[**Timing of the next election**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1725581/timing-of-the-next-election)

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FORMER prime minister and PTI chairman Imran Khan is relentlessly continuing his campaign, in one way or the other, to push Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Sindh and Balochistan chief ministers Murad Ali Shah and Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo to prematurely dissolve the National Assembly and the two provincial assemblies in order to have early general elections in the country.

He organised a series of public rallies and marches to pressurise the federal government to accept his demand to hold immediate general elections in the country.

Inherent in these moves was the threat that the government might face disruptions in the business of the state if the demand was not accepted. Despite a spirited campaign stretching over some eight months, the federal government proved to be a tough nut to crack and refused to capitulate.

The latest move of the former prime minister is to threaten dissolution of the two provincial assemblies including the one in Punjab, which is governed by Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi of the PML-Q, the much smaller allied party holding the balance of power in the assembly between the two larger and almost equally strong parties, the PTI and PML-N.

The other provincial assembly in KP is solely controlled by the PTI and headed by Chief Minister Mahmood Khan.

Imran Khan’s announcement of his party’s intention to [dissolve the two assemblies](https://www.dawn.com/news/1725147/imran-khan-determined-to-dissolve-kp-punjab-assemblies-in-next-few-days-qureshi) was probably based on his assessment that his opponents controlling the federal government and the two other provincial assemblies could not afford to hold elections in two instalments separated by about 10 months.

The exercise would not only be far more expensive than a simultaneous one for the national and the four provincial assemblies, but could also create unforeseen constitutional and administrative issues.

These could include the absence of neutral caretaker governments in Punjab and KP and the possibility of heavy political influence wielded by the governments in these provinces during the subsequent National Assembly polls, if elections to the two provincial assemblies are held prematurely.

Many feel it is almost insensitive to discuss early elections in the current circumstances.

The federal government spokespersons had earlier been egging on Imran Khan to dissolve the two provincial assemblies if he wanted early general elections in the whole country.

However, after Imran Khan’s announcement to dissolve them, the PDM-PPP combine announced they would resist the dissolution by such manoeuvres as moving a [no-confidence resolution](https://www.dawn.com/news/1723557) against the chief ministers, which would block dissolution during its pendency and/or ask the chief ministers through the governors to seek votes of confidence from their respective assemblies — a move that carries some risk of defeat for the Punjab chief minister.

Even trying the risky route of governor’s rule under Article 234 of the Constitution was mentioned.

The federal coalition government announced that even if the two provincial assemblies were dissolved, they would allow fresh elections of only these two assemblies to take place and would not dissolve the National Assembly and the remaining two provincial legislatures prematurely.

This possibility made many in the PTI and PML-Q question the wisdom of the early dissolution of the two assemblies controlled by the PTI and ask the PTI chief to reconsider his decision.

Although Imran Khan, or any other political leader for that matter, is free to demand early elections, the prerogative of dissolving a national or provincial assembly prematurely and thus going for early polls rests solely with the Leader of the House in the respective assembly.

Pressuring a Leader of the House to use the power which constitutionally belongs only to him is, then, equivalent to disrespecting the Constitution.

Our Constitution provides that unless an assembly is prematurely dissolved by the concerned Leader of the House, it completes its five-year term and then the ECP holds fresh elections within 60 days of the completion of the term of the assembly.

Pakistan is facing an acute economic crisis at the moment and many experts have alluded to the possibility of a financial default, which might have extremely serious ramifications for the country.

A large part of the population, especially in Sindh, Balochistan and south Punjab, have still not resettled after unprecedented rains and floods devastated their homes, farms and businesses. Many feel that it is almost insensitive to discuss premature elections in such circumstances.

Some of the federal government ministers have recently indicated the possibility of invoking the emergency provisions of Article 232(6) of the Constitution under which the five-year term of the National Assembly can be extended by up to one year after the proclamation of emergency.

Facing a judicial challenge to such a proclamation and paying the political price may, however, not be easy. But if economic conditions deteriorate further, emergency provisions may become a serious option.

Imran Khan argues that the current economic crisis can be successfully faced and resolved by a government which has a strong and fresh public mandate; hence, the need for early elections.

This argument may have been more convincing had Imran Khan not expressed serious reservations about the present Election Commission which is constitutionally responsible for holding elections.

In addition, the PTI is absent from the National Assembly and would not have any input in the formation of a federal caretaker government, which would run the affairs of the state during elections.

So, it is highly unlikely that the PTI would accept the result of the poll held in these conditions unless the result is squarely in favour of the PTI. Resultantly, it is not guaranteed that political stability will return to Pakistan even after fresh elections.

The [decision of the Council of Common Interests](https://www.dawn.com/news/1617912) taken in April 2021 under Imran Khan’s chairmanship to hold a fresh census before the next election can’t be implemented in case of earlier polls.

It is, therefore, appropriate for all assemblies to complete their five-year term, and for the PTI to return to the National Assembly and hold the government accountable in parliament and participate in the formation of a caretaker government before going for general elections across the country in October 2023.

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