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World Report 2025 - Pakistan

The government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, which [took office](#) after Pakistan's general elections in February 2024, continued the previous government's crackdown on free expression and civil society. Blasphemy-related violence against religious minorities, fostered in part by government persecution and [discriminatory laws](#), intensified. Attacks by Islamist militants, targeting law enforcement officials and religious minorities, increased, killing dozens of people in 2024 and providing a pretext for Pakistani authorities to continue their campaign to oust Afghan refugees.

Freedom of Expression and Attacks on Civil Society

The authorities' widespread clampdown on freedom of expression and association marred the February elections. Social media platforms such as X were [intermittently blocked](#) throughout the year. The government [cracked down](#) on [opposition parties and the media](#), detaining hundreds of activists, some on charges of using violence, while journalists faced intimidation, harassment, and digital and physical surveillance for perceived criticism of the government. Government threats and attacks created a climate of fear among journalists and civil society groups, with many resorting to self-censorship.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least seven journalists [were killed](#) in Pakistan in 2024, some allegedly by militant groups. Others were the victims of apparent enforced disappearances, including Syed Farhad Ali Shah, who was [abducted](#) from his home in May. The authorities also detained journalists for their critical reporting. In February, Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency [arrested digital journalist Asad Ali Toor](#) for an alleged "campaign" against Supreme Court judges after Toor reported on the [chief justice](#) and Pakistan's [military establishment](#).

In June, the Punjab provincial government enacted a vague and overbroad [defamation law](#), widely criticized by media and human rights organizations as a threat to media freedom. The law, which applies to social media posts as well as conventional media outlets, allows claimants to initiate legal action "without proof of actual damage or loss," and mandates draconian punishments without access to independent tribunals and due process.

The authorities charged several politicians and journalists under Pakistan's overly broad colonial-era sedition law, and civilians were tried in military courts in violation of international law. NGOs reported intimidation, harassment, and surveillance of various groups by government authorities. The government used its [Regulation of INGOs in Pakistan](#) policy to impede the registration and functioning of international humanitarian and human rights groups.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

The Pakistani authorities enforced blasphemy law provisions that have provided a pretext for violence against religious minorities and left them vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and prosecution. Mob and vigilante attacks on people for alleged "blasphemy" killed four people; the government failed to hold the perpetrators accountable.

In June, a mob [lynched](#) a 36-year-old man after accusing him of committing blasphemy. The local police failed to intervene to protect the man. In two separate incidents in Umerkot, Sindh and in Quetta in September, police [fatally shot two men](#) accused of blasphemy. In September, a court [sentenced](#) Shagufta Kiran, a Christian woman, to death for allegedly sharing "blasphemous" material in a WhatsApp group.

Members of the Ahmadiyya religious community continue to be a major target for prosecutions under blasphemy laws and specific anti-Ahmadi legislation. Militant groups and the Islamist political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP) [accused](#) Ahmadis of “posing as Muslims.” Pakistan’s penal code also treats “posing as Muslims” as a criminal offense. In June, a mob of around 150 people [attacked an Ahmadiyya place of worship](#) in Kotli district and ransacked and damaged the building.

Terrorism, Counterterrorism, and Law Enforcement Abuses

Militant groups including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Islamic State of Khorasan Province, Al-Qaeda, the Balochistan Liberation Army and their affiliates carried out suicide bombings and other attacks against security personnel that [killed at least 757 people](#) and caused hundreds of injuries, mostly to civilians, during the year. In August, the Balochistan Liberation Army [killed at least 74 people](#) in coordinated attacks targeting police stations, railway lines and highways across Balochistan province.

Pakistan law enforcement agencies [were responsible](#) for grave human rights violations, including detention without charge and extrajudicial killings. In July, the authorities detained [hundreds of people](#) in response to the Baloch National Gathering, a march seeking to raise awareness of human rights concerns in Balochistan. Some protesters [reportedly](#) attacked security forces, killing one soldier and injuring others. Baloch activists [have alleged](#) that government security forces used excessive force to prevent protesters from reaching the port city of Gwadar, the end point of the march. Government authorities [imposed an internet shutdown](#) on Gwadar in July.

In December a [military court](#) sentenced 60 civilians from 2 to 10 years in prison on charges of attacking military installations and offices following the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan in May 2023. The military courts held secret proceedings and otherwise denied defendants’ due process. The government said these defendants will have the right to appeal to the civilian high courts and Supreme Court.

Abuses Against Refugees

Government officials [blamed Afghan refugees](#) in Pakistan for the surge in attacks by militant groups, providing a pretext for an ongoing effort by the authorities to coerce Afghans — some of whom have lived in Pakistan for generations — to leave. Undocumented Afghans remained particularly vulnerable to abuse, as Pakistani police and local officials threatened undocumented Afghans. While the numbers deported or coerced to leave decreased compared to 2023, over 220,000 had returned to Afghanistan by September 2024, 88 percent of whom cited of whom cited fear of arrest as the reason. In July, the Pakistan government [announced](#) a one-year extension to more than 1.45 million Afghan refugees who held UNHCR-issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards. However, government officials maintained that the push to deport the remaining two million unregistered Afghans [would continue](#). In addition, Afghans living in Pakistan faced difficulties in accessing employment and education.

Economic Justice and Rights

With poverty, inflation, and unemployment soaring, Pakistan’s economic crisis jeopardized the rights to health, food, and an adequate standard of living for millions. An International Monetary Fund (IMF) program was conditioned on numerous austerity measures including removing subsidies without adequate compensatory measures, resulting in additional hardship for low-income groups. Colonial-era laws such as the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 continued to be used to evict low-income communities. In April, the Supreme Court [ordered](#) the removal of “encroachments” in Karachi to clear the roads; similar orders have led to [mass displacements](#) of low-income communities.

Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls — including rape, murder, acid attacks, domestic violence, denial of education, sexual harassment at work, and child and forced marriage — is a serious problem throughout Pakistan, and the government has not taken meaningful steps in response. Human rights defenders [estimate](#) that roughly 1,000 women are murdered in so-called “honor killings” every year.

While Pakistan faces a problem of reliable data of violence against women, the vulnerability of women in Pakistan was spotlighted by [media reports](#) in August finding 46 cases of abduction and sexual violence against women were reported in a single district of Punjab, Mandi Bahauddin, over a period of less than a month from July 1 to 24.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) [estimates](#) that 18.9 million of the country’s women and girls married before the age of 18, including 4.6 million before the age of 15. In 2023, UNICEF found that 18 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys married before age 18. Married girls are often forced into pregnancies that are dangerous due to the girl’s young age and pregnancies being closely spaced. Women from religious minority communities are particularly vulnerable to [forced marriage](#).

Children’s Rights

Over 6 million children of primary school age and 13 million children of secondary school age were out of school, [most of them girls](#). Human Rights Watch found that girls miss school for reasons including lack of schools, costs associated with studying, child marriage, harmful child labor, and gender discrimination. Employment of child domestic workers remains prevalent despite attempts to prohibit it.

Child sexual abuse remains common. The children’s rights organization Sahil [reported](#) that in the first six months of 2024, 862 cases of child sexual abuse, 668 cases of abduction, 82 cases of missing children, and 18 cases of child marriages were reported.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Same-sex sexual conduct between men remains a criminal offense under Pakistan’s criminal code, placing men who have sex with men and transgender women at a high risk of police abuse and other forms of violence and discrimination.

Transgender women continue to be targeted with violence. According to media reports, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province recorded 267 cases of violence against transgender persons in the last five years, with only one resulting in a conviction. At least seven transgender women were [killed](#) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2024.