



Background

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is a semi-autonomous region in northern Pakistan with a separate government and electoral system. The region was part of the formerly princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1970, it became a single administrative unit called the Northern Areas falling under administrative control of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. The Northern Areas were formed from an amalgamation of the Gilgit Agency, the Baltistan District of the Ladakh Wazarat, and the states of Hunza and Nagar. Today, GB is divided into two administrative divisions – Gilgit and Baltistan/Skardu – which taken together, include 14 districts and cover an area of 72,971 km¹ with an estimated population of 1.49² million people.

This factsheet provides information on the legislative assembly elections scheduled for November 15, 2020.

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 (GBESGO). The GB adopted Pakistan's Elections Act 2017 and associated Election Rules 2017 to conduct elections in the region. Through the GBESGO, administrative, political, financial and judicial reforms have been introduced and the following system of government have been established:

- GB Council, which is made up of 15 members;
- Legislative Assembly, which is made up of 33 representatives - 24 of whom are directly elected and 9 of whom are elected to reserved seats through a proportional representation system;
- GB Government, which is made up of Ministers and headed by a Chief Minister who is elected by the Legislative Assembly from among its members by majority vote; and
- Governor, appointed by the President of Pakistan on the advice of the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

The first elections for the Legislative Assembly were held on November 12, 2009 and second elections on June 8, 2015. Third Legislative Assembly elections in the territory will be held on November 15, 2020.

Gilgit-Baltistan Council

The GB Council plays a 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 coordinating with the Government of Pakistan on banking issues and planning for economic coordination, including scientific and technological research, and to make laws regarding these subjects.³

The GB Council consists of the following members:

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgit-Baltistan>

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgit-Baltistan>

It may, however, be noted that Pakistan's 2017 census results have not yet been officially published.

³ Section 47(2) sub section (a) "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009"

- Prime Minister of Pakistan who serves as Chairman of the Council;
- Governor of GB, who serves as Vice Chairman;
- 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
- Six members who are nominated by the Prime Minister of Pakistan from time to time from amongst Federal Ministers and Members of the Parliament.

The term of the Council is not clearly mentioned in the Ordinance, but seats may become vacant in the event that a member:

- Resigns;
- Is absent without leave for ten consecutive sittings;
- Fails to take the required oath within 90 days; or
- Is no longer qualified, this may happen after Legislative or National Assembly elections.

The Legislative Assembly

The Legislative Assembly is GB's directly elected body and has the power to legislate on 61 subjects, including land revenue and administrative courts.⁴ The Assembly also votes on the annual budget of the GB Consolidated Fund. The term of the Legislative Assembly is five years,⁵ but it may be dissolved earlier by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.⁶

Elections to the Legislative Assembly

The former Pakistan Muslim League (N) government completed its five-year tenure on June 23, 2020 and the federal government appointed Mir Afzal as Caretaker Chief Minister. According to Section 35(4) of the Order, elections for the GB Legislative Assembly are required to be held within 60 days from the date on which its term has expired. On July 2, 2020 the GB Election Commission announced August 18 as the election date, in keeping with the legal requirement, but the GB Chief Court ordered postponement of the election due to pending delimitation in three districts and regional situation – the regional situation probably referred to COVID-19 challenge. After consulting with political parties, the GB Election Commission ultimately announced November 15, 2020 as the election day.

According to the final electoral rolls, the number of registered voters in GB is 745,361 – with men representing 405,363 (54%) and women 339,998 (46%) of the registered voters.⁷ The GB Election Commission has set up 1,141 polling stations. Of these 1,141 polling stations, 557 have been declared of “sensitive nature,”⁸ meaning there is a history of and the potential for violence there.

Who is Being Elected?

According to the Election Commission of GB, there are 330 candidates contesting to represent 23 of GB's 24 constituencies,⁹ down from the 584 candidates who initially submitted their nomination papers. Election in one constituency – Gilgit 3 – has been postponed due to death of a candidate.¹⁰ There are only four women contesting for the 23 general seats, representing just 1.2 percent of the total contesting candidates.

⁴ Section 47(2) sub section (b) “Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009”

⁵ Section 35(3) “Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009”

⁶ Section 41(1) “Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009”

⁷ <https://pakvoter.org/wie/>; TDEA/FAFEN's report on GB voter registration 2020

⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1588503/over-50pc-gb-polling-stations-sensitive-senate-panel-told>

⁹ <https://www.geo.tv/latest/314579-list-of-pti-tickets-holders-for-gilgit-baltistan-elections-2020>

¹⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1585179/decision-on-gb-poll-nomination-appeals-today>

Elections for the Legislative Assembly are held on the basis of a first-past-the-post system within each of the 24 single-member constituencies. These 24 seats and their associated constituencies collectively cover 14 districts, with the number of seats per district determined by the size of the district population. In addition to the 24 general seats, 6 seats are reserved for women who are elected on the basis of proportional representation system. In this case, the number of reserved seats given to a political party is based on the proportion of general seats won by that political party and not on the basis of the proportion of votes obtained by political parties, region-wide. There are additional three seats reserved for technocrats and professionals who are also elected on the basis of Proportional Representation system from the political parties' list. The following table illustrates it:

Nature of Seats	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 ¹¹ .
Technocrats and Professionals (Reserved)	3	
Total	33	

The Election Commission of Gilgit-Baltistan

Elections are conducted by the Election Commission of GB, which has its own financial and administrative infrastructure separate from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The Election Commission of GB is headed by a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). Unlike the ECP, in the Election Commission of GB, the CEC is the only Member of the Commission. The Chairman of the GB Council (the Prime Minister of Pakistan) appoints the CEC on the advice of the Governor of GB (Vice Chairman).¹² The CEC of the Election Commission of GB is selected from a panel of retired judges and bureaucrats. The current CEC, Raja Shahbaz Khan, is an Anti-Terror Court judge. The Election Commission of GB seeks technical assistance and support from the ECP. As noted above, GB has adopted Pakistan's Elections Act 2017 and Election Rules 2017 for organizing and conducting elections in the territory.

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¹¹ Section 35(1), sub section (a) (b) (c) "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009"

¹² Section 82, "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009."