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Pakistan: Authorities pass bill with sweeping controls on social media

Responding to the passage of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025 at the National Assembly, Babu Ram Pant, Deputy Regional Director of Campaigns, South Asia, said:

“The latest amendment to the draconian Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) by the National Assembly will further tighten the government’s grip over Pakistan’s heavily controlled digital landscape, if passed by both houses of Parliament.

“The amendment introduces a criminal offence against those perpetrating so-called ‘false and fake information’ and imposes a maximum penalty of three years’ imprisonment with a fine. The vague and ambiguous framing of some elements of the offense together with a history of the PECA being used to silence dissent raises concerns that this new offence will chill what little is left of the right to online expression in the country.

“Presented in the absence of any consultation or debate, the amendment also expands the powers previously available to the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority through the newly created Social Media Regulation and Protection Authority. These provisions grant authorities power to block and remove content based on vague criteria, which will violate the right to freedom of expression and fail to meet standards of proportionality and necessity under international human rights law.

“These developments are in step with deployment of intrusive digital surveillance technologies and laws such as the Digital Nation Pakistan Bill, that fail to incorporate any human rights safeguards. Amnesty International calls on the authorities to immediately withdraw the Bill and instead engage in a meaningful consultative process with civil society to amend PECA to bring it in line with international human rights law.”

Background:

The amendment Bill was presented in and passed by the National Assembly on 23 January 2025 and referred to the Standing Committee the next day by the Senate after backlash from opposition, media and civil society.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act passed in 2016 triggered widespread criticism from human rights organizations and activists for its potential for harmful impact on the right to freedom of expression and access to information in the country. The nine years since have confirmed these fears as [journalists](#), human rights defenders and political opposition have been targeted under the law. Recently, the authorities have frequently imposed blanket bans on social media platforms and have blocked X, formerly Twitter, since February 2024.