

PAKISTAN'S NEXT GOVERNMENT BEGINNING TO TAKE SHAPE

Most of the results from Saturday's historic election in Pakistan are in. The biggest surprise is that Imran Khan's PTI party, which had been viewed as a possible upset winner, fell to third place behind the outgoing PPP. Nawaz Sharif and his PML-N party came very close to achieving a majority in the National Assembly, but since a majority was not achieved, Sharif is now in the process of forging the alliances that will be needed for him to form a government for which he will once again become Prime Minister. Here are the latest numbers from the Express Tribune:

Contrary to most pre-poll predictions, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the single largest party by securing 123 seats of the National Assembly, according to the results released by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The election commission has received 256 results out of 268 constituencies, and are still waiting for results from 12 constituencies, a senior ECP official said.

In order to win a simple majority in the 342-member lower house, a party or coalition would need 172 seats. Of the total seats, 272 are for directly elected members while 60 are reserved seats for women and 10 are for minorities.

These reserved seats are allocated to parties as per their performance in the polls. As per the results from ECP, PML-N has secured 123 seats; Pakistan

Peoples Party Parliamentarian (PPPP) bagged 37 seats, followed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which managed to get 27 seats. Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) won 18 seats, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) 10 seats, Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F) four seats, Jamaat-e-Islami three seats, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) two seats, NPP and PML two seats each.

We learn more about how the election proceeded from AFP (via the Express Tribune):

It was targeted by the Taliban, women and minorities were vastly under-represented, and videos of irregularities went viral online – yet Pakistan's 2013 election may still have been its fairest ever.

A much improved voter roll, near-record turnout, and vigilant citizens tweeting alleged rigging all played their part in what former Norwegian PM and election observer Kjell Magne Bondevik called “a credible expression of the will of the people”.

Saturday's election saw about 50 million Pakistanis vote, with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif emerging the winner nearly 14 years after he was deposed in a coup.

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Violence in the run-up to polls and on election day itself killed more than 150 people, according to an AFP tally, as the Taliban set their sights in particular on secular parties that made up the outgoing government.

In a remarkable use of technology, voters were able to text their voter ID number to find out immediately the location of their polling

station. Although 50 million votes were cast, the polling location service was accessed 55 million times.

Perhaps because of the unexpectedly poor performance of his party, Imran Khan is continuing to pursue charges of rigging in several districts:

The Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf has identified “significant rigging instances” in as many as 20 constituencies in Punjab and decided to move Supreme Court and Election Commission of Pakistan “to seek justice”.

The PTI issued a list of 15 national and five Punjab Assembly constituencies claiming the party had “valid proofs” of rigging there.

PTI chairman Imran Khan has said in a message the ECP and SC should take the rigging complaints seriously because future of the country as well as democracy directly depended upon free and fair elections.

Each of the three major parties will wind up controlling a provincial assembly. On this page from Dawn, we see that the PML-N has a large majority in Punjab, the PPP won the majority in Sindh and PTI is the majority party in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas.

Writing at Foreign Policy, Arif Rafiq put the election into perspective:

Whatever else Pakistanis may disagree on, there appears to be a consensus, at least for now, that democracy is the way forward. The country’s major power brokers – its two largest parties, the army, judiciary, and private media – have been at odds with one another over the past five years, but the chaos has been controlled and all these actors

exercised some restraint during the election so as to not derail the democratic process. With the high turnout on election day and enthusiasm that preceded the polls, the public appears to be buying in to the democratic system as well. (Remember, this is a country where military strongman Pervez Musharraf once enjoyed an approval rate above 60 percent.)

But if this pro-democratic sentiment is to survive, voters need to see results in the form of good governance and meaningful economic reform. The Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), which has led the country's ruling coalition for the past five years, must be given credit for helping instill a culture of consensus-building among Pakistan's political elite. This traditionally adversarial lot managed to pass three major constitutional amendments that not only involved a significant amount of give and take, but also instituted the electoral reforms that made Saturday's great turnout possible.

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The challenges Pakistan faces are grave. The economy is mired in stagflation. The government is essentially bankrupt. The terrorist threat endures and evolves. Radicalism is a cancer that eats at the country's core. And neighboring Afghanistan could face another civil war. But with one of its highest voter turnouts ever, and the army, politicians, judiciary, and media all acting in support of democracy, the country has taken a decisive step in right direction. Political stability and legitimate governance are prerequisites for enduring reform.

Congratulations to the citizens of Pakistan for

courageously stepping forward to exercise their rights. Let us hope the government they have elected continues this move toward a more functional democracy.