

CIFORB Country Profile – Pakistan

Demographics

Pakistan is an ethnically and religiously diverse country of approximately 200 million people.

Religious breakdown: 96.4% - Muslim (85-90% Sunni, 10-15% Shia), 3.6% - Other (e.g. Christians, Hindus)

Religious Demographics

- The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Pakistan identify as Sunni. The smaller Shia population is spread throughout Pakistan, and there are no provinces where Shias constitute a majority. The semi-autonomous region of Gilgit–Baltistan is one of the few areas where Shias form a majority of the population.

<https://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/dfat-tir-pakistan.pdf>

- Shias in Pakistan are often employed in Government and hold high offices. Notable examples include former Presidents and Prime Ministers. Shias are well represented in Parliament, the police, judiciary and other institutions. Shias are also represented in Pakistan’s Council of Islamic Ideology, the Constitutional body that provides advice to the Government of Pakistan on issues of Islamic jurisprudence and practice. Shias also have representation in the Shariat Courts.
- Sectarian violence between Sunni Deobandi and Shia Muslims in Pakistan has escalated in recent years. Most of this violence is perpetrated via local networks, but the sectarian phenomenon also has important ties to regional security dynamics and transnational ‘terrorist’ networks.

<http://www.usip.org/publications/pakistan-s-resurgent-sectarian-war>

- Two to four million Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, but Pakistani law does not recognise them as such. Prior to 1974, they were treated as Sunni. Although the 1998 Pakistani census states that there are 291,000 (0.22%) Ahmadis in Pakistan, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has boycotted the census since 1974, which makes official Pakistani figures likely to be inaccurate.
- According to an Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report on Pakistan, it is generally not possible to identify Ahmadis by name alone. However, it would be presumed that someone with an address in Rabwah was Ahmadi.

<http://dfat.gov.au/geo/pakistan/pages/pakistan-country-brief.aspx>

- Most of Pakistan's Hindu community lives in the southern province of Sindh. The majority of the Pakistani Christian community is spread throughout the central Punjab province, while Christians in other provinces are usually found in urban areas.

Language:

Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashto (alternate name, Pashtu) 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (official; lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.htm>

Geography.

- The Islamic Republic of Pakistan includes four provinces — Sindh (capital, Karachi), Punjab (capital, Lahore), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North-West Frontier Province) (capital, Peshawar) and Balochistan (capital, Quetta).
- All four provinces have their own elected provincial assemblies and governments. A Chief Minister heads each provincial government. Each province has a governor, who is appointed by the President of Pakistan. The chief minister is the head of the provincial government, whereas in contrast, the governor is the nominal head, or the 'de jure executive', and acts under the guidance of the chief minister. The chief minister is elected by the provincial assembly, and is the leader of the provincial Legislature
- Islamabad is a special 'Federal Capital Territory'. In addition, the Federal Government administers seven tribal agencies (Bajaur, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, Orakzai, South and North Waziristan) and six frontier regions. Collectively these thirteen administrative units are known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).
- Pakistan also administers approximately one-third of the area of the former princely states of Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan — also known as the 'Northern Areas' of Pakistan — which have a quasi-provincial status, and are not represented in the national parliament (legislature). They have their own elected parliaments and governments.

Political Affairs

- **Nawaz SHARIF** took office as Prime Minister in 2013, marking the first time

in Pakistani history that a democratically elected government completed a full term and transitioned to a successive democratically elected government. He is a member of the Pakistan Muslim League (N). His party draws its electoral support from central and northern Punjab. He resigned in July 2017 and was succeeded by Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the parliamentary election in 2018, and is the current Prime Minister.

Political Parties

- PML-N centre-right, fiscally and socially conservative party, the PML-N draws its strength from Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province.
- The Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) is a centre-right party drawn primarily from defectors from the rival PML-N who chose to support General Pervez Musharraf in the aftermath of his coup against the democratically elected government.
- The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was in power following the 2013 elections, having led a coalition government through a tumultuous period in Pakistan's political history.
- The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI, or Movement for Justice) was formed in 1996, after Imran Khan retired following a remarkably successful career as an international cricketer. The party's aim was primarily to wipe out corruption and tackle ineffective governance.
- The Awami National Party (ANP) is a left of centre, secular political movement, which focuses on Pashtun nationalism and wants improved ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan, India and the US despite its opposition to US drone attacks in the country's tribal areas. The ANP has been continually targeted in militant attacks, particularly those staged by the Pakistani Taliban.

Parliament (Majlis-i-Shoora) is bicameral, with a 342-member National Assembly (NA) and a 104-member Senate. The constitution envisages a parliamentary system of government headed by a prime minister, who must command a majority in the NA. An electoral college consisting of the Senate, the NA, and the provincial assemblies elects the president for up to two five-year terms.

Of the 342 seats, 272 are filled through direct elections in single-member districts, 60 are reserved for women, and ten are reserved for non-Muslim minorities (HH-although not Ahmiaydias). The reserved seats are filled through a proportional representation system with closed party lists. The seats for women are allocated in proportion to the number of general seats a party gains in each of the provinces. Parties fill the non-Muslim seats in proportion to the number of seats they win nationwide. The provincial assemblies employ a similar electoral system.

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/pakistan>

Problems with minority representation

- In the 2012 Stakeholder Submission to the UPR, AMC noted Pakistan marginalized Ahmadi Muslims by placing them on a separate electoral roll. Non-Muslim minorities, including Christians and Hindus, could only vote for non-Muslim candidates, comprising 5 percent of the National Assembly seats. In order to vote, they were forced to register on –non-Muslim electoral rolls, which may effectively deprive some of them this right.

<http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/4973789.45350647.html>

- Articles 62 and 63 of the constitution demand that a candidate be a ‘good Muslim of integrity and honesty’ who practises Islam, abstains from major sins and is knowledgeable about the religion.
- Article 62 of the Constitution specifies the qualifications that a prospective Parliamentarian must meet before he can be elected to the National or Provincial Assemblies in Pakistan whereas Article 63 lists the disqualifications.
- These provisions were introduced to the constitution in 1985 as a means of convincing the religious right that the government he was serious about Islamicising Pakistan. These provisions have not been removed since, as they are perceived as being impossible to implement in any event.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1125095>

Religious Political Parties

- Although the electoral performance of religious political parties remains poor, they have attempted to shape Pakistani public opinion on many issues, and remain influential. In 2011, the government was slow to condemn the killer of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, who were assassinated for calling for reform of the country's blasphemy laws.

<http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/islam-politics-pakistan/p24728>

- In addition, a handful of successive [legislative attempts](#) to reform the nation's anti-blasphemy laws were promptly shut down after popular protests, demonstrating the hold of the Islamic community over the government.

Military

- Pakistan's military has used real and perceived threats from India to remain at the centre of decision-making in the country, especially on foreign policy. It has seized power on a number of occasions, undermining democratic

institutions.

Religious Affairs

- The United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted in 2015 that 'No action was taken to reform repressive laws, with observers noting that the National Assembly spent only 15 hours out of over 1,000 to discuss rising violence against religious minorities.'
- It also observed that there were around 40 people on death row or serving life sentences for blasphemy, a statistic unmatched in the world. The blasphemy law also fosters violence against religious minorities, such as Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis. For example, 106 Muslims were acquitted from charges following an attack on a Christian neighbourhood in 2013. The group attacked the neighbourhood in retaliation to a Christian, Sawan Masih, being charged with blasphemy. Masih was given the death penalty in 2014, but his appeal is still pending in the Lahore High Court.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dclid=222339>

- In February 2017, the Pakistani National Assembly unanimously passed an amendment bill that curbs hate speech, forced marriage, and sectarianism. The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2016 enhances the yearlong imprisonment and unspecified fine for the offence of 'deliberately using words to hurt the religious feelings of any person', extending the sentence to a max of three years imprisonment, but no less than one, and/or a fine of Rs 500,000 (£3,800). The amendment prescribes the same punishment for inciting religious, sectarian or ethnic hatred by using loudspeakers or sound amplifier. The new law also proposes punishment for forced marriages or women and girls belonging to minority groups. In the amendment, a proviso has been added to provide for a sentence of up to 10 years and not less than five years and a fine of up to Rs1 million in the case of a girl child as defined in the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1992, or a non-Muslim woman - law hasn't received formal assent yet, however there is widespread support for the law, including from minority rights groups
- In 2016, over 1,000 Pakistanis applied for Indian citizenship on the grounds of religious persecution. Throughout the year there were 12,800 applications for long terms visas, and more than 1,200 applications for Indian citizenship from Pakistani minorities. Moreover, a number of Pakistani Hindus and Sikhs who entered India on pilgrimage visas have not returned to Pakistan on grounds of religious persecution.

Human Rights Record

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

- Pakistan's NHRC came into being in 2015 but is expressly barred from examining human rights violations by intelligence agencies, and is only allowed to seek a report from the government in cases of allegations against the armed forces. It is not clear yet whether it will get accreditation under Paris principles.

Ministry of Human Rights

- Ministry of Human Rights (MHR) was downgraded in 2013 from an independent ministry and merged into the Ministry of Law and Justice (MLJ). NHRC of Pakistan observed that this merging was problematic, as the MLJ was responsible for defending existing laws and the state, while the MHR was mandated to redress grievances of victims.
- In November 2015, the government declared the MHR an independent ministry, separate from the MLJ with which it had previously been merged. The decision was taken in late October after the country failed to win re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Forced conversions

- On 24th November 2016, the Sindh Assembly adopted a bill against forceful religious conversions. The bill recommends a five-year punishment for perpetrators, whereas facilitators will receive a sentence of three years. The bill also contains provisions for life sentences. It mandates a 21-day period for adults to consider their decision to convert, and forbids minors from choosing another religion of their free will.

Death Penalty

- 351 individuals have been executed between December 2014 and December 2016. The moratorium on the death penalty was lifted in 2014. The death penalty can be imposed 27 offences, including rape, drug smuggling, adultery and blasphemy. At least 40 people remain on death row for blasphemy, and 20 are serving life sentences.

FORB Record

- The right to religious conscience is a fundamental right under article 20 of the Pakistani Constitution. It has not been subjected or subordinated to any other provision of the Constitution, but may be restricted by law, public order and morality. However, this framework has been used to target religious minorities such as the Ahmadis.

- In the case of *Zaheeruddin v. State* (1993), five Ahmadis were charged for blasphemy under section 298C of Pakistan's Penal Code. The petitioners were charged with the offence of 'directly or indirectly posing as a Muslim' because they were found wearing badges displaying the Islamic declaration of faith. The case hinged on the fact that Ahmadis were not recognised as legitimate Muslims in Pakistan. The Supreme Court of Pakistan upheld the constitutionality of section 298C by relying on the 'public order' and 'morality' limitation ground found in article 20 of Pakistan's constitution. Incidentally, a moral framework based solely on Sunni Islam was relied upon to justify the restriction of the petitioners' freedom of religion.
- In practice, Pakistan has frequently faced challenges in the protection and promotion of FoRB. The most prominent of such issues has been with respect to blasphemy. For example, in a recent case, Patras Masih, a Pakistani Christian was arrested for allegedly sharing a picture of 'an unidentified man standing triumphantly atop the prophet Muhammad's tomb'. His cousin, Sajid Masih, who was also accused of blasphemy, jumped out of fourth-story window while being questioned at a police building, and nearly died of his injuries.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/christians-come-under-threat-in-pakistan-no-one-accused-of-blasphemy-is-ever-safe/2018/03/15/d5f88f46-232b-11e8-946c-9420060cb7bd_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.0e164394a699