

Pakistan's Domestic Political Setting

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Pakistan is a parliamentary democracy in which the Prime Minister is head of government and the President is head of state. A bicameral Parliament is comprised of a 342-seat National Assembly (NA) and a 104-seat Senate, both with directly-elected representatives from each of the country's four provinces, as well as from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the Islamabad Capital Territory (the quasi-independent regions of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan have no representation). The Prime Minister is selected for an indeterminate term by the NA. The President is elected to a five-year term by an Electoral College (EC) comprised of both chambers of Parliament, as well as members of each of the country's four provincial assemblies. NA and provincial assembly members are elected to five-year terms. Senate terms are six years, with elections every three years. In recent years, Pakistan's Supreme Court has taken actions significantly affecting governance.

Pakistan's political history is a troubled one. Military regimes have ruled Pakistan for more than half of its independent existence, interspersed with periods of generally weak civilian governance. In 1999, the democratically-elected government was ousted in a bloodless coup by then-Army Chief General Pervez Musharraf, who later assumed the title of President. Musharraf also retained the powerful title of Army Chief until his 2007 army retirement. Weeks before that retirement, the EC had "reelected" Musharraf to a new five-year term in a vote that many called unconstitutional (he resigned the presidency in 2008). The 2008 NA elections came only weeks after the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, leader of the dynastic Pakistan People's Party (PPP), who had returned to Pakistan in 2007 after a lengthy, self-imposed exile. Her longtime rival, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also returned from exile in 2007.

The 2008 NA elections (along with Musharraf's 2008 resignation) restored civilian governance after a decade-long hiatus, although the military continues to wield considerable influence over the country's foreign and national security policies. The five major parties listed below won about 90% of NA seats (a coalition of Islamist parties won only 2%). The PPP won a plurality of both votes and NA seats in 2008, and has led a ruling coalition government since that time. The PPP also holds 41 Senate seats, and its coalition allies hold 24 more, to provide a working majority in that chamber. Upon taking office, the coalition moved to reverse many of the constitutional changes overseen by the military government it had replaced, in particular changes in the 17th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution that had shifted key national powers from the National Assembly and Prime Minister to the President's office. The 18th Amendment, passed in 2010, restored most executive powers to the Prime Minister. The next National Assembly elections are slated to take place later in 2013. Pakistani law requires that a caretaker government be in place 90 days before such election.

Key Government Officials

President Asif Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's widower and PPP Co-Chair, began his five-year term in September 2008, previously served in both the NA and Senate during the 1990s, and was environment minister and then investment minister in Bhutto's second government (1993-1996). His term ends in September 2013.

Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, a PPP member from the Punjab province, was Minister of Water and Power from 2008-2012, and began his term in June 2012, following the judicial ouster of his predecessor, PPP stalwart Yousaf Raza Gilani, who served from 2008-2012.

National Assembly Speaker Fehmida Mirza, a PPP member and physician from the Sindh province, is the first-ever woman NA Speaker in Pakistan, as well as in the Muslim world.

Interior Minister Rehman Malik, a PPP member from Punjab, is a former bureaucrat and Senator who headed the Federal Investigation Agency during Bhutto's second government.

Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar, a Punjabi businesswoman, left the PML-Q (see below) to join the PPP in 2008, and became Pakistan's youngest and first-ever female foreign minister in 2011.

Finance Minister [open] (Economics PhD Abdul Hafeez Shaikh resigned in February 2013)

Commerce Minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim, a PPP member from Sindh, was a federal minister under Prime Minister Bhutto.

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Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Director from 2004-2007, succeeded General Musharraf as the only ISI leader to become Army Chief; in 2010 the civilian government granted him an unprecedented full-term (three-year) extension, ending in November 2013.

Inter-Services Intelligence Director-General Lieutenant General Zaheer ul-Islam, a former Karachi Corps Commander, began his three-year appointment in March 2012.

Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, nominated to lead Pakistan's Supreme Court in 2005, was controversially ousted by General Musharraf in 2007, was restored to office in 2007, and has since taken suo moto actions affecting both the civilian government and the military. His term ends in December 2013.

Key Parties

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was established in 1967 by former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir's father. Democratic socialist and home to many "secularists," its main votebank is in Sindh, where it leads the provincial ruling coalition, but it wins significant support in all Pakistani provinces. PPP Co-Chairs are President Zardari and his son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, widely considered heir-apparent to PPP leadership. The PPP holds 125 NA seats, won 31% of the 2008 vote, and now leads the national ruling coalition.

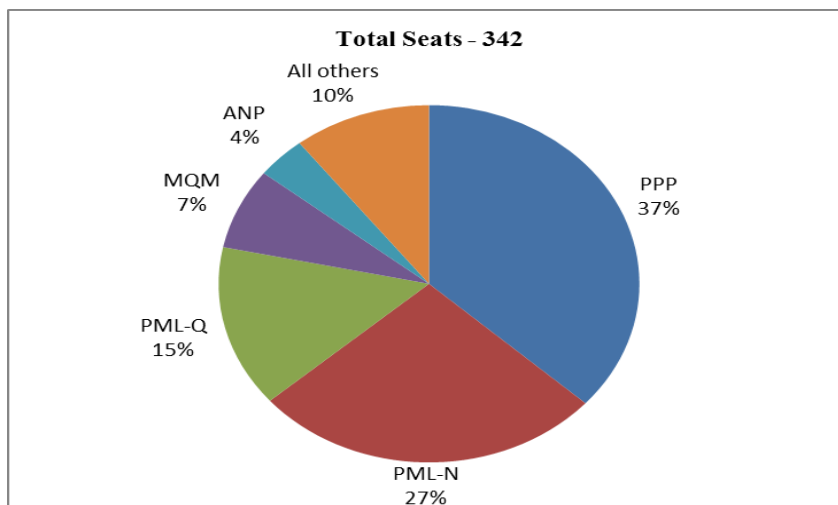
Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was established in 1993 by then-Prime Minister Sharif as an offshoot of the country's oldest party and the only major party existing at the time of independence. Right-leaning and home to many religious conservatives, its votebank is almost wholly limited to Punjab, where more than half of Pakistan's population resides, and where Nawaz's brother, Shabaz, is Chief Minister. The PML-N holds 92 NA seats, won 20% of the 2008 vote, and now leads the national political opposition.

Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) was formed by then-President General Musharraf in 2002 as an offshoot of the PML-N. This self-declared centrist party is led by Punjabi former Sharif loyalists-turned-former Musharraf supporters Shujaat Hussain and Mushahid Hussain Syed. The PML-Q holds 50 NA seats, won 23% of the 2008 vote, and has since 2011 been a member of the ruling coalition.

Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) is a regional party mainly comprised of the descendants of pre-partition immigrants (Muhajirs) from what is now India. It was founded in 1984 by Altaf Hussein, who lives in exile in London. Largely secular and focused on provincial issues, its votebank is wholly limited to Karachi, which it dominates politically, and to other Sindhi urban centers. The MQM holds 25 NA seats, won 7% of the 2008 vote, and is a sometimes unreliable member of the ruling coalition, having withdrawn from and rejoined it at least three times since 2010.

Awami National Party (ANP), a regional, ethnic Pashtun-based party, was formed in 1986. Democratic socialist and largely secular, its key leaders are Asfandyar Wali Khan and Amir Haider Hoti, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPk) Chief Minister. Its votebank is almost wholly limited to KPk and parts of urban Sindh. The ANP holds 13 NA seats, won 2% of the 2008 vote, and is a member of the ruling coalition.

Major Party Representation in Pakistan's National Assembly



Sources: Election Commission of Pakistan, other Government of Pakistan agencies, and party websites
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