

The new Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusuf Raza Gillani, was sworn into office on March 25, 2008. He represents the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which will lead the government for the first time in twelve years, significantly diminishing the power of President Pervez Musharraf. The results are influenced by a long history of transition between civilian and military rule, and three powerful figures: Musharraf and former Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and the late Benazir Bhutto.



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## Background and Context in Pakistan

Pakistan became independent in 1947. The first twenty-five years were marked with political instability and economic difficulty, culminating in a bloody civil war between East and West Pakistan. In 1971, East Pakistan split from West Pakistan to form Bangladesh. The president at the time, Yahya Khan, resigned and passed power on to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Bhutto, who had formed the Pakistan People's Party in 1967, was elected President and Chief Martial Law Administrator. Martial law was lifted four months into his presidency after an interim constitution was formed.

National confidence was low following the conflict with Bangladesh, and Bhutto moved to restore it by making drastic changes in the country through social and economic reforms. He nationalized the banking system and major industries. After the formation of the new Constitution, he relinquished the presidency to become Prime Minister. However, his rhetoric did not fully match his actions, and after many policy changes, the economy stagnated. In 1977, there were national elections in which Bhutto declared his own victory. The newly formed opposition party, the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) objected to the results and called for new elections. When Bhutto resisted, he was arrested by the military. Shortly after, parts of the Constitution were suspended, and Pakistan returned to martial law under the leadership of General Muhammed Zia ul-Haq.

General Zia claimed that elections could be held within three months, and released Bhutto with the promise that he could contest the election. When it was clear that Bhutto was still popular among Pakistan's citizens, Zia called for a criminal investigation into the PPP leadership. He found Bhutto guilty of conspiracy to murder a political opponent, and Bhutto was hanged in 1979. Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, took over as head of the party.

Zia assumed the presidency following Bhutto's hanging. He called for elections to be held that November, but was fearful that the PPP would win, so he delayed them again and banned all political activity. In 1980, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) formed under the leadership of the PPP to demand for new elections and a restoration of the Constitution. General Zia refused to fulfill their demands. In 1984, he held an election in which he tied his candidacy to approval of Islam and won by a landslide. His opponents boycotted the election. Under General Zia's rule, the United States became heavily involved in military efforts in Pakistan, directing aid to help remove the Soviet army from Afghanistan.

In 1988, Zia was killed in a plane crash. His party was left in disarray following his death, and the PPP quickly mobilized supporters under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto. Chairman of the Senate Ghulam Ishaq Khan became acting president, and he allowed scheduled elections to take place. The PPP won 94 out of 207 seats, making them the dominant party. Khan was forced to invite the PPP to form a government, which they succeeded in doing with the support of several other parties, including the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). Benazir Bhutto was elected Prime Minister, and became the first female in modern history to head a Muslim government.

Bhutto's government returned the country to civilian rule, but a number of barriers interfered with its ability to achieve any reforms. The relationship between the central government and regional authorities was poor, ethnic tensions

were high, there were debates over interpretations of constitutional authority, and there was a lack of military support for the government, which made it difficult to maintain order. President Khan would not allow Bhutto to work independently and in 1990, he dismissed Bhutto's government and dissolved the national and provincial assemblies.

Elections were held in October of 1990, and the Islamic Democratic Alliance won a two-thirds majority in the national assembly and control of all four regional parliaments. Nawaz Sharif, who led the largest party in the alliance--the Pakistan Muslim League (PML)--was elected Prime Minister. Sharif had strong support from the military and from President Khan, so he was a very powerful Prime Minister. He instituted many economic reforms and promoted widespread Islamization. However, his hold began to weaken when differing priorities among parties began to fracture the alliance. Sharif also faced corruption allegations and in 1993, President Khan formally charged him and forced him to leave office. However, the Supreme Court intervened, reinstating Sharif and his government. Sharif and Khan became politically gridlocked, and finally both were asked to resign in July 1993.

An interim government was formed until elections could be held in October. The PPP received a plurality of the votes, and Bhutto resumed power. She did not have a majority in the national assembly, so she relied on support from many small parties. Her heavy reliance on a coalition and intense opposition from Sharif's party made her government unstable. The newly elected president, Farooq Leghari, was close to Bhutto and initially strengthened her power base, but in 1996 he forced her government to disband, once again under corruption charges. Bhutto left the country under voluntary exile, and Sharif became Prime Minister for a second time. This time he amended the constitution to prevent the president from dismissing the Prime Minister and added other provisions that strengthened his role. Additionally, he led an anti-corruption campaign that was primarily used to target opposition candidates.

In October of 1999, the army ousted Sharif in a bloodless coup, following which Sharif was exiled to Saudi Arabia, escaping imprisonment. General Pervez Musharraf, Sharif's former Chief of Army Staff, became head of the new military led government. Musharraf quickly declared a state of emergency and suspended the parliament. Shortly after, he was named Chief Executive, and with this power appointed an eight member National Security Council that unanimously declared the coup valid, and gave him legislative and executive authority for three years from the coup date. In June 2001, he declared himself President.

Following the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 World Trade Center attacks, Musharraf pledged to give full cooperation to the United States government in their "war on terror." Pakistan became a key ally of the United States, and the US government began sending large amounts of military aide to Pakistan. In return, the government in Pakistan began cracking down on extremist groups and withdrew its support for the Taliban. In 2002, Musharraf extended his presidency for five additional years through a referendum. He had pledged to give up his army post and become a civilian president, but in 2004 announced that he would retain his military role. Seeing Musharraf as a key player in their relations with Pakistan, the United States government continued support for his presidency, despite growing dissatisfaction within the country.

In March of 2007, Musharraf suspended Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry under corruption charges. Many people accused Musharraf of removing him because of fears that Chaudhry would challenge his reelection attempts, since Musharraf's five-year term was coming to an end. The suspension led to widespread protests that ended with the deaths of forty people. Pressure increased within and outside the country for Musharraf to separate his government role from his military role, and for him to open the elections to opposition candidates. In particular, former Prime Ministers Bhutto and Sharif were fighting to be allowed to return to the country in order to run for office. They attempted to join forces to push for a return to civilian rule, but had trouble agreeing on all the terms.

The elections were officially set for October 6, 2007. Prior to the elections, there was an official challenge to Musharraf's ability to run for president while still holding his military position. Although the court declared that he could still run and hold his military post, an eligibility challenge caused the results of the election to be delayed. When all challenges were rejected and the results were announced, Musharraf had won by a wide margin. In the meantime, arrangements were made for Bhutto to return to Pakistan to work out a United States backed power sharing deal with Musharraf. Musharraf needed support of another candidate to address the growing unrest in the

country, and Bhutto would be cleared of all corruption charges as part of the terms of the agreement. Sharif also tried to return to Pakistan to vie for political office, but was deported as soon as his plane landed.

On November 3, 2007, Musharraf declared a state of emergency in the country, citing rising extremism and judicial interference. Critics decried the action, claiming it was an attempt to assert his control. Musharraf suspended the constitution and effectively dismantled the court system. Thousands of people took to the street to protest the state of emergency. Hundreds of lawyers, many activists, and 5,000 members of the PPP were arrested. Benazir Bhutto was placed under house arrest to prevent a protest that was scheduled to take place, but she was allowed to speak to members of her party from outside her home. She condemned Musharraf for his actions and refused to negotiate with him further until he restored the constitution and ended the state of emergency. The United State government urged Musharraf to release Bhutto and hold free and fair elections.

Late in November, Musharraf agreed to resign from his military post and be sworn in as a civilian, bowing to demands from the United States government and the civilian population in Pakistan. He also agreed to hold parliamentary elections in January. By this point, both Sharif and Bhutto were back in the country, contending for the role of Prime Minister. In mid-December, Musharraf lifted the state of emergency and reinstated a new Supreme Court, comprised of party loyalists.

On December 27, 2008, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated while attending an election rally in Rawalpindi. Her death, just a few days before the scheduled elections, sent the country into an uproar. Although the suicide bomber was officially linked to al-Qaeda, Bhutto supporters accused Musharraf, saying that at the very least he did not do enough to protect her. With elections so close and no replacement for Bhutto, the government decided to delay the elections until February 18, 2008 to give the PPP a chance to find a new party leader. Bhutto's husband and son, Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, took over in the interim. When elections were held, the PPP received a majority of the votes, with Sharif's party following close behind. The PPP and Sharif's party, the PML, agreed to put old rivalries aside to work out a power sharing deal. Their combined power removed Musharraf's party from power in parliament and significantly reduced Musharraf's authority.

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, Yusuf Raza Gillani of the PPP was sworn into office as Prime Minister. His first action was to free the judges who were jailed during the state of emergency in November. He also pledged to reinstate Chief Justice Chaudhry. He voiced his commitment to strengthening democratic institutions according to the needs of the people. Opposition groups have continued to push for the resignation of Musharraf. He has said that when the time is appropriate, he will leave office peacefully, but refuses to resign under pressure. If the Supreme Court challenges his legitimacy, it will be hard to predict Musharraf's response, and how it will affect the future stability of Pakistan.

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