

# Pakistan's Domestic Political Setting

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The Islamic Republic of 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 NA reserves 60 seats for women and 10 seats for religious minorities. 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 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.

Pakistan's political history is a troubled one, with military regimes directly ruling for more than half of the country's independent existence, interspersed with periods of generally weak civilian governance. In 1999, the democratically-elected government of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was ousted in a bloodless coup by Army Chief General Pervez Musharraf, who retained his rank until 2007 and held the (assumed) title of President until 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. Sharif, her longtime rival, also returned from exile in 2007. The PPP won a plurality of both votes and NA seats in 2008, and went on to lead a sometimes thin coalition government. These elections (along with Musharraf's 2008 resignation) restored civilian governance after a decade-long hiatus, although the military continued to wield considerable influence over the country's foreign and national security policies. Asif Zardari, Bhutto's widower and PPP Co-Chair, won the presidency in 2008 and was the country's most powerful civilian politician until 2013. While in office, the PPP-led coalition moved to reverse many of the constitutional changes overseen by the military government it had replaced, in particular those in the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution that had shifted key national powers from the National Assembly and Prime Minister to the President's office. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, passed in 2010, restored most executive powers to the Prime Minister (then a PPP loyalist). It also devolved considerable new governance powers to the provincial assemblies.

The 2013 NA elections saw Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) win an outright majority in the NA, handily defeating both the incumbent PPP and a new national-level challenger, the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI or Movement for Justice) led by former cricket star Imran Khan, whose party surged into prominence in 2012. Islamist militants opposed the elections and launched numerous attacks on "secular" parties and candidates, but a strong voter turnout of nearly 60% indicated that citizens largely defied their threats. The PML-N mandate is primarily a Punjabi one; more than 90% of the party's total NA seats are from that province. The PPP continues to hold 41 Senate seats and, with the help of some of its former coalition allies, maintains a working majority in that chamber. The five major parties listed below won about 90% of NA seats.

## Key Government Officials

**Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif**, an industrialist from Lahore, is serving his third nonconsecutive term. His political career began during the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, when he was finance minister and later Chief Minister of Punjab. Sharif also currently retains the Foreign and Defense Ministry portfolios.

**President Asif Zardari** previously served in both the NA and Senate during the 1990s, and was a minister in Bhutto's second government (1993-1996). His term ends in September 2013.

**Finance Minister Ishaq Dar**, a senior PML-N member from Punjab, served as both commerce and finance minister under Sharif during the 1990s, and was Leader of the Opposition in the Senate from 2012-2013.

**Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan** a senior PML-N member from Punjab, served as Leader of the Opposition in the NA from 2008-2013 and also was a minister under Sharif during the 1990s.

**National Security and Foreign Affairs Advisor Sartaj Aziz**, a PML-N stalwart from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPk), will work from the PM's Secretariat. He also was a minister under Sharif during the 1990s.

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**Special Assistant to the PM on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi**, a veteran diplomat and onetime Ambassador to the United States, will work from the Foreign Office.

**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 2009, and has since taken suo moto actions affecting both the civilian government and the military. His term ends in December 2013.

## Key Parties

**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 mostly 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 183 NA seats, won 33% of the 2013 vote, and now leads the Federal and Punjab governments.

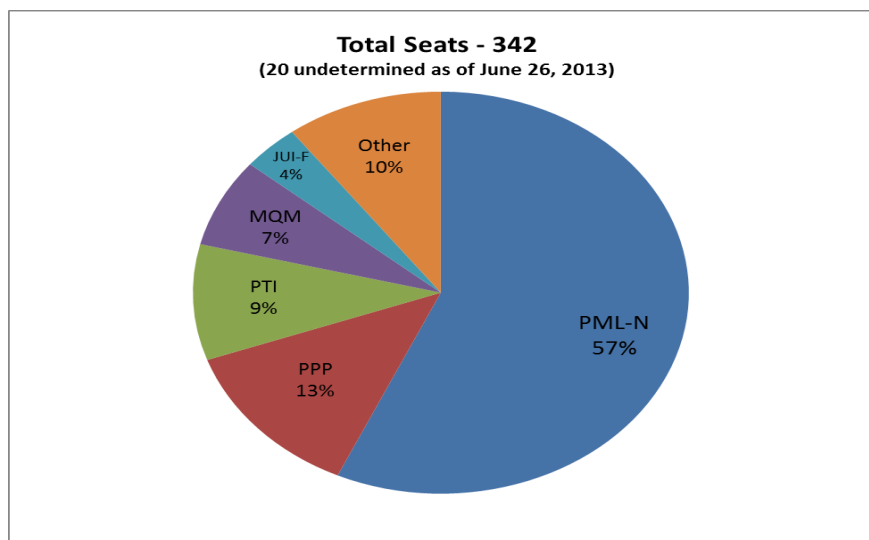
**Pakistan People's Party (PPP)** was established in 1967 by former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir's father. Democratic socialist and home to many "secularists," its main votebank is in Sindh, where it leads the provincial ruling coalition. PPP Co-Chairs are President Zardari and his son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, widely considered heir-apparent to PPP leadership. The PPP holds 41 NA seats and won 15% of the 2013 vote.

**Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)** was founded by in 1996 by former cricket star Imran Khan, who held the party's only NA seat until 2013. Centrist and nationalist in orientation, the party won numerous prominent converts as its popularity grew in 2012. Khan is a vocal opponent of Pakistan's counterterrorism cooperation with the United States and is at times viewed as sympathetic toward Islamist militants. The PTI holds 30 NA seats—the bulk of them from KP—won 17% of the 2013 vote, and leads the ruling coalition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**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. 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 23 NA seats and won 5% of the 2013 vote.

**Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam – Fazl-ur (JUI-F)**, a conservative Deobandi Islamist party led by cleric Fazl-ur Rehman since 1988, is ideologically similar to the Afghan Taliban and has links with many Pakistani militant groups. The JUI-F holds 12 NA seats—all but one from KP and Balochistan—and won 3% of the 2013 vote.

## Major Party Representation in Pakistan's 14<sup>th</sup> National Assembly



**Sources:** Election Commission of Pakistan, other Government of Pakistan agencies, and party websites  
**Contact:** K. Alan Kronstadt, Specialist in South Asian Affairs, 7-5415