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Freedom on the Net 2025 - Pakistan



Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Internet freedom remained restricted during the coverage period as the Pakistani government continued to expand censorship practices, particularly as the military establishment sought to curtail the influence of former prime minister Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf party. Authorities threatened to block virtual private networks (VPNs) and adopted amendments to the country's cybercrime law that rights groups said could be abused.

- In November 2024, authorities restricted internet services across Islamabad as widespread protests in support of former prime minister Imran Khan took place.¹ Khan was imprisoned throughout the coverage period (A3).
- Pakistanis reported periods of poor internet quality and disruptions to their access to WhatsApp, Signal, and other platforms throughout the coverage period.² Researchers found that the connectivity disruptions were likely linked to the deployment of new website monitoring and blocking technology (A3, B1, and C5).³
- In May 2025, Pakistani officials unblocked X, which had been restricted since February 2024. The platform became accessible during a four-day military conflict between Pakistan and India, which followed an April 2025 terrorist attack near Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir,⁴ and was a font of misinformation about the conflict, some of it from Pakistani government-linked accounts (B1 and B5).⁵
- Authorities repeatedly threatened to block VPNs operating in Pakistan without registration. Registration requirements released in November 2024 required the disclosure of information identifying customers; however, at the end of the month authorities said they would not block unregistered VPN connections. The development reportedly came after the Law Ministry found that the government lacked legal standing to block VPNs (B1 and C4).⁶
- Amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act signed into law in January 2025 contained ambiguous language rights groups said could be used to remove online speech deemed undesirable by authorities (B3).⁷
- At least five people were sentenced to death during the coverage period after being convicted of blasphemy in connection with material posted online. No executions were carried out, however (C3).⁸

Political Overview

Pakistan holds regular elections under a competitive multiparty system. However, the military exerts enormous influence over the conduct of elections, government formation, and policies; intimidates the media; and enjoys impunity for indiscriminate or extralegal use of force. The authorities often impose selective restrictions on civil liberties. Islamist militants conduct terrorist campaigns against the state and also regularly carry out attacks on members of religious minority groups and other perceived opponents.

Note

Pakistan-administered Kashmir is not covered in this report. Certain territories that are assessed separately in Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* report are also excluded from the relevant country reports in *Freedom on the Net*, as conditions in such territories differ significantly from those in the relevant countries. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Related, disputed, or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately from the relevant countries if they meet certain criteria, including distinct conditions for political rights and civil liberties and boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report [methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to [ongoing budget constraints](#). Please consider making a [donation](#) to support future editions of this vital resource.

For additional background information, see last year's [full report](#).

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?	2 / 6
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A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?	0 / 3
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A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?	1 / 6
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A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	3 / 6
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A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?

0 /
4

B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?

1 /
6

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?

1 /
4

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?

1 /
4

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?

1 / 4

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?

2 /
4

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?

2 /
3

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?

2 / 4

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?

3 /
6

C Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?	2 / 6
C2 0-4 pts	
Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	0 / 4
C3 0-6 pts	
Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?	1 / 6
C4 0-4 pts	
Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?	1 / 4
C5 0-6 pts	
Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?	1 / 6
C6 0-6 pts	
Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?	1 / 6
C7 0-5 pts	
Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?	1 / 5
C8 0-3 pts	
Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?	1 / 3

Footnotes

- 1 "Pakistani Capital Locked Down, Internet Partially Suspended Ahead Of Protest," RFE/RL, November 23, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-mobile-internet-partial-shutdown-imran...>
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- Usama Khilji, "The year they came for the internet," Dawn, January 6, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1882236/the-year-they-came-for-the-internet>.
- 3 Abid Hussain, "Pakistan tests secret China-like 'firewall' to tighten online surveillance," Al Jazeera, November 26, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/26/pakistan-tests-china-like-dig...>; "Pakistan: Mass surveillance and censorship machine is fueled by Chinese, European, Emirati and North American companies," Amnesty International, September 9, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/pakistan-mass-surveillance...>
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 - 5 "Inside the Misinformation and Disinformation War Between India and Pakistan," Center for the Study of Organized Hate, May 16, 2025, <https://www.csohate.org/2025/05/16/india-pakistan-digital-war/>; Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "How social media lies fuelled a rush to war between India and Pakistan," The Guardian, May 28, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/may/28/how-social-media-lies-fue...>
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 - 7 "Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act, 2025," National Assembly, 2025, https://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/679255ee36f45_595.pdf; "Pakistan: Repeal Amendment to Draconian Cyber Law," Human Rights Watch, February 3, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/03/pakistan-repeal-amendment-draconian...>
 - 8 Asim Tanveer, "Pakistani court sentences 4 people to death for blasphemy, AP, January 25, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-blasphemy-death-sentence-a3b46de992...>; "Pakistan: Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy," Vatican News, September 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2024-09/pakistan-blasphemy-dea...>