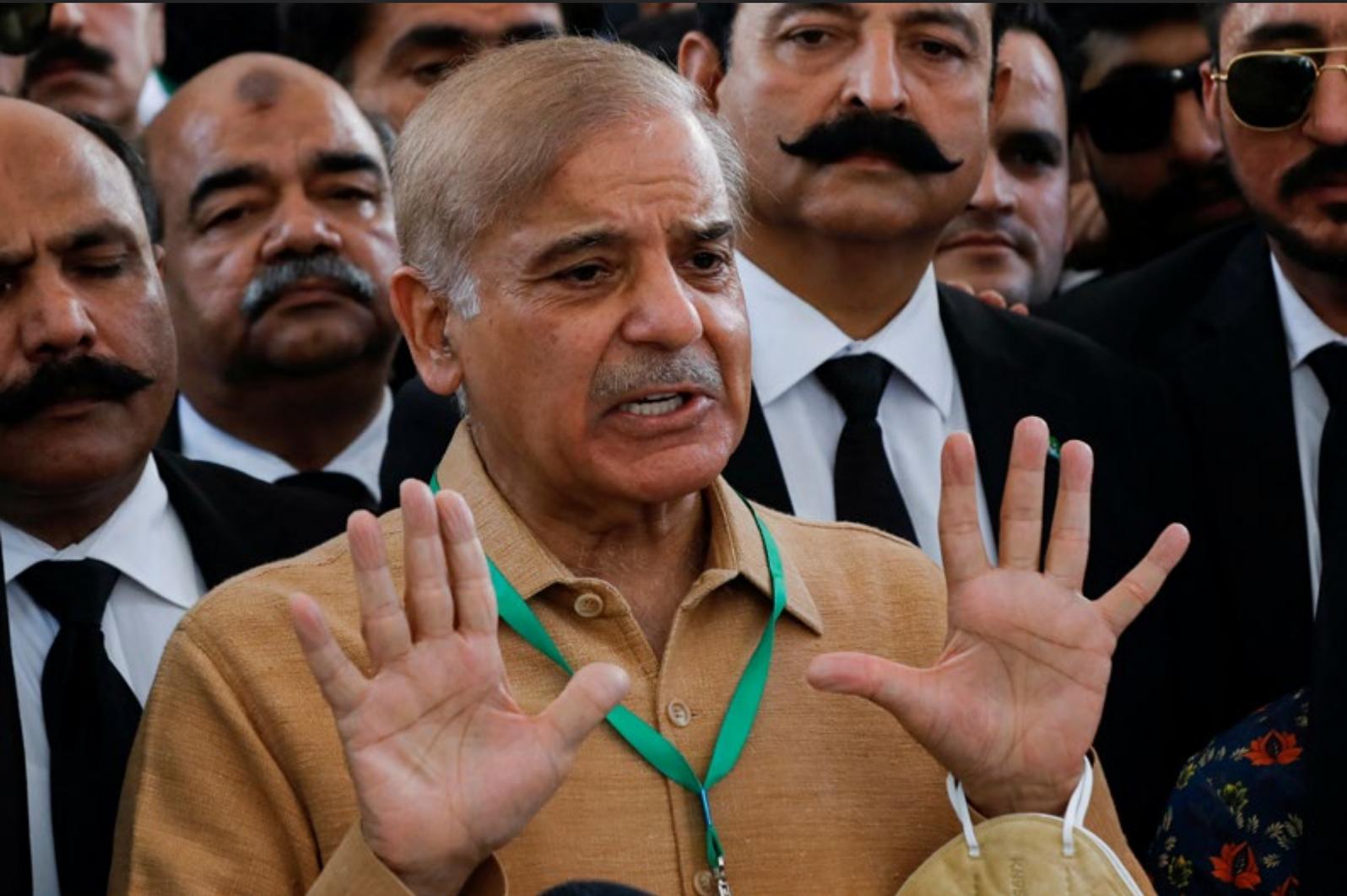


PAKISTAN

OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS



Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif April, 2022 (Photo Credit: REUTERS Akhtar Soomro)



INTRODUCTION

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#), a civil society platform that tracks civic space conditions around the world, has documented numerous violations of civic freedoms in Pakistan, including the targeting of activists, human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists, a continued crackdown on protests, the use of counter-terrorism and digital laws to criminalise online dissent, the persecution of ethnic minority activists, the failure to address enforced disappearances and ongoing efforts to crush the political opposition. Due to this, Pakistan is rated as [repressed](#) by the CIVICUS Monitor, the second worst category, and was flagged as a country of concern in the latest [People Power Under Attack report](#) published in December 2025.

The civic space situation has worsened since Pakistan's [controversial February 2026 election](#). Former Prime Minister Imran Khan was barred from running after the Election Commission of Pakistan disqualified him over his 2023 graft conviction, and he is now in jail. His Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party faced [restrictions](#) ahead of the election. The Supreme Court stripped of its [election symbol](#), which is used to identify party candidates. This led to the Election Commission rejecting the nomination of PTI candidates, forcing them to run as independents. PTI members also faced arbitrary detention, [harassment](#) and intimidation ahead of the elections. There was a total blackout of PTI on national media, and the party was not allowed to hold public gatherings or meetings during the campaign.

Despite this, politicians allied with Khan [won the most seats](#), but no party achieved a simple majority. Khan alleged that his party had been deprived of a far greater mandate by widespread rigging and manipulation of results.

On 21 February 2024, two political parties – The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party – reached a formal agreement to form a new coalition government. On 3 March 2024, the newly elected National Assembly chose [Shehbaz Sharif](#) from the PML-N as the country's new prime minister.

Pakistan's civic space violations contravene the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Pakistan ratified in 2010. The ICCPR imposes international obligations on the state to respect and protect civic freedoms, including freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly. These rights are also enshrined in Pakistan's constitution.

Pakistan's actions are also inconsistent with recommendations made by states to the government in January 2023 during the fourth cycle of its [Universal Periodic Review](#) at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council and the [concluding observations](#) issued by the UN Human Rights Committee during the review of Pakistan's implementation of the ICCPR in October 2024. Despite these failings, in October 2025, Pakistan was [elected](#) to the Human Rights Council for a three-year term starting in January 2026, after securing 178 votes in the UN General Assembly.

This brief assesses actions undertaken by the current Pakistan government, highlights issues of concern and makes recommendations for improvements.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The CIVICUS Monitor, an online platform that tracks threats to civil society in countries across the globe, rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Pakistan as **Repressed**.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED**REPRESSED****OBSTRUCTED****NARROWED****OPEN**



INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND PERSECUTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

HRDs remain at risk in Pakistan. In 2024, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) raised concerns about the chilling effect that criminal defamation, counter-terrorism and sedition laws and other recently adopted legislation have on the exercise of freedom of expression by HRDs. The Committee was also concerned about frequent reports of enforced disappearance, harassment, intimidation, killing, threats and torture against HRDs and others in civil society perceived to be critical of the government or to be promoting sensitive issues, perpetrated by state and non-state personnel, and highlighted the high level of impunity for these crimes.

The state misuses several laws to target HRDs including the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (MPO), Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), Official Secrets Act and section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which prohibits public gatherings.

On 26 July 2024, the Shehbaz Sharif government [arbitrarily detained](#) Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRC) chair Asad Iqbal Butt for three hours in a raid on his home in Karachi in a bid to stop his participation in a 28 July 2024 rally against enforced disappearances in Gwadar, Balochistan province. The HRC, the country's foremost independent rights watchdog, [said](#) it believed 'this measure was an intimidation tactic designed to stifle the voice of human rights defenders'.



Human rights defender Asad Iqbal Butt
(Photo Credit: Dawn.com)

In April 2025, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) [launched an inquiry](#) against well-respected HRD and former senator Farhatullah Babar following allegations of financial corruption. [According to the HRC](#), the timing of this probe raised serious doubts about its legitimacy, given that Babar, who has been the driving force behind some of Pakistan's most progressive legislation and serves on the HRC's governing council, has long been a vocal critic of state policies and institutions.

June and July 2025 saw a [systematic clampdown](#) on the HRC. Its meetings and public consultations, particularly in Gilgit-Baltistan and the capital, Islamabad, were forcibly cancelled after hotels, under state pressure, demanded No Objection Certificates (NOCs) – official permission issued by the district government – to proceed. It is [not a legal requirement](#) to have NOCs for indoor meetings. The HRC's operations in Lahore also faced disruption, including local authorities sealing its office in late 2024 on vague grounds.

Police have consistently targeted human rights lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari and her husband Hadi Ali Chattha. Mazari has [represented](#) numerous victims of human rights violations, taking up sensitive cases of arbitrary arrest, custodial violations, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Islamabad police [arrested](#) both on 28 October 2024 for allegedly 'creating a security risk' during the England cricket team's visit by removing road barriers. A video, shared on social media, purportedly showed Chattha and Mazari moving road barriers to clear the path for traffic. They were charged with 'interference in state duties', an offence under section 186 of the Penal Code and ATA section 7 on punishment for acts of terrorism. An Islamabad anti-terrorism court (ATC) placed them on a three-day [physical remand](#).



Human rights lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari
(Photo Credit: Front Line Defenders)

In March 2025, the FIA's Cybercrimes Reporting Unit in Lahore issued them a [summons](#) to appear for an inquiry based on what appear to be baseless allegations of blasphemy. Another [case](#) was filed against them on 12 August 2025 under PECA sections relating to cyber terrorism, false and fake information and hate speech,



alleging that Mazari had posted content on her Twitter/X account from 2021 to 2025 ‘targeting important State Institutions of Pakistan’. Chattha faced the same charges for sharing and reposting Mazari’s posts. On 24 January 2026, the two were [convicted and sentenced](#) to 17 years in jail under PECA for their multiple social posts.

In July 2025, plainclothes officers from the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) detained HRD [Gulzar Dost](#) at his home in Turbat, Balochistan province. The arresting officials reportedly did not show a warrant for his arrest, nor did they provide Dost with information on the charges he faced. The CTD held him incommunicado for several hours before confirming he was in its custody at its headquarters in Turbat. Charges filed against Dost include terrorism-related offences. He was reportedly released on bail on 1 August 2025.

HRDs have also faced abductions and attacks. In October 2025, plainclothes men [abducted](#) student activist Ghani Aman from the Memona Hospital, Karachi, where his daughter was receiving treatment. The men were accompanied by Rangers personnel. Ghani, a student leader and the Chief Organiser of the Sindhian National Students Federation, has been speaking out on issues of state oppression and social injustice for years.

[Abdul Latif Baloch](#), an HRD and journalist who regularly wrote about human rights violations in Balochistan, was shot dead in his home in Mashkay town, Awaran district, Balochistan in May 2025.

HRD Idris Khattak has spent over [six years in detention](#) in reprisal for his work. He [campaigns](#) for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, particularly against violations by intelligence agencies and the military in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area. Khattak was forcibly disappeared in November 2019 and found in state custody over seven months later. In December 2021, a military court tried and convicted him under the Official Secrets Act and sentenced him to 14 years’ imprisonment. In December 2024, [UN experts condemned](#) his unlawful detention and called on the government of Pakistan to ensure his immediate and unconditional release.

There are increasing concerns for HRDs after the National Assembly [passed amendments](#) to the ATA in August 2025, restoring preventive detention powers for security agencies. The [amendments](#) allow armed forces, the police and civil armed forces, including gendarmerie and paramilitary organisations responsible for maintaining internal security, to detain people suspected of terrorism or other serious offences for up to three months on the basis of ‘credible information’ or ‘reasonable suspicion’.

TARGETING OF BALOCH AND PASHTUN ACTIVISM

Since 2024, the state has led a relentless and systematic crackdown on activists for the rights of the Baloch ethnic minority, particularly the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), a peaceful grassroots movement that has mobilised thousands to demand accountability, justice and an end to enforced disappearances in Balochistan.

Police used [excessive force against protesters](#) who gathered in Quetta, Balochistan on 11 July 2024 to demand the release of a civilian reportedly abducted by the CTD. Police [opened fire](#) on the protesters and used baton charges and teargas. Several protesters, including women and children, suffered injuries. According to [Amnesty International](#), there were also mass arbitrary and unlawful arrests of peaceful protesters.

There were reports of police abuse and violence ahead of and during the Baloch National Gathering organised by the BYC in Gwadar Balochistan on 28 July 2024. In the weeks leading up to the gathering, BYC members and people associated with it faced [reprisals](#) by state authorities including arrests, false legal cases, raids and surveillance. The HRCP reported that some of the gathering’s organisers [received threats](#) demanding they call it off or face arrest or enforced disappearance.



Woman human rights defender Dr. Mahrang Baloch at a gathering in Dalbandin (Photo Credit: FB/@Baloch Yakjehti Committee)

From 26 to 28 July 2024, major highways in Balochistan were [blocked](#) by the military using containers, heavy stones and large trucks to prevent people joining the gathering. Bus drivers were threatened and told not to transport attendees. Internet, mobile and landline access were also [reportedly blocked](#), reducing avenues for information to be shared. [According to Human Rights Watch](#), the authorities detained hundreds of people. On 29 July 2024, uniformed armed personnel [detained](#) at least three HRDs: Sabiha Baloch, Sammi Deen Baloch and Sabghatullah Abdul Haq.

On 8 September 2024, authorities [restricted](#) Sammi Deen Baloch from travelling to Muscat, Oman. The state put her name on an Exit Control List, which prevents her travelling abroad. The state uses such tactics to restrict the movement of HRDs.

In October 2024, prominent human rights activist Mahrang Baloch was [charged](#) with aiding separatist groups in Balochistan. The charges against Baloch, a BYC leader, include accusations of incitement, spreading hatred and facilitating terrorist organisations under the ATA and several sections of the Penal Code. In January 2025, Pakistan authorities [registered another First Information Report](#) against Mahrang Baloch and other participants over a gathering held in the Tepul area of Naseerabad for violating section 144 Code of Criminal Procedure, which prohibits public gatherings of five or more people.

[According to Amnesty International](#), CTD officials took Baloch activists Bebag Zehri and Hammal Zehri from their home in Quetta on 20 March 2025 following a BYC press conference at the Quetta Press Club. On 22 March 2025, police [arrested](#) Beebow Baloch and Mahrang Baloch during a peaceful protest in Quetta. Police held them under the [MPO](#) and brought additional terrorism charges against Mahrang. The police use MPO section 3 to prolong the arbitrary detention of activists in violation of their rights to liberty and due process. It allows the police to order preventive detention of a person if they foresee the person intends to engage in activities that could 'disturb public order' or 'endanger public safety.'

On 24 March 2025, police detained at least six activists, including Sammi Deen Baloch, for disregarding a blanket ban on assemblies from 24 March to 31 March 2025 in Karachi, Sindh province, following a protest there. They [released](#) her on 1 April 2025.

[CTD officers](#) took BYC activist Shah Jee Sibghat Ullah from his home in Quetta on 30 March 2025 and detained him under MPO section 3. CTD personnel and police detained another BYC activist, Gulzadi Baloch, in Quetta on 7 April 2025. Security forces also [raided the home](#) of Sabiha Baloch on 16 July 2025.

The Balochistan authorities, through notifications issued in October 2025, designated 32 people from Chagai, Kech and Khuzdar districts, Balochistan province, as 'proscribed individuals' under section 11-EE in the Fourth Schedule of the ATA. These include women activists Shalee Assa, Sabiha Baloch, Sammi Deen Baloch, Naz Gul and Syed Babi Sharif.

[According to Amnesty International](#), the designation places people under heavy surveillance and severely restricts their freedom of movement and ability to take part in public life. Proscribed individuals cannot travel outside designated areas without express permission from their local police station. It also grants the authorities powers to investigate and freeze financial assets of a person and their immediate family members.

In June 2025, the Balochistan Assembly adopted the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act, 2025, giving law enforcement agencies [excessive powers](#). [Civil society raised concerns](#) that the law grants sweeping powers of preventive detention for up to three



Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) chief Manzoor Pashteen (Photo Credit: X/ Asad Ali Toor)

months without formal charges, an unacceptable measure that undermines the fundamental rights to liberty, due process and protection from arbitrary arrest.

The state has also targeted the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), also known as the Pashtun Protection Movement. This is a prominent group founded in 2014 that advocates for the rights of ethnic Pashtuns. It is known for its strident criticism of Pakistan's powerful military over its role in alleged enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of ethnic leaders and rights activists. In October 2024 the government [banned](#) the PTM after [placing it](#) on the List of Proscribed Organisations under the first schedule of the ATA.

The authorities allegedly [fired upon peaceful Pashtun protesters](#) at Tirah Valley, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in July 2025, killing seven ethnic Pashtuns and injuring over 20 others. The group had gathered to protest after a child was killed by mortar fire.

In November 2025, an anti-terrorism court reissued non-bailable [arrest warrants](#) for PTM chief Manzoor Pashteen and National Assembly member Mohsin Dawar in a four-year-old sedition case. The two were charged with allegedly committing sedition, delivering speeches defaming the state, holding an unlawful assembly and rioting in Shah Latif Town, Karachi, in 2018.

CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTERS AND RESTRICTIONS ON PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In October 2024, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) raised concerns about legislation that unduly restricts the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly, such as the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act, 2024, as well as about reports that authorities frequently impose blanket bans on assemblies under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, particularly to ban gatherings deemed unfavourable to the government.



Karachi Aurat March 2024 (Photo Credit: Alizee Ali Khan)

The Committee also raised concerns about the use of the provisions on sedition and unlawful assembly in the ATA, MPO and Penal Code, resulting in the prolonged detention of protesters, notably activists, HRDs, members of ethnic and religious minorities and political opponents.

In September 2024, the government bulldozed a [new law](#) to regulate protests through parliament that would increase restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly. The Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act 2024, which is applicable only to the Islamabad Capital Territory, [expands](#) the authorities' power to ban or restrict assemblies in Islamabad on broad grounds, including the 'disruption of daily activities', and significantly increases the maximum penalty for taking part in an 'unlawful assembly' from six months to three years' imprisonment.

The authorities have systematically targeted the women-led [Aurat March](#) since it first mobilised to mark International Women's Day in 2018. Women's rights activists condemned [actions taken against Aurat March participants](#) by Islamabad police on International Women's Day on 8 March 2024. This was the fifth consecutive year the organisation was denied an NOC, and the police obstructed the march. Despite this, a large number of people took part in the march to raise their voices against the discrimination, harassment and violence women are subjected to in Pakistan.

The following month, police blocked and arrested [farmers from across Punjab province](#) who gathered to protest against what they believe to be the authorities' unfair wheat procurement policy. The protesters managed to assemble at Mall Road in Lahore and attempted to march towards the Punjab Assembly,

where a heavy contingent of police intercepted them. Police placed containers to block the road, and Punjab police in anti-riot gear arrested over 250 farmers.

In May 2024, the authorities tried to quell a [protest against rising costs](#) of food, fuel and utility bills that erupted in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The protests were organised by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JKJAAC), an alliance demanding civil liberties and political rights in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir region. Police [arrested around 70 JKAAC activists](#) during raids on their homes and those of their relatives in Mirpur and Muzaffarabad divisions. The police [fired teargas shells](#) to disperse the protesting crowd, with some landing at a nearby school and injuring several girls. At least [four people died](#) and hundred others were left wounded. The administration also enforced section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code in the region to restrict protests.



Demonstration in Karachi for subsidies on electricity and wheat prices in the face of rising inflation (Photo Credit: REUTERS/Akhtar Soomro)

In July 2024, security forces allegedly fired upon a large rally in Bannu city, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, leaving at least [one protester dead](#) and another 27 injured. In October 2024, the authorities meted out [violent treatment](#) against civil society activists who took part in the Sindh Rawadari March in Karachi. Police arrested scores of protesters. In June 2025, police charged and fired teargas shells to [disperse protesting employees](#) of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government.

[According to Amnesty International](#), in September 2025, the JKJAAC organised protests to demand an end to special privileges for government officials, restoration of student unions and access to free and quality education and healthcare, among other demands. The JKJAAC had held talks with the government before calling for a region-wide strike on 29 September 2025. On 28 September 2025, the government shut down all mobile, landline and internet services in the region. Protest organisers claimed that over 100 protesters were injured following police use of lethal force. There were reports that at least nine people – six protesters and three police officers – died.

ONGOING DIGITAL RESTRICTIONS AND ARREST OF ONLINE ACTIVISTS

PECA is a draconian law that contains broad and vague provisions and disproportionate penalties to [criminalise online defamation](#). The law grants the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) broad censorship powers to block and remove internet content considered offensive under the Penal Code, including content containing blasphemy, false information or indecency, without providing any definitions. It also provides other agencies with the ability to conduct wide-ranging surveillance. Activists and human rights groups have criticised it for criminalising legitimate forms of expression.

In January 2025, the government further [tightened its control](#) on online speech by passing amendments to PECA. The amendments introduced a criminal offence for those publishing 'false and fake information' and imposed a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment with a fine. The amendment also expanded the powers available to the PTA through the newly created Social Media Regulation and Protection Authority. These provisions grant the authorities disproportionate executive control and power to block and remove content based on vague criteria, violating the right to freedom of expression and failing to meet standards of necessity and proportionality under international human rights law.

The FIA initiated a large-scale operation in December 2024, [arresting 30 social media activists](#) involved in 'spreading fake propaganda' and [criticism of the army](#) around alleged killings during a crackdown on protests by the PTI party in Islamabad in November 2024. According to reports, this operation, led by

the FIA Cybercrime Wing, resulted in multiple arrests and the registration of numerous First Information Reports in various regions. People were [charged](#) under various sections of PECA.



Journalist Ahmad Noorani (Photo Credit: Clooney Foundation for Justice)

In May 2025, YouTube told exiled investigative journalist Ahmad Noorani that it had [blocked his channel](#), with 173,000 followers, in Pakistan based on a legal complaint from the government. The following day, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) opened an investigation into Noorani under PECA, accusing him of running hate campaigns against the armed forces. Investigators cited two of Noorani's posts on Twitter/X that criticised Pakistan's army during [conflict](#) with India in April and May 2025. Previously, in March 2025, over 20 people who identified themselves as police [forcibly entered](#) and searched Noorani's family home in Islamabad.

On 8 July 2025, the state expanded its crackdown on dissent when an Islamabad judicial magistrate, acting on a request from the NCCIA, ordered YouTube to block 27 channels, including those of veteran reporters Matiullah Jan and Asad Toor, several other political commentators and the official channel of the PTI. [The NCCIA filed its request](#) under PECA section 37, which empowers authorities to restrict access to online content deemed harmful to national security, public order or the integrity of the state. The HRC [expressed concern](#) about the court order, saying the blanket ban 'conflates dissent with criminal activity'. On 11 July 2025, Islamabad Additional Sessions Judge Afzal Majoka [suspended](#) the ban.

The state frequently blocks social media apps and applies internet shutdowns to silence dissent and limit access to information. In an April 2024 written court submission, the authorities stated that they had [blocked access](#) to Twitter/X in the week following the February 2024 election, citing national security concerns based on confidential reports from intelligence and security agencies. In the last week of November 2024, major cities in Pakistan went into what was essentially an [internet blackout](#) after the authorities [blocked](#) internet and mobile phone services. This was ahead of a planned march to Islamabad by PTI supporters to protest at Imran Khan's imprisonment. Those using [VPNs](#) to circumvent restrictions also faced challenges. Mobile internet services were shut down [multiple times](#) in Balochistan throughout 2025. According to [UN experts](#) this 'impeded freedom of information, transparency, accountability and political participation'.

ARREST, HARASSMENT AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

Pakistan's 2025 [Reporters without Borders](#) (RSF) Press Freedom Index ranking [declined](#) from 152nd to 158th place. RSF attributed Pakistan's decline primarily to tightening restrictions on journalistic freedom, highlighting growing censorship and restrictions imposed on the media landscape.

In October 2024, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) raised concerns about the chilling effect of criminal defamation and counter-terrorism laws on the exercise of freedom of expression by journalists. The Committee was further concerned about reports of increased coercion and censorship of media outlets for airing criticism of the government, intelligence agencies and the military, including closures and suspension of licences for television channels, notably by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority.

Over the last two years, authorities have continued to summon, interrogate and detain journalists, including on fabricated charges, for their reporting or criticism of the state. Imran Riaz Khan, a well-known Pakistani YouTuber and TV anchor, was [arrested](#) on 1 March 2024 and placed on judicial remand by the ATC in Lahore on fabricated charges for his alleged involvement in an incident at Zaman Park in Lahore, where he was accused of arson and throwing stones at police as they arrested Imran Khan. He was [released on bail](#) on 9 March 2025.



Pakistani senior journalist Matiullah Jan
(Photo Credit: IFJ)

Islamabad Police [took veteran journalist Matiullah Jan](#) into custody on 27 November 2024, with police registering a First Information Report on spurious drug possession and terrorism charges. Jan has investigated and reported on excessive use of force during PTI protests. Unidentified individuals initially abducted Jan with another journalist, Sadiq Bashir. Bashir was later released, while Jan's whereabouts were unknown until his appearance at the Rawalpindi ATC the following day. He was released from custody on bail on 1 December 2024. Jan, who is known for his criticism of Pakistan's powerful institutions, including its military, [vehemently denied](#) the charges against him.

Broadcast journalist Harmeet Singh was [summoned](#) to appear for questioning on 24 December 2024 at the FIA's Cybercrime Reporting Centre in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on allegations he engaged in 'negative rhetoric against state institutions'. The FIA report accused him of using his social media account to 'propagate a misleading, concocted, and baseless campaign against state institutions and security agencies of Pakistan'. The allegations relate to Singh's social media activity during his coverage of November 2024 protests in Islamabad by Imran Khan supporters.

In December 2024, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists [condemned](#) arrest orders authorities issues against 150 journalists under PECA, which accused them of spreading 'a false narrative against state institutions', particularly against security agencies over the crackdown on PTI supporters in Islamabad on 26 November 2024. Various sections of PECA were used, including sections 9, 10, 11 and 24, which pertain to incitement, defamation and dissemination of false information.

The FIA [detained](#) journalist Farhan Mallick in Karachi on 21 March 2025. Mallick, founder of the independent online media platform Raftar, was arrested on accusations of running 'several programs against the security establishment'. Mallick appeared before the Judicial Magistrate (East) court in Karachi, where the magistrate placed him in FIA custody for four days. He was then remanded by a judicial magistrate to judicial custody before being [released on bail](#) on 8 April 2025.

The NCCIA [summoned](#) journalist Muhammad Akbar Notezai on 4 August 2025 to its offices in Quetta, where he was questioned for 30 minutes about an August 2024 investigative report on corruption in the construction of the Turbat-Buleda road in Balochistan. According to Notezai, the FIA alleged the report was defamatory.

Journalists also report facing harassment, intimidation, physical attacks and threats for their work. In May 2024, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that prominent television anchor Hamid Mir, who hosts the flagship political show Capital Talk on Geo News, faced [death threats and online harassment](#). In the same month, a group of people [attacked](#) Syed Iqrar ul Hassan, a prominent TV anchor with ARY News, and three team members in Gujranwala city, Punjab province. Hassan and his team sustained minor injuries.

On 2 October 2025, police conducted a [violent raid](#) of the National Press Club in Islamabad and assaulted journalists at the press club premises. [According to the Pakistan Press Foundation](#), footage shared by media outlets and on social media showed police manhandling, pushing and shoving journalists inside the press club premises. Police tried to stop journalists documenting the events by snatching their cameras and phones. Two photographers and three press club staff members were injured.

There have also been reports of abduction and killings. On 26 March 2025 in Islamabad, [masked men](#) broke into the home of



Police outside the Islamabad National Press Club (Photo Credit: IFJ)

journalist Waheed Murad and took him away. Murad, who works as a reporter for Urdu News and runs the independent news site Pakistani24, appeared before the Judicial Magistrate Islamabad (West) court, where he was placed in FIA custody for two days under Pakistan's cybercrime laws for allegedly posting 'intimidating content' online.

Journalist Muhammad Siddique Mengal died in a [bomb attack](#) in Khuzdar city, southwestern Balochistan province on 3 May 2024. Mengal was president of the local Khuzdar Press Club and journalist for the local newspaper The Daily Baakhbar Quetta and Independent News Pakistan news agency. In the same month, armed assailants [attacked and killed](#) Awami Awaz, a reporter for local Sindhi language newspaper Nasrullah Gadani, in the Kori Goth area of the Ghotki district in Sindh. A militant group allegedly [murdered](#) journalist Imtiaz Mir in September 2025 in connection with his reporting on Israel.

RESTRICTIONS AND CRIMINALISATION OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Over the last two years, the CIVICUS Monitor has documented a crackdown on the political opposition, particularly around protests, with incidents of unlawful killings, excessive force including the use of firearms, arbitrary arrests and the prosecution of protesters. In most cases, no one has been held accountable for these violations.

A month after the February 2024 election, on 3 March 2024, police in Punjab province [arrested over 100 PTI supporters](#) in Gujrat and Lahore for staging rallies against alleged vote-rigging. Police also baton-charged protesters.

On 10 March 2024, police launched a [brutal attack on PTI supporters](#) in Lahore, arresting over 100 people. Multiple social media videos showed police officers attacking protesters with sticks and shoving people into police vehicles. Police met other protests in several cities in Punjab province on the same day with [heavy-handed measures](#), resulting in the detention of scores of PTI leaders and workers.

In September 2024, police [arrested several PTI leaders and parliamentarians](#) in a series of raids in Islamabad. The raids followed a PTI rally on 8 September 2024 in which tens of thousands of supporters demanded Imran Khan's release from jail. On 5 October 2024, police cracked down on PTI protests in Islamabad. [According to Human Rights Watch](#), police used teargas and blocked roads to prevent the march. Police arrested over 500 people under broad and vague laws that prohibit rioting and threats to public order. Dozens of protesters and police were reportedly injured.

Ahead of PTI protests in Islamabad on 24 November 2024, the government disrupted internet services across Pakistan and shut down mobile internet in Islamabad for four days. [According to Amnesty International](#), authorities barricaded all major highways and routes leading to Islamabad to hinder the movement of protesters, and 4,000 PTI supporters were reportedly detained prior to the protests and around 610 detained on the day of the protest.



Protest on enforced disappearances
(Photo Credit: Amnesty International)

On 8 February 2025, police [arrested multiple opposition members](#) ahead of a planned protest by the Jamaat-e-Islami opposition party and the PTI to mark the anniversary of the national election. The administration invoked section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, banning large gatherings across Sindh province to prevent political demonstrations.



In July 2025, an anti-terrorism court [sentenced eight PTI members](#) to 10 years in jail each for inciting protests following Imran Khan's arrest that targeted military sites at Sherpao Bridge in [Lahore](#) on 9 May 2023. Later in July 2025, an [anti-terrorism court](#) in Faisalabad convicted 108 PTI members in connection with the May 2023 protests. The court handed 10-year sentences to top PTI leaders, while others received sentences ranging from one to three years. [Human rights organisations](#) have raised serious concerns about the fairness of the trial process against the 108 people, citing closed hearings, limited access to legal counsel and the use of military and anti-terror courts to try civilians

Police in Lahore [arrested](#) at least 200 PTI activists in August 2025 around the second anniversary of Imran Khan's imprisonment.

FAILURE TO ADDRESS ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

According to [civil society organisations](#) (CSOs), the government has systematically failed to stop enforced disappearances and provide truth, justice and reparations to victims and families of the disappeared.

Pakistani authorities continue to routinely use enforced disappearances to target dissidents and HRDs, with thousands of cases having been documented by local CSOs.

Over 15 years since the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, it has consistently failed to provide meaningful remedy to victims and their families. This lack of accountability renders the commission ineffective and further traumatises families, who may be left with written orders but no justice.

Pakistan has not yet ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Further, authorities have harassed, spied on and threatened families and activists campaigning and protesting for the return of their loved ones. The state often represses peaceful protests organised by families of disappeared people, resulting in arbitrary arrests and unlawful use of force.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

In October 2024, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) highlighted concerns that the legal and policy framework and procedures governing the activities of national and international CSOs unduly restrict the exercise of the right to freedom of association, including the 2015 policy on the regulation of international CSOs and the 2022 policy on local CSOs receiving foreign contributions.

These policies and laws introduce cumbersome and costly annual registration procedures for CSOs and restrictive regulations on foreign funding and provide the authorities with extensive monitoring powers, leading to harassment and investigations by security agencies and other government offices. There were several instances of authorities arbitrarily placing CSOs, including ethnic minority grassroots movements, on the First Schedule list of proscribed organisations under the ATA.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of Pakistan should:

PROTECT CIVIL SOCIETY, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND JOURNALISTS

- Adopt all measures necessary to ensure the effective enjoyment of the right to freedom of association, including by bringing the policy and legal framework and registration procedures into full compliance with the ICCPR.
- Remove all undue restrictions on the ability of CSOs to receive domestic and international funding and end the use of the ATA to criminalise CSOs, including grassroots movements.
- Ensure that criminal laws and counter-terrorism legislation are not used to silence dissenting voices, HRDs, journalists and members of ethnic minorities.
- Guarantee that civil society personnel, HRDs and journalists can operate safely, freely and independently without fear of being subjected to harassment, intimidation, persecution or reprisals.
- Ensure that all allegations of enforced disappearance, intimidation, killing and torture of civil society personnel, HRDs and journalists are investigated and perpetrators are brought to justice.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all HRDs, particularly Baloch and Pashtun activists, who have been detained for exercising their fundamental rights to freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, and review their cases to prevent further harassment.

GUARANTEE THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

- Review PECA and other laws and provisions in order to bring them into line with best practices and international standards on freedom of expression.
- Take immediate steps to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to freedom of expression online and offline without interference, by ending measures that unduly restrict freedom of expression, such as blocking websites and online resources, internet shutdowns and social media bans.
- Enable unfettered access to information, including domestic and international media outlets, social media platforms and CSO websites.
- Act with transparency on decisions that impact on the free use of the internet and issue statements of clarification to outline the reasons and legal basis for the blocking of social media platforms.

RESPECT AND PROTECT THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

- Review the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act 2024, the MPO and section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to ensure they are consistent with the ICCPR and not misused to restrict protests or criminal protesters.
- Guarantee, in law and in practice, the full exercise of the right of peaceful assembly, including by ethnic minority organisations, opposition groups, political parties and women's organisations, and ensure fully free media coverage of those assemblies.
- Unconditionally and immediately release all protesters detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and review their cases to prevent further harassment.
- Ensure that all allegations of arbitrary detention, excessive use of force and torture during protests are promptly, impartially and effectively investigated, that those responsible are brought to justice and that all victims of such acts receive full reparation.
- Provide law enforcement officials with appropriate training on the use of force and the employment of non-violent means of crowd control, including on the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement.