

## CLINGING ON: ON IMRAN KHAN'S OUSTER

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

After a week's delay, and twists and turns, [Shehbaz Sharif has been voted in as Pakistan's new Prime Minister](#) at the National Assembly. Mr. Sharif, who won a majority of 174 votes in the 342-seat Assembly, has been made to wait for days due to the attempts by Prime Minister Imran Khan — now ousted — to abrogate the No-Confidence Motion (NCM) process. While Mr. Sharif and the Opposition led by the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan People's Party, submitted a no-confidence motion on March 8, the debate was only scheduled on April 3 by Asad Qaiser, the National Assembly Speaker from Mr. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. In the Assembly, Mr. Qaiser's deputy rejected the NCM over allegations of a "foreign conspiracy", which was followed by Mr. Khan resigning, asking the President to dissolve the Assembly and calling for elections. The Supreme Court stepped in to end the cascading crises, and reversed the Speaker's actions. Even when the Assembly was reconvened on April 9 under strict orders from the Court, the Speaker allowed a debate on the "foreign conspiracy" angle to drag on for hours, before the vote to oust Mr. Khan was finally allowed just short of midnight on Saturday. The ruling PTI seemed unwilling to give up power, and even proposed its own candidate, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, before resigning from the Assembly en masse before Mr. Sharif was elected. Mr. Khan, who continues to allege his ouster was the outcome of an "international regime-change conspiracy", has vowed to now take his battle "to the people", and is likely to spend the rest of the Assembly's tenure, due to end in August 2023, in a political campaign against Mr. Sharif.

Mr. Khan's defeat marks the first time a confidence vote has gone against a sitting Pakistani Prime Minister. However, the ouster of a PM mid-tenure is not new in a country that has often seen the military establishment prevail over any PM who challenges its power. In this case, the Army took no overt action, but it is clear that the strain between Islamabad and Rawalpindi was an important factor once the Opposition decided to push Mr. Khan out. The PTI's dangerous flirtation with religious fundamentalism did not help Mr. Khan. Nor could he rely on his rabble-rousing street protests to save him, especially after he was unable to prove charges that his opponents acted as "agents of the US" in both the Assembly and in Court. There are lessons for Pakistan's neighbourhood as well from the outcome of Mr. Khan's brand of politics: polarising the polity, an unwillingness to work by consensus, and blaming external forces for domestic problems are the hallmarks of autocrats, not democrats, who need to offer their people something more substantial than demagoguery in the long run.

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