

## **Chapter 4**

### **Election Campaign and Media**

#### **Political parties**

One hundred and forty eight political parties contested the national and provincial assembly elections. The main parties were: the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) (which contests elections as the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Awami National Party (ANP), the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), the Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

#### **Campaign period and key campaign themes**

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) issued a revised code of conduct for political parties in October 2012, which among other things, provided the framework for election campaigning. The Election Commission also put in place a small number of monitors to track compliance with the Code.

Of note is the fact that the Code of Conduct required political parties and candidates to:

- Not undermine the ideology of Pakistan or ridicule its judiciary or armed forces
- Abide by all directives issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan
- Uphold the rights and freedoms of the people of Pakistan as guaranteed by the Constitution

Additionally, the Code sets out limits on campaign spending by candidates, size of campaign materials and their placement, use of government resources, interaction with the media and use of fire arms.

The campaign period lasted for three weeks, with a 48-hour campaign silence before the opening of the poll on 11 May 2013.

Campaign issues varied across provinces and parties, but key themes were the economy, the energy crisis and security.

#### **Campaign environment**

The traditional campaigning style of mass rallies and large meetings with party leaders was possible only for some parties and in some regions. This was because the campaign environment was marred by violence and the threat of violence. This violence was perpetrated by non-state actors, consisting mainly of the Pakistani Taliban, but also nationalist insurgents

in Balochistan. In the weeks leading up to the election, the Pakistani Taliban stated their intent to target three parties; the PPPP, MQM and ANP. These parties were targeted for the perceived secular nature of their politics during their joint stint in power as members of the outgoing coalition government. The Taliban also declared the elections un-Islamic and vowed to disrupt the electoral process. This was offset by a group of senior clerics issuing a fatwa (religious decree) declaring that voting is a national duty.

Over 130 people were killed in the three weeks leading up to the election, including three election candidates. Most of the attacks that resulted in these deaths were claimed by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. The MQM and ANP suffered from fatal attacks on their offices, rallies and party workers. The threat of violence also kept the PPPP's top leadership from openly campaigning in any of the provinces, except in interior Sindh. A candidate for the PPPP (also the son of a former prime minister) was kidnapped two days before the election from a campaign rally in southern Punjab. When the Mission departed Pakistan on 16 May, this candidate had not yet been found.

In response, these parties jointly vowed to see through the electoral process. They resorted to electronic and print media advertisements, video links, Skype and mobile phone technology, door-to-door campaigning and corner meetings to reach out to voters. This campaign style was particularly widely adopted in Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where these parties have traditional strongholds.

By contrast, parties perceived to have taken a softer stance in relation to militancy were left largely unharmed.<sup>14</sup> They were able to campaign openly and actively, holding large rallies and public meetings. Amongst these parties, campaigning was competitive and vibrant and significantly, concentrated in the Punjab province. As Punjab also represents a majority of the seats in the National Assembly, coverage of campaigning in the province dominated electronic media, leading to conclusions that the main electoral battle was being fought in Punjab.

Media and civil society consistently highlighted the discrepancies in the security environments across provinces and parties. Political parties also took up the issue strongly, blaming the caretaker government and Election Commission for failing to provide a fairer campaigning environment. In relation to this, the Mission notes a statement made by a citizen observer group, the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), which fielded some 40,000 election observers across the country. It said that the pre-election violence which made the election one of the most deadly in the country's history 'was not met with an effective counter-attack by state security forces, raising concerns of patronage of certain political interests.'

### **Code of conduct**

Citizen observers regularly reported violations of the code. FAFEN reported 799 violations in

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<sup>14</sup> An isolated incident of an attack on the rally of a 'non-targeted' party was reported in the week before polling day, in which 23 people were killed. It was reported that the candidate in question was attacked for a previous alliance with the PPPP.

152 out of 272 constituencies across the four provinces in late April. Alongside independent reports of violations, political parties were active in reporting perceived violations to the Election Commission. Regularly reported violations included that of guidelines on campaign materials, use of government resources in campaigning and exceeding limits on campaign spending.

Campaign spending was a significant issue. The current campaign-spending limit for each National Assembly candidate is currently 1.5 million Rupees (\$15,000) and 1 million Rupees (\$10,000) for a Provincial Assembly candidate. Successful candidates are required to submit campaign expenses to the Election Commission within 10 days. By contrast, there is no upper limit on the campaign expenses of political parties.

Several of the political parties and analysts informed the Mission that the stipulated spending limits were unrealistic and created a situation in which candidates withheld information from the Election Commission.

## **Media**

Pakistan has a vibrant and diverse media. It plays an active role in determining public debate on national issues and in moulding public perceptions of the performance of government.

The liberalisation of the media sector in 2002 ushered in 87 new privately owned television channels (of which 15 are 24-hour news channels) and over 100 radio stations. There are an estimated 200 privately owned daily newspapers. Television is extremely popular in urban areas. In rural areas, radio penetration is high. Widespread use of the internet in urban areas contributes to a rich media landscape in which online newspapers and social media are extensively used.

Privately-owned media outlets are relatively independent from state influence and have increasingly assumed the role of challengers to the government of the day. Lack of training and investment in raising professional standards in journalism has contributed to the tendency of several, especially new, media outlets to seek sensationalist stories.

## **Election coverage**

The Election Commission of Pakistan issued a media code of conduct in April 2013. The code sought equal and equitable coverage of candidates and parties in the run up to the election. However, the lack of an enforcement mechanism was conspicuous, and meant that regulatory authorities could only deal with formally lodged complaints and did not undertake media monitoring.

Domestic media was active in its election coverage. All 24-hour news channels dedicated significant airtime to election issues. Election-related programmes provided commentary and analysis on candidates, parties, manifestos and election preparations. Extensive and high quality election supplements and editorials were a regular feature in daily newspapers. This

coverage, in addition to extensive paid advertising by political parties on state and private television networks, and in newspapers, resulted in an election-dominated media environment in the campaign period.

There were some reports that major media groups, endorsed by editors and led by popular TV anchors, gave disproportionately extensive coverage to certain political parties and candidates. On the whole however, independent citizen and international observers deemed media coverage of parties and candidates to be reasonably balanced.

Most major political parties and candidates competing in the election had active Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. One of the reasons why social media was so popular in this election was the desire of parties to attract youth voters (18–35 years), who formed at least 50 per cent of registered vote

### **Recommendations**

- Review the effectiveness of measures to ensure security to candidates and parties, in light of the experiences of this election period, and in consultation with political parties.
- Review the limits on campaign spending in consultation with political parties so that limits are realistic.