has filled his cabinet with tried and failed Musharraf-era technocrats and ministers, and has shown himself unable to make firm decisions or offer a coherent policy program. Lacking experience at governing, he has wavered from one policy position to another and continued to make bombastic populist promises—such as providing ten-million jobs and building five-million units of public housing—that he will never be able to keep given Pakistan's dependence on foreign assistance to keep its economy afloat. In fact, his government is in talks to seek an IMF bailout worth \$12 billion to avert a balance-of-payments crisis.

Khan has made relatively pragmatic statements on relations with neighbors, emphasizing peace and trade with India rather than conflict. But in their efforts to appear stronger than their predecessors, Khan and his team have made a series of blunders. For example, his government forcefully denied that the U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo had urged Khan in a telephone call to act against terrorists operating in Pakistan, only to backtrack after U.S. authorities released a transcript of the conversation. Despite his government's declaration of independence in making domestic and foreign policy, Khan owes his most notable initiative—the opening of a border corridor in Kartarpur (Punjab), home to a Sikh holy site, to pilgrims from India—to the army's chief of staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. In an apparent bid to end Pakistan's diplomatic isolation by appearing conciliatory with archrival India, Bajwa had offered to open the crossing while meeting a prominent Indian Sikh politician and former cricketer who was visiting Pakistan for Khan's inauguration.<sup>29</sup>

The hot-button issue of Khan's young premiership has been the Asia Bibi case. When the Supreme Court in late October 2018 overturned the Christian woman's 2010 conviction on capital blasphemy charges, ruling that witnesses had lied, the TLP took to the streets once again. Doubtless emboldened by the success of its 2017 road blockade, the TLP not only demanded that Bibi be hanged despite the ruling, but also denounced the judges as apostates who deserved to be killed. In addition, it incited the army to revolt against General Bajwa, based on the claim that he is an Ahmadi (a member of a minority sect officially declared "non-Muslim" in 1974 due to its lack of belief in Muhammad's status as God's final prophet). The TLP's supporters blockaded highways across the country, destroyed public and private property, and clashed with the police.

Khan at first seemed to take a resolute stand, warning TLP leaders in a nationally televised address that rejecting the state's authority would prove costly. But in a characteristic retreat, his government then sought an agreement with the TLP, once again brokered by the ISI. If the TLP called off its street actions, the government pledged, it would put Bibi

on the no-fly list, allow an appeal seeking to overturn her acquittal, and release all protesters.<sup>30</sup> While TLP leaders were subsequently placed in “protective custody” for refusing to call off another planned protest, by showing their inability or unwillingness to enforce the rule of law, Khan and his military sponsors have undermined state authority, given a fillip to the TLP’s bigotry, and further reduced the cost to such groups of using violence to achieve political goals.

Pakistan has made some democratic gains since the transition from Musharraf’s authoritarian rule, including the landmark Eighteenth Amendment. But despite passing the two-turnover test of democratic consolidation, the country’s political system may be most accurately classified as a pseudodemocratic façade covering the reality of continued military tutelage. As the military constricts the civic space for opposition and dissent, it expects Khan to do its bidding if he wants to remain prime minister. For Khan, indeed, this may not be much of an imposition: There is no indication that he disagrees with the military on important domestic and external issues. Thus civil-military relations are likely to be harmonious, but the surface calm will mask a power imbalance between the politicians and the soldiers that may not always prove stable.

## NOTES

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