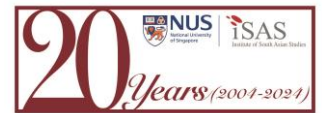


Power, Politics and Patronage: Pakistan's Post-Election Coalition

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Summary

This paper provides a concise overview of Pakistan's recent coalition government formation and cabinet composition. It examines the details and context of the collaboration between the Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz, the Pakistani Peoples Party and other smaller parties. The paper also outlines the distribution of ministerial roles and the strategic manoeuvres of key political players. It also offers insights into the nation's evolving political landscape.

Months of anticipation and uncertainty culminated in Pakistan's long-awaited general elections on 8 February 2024. However, the electoral process was marred by violence, tensions and swirling rumours of corruption, casting a shadow over the legitimacy of the results. Despite this tumultuous backdrop, a coalition government materialised with the Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistani Peoples Party (PPP) forging an uneasy partnership to navigate the complex post-election landscape. As the PML-N assumed a senior role in the alliance, a delicate balance of power now rests on the cooperation between the political factions, erstwhile rivals, and the military leadership. Finally, the paper provides a summary of the composition of the coalition government and the cabinet of the new administration.

Coalition Members

Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz

The two main parties of the current coalition are the PPP and PML-N. Along with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the PML-N and the PPP have been the most prominent and powerful political parties in Pakistani politics in recent years. Despite their historical rivalry, these parties have forged an alliance driven by a shared opposition to the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Over time, their common stance against the PTI has overridden past animosities and led to a strategic partnership in the political arena. The alliance between the PML-N and the PPP was crucial for forming the Pakistani Democratic Movement (PDM), which orchestrated Imran Khan's removal in 2022 through a vote of no confidence.¹ During the elections, the PML-N faced high stakes but benefitted from developments in the lead up to the polls, most notably Imran Khan's incarceration, which curtailed the PTI's ability to capitalise on his popularity.² Moreover, the PTI's iconic election symbol was banned, effectively forcing its

¹ Cyril Almeida, "What led to leader Imran Khan's downfall in Pakistan?", *Al Jazeera*, 9 April 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/9/analysis-end-of-imran-khans-term>.

² Ariba Shahid, "What does Imran Khan's jail sentence mean for Pakistan election?", *Al Jazeera*, 31 January 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/what-does-imran-khans-conviction-mean-pakistans-election-2024-01-31/>.

candidates to run as independents.³ Furthermore, PTI-supported candidates had to align with the Sunni Ittehad Council, a party of marginal influence in Pakistani politics.⁴

Shehbaz Sharif returned to the Prime Minister's office for a second term,⁵ while Maryam Nawaz, daughter of Nawaz Sharif, clinched the Chief Minister position in Punjab.⁶ The party commanding Punjab holds significant sway in Pakistani politics due to the province's size, demography, electoral weight and economy. Maryam's appointment as the chief minister is also groundbreaking as she became the first woman chief minister of Punjab. Furthermore, PML-N's Saisal Nasir secured the unopposed position of Deputy Chairman of the Senate,⁷ while Ayaz Sadiq, also from PML-N, acquired the role of the Speaker of the National Assembly.⁸ The PML-N now control key federal and provincial positions in the governing architecture of the country.

Pakistani Peoples Party

Although the PPP did not acquire cabinet positions, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari maintained his support for the coalition. The party holds important provincial posts, with Murad Ali Shah, a veteran party member, as the Chief Minister of Sindh, and Sarfraz Bugti as the Chief Minister of Balochistan.⁹ Asif Ali Zardari, Bilawal Bhutto's father, was also elected as the coalition government's candidate for the presidency, comfortably winning the vote against Mahmood Khan Achakzai.¹⁰ This is Zardari's second term as president after previously serving in the position from 2008 to 2013. Additionally, former prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gilani, a PPP veteran, unanimously clinched the Senate Chairmanship in a session boycotted by the PTI, as 41 new senate members were sworn in.¹¹

On the surface, the PPP maintained that by forgoing cabinet positions, it aimed to concentrate on fostering stability within the government and channel its efforts towards

³ Asif Shahzad, "Pakistan's Imran Khan's party loses cricket bat electoral symbol", *Reuters*, 14 January 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistans-imran-khans-party-loses-cricket-bat-electoral-symbol-2024-01-14/>.

⁴ Usama Iqbal, "PTI-backed MPs swell SIC ranks", *The Express Tribune*, 20 February 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2457014/pti-backed-mps-swell-sic-ranks>.

⁵ "Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan's prime minister for second term", *The Straits Times*, 3 March 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/pakistans-shehbaz-sharif-set-to-take-oath-as-prime-minister-for-second-term>.

⁶ Adnan Aamir, "Pakistan's Nawaz Sharif passes torch as daughter Maryam elected Punjab chief", *Nikkei Asia*, 26 February 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Pakistan-elections/Pakistan-s-Nawaz-Sharif-passes-torch-as-daughter-Maryam-elected-Punjab-chief>.

⁷ Bahzad Saleemi, "PPP's Yousaf Raza Gilani, PML-N's Saisal Khan elected Senate chairman, deputy unopposed", *Samaa*, 9 April 2024, <https://www.samaa.tv/2087312825-ppp-s-yousaf-raza-gilani-pml-n-s-saisal-khan-elected-senate-chairman-deputy-unopposed>.

⁸ Aamir Saeed, "Pakistan's National Assembly elects Ayaz Sadiq as 23rd speaker amid opposition protest", *Arab News*, 1 March 2024, <https://arab.news/vemkb>.

⁹ Imran Ahmed and Muhammad Saad Ul Haque, "Unpacking Pakistan's 2024 General Elections and the Aftermath", *ISAS Insight No. 745*, Institute of South Asian Studies, 11 April 2024, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/unpacking-pakistans-2024-general-elections-and-the-aftermath/>.

¹⁰ "Asif Ali Zardari elected Pakistan's president for second time", *Al Jazeera*, 9 March 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/9/asif-ali-zardari-elected-pakistans-president-for-second-time>.

¹¹ Rizwan Shehzad, "Historic trifecta as Gilani wins Senate chair", 10 April 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2462271/historic-trifecta-as-gilani-wins-senate-chair>.

grassroots-level development projects. Sherry Rehman, Vice President of the PPP, explained, “Our actions to forego certain benefits and use the time and space to work on the grassroots should help people see politics less about patronage and more about bringing much-needed change to people living under severe economic and climate stress.”¹² Earlier, it was also reported that Bilawal would seek the office of prime minister, as part of a power sharing agreement with the PML-N. However, when addressing a post-elections rally in Thatta, Bilawal declared, “I was told [by the PML-N] that let us be the prime minister for three years and then you can take the premiership for the remaining two years...I said no to this. I said I do not want to be a prime minister like this...If I become the prime minister, it would be after the people of Pakistan elect me.”¹³

It is likely that side-stepping prominent ministerial roles is a strategic and potentially face-saving posture, leaving the PML-N in the direct firing line of criticism should things go further awry. The last coalition government after Imran Khan’s ouster, with Bhutto Zardari as foreign minister and other PPP members in the cabinet, oversaw an alarming decline in Pakistan’s economic stability, approaching the brink of default. Amidst public and opposition scepticism regarding the elections’ legitimacy, the new coalition’s governing mandate remains under scrutiny. It makes sense then to speculate that the PPP prefers to be at the sidelines rather than the centre of governance and government.

Smaller Parties

The other parties involved in the coalition are the Mutahhida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Awami National Party (ANP), Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) and the National Party (NP).

Foremost among these parties is the MQM-P, once the PPP’s rival for dominance in Sindh during the 1990s. However, internal discord and the PTI’s increasing popularity have diminished the MQM-P’s influence over time. In early March 2024, the MQM-P finalised its involvement in the coalition through a meeting between the PML-N’s Ahsan Iqbal and the MQM-P’s leader, Mustafa Kamal.¹⁴ With 17 National Assembly seats in Karachi and Hyderabad, the MQM-P sought support for three constitutional amendments empowering local governments.¹⁵ In exchange, the MQM-P pledged their support for PML-N’s candidate for prime minister and National Assembly Speaker, opting to sit on the treasury benches with the other coalition members instead of with the opposition.¹⁶ Both parties also signed a memorandum of understanding on 2 March 2024, committing to the 26th constitutional amendment.¹⁷

¹² Abid Hussain, “Bhutto about-turn: Behind the PPP plan to back Pakistan’s new government”, *Al Jazeera*, 16 February 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/16/bhutto-about-turn-behind-the-ppp-plan-to-back-pakistans-new-government>.

¹³ “Bilawal reveals power-sharing formula offered to PPP”, *Dawn*, 18 February 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1815252>.

¹⁴ “ML-N, MQM-P reach agreement on coalition government”, *The Nation*, 1 March 2024, <https://www.nation.com.pk/01-Mar-2024/pml-n-mqm-p-reach-agreement-on-coalition-government>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kalbe Ali, “PML-N, MQM-P accord to empower local govts”, *Dawn*, 2 March 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1818459>.

In another development, the ANP backed Zardari and the PPP's presidential bid. In reciprocation, the PPP endorsed Aimal Wali Khan, ANP's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa president, as their joint candidate for senator from the Balochistan assembly.¹⁸ Following his successful bid, Senator Aimal Wali Khan pledged to represent the interests of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in the Senate and at the national level.

National Cabinet and its Composition

The national cabinet of Pakistan officially took oath on 11 March 2024. Taking place in Islamabad, a list of recommendations was sent to Zardari who then presided over the official oath-taking.¹⁹ The cabinet includes 12 ministers of the National Assembly, three senators and three technocrats.

Two of the most notable members of the cabinet are Khawaja Muhammad Asif and Mohammad Ishaq Dar. Asif is a seasoned veteran in Pakistani politics, having previously served as Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Water and Power, Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources, and Minister for Sports, all on the PML-N's ticket. He has been a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan since 1993 (from NA-71 Sialkot).²⁰ Asif received the Ministries of Defence, Defence Production and Aviation.²¹ Dar is also an influential member of Shehbaz Sharif's party. He previously served as Minister of Finance on four different occasions, as well as Minister for Commerce and Minister for Industries and he is also an incumbent member of the senate, having previously served from 2003 to 2018.²² In a surprise to many, Dar was given the Ministry for Foreign affairs instead of the expected Ministry for Finance.²³

Given the Ministries for Planning, Development and Special initiatives, Iqbal is also the Secretary General of the PML-N.²⁴ He has previously served as Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives on three other occasions, along with terms as Minister for Education, Minister for Minorities and Minister for Interior.²⁵ Between 2013 and 2017, Iqbal also served as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of Pakistan.

The other PML-N candidates in the Cabinet are Rana Tanveer Hussain, Azam Nazeer Tarar, Jam Kamal Khan, Amir Muqam, Awais Leghari, Ataullah Terar, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Musadik Malik, Muhammad Aurangzeb, and Ahad Cheema. Ataullah Terar was given the post of Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh the post of Minister of Maritime Affairs while Riaz Hussain Pirzada was

¹⁸ "Aimal Wali vows to raise voice for oppressed people in Senate", *The News International*, 29 March 2024, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1173378-aimal-wali-vows-to-raise-voice-for-oppressed-people-in-senate>.

¹⁹ Nadir Guramani, "Ishaq Dar becomes FM as PM Shehbaz's 19-member cabinet sworn in", *Dawn*, 11 March 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1820748>.

²⁰ "Who's who in PM Shehbaz Sharif's 19-member cabinet", *The Nation*, 11 March 2024, <https://www.nation.com.pk/11-Mar-2024/who-s-who-in-pm-shehbaz-sharif-s-19-member-cabinet>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

chosen as Minister of Housing and Works – he has previous experience in the cabinet, serving as Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination and Minister of Federal Education and Professional Training.²⁶ Senator Musadik Malik was given the Ministry for Power and Water Resources, a post he has previously held, while Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar was selected Minister of Law and Justice.²⁷ Tarar had previously served in the cabinet with the same portfolio and was a previous leader of the senate. Rana Tanveer Hussain was given the Ministries of Industries and Production, and National Food Security and Research. Hussain had previously as Minister for Defence Production, Minister for Science and Technology and Minister of Federal Education and Professional training. Jam Kamal Khan was given the Ministry of Commerce.²⁸ A member of the royal family of Las Bela, Jam Kamal Khan served as Chief Minister of Balochistan from 2018 to 2021 and served twice as Minister of State for Petroleum.²⁹ He had previously been a candidate of the BAP and was elected its president in 2018. Amir Muqam was given the Ministries of States and Frontier Regions, and National Heritage and Culture – he had previously served as the Federal Minister for Political Affairs and Minister for State of Water and Power.³⁰

Awais Leghari, son of former president, Farooq Leghari, was announced as Federal Minister for Energy.³¹ He previously served as Federal Minister for Power and as a Federal Minister without portfolio.³² Ahad Cheema, one of the three technocrats included in the cabinet, was given the role of Minister of Economic Affairs.³³ He was also given the additional portfolio of Minister of Establishment, an important and sensitive position, as it is the ministry in charge of the civil service.³⁴ Cheema was previously serving as an advisor to the Prime Minister on the Establishment, before the Election Commission of Pakistan ordered him to resign from his post, citing concerns over his influence for the elections.³⁵

Finally, perhaps the most contentious ministry was given to Mohammed Aurangzeb. Now Minister of Finance, he is a banker by trade who previously served as the head of one of Pakistan's largest banks, Habib Bank Limited, and worked in Citibank and JP Morgan.³⁶ Chosen over the conventional candidate Dar, Aurangzeb faces the daunting task of stabilising Pakistan's faltering economy.

The remaining members of the cabinet were candidates from the other members of the coalition. Chaudhry Salik Hussain, son of the former prime minister and current PML-Q

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Jam Kamal Khan assumes Office as Federal Minister for Commerce", *Associated Press of Pakistan*, 12 March 2024, <https://www.app.com.pk/business/jam-kamal-khan-assumes-office-as-federal-minister-for-commerce/>.

²⁹ "History", *Jam Kamal House*, <https://jamkamalkhan.pk/history/>.

³⁰ "Politicians Profiles", *Pakvoter*, https://pakvoter.org/politicians_profiles/amir-mugam/.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Guramani, "Ishaq Dar becomes FM as PM Shehbaz's 19-member cabinet sworn in", op. cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Irfan Sadozai, "ECP orders removal of PM's adviser Ahad Cheema from post", *Dawn*, 19 December 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1799191>.

³⁶ Abid Hussain, "Who is Muhammad Aurangzeb, the man tasked with fixing Pakistan's economy?", *Al Jazeera*, 13 March 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/13/who-is-muhammad-aurangzeb-the-man-tasked-with-fixing-pakistans-economy>.

President, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, was given the position of Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Resource Development, and Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony.³⁷ Aleem Khan, a former ally of Imran Khan who left to form the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party, was selected as Minister for Privatisation and Communications.³⁸ Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, convenor of the MQM-P, was given the portfolios of Science and Technology and Federal Education and Professional Training.³⁹ Siddiqui has previous experience, serving as Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication and Minister for Industries and Production.⁴⁰

Mohsin Raza Naqvi's selection was the most controversial. Previously, both the PPP and PML-N claimed that Naqvi had no overt links to any of the major political parties.⁴¹ Instead, Naqvi, a media mogul and a previous Chief Minister for Punjab, is generally believed to be the army's candidate of choice in the cabinet.⁴² Naqvi is alleged to have strong ties to the security establishment and is expected to express its voice in the federal cabinet. He is now Interior Minister and was assigned the additional portfolio of Narcotics Control.⁴³

Final Remarks

Amid anticipation and controversy, the coalition government led by Shehbaz Sharif now sees the PML-N dominate key federal positions. While the PPP focuses on provincial leadership, the smaller parties joining the coalition have brought forth political demands as conditions for their support. Interestingly, a familiar face missing from the coalition is President of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam and a former leader of the PDM, Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman. Rehman has expressed his rejection of the 8 February 2024 election results.

At first glance, it appears that a politics of convenience rather than a shared and coherent ideology holds the disparate coalition group together. This means that driven by self-interest, political factions within the coalition are likely to prioritise individual gains over collective unity, leading potentially to discord and fragility within the government. For the PML-N, overcoming internal divisions and instability remains a significant challenge.

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³⁷ Guramani, "Ishaq Dar becomes FM as PM Shehbaz's 19-member cabinet sworn in", op. cit.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui - a profile", *Dunya*, 5 February 2024, <https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/789599-Khalid-Maqbool-Siddiqui---Profile>.

⁴¹ Rameez Khan, "PML-N, PPP both deny Naqvi is 'their man'", *The Express Tribune*, 11 March 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2459004/pml-n-ppp-both-deny-naqvi-is-their-man>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Guramani, "Ishaq Dar becomes FM as PM Shehbaz's 19-member cabinet sworn in", op. cit.