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World Report 2023 - Pakistan

Pakistan is exceedingly vulnerable to climate change and faces rates of warming considerably above the global average, making [extreme climate events](#) more frequent and intense. In March and April, an extreme heat wave in South Asia featured some of the hottest recorded temperatures in the country's modern history and led to spikes in maternal mortality and deaths of older people. In August, Pakistan experienced [devastating floods](#) covering over one-third of the country, killing over 1,000 people, displacing more than 30 million, and causing billions of dollars in damage. These crises came as Pakistan faced deepening political and economic crises and skyrocketing food and fuel prices.

In early April, Prime Minister Imran Khan, facing a vote of no-confidence after losing the support of most of the parliament, [attempted to dissolve the national assembly](#). The action was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The parliament subsequently removed Imran Khan as prime minister on April 10. In October, Imran Khan was [disqualified](#) by the Election Commission of Pakistan from his parliamentary seat for non-declaration of assets.

Throughout the year, the government continued to control media and curtail dissent. Authorities harassed and at times detained journalists and other members of civil society for criticizing government officials and policies. Violent attacks on members of the media also continued.

Women, religious minorities, and transgender people continued to face violence, discrimination, and persecution, with authorities failing to provide adequate protection or hold perpetrators to account. The government continued to do little to hold law enforcement agencies accountable for torture and other serious abuses.

Attacks by Islamist militants, notably the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, targeting law enforcement officials and religious minorities killed dozens of people.

Freedom of Expression, Attacks on Civil Society Groups

Government threats and attacks on media continued to contribute to a climate of fear among journalists and civil society groups, with many resorting to self-censorship. Authorities have pressured or threatened media outlets not to criticize government institutions or the judiciary. In several cases in 2022, government regulatory agencies blocked cable operators and television channels that aired critical programs.

Pakistan's sedition law, based on a colonial-era British provision, is vague and overly broad and has often been used against political opponents and journalists. Shahbaz Gill, a senior official with the opposition party Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf (PTI), was arrested in Islamabad in August on [charges of sedition and incitement to mutiny](#) after he said on a television program that junior military officers should not follow orders that are against public opinion. Gill was subsequently released on bail.

In May, journalists Sami Abraham, Arshad Sharif, Sabir Shakir, and Imran Riaz Khan [were charged](#) with abetment of mutiny and publication of statements causing public mischief by criticizing state institutions and the army in their journalistic work and unspecified social media posts. In October, Arshad Sharif was [killed by the police](#) in Kenya. Sharif had left Pakistan citing threats to his life.

Several journalists suffered violent attacks and threats in 2022. In April, members of

political party, Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaaf [assaulted Khawar Mughal](#) in Lahore. Also, in April, Gharida Farooqi, a renowned television journalist was subject to threats of rape.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported intimidation, harassment, and surveillance by government authorities. The government used the ["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 government did not amend or repeal blasphemy law provisions that have provided a pretext for violence against religious minorities and have left them vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and prosecution. The death penalty is mandatory for blasphemy, and dozens of people remained on death row as of late 2021.

Members of the Ahmadiyya religious community continue to be a major target for prosecutions under blasphemy laws, as well as specific anti-Ahmadi laws. Militant groups and the Islamist political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP) [accuse](#) Ahmadis of “posing as Muslims.” The Pakistan penal code also treats “posing as Muslims” as a criminal offense.

In January, an anti-cybercrime court [sentenced Aneeqa Atiq](#), a woman, to death for sharing “blasphemous content” on WhatsApp. In February, Mushtaq Ahmed, who had a psychosocial disability, was [stoned to death by a mob](#) for allegedly desecrating the Quran, in Khanewal, Punjab.

In March, a 21-year-old woman in Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province was [killed by three women](#) who accused her of blasphemy. According to the police investigation, the suspects claimed that a 13-year-old female relative of theirs found out in “a dream” that the victim had committed blasphemy.

In August, authorities in Punjab [brought a blasphemy charge](#) against Waqar Satti, a journalist, for posting a video on Twitter.

According to a Pakistani human rights organization, the [Centre for Social Justice](#), at least 1,855 people [have been charged](#) under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws between 1987 and February 2021.

Abuses against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls—including rape, murder, acid attacks, domestic violence, and forced and child marriage—remained widespread. Human rights defenders [estimate](#) that roughly 1,000 women are killed in so-called honor killings every year.

The UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, [estimates that 18.9 million girls](#) in Pakistan marry before the age of 18, and 4.6 million before 15. Married girls are often forced into dangerous pregnancies at a young age and pregnancies that are too closely spaced. Women from religious minority communities remain particularly vulnerable to [forced marriage](#). The government did little to stop child and forced marriages.

Among those millions severely affected by floods were at least [650,000](#) pregnant women and girls, [73,000](#) of whom were near their due date. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) many of the affected women [lacked access](#) to the healthcare facilities and support they needed to deliver their children safely.

Even before the 2022 floods, Pakistani women faced numerous reproductive health challenges and had one of the [highest maternal mortality ratios](#) in South Asia.

In January, Pakistan appointed [Justice Ayesha Malik](#), the first ever female Supreme Court judge.

In January, Pakistan’s parliament [passed a bill strengthening protections for women](#) in the workplace against violence and harassment. The law expanded the definition of the workplace to encompass both formal and informal workplaces, bringing it closer to the definition set out in the 2019 International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention (C190), which Pakistan has not ratified.

Children’s Rights

More than [400 children](#) were killed in the floods, and many more injured. UNICEF [reported](#) that at least 3.4 million children needed urgent humanitarian assistance and were at increased risk of waterborne diseases, drowning, and malnutrition. Most of the approximately 16 million affected children were without homes, lacked access to safe drinking water, and had to live in unsanitary conditions.

The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the [72 worst-hit districts](#) in Pakistan already had high levels of poverty and impaired growth and development among children. The floods also [fully or partially destroyed](#) more than 18,000 schools. The hardest-hit province, Sindh, had nearly [16,000 schools](#) destroyed alone. Another [5,500 schools](#) were used to house families displaced by the floods.

Even before the floods, over 5 million primary school-age children in Pakistan were [out of school](#), most of them girls. Human Rights Watch research found that girls miss school for reasons including lack of schools, costs associated with studying, child marriage, child labor, and gender discrimination. School closures to protect against the spread of Covid-19 affected almost 45 million students; Pakistan's poor internet connectivity and the difficulty many families face affording internet service and devices hampered online learning.

Child sexual abuse remains common. The children's rights organization Sahil reported an average of [over 12 daily cases](#) of child sexual abuse across Pakistan for the first six months of 2022. The real figures are likely to be significantly higher due to underreporting.

Terrorism, Counterterrorism and Law Enforcement Abuses

Tehrik-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al-Qaeda, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and their affiliates claimed responsibility for carrying out suicide bombings and other attacks against security personnel and civilians that caused hundreds of deaths and injuries during the year.

Pakistan law enforcement agencies [were responsible](#) for grave human rights violations, including detention without charge and extrajudicial killings. Pakistan failed to enact a law criminalizing torture, despite Pakistan's international obligation to do so as a party to the Convention against Torture.

Pakistan has more than [3831 prisoners on death row](#), one of the world's largest populations facing execution. At least 516 individuals [have been executed](#) since Pakistan lifted the moratorium on the death penalty in December 2014. Those on death row are often from the most marginalized sections of society.

In June, Islamabad High Court in a landmark decision [held that](#), "When there is sufficient evidence to conclude that it is, prima facie, a case of enforced disappearance then it becomes an obligation of the State and all its organs to trace the disappeared citizen." However, the government failed to take any significant measures to implement the decision.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Pakistan's penal code continued to criminalize same-sex sexual conduct, placing men who have sex with men and transgender people at risk of police abuse, and other violence and discrimination.

Transgender women in Pakistan, particularly in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, remained under threat of attack and at least [seven transgender women were killed](#) in the province in 2022. In September, [protests by religious groups](#) against a 2018 transgender rights law caused lawmakers to consider revising it, threatening the rights protections it enshrines.

Key International Actors

In August, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided to [revive a stalled loan program](#) approved in July 2019 and [disburse nearly US\\$1.17 billion](#) to reduce some burdens of the economic crisis on Pakistan's population. The IMF had earlier conditioned the loan program on [austerity measures](#), including [removing electricity and fuel subsidies](#) and imposing a fuel tax that added to inflation and further burdened many Pakistanis' ability to realize their economic rights.

In September, MEPs from the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) [visited Pakistan](#). The delegation focused on the human rights situation as part of the final round of EU monitoring of Pakistan's preferential trade access to the EU market under the "GSP+" scheme for 2014-2033 and its preparations for an application to the next GSP system to be determined in 2024. The delegation urged Pakistan to undertake timely reforms and legislative changes on human rights issues with determined and structured action, including the quick adoption of laws against torture and enforced disappearance, and to substantially reduce the number of crimes carrying the death penalty.

In September, Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto [demanded](#) "climate justice" from the world. Also, in September, a [draft paper](#) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposed that Pakistan's creditors should consider allowing debt relief so Pakistan can prioritize financing its disaster response over repayment of loans.

Pakistani and Chinese governments deepened extensive economic and political ties in 2022, and work continued on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a project consisting of construction of roads, railways, and energy pipelines.

In September, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to commemorate the 75th anniversary of US-Pakistan relations noting: "We've had our differences; that's no secret. But we share a common objective: a more stable, a more peaceful, and free future for all of Afghanistan and for those across the broader region." USAID Administrator Samantha Power visited Pakistan as part of a flood relief effort that [brought \\$56 million in assistance](#). Earlier in the year, former Prime Minister Imran Khan alleged US involvement in his removal from office calling it a US-backed "[regime change](#)" operation in connivance with the then Pakistani opposition parties and referring to a "cipher" as evidence. The US [denied these allegations](#).

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