

Background

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), formally known as the Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), is an autonomous region northern Pakistan with separate government and electoral systems.

The region, which was part of the formerly princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, is contested by Pakistan, India and the native inhabitants. In 1970, it became a single administrative unit called the Northern Areas under administrative control of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas, formed from the amalgamation of the Gilgit Agency, the Baltistan District of the Ladakh Wazarat, and the states of Hunza and Nagar. The region is divided into two administrative divisions: Gilgit and Baltistan/Skardu, and covers 72,971 km² with an estimated population of 1.3 million.



Electoral Legal Framework

The government structure and electoral framework for the GB region is outlined in the “Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009.” The Order introduced administrative, political, financial and judicial reforms and built upon the previous reforms of 1970, 1975 and 1994, establishing the following system of government:

- the GB Council;
- the Legislative Assembly;
- the Government, which is made up of Ministers and headed by the Chief Minister who is elected by the Legislative Assembly from among its members by majority vote; and
- a Governor who is appointed by the President of Pakistan on the advice of the Prime Minister.

The first elections for the Legislative Assembly were held on 12 November 2009, and subsequent, legal amendments were introduced to improve the existing legal framework. The major amendments include:

- Changing the manual electoral roll into computerized electoral roll database based on national identity card numbers that act as unique voter identification, and
- Introduction of a caretaker government after the Legislative Assembly is dissolved to oversee the conduct of elections and serve until the formation of the elected government.

Gilgit-Baltistan Council

The GB Council plays key role in policymaking and provides the essential link between the GB Government and the Government of Pakistan. It has the power to address 55 subjects – for example, coordination with the Government of Pakistan on banking business and planning for economic coordination (including scientific and technological research) – and make laws regarding these subjects.¹

¹ Section 47(2) sub section (a) “Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009”

The GB Council consists of the following members:

- the Prime Minister of Pakistan who serves as Chairman of the Council
- the Governor of GB, who serves as Vice Chairman
- the Chief Minister of GB
- six members who are elected by the Legislative Assembly under a system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote; and
- another six members who are "nominated" by the Prime minister of Pakistan from time to time from amongst Federal Ministers and members of Parliament.

The term of the Council is not explicitly mentioned in the Ordinance, but seats may fall vacant in four instances:

- If the member resigns;
- If he/she is absent without leave for ten consecutive sittings;
- If he/she does not take the required oath within 90 days; or
- If the member is no longer qualified, this may happen after Legislative or National Assembly elections.

Legislative Assembly

The Legislative Assembly is an elected body that has the power to legislate on 61 subjects, including land revenue, and administrative courts.² The Assembly also votes on the annual budget of the GB Consolidated Fund. The term of the Legislative Assembly is five years³, but it may be dissolved earlier by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.⁴ The make-up of the body is illustrated in the table below.

Seat	Number of Seats	Electoral system
General	24	Single member constituencies elected directly by registered voters of GB under a first past the post system.
Women (Reserved)	6	Elected indirectly through a party list proportional representation system ⁵ .
Technocrats and Professionals (Reserved)	3	
Total	33	

Elections to the Legislative Assembly

The former Pakistan People's Party-led government completed its five-year tenure on 10 December 2014 and the federal government appointed Sher Jahan Mir, as the first caretaker Chief Minister. According to Section 35(4) of the Order, election to the assembly should be held within 60 days from the date on which term of assembly had expired; but, as of 14 January 2015, the Election Commission of GB (ECGB) has yet to announce the election schedule.

According to draft electoral roll prepared by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), the number of registered voters in GB is approximately 594,000. In September 2014, NADRA carried out door-to-door verification of the electoral roll. The preliminary list, based on this exercise, will be published and displayed for 21 days to invite objections and applications for inclusion, exclusion or correction of voters' information. The final electoral roll will be prepared after incorporating all

² Section 47(2) sub section (b) "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009"

³ Section 35(3) "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009"

⁴ Section 41(1) "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009"

⁵ Section 35(1), sub section (a) (b) (c) "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009"

necessary changes. ECGB has also requested NADRA to provide the 8300 SMS service to help registered voters check their registration status.

The Election Commission of Gilgit-Baltistan

Elections are conducted by the ECGB, which has its own financial and administrative infrastructure. The ECGB is headed by a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). Unlike the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in the ECGB, the CEC is the only Member of the Commission. The Chairman of the Council (the Prime Minister of Pakistan) appoints the CEC on the advice of the Governor of GB (Vice Chairman).⁶ The CEC of ECGB is selected from a panel of retired judges and bureaucrats. The current CEC of ECGB, Mr. Tahir Ali Shah, is a retired judge of Supreme Appellate Court of GB. The eligibility criterion for the CEC in GB is distinct from that of Members of the ECP, who may only be retired judges. Most of the ECGB administrative officials have been seconded from the District Management Services of GB. While it is a separate organization, the ECGB is in contact with the ECP and seeks technical assistance and support from time to time.

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⁶ Section 82, "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009."