



PILDAT Releases Comparative Study of Election Manifestoes

Election 2008 Manifestoes of Political Parties: Parties' Positions Remain Vague on Key Issues

The Analysis of the Election 2008 Manifestoes of Major Political Parties of Pakistan is an attempt by PILDAT to highlight, for the benefit of the Pakistani electorate, how each of the major political parties plans to address key national issues confronting Pakistani state and society today. The comparative analysis of election manifestos of major political parties aims to provide a tool whereby the general public becomes more aware of the alternative choices available to them in the form of different political parties.

The paper analyses the manifestoes of major political parties that have been unveiled ahead of Election 2008. The paper covers the manifestoes of the Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), Muttahidda Quami Movement (MQM), Pakistan Muslim League (PML), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Instead of analysing the manifesto of each political party separately, the paper analyses the position of each of the parties included in the study on a list of issues including Economic Issues, Political Issues, Social Issues and Nuclear Policy and Foreign Relations. The list of issues analysed in the study has been either derived from the result of various recent public opinion polls in which people have ordered issues of importance or PILDAT has picked them as issues that dominate the 2008 Election debate. For the purpose of analysis, parties' positions have been defined as General, Detailed, Extensive or No Stance. The analysis of the manifestoes reveals that on most issues, the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz have outlined detailed or extensive policies. Some other parties analysed such as the PML and the MQM have also presented detailed positions on some issues but in comparison to the PPP and PML-N who have had experience in running the governments at the centre and in the provinces, the positions of other political parties lack comprehensive treatment.

A common feature of the manifestoes is the generality or vagueness of their positions on a number of issues. At times, the articulation of the positions amounts to non-statements. Despite this common flaw, some parties have taken specific positions on some issues and that makes the public accountability of the party easy once it comes into power and serves for a term.

Apart from parties' positions on each issue tabulated in the study, the Party Position Chart in the beginning of the study outlines whether a party has taken a position on the issue and the extent of the policies of each party contained in their manifestoes on the categorisation of General, Detailed and Extensive.

On the broader cluster of Economic Issues including Unemployment, Poverty Alleviation, Agricultural Development and Water Resources and Energy, the PML-N and the PPP have presented detailed policies followed by the PML and the MQM. The ANP, mostly focussing on economic issues faced by the NWFP has taken a detailed position only on the Agricultural Development and Water Resources stressing its position against the construction of new water reservoirs. On the critical issue of Energy crisis in the country, both MQM and the PML have outlined no position in their manifestoes while only the PPP has discussed the subject in detail with all remaining parties with a general mention of their position on the issue. The most striking and bold aspect of the PPP's economic manifesto is the commitment to provide guaranteed employment for at least 1 year.

In the section containing Political Issues including Independence of the Judiciary, Civil-Military Relations, Sovereignty of the Parliament, Provincial Autonomy, Devolution and the Local Government System, Status of FATA, Policy to Counter Terrorism, Independence of the Media and Corruption and Accountability, it is the PML-N and the PPP that have made extensive pledges. The PML-N is the only political party that has devoted a chapter in its manifesto to the Independence of the Judiciary and the Civil-Military Relations, taking a clear position on the reinstatement of the deposed judges. The PML and the MQM, both allies of the Musharraf regime, have taken no position on the question of civil-military relations or on the role of military in politics or the independence of the judiciary. The PPP is conspicuous by taking a very brief, general and almost vague position on the Independence of Judiciary and by taking no position at all on the reinstatement of the judges deposed unconstitutionally on November 3, 2007. Both PPP and the PML-N have outlined extensive positions on the sovereignty of the Parliament outlining key reform to strengthen the institution of Parliament.

On the issues of Education, Health, Labour, Rights of Women, Non-Muslims, Youth and Environment, the parties' positions follow the same pattern. Despite Youth constituting a large chunk of the population and notwithstanding youth's role in the overall electorate today and in the days to come, most political parties including the PPP, the ANP, the MMA and the MQM do not mention Youth in their manifestoes with only the PML and the PML-N outlining detailed positions on the subject. The issue of Health, Women Development, Rights of Non-Muslim Communities and Environment too do not receive adequate levels of attention by the political parties whose manifestoes have been covered in the study. Issues of Labour, as expected, have been mentioned in the greatest detail and the most specific terms in the PPP manifesto. The PML-N, though, is the only party which has given a specific figure (Rs. 5000) for the new minimum monthly wage for labour.

On the Security Policy, especially Nuclear Policy and Pakistan's Foreign Policy with key regional and international players including India, Afghanistan, USA, European Union, China and the Muslim Countries, most parties' positions are not a departure from the existing nuclear policy of the country with all parties supporting strengthening of relations with regional and international players. The PPP wishes to place the command and control of nuclear weapons under the Defence Committee of the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister unlike the current position where this control has been vested in the President recently. The PPP has also outlined extensive proposals to improve relations

with Afghanistan while the PML-N wishes to focus on building economic ties with countries around the world.

An important issue which has not received direct or detailed attention from any political party is the fast declining business competitiveness of Pakistan in a globalised world. The vision, policy and plan to address this critical issue are missing from the party manifestoes.

Almost all parties except the former ruling party the PML have repeatedly demanded “an independent Election Commission” but surprisingly how these parties, with the small exception of the PML-N, propose to make the Election Commission independent is not touched in the manifestoes.

Agriculture in Pakistan is suffering due to shortage of irrigation water. The scarcity of water during the low-rain periods necessitates development of water reservoirs on the rivers. The current reservoirs are silting up and capacity is depleting. In addition, hydroelectric projects are essential to meet the rising needs of energy at competitive rates. Despite these pressing needs, Pakistan has been unable to build new storage dams and hydroelectric projects because the provinces could not develop consensus. Unfortunately, none of the political parties have proposed a tangible solution to this critical problem and have largely dwelled in generalities and expression of good wishes.

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