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Elections in Pakistan

2018 Senate Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Pakistan elections authorities as of February 28, 2018 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When are the Senate elections taking place?

Senate elections will take place on March 3, 2018 to fill 52 seats vacated by senators retiring at the end of their six-year term on March 11, 2018.

What is the structure of the Parliament?

The *Majlis-e-Shura* (Parliament) consists of the president and two houses, known respectively as the *Qawmi Assembly* (National Assembly) and the Senate. The Senate was constituted for the first time in 1973 under Article 50 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which stipulates a bicameral Parliament.

The main purpose for the creation of the Senate was to give equal representation to all federating (administrative) units and to increase participation of smaller units in national affairs. The role of the Senate is to promote national cohesion and harmony and to alleviate fears of the smaller provinces regarding domination by any one province because of its majority in the National Assembly.

Each region votes for general and reserved seats as illustrated below:

- 1) The four provincial assemblies will each vote to elect 14 senators for general seats as well as four women, four technocrats (including *Ulema*, or religious scholars) and one non-Muslim for reserved seats;
- 2) The members of the National Assembly from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) will elect eight senators to represent FATA; and
- 3) Members of the National Assembly will vote for two senators for general seats, one woman and one technocrat, for the Federal Capital.

The Senate is constructed as follows:

Province/ Area	General Seats	Seats reserved for women	Seats reserved for technocrats including <i>Ulema</i>	Seats reserved for non- Muslims	Total
Punjab	14	4	4	1	23
Sindh	14	4	4	1	23
KPK	14	4	4	1	23
Balochistan	14	4	4	1	23
FATA	8	-	-	-	8
ICT (Islamabad)	2	1	1	-	4
Total	66	17	17	4	104

Who is voting in these elections?

Electoral colleges, comprised of members of provincial and national assemblies, will vote for candidates in their province/region to elect 52 new senators for general and reserved seats as per chapter VII of the Elections Act, 2017. The term of senators is six years with half of the seats being up for election every three years.

The following seats are open in the March 3 election:

Province/ Area	General Seats	Seats reserved for women	Seats reserved for technocrats, including <i>Ulema</i>	Seats reserved for non- Muslims	Total
Punjab	7	2	2	1	12
Sindh	7	2	2	1	12
KPK	7	2	2	-	11
Balochistan	7	2	2	-	11
FATA	4	-	-	-	4
ICT (Islamabad)	1	-	1	-	2
Total	33	8	9	2	52

The Senate, under the constitution, is not subject to dissolution.

Why are these Senate elections important?

Recent political upsets in Balochistan, plus the large number of retiring senators from a single party – the Pakistan People’s Party – means that the competition for upper house seats could be contentious and will have a significant impact on who holds the majority vote in the Senate, especially coming only five months before the general elections scheduled for July 2018.

Are there reserved seats for women and minorities?

There are four reserved seats for women in each of the four provinces, four for technocrats and one for non-Muslims. In the capital region there is one reserved seat for women and one for technocrats. There are no reserved seats for women and minorities in Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Eight women’s seats are being contested on March 3.

Among the 135 candidates running for the 52 Senate seats, 24 are women; 23 are competing for eight reserved women's seats and one is competing for a general seat.

Who will administer the elections?

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is responsible for the conduct of Senate elections. The ECP appoints returning officers and polling officers from its senior officers to run the polling.

What is the electoral system?

Seats filled by the four provincial assemblies and the National Assembly will be done according to a proportional representation system by means of single transferable vote (STV). STV is a voting system designed to achieve proportional representation through ranked voting in multi-seat constituencies. With STV, votes can be transferred to an elector’s second or third choice if their first-choice candidate is

not elected, or is elected with a surplus of votes. The version of STV used for these elections allows surplus votes from winning candidates to be redistributed to other candidates.

Senators from Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are chosen by members of the National Assembly from FATA, using a block vote. Each member of the National Assembly from FATA can cast as many ballots as there are empty seats, and the candidates with the most votes will be elected.

Who is eligible to run in these elections?

A person seeking election to the Senate must be a citizen of Pakistan, not less than 30 years of age and be registered as a voter in the province or area in which s/he is seeking election. Those seeking election for seats reserved for technocrats, in addition to above, should have at least 16 years of education and 20 years' experience including achievements at a national or international level. An *Aalim* (Muslim scholar) seeking a technocrat seat must hold a degree requiring at least 16 years of education recognized by the Higher Education Commission, and 20 years of experience as a teacher or researcher in the fields relating to the principles and philosophy of Islam and Islamic law.

The Election Commission of Pakistan has approved 135 candidates to run for the 52 Senate seats.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

Polling will take place in each of the four provincial assemblies and the National Assembly and is conducted by returning officers and polling officers appointed by the Election Commission of Pakistan. Polling for Federally Administered Tribal Areas takes place in the National Assembly. In total, there will be 45 poll workers at the five polling centers.

How is counting conducted?

Soon after the six-hour poll, counting takes place at the polling stations – within the buildings of the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies – in the presence of the candidates and or their agents.

Counting of single transferable vote (STV) ballots is a multi-step process under the direct supervision of the returning officer in each polling location. Counting begins after the close of polling. First, all ballots will be counted and invalid ballots removed. Then valid ballot papers will be sorted by first preference candidate. If more than one seat is to be filled, the value of each valid vote will be 100. For example, if a candidate receives 12 first preference votes they will receive a weighted vote of 1,200. If only one seat is to be filled, as with the non-Muslim and women's reserved seats in the Islamabad Capital Territory, then each vote will have the value of one.

Winning candidates must meet a minimum weighted vote "quota" $\left[\frac{\text{total number of valid votes} \times \text{value of each vote}}{\text{number of seats} + 1} + 1\right]$. In this example, if there are 14 seats available and 124 valid votes the quota would be $\left[\frac{(124 \times 100)}{(14 + 1)} + 1\right] = 827.66$. The numbers following the decimal point are ignored, resulting in a quota of 827. All candidates reaching the threshold on this first count will be considered elected.

As it is unlikely that enough candidates will reach the quota in the first count to fill all vacant seats, any surplus votes above the quota are transferred to the next available preference candidate. The surplus of the candidate with the highest order is transferred first and then the remaining surpluses of candidates in descending order. To ensure a fair surplus vote transfer, the votes are transferred at a fraction of their original value, equal to the number of surplus votes (weighted votes received minus quota required, i.e., $1200-827=373$) divided by the total number of transferable ballots (all those that indicate a second preference). This number is then multiplied by the number of second choice votes per candidate. For example, if Candidate B received three second preference votes, and the number of transferable ballots is seven, then Candidate B adds a new score (in this case, $373/7 \times 3=160$) to their original score. Candidates who now reach the threshold are considered elected and the surplus votes of the candidate with the next highest score will be treated in the same manner and so forth.

If after all surpluses have been accounted for and there are still unfilled seats, then the surpluses of those who reached the quota in the second round will be considered based on third preference votes.

At this point, should open seats still remain, the candidate with the fewest first preference votes will be eliminated and those votes transferred to the next available preferences on the ballots. If two candidates are tied for fewest votes, lots will be drawn to determine who is eliminated. This elimination process continues until all candidates reach the quota or the remaining number of candidates is equal to the remaining empty seats. The results of the count will be then signed by the returning officer and party agents and publicly displayed.

In practice voting is often simpler than this process suggests as most electors vote for party representatives and do not list other preferences.

Who can observe on Election Day?

Candidates, candidate agents and observers are permitted to observe the election, according to the Elections Act, 2017. Only rarely do candidate agents observe since candidates are present. There will be domestic election observation for the 2018 Senate elections.

When will official results be announced?

Results are officially announced same day, immediately following the count.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Challenges to the eligibility of candidates can be raised with the returning officer. The returning officer can accept or reject candidate nomination papers. An appeal against the decision of the returning officer can be filed with the Tribunal appointed by the Commission in consultation with the chief justice of the concerned High Court. A sitting judge of the High Court can be appointed as Tribunal.

Election disputes pertaining to counting may be submitted in writing to the Electoral Tribunal, in accordance with the Electoral Act, 2017. Appeals can be made to the Supreme Court.

How will Election Day security be ensured?

Polling will take place at the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies. These buildings are already secured.

Resources

- [Constitution of Pakistan](#)
- [Elections Act, 2017](#)
- [Election Commission of Pakistan](#)
- [Election Rules, 2017](#)
- [PakVoter](#)
- [Senate of Pakistan](#)