



Pakistan — Va-PoReg Country Report

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For time before 08/14/1947, see India

08/14/1947 Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy: In 1947, Pakistan consisted of West Pakistan (today's Pakistan) and East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh). Upon achieving independence, authority transitioned to a government headed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Jinnah had been elected shortly prior to independence by a Constituent Assembly, which itself was formed through a combination of appointments by the rulers of princely states and selections from provincial legislatures, either elected through restricted franchise elections or comprising delegates from the Indian Central Assembly who opted for Pakistan (Feit 1973: 70, Gauhar 1996: 16, Zingel 2001). The Constituent Assembly, which had 69 members, served as the legislature, remained in office for seven years without producing the constitution that would set the rules through which future legislatures would be elected. During that time the executive, the Governor General, continued to function under the rules of the colonial administration, which allowed him to choose and dismiss prime ministers without consulting the legislature and to dismiss elected provincial governments (Shehab 1995: 201, Gauhar 1996: 25-29). He dismissed a bill from the Constituent Assembly that required the Governor General to choose prime ministers responsible to parliament (Shehab 1995: 234-38, Gauhar 1996: 23-24). A new Constituent Assembly was chosen in 1954, again mostly by provincial assemblies, some of which had been intervened by the Governor General (Asfar 1991: 54, Feit 1973: 70, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 84-85). In 1948, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. In 1949 and 1950, according to Polity5, the executive's constraints were categorized as Intermediate Category 2, between slight and substantial limitations. Since 1951, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. For 1947, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For 1948, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1949, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. From 1950 to 1952, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1953-1957, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

03/23/1956 Continuation Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy (as a republic): On this date the Assembly endorsed its inaugural Constitution, setting up an Islamic Republic governed by a parliamentary system, and substituting the Governor-General with a president wielding significant executive authority. The monarchy was thereby abolished. The presidency has consistently remained intact, although the extent of its constitutional authority has fluctuated over time. The president has consistently been chosen through an indirect election process involving an electoral college. In 1956 the first indirect presidential elections by the constituent assembly took place (Zingel 2001). Due to the lack of widespread suffrage and the absence of direct national office elections, this period is characterized as an electoral oligarchy. From 1947 to 1958,

Pakistan did not conduct any direct national elections. Even the National Assembly elections of 1962 and 1965 were indirect (Zingel 2001). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED the elections were competitive between 1950 and 1955. For the remaining years no competitiveness was achieved. Whereas V-Dem's EF&FI indicates no elections for the entire time. Therefore, V-Dem's CEI scores no cleanliness. However, provincial elections were sporadically organized. Despite the absence of nationwide elections, certain datasets, for reasons not clearly explained, classify this era as either democratic (for example, MCM, BMR) or semi-democratic. The LIED database identifies Pakistan as an exclusive democracy from 1950 to 1958, whereas the GWF labels it as a party autocracy. Our analysis categorizes the regime during this period as an electoral oligarchy. Vanhanen recorded for the elections 1947 (for the constituent assembly) and 1955 that zero percentage of the population participated (Vanhanen 2019). In 1951, male suffrage was enacted, and by 1956, women also gained the right to vote in national elections. Despite the absence of national elections, the first direct elections within the country post-independence were conducted for the Provincial Assembly of Punjab from 03/10/1951 to 03/20/1951.¹ On 10/07/1958 President Iskander Mirza dismissed the prime minister, shut down the parliament, suspended the constitution, declared martial law as his political grip on power was challenged by deadlock and challenges internally and externally to his foreign policy. Per LIED political liberties were absent during this time. V-Dem's PCLI indicates an ambiguous state regarding political liberties. In 1956 and 1957, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. In 1958, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations.

10/27/1958 End Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: A military coup led by Commander-in-Chief General Ayub Khan ousted the government of President Iskander Mirza and established military rule (Feit 1973: 68, Mook 1974: 102, Shehab 1995: 248-50, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85). Mirza appointed General Ayub as chief martial law administrator (CMLA), who then declared martial law.² In 1960, a referendum was held asking a network of local self-governing bodies, which members were elected by constituencies of 800–1,000 adults: Do you have confidence in Muhammad Ayub Khan? The confirmation was used to install Ayub Khan as president.³ The regime is classified by CGW as military and GWF as military-personalist. However, MCM dissent and do classify the case as multiparty. In this classification the criteria for an electoral autocracy are clearly not fulfilled in the case of this regime and it is classified as a military autocracy. To our knowledge the elections to the electoral colleges were based on a non-party base (Hassan et al. 2021). Due to mass protests over prices Ayub Khan was forced to hand over power to General Yahya Khan, the army chief of staff. Yahya Khan reenforced martial law and suspended the constitution. In November 1969 Yahya announced parliamentary elections to return power to elected civilians. On 12/07/1970 the first ever general elections in Pakistan took place. However, they did not mark a regime change since Bhutto and a faction of the military did not allow the assembly to come together. As indicated by LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were not conducted until 1959. In 1960 and 1961, only executive elections were held, and they were not categorized as multiparty. However, between 1962 and 1964, only multiparty executive elections were conducted. Between 1965 and 1968, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. From 1969 onward, only legislative elections were held but they were not categorized as multiparty. No executive elections were held during this period. From 1958 to 1961, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations. Between 1963 and 1968, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 1958 and 1962, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. During 1959-1961, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are limited. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. From 1963 to 1968, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE

is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1969, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1970, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present and were in an ambiguous state in 1966. On 12/16/1971, Pakistani troops located in East Pakistan signed the Instrument of Surrender, ending the Bangladesh Liberation War, as well as the Indo-Pakistani war. East Pakistan was established as an independent nation on the following day.⁴ For further information, see Bangladesh.

12/20/1971 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: In December 1971 Yahya resigned in response to demonstrations after the military's defeat by Indian forces in what was to become Bangladesh; and Yahya Khan turned power over to Bhutto, whose party had won a majority in West Pakistan in the December 1970 parliamentary elections. This impasse led to violent demonstrations in East Pakistan, which the army attempted to put down amid great bloodshed. Khan was placed under house arrest afterwards. Bhutto called the previously elected Assembly into session in spring 1972, and civilian government was resumed (Middle East Journal 1972). According to GWF the resignation of Yahya Khan is coded in this data set as the regime change event (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85). Different from other datasets, Bhutto's regime is coded here as non-democratic from the start since he was not willing to accept the victory of the Awami League in the 1970 elections. On 02/09/1975 The leaders of the primary opposition party were detained, and their party was subsequently prohibited (Middle East Journal 1972, Wheeler 1975: 111, 113-114, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED the elections score competitiveness between 1973 and 1976. Whereas V-Dem's EF&FI indicates no elections for the entire time, thus V-Dem's CEI states no cleanliness. Regarding the political liberties, they are absent according to LIED. In addition, V-Dem's PCLI points out an ambiguous presence of political liberties. Since 1973, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For 1971, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1972-1976, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. While GWF codes this event as a regime change to a party autocracy, our data set considers it as an event confirming the character of the regime as an electoral autocracy. According to FH, from 1972 to 1974, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. In 1975 and 1976 the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free.

07/05/1977 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: When the ruling leftist party won elections the rightist alliance declared fraud. Political unrest ensued with help from the United States. On 07/05/1977 General Zia-ul-Huq overthrew Bhutto's government in the name of restoring order and to a lesser degree, defeating the leftist influences in the nation. Martial law was declared, and Zia became the military president (Baxter 1991: 30, Baxter 1995a, Richter 1971: 548, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85). In May 1988, General Muhammed Zia al-Haq dissolved the national parliament and provincial assemblies, calling new elections for November. But shortly thereafter (August) he died in a mysterious plane crash. Elections were announced by the acting President, Ghulam Ishaque Khan, and the unconstitutionality of the suspension of the elections was upheld by the Supreme Court. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held until 1983. In 1984 only executive elections were conducted, but they were not categorized as multiparty. From 1985 onward, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Until 1984, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations. Since 1985, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. For 1977, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE

is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. In 1978 and 1979, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1980-1984, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. In 1985 and 1986, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1987, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present and were absent between 1980 and 1981. As classified by FH in 1977 the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. From 1978 to 1984 the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. From 1985 to 1987 the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free.

11/16/1988 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, parliamentary elections were held, bringing Benazir Bhutto and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) coalition to power (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 49, Baxter 1995b, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85).⁵ During this period, Pakistan held regular elections, but the military continued to play a dominant role in politics. The military intervened in the political process on several occasions, and it also controlled key government institutions, such as the intelligence services and the judiciary. Despite the military's influence, there were some positive developments during this period. The media became more independent, and civil society organizations became more active. There was also some progress on economic reforms. In 1990, Bhutto's government was dismissed by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, who accused her of corruption and nepotism. Bhutto's PPP won the 1993 parliamentary elections, but her government was again dismissed by President Farooq Leghari in 1996. In 1997, Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) won the parliamentary elections. Sharif's government pursued a number of economic reforms, but it was also accused of corruption and nepotism. Due to the veto power of the military and widespread nepotism and corruption, the period can only be considered an electoral hybrid regime. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED considers the elections as competitive at this time. However, since 1989 V-Dem's CEI indicates not really cleanliness scores. In addition, V-Dem's EF&FI scores ambiguous overall election conditions. LIED scores concerning the political liberties remained absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI indicates their somewhat presence for the entire time. Until 1996, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. In 1997 and 1998, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. For 1988 to 1998, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. For 1999, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. In this period Pakistan is according to our observations an electoral hybrid regime that mixes democratic and autocratic elements. Per FH, in 1988 and 1989, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. According to FH, in 1990, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. As classified by FH from 1991 and 1992, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH's scoring from 1993 to 1995, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. Per FH's evaluation from 1996 to 1998, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free.

10/12/1999 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military Autocracy: A military coup, spearheaded by General Pervez Musharraf, ousted the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 84). The

reason was that Sharif tried to fire Musharraf for the defeat in the Kargil war. After the coup the seven-man National Security Council, made up of the commanders of the military services, the civilian prime minister and several civilian ministers, was established. However, power laid in the hands of a few generals and heads of military intelligence agencies (Lansford 2012: 1089, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85). From 1999 to 2001, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations. Between 2002 and 2006, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. As documented in LIED, no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 2001. In the period between 2002 and 2003, only legislative elections were held but they were not categorized as multiparty. From 2004 onward, multiparty legislative elections were conducted yet no executive elections were held. In 2007, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. For 2000 and 2001, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 2002, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 2003-2004, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. From 2005 to 2007, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as suggesting that political liberties are somewhat present. Per FH, from 1999 to 2007, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free.

02/18/2008 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, multiparty elections for the parliament were held. On 08/18/2008 Musharraf resigned under threat of impeachment (Nelson 2009: 16-27, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 85-86).⁶ Based on the results of the elections Asif Ali Zardari, widower of Benazir Bhutto, became president on 09/09/2008 of a coalition government (in opposition to Musharraf) (Lansford 2021: 1266). Observations on Pakistan clearly indicate that it cannot be classified as a full democracy. For instance, the extensive deployment of security agents at numerous polling stations in 2018 was construed by observers, including the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, as equivalent to voter intimidation.⁷ In the typology of this dataset, it is classified as an electoral hybrid regime. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 2008, the elections held are classified as competitive by LIED. V-Dem's CEI still scores not really electoral cleanliness. Anyhow, according to V-Dem's EF&FI the overall conditions were somewhat free and fair during this period. According to FH, for the regime period under consideration, a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. According to LIED political liberties are still absent. V-Dem's PCLI indicates somewhat political liberties from 2008 to 2016 and since 2021. For the remaining four years ambiguous scores were given. In 2008 and 2009, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks. Since 2010, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. For 2008, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. From 2009 onward, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Marcinkowska 2008, Afzal 2001, Blood 1994, Cohen 2011, Diamond 2000, Kaushik 1993, Mahmood 2001, Rahman 2009, Wagner 2008)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
 - ² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayub_Khan_\(President_of_Pakistan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayub_Khan_(President_of_Pakistan)) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayub_Khan_\(President_of_Pakistan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayub_Khan_(President_of_Pakistan))
 - ³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammad-Ayub-Khan#ref129208>
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammad-Ayub-Khan#ref129208>
 - ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Bangladesh#Pakistani_capitulation_and_aftermath
 - ⁵ <http://tinyurl.com/4yfm861>
 - ⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/19/world/asia/19legacy.html?ref=pervezmusharraf&pagewanted=1>
 - ⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-world/2022>
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