

s22(1)(a)(ii)

s 47E(d)

**Title:** Pakistan: Elections: 8 February – tentatively confirmed  
**MRN:** s 47E(d) s 22(1)(a)(ii)  
**To:** Canberra  
**Cc:** RR : Indo-Pacific Posts, Middle East Posts  
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**Files:**  
**References:** s 47E(d)  
**Response:** Routine, Information Only

## Summary

Pakistan is meant to be gearing up for national elections on 8 February. s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)  
Candidates supporting Imran Khan's PTI party will contest elections, though many have been rejected by the Electoral Commission. It is unclear whether the PTI will be able to use its drawcard cricket bat symbol, s 33(a)(iii)  
Delaying the election is still possible, as political violence ticks up. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

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Cable provides an update on Pakistan's domestic political situation, including recent Supreme Court rulings, polling and insights from HOM's meetings in Islamabad.

## Senate resolutions

2. On 5 January 2024, Pakistan's senate passed a resolution calling for elections to be delayed. Only 14 of the 97 senators were in the chamber at the time of the s 33(a)(iii)  
The caretaker government, most major parties and the media rejected the vote. s 33(a)(iii)

## Contenders take the field

3. On 8 January, Pakistan's Supreme Court quashed a lifetime disqualification for lawmakers under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution, clearing the way for former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the head of the newly-formed Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) to run. The IPP's leader, Jahangeer Tareen, is a former funder of Imran Khan but has since recast himself as an opponent.

## Can the PTI bat?

4. The Peshawar High Court approved the PTI's use of the cricket bat after the Electoral Commission issued an order barring it from use on 22 December 2023, claiming the symbol was 'unconstitutional'. Use of the symbol would bring brand-recognition for the PTI s 33(a)(iii)

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5. Still, the PTI faces obstacles – candidates were required to register with the Electoral Commission between 20 and 22 December and numerous applications from the PTI were rejected (only some were granted on appeal). Media widely criticised the disqualification of PTI candidates.

### **Polls tighten**

6. A Gallup poll, released on 10 January, found the PML-N had become more competitive vis-à-vis the PTI over the last eight months. In March 2023, the PTI had a decisive 21 per cent lead over the PML-N in the battleground province of Punjab, Pakistan's most populous. In December 2023, that gap had narrowed to two per cent.

7. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) – led by former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari – remains the most popular party in Sindh, with 41 per cent of those polled by Gallup saying they would vote for the PPP in the general election. Nineteen per cent of those polled said they would vote for the PTI.

8. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 45 per cent of voters polled said they would vote for the PTI. However, the JUI-F enjoys significant popularity in southern KP, while the PML-N has significant support in Hazara. An alliance between the JUI-F and the PML-N could put the pressure on the PTI in KP.

9. At the national level, Imran Khan's approval rating has dipped slightly from 60 per cent in June 2023 to 57 per cent in December 2023, while Nawaz Sharif's approval rating has risen significantly from 36 per cent to 52 per cent over the same period. (Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's approval rating has risen to 36 per cent from 35 per cent, but this is within the margin of error.)

s33(a)(iii)

### **Messages from the Supreme Court**

12. On 11 January, the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of former military dictator Pervez Musharraf, who governed between 2001 and 2008. Similarly, on 8 January, Pakistan's Chief Justice, Qazi Faez Isa, said the Supreme Court could revisit the 1979 death sentence handed down to former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, saying the court could determine whether political interference from the military resulted in a miscarriage of justice.

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**As the security environment deteriorates**

14. Post is aware of 13 shooting events in Islamabad and Rawalpindi over the past three months, killing three and injuring six s47E(d) Some of these events were politically motivated, with one shooter injuring a candidate from a religious Sunni party the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam.

15. Recent shooting events in Islamabad follow a resurgence in terrorism across the country, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkwa s 47E(d)  
. s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)

**Comment**

16. Post regularly advocates for a free, fair and inclusive election process with figures of all political persuasions. Post points out that a stable, democratically-elected, legitimate government is essential to attract investment, including in the mining sector. s 33(a)(iii)

17. s 33(a)(iii)

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In November, we held a business continuity  
exercise. s47E(d)

text ends

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**Sent by:** s 22(1)(a)(ii)**Prepared** s 22(1)(a)(ii)**by:****Approved** HOM Neil Hawkins**by:****Topics:** s 47E(d)

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