

April 2008
Report n. 5



PAKISTAN
HAS THE FUTURE BEGUN?

Executive Summary

The February 18 elections ushered in a new phase in Pakistan's history. The electorate clearly awarded parties inspired by democratic ideals, and rejected the military regime as well as religious extremist groups. In particular, the election reinforced the Bhutto family's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) party of Nawaz Sharif, and the Awami National Party (ANP), popular especially among the ethnic Pashtun population. On the other hand, the Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-I-Azam (PML-Q), Musharraf's ally party, was defeated. The results clearly confirm the pre-electoral polls, showing that possible vote-rigging was not able to override the will of the people, as had occurred various other times in the country's history.

After several weeks of consultation, the victorious parties reached an agreement regarding the composition of the government. Yusuf Raza Gilani, the Punjab parliamentary deputy and member of PPP, was elected prime minister. Notably, Gilani's votes included the *Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam - Fazlur Rehman* (JUI-F) party, the only one of six religious groups united in the coalition *Muttahida-Majilis-i-Amal* (MMA) present at the election, as well as *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (MQM), the party supporting Musharraf.

However, despite the initial enthusiasm for a new political direction, different variables threaten to influence the country's progress toward democracy and stability; the following are factors that cause the most concern:

- The majority that backs the government is formed by parties with rather different historic, ideological and geographical roots; therefore the cohesion of the alliance could be precarious when faced with making controversial or unpopular decisions. The executive power faces issues crucial for the country such as the reinstatement of the judges and the independence of the Judiciary, the revival of the economy and the protection of the weakest social classes, the fight against terrorism, the reestablishment of a balance between the center and peripheral areas of the country, and the normalisation of relationships between political leaders and military leaders in a framework of mutual trust and respect.
- It remains to be seen how President Musharraf, having been confirmed by the departing legislature, will react to the new government whose principal element of cohesion is hostility towards him. Musharraf holds vast, self-granted power (of dissolution of the parliament, dismissal of the prime minister, and nomination of top military figures) that

parliament is unable to change due to the fact that a two-thirds majority in both houses is necessary to amend the constitution, and pro-Musharraf parties still prevail in the senate. Impeachment could be impending for the president, which requires a two-thirds majority of both houses together, and could be attained with the opposition parties.

- The sudden political changes in Pakistan have put the USA in a difficult position. Despite his decrease in popularity in 2007, the US was a staunch supporter of Musharraf until just recently, convinced he was the only figure capable of opposing terrorism and protecting the country's nuclear assets. Now, it is important to understand whether the USA is able to recognise the significance of a vote that reflects their fundamental values and their security requirements, and will choose to put their support in the entire population of Pakistan instead of a single individual. The main challenge involves Washington's capability to accept the new government's policy regarding internal insurrection, composed of a mix of political and military measures.
- The evolution of the current economic situation is of utmost concern. Pakistan was strongly impacted by the global rise in the cost of crude oil and raw materials which has had a particularly devastating effect on the most vulnerable sector of the population. Sacrifices and unpopular choices must be made, which could threaten political stability.
- Military leaders have always played an important role in Pakistan's political life. The new Chief of Army Staff Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, western-educated and liberal, is leading the army to abandon its interventionism in politics. Among other reasons, this is to improve its public image, seriously damaged in the eyes of the people who view the military synonymously with the unpopular authoritarian regime of Musharraf. Kayani has repeatedly voiced his loyalty to public institutions, and his desire to create a steadfast collaboration among all bodies of the state. It remains to be seen what decisions he will make when faced with choices that could exceedingly penalise the military.
- Subversive groups continue to carry out destabilising terrorist attacks against institutional and military targets. When faced with peace proposals from the new government, Pakistan Taliban groups have demonstrated a general willingness to participate in negotiations, but under unacceptable conditions such as the interruption of military collaboration with the US, the introduction of Sharia law in tribal areas, and the liberation of subversive leaders in captivity.

In conclusion, signs emerging from post-election political developments are encouraging. All of the principal players have demonstrated a flexibility and pragmatism which they were lacking in the past. Collaboration has been favoured over conflict, allowing hope for the possibility of transition to democracy. In the end, the deciding factor of the success of this transition will be the ability of the government's coalition members to act judiciously, and resist

the urge to try and weaken other members of the coalition. The duration of the coalition will depend on the maturity of their political leaders, who must know how to put the general interest of the people above the specific interests of their party, their social groups, or the geographical areas that they represent. All political forces, including those of the opposition, must work together to make parliament sovereign and the Judiciary independent, and to develop a series of checks and balances between the chief of army staff and the prime minister.

The international community, particularly the US, needs to assist in this process, keeping in mind the past errors and avoiding further placement of excessive emphasis – and excessive funding – on the military. Instead, the focus should be on the country's development, especially in the areas along the border with Afghanistan. It would be opportune to continue to believe, in word and in action, that the most effective tools for fighting terrorism are democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of rights.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Executive Summary</i>	i
<i>Table of Contents</i>	v
1. Election results	1
2. Variables on the road to stability	6
2.1. Cohesion of the majority	6
2.2. Musharraf’s reaction	7
2.3. The USA’s conduct	8
2.4. Development of the economic situation.....	10
2.5. The Army’s actions	11
2.6. Subversive groups’ initiatives	13
3. Conclusions	17
Annex:	
Election results	19

NB. This report is the third update of the report on Pakistan previously produced by ARGO (www.argoriente.it), where background material is available that is not included in the present report.

Please refer to:

Report n. 1 - *Pakistan, an uncertain future*, October 2007

Annexes:

 Chronology

 Main political parties and coalitions

 Acronyms

Report n. 2 – *Pakistan, A difficult road to democracy*, December 2007

Report n. 3 – *Pakistan, between instability and risk of economic crisis*, January 2008

Annex:

 Chronology of main events of 2007