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Elections in Pakistan

May 11 General Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Pakistani elections authorities as of May 6, 2013, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

Who will Pakistanis vote for on May 11, 2013?

The 2013 general elections will be for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies in Pakistan.

What is the composition of the National Assembly?

The National Assembly (lower house) has 342 seats. Political parties file lists of candidates for reserved seats for women and for non-Muslims prior to the elections. These reserved seats are then allocated to political parties in direct proportion to the number of general seats they obtained in the province, for reserved women's seats, and, nationally, for non-Muslim seats. The breakdown is as follows:¹

Category	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Balochistan	FATAs ²	Federal Capital	Total
General	148	61	35	14	12	2	272
Women	35	14	8	3	--	--	60
Non-Muslims	--	--	--	--	--	--	10
Total	183	75	43	17	12	2	342

What are the compositions of the provincial assemblies?

Provincial assembly seats for the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan total 728. The number of seats varies from province to province depending on population. Political parties file lists of candidates for reserved seats for women and for non-Muslims prior to the elections. These reserved seats are then allocated to political parties in direct proportion to the number of general seats they obtained in the province, for reserved women's seats, and, nationally, for non-Muslim seats. The breakdown is as follows:³

Category	Punjab Assembly	Sindh Assembly	KPK Assembly	Balochistan Assembly
General Seats	297	130	99	51
Women	66	29	22	11
Non-Muslims	8	9	3	3
Total	371	168	124	65

¹ Article 51, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

² The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs) comprise seven tribal agencies (districts) and six frontier regions, and are directly governed by Pakistan's federal government through a special set of laws called the Frontier Crimes Regulations. The territory is almost exclusively inhabited by the Pashtuns.

³ Article 106, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

What are the terms of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies?

Both assemblies have five-year terms from the date of their first meeting. The National Assembly completed its five-year term on March 16, 2013. All provincial assemblies were dissolved within three days of the National Assembly to facilitate simultaneous elections.

What is the electoral system in Pakistan?

Three different electoral systems are used in Pakistan. The electoral system for the National Assembly is based on single-member geographic constituencies in which members are elected by direct vote through a first-past-the-post system, also known as a simple majority.

Reserved seats for women and non-Muslims are filled through an indirect proportional representation list system. Political parties file their lists of candidates for reserved seats with the Election Commission of Pakistan prior to the election. After the results for general seats are finalized, reserved women's seats are distributed to parties relative to the number of general seats secured in each of the provinces. Non-Muslim seats are allocated to political parties in proportion to the overall number of general seats secured.⁴

Members of the Senate are elected by an electoral college through a system of proportional representation by a single, transferrable vote.⁵ The Electoral College has members from the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. Members from the National Assembly elect Senators from the Islamabad Capital Territory and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Electoral College members from the provincial assemblies elect Senators from the provinces.

What is the difference between the Election Commission and the Election Commission of Pakistan?

The Election Commission consists of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and four members responsible for conducting elections.^{6,7} The Election Commission is an independent, constitutional entity charged with organizing and conducting the election. This body must ensure the election is honest, just, fair and in accordance with the law. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is an independent, constitutional entity responsible for assisting the Election Commission in implementing its policies and decisions.

The CEC is required to be a sitting or retired Supreme Court Justice, or one whom, at the time of his/her retirement as judge of a High Court, was qualified to become a judge of the Supreme Court. All members of the Election Commission are to be retired judges of High Courts, with one from each

⁴ Article 51, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

⁵ Article 54, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

⁶ Article 218, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

⁷ The Election Commission Order, 2002.

province. The CEC and members are appointed for five years by the President through a consultative parliamentary process.

The ECP has offices throughout the country at provincial, divisional and district levels. The ECP is headed by a Secretary who is stationed in Islamabad. Provincial election commissioners supervise election work at the provincial level. They are assisted by regional election commissioners and district/agency election commissioners at the lowest level.

Who is eligible to vote?

All Pakistani nationals 18 years or older who possess a national identity card, live in an electoral area⁸ and not declared of unsound mind by a court, are eligible to vote.⁹

How many people are registered to vote?

There are about 86.2 million registered voters nationwide. Of those, approximately 37.6 million (44%) are women. The table below details the number of registered male and female voters in the various provinces and special areas.¹⁰

Province/Area	Male		Female		Sub Total
	Voters	% of registered voters	Voters	% of registered voters	
Balochistan	1,915,388	57	1,421,271	43	3,336,659
Federally Administered Tribal Areas	1,142,234	66	596,079	34	1,738,313
Islamabad Capital Territory	337,900	54	288,064	46	625,964
KPK	7,008,533	57	5,257,624	43	12,266,157
Punjab	27,697,701	56	21,561,633	44	49,259,334
Sindh	10,490,631	55	8,472,744	45	18,963,375
Grand Total	48,592,387	56	37,597,415	44	86,189,802

⁸ Electoral areas are the basis on which the electoral roll is developed and are based on census blocks.

⁹ Section 6, Electoral Rolls Act, 1974.

¹⁰ Election Commission of Pakistan website: www.ecp.gov.pk

How was the electoral roll compiled for the 2013 general elections?

Compared to the Final Electoral Roll of 2007 (FER-2007), the new electoral rolls are significantly more accurate and credible, as the computerized national identity card (CNIC) acts as a unique voter identification device. The biometric technology used by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in the form of fingerprint collection also improved the quality of the electoral roll by eliminating the potential for one person to register for multiple CNICs.

In April 2011, Parliament passed a bill making possession of a valid national identity card mandatory for voter registration and casting a ballot on Election Day.¹¹ The 2011 law paved the way for collaboration between the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and NADRA, the government agency working under the Ministry of Interior tasked with issuing CNICs.

The ECP handed over data from the 2007 electoral rolls to NADRA, as well as head-of-household data captured during the 2011 census. NADRA prepared draft electoral rolls based on their CNIC data, crosschecking all CNIC and outdated national identity card numbers in the 2007 list with their database to avoid duplicate entries and other errors, such as deceased voters or wrong/fictitious entries.

How was the electoral roll for the 2013 general elections verified?

Out of 81 million entries, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) was able to verify about 44 million entries on the 2007 list. The rest of the 37 million entries were duplicates or have unverifiable data, such as missing computerized national identity card (CNIC) information, and were removed. NADRA then went through its own database and identified approximately 36 million citizens who were not included on the Final Electoral Roll of 2007 (FER-2007), but were eligible to be placed on the voter list automatically. Most of the non-duplicate entries that were excluded during the verification process were then re-added using NADRA's data. All voters were then assigned to electoral areas based on the 2011 census data.

After NADRA finished compiling the data, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) validated the draft electoral rolls through door-to-door verification. Over 75 million, or 92.87 percent, voters on the draft roll were verified either in person or through a family member.

After verification, the ECP displayed the preliminary rolls for 21 days at 52,166 display centers across the country. Locations of display centers were publicized through a print and electronic media campaign. The public was invited to verify that their information was complete and accurate. They were also encouraged to file claims for the inclusion of missing names and information; objections to registered voters who were not entitled to be on the list; and to correct personal information. During this time, citizens filed 3,191,910 corrections/objections. After the display period, the ECP made changes based on these claims. They also added about 1 million voters who had obtained fresh CNICs since NADRA handed over the data.

¹¹ Election Laws Amendment Bill, 2011.

NADRA and the ECP designed a semi-automatic procedure for adding new CNIC holders to the voter list ahead of the general elections. NADRA sent data on 781,735 new CNIC holders who were issued cards between June and December 31, 2012, to the ECP's field offices for verification. Citizens who received a CNIC from January 1, 2013, until the election schedule was announced on March 22, 2013, were able to apply to vote at their local ECP office.

What will the electoral roll look like on Election Day?

For the first time in Pakistani general elections, the electoral rolls at the polling stations will have voter photographs, with the exception of some women who, for religious or cultural reasons, did not submit a photograph when applying for their computerized national identity card (CNIC). The rolls will also have a blank column for voters to provide their thumbprint on Election Day using magnetic ink. The thumbprint will be used for voter identification in case of any electoral disputes.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) prepares the electoral rolls based on electoral areas,¹² or census blocks, with separate rolls for male and female voters in each constituency. Since one polling station covers several electoral areas, there are multiple voter lists used at each polling station on Election Day. Each voter list is divided into separate lists for men, women and, if applicable, the Ahmadi, a minority group in Pakistan. The Ahmadi voter list is described in the next question.

Currently, electoral rolls are sorted based on a *gharana* (household) number, which is not reflected on voters' CNICs. To help voters and polling officials locate voter names on the electoral rolls, supporters of political parties and contesting candidates will establish camps adjacent to or in front of polling stations and issue *chits*, also known as *perchis*, which are pieces of paper containing the voter's name, serial number on the electoral roll and the voter's electoral area.

In many cases, political parties also deliver *chits* to voters at their residences. However, in addition to a voter's information, *chits* usually contain the candidate's name and his or her election symbol so voters can identify it on the ballot. *Chits* with a political party symbol or candidate's name are considered campaign material, and are not allowed within 400 yards of a polling station. Therefore, distributing political party *chits* for voters to bring into the polling station is illegal.

Why are Ahmadi on a separate electoral roll?

Both Muslims and non-Muslims are on the same joint electoral roll except the Ahmadi, a religious minority. While Ahmadis consider themselves Muslim, the Constitution of Pakistan recognizes them as non-Muslim. All voters must declare their religion on their computerized national identity card (CNIC); one of the options presented is Ahmadi. If a citizen declares him or herself Muslim, he or she is required to sign a declaration of faith in the finality of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad, a statement that goes against the beliefs of most Ahmadis.

¹² Electoral areas are the basis on which the electoral roll is developed and are based on census blocks.

Although the electoral rolls for Muslims and non-Muslims were combined in 2002, Chief Executive Order No. 7 of 2002, passed by General Pervez Musharraf, states the Ahmadi status is to remain as non-Muslim. However, they are to be kept on a “supplementary list.” If an Ahmadi is placed on the main electoral list, his or her entry can be challenged. If someone files an objection against the entry, he or she will receive a notice to appear before the Revising Authority within 15 days to sign the aforementioned declaration of faith. If the voter refuses to sign the declaration, he or she will be deemed a non-Muslim and his or her name will be deleted from the joint electoral rolls and added to “a supplementary list of voters in the same electoral area as non-Muslim.”¹³

If the voter does not turn up in spite of service of notice, an order may be passed against him or her in absentia, and the voter’s name will be transferred accordingly.

How are polling stations established?

Polling stations are established by returning officers, with the approval of district returning officers, in public buildings easily accessible for voters. One polling station may have a number of polling booths depending on the number of voters assigned to that polling station. Normally, one polling booth can service 300 to 400 voters in one day.

Separate polling booths and, in some cases, separate polling stations are set up for male and female voters.

How are election officials selected?

Conduct of elections largely depends on the services of staff drawn temporarily from the judiciary, and federal and provincial governments. They are appointed by the Election Commission as district returning officers, returning officers and assistant returning officers. About 720,000 polling personnel (presiding officers, assistant presiding officers and polling officers) from different government departments and autonomous bodies are appointed to manage 72,188 polling stations.

What is the official campaign period?

No specific date or time is prescribed in the legal framework for the official start of an election campaign by candidates and political parties. However, there is a provision that states when to stop campaigning. Campaigning must end 48 hours before the midnight following the closing of polls; this means 32 hours before the start of polling on Election Day.¹⁴

Prospective candidates start their campaign well before the announcement of an election schedule. However, campaigns gain momentum after nominations are filed by candidates. Campaigns are in full swing the last three weeks before Election Day. Rallies, processions, corner meetings, billboards, banners and posters are commonly used during this period.

¹³ Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002.

¹⁴ Section 84, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

What codes of conduct are in place for the 2013 general elections?

For forthcoming general elections, the Election Commission is prescribing separate codes of conduct for political parties and candidates, polling personnel, media, election observers and security personnel. All codes can be found on the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) website.

The code for political parties and candidates contains a comprehensive framework for regulating election campaigning and ensuring a level playing field for all contestants. However, its implementation has been problematic for the Election Commission due to weak and ineffective monitoring and implementation mechanisms. The ECP is now planning to field its own constituency monitors and adopt a district level election complaints resolution system.

What is the process at the polling station?

Polling starts at 8:00 a.m. and continues without any break until 5:00 p.m. However, those in queues waiting to vote at 5:00 p.m. are allowed to cast their ballots.¹⁵ At the polling station, the following actions will be part of the polling process:

- Presiding officer instructs one of the polling officials to show the empty ballot boxes to those present, including polling agents of candidates
- Presiding officer opens a sealed bag containing ballot papers in front of all present and records their number
- Polling officer allows a voter into the polling center and asks the voter to show his or her original national identity card
- Polling officer applies indelible ink to the cuticle of the voter's right thumb
- Assistant presiding officer enters voter information on counterfoil of the ballot paper; obtains a voter's thumb impression on the counterfoil; and stamps and signs the back of the ballot paper before handing it over to the voter
- The voter proceeds to a voting screen to mark the name of the candidate of his or her choice and then inserts it in the ballot box in front of the polling staff¹⁶

What is the plan for election observation?

The 2013 general elections will be observed by both domestic and international observers. The largest domestic observation effort will be undertaken by the Free and Fair Election Network, who will field 43,000 observers across the country. International observation will include election observation missions from the European Union; the National Democratic Institute in collaboration with Asian Network for Free Elections; and the Commonwealth of Nations.

¹⁵ Section 37, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

¹⁶ Section 33, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

What special measures are in place to help voters with disabilities?

On Election Day, security personnel standing outside the polling station are obligated to assist a person with a physical disability while he or she is waiting to enter the polling station; a voter with disabilities may even go to the front of the queue.¹⁷ If a person's disability physically prevents him or her from being able to vote independently, the voter may bring someone to assist in the polling process.¹⁸ If there is no person accompanying such a voter, he or she may request assistance from the presiding officer.

However, many persons with disabilities cannot vote in Pakistan due to their limited mobility and the neglect of considering access for persons with disabilities when assigning polling stations.

What is the purpose of the caretaker Cabinet?

The purpose of the caretaker administration in Pakistan is to ensure neutrality of the government in overseeing elections, and reduce the potential for abuse or misuse of power and State resources in election campaigns. After the National Assembly is dissolved, the President appoints a neutral caretaker Cabinet that will oversee the conduct of elections and serve until the formation of the elected government. Similarly, at the provincial level, the governor appoints a caretaker Cabinet for the province ahead of provincial assembly elections.¹⁹

Caretaker Cabinet members possess the same powers and responsibilities as the elected Prime Minister, chief ministers and ministers who they replaced. The caretaker Prime Minister and provincial chief ministers have full authority to appoint persons of their choice to key positions in the bureaucracy.

The only legal restriction on the caretaker administration is that the caretaker Prime Minister, chief ministers, ministers, their spouses and children are not eligible to contest the election conducted under the caretaker government. There are no legal qualifications for appointment, but it is understood that those appointed to the positions should be neutral and have no known affiliation to any political party.

How are the caretaker Prime Minister and chief ministers appointed?

The 18th and 20th Amendments to the Constitution of Pakistan have made selection of the caretaker Prime Minister, chief ministers and federal and provincial ministers more consultative and transparent. The President is required to appoint a caretaker Prime Minister in consultation with the incumbent Prime Minister and opposition leader. Caretaker ministers are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The same is true for the provincial caretaker Cabinet.

If the Prime Minister and the opposition leader cannot agree on a caretaker Prime Minister within three days of the dissolution of the National Assembly, they will each forward two names to a parliamentary committee tasked with making the decision. The committee would be comprised of eight members of the outgoing National Assembly and/or Senate with equal representation from the government and

¹⁷ Code of Conduct for Security Personnel.

¹⁸ Section 33, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

¹⁹ Article 224, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

opposition. Members of the committee will be nominated by the Prime Minister and opposition leader, respectively. The committee must finalize their decision within three days. The same basic procedure is used for the appointment of a caretaker chief minister by the governor of a province. However, the committee would be made up of six members rather than eight. If there are fewer than five members of the opposition in Parliament, or fewer than four in a provincial assembly, they would all be members of the committee.²⁰

If the committee also fails to agree on one of the four options sent by the Prime Minister/Chief Minister and the opposition leader, the names are then referred to the Election Commission of Pakistan, which will make the final decision within two days.²¹

During the appointment process, the incumbent Prime Minister/Chief Minister continues in his or her position until the caretaker replacement is appointed.

When will results be declared?

The entire results declaration process could take up to 14 days.

At the end of Election Day, vote counting starts at the polling station in front of polling staff, candidates, election/polling agents and observers who might be present. After the count, the presiding officer prepares an official Statement of the Count and a Ballot Paper Account in the presence of polling staff, polling agents and observers, if any.²² He or she is supposed to provide certified copies of both documents to polling agents present at the time of counting and affix one copy of each outside the polling station for the general public to view.

The presiding officer then sends a copy of the results to his or her returning officer. Returning officers compile the unofficial results, after receiving results from presiding officers, at each polling station and send it to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for announcement.

Returning officers again consolidate the results as soon as possible in the presence of candidates or party agents. After receiving and counting all postal ballots, returning officers then send the results to the ECP,²³ either directly or through a district returning officer.

The ECP then consolidates the nationwide results and announces them no later than 14 days after Election Day.

²⁰ Article 224A, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

²¹ Articles 224 and 224A, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

²² Section 38, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

²³ Section 42, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

How are election disputes settled after results are announced?

Losing candidates have the right to challenge the election of the winning candidate through an election petition filed within 45 days of the publication of election results in the official gazette.²⁴ The Election Commission appoints tribunals to adjudicate election petitions. A serving or retired judge of a High Court, or a retired district and sessions judge whom, at the time of retirement, was qualified to be appointed as a judge of the High Court can be appointed onto an election tribunal.²⁵ These tribunals must process all election petitions within four months.

²⁴ Section 52, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

²⁵ Section 57, Representation of the People Act, 1976.

Resources

- IFES [factsheets](#) on Pakistan covering:
 - The [Election Commission of Pakistan](#)
 - [Women, Minorities and Persons with Disabilities](#)
 - The [2013 Election Timeline](#)
 - The [Provincial Assembly](#)
 - The [Nomination Process](#)
 - The [Electoral Rolls](#)
 - The [Caretaker Government Set-up](#)
 - The [National Assembly of Pakistan](#)
 - The [Senate of Pakistan](#)
 - The [Electoral Timeline](#)
 - [IFES in Pakistan](#)
- [The Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002 \(Chief Executive Order No. 7 of 2002\)](#)
- [Electoral Rolls Act, 1974](#)
- [Website of the Election Commission of Pakistan](#)
- [Overview of the Ahmadi](#)
- [Overview of Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)