



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Pakistan

General Elections

February 8, 2024

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Election Snapshot

- Election Day: February 8, 2024
- Registered voters: 128,585,760
- Polling stations: 90,675
- Seats: 336 National Assembly seats and 749 Provincial Assembly seats
- Candidate lists: 17,816 candidates competing for 859 single-member constituency seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies
- Campaign expenditure limits: 10 million rupees (about 35,675 USD) for a National Assembly seat; 4 million rupees (about 14,270 USD) for a provincial assembly seat

When is Election Day?

Pakistan will hold general elections on Thursday, February 8, 2024. These include elections for the National Assembly and provincial assemblies in Pakistan's four provinces, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh. Voting will be conducted at 90,675 polling stations across the country, more than half of which the Election Commission of Pakistan has deemed 'sensitive' or 'highly sensitive.'

Why are these elections important?

Pakistan, the world's fifth most populous country, faces several significant challenges that elected leaders must address in the coming years. Therefore, these elections are pivotal for both the people of Pakistan and the South Asia region. Pakistan was at risk of economic default for much of 2023, and chief among the challenges the country will face is sustaining recent signs of economic recovery.¹ Pakistan mitigated the risk through cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and other international donors. However, the economic crisis and measures taken to combat it took a heavy toll on the people of Pakistan in the form of inflation, commodity shortages, and other impacts.

In recent years, Pakistan has also faced an increase in militant attacks. In 2023 alone, an estimated 1,000 civilians and security forces were killed – the largest number of casualties from such attacks in six years.² Regional developments in Afghanistan and elsewhere have contributed to a security context that will continue to challenge Pakistan's government, especially in the Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. These dynamics are further complicated by the long-term impacts of devastating flooding in August 2022 that covered one-third of the country; directly impacted 33 million people; and resulted in large-scale displacement, extensive economic losses, and persistent threats to health and livelihoods. Providing ongoing relief to those impacted, and strengthening resilience to future environmental disasters and the impacts of global climate change, will be a critical task for Pakistan's leadership.

¹ See Rana, S. (2023, September 6). [The Promise and Peril of Pakistan's Economic Recovery Effort](#). United States Institute of Peace.

² [Report: Terrorist Attacks Kill Nearly 1,000 Pakistanis in 2023](#). (2023, December 31). Voice of America.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

At the national level, Pakistani voters will elect 336 members of the National Assembly. They will fill 266 seats through the single member constituency, first-past-the-post election system, while 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 seats for non-Muslims through a proportional representation party list system based on the number of general seats won by a political party.

At the provincial level, 749 members will be elected across Pakistan's four provincial assemblies. As with the National Assembly elections, Provincial Assembly seats will be filled through a combination of a single member constituency, first-past-the-post election system (593 general seats in all for the four provincial assemblies) and proportional representation assignment of 132 seats reserved for women and 24 seats for non-Muslims.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The Elections Act³ is the primary law governing the conduct of elections in Pakistan. The Act's 15 chapters detail, among other topics:

- Responsibilities of the Election Commission of Pakistan;
- Delimitation of constituencies;
- Development of the electoral rolls;
- Processes for conducting elections for each level and branch of the government;
- Restrictions on and statements of election expenses;
- Adjudication of election disputes;
- Identification of election offenses and penalties; and
- The eligibility of and allocation of symbols to political parties for elections.

Pakistan's Constitution provides for the Elections Act through Part VIII on elections, and Article 222, which empowers Parliament (comprising the President, National Assembly and Senate) to articulate electoral laws.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

To be eligible for election to the National Assembly or a Provincial Assembly, an individual must be a Pakistani citizen and at least 25 years old. Article 62 of the Constitution⁴ further requires a candidate to "[be] of good character and ... not commonly known as one who violates Islamic injunctions," "[have] adequate knowledge of Islamic teachings and [practice] obligatory duties prescribed by Islam." In addition, Article 62 requires that there be no declaration by a court of law against the candidate's honesty and that the candidate has not "worked against the integrity of the country or opposed the ideology of Pakistan." Requirements related to Islamic knowledge or practice are exempted for any candidate who is not Muslim, with the Constitution instead requiring such individuals "[to] have good moral reputation."

³ [Elections Act, 2017](#).

⁴ [Constitution of Pakistan](#).

Are there reserved seats for women?

Sixty seats are reserved for women in the National Assembly and 132 across the four provincial assemblies. These seats are assigned through a proportional representation system based on the number of seats that parties win through first-past-the-post elections to each assembly.

During the nomination period, 459 women filed to be included as candidates for the reserved seats in the National Assembly, and 1,365 for the reserved seats in the provincial assemblies.

What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

In addition to reserved seats for women, Section 206 of the Elections Act directs political parties to ensure at least 5 percent representation of women in the selection of candidates for general seats. Based on candidate data released by the Election Commission of Pakistan,⁵ the total number of contesting candidates for general seats in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies is 22,711, including 1,027 women.

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

The limit on election expenses is 10 million Pakistani rupees for a seat in the National Assembly and 4 million rupees for a seat in a provincial assembly. Applicable expenses include costs for stationery, postage, advertisements, transport or any other expense incurred by a candidate or any person or political party on behalf of the candidate. This limit applies from the date a candidate files nomination papers until the date when the final consolidated result is issued.

There is no limit on donations to a candidate by any individual or entity.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is the election management body in Pakistan. The ECP was established through Article 218 of the Constitution and is mandated to “organize and conduct the election and to make such arrangements as are necessary to ensure that the election is conducted honestly, justly, fairly and in accordance with law, and that corrupt practices are guarded against.” The ECP comprises a chief election commissioner and four other members, each of whom represents one of Pakistan’s four provinces. All members serve five-year terms.

Article 219 of the Constitution identifies the specific duties of the ECP:

- Preparing electoral rolls for election to the National Assembly, provincial assemblies, and local governments, and revising such rolls periodically to keep them up to date;
- Organizing and conducting elections to the Senate or to fill casual vacancies in the National Assembly, Senate, or a provincial assembly;
- Appointing election tribunals;
- Holding general elections to the National Assembly, provincial assemblies, and local governments; and

⁵ [Stats regarding validly nominated candidates General Seats – GE-2024](#). Election Commission of Pakistan.

- Such other functions as may be specified by an act of Parliament.

Additionally, Article 222 of the Constitution, in delineating the powers of Parliament to issue electoral laws, stipulates that “no such law shall have the effect of taking away of abridging any of the powers of the Commissioner or the Election Commission under this part.”

Who can vote in these elections?

To be eligible to vote, an individual must be a citizen of Pakistan, be at least 18 years and possess a national identity card (NIC) issued by the National Database and Registration Authority and be registered as a voter in the relevant electoral area. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) maintains the voter list in cooperation with the National Database and Registration Authority, which manages the issuance of NICs in Pakistan. Chapter IV of the Elections Act mandates the authority to transmit NIC information to the ECP for the purpose of registering voters on the electoral roll.

How many registered voters are there?

For the 2024 General Elections, 128,585,760 registered voters are eligible to vote. Among registered voters, 69,263,704 (53.87 percent) are men and 59,322,056 (46.13 percent) are women. Since the 2018 general elections, more than 22 million new voters have been added to the voter list, and 56,864,196 registered voters (44.22 percent) are between the ages of 18 and 35.

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups?

Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan states that all citizens are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection, including the commitment that there shall be no discrimination based on sex. Provisions in the Elections Act to support the equal participation of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups include the following:

- Section 9 mandates the Election Commission to void the results at one or more polling stations or the election in an entire constituency if the turnout of women voters is less than 10 percent of the total votes polled in a constituency.
- Section 203 directs political parties to encourage women, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities to become members.
- Section 206 requires political parties to ensure at least 5 percent representation of women candidates while selecting candidates for general seats.
- Sections 47 and 48 require the Election Commission to take special measures for the registration of women, persons with disabilities, members of minorities, and transgender persons as voters.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Out-of-country voting is not currently available for Pakistanis who live outside the country. Section 94 of the Elections Act states under “Voting by Overseas Pakistanis” that the Election Commission

of Pakistan may choose to conduct pilot projects during by-elections for voters living outside of Pakistan “to ascertain the technical efficacy, secrecy, security and financial feasibility of such voting.” However, overseas voters are part of the electoral roll and are eligible to vote at a specific polling station within a constituency.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Section 238 of the Elections Act mandates the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to allow domestic or international election observation organizations, including the media, to observe the process of conducting elections. This includes access to polling stations to observe the polling and counting process and access to the Office of Returning Officers to observe the consolidation of results.

Interested domestic or international election observation organizations or media organizations may apply to the ECP for accreditation cards for their nominated observers. These cards are mandatory to observe the election process. International and national observers and media must follow the code of conduct that the ECP has issued for observers.

Who is managing security on Election Day?

Under Article 220 of the Constitution, all executive authorities in the federation and provinces are required to assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The ECP uses this power to mobilize the required resources from the federal and provincial governments, including security forces from the police and, where necessary, the armed forces.

Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

Immediately following the closing of a polling station, its presiding officer conducts the vote count onsite. The only people permitted to be present during the count are contesting candidates, election agents, polling agents, and observers accredited by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Ballots that are deemed valid are counted, sorted according to the candidate for whom the ballot was cast, and placed in packets that are sealed when counting is complete. Ballots deemed invalid are placed in a separate sealed packet. The presiding officer then prepares the polling station’s results by listing the number of votes cast for each candidate and the number of ballot papers excluded from the count.

Immediately after completing the count at the polling station, the presiding officer is directed to take a snapshot of the result and, as soon as connectivity is available, submit it electronically to the ECP and the returning officer for the constituency. After this transmission (or after a determination that such transmission is not possible), the presiding officer must personally deliver the results and all physical documentation to the returning officer.

After receiving all results for the constituency, the returning officer prepares and announces the provisional consolidated statement of results for the constituency. This statement does not include postal ballots cast for the constituency or a review of any ballots excluded from the initial polling station count.

After the provisional results are announced, the returning officer notifies the candidates and their agents of the time and place for the full tabulation of results. As with the polling station count, contesting candidates, election agents, and accredited observers are permitted to observe the preparation of the consolidated result. During this process, the returning officer reviews ballots excluded from the initial count to determine whether they are valid and should be added to the tally for a candidate; counts postal ballots received; and recounts ballots from selected polling stations if a challenge has been made and the provisional vote count meets certain conditions regarding the narrowness of the margin. This consolidation process must be completed within seven days of the election for the National Assembly vote and within five days of the election for the Provincial Assembly. The results are sent to the ECP within 24 hours of the completion of the tabulation.

When will official results be announced?

Section 98 of the Elections Act requires the Election Commission of Pakistan to publish official results within 14 days of the election. For the elections on February 8, this means official results should be announced by Thursday, February 22.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Immediately after announcing final election results, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is required to appoint election tribunals to adjudicate any election disputes. Section 140 of the Elections Act specifies that, for elections to an assembly, members of election tribunals must be judges of a high court and appointed by the ECP in consultation with the chief of justice of the high court concerned.⁶

Following the announcement of official results, contesting candidates have 45 days to file petitions with the election tribunal disputing the result of the election in their constituency and seeking remedy. Petitions must describe the details of alleged corrupt or illegal practices and the relief sought. After a trial is conducted, the tribunal issues a decision within 180 days of the filing of the petition, either to dismiss the petition or to grant relief. Relief can include 1) a declaration that another candidate has been elected in the constituency, 2) a decision that polling should be repeated at one or more polling stations in the constituency, or 3) a decision that the entire election in the constituency should be voided and conducted again.

In cases involving election to a National or Provincial Assembly constituency, any appeals against the decisions of an election tribunal must be submitted to the Supreme Court of Pakistan within 30 days of the date of the decision. The Supreme Court will rule on any appeals within 180 days.

⁶ There are five high courts in Pakistan, one for each of the four provinces and one for the Islamabad Capital Territory.

Resources

- [Constitution of Pakistan](#)
- [Election Commission of Pakistan](#)
- [Elections Act, 2017](#)
- [PakVoter Civic Information Portal](#)

About IFES in Pakistan

IFES has more than two decades of experience implementing programs in Pakistan. IFES has worked with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and civil society partners to strengthen the election process and promote the inclusion of women, persons with disabilities, young voters, and other marginalized groups through increased access to civic and voter education and voter registration. These partnerships have included conducting initiatives to increase National Identity Card registration in all four provinces; launching the *She Leads* women's leadership program, which trained 500 women leaders nationwide to conduct advocacy campaigns; and mobilizing men in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to conduct peer-to-peer outreach around inclusive democratic participation. IFES supported the ECP in the drafting of inclusion provisions in the 2017 Elections Act; establishment of the ECP Gender Wing and Gender and Disability Working Group; development of the ECP's first two strategic plans, which integrated a focus on outreach to marginalized groups; launch of the nationwide PakVoter voter education platform; and support to civil society partners that led to the implementation of the first election accessibility audit in Pakistan's history.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect the provisions of the constitution of Pakistan, the Election Act and Rules, and other information available as of February 2, 2024 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

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