

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe inside. The top bulb is dark blue, and the bottom bulb is light blue. The globe is centered in the narrow neck of the hourglass. The top bulb is filled with a dark blue color, and the bottom bulb is filled with a light blue color. The globe is centered in the narrow neck of the hourglass.

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Report RL34335

Pakistan's Scheduled 2008 Election: Background

K. Alan Kronstadt, Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division

January 24, 2008

Abstract. This report provides an overview of Pakistan's political setting and current status, along with a discussion of the country's major political parties and figures.

WikiLeaks



Pakistan's Scheduled 2008 Election: Background

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Summary

A stable, democratic, prosperous Pakistan actively working to counter Islamist militancy is considered vital to U.S. interests. Pakistan is a key ally in U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts. The history of democracy in Pakistan is a troubled one marked by ongoing tripartite power struggles among presidents, prime ministers, and army chiefs. Military regimes have ruled Pakistan directly for 34 of the country's 60 years in existence, and most observers agree that Pakistan has no sustained history of effective constitutionalism or parliamentary democracy. The United States has supported the government of President Pervez Musharraf, whose credibility and popularity have decreased markedly in 2007. The country is scheduled to hold parliamentary elections in February 2008.

In 1999, the elected government of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was ousted in a bloodless coup led by then-Army Chief Gen. Musharraf, who later assumed the title of president (in October 2007, Pakistan's Electoral College reelected Musharraf in a controversial vote). Supreme Court-ordered parliamentary elections—identified as flawed by opposition parties and international observers—seated a new civilian government in 2002, but it remained weak, and Musharraf retained the position as army chief until his November 2007 retirement from that post. The United States urges restoration of full civilian rule in Islamabad, expecting the planned February 18, 2008, polls to be free, fair, and transparent. Such expectations became sharper after Musharraf's November 2007 suspension of the Constitution and imposition of emergency rule (nominally lifted six weeks later) and the December 2007 assassination of former Prime Minister and leading opposition figure Benazir Bhutto. Current political circumstances in Pakistan are extremely fluid, and the country's internal security and stability are under serious threat. Many observers urge a broad re-evaluation of U.S. policies toward Pakistan.

This report provides an overview of Pakistan's political setting and current status, along with a discussion of the country's major political parties and figures. See also CRS Report RL33498, *Pakistan-U.S. Relations*, and CRS Report RL34240, *Pakistan's Political Crises*. This report will not be updated.

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Background

A stable, democratic, prosperous Pakistan actively working to counter Islamist militancy is considered vital to U.S. interests. The history of democracy in Pakistan is a troubled one marked by ongoing tripartite power struggles among presidents, prime ministers, and army chiefs. Military regimes have ruled Pakistan directly for 34 of the country's 60 years in existence, and most observers agree that Pakistan has no sustained history of effective constitutionalism or parliamentary democracy. The country has had five constitutions, the most recent being ratified in 1973 (and significantly modified several times since). From the earliest days of independence, the country's armed forces have thought of themselves as "saviors of the nation," a perception that has received significant, though limited, public support. The military, usually acting in tandem with the president, has engaged in three outright seizures of power from civilian-led governments: by Gen. Ayub Khan in 1958, Gen. Zia-ul-Haq in 1977, and Gen. Pervez Musharraf in 1999.¹

After 1970, five successive governments were voted into power, but not a single time was a government voted out of power—all five were removed by the army through explicit or implicit presidential orders.² Of Pakistan's three most prominent Prime Ministers, one (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) was executed, another (Benazir Bhutto) exiled (then later assassinated), and her husband jailed for eight years without conviction, and the last (Nawaz Sharif) suffered seven years in exile under threat of life in prison for similar abuses before his 2007 return. Such long-standing turmoil in the governance system may partially explain why, in a 2004 public opinion survey, nearly two-thirds of Pakistanis were unable to provide a meaning for the term "democracy."³

Table I. Notable Leaders of Pakistan

Governor-General Mohammed Ali Jinnah	1947-1948
Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan	1947-1951
President Iskandar Ali Mirza	1955-1958
President-General Mohammed Ayub Khan	1958-1969
President-General Mohammed Yahya Khan	1969-1971
President-Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto	1971-1977

¹ In 1958, President Iskander Mizra, with the support of the army, abrogated the Constitution as "unworkable and full of dangerous compromises." Three weeks later Mizra was exiled and Army Chief Gen. Ayub Khan installed himself as President while declaring martial law and banning all political parties (thus formalizing the militarization of Pakistan's political system). His appointment of a senior civil servant as Deputy Martial Law Administrator gave some legitimating cast to the event and, four years later, Ayub Khan introduced a new Constitution that sought to legitimate his rule in the absence of martial law. In 1977, and in the midst of political turmoil involving Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto and the Pakistan National Alliance opposed to him, Army Chief Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, in apparent collusion with conservative Islamic groups, declared martial law, suspended the Constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, and took power in a bloodless coup. He vowed to hold national elections within 90 days, but soon rescinded that promise, and spent the next 11 years making changes to the Pakistani constitution and system of governance that would ensure his continued hold on power. Two of the three coups d'état (Zia in 1977 and Musharraf in 1999) were entirely extra-constitutional in nature. See Robert Stern, *Democracy and Dictatorship in South Asia* (Praeger, 2001).

² See "The Calculus of Electoral Politics in Pakistan (1970-2008)," Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, January 2008, at <http://www.pildat.org/publications/publication/elections/Calculus%20of%20Electoral%20Politics.pdf>.

³ International Foundation for Election Systems, "National Public Opinion Survey Pakistan 2004," available at <http://www.plsc.org.pk/survey/index.htm>.

President-General Zia ul-Haq	1978-1988
Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto	1988-1990
Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif	1990-1993
Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto	1993-1996
Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif	1997-1999
President-General Pervez Musharraf	1999-

Current Political Setting

The year 2007 saw Pakistan buffeted by numerous and serious political crises culminating in the December 27 assassination of former Prime Minister and leading opposition figure Benazir Bhutto, who had returned to Pakistan from self-imposed exile in October. Bhutto's killing in an apparent gun and bomb attack (the circumstances remain controversial) has been called a national tragedy for Pakistan and did immense damage to already troubled efforts to democratize the country. Pakistan's security situation has deteriorated sharply: the federal government faces armed rebellions in two of the country's four provinces, as well as in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The country experienced about 44 suicide bomb attacks in the latter half of 2007 that killed more than 700 people.⁴ The country is scheduled to hold parliamentary elections in February 2008.

Pakistan now suffers from considerable political uncertainty as the tenuous governance structure put in place by President Musharraf has come under strain. Musharraf himself was reelected to a second five-year presidential term in a controversial October 2007 vote by the country's electoral college and, under mounting domestic and international pressure, he finally resigned his military commission six weeks later. Yet popular opposition to military rule had been growing steadily with a series of political crises in 2007: a bungled attempt by Musharraf to dismiss the country's Chief Justice; Supreme Court rulings that damaged Musharraf's standing and credibility; constitutional questions about the legality of Musharraf's status as president; a return to Pakistan's political stage by two former Prime Ministers with considerable public support; and the pressures of impending parliamentary elections now set for February 18, 2008. The catastrophic removal of Benazir Bhutto from Pakistan's political equation dealt a serious blow both to the cause of Pakistani democratization and to U.S. interests.

On November 3, 2007, President Musharraf had launched a "second coup" by suspending the country's constitution and assuming emergency powers in his role as both president and army chief. The move came as security circumstances deteriorated sharply across the country, but was widely viewed as being an effort by Musharraf to maintain his own power. His government dismissed uncooperative Supreme Court justices, including the Chief Justice, and jailed thousands of opposition figures and lawyers who opposed the abrogation of rule of law. It also cracked down on independent media outlets, many of which temporarily were shut down. The emergency order was lifted on December 15, but independent analysts find little evidence that the order's lifting has led to meaningful change, given what they see as repressive media curbs and a stacked judiciary. On the day before his action, Musharraf issued several decrees and made

⁴ See the South Asia Terrorism Portal database at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/Fidayeenattack.htm>.

amendments to the Pakistani Constitution, some of which would ensure that his actions under emergency rule would not be challenged by any court.

Pakistan's National Assembly ended its five-year term on November 15, 2007. Musharraf ally and recent Chairman of the Senate, Mohammadmian Soomro, was appointed to serve as caretaker Prime Minister during the election period. Many analysts view the caretaker cabinet as being stacked with partisan Musharraf supporters and so further damaging to hopes for credible elections. There have been numerous reports of government efforts to "pre-rig" the election.⁵ Pakistan's Chief Election Commissioner initially announced that polls would be held on January 8, 2007. About 13,500 candidates subsequently filed papers to vie for Pakistan's 272 elected National Assembly seats and 577 provincial assembly constituencies. The full National Assembly has 342 seats, with 60 reserved for women and another 10 reserved for non-Muslims. Amendments to the Pakistan Constitution and impeachment of the president require a two-thirds majority for passage.

Opposition parties have been placed in the difficult position of choosing whether to participate in elections that may well be manipulated by the incumbent government or to boycott the process in protest. Following Bhutto's assassination and ensuing civil strife, the Election Commission chose to delay polls until February 18. The decision was criticized by the main opposition parties, which accuse the government of fearing a major loss, but which have chosen to participate.

As Musharraf's political clout has waned, the ruling, Musharraf-allied PML-Q party faces more daunting odds in convincing a skeptical electorate that it deserves another five years in power.⁶ What follows is a review of the five leading political parties/coalitions (which accounted for 85% of the National Assembly seats won in the 2002 election) and some of their most important figures.⁷

Major Political Parties and Politicians

The Muslim League

The Muslim League is Pakistan's oldest political party and was the only major party existing at the time of independence. Long associated with the Quaid-e-Azam (Father of the Nation) Mohammed Ali Jinnah and his lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan (the country's first Prime Minister), the League was weakened upon their premature deaths in 1948 and 1951 (Jinnah by natural causes, Khan by assassination). With its primary goal (the creation of a homeland for the Muslims

⁵ See "Reflections on the Electoral History of Pakistan (1970-2008)," Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, January 2008, at <http://www.pildat.org/publications/publication/elections/How%20Elections%20Stolen.pdf>.

⁶ "Musharraf Ally Battles Foes and Apathy in Pakistan Vote," *Reuters*, December 19, 2007. A public opinion survey undertaken by the Washington-based International Republican Institute during the emergency did not bring good news for Musharraf or the incumbent government: A large majority of Pakistanis expressed their opposition to the measure and nearly two-thirds said they would support a boycott of scheduled elections. Musharraf's approval rating remained low, with nearly three-quarters of respondents saying they opposed his reelection as president and 67% wanting his resignation. When asked who they thought was the best leader to handle the problems facing Pakistan, 31% chose Bhutto, 25% cited Sharif, and 23% said Musharraf (see <http://www.iri.org/mena/pakistan/pdfs/2007-12-12-pakistan-poll-index.pdf>).

⁷ For broader information on slated Pakistani elections, see <http://www.elections.com.pk>.

of British India) accomplished, the party struggled to find a coherent ideology. The Pakistan Muslim League (PML) was established in 1964 as a successor to the Muslim League. It was not until the 1988 elections that the PML—in coalition with Islamist parties—was again a major player on the national scene.

Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)

Nawaz Sharif's faction of the PML was formed in 1993. The PML-N's electoral strength typically is found in the densely populated Punjab province and includes the cities of Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Multan. The party's current election manifesto stresses its demands for "revival of genuine democracy" through a sovereign parliament, an independent judiciary, and a free and fair electoral process.⁸ Party leaders have been consistent and explicit in their criticisms of President Musharraf, calling him a "one-man calamity" who has single-handedly brought ruin to Pakistan through efforts to retain personal power. They call for restored democracy and urge the U.S. government to support the Pakistani nation rather than a single individual.⁹

Nawaz Sharif

Nawaz Sharif, who had been Gen. Zia's finance minister in the 1980s, led a PML-Islamist coalition to a strong second-place showing in 1988 elections and became Punjab chief minister. The scion of a wealthy Lahore industrialist family, Sharif was elected Prime Minister in 1990. Three years later, he established the offshoot PML-Nawaz (PML-N), which went on to dominate the 1997 national elections. While in office, Sharif moved to bolster the power of the Prime Minister's office.¹⁰ Sharif was later ousted in a bloodless coup led by his army chief, Gen. Musharraf, in 1999. He and most of his immediate family lived in exile in Saudi Arabia following his conviction on criminal charges and a brief stay in prison related to his actions on the day of the coup. His family's legal status remained unclear, but reports indicated that, after the 1999 coup, the Sharif family and the Musharraf government, in collusion with the Saudi government, concluded an "arrangement" that would bar any family member from returning to Pakistan for a period of ten years.

Sharif is constitutionally barred from serving a third term as Prime Minister. His electoral plans met a major obstacle when, in December 2007, his nomination papers were rejected, making him ineligible to compete in the elections because of criminal convictions related to his 1999 ouster from power. Because he has refused to engage in any negotiations with the Musharraf government, Sharif has been able to seize a mantle as an opposition "purist," and he wields considerable political influence in the populous Punjab province. With Bhutto's demise, Sharif has stepped up as the most visible opposition figure with national credentials. A conservative with long-held ties to Pakistan's Islamist political parties, Sharif is a bitter enemy of Musharraf and is viewed with considerable wariness by many in Washington, where there are concerns that a

⁸ See <http://www.pmln.org.pk/manifesto.php>.

⁹ Nawaz Sharif, "Pakistan's One-Man Calamity," *Washington Post*, November 17, 2007.

¹⁰ Pakistan's 1973 constitution envisaged a sovereign parliament where powers rested with the Prime Minister, but subsequent changes under the military-dominated regime of Gen. Zia shifted power to the presidency. The very Parliament that provided Zia with these powers was itself dismissed by him in 1988. In 1997, Sharif oversaw passage of the 13th Amendment to the constitution, repealing Zia's 8th Amendment (1985) right to dismiss the government and appoint military chiefs.

resurgence of his party to national power could bring a diminishment of Pakistan's anti-extremism policies and be contrary to U.S. interests.

Shahbaz Sharif

Shahbaz Sharif is Nawaz's younger brother and president of the PML-N. A former Punjab Chief Minister and political heavyweight in his own right, Shahbaz also saw his election nomination papers rejected in late 2007, apparently due to pending criminal charges against him. In 2008, Shahbaz is reported to be in consultation with interlocutors from the Musharraf government, causing some observers to suggest that, despite Nawaz's sharp anti-Musharraf rhetoric, the PML-N may be amenable to power-sharing in a potential "national unity government."

Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q)

In the lead up to the 2002 national elections, most former (but still influential) politicians loyal to Nawaz Sharif joined the new PML-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q), a centrist-conservative group seen to enjoy overt support from the military.¹¹ The PML-Q—also called the "king's party" due to its perceived pro-military bent—won 118 of the total 342 parliamentary seats in the flawed 2002 election, almost all of them from Punjab. This gave the pro-Musharraf parties a plurality in the National Assembly, but fell well short of the majority representation needed to control the body outright. Today the party claims be promoting "the vision of Pakistan's founding fathers," Jinnah and Mohammad Iqbal, a renowned poet whose early 20th century Islamist writings inspired the Pakistan movement. This vision is to include democracy and respect for diversity, along with opposition to terrorism "in all its forms."¹² Yet, while in power, the party came under fire for presenting or preserving legal and legislative obstacles to what Western countries might consider to be important human rights protections, such as those for women and religious minorities. Notable leaders are the "Chaudhrys of Gujrat," cousins from the southern Punjabi city who had been bitter political enemies of Benazir Bhutto and the PPP.

Chaudhry Shujaat Hussein

In 2004, five PML factions united and named Punjabi politician and industrialist Chaudhry Shujaat Hussein as their leader. Shujaat entered politics in 1981 and has been elected to Parliament five times since, including service as Nawaz Sharif's Interior Minister from 1990-1993. As president of the PML-Q, Shujaat has been a key political ally of President Musharraf. For two months in 2004, he served as a transitional Prime Minister when Musharraf "shuffled" Prime Ministers to seat his longtime finance minister, Shaukat Aziz. Shujaat's father, also a politician, was assassinated in 1981 by a terrorist group allegedly run by Benazir Bhutto's brother, Murtaza.

Chaudhry Pervez Elahi

Chaudhry Pervez Elahi is the cousin and brother-in-law of Shujaat Hussein who served as Chief Minister of Punjab from 2002-2007. He is widely regarded as the PML-Q's prime ministerial

¹¹ See <http://www.pml.org.pk>.

¹² See <http://www.pml.org.pk/downloads/manifestopmlcomplete.pdf>.

candidate in 2008. His political vision is based upon a “relentless pursuit of modernization, innovation, confidence, and tolerance.”¹³ Elahi was among four Pakistani government officials believed named by Benazir Bhutto as posing a potential threat to her life.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

The left-leaning Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was established in 1967 in reaction to the military dictatorship of Gen. Khan.¹⁴ The party slogan was and remains “Islam is our Faith, Democracy is our Polity, Socialism is our Economy.” Under the leadership of Z.A. Bhutto, who had resigned his post as Khan's foreign minister, the PPP won a majority of West Pakistan's assembly seats in 1970 elections and held power from 1971 until 1977, when Bhutto's government was overthrown by his Army Chief, Gen. Zia.¹⁵ Bhutto, who oversaw the establishment of a parliamentary system with the 1973 Constitution and who launched Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, was executed by the military government in 1979.

When Gen. Zia's ban on political parties was lifted in 1986, Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, emerged as the new PPP leader and won the Prime Ministership in 1988 and again in 1993. Following Musharraf's coup, she spent eight years in self-imposed exile in London and Dubai under threat of imprisonment should she return. In an effort to skirt legal barriers to its electoral participation in 2002 national elections, the PPP formed a separate entity, the PPP Parliamentarians (PPPP), that pledged to uphold Bhutto's political philosophy. Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in December 2007, just two months after her return to Pakistan. In the view of the longtime leader of the PPP, the ruling, Musharraf-allied PML-Q party saw its fortunes rapidly declining and could expect to lose badly in any free election. Thus, she asserted, its leaders chose to collude with allies in the intelligence agencies to have the polls postponed (she called Musharraf's electoral plans “a farce”).¹⁶ The PPP historically has done especially well in the southern Sindh province, including in the cities of Karachi and Hyderabad.

President Musharraf and Bhutto in 2007 had negotiations on a power-sharing arrangement that could have facilitated Musharraf's continued national political role while allowing Bhutto to return to Pakistan from self-imposed exile, potentially to serve as prime minister for a third time. The Bush Administration encouraged such an arrangement as the best means of both sustaining Musharraf's role and of strengthening moderate political forces in Islamabad. Some analysts took a cynical view of Bhutto's motives in the negotiations, believing her central goal was personal power and removal of standing corruption cases against her.¹⁷ Bhutto insisted that she engaged

¹³ See <http://www.chpervaizelahi.com/cmvision.html>.

¹⁴ See <http://www.ppp.org.pk>.

¹⁵ Pakistan began as a geographical oddity at the northeastern and northwestern reaches of British India, with a multiethnic West Pakistan and a mostly homogeneous (and more populated) Bengali East Pakistan separated by the vast new Indian state. A 1971 war sparked by Bengali grievances against West Pakistani political domination resulted in a partition of the country when East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh.

¹⁶ Benazir Bhutto, “Musharraf's Martial Plan,” *New York Times*, November 7, 2007; Benazir Bhutto, “Musharraf's Electoral Farce,” *Washington Post*, November 14, 2007.

¹⁷ Ijaz Hussain, “Deal-ing a Bad Hand” (op-ed), *Daily Times* (Lahore), August 29, 2007; “Bhutto's Persona Raises Distrust, As Well As Hope,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2007; “Skepticism Tinges Support for Bhutto,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 2007. Bhutto's own niece called the political posturing “sheer pantomime” (Fatima Bhutto, “Aunt Benazir's False Promises,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 2007). Other Bhutto detractors emphasize that she was in power while the Pakistani government nurtured the Afghan Taliban movement, that she did little to reduce the “cross-border” exfiltration of Islamist militants into Indian-controlled Kashmir, that Pakistan was the site of (continued...)

Musharraf so as to facilitate “an effective and peaceful transition to democracy.” When asked whether the United States still favored a Musharraf-Bhutto power-sharing agreement in the wake of the emergency decree and deteriorating relations between the president and former prime minister, U.S. officials only reiterated a belief that Pakistan’s moderate forces should work together to bring constitutional, democratic rule. Yet reports continued to suggest that Washington was pushing for such an accommodation even after Bhutto’s apparently full post-emergency embrace of the opposition and perhaps even after her assassination.¹⁸

Asif Zardari

In 2004, Asif Zardari—then husband of Benazir Bhutto and a political figure in his own right who had been imprisoned for eight years without conviction—was released on bail after a Supreme Court ruling. Zardari, who continued to face legal action in eight pending criminal cases, later received permission to leave the country to join his wife. He previously had served in the National Assembly and as Environment Minister in his wife’s cabinet.

As per Bhutto’s will, and in perpetuation of South Asia’s dynastic politics, in the wake of her assassination the PPP named her young son, Bilawal, and Zardari to succeed her as party leaders. Until Bilawal completes studies at Oxford, Zardari is to run the party. Zardari is a controversial figure in Pakistan: he has gained a reputation for corruption and other charges, including complicity in murder.¹⁹ His rise to leadership of Pakistan’s largest opposition party could present difficulties for U.S. policy makers who had quietly urged President Musharraf to reach a power-sharing accommodation with the PPP under Benazir.

Zardari (along with Sharif) had demanded that elections be held as originally scheduled on January 8, 2008. His calculation likely was rooted in expectations of a significant sympathy vote for the PPP. Zardari has been adamant in his demands for a United Nations investigation into his wife’s murder. Some reports in 2008 suggest he may be open to joining a “national unity government” that could include the Musharraf-allied PML-Q. Zardari may be in negotiation with Musharraf’s interlocutors as part of this potential development.

Amin Fahim

The PPP Parliamentarians was headed by Amin Fahim, who served as Benazir Bhutto’s deputy and party leader in Parliament during her absence from Pakistan. Fahim, who comes from a feudal Sindh background similar to that of Bhutto, led the party competently in her absence, but does not possess national standing and support anything close to that enjoyed by Bhutto herself.

(...continued)

numerous and serious human rights violations under her government, and that the PPP has been run in a nondemocratic fashion (see, for example, William Dalrymple, “Bhutto’s Deadly Legacy” (op-ed), *New York Times*, January 4, 2008).

¹⁸ “U.S. Trying to Revive Musharraf-Bhutto Deal,” *Reuters*, November 17, 2007; “US Still Hopes Musharraf-Bhutto Deal Can Be Saved,” *Jane’s Country Daily Risk Report*, January 7, 2008.

¹⁹ See John Burns, “House of Graft,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1998.

Aitzaz Ahsan

Aitzaz Ahsan, elected president of the Supreme Court Bar Association in 2007, was the lawyer who led the successful effort to have former Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry reseated in July. He has since been at the forefront of an effort to have the Supreme Court reconstituted by Musharraf restored to its pre-November status. His stand has made him a heroic figure in the eyes of many pro-democracy, pro-rule of law Pakistanis, many lawyers among them. Ahsan even accused the U.S. government of not seeming to care about Musharraf's crackdown on the Supreme Court and making no mention of the issue in various agency briefings.²⁰ Ahsan was arrested upon the launch of the November emergency; 33 U.S. Senators later signed a letter to President Musharraf urging his immediate release. Following Bhutto's assassination, some reports named Ahsan as a potential successor, but it is generally believed that he will for the time being remain loyal to the current PPP leadership and may even take a senior party post in the future.

Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA or United Action Front)

The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA or United Action Forum) is a loose coalition of six Islamist parties formed for the 2002 elections.²¹ Its largest constituent is the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), founded by Maulana Maududi in 1941 and considered to be Pakistan's best-organized religious party. Another major, long-standing Islamist party is the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI). The JUI is associated with religious schools (madrassas) that gave rise to the Afghan Taliban movement. Pakistan's Islamist parties are conservative advocates of a central role for Islam and *sharia* (Islamic law) in national governance. They also oppose Westernization in its socioeconomic and cultural forms. Although Pakistan's religious parties enjoy considerable "street" power and were strengthened by Gen. Zia's policies of the 1980s, their electoral showing has in the past been quite limited (they won only two parliamentary seats in the 1993 and 1997 elections, and gained about 11% of the total vote in 2002, their best national showing ever).

The MMA spent the period 2002-2007 as the "dummy opposition" in Islamabad—nominally opposed to the Musharraf government at the center, but allowing for Musharraf's controversial constitutional changes in 2003 and enjoying provincial power in Pakistan's two western provinces (including in outright majority in the North West Frontier and in coalition with the nationally ruling PML-Q in Baluchistan).²² This allowed for what many observers called an intentional marginalization of Pakistan's non-Islamist opposition parties. In 2007, the MMA became weakened by the increasingly divergent approaches taken by its two main figures, JI chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed, a vehement critic of the military-led government, and JUI chief Fazl-ur-Rehman, who largely has accommodated the Musharraf regime. With its two major constituents holding directly opposing views on the wisdom of participating in upcoming elections, the MMA all but formally split, diminishing its prospects for holding power in Pakistan's two western provinces. Still, the JUI may find itself coveted by parties eager for parliamentary allies and its leadership may play a key role in determining the composition of both national and western provincial governments.

²⁰ Aitzaz Ahsan, "Pakistan's Tyranny Continues" (op-ed), *New York Times*, December 23, 2007.

²¹ See <http://www.mma.org.pk>.

²² Some more cynical Pakistanis have quipped that "MMA" meant "Mullah-Military Alliance." This later became perceived as an explicit "Maulana-Musharraf Alliance" in reference to JUI leader Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman.

Fazl-ur-Rehman

The Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam faction headed by Fazl-ur-Rehman is an ideological party that seeks to impose Islamic law in Pakistan through peaceful, democratic means. Its Deobandi roots bring fairly rigid interpretations of Islam and the JUI oversees thousands of religious schools in western Pakistan. Its membership tends to strongly support the Taliban movement in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Two U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Harakat ul-Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammed, are believed to have links with the JUI. Rehman, a native of the North West Frontier Province, served as Leader of the Opposition in the Pakistani Senate from 2004 to 2007. He previously had served three terms in the National Assembly, at one time as Chairman of the body's Foreign Affairs Committee under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Despite his Islamist ideology, Rehman is widely considered to be a political pragmatist. The JUI's electoral strength is mainly found in Pakistan's two western provinces, including in the cities of Peshawar and Quetta.

Qazi Hussein Ahmed

The Jamaat-i-Islami is another ideological party that seeks to impose Islamic law in Pakistan through peaceful, democratic means.²³ It is largely comprised of urban, middle-class citizens across Pakistan. JI chief Qazi Hussein Ahmed, also a native of the North West Frontier Province, has served as MMA president since the coalition's 2002 formation. He is an adamant and vocal opponent of the Musharraf government who has in the past been active in such political causes the Pakistan-supported "jihad" in Indian Kashmir (the Hizbul Mujahideen, which appears on the U.S. State Department's list of "other groups of concern," is the militant wing of the JI). "The Qazi," as he is often known, served in the Pakistani Senate from 1986 to 1996, when he resigned in protest of a "corrupt system." The JI leader is considered to be uncompromising in his views and so often unamenable to political compromise.

Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM)

The Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) is a Sindhi regional party mainly composed of the descendants of pre-partition, Urdu-speaking immigrants (Muhajirs) from what is now India.²⁴ Its roots are found in a 1980s student movement launched to protect the rights of Muhajirs who perceived themselves to be victims of discrimination and repression following independence. The party has long faced accusations of using terrorist tactics. Although it did well in Sindh's provincial elections, the MQM collected only a small percentage of the national vote in 2002 (winning 17 national seats). Yet the party is notable for its firm grip on political power in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and primary business hub. The current party manifesto stresses a need for provincial autonomy and cultural pluralism in Pakistan, and calls for an abolition of the feudal economic system still prevalent in Sindh.

As a key parliamentary ally of the Musharraf-friendly PML-Q, the MQM appeared to take sides in a showdown between supporters and opponents of ousted Chief Justice Chaudhry, who tried to visit Karachi in May 2007. Its cadres were involved in Karachi street battles with opposition activists that left at least 40 people dead on May 12, most of them PPP members. Reports had

²³ See <http://jamaat.org/overview/objectives.html>.

²⁴ While the MQM aspires to national party status, its representation beyond of southern Sindh is negligible. See <http://www.mqm.org>.

local police and security forces standing by without intervening while the MQM attacked anti-Musharraf protesters, leading many observers to charge the government with complicity in the bloody rioting.²⁵ MQM leaders denied that party activists had been involved in malicious acts.

MQM chief Altaf Hussein has led the party from exile in London since 1992, when he fled Karachi ahead of military operations against the MQM. He has been accused of involvement in several violent plots, including the kidnaping of an army major, but was never convicted. Hussein was an early and vocal sympathizer with the United States following September 2001 terrorist attacks there.

Table 2. Selected Official 2002 National Assembly Election Results

Party/Coalition	Votes won	Percentage of total vote	Seats secured	Percentage of elected NA seats secured ^a
PML-Q (Pakistan Muslim League- Quaid-e-Azam)	6,898,587	26.6	118	33.8
PPP (Pakistan People's Party - Parliamentarians)	7,361,423	28.4	80	23.2
MMA (Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal or United Action Forum)	3,181,483	12.3	59	16.5
PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz)	3,292,659	12.7	18	5.2
MQM (Muttahida Quami Movement)	920,381	3.6	17	4.8
Other ^b	4,251,695	16.4	50	16.5
Total	25,906,228	—	342	—

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan at <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/content/GE-2002.htm>.

- a. Pakistan's National Assembly has 272 elected seats. Another 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 seats are reserved for non-Muslims.
- b. Other Pakistani political parties of note are the Awami National Party, a Pashtun nationalist organization with a constituency in western Pakistan, especially the North West Frontier Province; the Pakistan People's Party - Sherpao, an offshoot of the PPP led by Aftab Sherpao, who served as Interior Minister in the government of Shaukat Aziz; the Baluchistan National Movement; the Sindh National Front, and numerous other smaller regional and religious parties. A list of the 49 parties registered for the 2008 election is at <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/content/Symbol-allotted.pdf>.

²⁵ The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan called the riots "the result of a calculated adventure hatched by the president and the MQM with the cooperation of the Sindh government" (May 13, 2007, press release at <http://www.hrcp.cjb.net>; see also "Pakistan on Brink of Disaster as Karachi Burns," *Telegraph* (London), May 12, 2007 and "Clashes in Pakistan Kill 28, Injure Scores as Unrest Escalates," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2007).

Figure 1. Map of Pakistan



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.

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