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## Good news or bad: Why everyone blames the messenger?



ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has claimed that the recent pre-elections surveys in Gilgit-Baltistan were part of the rigging process. These surveys were conducted by Gallup and Pulse and released by Geo/Jang Group. The accusations of the major opposition party are not new. The political parties in the past too attacked the messenger when the survey results were unfavourable to them but endorse and took support from the surveys when it suits them.

The PML-N has repeatedly accused that the recent surveys are part of the rigging in Gilgit-Baltistan elections. However authorities' views and the survey agencies heads' opinions are quite different from the opposition party's allegations. The ground realities, the incumbency factor in the Federation and some of the electables who deserted the PML-N before the elections are the factors which cannot be ignored.

In the past, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Imran Khan too had accused Geo/Jang Group of playing a key role in rigging the elections. After the general elections 2013 Imran Khan had accused Geo's anchors Kamran Khan of announcing the results prematurely at 11:33pm to facilitate the rigging of elections in favour of the PML-N. In 2014, Imran Khan quoted and endorsed Gallup survey because it was favourable to the PTI-led government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. But he attacked the same survey agency several times when the survey findings were not favourable for the PTI.

According to experts, the recent pre-elections survey wasn't carried out by a single agency, but by two different agencies that predicted the election results. One of the survey agencies is Gallup that according to the PTI is allegedly anti-PTI. Similarly, the method and survey results were published by the survey agencies therefore any doubt on the survey findings is out of question. Political experts having keen eye on the elections in GB claim that the PML-N had only six serious candidates in the race for GB elections 2020. Most of its electables had joined the PTI or moved away and contested the elections as independent candidates. The on-ground reports were similar to the survey ranges.

According to authorities concerned, the ruling party in the Federation typically wins in such types of elections, in other words incumbency plays a huge role in GB elections.

Just two days after these surveys, Geo/Jang Group published another survey whose findings were favourable to the PML-N. According to that survey, the PML-N would beat PTI if snap national elections are held. Similarly, in another survey which was published by Geo/Jang Group the same day which showed that the PTI drive for corruption is actually a drive against competition. However, the PML-N didn't point its fingers on these surveys.

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Geo/Jang Group published [Institute for Public Opinion Research \(IPOR\)](#) survey which was carried out from October 27 to November 11. According to this survey, the majority of Pakistanis (53 percent) believed that the PTI government is trying to target its opponents. While 31 percent said that the PTI government is sincere to wipe out corruption and remaining 16 percent said they don't know or have no response.

The IPOR survey further revealed that overall 49 percent respondents opined that the PDM is fighting for civil supremacy, whereas 32 percent negate that statement and said the opposition is just trying to hide its corruptions and another 19 percent did not answer this question.

According to this survey, majority 45 percent of the respondents said that they support opposition's demand for ousting this government, while 31 percent said that they support the present government to complete its term but remaining 24 percent said they don't know or have no response.

Similarly, the ballot test shows the PML-N and PTI are at neck-to-neck in their popularity with 26 percent and 25 percent, respectively. The PPP is standing at 9 percent. The biggest finding of this poll is that in case of mid-term elections, no political party will be able form the government single handedly. But the sign of concern is dismay in the electoral system and politicians as 12 percent say they will not cast vote at all.

"A close look at the numbers tells us that although the PTI has lost its popularity for 7 percent percentage points, the PML-N has gained only 2 percent since the elections of 2018. The PPP's rating is steady going down within margin of error (2.2 percent)," the survey shows.

Geo/Jang Group also published Ipsos Tracker and snap poll after the pre-elections survey according to which half of the Pakistanis blame the federal government for inflation, only 15 percent consider previous governments to be responsible. The survey showed that price hike has been felt across Pakistan, bottom end socio-economic classes are most worried about it. Similarly, 4 in 5 Pakistanis have faced a cut in their income due to COVID-19, bottom of the pyramid faced the biggest hit.

According to the findings of this survey, after remaining stagnant for the last six months, awareness level regarding COVID-19 has shown a surge amid increase in new +ve cases. After achieving ever lowest figures in September, threat perception of COVID-19 has suddenly risen sharply across all levels.

The survey further showed that Pakistanis express high trust in local news channels and religious centres for COVID-19 updates, negligible trust in social media.

"Parents' concerns regarding sending their children seem to be rebounding now across Pakistan. 20 percent more Pakistanis fear the second corona wave, since August - mainly due to non-compliance of preventive measures and SOPs are not being implemented effectively. Half of the Pakistanis are optimistic that vaccine for the cure of coronavirus will be available to them before the end of 2020. 25 percent increase in the acceptance of vaccine, 3 in 5 are now eager to get themselves vaccinated," Ipsos survey revealed.

Bilal Gilani, Executive Director Gallup Pakistan, while talking to The News said the political parties have the right to express their opinion on any public polls or surveys. He said if the survey is about politics then definitely the politicians will give their opinion about it.

"If someone analyses the survey critically, raises questions on the methodology, point fingers on the survey samples, the male and female ratio of the sample is questionable or the questionnaire of the survey wasn't framed properly, then we can answer it and engage properly. However, raising questions on the intention is problematic and it can't be analysed objectively," Gilani said.

"Two agencies have carried out surveys. If their findings are poles apart then the survey can be questioned. But if their findings are almost similar then it authenticates the findings of the surveys," he said.

Kashif Hafeez Siddiqui, CEO Pulse Consultancy, while talking to The News said the surveys are basically carried out before the elections to predict the results and this is being done across the world.

“We were hired by Geo/Jang Group for the survey but Geo has never forced us or pressured us for specific results. Geo/Jang Group is the only media organisation in Pakistan which engages the survey agencies before any important event in the country. The media organisation never demanded us for desired results of the survey though we discuss the sampling approach. The sample size of our survey was 1,400 from all 24 constituencies,” commented the head of Pulse.

“If the process of the survey wasn’t right, then one can question the research findings, but if the survey has been carried out scientifically then raising fingers or labelling the findings as pre-poll rigging is unjustified,” Kashif said.

According to Kashif, if survey findings are as per one’s wishes, they will accept it and if the findings are against them, they will reject it. Those who are rejecting the survey findings now have endorsed Pulse’s surveys in the past. About public gathering in opposition rallies, he said that the people of GB are very hospitable.

“The political dynamics and public needs in GB are different from mainstream Pakistan. Seeing gigantic names of Pakistani politics like Maryam Nawaz and Bilawal Bhutto in person is one thing, but voting is a different thing. Therefore one cannot judge the electoral politics from the public gatherings because GB’s dynamics are different,” Kashif commented.