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The State of the World's Human Rights; Pakistan 2025

Despite a significant decline in inflation, poverty was pervasive. Budget cuts and flooding caused loss of life and further affected economic well-being. Amendments to online speech and anti-terrorism laws significantly impacted freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, leading to detention of journalists, activists and opposition party members. Enforced disappearances remained a significant concern. Violations of the freedom of religion and belief continued, particularly the ongoing persecution of the Ahmadiyya community. Violence against women and transgender people increased. Afghan refugees were deported under Pakistan's Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan after their registration cards had expired. The post-disaster response to severe flooding was inadequate.

Background

Terrorist attacks continued unabated, along with heightened tensions with India, resulting in increased military operations in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. Drone strikes and attacks by both militants and state forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa resulted in dozens of civilian deaths. In May, tensions with India escalated into armed attacks leading to loss of civilian life. The Twenty-seventh Constitutional Amendment, passed in November, significantly undermined the independence of the higher judiciary and provided broad immunity to the heads of the armed forces and the president. Inflation remained on average lower than in 2024, dropping to a historic low of 0.3% in April, but rising steadily since. Rates rose to above 5% in the aftermath of the summer floods. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved two payments during the year: USD 1 billion in May and provisional approval for USD 1.2 billion in October.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Despite the significant decrease in inflation, according to the World Bank, 44.7% of Pakistanis were living below the poverty line. Due to constraints imposed by the IMF, the developmental budget for the year was substantially reduced, including funding for food, water, energy and social sectors such as health, education and social protection. The budget released in June saw defence spending increase by 20.2%, while spending on health and education declined as a proportion of GDP.

The economic situation particularly affected marginalized groups. The ILO reported that the gender pay gap in Pakistan was at 25% for hourly wages and 30% for monthly wages. Sanitation workers, particularly non-Muslims belonging to so-called "lower castes", faced

systemic discrimination and lacked protections related to fair wages, workplace security and access to social security.¹ Exploitative practices continued in other areas of work, including bonded labour in brick kilns.

Freedom of expression

There were some signs of progress as courts granted relief in certain cases related to journalists, and the 15-month ban on social media website X was lifted in May. Overall, however, the authorities continued to use detention and cybercrime and anti-terror laws to clamp down on freedom of expression. Amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), introduced in January, expanded powers of censorship and introduced “false and fake information” as a criminal offence.²

Censorship of online content persisted with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) implementing arbitrary internet shutdowns, particularly in Balochistan. Pakistan updated its web monitoring system to block online content, primarily with technology from China.³ The authorities also selectively withdrew advertisements from newspapers, a significant source of revenue, in retaliation for critical reporting.

In May, the PTA blocked 16 Indian YouTube channels and 32 websites for spreading “propaganda”. In June, speeches by opposition party members were censored on state television during the budget session. In July, a court issued orders to ban 27 YouTube channels belonging to journalists and opposition parties for “anti-state” content. In September, the Islamabad High Court overturned the lower court’s order to ban the channels.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Parliament passed the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Bill in August, allowing detention without charges for up to three months. Journalists were repeatedly targeted under PECA for reporting deemed critical by the authorities. In March, journalists Farhan Mallick and Waheed Murad were separately arrested for sharing alleged “anti-state” content online. Both were subsequently released on bail. In August, journalist Khalid Jamil was arrested by the National Cyber Crimes Investigation Agency for allegedly sharing “fake content” on social media. He was released a day later. Human rights defenders and lawyers, Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chatta, faced a criminal trial for alleged “anti-state” tweets. Hadi was briefly detained in relation to the charges and the trial raised grave due process concerns.

There was a crackdown on so-called “anti-state” content after the conflict with India in May, leading to the arrest and detention of nearly a dozen people. Additionally, Baloch activists were also targeted, including Mahrang Baloch, Bebagh Zehri, Beebow Baloch, Shah Jee Sibghat Ullah, Ghaffar Qambarani and Gulzadi Baloch, leading to detention under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance and anti-terror laws.⁴ In August, a criminal case was registered against a minor from the city of Gwadar for allegedly sharing the video of a speech by human rights activist Gulzar Dost. Activist Ali Wazir, along with various members of the

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, remained unlawfully detained. Leader of political party Pakistan Tehreek-i- Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, remained in jail, marking two years of incarceration on 5 August on politically motivated charges. Reports indicated that he had been kept in solitary confinement for weeks and arbitrarily denied access to legal counsel and family members.

Freedom of movement was also severely restricted. Balochistan National Party President Sardar Akhtar Mengal was not allowed to leave the country in July on account of being placed on the Provisional National Identification List. Journalists Asad Toor and Sohrab Barkat were barred from travelling outside the country on separate occasions. Sohrab was later charged under PECA after being stopped from travelling to attend a UN conference. In October, 32 individuals, including several Baloch activists, were designated as “proscribed persons” under the Anti-Terrorism Act, restricting their freedom of movement and liberty.

Enforced disappearances

Enforced disappearances remained a significant concern. The government’s Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances recorded 125 new cases in the first half of 2025. A significant number of cases were not reported or registered by the commission. Civil society organization Defence of Human Rights separately documented 60 new cases during the year; regional organizations reported significantly higher numbers.⁵ The government commission claimed in September that it had “disposed of” 83% of all the cases it had received since inception; however, concerns remained from civil society and victims’ families regarding the processes adopted by the commission.

In March, exiled journalist Ahmad Noorani’s house was raided and his two brothers were forcibly disappeared for over a month.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

In March, protests and rallies by Baloch activists in Balochistan and Sindh were curtailed by the state. During a protest by the Baloch Yakjethi Committee on 21 March calling for the release of Baloch activists forcibly disappeared, three protesters were killed through use of unlawful force by law enforcement, according to reports from local activists.⁶ In September, authorities clamped down on protests in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir region. They imposed a nearly week-long blanket network and internet shutdown and used force against protesters, leading to the deaths of nine people, including at least six protesters.

During the year, more than 100 PTI leaders and activists were convicted by anti-terrorism courts in cases relating to the 9 May 2023 protests, including opposition leaders in the National Assembly and Senate, Omer Ayub and Shibli Faraz respectively, member of the National Assembly Zartaj Gul, and activist Khadija Shah. In May, the Supreme Court upheld the convictions of protesters by military courts following the 9 May protests.

Freedom of religion and belief

Violence against the Ahmadiyya community escalated in the form of arrests, attacks on places of worship, grave desecrations and targeted killings.⁷ At least three Ahmadis were killed during the year, including an Ahmadi man who was lynched after Friday prayers. Severe restrictions were imposed on Ahmadis celebrating occasions such as Ramadhan, Eid and Ashura. In December, an Ahmadi man in Khushab, Punjab province, was shot by gunmen while returning home from work. An Ahmadi man was arrested in the city of Gujranwala in a blasphemy case for distributing free food on Ashura in July. In September, an Ahmadi man narrowly escaped a gun attack in the city of Sahiwal. On 28 September, Ahmadis in the city of Sialkot, Punjab province, were attacked, resulting in at least five injuries, and multiple Ahmadi properties were set on fire. On 10 October, an Ahmadi place of worship was attacked by a gunman during Friday prayers. Many of these instances of violence were organized by right-wing religious groups such as Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Civil society expressed concern that TLP and other groups were not held adequately accountable for these acts of violence. However, in October, the federal government approved a ban of TLP under the Anti-Terrorism Act following violent protests that month.

Abuse of the blasphemy law continued. In July, the Islamabad High Court ordered the formation of a commission to investigate the alleged entrapment of hundreds of people in reportedly trumped-up online blasphemy cases. The order was suspended a week later during an intra-court appeal. In December, Mubarak Saani, an Ahmadi man, was sentenced to life imprisonment on blasphemy charges.

Accountability for the 2023 Jaranwala attack on the Christian community remained elusive, with 10 people acquitted by a local court in June due to lack of evidence. Christian organizations highlighted the failure of the police to conduct a transparent investigation, alleging that they had ignored crucial evidence.

Women's and girls' rights

Violence against women continued unabated. Sahil, an organization monitoring gender-based violence through newspaper reports, recorded a 25% rise in the number of reported cases in the first 11 months of 2025. The NGO the Sustainable Social Development Organisation recorded more than 20,000 incidents nationwide during the first six months of the year.

A high-profile case of a so-called "honour killing" emerged in July in Balochistan after a video went viral of a tribal council killing a woman and man for being in a relationship against the families' wishes. Sixteen people were arrested in the immediate aftermath of the killings. Violence was also reported against women active on social media, such as 17-year-old Sana Yousaf, who was murdered after she rejected a marriage proposal from a man following her on social media.

In May, parliament passed the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act, setting 18 years as the minimum age for marriage, with criminal sanctions for violations, despite opposition from religious parties. Similarly, Balochistan province passed a bill in November raising the minimum age to 18 years. Both houses of parliament passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill for Islamabad; religious parties expressed opposition.

LGBTI people's rights

The number of killings of transgender people remained high. At least 10 murders of transgender people were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province alone. In September, three transgender women were shot and killed in an incident in the city of Karachi, Sindh province. There were at least four reports of transgender women being gang raped in Islamabad, Sahiwal, Kasur and Bahawalnagar cities. A local organization working on transgender rights reported that 56 transgender people had been killed in two years in Sindh province.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Pakistan began phases two and three of the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan, announced in October 2023, deporting people with a Proof of Registration or Afghan Citizen Card, in breach of the principle of non-refoulement. In March, Pakistan also announced that all Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers, must leave the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.⁸ Proof of Registration Cards issued by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, expired at the end of June and the authorities failed to renew their registration. As a result, more than 999,000 Afghan nationals returned to Afghanistan between January and December, 153,670 of whom were deported, according to the UN International Organization for Migration. Between September 2023 and December 2025, 1,930,937 Afghan nationals returned to Afghanistan, the majority forcibly returned, or pushed by conditions in Pakistan.

Right to a healthy environment

Flooding that began in late June affected 6.9 million people, resulting in more than 1,000 deaths and more than 3.5 million people displaced. Disaster response, particularly to flash flooding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, was seen as inadequate, particularly in terms of early warnings and post-disaster relief.

In April and June, parts of Pakistan experienced heatwaves with temperatures rising to 49°C, putting residents under levels of thermal stress that could be deadly. Both the extreme temperatures and flooding were made more likely by climate change.

Pakistan announced its third NDC, voluntarily pledging to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 50% by 2035. Of this, 17% was unconditional through domestic resources and policy

and 33% was conditional on the provision of adequate grant-based or concessional international climate finance.

