



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Pakistan: Political parties and affiliation

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Executive summary

Pakistan's political system formally allows party registration and electoral participation with few legal barriers. While opposition parties contest elections, military influence significantly shapes electoral competition and governance.

Corruption remains pervasive, involving bribery, nepotism, and patronage. Accountability bodies have been used selectively for political purposes. Under Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) tenure (2018 to 2022), led by Imran Khan, senior members of opposition parties faced corruption charges. Similar tactics targeted PTI leaders after Khan was removed as Prime Minister through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022.

In October 2022, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified Imran Khan from office for 5 years. Ahead of the February 2024 elections, PTI candidates were barred from using their party name and symbol, forcing them to run as independents. Despite these restrictions, PTI-backed independents won the most seats, but Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) formed a coalition government. Observers widely deemed the elections neither free nor fair.

Pakistan's constitution guarantees freedoms of expression and assembly, yet these rights are repeatedly curtailed. PTI leaders and supporters have faced mass arrests and intimidation since Khan's removal from office. Khan himself was arrested in May 2023 and sentenced to 14 years in prison in January 2025. In August 2025, 108 PTI members were jailed for their involvement in the May 2023 protests.

The Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), founded to advocate Pashtun rights, was proscribed as a terrorist group in Pakistan in October 2024, following allegations of activities 'prejudicial to peace.' Leaders report harassment, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances and hundreds of members have been arrested, even before proscription. Muttahida Qaumi Movement–London (MQM-L), led by Altaf Hussain from UK exile, faces operational restrictions despite not being officially banned. Hussain's speeches remain prohibited, and supporters have been arrested for attending pro-Hussain rallies and chanting anti-Pakistan slogans, though later released. Leaders were unlawfully detained ahead of the election.

Leaders of some opposition parties – particularly those who are high-profile or vocal critics of the government or military – are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state.

Ordinary members, supporters and sympathisers are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

Political violence primarily occurs during elections, often involving rival party clashes or militant attacks. Groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch militants have targeted rallies and offices of major parties.

Leaders, members and supporters of political parties are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors.

Protection and internal relocation are likely to be available to people fearing non-state actors.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

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Assessment

Section updated: 28 January 2026

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of **whether, in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state and/or non-state actors because of their actual or perceived political opinion
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- a claim, if refused, is likely or not to be certified as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when one has not already been undertaken (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- 1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its

individual facts.

- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.3 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3. Risk

3.1 Risk from state actors

- 3.1.1 Ordinary members, supporters and sympathisers of opposition parties and political movements are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.2 Except during major protests or if involved in violence or activism, most arrests of rank-and-file members are short-term and aimed at deterrence. Arrests may be less likely to occur outside of election periods, or times of raised political tension within society. In general, the arrest and subsequent release of a person is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition to amount to persecution or serious harm.
- 3.1.3 Leaders of opposition parties – particularly those who are high-profile or vocal critics of the government or military – may face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state. This will depend on the profile of the person, the party they support and the area it operates in, their activities and any previous state interest.
- 3.1.4 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders have faced repeated arrests, enforced disappearances, sedition and terrorism charges, and long prison sentences. Patterns of harassment and detention have affected leaders of Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement–London (MQM-L).

- 3.1.5 Few legal barriers exist to registering a political party or contesting elections. In practice, electoral contests have been dominated by major parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). While opposition parties generally campaign and contest elections, free competition and the ability to participate may depend on the strength of a party's relationship with the military. For example, in October 2022, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), reportedly directed by the military, barred PTI leader, Imran Khan, from holding office for 5 years and rejected his nomination for the 2024 elections (see [Registering a party and contesting elections](#)).
- 3.1.6 PTI candidates were prevented from using their party name and electoral symbol in the February 2024 elections, forcing them to run as independents. Many sources declared the elections were neither free nor fair. PTI-backed independents won most seats at the national level, ahead of PML-N and the PPP, who later formed a coalition government alongside smaller parties (see [Registering a party and contesting elections](#), [General elections – February 2024](#), and [Election results and formation of government](#)).
- 3.1.7 The US State Department's human rights reports and Freedom House note that corruption is endemic in politics and government, involving bribery, nepotism, and patronage. Accountability mechanisms, such as the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), have often been used selectively and politically. Under the PTI government (2018 to 2022), senior members of opposition parties like the PPP and PML-N faced corruption charges, while after Khan's ouster in 2022, similar tactics were deployed against PTI leaders (see [Allegations of corruption](#)).
- 3.1.8 Repression of political opponents is a recurring pattern. While Pakistan's constitution guarantees freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, these rights have repeatedly been curtailed. Governments of all affiliations have used laws to restrict protests and censor criticism, particularly of the military. Crackdowns on demonstrations, arrests of activists, and harassment of journalists have occurred under successive administrations, illustrating that restrictions on civil liberties are not unique to PTI but part of a broader trend in Pakistan's political culture (see [Freedom of expression and right to protest](#)).
- 3.1.9 The PTI governed Pakistan from 2018 until its founder and leader, Imran Khan, was removed as Prime Minister through a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Khan was arrested in May 2023 on corruption charges, sparking nationwide protests. He has faced over 100 criminal cases and was sentenced to 14 years in prison in January 2025. Senior PTI leaders have been arrested and detained (sometimes repeatedly), subjected to enforced disappearances, and pressured to abandon the party (see [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf \(PTI\)](#)).
- 3.1.10 While thousands of ordinary PTI members and supporters were arrested during major protests – particularly after Khan's May 2023 detention – low-level supporters who avoid violence are generally not targeted. However, reports indicate isolated cases of harassment and short-term detention aimed at discouraging participation in demonstrations that continue to call for Khan's release (see [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf \(PTI\)](#)).
- 3.1.11 At least 14 civilians were killed during the May 2023 unrest after police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protests. Later demonstrations in

2024 met similar enforcement measures, with sedition and terrorism charges filed against Khan, PTI party leaders and thousands of party workers. In August 2025, 108 PTI members were jailed for their involvement in the May 2023 protests. Some party leaders received prison terms of up to 10 years (see [Freedom of expression and right to protest](#) and [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf \(PTI\)](#)).

- 3.1.12 The Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), founded in 2014, was proscribed as a terrorist group in October 2024 for activities deemed 'prejudicial to peace and security.' Human rights groups condemned the government's decision to ban the group. The PTM advocates for Pashtun rights and has organised large, peaceful rallies demanding better protection from the state, whom they claim have targeted Pashtuns due to the political affiliation, tribal descent, or criticism of the government. Leaders allege harassment, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances, even before the group was proscribed. Hundreds of members were reportedly arrested, though it was unclear if they were charged or detained. Mere membership of a proscribed group is a criminal offence, and a convicted person is liable to up to 6 months imprisonment. After the ban, the movement's leader went into hiding, though in March 2025 he filed a petition with the Peshawar High Court against the group's proscription (see [Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement \(PTM\)](#)).
- 3.1.13 Muttahida Qaumi Movement – London (MQM-L) is a faction of the Karachi-based MQM, led by Altaf Hussain from self-imposed exile in the UK. While not officially proscribed, since 2016 Hussain's speeches are banned from public broadcast in Pakistan, although the MQM's official website was unblocked in Pakistan in June 2023. In July 2023, 28 supporters were arrested when rallying in support of Hussain. In December 2024, 6 MQM-L supporters were arrested for chanting anti-Pakistan slogans. In February 2024, MQM-L-backed election candidates were detained ahead of polls, and reports indicate repeated unlawful detentions of at least one senior figure (see [Muttahida Qaumi Movement \(MQM\)](#) and [MQM-London \(MQM-L\)](#)).
- 3.1.14 In July 2024, the government formally authorised the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to intercept calls and messages of any citizen under Section 54 of the Pakistan Telecommunication Act. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act grants broad powers to access and retain personal data without judicial oversight. Reports indicate the installation of mass surveillance systems, including the Lawful Intercept Management System (LIMS), which can monitor up to 4 million mobile users, and the Web Monitoring System (WMS 2.0), capable of inspecting and blocking millions of internet sessions. These tools enable interception of calls, texts, browsing history, and location data. Human rights bodies have raised concerns about targeted surveillance of journalists, activists, and political opponents, as well as the lack of regulatory oversight and judicial authorisation. Allegations of monitoring, surveillance and intimidation of members of the diaspora have also been reported, though specific cases remain unverified (see [Monitoring and surveillance, including abroad](#)).
- 3.1.15 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.2 Risk from non-state actors

- 3.2.1 Leaders, members and supporters of political parties are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.2.2 Violence against political opponents primarily occurs prior to and during election periods and is often linked to militant groups or rival party clashes rather than systematic targeting. The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) recorded 19 incidents of political violence in early 2024, resulting in deaths and injuries, involving supporters of major parties such as PTI, PML-N, PPP, and MQM. Additionally, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported militant attacks at rallies and offices of major parties, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, carried out by groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch nationalist militants. U.S. State Department reports also note that militants have targeted political offices and candidates (see [General elections – February 2024](#) and [Attacks on political party members and supporters](#)).
- 3.2.3 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection.
- 4.1.2 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor is likely to obtain protection from the state.
- 4.1.3 In the country guidance case of [AH \(Sufficiency of Protection, Sunni Extremists\) Pakistan CG \[2002\] UKIAT 05862](#), heard on 4 October 2002 and promulgated on 31 December 2002, the Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) held that the state of Pakistan ‘... has a functioning system of criminal law and criminal acts are prosecuted albeit that there may be difficulties which will arise in individual cases in successfully doing so. The degree of protection which the state is required to provide to its subjects is clearly illustrated in the approach of the European Court in Strasbourg to the need to have regard to the difficulties involved in policing modern societies and resources’ (paragraph 17).
- 4.1.4 In the reported case of [AW \(sufficiency of protection\) Pakistan \[2011\] UKUT 31 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 11 November 2010 and promulgated on 26 January 2011, the Upper Tribunal (UT), having regard to the case of [AH](#), found that there was no ‘general insufficiency of state protection’ (paragraph 34).
- 4.1.5 The UT in [AW](#) held that ‘Notwithstanding systemic sufficiency of state protection, a claimant may still have a well founded fear of persecution if authorities know or ought to know of circumstances particular to his/her case giving rise to the fear, but are unlikely to provide the additional protection the particular circumstances reasonably require...’ (Headnote 2).
- 4.1.6 The UT also held that ‘In considering whether an appellant’s particular circumstances give rise to a need for additional protection, particular account must be taken of past persecution (if any) so as to ensure the question

posed is whether there are good reasons to consider that such persecution (and past lack of sufficient protection) will not be repeated' (Headnote 3).

- 4.1.7 The country evidence available since [AH](#) and [AW](#) were heard does not indicate that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from either sets of findings.
- 4.1.8 Despite some shortcomings, in general, Pakistan takes reasonable steps to prevent the persecution by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and a person is generally able to access the protection.
- 4.1.9 As such, the state is both willing and able to offer sufficient protection to persons fearing non-state, including 'rogue' state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 4.1.10 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).
- 4.1.11 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor, they are likely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 This is because in general, there are parts of Pakistan, particularly large urban areas and cities such as (but not limited to) Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, where it is reasonable to expect political opponents to relocate to.
- 5.1.3 See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Internal relocation](#) and the Country Information Note Pakistan (copy on request).
- 5.1.4 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment which, as stated in the [About the assessment](#), is the guide to the current objective conditions.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

Some sources refer to Transnational Repression (TNR), with differing definitions and explanations of what this entails. The UK recognises TNR as a term to describe certain foreign state-directed crimes against individuals. This activity can take place both physically or online, with examples including intimidation, surveillance, harassment, forced/coerced return, abduction and even assassination at the most serious end of the scale.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **30 November 2025**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included. Pakistan-administered Kashmir is not covered in this report.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

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7. Political context

7.1 Structure and electoral system

- 7.1.1 A House of Commons Library Research Briefing on Pakistan's February 2024 general election, based on a range of sources, published May 2024, stated 'Pakistan is a parliamentary democracy, with most executive powers held by the Prime Minister. Pakistan has four provinces, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh, as well as the federally administered Islamabad capital territory.'¹
- 7.1.2 The Research Briefing provided background information on the role of the Prime Minister and President, and on parliament (Majlis-e-Shoora), which consisted of the National Assembly and the Senate². There were 336 seats in the National Assembly, 266 of whom were directly elected, 60 seats reserved for women and 10 for representatives of religious minorities³. Reserved seats were allotted in proportion to provincial party votes won in the election⁴ ⁵.
- 7.1.3 The Research Briefing noted that 'No Pakistani Prime Minister has ever served a full five-year term in office. They have variously resigned, been dismissed by Presidents (when presidential powers were greater),

¹ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 8), 28 May 2024

² House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (pages 8 to 9), 28 May 2024

³ National Assembly of Pakistan, [Composition](#), no date

⁴ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 16), 28 May 2024

⁵ Al Jazeera, [As Pakistan's newly elected parliament meets, a look at the PM...](#), 29 February 2024

assassinated, ousted in coups, dismissed or disqualified by courts, and in 2022 Imran Khan [leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaaf (PTI)⁶] became the first to be removed by a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly.⁷

- 7.1.4 After Khan's removal from office, Shehbaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) was selected as prime minister (PM) by parliament in April 2022^{8 9}. Following the [General elections](#), held on 8 February 2024, Shehbaz Sharif was elected PM by the National Assembly on 3 March 2024¹⁰. See also [Pakistan Muslim League \(Nawaz\)](#).
- 7.1.5 The Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 Country Report Pakistan, which assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy, covering the period from 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, noted:
- 'Pakistan's military establishment continues to exercise a tremendous amount of power over questions of policy and governance, playing the principal role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy as well as issues related to its internal security. Pakistan's civilian leadership, including the prime minister, regularly meets with the country's chief of army staff and head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (the main intelligence agency). In these meetings, matters pertaining to international and domestic affairs are discussed, while former military officers have been appointed to key posts in government. This can be seen as a de facto consultation of the military in the political process.'¹¹
- 7.1.6 The role of President is largely ceremonial¹². Asif Ali Zardari, of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was elected as the 14th President of Pakistan and took oath of office on 10 March 2024^{13 14}. Presidential terms were 5 years¹⁵.
- 7.1.7 The Australian Government's report by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, dated April 2025 (2025 DFAT report), based on a range of sources, stated that:
- 'Local government is made up of various divisions, districts, subdistricts (tehsils or tahsils), municipal and village councils. These units are run by a hierarchy of administrators, such as the divisional commissioner, the deputy commissioner at the district level, and the subdivisional magistrate, subdivisional officer, or tehsildar (tahsildar) at the subdistrict level. The key level is the district, where the deputy commissioner shares power with the elected chairman of the district council.'¹⁶

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8. Political participation

8.1 Registering a party and contesting elections

⁶ PTI, [Imran Khan](#), no date

⁷ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 9), 28 May 2024

⁸ Dawn, [Imran Khan loses no-trust vote, prime ministerial term comes to...](#), 9 April 2022

⁹ BBC News, [Pakistan: Shehbaz Sharif chosen as PM after week-long uncertainty](#), 11 April 2022

¹⁰ Al Jazeera, [Why is Pakistan's PTI fighting for reserved seats in parliament?](#), 7 March 2024

¹¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, [BTI 2024 Country Report Pakistan](#) (Political participation, page 10), 2024

¹² House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 9), 28 May 2024

¹³ President of Pakistan, [Asif Ali Zardari](#), no date

¹⁴ PPP, [Central Office Bearers](#), no date

¹⁵ The Pakistan Code, [Constitution of Pakistan](#), (Article 44), 10 April 1973

¹⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 2.50), 30 April 2025

- 8.1.1 For at least 2022 and 2023, the US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (USSD HR Reports) did not note any reports of 'restrictions on political parties participating in elections, except for those prohibited due to terrorist affiliations.'^{17 18} All USSD reports on human rights practices for 2024, published on 12 August 2025, were reduced in size and scope compared to previous years' reports¹⁹, and general information on political parties was not included in the 2024 USSD HR report for Pakistan²⁰.
- 8.1.2 The BTI 2024 Country Report Pakistan noted 'In Pakistan, there are few legal barriers to registering a political party or contesting an election as a candidate. In practice, however, while there are thousands of "independent" candidates and dozens of smaller parties contesting elections in constituencies across the country, electoral contests remain dominated by a small number of large political parties, such as the PML-N, PTI and PPP.'²¹
- 8.1.3 However, in December 2023 the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) rejected former Prime Minister Imran Khan's nomination to contest the 2024 parliamentary elections²². Members of Khan's PTI party were consequently unable to participate in the 2024 general elections under the PTI party name, or utilise the iconic cricket bat symbol, and instead ran as independents²³.
- 8.1.4 Freedom House observed, in its Freedom in the World 2025 report on Pakistan, covering 2024 events, that 'Opposition parties campaign and contest elections, which regularly result in transfers of power at the national level. National opposition parties also hold power or significant representation at the provincial and local levels. However, the military has long been considered more powerful than elected politicians and able to influence electoral outcomes.'²⁴
- 8.1.5 According to the same report:
 'Several major parties and numerous smaller parties and independents compete in elections and are represented in the parliament and provincial legislatures. However, free competition has been distorted through coercive and quasi-legal measures directed by the military against political actors who have fallen out of favor, and by the willingness of political parties to seek the military's patronage. During 2024, the PTI was the party which suffered the most blatant obstacles ...'²⁵
- 8.1.6 Referring to the February 2024 elections, the Freedom in the World 2025 stated:
 '... during the 2024 general election period, the ECP made a series of decisions that helped to exclude the PTI from formal participation in the election and which were favorable to the efforts by PTI's rivals to form a coalition government. These decisions, which included the ECP in October 2022 barring Imran Khan for five years from holding public office, prompted concerns that the ECP deliberately cooperated with efforts, directed by the

¹⁷ USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights 2022](#) (section 3), 20 March 2023

¹⁸ USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights 2023](#) (section 3), 22 April 2024

¹⁹ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), 12 August 2025

²⁰ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#), 12 August 2025

²¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, [BTI 2024 Country Report Pakistan](#) (Political participation, page 9), 2024

²² Al Jazeera, [Pakistan poll body rejects ex-PM Imran Khan's nomination...](#), 30 December 2023

²³ VOA, [Pakistan's PTI Barred From Using Cricket Bat Electoral Symbol](#), 14 January 2024

²⁴ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section B2), 2025

²⁵ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section B1), 2025

army, to suppress the PTI's vote and exclude it from power.'²⁶

8.1.7 The same report noted:

'Candidates affiliated with Imran Khan's PTI won 92 of the directly elected National Assembly seats in the February 2024 elections, ahead of Nawaz Sherif's PML-N and Bilawal Bhutto's PPP (54 seats). The PTI result was achieved despite multiple steps taken by civil and military authorities in the run-up to the election to hinder the party's performance. These included the jailing of Imran Khan in 2023, jailing and intimidation of party officers and members, and a decision by the ECP preventing the PTI from officially nominating candidates in the general election and from using its well-known electoral symbol, a cricket bat. (Electoral symbols are relevant to Pakistan's illiterate voters.) In response, PTI candidates stood as independents and, after being elected, rebadged themselves as members of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), a registered party that had not stood candidates.'²⁷

See also [General elections – February 2024](#)

8.1.8 The 2025 DFAT report noted 'Besides Ahmadis (who are effectively required to renounce their religion by accepting they are non-Muslims to stand), there are no legal restrictions preventing ethnic or religious minorities from participating in the political process.'²⁸ See the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Ahmadis](#) for information on voting rights of Ahmadis.

8.1.9 As of 22 October 2025, 170 [political parties](#) were registered with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

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8.2 General elections – February 2024

8.2.1 On 8 February 2024, Pakistan held elections for its National Assembly and 4 provincial assemblies – Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh²⁹. For a detailed account and background see the House of Commons Research Briefing on [Pakistan: 2024 general election](#).

8.2.2 In its preliminary observations of the elections, which saw about 60 million voters go to the polls, the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), a 'network of civil society networks in Pakistan dedicated to strengthening democracy through observation and oversight of electoral, parliamentary, and governance processes' which are undertaken by 'trained and legally accredited observers'³⁰, found that voting and counting at polling stations '... largely remained free of controversy, notwithstanding sporadic complaints by political parties and candidates about not getting the election results forms to which they are legally entitled. More than 0.7 million police and military officials stood guard across Pakistan and outside polling stations, ensuring peace and order on the election day against the backdrop of fears of militant and political violence.'³¹

8.2.3 On 9 February 2024, the EU issued a statement noting '... the lack of a level

²⁶ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section A3), 2025

²⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section A2), 2025

²⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.128), 30 April 2025

²⁹ FAFEN, [FAFEN preliminary election observation report of General Election 2024](#), 10 February 2024

³⁰ FAFEN, [About us](#), no date

³¹ FAFEN, [FAFEN preliminary election observation report of General Election 2024](#), 10 February 2024

playing field due to the inability of some political actors to contest the elections, restrictions to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression both online and offline, restrictions of access to the internet, as well as allegations of severe interference in the electoral process, including arrests of political activists.’³²

8.2.4 As noted in the 2025 DFAT report:

‘The 8 February 2024 general election was not free or fair according to many in-country sources, foreign governments, local and international media, and local and international human rights organisations. During the 2024 election, all PTI politicians were forced to run as independents. Pakistan’s government also: enforced a widespread clampdown on freedom of expression and association, detained and harassed PTI supporters, banned PTI election symbols, shut down cell phone signals on election day, delayed the announcement of election results; and was observed engaged in efforts to rig voting outcomes in some locations.’³³ For more information on the sources considered by DFAT in relation to conduct during the election see paragraph 2.55 of the DFAT report.

8.2.5 A report on the February 2024 elections by the International Crisis Group (ICG) stated that:

‘A spike in violence in the run-up to election day raised alarm in many parts of Pakistan. An array of militant groups – ranging from Baloch nationalist hardliners to the jihadist Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) – claimed attacks on political rallies, election offices and the homes of leaders of all major parties, particularly in the conflict-hit provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that border Afghanistan. A day before the vote, at least 28 people were killed and over 50 wounded in two bomb blasts outside candidates’ offices in Balochistan’s Pishin and Qilla Saifullah districts. Almost two dozen militant attacks took place mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan on polling day, killing scores of security personnel – many of whom had been deployed to guard voting stations – and civilians. In the rest of the country, however, polling went ahead relatively smoothly.’³⁴

8.2.6 A press release by the Pakistan’s Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, dated 9 February 2024, stated that there were 61 incidents of violence recorded on election day, which killed 16 citizens and injured 54 others³⁵.

See also [Attacks on political party members and supporters](#).

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8.3 Election results and formation of government

8.3.1 Following the release of the election results, an article in The Conversation, an independent source of news analysis and informed comment written by academic experts, working with professional journalists³⁶, noted that independents aligned with former Prime Minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won the most seats at the national level, followed by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

³² European Council, [Pakistan: Statement by the High Representative on behalf ...](#), 9 February 2024

³³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.130), 30 April 2025

³⁴ ICG, [Disputed Polls and Political Furies: Handling Pakistan's ...](#) (page 3), 28 November 2024

³⁵ MOIB, [PR No. 65 Statement by Caretaker Federal Minister for Interior Dr Gohar ...](#), 9 February 2024

³⁶ The Conversation, [Who we are](#), no date

(PML-N), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). No party won an absolute majority needed to form a government on its own³⁷.

- 8.3.2 According to Al Jazeera, independent candidates backed by the PTI gained 93 seats, PML-N came in second with 75 seats, and PPP third with 54 seats. PML-N, together with one PTI-backed candidate who then joined PML-N, and PPP formed a coalition government³⁸.
- 8.3.3 On 3 March 2024, the National Assembly approved a new coalition government led by Shehbaz Sharif (PML-N), supported by PPP, Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM (P)), Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Zia (PML (Z)), Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), and National Party (NP)^{39 40 41}.
- 8.3.4 FAFEN reported on 11 June 2024 that 'The Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) emerged as the largest parliamentary party after a majority of independent lawmakers (84) supported by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) joined it. However, they opted to sit on opposition benches ...'⁴²
- 8.3.5 However, in March 2024, the ECP declared that the SIC could not claim their allocation of reserved seats because the party had failed to submit a party list for reserved seats before the ECP's deadline⁴³. The SIC applied to the Supreme Court to reverse the ECP's decision⁴⁴.
- 8.3.6 On 12 July 2024, a majority judgement by the Supreme Court declared the PTI was a parliamentary party and was eligible to receive reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies⁴⁵. However, that decision was overturned in June 2025 by a constitutional bench of the Supreme Court, meaning the PTI was no longer a parliamentary party, and the reserved seats would be allocated to the other parties in the respective assemblies^{46 47}.
- 8.3.7 On 9 October 2025, the ECP declared all PTI and SIC members in the national and provincial assemblies as independent⁴⁸.
- 8.3.8 By-elections in November 2025 increased the number of seats held by the PML-N in the National Assembly, reported private satellite news channel, Samaa TV⁴⁹, which noted that, 'Following the by-election victories, PML-N's seat count in the 336-member National Assembly has risen to 132, solidifying its position as the leading political party in the lower house ... ending its reliance on the PPP for a simple majority.'⁵⁰

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³⁷ The Conversation, [No party won a majority in Pakistan's contentious election ...](#), 14 February 2024

³⁸ Al Jazeera, [As Pakistan's newly elected parliament meets, a look at the PM...](#), 29 February 2024

³⁹ APP, [Ruling coalition secure two-third majority in national assembly](#), 6 March 2024

⁴⁰ FAFEN, [FAFEN Report: 100 Days of 16th National Assembly of Pakistan](#), 11 June 2024

⁴¹ IPU Parline, [Pakistan Election results 2024](#), no date

⁴² FAFEN, [FAFEN Report: 100 Days of 16th National Assembly of Pakistan](#), 11 June 2024

⁴³ Al Jazeera, [Why is Pakistan's PTI fighting for reserved seats in parliament?](#), 7 March 2024

⁴⁴ Firstpost, [Is Imran Khan's PTI coming back? Pak SC overturns denial of reserved ...](#), 12 July 2024

⁴⁵ Dawn, [SC gives PTI its groove back](#), 13 July 2024

⁴⁶ Express Tribune, [PTI loses court battle for reserved seats](#), 28 June 2025

⁴⁷ Dawn, [PTI's hopes dashed as rivals set to receive reserved seats](#), 28 June 2025

⁴⁸ Pakistan Today, [ECP declares all PTI-supported lawmakers as 'independent'](#), 9 October 2025

⁴⁹ Samaa TV, [About us](#), no date

⁵⁰ Samaa TV, [PML-N becomes largest party in NA after by-election wins](#), 24 November 2025

9. Mainstream parties

9.1 Members of the National Assembly

- 9.1.1 The National Assembly of Pakistan listed all its [Members](#) of the National Assembly (MNA), including party-wise lists of those in Government and those in Opposition⁵¹. See also [Election results](#).

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9.2 Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N)

- 9.2.1 The PML-N has its origins in the PML, which was established in 1962. In 1993, the PML split into 2 factions, one of them led by Nawaz Sharif, which became known as the PML-N⁵². Nawaz Sharif has been Prime Minister on 3 occasions (1990 to 1993, 1997 to 1999, 2013 to 2017)⁵³. His second period in office was ended after he was ousted in a military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf⁵⁴. In 2017 he was removed from office due to corruption charges against him⁵⁵.
- 9.2.2 Nawaz was barred from holding office in 2018 so his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif, headed the PML-N⁵⁶ ⁵⁷. After being acquitted of corruption charges in 2023, Nawaz was elected leader of the PML-N in May 2024⁵⁸.
- 9.2.3 The PML-N, a centre-right party that attracts the votes of religious conservatives, were especially strong in Punjab, the country's largest province⁵⁹.

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9.3 Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

- 9.3.1 The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was founded in 1967 by the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967⁶⁰ ⁶¹. Zulfikar's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, served as Prime Minister twice and was assassinated in 2007 during her campaign for the 2008 elections⁶². Her son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, became sole leader of the PPP in 2021⁶³, and was re-elected as chairman for another 4-year term in April 2025⁶⁴. Bilawal's father and PPP member, Asif Ali Zardari, became President of Pakistan in March 2024⁶⁵ ⁶⁶.
- 9.3.2 The PPP was described as a centre-left party, with its main base in Sindh province⁶⁷ ⁶⁸.

⁵¹ National Assembly of Pakistan, ([Members](#)), no date

⁵² House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁵³ National Assembly of Pakistan, [Prime Ministers](#), no date

⁵⁴ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁵⁵ Al Jazeera, [Pakistan election 2024: Which are the major political parties?](#), 3 February 2024

⁵⁶ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁵⁷ Al Jazeera, [Shehbaz Sharif elected as Pakistan's new prime minister](#), 11 April 2022

⁵⁸ Dawn, [Nawaz reclaims 'N' in PML-N after 6 years](#), 28 May 2024

⁵⁹ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁶⁰ Dawn, [Pakistan Peoples Party](#), 14 July 2018

⁶¹ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁶² House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁶³ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 10), 28 May 2024

⁶⁴ Dawn, [Bilawal, Shujaat re-elected as PPP, PML-Q chiefs](#), 13 April 2025

⁶⁵ President of Pakistan, [Asif Ali Zardari](#), no date

⁶⁶ CNN, [Shehbaz Sharif: Pakistani legislators elect new prime minister to head ...](#), 3 March 2024

⁶⁷ Al Jazeera, [Pakistan election 2024: Which are the major political parties?](#), 3 February 2024

⁶⁸ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 11), 28 May 2024

9.4 Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

- 9.4.1 The PTI, described as a secular, centre-right, was founded in 1996 by Imran Khan^{69 70 71}. Khan became Prime Minister after the PTI secured its biggest victory in 2018 after winning the largest number of National Assembly seats and forming a coalition with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement – Pakistan (MQM-P), other smaller parties and independents⁷².
- 9.4.2 On 10 April 2022, Imran Khan was ousted as prime minister after a no-confidence vote⁷³. Minutes before parliament was due to elect a new prime minister, the PTI resigned from the National Assembly in line with the party's narrative, in which Khan blamed a 'foreign conspiracy' for his removal as prime minister^{74 75}. In October 2022, the ECP disqualified Khan from being elected or remaining as a member of parliament, for non-declaration of assets⁷⁶. On 3 November 2022, Imran Khan was injured and a PTI supporter was killed when a gunman opened fire on a convoy of which Khan was part. He accused Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and military officials of involvement, which they denied⁷⁷.
- 9.4.3 Al Jazeera reported that Khan was arrested on 9 May 2023 for corruption offences, '... triggering nationwide protests by his supporters who [blame the military](#) for orchestrating the arrest.'⁷⁸ Some of the protests turned violent, with clashes between protesters and the police resulting in several deaths⁷⁹. According to CIVICUS Monitor, an international alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world, 'While the protests began as peaceful demonstrations, they quickly escalated into violence, with attacks on military and government buildings, including the Lahore Corps Commander House, triggering a massive security response. The state accused PTI of orchestrating the violence and used anti-terrorism laws to pursue hundreds of its members.'⁸⁰
- 9.4.4 In intra-party elections in December 2023, Gohar Ali Khan was elected unopposed as chairman of the PTI, after being nominated for the post by Imran Khan⁸¹.
- 9.4.5 The 2025 DFAT report noted that:
- 'Human rights organisations report Pakistan's authorities have targeted PTI leaders and their family members with enforced disappearances, arrest and imprisonment (sometimes on multiple instances) on the basis of their political opinions. According to in-country sources, Pakistan's government, military and security services have sought to weaken the PTI by putting pressure on its leaders through "pre-emptive detention". "Disappeared" PTI politicians

⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, [Pakistan election 2024: Which are the major political parties?](#), 3 February 2024

⁷⁰ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 11), 28 May 2024

⁷¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.141), 30 April 2025

⁷² House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 11), 28 May 2024

⁷³ BBC News, [Pakistan: Shehbaz Sharif chosen as PM after week-long uncertainty](#), 11 April 2022

⁷⁴ Dawn, [PTI announces mass resignations from National Assembly](#), 11 April 2022

⁷⁵ National Herald, [Pakistan Assembly accepts resignations of 123 PTI MNAs](#), 8 May 2022

⁷⁶ Dawn, [Imran disqualified](#), 22 October 2022

⁷⁷ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 13), 28 May 2024

⁷⁸ Al Jazeera, [Imran Khan vs Pakistan's government: A timeline of political upheaval](#), 9 May 2024

⁷⁹ House of Commons Library, [Pakistan: 2024 general elections](#) (page 14), 28 May 2024

⁸⁰ CIVICUS, [Pakistan: Criminalisation of Baloch and ...](#) (Peaceful assembly), 24 November 2025

⁸¹ Express Tribune, [Barrister Gohar elected as PTI's new chairman](#), 2 December 2023

often reappeared later with changed political views that condemned the PTI, with many stepping away from politics all together ...

‘Authorities have harassed and threatened to arrest PTI members on the basis of their political opinions. Local media reported 493 FIRs were registered, 8,031 arrests made, and 3,261 people detained in connection with the 9 May [2023] PTI protests. In October 2023, the PTI stated upwards of 10,000 PTI supporters had been placed on remand since the 9 May protests. In-country sources told DFAT high profile PTI members were most likely to face harassment or arrest by authorities. In-country sources said while first, second and third tier PTI leaders were sometimes targeted by authorities, low-level supporters who did not engage in violence during the 9 May protests were highly unlikely to receive any adverse official attention. In-country sources reported isolated instances of PTI supporters being detained in order to discourage their participation in future protests.’⁸²

- 9.4.6 The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), noted in their Pakistan Country Focus COI Report, covering the period 1 October 2023 to 25 October 2024, based on a range of sources, that:

‘In July 2024, the police raided the PTI’s offices. According to the police, “the raid was conducted due to [PTI] running a disinformation campaign against the country.” On 7 October 2024, police filed a case against Khan, 200 PTI members, workers, and lawyers. The case was filed under First Information Report (FIR) on sedition, terrorism and attempted murder charges. The PTI founder and 200 members were allegedly accused of “rebellion and terrorism”, inciting violence against the state. In October 2024, police raided the house of PTI-affiliated politician Zartaj Gul and arrested her under section 3 of the MPO [Maintenance of Public Order] Ordinance. Gul was released from jail on 9 October 2024 on court orders.’⁸³

- 9.4.7 BBC News reported in January 2025 that: ‘Former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan has been sentenced to 14 years in prison over a corruption case, in the latest of a series of charges laid against him. ‘It is the longest valid jail sentence the cricket star-turned-politician, who has been [detained since August 2023](#), has received. ‘He has faced charges in over 100 cases, ranging from leaking state secrets to selling state gifts - all of which he has decried as politically motivated.’⁸⁴

- 9.4.8 In August 2025, 108 members of the PTI were convicted and jailed, by an anti-terrorism court, for their involvement in nationwide protests and violent clashes with security forces that occurred in May 2023. Several PTI leaders, including (former) members of parliament, were given prison terms of up to 10 years^{85 86}. PTI Chairman, Gohar Ali Khan, called the verdicts ‘politically motivated.’⁸⁷

See also [Freedom of expression and right to protest](#).

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9.5 Awami National Party (ANP)

⁸² DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraphs 3.144 and 3.145), 30 April 2025

⁸³ EUAA, [Pakistan Country Focus](#) (pages 123 to 124), December 2024

⁸⁴ BBC News, [Pakistan: Imran Khan sentenced to 14 years in corruption case](#), 17 January 2025

⁸⁵ BBC News, [Pakistan jails 108 members of Imran Khan's party](#), 1 August 2025

⁸⁶ Express Tribune, [PTI heavyweights jailed for 'attacks on state institutions'](#), 1 August 2025

⁸⁷ Express Tribune, [PTI heavyweights jailed for 'attacks on state institutions'](#), 1 August 2025

- 9.5.1 The 2025 DFAT report noted that ‘The ANP, formed in 1986, is a secular Pashtun nationalist political party that follows the ideology of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (also known as Bacha Khan), who preached non-violence and advocated for maximum autonomy of Pakistan’s provinces. The ANP is active in KP [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa] and Pashtun-majority areas of Balochistan ... The ANP was part of the PTI-led coalition government from 2018 to 2022.’⁸⁸
- 9.5.2 The ANP gained 2 seats (one elected, one reserved) in the KP Assembly⁸⁹ and 3 seats (2 elected, one reserved) in the Balochistan Assembly⁹⁰, but failed to secure a seat in the National Assembly in the 2024 general elections^{91 92}.
- 9.5.3 In May 2024, Aimal Wali Khan was elected as the new central president of the ANP during intra-party elections⁹³.
- 9.5.4 The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) noted in their general COI report on Pakistan, based on a range of sources, covering the period September 2022 to May 2024, that:
- ‘The ANP has become increasingly weak politically over the past decade. The leadership is in the hands of one family, and some ANP supporters are said to be dissatisfied with the leadership of the current leader, Aimal Wali Khan. According to one source, the party was weakened, as splits have emerged. Parts of the party defected to the PTM. According to this source, the authorities no longer saw the party as a threat and therefore allegedly took no more action against it.’⁹⁴
- 9.5.5 In July 2025, ANP politician, Maulana Khan Zeb, was shot and killed by unknown assailants in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Bajaur district, whilst campaigning for a peace parade. A police officer was also killed in the attack^{95 96}.

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9.6 Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)

- 9.6.1 The 2025 DFAT report stated that:
- ‘The Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (United National Movement) or MQM was formed in 1984 and is a Karachi-based secular political party that advocates for the rights of Muhajirs, Urdu-speaking Muslim migrants from India and their descendants. The MQM was a major political force in Sindh in the 1980s and 1990s, when it was involved in widespread political violence in Karachi as MQM militants fought government forces, breakaway factions and militants from other ethnic political movements.’⁹⁷
- 9.6.2 In 2016, the MQM split into 2 factions: the MQM-London (MQM-L) led by Altaf Hussain, living in self-imposed exile in the UK, and the MQM-Pakistan

⁸⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraphs 3.132 and 3.133), 30 April 2025

⁸⁹ Dunya News, [KP Assembly 2024](#), 2024

⁹⁰ Dunya News, [Balochistan Assembly 2024](#), 2024

⁹¹ Dunya News, [National Assembly Election Results 2024](#), 2024

⁹² DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.133), 30 April 2025

⁹³ Dawn, [ANP new chief vows to protect 18th Amendment at all costs](#), 6 May 2024

⁹⁴ Netherlands MFA, [General Country of Origin Information Report ...](#) (page 32), 5 July 2024

⁹⁵ Dawn, [ANP leader Maulana Khan Zeb, cop gunned down in KP's Bajaur: police](#), 10 July 2025

⁹⁶ Express Tribune, [ANP leader Maulana Khan Zeb among three killed in Bajaur ...](#), 10 July 2025

⁹⁷ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.137), 30 April 2025

(MQM-P), initially led by Farooq Sattar, who was succeeded by Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui in February 2018^{98 99}.

- 9.6.3 In the 2025 DFAT report it was noted that ‘In-country sources said MQM-Pakistan and MQM-London had reconciled, and the united party was noticeably less “anti-establishment” than before.’¹⁰⁰ However, in August 2025, Pakistani English-language newspaper, Dawn, reported that Sindh Governor and MQM-P member, Kamran Khan Tessori, ‘... was bound to follow the policy of the MQM-P, which had openly dissociated itself from Mr Hussain ... “Altaf Hussain sahab has nothing to do with the politics of MQM Pakistan [and] its leadership is not going to accept him [in their fold] as they openly parted ways with him,” [Tessori] said ...’¹⁰¹
- 9.6.4 The DFAT report stated ‘MQM [Pakistan] won 22 federal seats in the 2024 general election and 36 out of 168 seats in Sindh’s provincial election.’¹⁰² The MQM-P was a member of the PML-N-led coalition government^{103 104}.

See also Treatment of political opponents: [MQM-London \(MQM-L\)](#) and [Attacks on political party members and supporters](#)

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9.7 Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q)

- 9.7.1 The PML-Q was formed in 2002 by dissident PML-N members and became an integral part of General Musharraf’s government, in power from 2002 to 2008¹⁰⁵. PML-Q leader, Shujaat Hussain, served briefly as prime minister during Musharraf’s presidency¹⁰⁶. The PML-Q was a coalition partner of the PTI¹⁰⁷. The PML-Q then became a coalition partner of the PML-N following the ousting of Imran Khan in April 2022¹⁰⁸, and maintained that partnership following the February 2024 elections¹⁰⁹.

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10. Sectarian parties

10.1 Islamist parties

- 10.1.1 According to a report by Dawn news, dated 17 March 2024:

‘Pakistan’s political landscape includes a significant number of religio-political parties. Out of the 167 parties registered with the Election Commission, roughly 25 have Islamist or sectarian names, reflecting their religious affiliations.

‘Notable among them are the JUI-F [Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam – Fazl], the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), the Majlis-i-Wahdat-i-Muslimeen (MWM), the Pakistan Rah-i-Haq Party, the Pakistan

⁹⁸ BBC News, [Pakistan MQM founder Altaf Hussain arrested in UK](#), 11 June 2019

⁹⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.168), 20 February 2019

¹⁰⁰ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.138), 30 April 2025

¹⁰¹ Dawn, [Governor Tessori red-faced over remarks about ‘Bhai’s comeback’](#), 15 August 2025

¹⁰² DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.138), 30 April 2025

¹⁰³ ANI, [Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan \(MQM-P\) joins PML-N-led ...](#), 26 February 2024

¹⁰⁴ Dunya News, [Govt to discuss key points of 27th Amendment with coalition ...](#), 4 November 2025

¹⁰⁵ Dawn, [PML-Q went on to become an integral part of Musharraf’s government](#), 16 July 2018

¹⁰⁶ Dawn, [PML-Q went on to become an integral part of Musharraf’s government](#), 16 July 2018

¹⁰⁷ Dawn, [Setback for PTI as BNP-M quits ruling alliance](#), 18 June 2020

¹⁰⁸ The Economic Times, [Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s Cabinet takes oath](#), 19 April 2022

¹⁰⁹ IPU Parline, [Pakistan Election results 2024](#), no date

Markazi Muslim League, and the Jamiat-i-Ulema Islam-Nazriati, all of which actively participated in the February 8 [2024] polls.’¹¹⁰

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10.2 Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam – Fazl (JUI-F)

- 10.2.1 The JUI-F, a Sunni Deobandi political party led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman since 1980, has promoted the implementation of Sharia law, drawing strength from mosques and madrassahs for membership¹¹¹. Its electoral performance has fluctuated, winning 41 seats in 2002 but only 12 in 2018¹¹². In 2024 it secured 2.16 million votes (3.7%)¹¹³, ranking fifth nationally¹¹⁴, and secured 4 seats in the National Assembly¹¹⁵. The party’s voter base was concentrated largely in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but it also received support in Sindh, Punjab, ICT and Balochistan in the 2024 elections¹¹⁶.
- 10.2.2 The JUI-F became a coalition partner of the PML-N following the ousting of Imran Khan in April 2022¹¹⁷.

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10.3 Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)

- 10.3.1 The Netherlands MFA noted in their COI report on Pakistan, published in July 2024, that:

‘The main sectarian party in Pakistan is the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). In the elections of 8 February 2024, the TLP failed to win a single seat in the national parliament. Support for the party nevertheless grew from 2.1 million votes in 2018 to 2.8 million in 2024. The extremist Muslim party has many followers and a considerable amount of “street power”. Closely linked to the TLP is the Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLRY), which adheres to the same conservative Barelvi [a school of thought within Sunni Islam¹¹⁸] ideas. The leaders of both parties started their radical religious movement together in Karachi, but they parted ways over various disagreements. The TLP divides the world into “us” and “them”. Within this context, “they” include Western powers who purportedly committed blasphemy or the elite who were said to be “bad Muslims”. The TLP present themselves as the sole representatives of Barelvi thought. The TLP’s implacable stance against blasphemy encourages citizens to carry out violent actions in a vigilante style. According to some studies, most TLP supporters are young people from poor and middle-class Barelvi families in Punjab. When asked by TLP leaders, the young supporters proceed to vandalise property, attack cars, burn car tyres and block major thoroughfares during protests. In recent years, several individuals claiming to be motivated by the speeches of the TLP leader Rizvi have committed killings of civilians. No further information is known about these individuals. Online, the party has built a strong following and regularly conducts anti-state, anti-Ahmadi and anti-Western

¹¹⁰ Dawn, [The Decline of Islamist Politics?](#), 17 March 2024

¹¹¹ Dawn, [Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam — Fazl](#), 7 February 2024

¹¹² Dawn, [Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam — Fazl](#), 7 February 2024

¹¹³ The Diplomat, [Pakistan’s Islamist Parties Pivot to Economic Populism](#), 29 October 2025

¹¹⁴ Gallup Pakistan, [JUI-F received 2.16 million votes in the 2024 General Elections ...](#), 23 April 2024

¹¹⁵ Dawn, [The Decline of Islamist Politics?](#), 17 March 2024

¹¹⁶ Gallup Pakistan, [JUI-F received 2.16 million votes in the 2024 General Elections ...](#), 23 April 2024

¹¹⁷ The Economic Times, [Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s Cabinet takes oath](#), 19 April 2022

¹¹⁸ New Age Islam, [A Subcontinent’s Sunni Schism: Understanding The ...](#), 14 October 2024

campaigns on social media.’¹¹⁹

- 10.3.2 In their Briefing Notes dated 27 October 2025, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) noted for Pakistan that:

‘On 23 October 2025, the Pakistani government banned the Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). This followed more than a week of clashes between TLP supporters and the police, in which, according to media reports, at least five people were killed ... The background to these events was a march organised by the TLP, which took place at the beginning of the month from the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore towards the capital Islamabad. The destination was the US embassy in the capital, where the marchers wanted to demonstrate in solidarity with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The march eventually escalated into violent street battles between TLP supporters and the police in the city of Muridke near Lahore. The ban is the latest climax in the relationship between the Pakistani state and the TLP. With its views, particularly on blasphemy or the denigration of Islam, the TLP had gained considerable support among the population in recent years.’¹²⁰

- 10.3.3 The South Asia Intelligence Review (SAIR) of the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) noted in their weekly assessment, dated 27 October 2025:

‘On October 24 [2025], the Federal Interior Ministry notified the ban on the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), declaring that the Federal Government had “reasonable grounds” to believe the religio-political party was connected to terrorism ... This is not first time TLP has been banned, as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Government proscribed the group on April 14, 2021, after violent protests caused the deaths of two Policemen and left 340 injured. The Federal Interior Ministry informed the Cabinet that the 2021 ban on TLP was lifted after six months on the assurance that it would refrain from violence, and that the current ban on the group stemmed from its reneging on those guarantees.’¹²¹

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11. Pashtun groups

11.1 Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM)

- 11.1.1 The PTM was founded in 2014 and advocates for the rights of ethnic Pashtuns, a distinct ethnic group living mostly in Pakistan and Afghanistan¹²². It was mostly active in KP and Pashtun-dominated areas of Balochistan¹²³. Though not a political party, Al Jazeera noted in October 2024 that the group ‘... has at its peak pulled tens of thousands of people to largely peaceful rallies demanding better protection from the state.’¹²⁴

- 11.1.2 Repeating similar assertions made in its 2021¹²⁵ and 2022¹²⁶ reports, the USSD HR Report 2023 noted that:

¹¹⁹ Netherlands MFA, [General Country of Origin Information Report ...](#) (pages 32, 33), 5 July 2024

¹²⁰ BAMF, [Briefing Notes, Group 62](#) (page 8), 27 October 2025

¹²¹ SATP, [SAIR Weekly Assessments & Briefings Volume 24, No. 19](#), 27 October 2025

¹²² Al Jazeera, [Pakistan bans prominent Pashtun rights group citing security ...](#), 7 October 2024

¹²³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.148), 30 April 2025

¹²⁴ Al Jazeera, [Pakistan bans prominent Pashtun rights group citing security ...](#), 7 October 2024

¹²⁵ USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 4), 12 April 2022

¹²⁶ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 4), 20 March 2023

'The PTM and secular Pashtun political leaders claimed Pashtuns were targeted and killed by both antistate militants and security forces because of their political affiliation or beliefs, antimilitancy stance, or criticism of the government. PTM leaders and activists claimed they had been threatened, illegally detained, imprisoned without trial, banned from domestic and international travel, and censored. Anti-Taliban Pashtun activists and political leaders were targeted and killed, allegedly by militants, in Sindh, Balochistan, and KP. Pashtuns from the former FATA complained they were frequently profiled as militants, based on their tribe, dress, appearance, or ancestral district of origin. Pashtun activists claimed that they were subject to military censorship and that sedition laws were used to stifle PTM and other Pashtun critics of the government.'¹²⁷

- 11.1.3 On 6 October 2024 the government banned the PTM, listing it as a proscribed organisation^{128 129}. A notification issued by the federal government said the PTM was "engaged in certain activities which are prejudicial to the peace and security of the country".¹³⁰ The [Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997](#)¹³¹ describes the measures taken against proscribed groups. Under the Act, membership of a proscribed organisation is itself a criminal offence, even if the person is not involved in any other activity and is liable on conviction to imprisonment of up to 6 months and a fine¹³².
- 11.1.4 Amnesty International called for the PTM ban to be revoked, stating that 'The listing of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement as a proscribed organization, days ahead of their gathering scheduled on 11 October [2024], is part of a systematic and relentless clampdown by the Pakistani authorities on peaceful protests and assemblies by dissenting groups ...'¹³³ The HRCP also condemned the decision and posted on X that the group had '... never resorted to violence and always used the framework of the Constitution to advocate its cause.'¹³⁴
- 11.1.5 According to Amnesty International, 'Under the wide powers of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), the Pakistan government can designate any organization as proscribed "on the basis of information received from any credible source." However, the government has failed to provide any concrete evidence in this regard about the PTM.'¹³⁵
- 11.1.6 The 2025 DFAT report noted that, even prior to the group's proscription, PTM leaders faced arrest and were subject to enforced disappearances on the basis of their political opinions¹³⁶. The same report also noted that some PTM members were harassed and threatened with arrest due to their political opinion before the group was proscribed¹³⁷. The DFAT report added that 'In October 2024, local and international media reported hundreds of PTM members had been arrested, and the movement's leader, Manzoor

¹²⁷ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 6), 22 April 2024

¹²⁸ NACTA, [NACTA: List of Proscribed Organizations](#), no date

¹²⁹ Al Jazeera, [Pakistan bans prominent Pashtun rights group citing security ...](#), 7 October 2024

¹³⁰ Al Jazeera, [Pakistan bans prominent Pashtun rights group citing security ...](#), 7 October 2024

¹³¹ NACTA, [The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997](#)

¹³² NACTA, [The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997](#) (Section 11F)

¹³³ Amnesty International, [Authorities must immediately revoke ban on \[PTM\]](#), 8 October 2024

¹³⁴ X, @HRCP87, [HRCP condemns the government's decision to proscribe PTM ...](#), 6 October 2024

¹³⁵ Amnesty International, [Authorities must immediately revoke ban on \[PTM\]](#), 8 October 2024

¹³⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.149), 30 April 2025

¹³⁷ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.150), 30 April 2025

Pashteen, was in hiding.’¹³⁸

- 11.1.7 Amu TV reported that, according to local activists and PTM officials, a PTM member, Tajmanullah, from South Waziristan, died in June 2025 after 8 years in custody, having never been formally charged or tried. Pashtun rights advocates stated that ‘Tajmanullah is one of hundreds of PTM members detained without due process in Pakistan.’¹³⁹
- 11.1.8 In March 2025, the Peshawar High Court ordered the federal government to submit cabinet minutes related to PTM’s proscription under the ATA, in response to a petition by PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen and other members, which challenged the group’s ban and the designation of a reported 250 PTM leaders^{140 141}.

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12. Treatment of political opponents

12.1 Allegations of corruption

- 12.1.1 Repeating the same statements made in its 2021¹⁴² and 2022¹⁴³ reports, the USSD HR Report 2023 noted that ‘Corruption was pervasive in politics and government, and various politicians and public office holders faced allegations of corruption, including bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft, and embezzlement.’¹⁴⁴
- 12.1.2 Similar to Freedom in the World reports of 2023¹⁴⁵ and 2024¹⁴⁶, the Freedom in the World 2025 report observed that ‘Despite numerous formal safeguards, official corruption is endemic in practice. The use of accountability mechanisms is often selective and politically driven. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), the government’s anticorruption body, focuses on cases against politicians and senior officials, which tend to be protracted. The military and judiciary have their own disciplinary systems for corruption.’¹⁴⁷
- 12.1.3 The Freedom in the World 2025 report further noted that:
- ‘Law enforcement mechanisms have repeatedly been abused to impede opposition parties. Under the 2018–22 PTI government, the PPP and PML-N faced a succession of corruption charges. After his own ouster as prime minister in 2022, Imran Khan faced similar treatment, culminating in his May 2023 arrest. Ahead of and after the 2024 general election, authorities, orchestrated by the army, imposed multiple restrictions on Imran Khan, other PTI leaders, and the party to ensure that they could not achieve a parliamentary majority to form a national government.’¹⁴⁸ For information on historical corruption charges related to the PPP and PML-N see the archived version of the [CPIN Pakistan: Political parties and affiliation](#), May 2023

¹³⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.150), 30 April 2025

¹³⁹ Amu TV, [Pakistani activist dies after eight years in custody without trial, local ...](#), 24 June 2025

¹⁴⁰ News International, [PHC seeks cabinet meeting minutes about ban on PTM](#), 12 March 2025

¹⁴¹ Dawn, [PHC seeks cabinet meeting’s minutes on PTM ban](#), 12 March 2025

¹⁴² USSD, [2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 4), 12 April 2022

¹⁴³ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 4), 20 March 2023

¹⁴⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 4), 22 April 2024

¹⁴⁵ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2023 – Pakistan](#) (section C2), 2023

¹⁴⁶ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Pakistan](#) (section C2), 2024

¹⁴⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section C2), 2025

¹⁴⁸ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section B2), 2025

12.1.4 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted that:

‘The NAB continued to press corruption charges against opposition political figures, but corruption charges were rarely pursued against figures aligned with the federal coalition government, and the NAB sometimes dropped investigations or prosecutions after a change in administration. Although multiple cases remained pending with the NAB, in June 2022 the government amended the NAB law’s anti-corruption provisions, greatly curtailing the watchdog’s powers. On September 15 [2023], the Supreme Court restored the NAB’s powers by rejecting amendments made to the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999.’¹⁴⁹

12.1.5 The 2025 DFAT report noted:

‘CSOs [civil society organisations], human rights defenders and politicians stated the NAB primarily used its powers to target government critics and those who had fallen out of favour with “the military and security services, including former prime ministers Imran Khan, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Nawaz Sharif”. In July 2020, the Supreme Court ruled the NAB violated the rights to fair trial and due process in the arrest of two opposition politicians, Khawaja Saad Rafique and Khawaja Salman Rafique, whom the NAB detained for 15 months “without reasonable grounds”. The Supreme Court granted the men bail and criticised the NAB for showing “utter disregard to the law, fair play, equity and propriety”. CSOs, human rights defenders and politicians have also stated the NAB failed to investigate and close cases against those affiliated with Pakistan’s government.’¹⁵⁰

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12.2 Freedom of expression and right to protest

12.2.1 As noted in the USSD HR Report 2024, and similarly observed in the USSD HR reports for 2022¹⁵¹ and 2023¹⁵², the law allowed for freedom of expression and permitted citizens to criticise the government, publicly or privately, though the USSD HR Report 2024 added that ‘Journalists experienced physical threats, economic coercion, harassment, and violence when reporting on sensitive topics critical of the government, ruling political parties, and the military.’¹⁵³

12.2.2 Like similar observations made in the Freedom in the World reports of 2023¹⁵⁴ and 2024¹⁵⁵, Freedom in the World 2025 noted, regarding the ability for civilians to freely express their views on political topics, that:

‘Pakistanis are free in practice to discuss many topics, but the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act gives the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) unchecked powers to censor material online. Its broad and poorly defined mandate includes prevention of both morally objectionable content and any maligning of the “state, judiciary, or armed forces.”

‘Direct or implied criticism of the military and its perspectives on national

¹⁴⁹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1e), 22 April 2024

¹⁵⁰ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 2.59), 30 April 2025

¹⁵¹ USSD, [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 2a), 20 March 2023

¹⁵² USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 2a), 22 April 2024

¹⁵³ USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 2a) 12 August 2025

¹⁵⁴ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2023 – Pakistan](#) (section D4), 2023

¹⁵⁵ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Pakistan](#) (section D4), 2024

security can draw criminal or extralegal punishment.’¹⁵⁶

See also [Monitoring and surveillance, including abroad](#)

12.2.3 The law provides for ‘... the right to assemble peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of public order.’¹⁵⁷ However, the right to protest peacefully was not always respected by the state¹⁵⁸. Freedom House Freedom in the World 2025 stated ‘There is a well-established pattern of law enforcement action against assemblies that the military considers prejudicial to its notion of national security, or which the civilian government considers a challenge to its authority.’¹⁵⁹

12.2.4 The EUAA Pakistan Country Focus noted that:

‘In September 2024, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) legislators introduced a new bill titled the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act in the Senate. The president signed the bill into law one week later. According to Al Jazeera the bills grant the authorities the right to regulate and ban public demonstrations and gatherings in Islamabad. Moreover, the bill increases the maximum penalty for taking part in an “unlawful assembly” to three years of imprisonment. According to the Deputy Regional Director for South Asia at Amnesty International (AI) Babu Ram Pant, the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act “is yet another attack on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Pakistan”.’¹⁶⁰

12.2.5 EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE), ‘a consortium of international organisations and network members in 86 countries [which] implements an Early Warning and Monitoring Mechanism to document changes and shed light on critical trends in the enabling environment for civil society’¹⁶¹, noted in its Pakistan Country Focus Report, dated July 2025, that ‘Article 16 of the Constitution of Pakistan protects peaceful assembly, but this right is repeatedly curtailed through the use of Section 144 of Pakistan’s Penal Code, which allows local administrations to ban gatherings without judicial oversight. The use of Section 144 to consistently undermine the right to gather and protest has become a routine administrative mechanism to disrupt civil society events, particularly in urban areas.’¹⁶²

12.2.6 According to the 2025 DFAT report, ‘Mass protests are a common occurrence in Pakistan and are conducted with varying levels of violence, by protesters, police and the military.’¹⁶³

12.2.7 The 2025 DFAT report noted that:

‘Pakistan’s government has had less tolerance for public demonstrations critical of its action and the military following the 9 May 2023 protests against the arrest of Imran Khan, which involved tens of thousands of his supporters ... Police responded to the 9 May 2023 protests with tear gas, rubber bullets, and charged protesters with batons. More than 4,000 people were arrested

¹⁵⁶ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section D4), 2025

¹⁵⁷ The Pakistan Code, [Constitution of Pakistan](#), (Article 16), 10 April 1973

¹⁵⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.159), 30 April 2025

¹⁵⁹ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2025 – Pakistan](#) (section E1), 2025

¹⁶⁰ EUAA, [Pakistan Country Focus](#) (page 126), December 2024

¹⁶¹ EU SEE, [About – Eu SEE](#), no date

¹⁶² EU SEE, [Country Focus Report Pakistan](#) (page 4), July 2025

¹⁶³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.168), 30 April 2025

in the weeks after the 9 May protests. In response to Pakistan's handling of the 9 May protests, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated authorities "need to respect the right to peaceful assembly" and urged them to "respect due process and the rule of law in proceedings brought against former Prime Minister Khan".¹⁶⁴

12.2.8 The same report noted that 'In response to the 9 May 2023 protests, Pakistan's government deployed the military and imposed Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (1898), which prohibited all unauthorised public gatherings of over four people. Local media reported 14 civilians were killed during the 9 May protests, with no police and law enforcement officers killed.'¹⁶⁵

12.2.9 Reporting on other protests led by the PTI, the 2025 DFAT report noted: 'Following the 8 February 2024 general election, more than 100 PTI members were arrested at nationwide protests against vote rigging. International media reported police officers attacked protesters with sticks at some of the PTI protests. A PTI spokesperson stated in March 2024 the majority of those arrested at the PTI protests had been released. Nine PTI members of parliament were also arrested in relation to their participation in a rally held in Islamabad on 8 September which was broken up with tear gas. In response to large PTI-led protests in Islamabad from 4-5 October 2024, police filed FIRs against Imran Khan, 63 PTI party leaders and over 3,000 PTI party workers for sedition, terrorism and attempted murder.'¹⁶⁶

12.2.10 The same report added 'On 26 November 2024, upwards of 40,000 PTI protesters assembled on the outskirts of Islamabad to demand Imran Khan's release from prison. Security forces conducted a clearance operation using tear gas and rubber bullets targeting reportedly 2,000-3,000 protesters who had entered central Islamabad. Local media reported 4,000 protesters were detained and six people killed during the protests.'¹⁶⁷

12.2.11 Al Jazeera noted regarding the November protests that 'While some PTI leaders initially said hundreds of supporters had been killed, party chairman Gohar Ali Khan later said the number of dead protesters stood at 12.' According to the PTI, at least 10 of those killed had bullet wounds¹⁶⁸.

12.2.12 In December 2024, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) conducted a fact-finding mission in relation to the November 2024 PTI protests in Islamabad and held meetings with police, federal ministers, lawyers, journalists covering the protests, PTI leaders and the families of victims associated with the PTI allegedly killed by law enforcement during the protests¹⁶⁹. The subsequent report, published in February 2025, noted that PTI's former secretary-general, Omar Ayub Khan, told the HRCP that over 200 PTI workers were 'missing and presumed dead ...', and that around '5,000 PTI workers had been arrested nationwide, primarily in Punjab.'¹⁷⁰ According to an official at Islamabad's Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC), where arrested protesters were taken, '... if no evidence was found

¹⁶⁴ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.160), 30 April 2025

¹⁶⁵ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.143), 30 April 2025

¹⁶⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.163), 30 April 2025

¹⁶⁷ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.166), 30 April 2025

¹⁶⁸ Al Jazeera, [Dead but not counted: Hidden victims of Pakistan's latest ...](#), 4 December 2024

¹⁶⁹ HRCP, [November 2024 PTI Protests: An HRCP fact-finding report](#) (page 1), February 2025

¹⁷⁰ HRCP, [November 2024 PTI Protests: An HRCP fact-finding report](#) (pages 6, 7), February 2025

against those arrested, they would be released.’¹⁷¹

12.2.13 In their concluding observations, the HRCP noted that:

‘... The PTI claimed that a large number of protesters were killed, while the government asserted that its security forces were unarmed and that no protesters died. The mission was, however, able to speak to the families of seven people who were allegedly killed during the protest. In addition, there were reported deaths of Rangers [federal paramilitary forces] personnel.

‘... Reports indicate that some protesters carried slingshots, tear gas shells and firearms spotted on occasion. The administration demonstrated a clear lack of proficiency in managing the protest and used force excessively and disproportionately.

‘The mission is deeply concerned by allegations that the hospital administrations and police withheld the bodies of victims until their families agreed not to pursue any legal action.’¹⁷²

See also [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf \(PTI\)](#)

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12.3 Monitoring and surveillance, including abroad

12.3.1 In July 2024, the government formally authorised the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to intercept calls and messages under Section 54 of the Pakistan Telecommunication Act, citing ‘national security.’^{173 174}

12.3.2 The UN Human Rights Committee’s concluding observations on the state report on implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), dated 2 December 2024, noted that:

‘The Committee remains concerned that the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, grants the authorities overly broad powers to access and retain personal data and to share it with foreign Governments, without judicial authorization and sufficient oversight. It is also concerned about reports of the increase in surveillance measures and mechanisms in the State party, such as: (a) the authorization granted to the Inter-Services Intelligence in July 2024 to intercept telephone calls and text messages of citizens under section 54 (1) of the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-Organisation) Act, 1996; and (b) the installation of a mass surveillance system (Lawful Intercept Management System) imposed on telecommunications companies, with the capacity to intercept data and telecom records of up to 4 million users without any regulatory oversight or judicial authorization. It is further concerned about reports that the intelligence agencies are conducting targeted surveillance and monitoring of individuals, in particular human rights defenders, journalists, political activists, politicians and individuals critical of the Government, including through the use of digital technologies such as spyware.’¹⁷⁵

12.3.3 Amnesty International’s 2025 report, [Shadows of Control](#), revealed that Pakistan operated 2 major surveillance systems:

¹⁷¹ HRCP, [November 2024 PTI Protests: An HRCP fact-finding report](#) (page 3), February 2025

¹⁷² HRCP, [November 2024 PTI Protests: An HRCP fact-finding report](#) (page 13), February 2025

¹⁷³ Express Tribune, [Govt defends legal cover for surveillance](#), 10 July 2024

¹⁷⁴ Advox Global Voices, [Pakistan’s intelligence agencies gain legal cover for ...](#), 18 July 2024

¹⁷⁵ UNHRC, [Concluding observations on the second periodic report ...](#) (para 44), 2 December 2024

- Lawful Intercept Management System (LIMS), which allows interception of calls, texts, and internet activity of up to 4 million mobile phones at a time, including browsing history and location data¹⁷⁶
 - Web Monitoring System (WMS 2.0): A firewall that inspects and blocks internet traffic, targeting social media and websites¹⁷⁷
- 12.3.4 Direct evidence of technical surveillance abroad of political activists could not be found amongst sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 12.3.5 The Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), appointed by the House of Lords and the House of Commons to consider matters relating to human rights in the United Kingdom, stated that, according to evidence submitted to the inquiry on Transnational repression (TNR) in the UK, Pakistan was alleged to have perpetrated such acts. However, the report did not provide any specific examples and at that time noted ‘There is no formal definition of transnational repression in the UK’¹⁷⁸. In May 2025, as a result of a UK Government Taskforce review on the UK’s response to TNR, Minister of State for Security, Dan Jarvis, stated: ‘The UK recognises TNR as a term to describe certain foreign state-directed crimes against individuals. This activity can take place both physically or online, with examples including intimidation, surveillance, harassment, forced/coerced return, abduction and even assassination at the most serious end of the scale.’¹⁷⁹
- 12.3.6 Freedom House defined TNR as ‘governments reaching across borders to silence dissent among diasporas and exiles, including through assassinations, illegal deportations, abductions, digital threats, Interpol abuse, and family intimidation.’¹⁸⁰
- 12.3.7 According to the USSD HR Report 2023¹⁸¹, and the USSD HR Report 2024, ‘The government allegedly engaged in transnational repression to intimidate or extract reprisal against individuals outside its borders, including civil society activists, human rights defenders, and journalists.’¹⁸² The USSD did not provide its definition of TNR.

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12.4 Enforced disappearances

- 12.4.1 The Human Rights Committee’s concluding observations on the state report on implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), dated 2 December 2024, noted that:

‘The Committee is deeply concerned about reports of the increase in enforced disappearances, including those of short duration, torture and extrajudicial and summary executions allegedly perpetrated by members of the military and the police forces and of intelligence agencies, including extraterritorially, of human rights defenders, journalists, students, political activists, members of ethnic and religious minorities, public officials, including members of the Senate and the National Assembly, and political opponents and their families. It is also concerned about the lack of

¹⁷⁶ Amnesty International, [Pakistan: Shadows of Control ...](#) (page 18), 9 September 2025

¹⁷⁷ Amnesty International, [Pakistan: Shadows of Control ...](#) (pages 29, 44 to 47), 9 September 2025

¹⁷⁸ UK Parliament, JCHR, [TNR in the UK](#) (Summary, paragraph 8), 30 July 2025

¹⁷⁹ UK Parliament, [Transnational Repression Review](#), 14 May 2025

¹⁸⁰ Freedom House, [Transnational Repression](#), no date

¹⁸¹ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 1f), 22 April 2024

¹⁸² USSD, [2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan](#) (section 3e) 12 August 2025

information on judicial investigations and prosecutions and about reports indicating an alarming degree of impunity surrounding reported cases, which leads to further violations. It remains concerned about the lack of explicit criminalization of enforced disappearances in domestic law and at reports that the national Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances is not sufficiently independent and that its work to date has not resulted in any criminal convictions in cases of enforced disappearance.’¹⁸³

- 12.4.2 For further information on enforced disappearances, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).

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12.5 Attacks on political party members and supporters

- 12.5.1 The DFAT report noted that ‘Members of MQM have been the target of physical violence and extrajudicial killings, although the frequency of incidents has trended downwards since 2021. For example, an MQM party member was killed during clashes with rival PPP members in Karachi in January 2024 in the lead up to the general election. In February 2024, an MQM member was shot at his in-laws’ home in Karachi by unknown assailants.’¹⁸⁴
- 12.5.2 In their security report for 2024, the research and advocacy think-tank¹⁸⁵, Pak Institute for Peace Studies PIPS, cited an increase in political violence and armed clashes compared to 2023, which occurred across 15 districts between January and April 2024, linked to the February 2024 general elections. The report noted:
- ‘While only two such incidents were reported in 2023, as many as 19 were recorded in 2024, resulting in 15 deaths and 43 injuries ... The violence involved workers and supporters from various political parties. In Punjab, the clashes included members of PML-N, PTI, PPP, and PML-Q. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, parties such as PPP, PTI, and JUI-F were involved. Incidents in Sindh included supporters of PPP, MQM-P, and GDA, while in Balochistan, clashing workers included those affiliated with PPP, BAP, PML-N, PTI, and independent candidates.’¹⁸⁶
- See also [General elections – February 2024](#)
- 12.5.3 The chart below, drawn from data recorded by PIPS, in their 2021¹⁸⁷, 2022¹⁸⁸, 2023¹⁸⁹ and 2024¹⁹⁰ security reports, shows the number of targeted terrorist attacks against political leaders/workers compared to the total number of terrorist attacks (most of which targeted security and law enforcement personnel) in those years:

¹⁸³ UNHRC, [Concluding observations on the second periodic report ...](#) (para 24), 2 December 2024

¹⁸⁴ DFAT, [Country Information Report Pakistan](#) (paragraph 3.139), 30 April 2025

¹⁸⁵ PIPS, [Concept note](#), no date

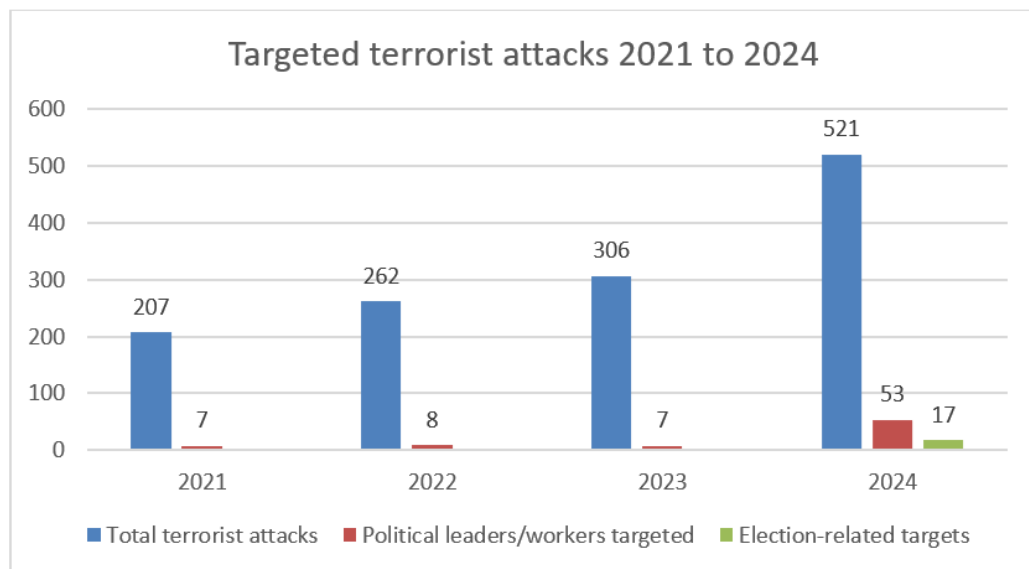
¹⁸⁶ PIPS, [Security Report 2024: An abridged version](#) (page 12), 1 January 2025

¹⁸⁷ PIPS, [Security Report 2021](#) (pages 16 to 17), 7 January 2022

¹⁸⁸ PIPS, [Security Report 2022](#) (page 12), 24 February 2023

¹⁸⁹ PIPS, [Security Report 2023](#) (page 16), 3 June 2024

¹⁹⁰ PIPS, [Security Report 2024: An abridged version](#) (page 5), 1 January 2025



12.5.4 According to the PIPS security reports for 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, the majority of terrorist attacks overall took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces^{191 192 193 194}.

12.5.5 The USSD HR Reports for 2021 and 2022 both noted that, ‘Militants carried out numerous attacks on political party offices and candidates.’^{195 196} The USSD HR Report 2023 repeated this assertion¹⁹⁷.

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12.6 MQM-London (MQM-L)

12.6.1 In June 2023 it was reported that the official website of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) leader and founder Altaf Hussain was unblocked in Pakistan after it had been banned for 7 years^{198 199}. The MQM-L site was blocked in August 2016 following Hussain’s anti-Pakistan speech^{200 201}.

12.6.2 Altaf Hussain’s speeches were still banned from broadcast in Pakistan, according to reports^{202 203}. The Lahore High Court (LHC) originally imposed this restriction in 2015 after his alleged ‘anti-army’ remarks, and petitions seeking a permanent ban were still being heard as of March 2025^{204 205 206}. The MQM-L was not listed as a proscribed group on the Pakistani government list of proscribed organisations²⁰⁷.

¹⁹¹ PIPS, [Security Report 2021](#) (page 17), 7 January 2022

¹⁹² PIPS, [Security Report 2022](#) (page 13), 24 February 2023

¹⁹³ PIPS, [Security Report 2023](#) (page 17), 3 June 2024

¹⁹⁴ PIPS, [Security Report 2024: An abridged version](#) (page 6), 1 January 2024

¹⁹⁵ USSD, ‘[Country Report on Human Rights 2021](#)’ (section 1g), 12 April 2022

¹⁹⁶ USSD, ‘[Country Report on Human Rights 2022](#)’ (section 1g), 20 March 2023

¹⁹⁷ USSD, [Country Report on Human Rights 2023](#) (section 1i), 22 April 2024

¹⁹⁸ Dawn, [MQM-L website unblocked in Pakistan after seven years](#), 23 June 2023

¹⁹⁹ Geo TV, [After seven years hiatus, MQM founder Altaf Hussain’s website ...](#), 24 June 2023

²⁰⁰ Dawn, [MQM-L website unblocked in Pakistan after seven years](#), 23 June 2023

²⁰¹ The News, [Why did MQM split?](#), 27 September 2016

²⁰² Dawn, [LHC summons AGP to assist with 2015 plea seeking ban on Altaf ...](#), 19 March 2025

²⁰³ PPF, [LHC Reviews Petition Seeking Ban on Altaf Hussain’s Media Coverage ...](#), 25 March 2025

²⁰⁴ Dawn, [LHC summons AGP to assist with 2015 plea seeking ban on Altaf ...](#), 19 March 2025

²⁰⁵ Business Recorder, [Plea against ban on Altaf’s speeches: LHC FB adjourns ...](#), 20 March 2025

²⁰⁶ PPF, [LHC Reviews Petition Seeking Ban on Altaf Hussain’s Media Coverage ...](#), 25 March 2025

²⁰⁷ NACTA, [NACTA: List of Proscribed Organizations](#), no date

- 12.6.3 In July 2023, The Express Tribune reported that 28 MQM-L workers were arrested after taking part in a rally where they expressed support for the party's founder, Altaf Hussain²⁰⁸.
- 12.6.4 In February 2024, the MQM-L announced it was backing 81 independent candidates in the national election. According to the party, at least 3 candidates were arrested ahead of the elections when police raided their homes soon after the MQM-L announced their support. The MQM-L also said that 15 other candidates' houses were raided by police in Karachi and Hyderabad²⁰⁹.
- 12.6.5 The HRCP's State of Human Rights in 2024 report stated, in the section covering missing people in Sindh province, that 'Allegations of victimization ... surfaced against MQM-London candidates. Nisar Panhwar and his son Mohsin Nisar, both provincial assembly candidates, were reportedly taken by law enforcement agencies during a raid at their home in Saadi Town on 9 January [2024]. Nisar Panhwar's other son, Hassan Nisar, approached the Sindh High Court seeking the recovery of his father and brother.'²¹⁰
- 12.6.6 Dawn news reported on 7 February 2024 that Panhwar and Mohsin were contesting the February 2024 elections '... as independent candidates backed by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-London.'²¹¹
- 12.6.7 Voicepk.net, a Pakistan digital media platform dedicated to investigating, reporting & broadcasting human rights and legal issues²¹², reported that the pair were '... held in illegal detention for 43 days, during which their whereabouts were unknown to their family. The family approached the Sindh High Court, which directed recovery. They were released on February 21, 2024, without any judicial process, underscoring custodial torture and enforced disappearance.'²¹³ According to the same report, this was the fourth time Nisar Panhwar had been 'abducted' and unlawfully detained by state agents since before 2022 (specific dates were not publicly available). Panhwar went missing again on 16 September 2025 with another MQM-L-affiliated leader, Anwar Khan Tareen²¹⁴.
- 12.6.8 Police in Hyderabad arrested 6 MQM-L supporters and booked over 60 others for chanting anti-Pakistan slogans during a Yom-e-Shuhda [martyr's day] gathering at Pukka Qila, reported The Express Tribune on 11 December 2024²¹⁵. Authorities had blocked access to the memorial site with barbed wire and heavy security. A FIR (first information report) cited sections of the Pakistan Penal Code and Anti-Terrorism Act. Meanwhile, a Karachi court discharged 24 MQM-London activists arrested for violating Section 144, ruling that police lacked grounds for remand and ordering their release on surety bonds²¹⁶.
- 12.6.9 According to a report on Hamariweb.com, a Pakistan-based 'info portal', dated 9 January 2025, 'Altaf Hussain banners in Karachi appeared recently

²⁰⁸ Express Tribune, [Crackdown continues as police arrest 28 MQM-London workers ...](#), 10 July 2023

²⁰⁹ Arab News, [Candidates backed by Altaf Hussain's MQM arrested ahead of ...](#), 6 February 2024

²¹⁰ HRCP, [State of Human Rights in 2024](#) (page 71), 2025.

²¹¹ Dawn, [SHC irked by poor investigation in missing persons cases](#), 7 February 2024

²¹² Voicepk.net, [About Us](#), no date

²¹³ Voicepk.net, [Two MQM senior leaders go missing again from Karachi](#), 17 September 2025

²¹⁴ Voicepk.net, [Two MQM senior leaders go missing again from Karachi](#), 17 September 2025

²¹⁵ Express Tribune, [Six MQM-London workers arrested](#), 11 December 2024

²¹⁶ Express Tribune, [Six MQM-London workers arrested](#), 11 December 2024

and have reignited debates about his potential return to Pakistan's political scene. After a 9-year absence, a large banner was prominently displayed at the Aisha Manzil Karachi's pedestrian bridge ... While there is no official confirmation of Hussain's return, the reappearance of his banners has underscored his continued influence.'²¹⁷

- 12.6.10 However, it was reported that Altaf Hussain posted a message on X on 10 August 2025, in which he released party workers from their 'oath of loyalty' and said they were free to join any political party of their choice^{218 219}. He also said that he '... would continue the struggle for rights [of Mohajirs] through social media as long as he lived.'²²⁰

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²¹⁷ Hamariweb, [Altaf Hussain Banners in Karachi Spark Controversy and Rumors ...](#), 9 January 2025

²¹⁸ MM News, [Did MQM founder Altaf Hussain quit politics?](#), 11 August 2025

²¹⁹ Dialogue Pakistan, [Governor Sindh claims Altaf Hussain set to return to ...](#), 12 August 2025

²²⁰ MM News, [Did MQM founder Altaf Hussain quit politics?](#), 11 August 2025

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Political context and system, including military influence on governance.
- Ability to register parties and contest elections; barriers to participation.
- Treatment of members/supporters of mainstream parties (PML-N, PPP, PTI), sectarian parties, and ethnic movements.
- Specific focus on PTI, PTM, MQM (including MQM-London), and other dissenting voices.
- Patterns of repression: arrests, enforced disappearances, sedition laws, travel bans.
- Freedom of expression, right to protest, and surveillance practices.
- Political violence and attacks on activists.
- Corruption allegations and selective accountability.

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **02 February 2026**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information since May 2023, and updated assessment in line

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Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

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Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support them in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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