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Uncertainty and instability set in Pakistan



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The elections scheduled for November 2023 were finally held on the 8th. However, doubts, controversy and scepticism loom over Pakistan, and it seems that, once again, the popular will will not be respected. The Asian giant faces a delicate crossroads.

The possible victory of the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf/Pakistan Justice Movement) has shattered all pre-election forecasts. And all this at a more than adverse juncture.

Its leader was imprisoned, and received an avalanche of sentences days before the elections, many of its leaders and cadres in prison or in hiding. The party was stripped of its iconic electoral symbol (cricket bat), was unable to run as a political party (which prevents it from accessing the distribution of the 70 seats for minorities and women) and was barely able to hold rallies, its website was shut down. He was denied a level playing field. All the institutions and political parties were against him.

And yet it is the leading force in the state parliament and has won two of the four provincial parliaments. Local analysts point out that "the support of young people, a vote of sympathy for the imprisoned leader and the feeling of rejection of the maneuvers of the establishment" would have been key in that victory.

The maneuvers and the hand of the all-powerful establishment (a term not to call the army by its name) continue to pull the strings. The final recount of the votes, carried out at night and treacherously, has opened the door to new post-election manipulations. Leaving doubts about the transparency and impartiality of the process.

The all-powerful Pakistani military continues to control the landscape. An army heir to British colonial practice, and which later took advantage of the Cold War and the support of the United States, finally becoming a state within a state. It has long been using the fear of a possible confrontation with India and control of foreign and domestic policy to maintain its political and material privileges.

Today, it is the institution with the best economic resources in the country, with large budget items, a business conglomerate and huge land holdings. Not to mention that it continues to receive economic and military assistance from the United States. For all these reasons, it wants to maintain the huge budget allocations and all its advantages and business ventures.

Journalist M. S. Ullah has described the situation this way, "feudal lords, in collaboration with a complicit local bureaucracy, law enforcement and thugs, exert overwhelming influence over local governance, leaving ordinary citizens vulnerable to their whims and favouritism, and even dictating their electoral choices, thus stifling independence and political freedoms."

Pakistan faces a complex set of challenges. The economic outlook is bleak, with inflation and unemployment on the rise, and a very serious capital crisis, all exacerbated by international crises and severe floods in 2022. Some analysts point to the need to resort to new loans, which will generate an avalanche of neoliberal measures, which in turn will bring the anger of the population.

Internal political instability, marked by political polarization and the prospect of the formation of a weak alliance government, will be aggravated by the increase in violence. In recent months the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) have reorganized, and taking advantage of the weaponry abandoned by NATO in Afghanistan has launched a series of "high-profile" attacks. And then there's the Baloch insurgency, which attacks both Pakistan and Chinese interests in the region.

Border relations are not at their best either. The expulsion of thousands of Afghan migrants and the armed activity of the TTP has led to significant friction with neighboring Afghanistan. Cross-border attacks with Iran on the western border have opened up a new focus of concern. Meanwhile, relations around the eastern border continue to be marked by the strategic concerns of its historic adversary, India, which holds elections next May. The bet on the formation of an alliance of several parties would give the country a weak government, something that the establishment would take advantage of to continue controlling the reins, since, in case the situation goes even worse, it could force its dissolution and call new elections. Without the credibility of the elections and the legitimacy of the government that is formed, Pakistan will hardly be able to cope with political, economic and social instability. And anything that returns to the governance patterns of corrupt family dynasties will lead to further social unrest.

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