



# QUARTERLY

A Periodical of INSIGHTS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَم  
TAUGHT MAN THAT WHICH HE KNEW NOT

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# E9 QUARTERLY

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## Editorial Note

The second issue of volume 5, 2026, of E9 Quarterly has been published. This edition of E9 features 12 INSIGHTS on various socio-economic, political, and security-related issues.

The first Insight in this issue examines the structural role of Pakistan's informal economy within a dual economic system marked by regulatory rigidity and institutional gaps. It argues for a transitional, reform-oriented approach that integrates productivity enhancement with gradual formalisation.

Second Insight focuses on the Arctic region's escalating geopolitical significance, driven by climate-induced ice melt that is unlocking new shipping routes and vast untapped mineral and energy resources.

This issue also explores the evolving US National Security Strategy (NSS) towards South Asia, particularly focusing on the shifting dynamics in relations with India and Pakistan since the Cold War.

Another Insight examines Pakistan's persistently low conviction rates despite increasing police budgets and arrest figures. According to the author, Pakistan can bridge the gap between arrests and convictions by addressing these systemic issues through stricter oversight, enhanced institutional capacity, and improved coordination.

An Insight in this issue critically examines India's secessionist and freedom movements, rooted in historical injustices, ethnic marginalisation, and centralised repression. Insight also highlights India's growing internal fault lines, which may undermine its democratic image and regional stability.

One Insight in this issue discusses the legal and political marginalisation of India's Muslim population under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government. According to the author, there is a

growing danger that Modi may prefer to engage in regional chest-thumping to divert the masses' attention in the name of nationalism.

One Insight included in this issue critically examines the decline of Pakistan Television (PTV) amid digital disruption and media pluralism. The author makes a few recommendations for PTV to reclaim its place as the state broadcaster.

This issue also includes an Insight exploring the intersection of technology policymaking and national security within the digital landscape, emphasising the role of social and technology platforms (STPs) in shaping political narratives and influencing international relations.

This issue also discusses Pakistan's labour export framework as a critical source of remittances, highlighting its heavy dependence on Gulf markets, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

One Insight in this issue examines the geopolitical significance of the International Organisation for Mediation (IOMed), its potential to amplify the voices of the Global South, and its strategic relevance to Pakistan as a founding member.

This issue also examines the role of internal politics and global powers in the Sudan conflict. According to the author, Sudan's prolonged instability reflects the convergence of internal fractures and external rivalries, making it a proxy battleground for African, Arab, and global interests.

The final Insight in this issue discusses the impact of Pakistan's limited shipping potential on maritime trade performance, foreign exchange outflows, supply-chain security, and blue economy growth.

At the end, we hope that this publication will enlighten our readers on diverse topics and issues. Hoping for positive feedback.

# Informal Economy of Pakistan: A Challenge or a Blessing in Disguise

*Dr M. A. Gul*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT examines the structural role of Pakistan's informal economy within a dual economic system marked by regulatory rigidity and institutional gaps. Accounting for nearly 72% of employment and a substantial share of GDP, the informal sector functions as a socioeconomic buffer during periods of crisis, including sanctions, financial downturns, and COVID-19. Rather than viewing informality solely as a governance failure, the study reframes it as a stabilizing mechanism that sustains livelihoods and mitigates unemployment. It argues for a transitional, reform-oriented approach that integrates productivity enhancement with gradual formalization.*

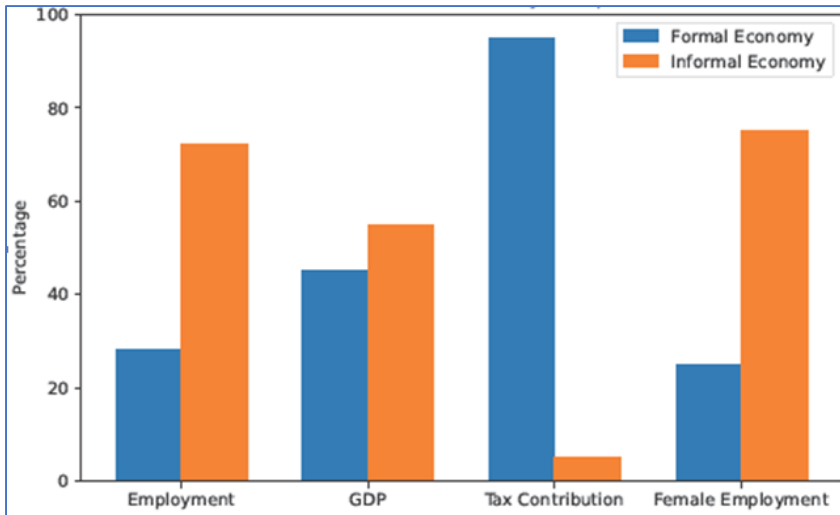
**Keywords:** Informal Economy, Formal Economy, Unemployment, Financial Crisis.

Pakistan's economic structure is characterised by a dualism between a heavily regulated formal sector and a huge informal sector.<sup>1</sup> The informal economy refers to economic activities that remain outside formal taxation, registration, and labour regulation, including small retail, agriculture, construction, and self-employment. In a country where governance deficits, regulatory overreach, and political instability constrain formal enterprise, the informal economy appears not as an anomaly but as a structural necessity.<sup>2</sup>

This Insight examines how Pakistan's informal economy sustains livelihoods and mitigates deeper crises of the formal sector. With a population exceeding 250 million, Pakistan faces high unemployment, underemployment, inflationary pressures, and balance-of-payments crises.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the informal economy accounts for 72% employment (Graph 1) and serves as a survival mechanism, sustaining livelihoods and ensuring household consumption when the formal sector is unable to absorb labour.<sup>4</sup>

**Graph 1:** Comparison of Formal and Informal Economy



**Source:** Pakistan Labour Force Survey

Empirical studies show the magnitude of Pakistan's informal economy. Estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and national researchers place its size between 35-40% of GDP, with some scholars suggesting contributions as high as 59% when measured in local currency.<sup>5</sup> Although estimates vary due to measurement methods, this suggests that a substantial portion of Pakistan's real economic activity remains unreported in official records.

**Rather than viewing the informal economy as an obstacle to development, policymakers should recognise it as a strategic asset, one that buys social stability before deeper institutional reforms take root.**

The informal economy employs nearly 75% of the non-agricultural workforce, making it the primary source of employment for many Pakistanis (Graph 1).<sup>6</sup> Agriculture, which employs 37% of the population, operates largely through informal labour arrangements.<sup>7</sup> From wholesale markets to transport hubs and home-based units, informal activity underpins everyday economic life. While often criticised for weak productivity and tax leakage, informality persists largely due to high compliance costs, inconsistent regulation, and rent-seeking behaviour discouraging formalisation.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the informal economy reflects institutional failure rather than individual choice.

The informal economy plays a decisive role in job creation and poverty mitigation. In periods of low growth, it absorbs labour displaced from the formal sector and provides entry-level opportunities for youth, migrants, and women. Home-based work in garments, food processing, and handicrafts has been crucial to female labour participation, directly contributing to household income and food security.<sup>9</sup>

The World Bank has noted that informal earnings are often more resilient than formal wages during downturns.<sup>10</sup> Flexible working hours, with diversified income sources, allow informal households to smooth consumption and avoid extreme poverty. In the absence of comprehensive social protection, the informal economy effectively substitutes for a weak welfare state.<sup>11</sup>

Pakistan's reliance on the informal economy becomes most evident during periods of crisis. During the economic stagnation of the 1990s, marked by sanctions, fiscal stress, and low investment, the informal sector expanded, cushioning employment losses in manufacturing and public enterprises (Table 1).<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1:** Economic Growth during Crisis Period

<b>Crisis Period</b>	<b>Formal Economy Performance (% GDP Growth)</b>	<b>Informal Economy Performance (Buffer Effect)</b>
1990s Sanctions Era (Post-1998 Nuclear Tests)	-4.0%	+6.0% (Estimated growth)
2008 Global Financial Crisis	-2.0%	+4.0%
COVID-19 (2019–2021)	-0.5%	+4.4%

**Source:** Self-extracted

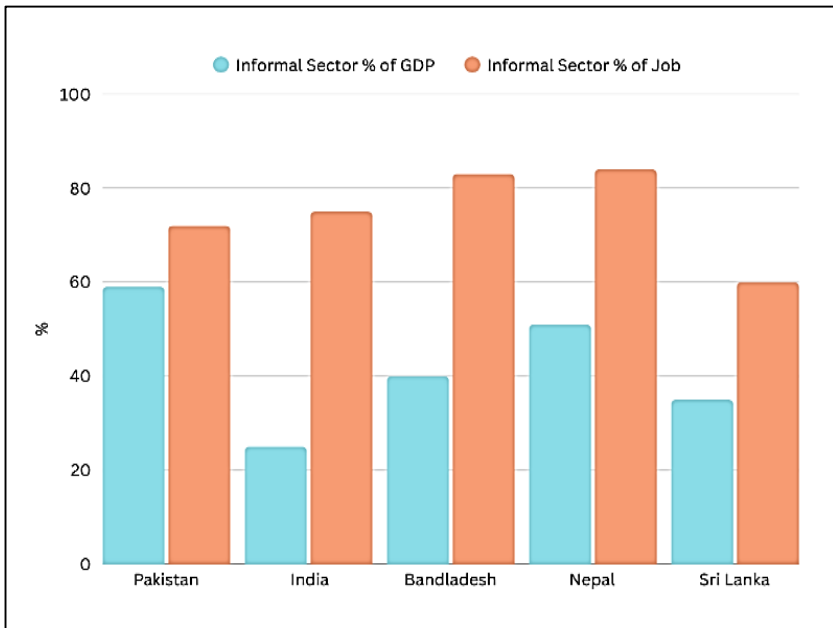
Similarly, during the 2008 global financial crisis, Pakistan experienced declining exports, capital outflows, and rising unemployment. Yet the informal economy mitigated the social impact. As noted by the ILO, countries with large informal sectors, including Pakistan, exhibited greater labour-market absorption capacity, allowing workers to shift into self-employment, petty trade, and casual services rather than remaining unemployed.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, during COVID-19, informal networks played a central role in community-level recovery, supplying goods, labour, and services when state responses were delayed or insufficient.

Critics point to the costs of informality, including foregone tax revenues, poor working conditions, low productivity, and limited access to finance. However, premature or coercive formalisation risks destroying livelihoods without creating alternatives. The informal economy exists because formal systems are exclusionary, not because informal actors reject legality.

A brief regional comparison (Graph 2) shows that Pakistan’s informal economy mirrors broader South Asian patterns, in which it is a dominant source of employment in India and Bangladesh.

**Graph 2:** South Asian Pattern in Informal Economy



Source: ILO

Pakistan’s informal economy is not merely an unregulated residual but a core pillar of socioeconomic resilience. In an environment that constrains formal-sector growth, informality sustains employment, stabilises consumption, and prevents social breakdown during crises. From sanctions in 1990s to the 2008 financial crisis and Covid-19, it ensured that millions continue to put food on their tables.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than viewing the informal economy as an obstacle to development, policymakers should recognise it as a strategic asset, one that buys social stability before deeper institutional reforms take root. Pakistan can adopt a transitional rather than punitive approach toward informality.

Priority measures should include simplified registration, tiered taxation, access to microfinance, and digital payment systems. These steps can raise productivity without undermining flexibility. Governance reform, regulatory predictability, and trust-building remain prerequisites for meaningful formalisation.<sup>15</sup>

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## About Insight and Author

This *INSIGHT* was first published on the ISSRA website on 3 March 2026. It can be accessed at <https://www.issra.pk/insight/2026/informal-economy-of-pakistan-a-challenge-or-a-blessing-in-disguise/insight.php>. The writer can be reached at [maqul68@outlook.com](mailto:maqul68@outlook.com).

# Growing Geopolitical Significance of the Arctic

*Javeria Noor Sawal*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT explores the escalating geopolitical significance of the Arctic, driven by climate-induced ice melt that is unlocking new shipping routes and vast untapped mineral and energy resources. As global powers—particularly Russia, the US, China, and the EU—assert strategic influence, the region faces increased militarization and competition. Despite the Arctic Council’s cooperative mandate, its limitations have prompted calls for a robust international security framework to prevent future conflict and maintain sustainable governance in this emerging geopolitical frontier.*

**Keywords:** Arctic Sea, Arctic Council, China, Russia, European Union.

The Arctic covers an area of 14.5 million square kilometers centered on the North Pole. It comprises the Arctic Ocean, parts of Russia, Canada, the US, Iceland, Greenland, Finland, Sweden, and Norway<sup>1</sup>. While the Arctic Ocean, particularly its central high seas beyond national Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), is considered a global common governed under UNCLOS, the broader Arctic region, which includes the land and maritime zones of the eight Arctic nations, is not formally designated as a global common.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1

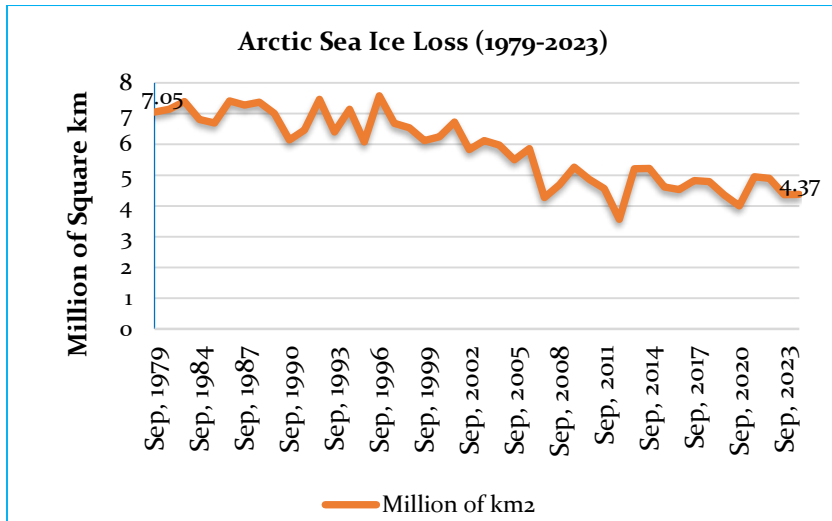


Source: Shutterstock<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the vast untapped natural resources, emerging sea routes, and the region's strategic importance have attracted aggressive posturing from global powers<sup>4</sup>. This insight underscores the growing geopolitical rivalry in the Arctic region, fueled by accelerating ice melt and the strategic interests of major powers.

The Arctic sea ice loss (Figure 2) shows an alarming decline. This decrease over the years highlights the severe impact of global warming. Although yearly fluctuations occur, the overall trend confirms an accelerating ice loss<sup>5</sup>. This signals broader climate instability and increases geopolitical interest in the region's newly accessible routes and resources.

Figure 2



**Source:** Self-Visualized by the Author from Various Sources<sup>6</sup>

For centuries, ships have traveled from East Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal, covering approximately 21,000 kilometers and taking about 48 days. Due to global warming and melting ice, a new shipping route, particularly the Northern Sea Route (NSR), is emerging. This will significantly reduce the distance of sea shipping by 12,800 km and the duration by 10 to 15 days<sup>7</sup> (Figure 3), resulting in faster delivery of goods, lower fuel costs, increased revenue, and greater profits<sup>8</sup>.

**"As Arctic ice is melting, each state is scripting its own chapter vying for supremacy in the world's new frontier, risking the region into the next geopolitical battleground".**

It will particularly benefit the Arctic countries, China, and the European nations in terms of global trade and will potentially stimulate economic development for shipping companies<sup>9</sup>. Controlling this region would enable countries to secure significant influence over international trade flow and attract the interest of both Arctic and non-Arctic states<sup>10</sup>.

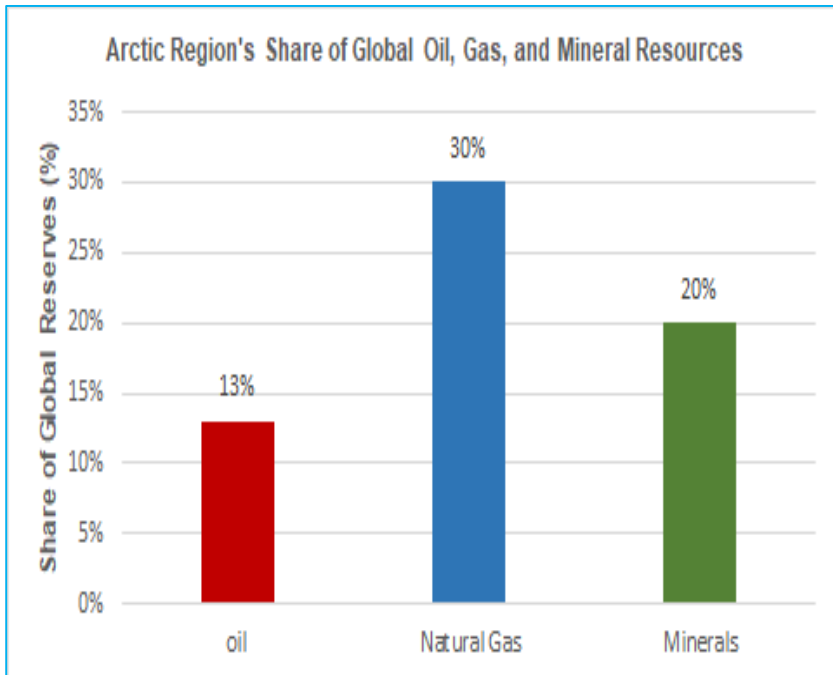
Figure 3



**Source:** The Economist<sup>6</sup>

As Arctic ice melts, it has revealed previously inaccessible reserves of oil, gas, and minerals (Figure 4), presenting opportunities for major powers to pursue their economic interests. This includes resource extraction, particularly from Greenland, which accounts for 148 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, 31.4 billion barrels of oil, and 1.5 million metric tons of rare earth minerals. This represents almost 20% of the world's available reserves and nearly 10% of global resources<sup>11</sup>. According to the US National Intelligence Council, an estimated \$1 trillion worth of minerals and metals will be available in the Arctic, essential for manufacturing semiconductors and batteries. Thus, these resource-driven interests also heighten the geopolitical competition in the polar region.

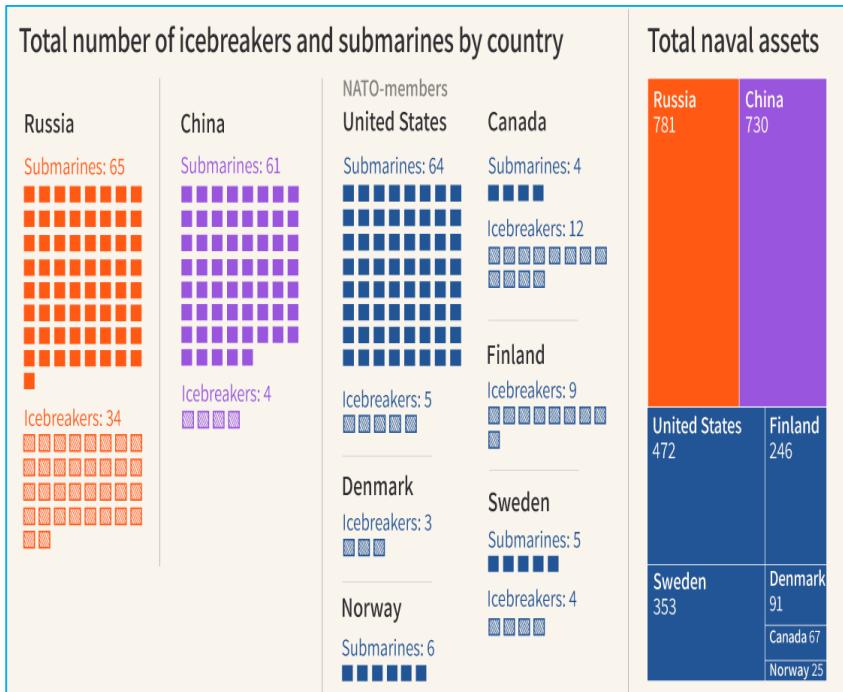
Figure 4



**Source:** Self-illustrated, data compiled from the US Geological Survey<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, rising tensions among major powers in the Arctic region have triggered increased militarization by both NATO and Russia, strengthened strategic cooperation between Russia and China, and prompted the European Union (EU) to revise and reinforce its regional policies. (Figure 5 highlights Russia's regional strategic dominance, followed by the US).

Figure 5



Source: Dragonfly<sup>13</sup>

**Russia**, with 53% of the Arctic coastline, has a powerful icebreaker fleet, a modernized navy, and new hypersonic missiles designed to evade US sensors and defenses. It revitalizes Soviet-era military bases, especially around the Kola Peninsula (most of the peninsula lies in the Arctic Circle), signaling deterrence and strength against the US and its NATO allies<sup>14</sup>.

The US Department of Defense (DoD) initiated the 2024 Arctic strategy, a defense-oriented plan to safeguard the US national interest in the Arctic<sup>15</sup>. According to which, **the US** plans to boost its Arctic military capabilities, emphasizing stronger monitoring, uncrewed systems, satellites, and allied cooperation.

It has also launched an Icebreaker Collaboration Effort (ICE) in 2024, a strategic trilateral initiative of the US, Canada, and Finland to build more icebreakers<sup>16</sup>. While recognizing the strategic value of Greenland, the US has enhanced its presence since 2019 by reopening a consulate in Nuuk, signing MOUs with the Ministry of Greenland, and offering \$12.1 million in aid for tourism, mining, and education. Additionally, most recently, President Trump has expressed interest in purchasing the island<sup>17</sup>. This reflects the US's influence to undermine the strategic presence of Russia and China in the region.

**China** has incorporated the Arctic into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), developing a "Polar Silk Road" plan for Arctic shipping and asserting itself as a "near Arctic State." It has built a large navy and is gradually increasing its Arctic footprint via icebreakers and partnerships with Russia. It also operates four polar research vessels, and in 2023, China invested in the Russian Projects along the NSR and conducted joint naval exercises. Moreover, to expand its influence, it heavily invests in mineral exploration projects, such as Greenland's Kvanefjeld (a rare earth and uranium mine), which conflicts with US interests<sup>18</sup>.

Meanwhile, the *EU's policy in the Arctic region has evolved from an environmental approach (focused on climate change) to a geopolitical and strategic one*. However, it seeks to access the critical minerals to reduce its dependency on external suppliers<sup>19</sup>. The EU is facing a dilemma in balancing the demands of US security concerns with those of China's and Russia's growing economic interests in the region<sup>20</sup>.

The **Arctic Council (1996)**, a leading intergovernmental forum, is responsible for promoting cooperation among Arctic states and other stakeholders on Arctic issues, including environmental protection and sustainable development. It has eight member states, including the US, Russia, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Finland, with territories within the Arctic Circle<sup>21</sup>. The Council serves as a key platform for addressing the region's evolving challenges; however, the exclusion of security and military matters from the Council's mandate, along with its lack of binding authority, has impacted its ability to tackle complex security challenges and shape Arctic geopolitics.

While considering the Arctic Council's limitations, there is an urgent need for a new international security framework that regulates military activities, ensures peaceful cooperation, and facilitates effective crisis management. However, if the current trends continue, the existing rivalries and major power competition will soon transform the region into a zone of Cold War, where the need to balance security, sovereignty, and sustainability will ultimately shape the future of Arctic geopolitics.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Evolving US National Security Strategy for South Asia

*Ms Anoshay Fatima*

## Abstract

*The INSIGHT examines the evolving US National Security Strategy (NSS) towards South Asia, particularly focusing on the shifting dynamics in relations with India and Pakistan since the Cold War. Initially, the US maintained a balanced approach, engaging with both countries. However, with the rise of China as a strategic adversary, the US increasingly viewed India as a counterweight to China, resulting in closer defense and economic ties. In contrast, Pakistan's role diminished due to its struggles with terrorism and its strategic alignment with China. This shift reflects broader geopolitical changes, with implications for regional stability and the future trajectory of US foreign policy in South Asia.*

**Keywords:** Nuclear Security Strategy, United States, Pakistan, Indo-Pacific.

**T**he National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States (US) reflects the country's evolving global threat perceptions and strategic objectives. Since the end of the Cold War, US approach to South Asia has evolved, shaped by the Soviet disintegration and the War on Terror, to a rising rivalry with China.

This Insight traces shifts in US NSS' language since 1987, highlighting key inferences that reveal South Asia's changing role in American grand strategy.

NSS 1987 (President Reagan) had warmly praised Pakistan for "withstanding strong pressures [due to the] Soviet invasion of Afghanistan,"<sup>2</sup> offering to "bolster the security of Pakistan" for aiding the "Afghan cause."<sup>3</sup>

NSS 1990 (President Bush) referred to both Pakistan and India as “friends,” expressing a desire to “encourage Indo-Pakistani rapprochement” while reaffirming a “special relationship” with “traditional ally Pakistan.”<sup>4</sup>

NSS 1995 (President Clinton) urged India and Pakistan to “cap, reduce and ultimately eliminate their weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile capabilities.”<sup>5</sup>

**As China replaced the USSR as its primary adversary, the US began to view India as a counterweight to China. This shift in US geopolitical lens is clearly visible in its NSS of past three decades.**

NSS 1997 reiterated the need for both to align “their nuclear and missile programmes into conformity with international standards.”<sup>6</sup>

NSS 1998,<sup>7</sup> reacted sharply to nuclear tests, criticising them for “contributing to a self-defeating cycle of escalation” and urging immediate accession to the CTBT.<sup>8</sup> NSS 1999 and 2000 echoed similar concerns, calling to “respect the Line of Control in Kashmir” and “join the NPT”<sup>9</sup> to avoid the possibility of a “dangerous arms race in South Asia.”<sup>10</sup>

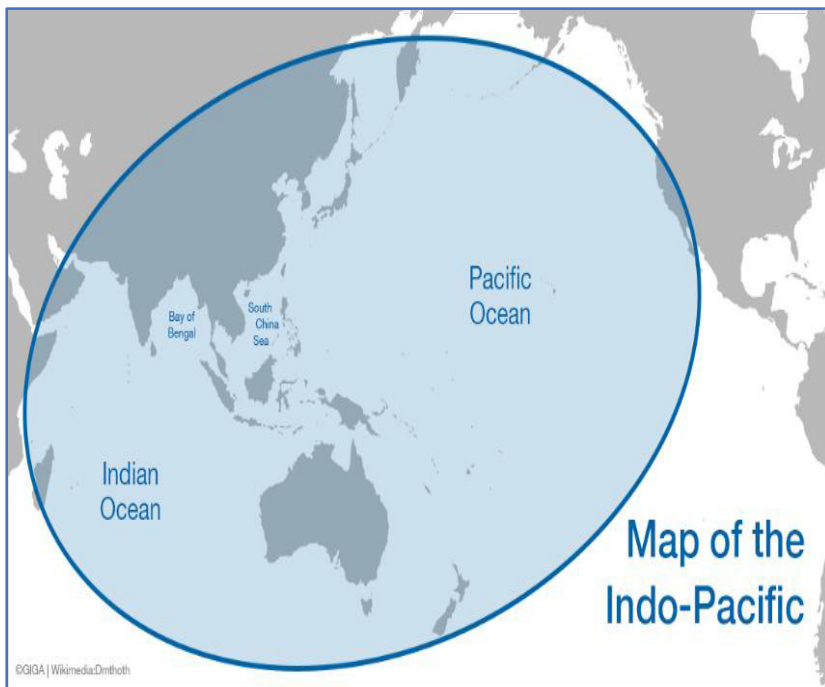
NSS 2002 (President George W. Bush) stated: “With Pakistan, our bilateral relations have been bolstered by Pakistan’s choice to join the war against terror.” It acknowledged India’s potential to become “one of the great democratic powers in the twenty-first century” and appreciated it for “working hard to transform” its bilateral relationship with the US.<sup>11</sup>

NSS 2006 praised Pakistan’s “effective efforts” in counterterrorism while elevating India through the landmark civil nuclear deal and a “roadmap [for] meaningful cooperation.” The strategy, while addressing South and Central Asia as adjacent regions, highlighted Afghanistan’s “historical role as a land bridge” for connecting “two vital regions.”<sup>12</sup>

By 2010, a broader regional framework began to take shape. NSS 2010 (President Obama) pledged to “strengthen Pakistan’s capacity to target violent extremists” while building a long-term “strategic partnership.” India was now described as “a key centre of influence” whose “responsible advancement” provided “an opportunity for increased economic, scientific, environmental, and security partnership.”<sup>13</sup>

NSS 2015 placed South Asia within the new context of the US “Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific.” It called for working with both India and Pakistan to “promote strategic stability, combat terrorism, and advance regional economic integration” but aligned India’s “Act East” policy with American regional interests.<sup>14</sup>

NSS 2017 (President Trump) was a turning point. The strategy replaced “Asia-Pacific” with “Indo-Pacific” and described China as a “revisionist power” seeking to “displace” the US. India emerged as a “Major Defence Partner,” while Pakistan was cautioned to demonstrate its willingness to decisively confront “terrorist groups operating on its soil” or risk losing “trade and investment ties.”<sup>15</sup>



**Source:** German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA)

The latest NSS 2022 (President Biden) declared 2022-2032 “a decisive decade” for US-China competition. It underscored the need to counter China’s so-called “coercive behaviour” and ensure a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” by deepening ties with India, which it declared “world’s largest democracy” and “Major Defence Partner.” While providing an “overview” of US “strategic approach,” this NSS highlighted alliances like “Quad,” “I2U2,” and “AUKUS” to “deepen cooperation with like-minded states. Pakistan was not mentioned for the first time since NSS 1993.<sup>16</sup>

An overview of US NSS since the end of the Cold War reveals that the pendulum of US priorities in South Asia shifted from a focus on both countries to one on India. While the 1990s NSS mainly adopted a neutral tone, post-9/11 strategies narrowed Pakistan’s significance to counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan.

Over time, Pakistan’s status declined from a “special relationship” (1990) to a complete omission (2022). Conversely, India’s standing steadily rose from a “friend” (1990) to a “regional security provider” (2015) and “Major Defence Partner” (2022), indicating Washington’s shift in favour of New Delhi. Pakistan, which was once a key ally in countering Soviet influence during the Cold War, was no longer perceived as a suitable partner for the US in achieving its strategic objectives in South Asia.

The shift in US policy was driven by its changing geopolitical lens. As China replaced the USSR as its primary adversary, the US began to view India as a counterweight to China and a potential “net security provider”<sup>17</sup> in China’s surrounding region. However, India reaps the benefits of its defence and security ties with the US-led West and Russia, as well as its economic partnership with China. Although this strategy reduces its overdependence on any single power, the support of big powers gives India a false sense of strength. Posing a risk to regional stability, this strategic over-smartness leads India to assertive actions, such as its recent conflict with Pakistan in May 2025. If Western support for India goes unchecked, volatility in the region may escalate, compounded by India’s internal issues, such as Hindutva-driven democratic backsliding, innumerable freedom movements, and societal polarisation.

Amidst the shifting trajectory of US security strategy and its deepening alignment with India, Pakistan cannot afford to only react to the geopolitical landscape. With a clear and resilient foreign policy, Pakistan needs to reinforce ties with China (CPEC, cybersecurity, AI, green technology, etc.) and diversify partnerships, especially with middle powers and Global South forums. Relevance in regional stability, counterterrorism, and connectivity, especially vis-à-vis Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Gulf, is also essential for Pakistan. To reclaim its strategic visibility in Washington, considering its post-Marka-e-Haq improvement in relations with the US, Pakistan must increase engagement through think tanks and diaspora. This will also restore balance in South Asia's strategic equation by countering India-centric framings, i.e., narratives that prioritise India's perspective while sidelining other regional voices, especially Pakistan.

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- <sup>1</sup> The US NSS is developed by the executive branch, primarily through the National Security Council and approved by the US President. Though meant to be annual, it is usually issued once per presidential term. For South Asia, the NSS highlights US foreign policy primarily towards Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.
  - <sup>2</sup> "A National Security Strategy of the United States January 1987," Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>.
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  - <sup>4</sup> "A National Security Strategy of the United States March 1990," Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>.
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  - <sup>7</sup> "A National Security Strategy for a New Century October 1998," Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>.
  - <sup>8</sup> The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) prohibits all nuclear explosions for both civilian and military purposes. Though adopted in 1996, it has yet to enter into force due to the non-ratification by key states, including the U.S., China, and India.
  - <sup>9</sup> The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in force since 1970, aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote disarmament, and ensure peaceful use of nuclear energy. It divides states into nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon categories, with distinct obligations for each.
  - <sup>10</sup> "A National Security Strategy for a Global Stage December 2000," Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>.
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- <sup>14</sup> “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America February 2015,” Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense, <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>.
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## About Insight and Author

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# Conviction Rate in Pakistan: Challenges and Way Forward

*Dr. Abdul Rauf Iqbal*

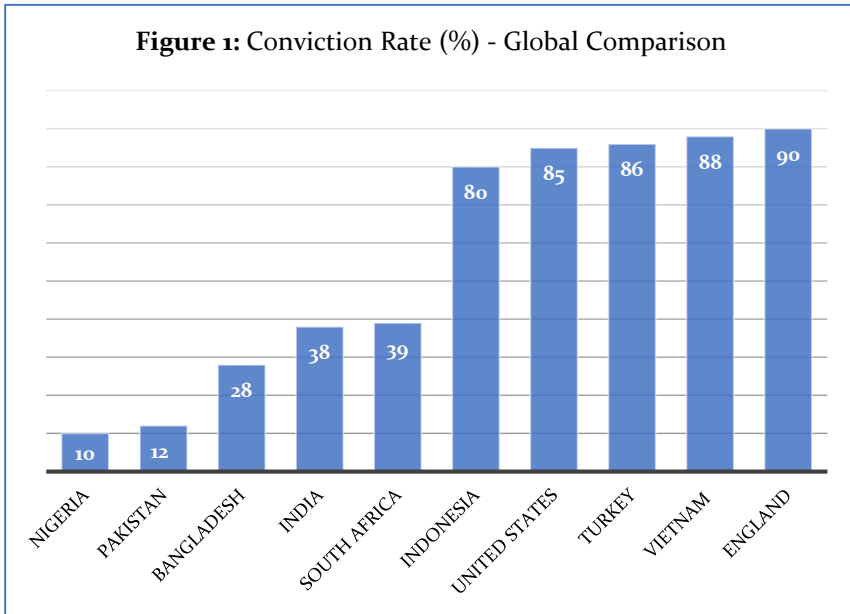
## Abstract

*This INSIGHT examines Pakistan's persistently low conviction rates despite increasing police budgets and arrest figures. It highlights stark inter-provincial disparities, systemic flaws in investigation and prosecution, inadequate forensic infrastructure, and weak inter-agency coordination. The paper argues that financial investments alone are insufficient without structural reforms, recommending a multi-pronged, province-specific strategy emphasizing accountability, forensic development, institutional collaboration, and specialized training to close the arrest-conviction gap and improve justice delivery.*

**Keywords:** Conviction Rate, Police Station, Police Order 2002, Forensic Experts, Budget, Training.

The conviction rate is one of the key indicators of a country's police credibility. While the arrest rate measures the number of individuals apprehended, the conviction rate reflects the number of successful prosecutions that result in convictions. In this context, this Insight compares arrest and conviction rates across Pakistan.

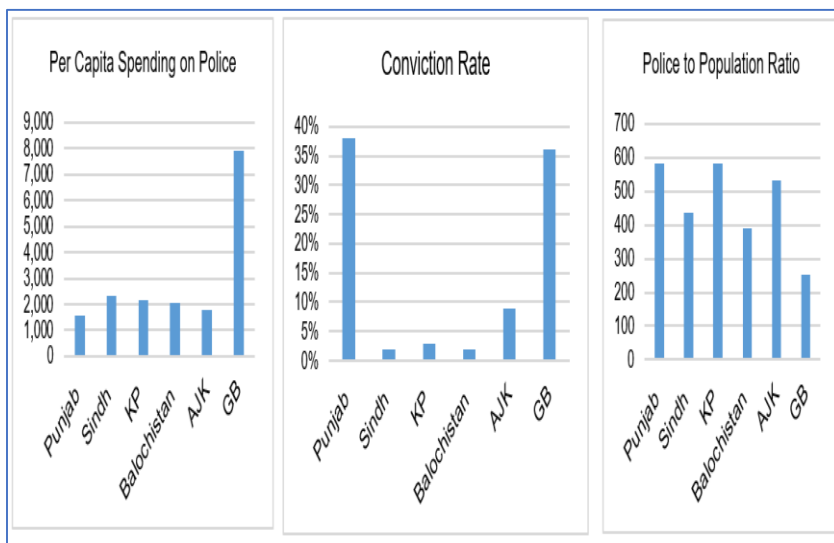
National reports on conviction rates highlight data inconsistencies, with the Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) estimating an 8.66% rate, versus provincial data suggesting a rate of around 12%.<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 illustrates that Pakistan's conviction rate is alarmingly low compared to other countries.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Pakistan's average police-to-population ratio is 1:517, compared to the standard of 1:450 set by the Police Rules.<sup>3</sup>



**Source:** World Prison Brief

Punjab allocates the largest police budget (Figure 2) and operates 720 police stations covering 53% of Pakistan's population.<sup>4</sup> Despite a police-to-population ratio of 1:583 and the lowest per capita spending, Punjab achieved a conviction rate of 38% in 2024, with 96,962 convictions out of 256,210 resolved cases.<sup>5</sup>

Sindh's 555 police stations serve 23% of the country's population. It has the second-highest per capita police spending and a 1:436 police-to-population ratio. In 2024, Sindh convicted 707 individuals out of 38,372 decided cases, resulting in a conviction rate of approximately 2%.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2: Policing in Pakistan – A Comparison**

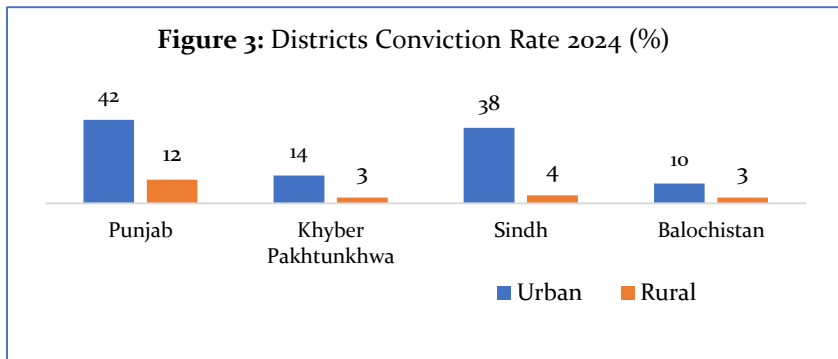
**Source:** Police Reports, and Finance Departments

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's 297 police stations cover 17% of the country's population. Although the per capita spending is relatively high, the police-to-population ratio is similar to that of Punjab. According to the KP Statistics Bureau, only 837 individuals were convicted out of 32,204 cases, resulting in a conviction rate of 3% in 2023.<sup>7</sup>

Balochistan is divided into "A" (police-managed) and "B" (Levies-controlled) areas. Despite a fragmented law enforcement structure, its 130 police/levy stations cover the country's 6% population. Its police-to-population ratio is 1:391. According to the Balochistan Police, 2,546 cases were reported, with only 2% resulting in convictions in 2024.<sup>8</sup>

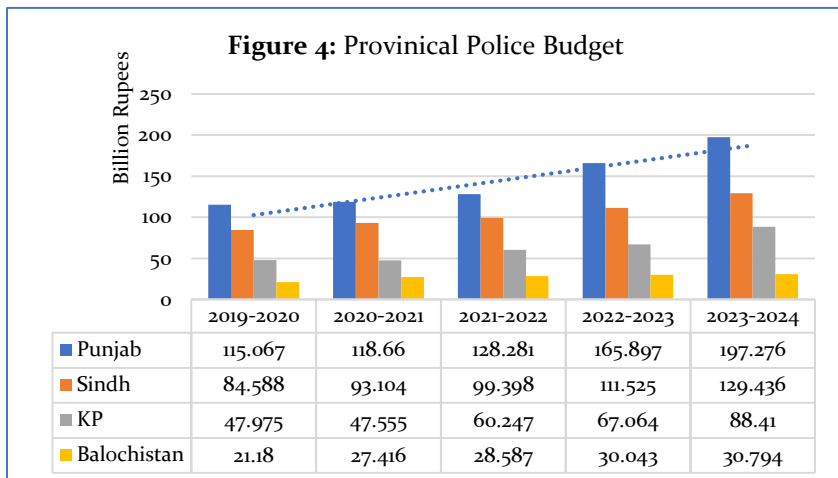
Azad Jammu and Kashmir's (AJK) 40 police stations are responsible for the region's 4.5 million residents. The autonomous region's police-to-population ratio is 1:533. However, according to the AJK Police, 932 individuals were incarcerated in AJK's prisons, corresponding to 9,962 cases, resulting in a conviction rate of 9% in 2023.<sup>9</sup>

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) has the highest per capita police spending and Pakistan’s best police-to-population ratio (1:252). The 67 police stations cover a population of 1.49 million. According to the GB government, 18 persons were convicted out of 50 disposed cases, resulting in a conviction rate of 36%, second to Punjab.<sup>10</sup>



Source: Police Reports

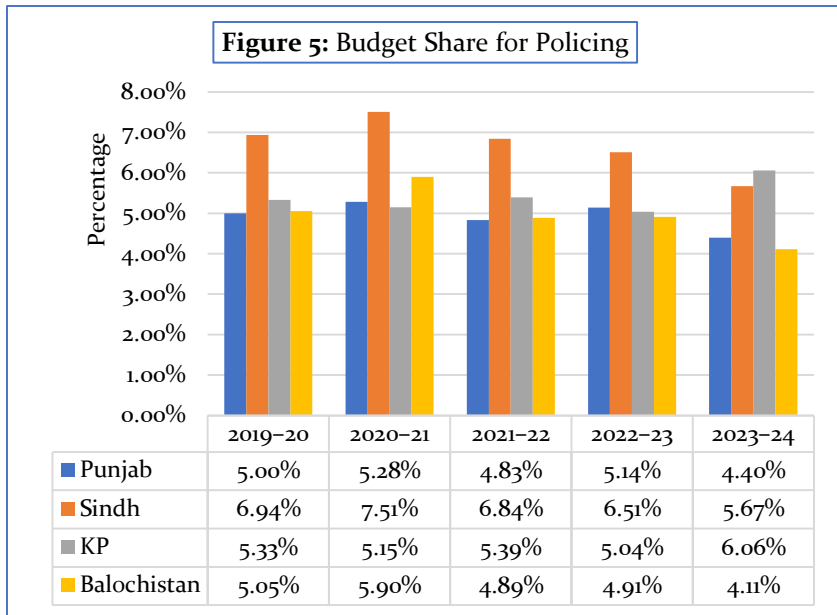
District-level data (Figure 3) reveal significant regional variation and a rural-urban divide in conviction rates. For example, despite higher population density, urban areas consistently show higher conviction rates than rural districts.



Source: Provincial Finance Departments

Figure 4 shows the police budget across provinces, and Figure 5 highlights the percentage of each province’s total budget for policing. While police spending has consistently increased over the years, provinces spend 4-6% of their total budget on policing.

Punjab spends the most on police, but its percentage allocation is declining, yet it maintains the highest conviction rate. Sindh allocates the highest percentage, but conviction rates lag spending. KP’s percentage allocation is gradually increasing, but it is not having a positive impact on the conviction rate. Balochistan’s spending remains stable, but its percentage share is decreasing and maintains a low conviction rate.



**Source:** Provincial Finance Departments

The analysis reflects a disconnect between police spending and conviction rates. Therefore, simply increasing funds is not the answer. Instead, the police budget should focus on improving the conviction rate. Each province needs to conduct its impact analysis to ensure funds are allocated effectively.

Pakistan Police is functionally divided into investigative and operational branches.<sup>11</sup> Once first information reports (FIRs) are registered, the investigation branch initiates the legal process. It faces distinct yet interrelated challenges, including weak investigations and the filing of fake FIRs.<sup>12</sup> Punjab established the Punjab Forensic Science Agency (PFSA) in 2012, with fourteen specialised forensic departments. Sindh's forensic lab is just a DNA testing facility.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Forensic Science Laboratory, set up in 2017, offers only preliminary forensic support. Balochistan passed the Forensic Science Agency Act in 2015; however, no lab has been established.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the police of these provinces either rely on outdated methods or depend on Punjab's forensic lab.

The lack of coordination between police, forensic experts, and prosecutors results in a low conviction rate. Prosecutors often receive incomplete investigation files or those lacking forensic details, making it challenging to construct strong legal arguments. The acquittal rate underscores systemic failures in ensuring substantial, evidence-backed prosecutions.

Police in Pakistan lack specialised investigation training for homicide, cybercrime, and financial crimes. A survey in Karachi found that 86% of police officers had not received forensic training in the past three years, weakening the quality of investigations.<sup>14</sup> An investigation officer in Rawalpindi said that he had not received any new training in the last ten years.<sup>15</sup>

Besides weak investigation, fake FIRs are often used to implicate innocents due to personal enmity, with police misusing arrests as a coercive tool.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, politically motivated FIRs under the maintenance of public order (MPO) and Section 144 also increase the arrest rate.<sup>17</sup> Such cases rarely result in convictions, diverting resources from legitimate investigations and exacerbating the gap between arrests and convictions. Despite the Police Order 2002 imposing penalties for misconduct, systemic issues persist.<sup>18</sup>

Pakistan can enhance conviction rates by addressing institutional challenges through a multi-pronged, province-specific, and impact-driven strategy.

First, enforce the Police Order 2002 to hold police accountable for abuse of power, e.g., fake FIRs, wrongful arrests. Transparency in data accessibility can enhance accountability and enable accurate assessment of policing outcomes. However, political resistance and risks of data manipulation pose challenges. Solutions include establishing independent oversight units and third-party audits.

Second, strengthening institutional capacity is critical. Provincial governments must finance modern forensic infrastructure, treating it as a long-term investment. Although budget constraints are significant, public-private partnerships with universities or private labs, alongside training programmes, offer sustainable solutions. Over time, forensic breakthroughs can deter crime and boost public confidence.

Third, fostering coordination among police, forensic experts, and prosecutors is essential. Standardized protocols and mandatory forensic evidence enhance the quality of prosecutions. While Pakistan's siloed institutional culture presents a challenge, implementing shared digital platforms for real-time data sharing and inter-agency workshops can bridge these gaps.

Fourth, specialized training is essential for addressing complex financial and cybercrimes. While rapidly advancing technology poses new challenges for investigators, collaborating with global cybersecurity firms for cutting-edge training can help build expertise and stay ahead of the curve.

Pakistan can bridge the gap between arrests and convictions by addressing these systemic issues through stricter oversight, enhanced institutional capacity, and improved coordination.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Analysing India's Secessionist and Freedom Movements

*Ms Manal Shah*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT critically examines India's secessionist and freedom movements, rooted in historical injustices, ethnic marginalization, and centralized repression. From Kashmir and Khalistan to the Naxalite belt and Northeast, the state's reliance on militarization, harsh laws, and media control has intensified dissent. The analysis warns that India's growing internal fault lines, if ignored, may undermine its democratic image and regional stability.*

**Keywords:** India, Internal Conflict, Freedom Movement, Kashmir, Khalistan.

Despite its “largest democracy” claim, India faces rising internal conflicts through secessionist and freedom movements rooted in mass alienation and state mistrust. This Insight examines their origins, current status, and the state's military, political, legal, and media responses amid growing domestic radicalism. In India's Northeast, post-independence integration failures have fuelled enduring secessionist movements, such as those in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura.

Naga movement is rooted in identity-based grievances and refusal to join India due to state negligence, leading to the independence declaration (1947). Despite gaining so-called statehood (1963), key concerns remain unresolved.

State-led Shillong Accords (1975), ceasefire (1997) and framework agreement (2015) have collapsed, leading to deadlocked negotiations, splits in liberation factions, and increased demand for Greater Nagaland.<sup>1</sup>

Manipur's conflict stems from ethnic tensions between dominant Meiteis and over 30 hill tribes with Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.<sup>2</sup> Kuki-Zomi and Naga tribes, mostly Christian, sought autonomy, while Meiteis, predominantly Hindu and excluded from ST status, formed a liberation front (1964). Despite a ceasefire (2008), deadly Meitei-Kuki clashes reignited (2023), fuelled by alleged bias from Meitei-led BJP-backed institutions. Despite troop deployments (40,000) and administrative division, peace remains elusive.<sup>3</sup>

Assam movement (1979) stems from ethnic nationalism and fears of cultural erosion and economic marginalisation due to large-scale migration from Bangladesh.

Groups like United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) have sought independence (1979), citing state neglect and threats to Assamese identity.<sup>4</sup> Despite

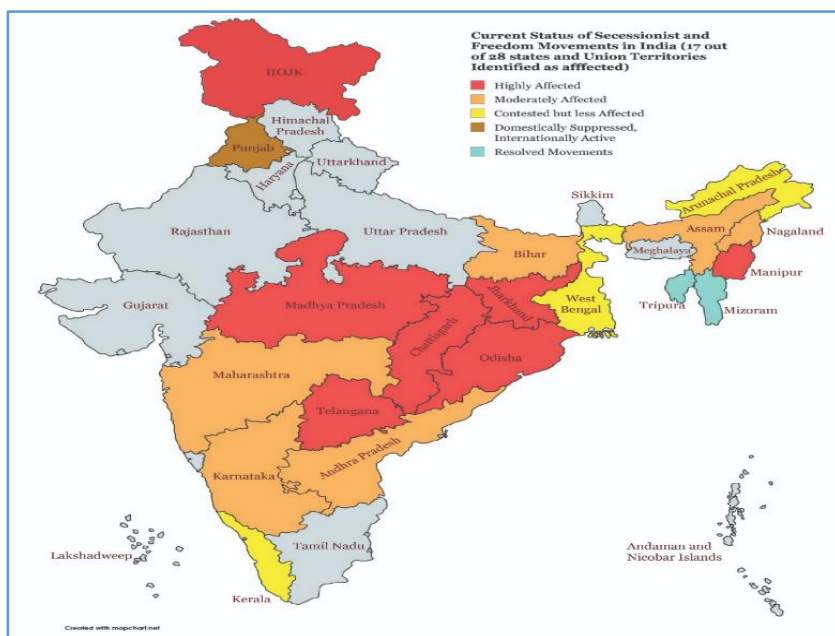
**Persistent secessionist and freedom movements across India highlight unresolved injustice and state apparatus increasingly reliant on exclusion and repression over reforms and stability.**

Assam Accord (1985), unrest has persisted.<sup>5</sup> The ULFA-Arabinda faction signed peace deal (2020), but Baruah-led faction remains active.

In central-east, Naxalite movement began in Naxalbari, West Bengal (1967) as an armed struggle for land and tribal rights, spreading across underdeveloped "Red Corridor."<sup>6</sup> It remains low-intensity movement calling for revolutionary change. Peaking around 2009-2010,<sup>7</sup> it now faces state crackdowns, with BJP-led government accused of staged encounters and forced tribal evictions.

Mizoram movement began after state neglect during the 1959 famine, highlighting state's disconnect with peripheral regions. After a call for independence (1961) and decades of unrest, a peace accord (1986) led to its statehood (1987).<sup>8</sup>

## Secessionist and Freedom Movements in India



Source: Self Compiled

Tripura movement (1980s), rooted in tribal resentment over loss of land, identity, and political power mainly due to large-scale migration from Bangladesh, demanded secession for indigenous Tripuris. Violence weakened (2000s) due to peace accords, surrenders, and partial autonomy (2024).

Towards India's west, Khalistan freedom movement arose (1970s-80s) by Sikh alienation, economic marginalisation, and state repression, intensifying after Indian military's Operation Blue Star (1984), followed by over 500 killings and 2,097 secret cremations by Amritsar police.<sup>9</sup> Despite their historical rule in Punjab, denial of a Sikh-majority state was seen as a cultural erasure.<sup>10</sup> Though it is largely suppressed internally through a combination of military operations, stringent policing and political engagement, periodic flare-ups, and diaspora-linked activism persist. BJP's targeting of activists abroad<sup>11</sup> raised concerns over India's breach of international norms to serve domestic political agendas.<sup>12</sup>

Kashmir freedom movement began (1947) after India denied self-determination to its Muslim-majority population, sparking one of world's oldest and biggest disputes. India's occupation of disputed territory has involved mass repression and highest troop deployment in any civilian area (900,000 – MOFA 2021),<sup>13</sup> with widespread human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, rapes, detentions, tortures, and extrajudicial killings.<sup>14</sup> Before 2019, India maintained the special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in line with its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions. The BJP government unlawfully revoked Indian constitution's Articles 370 and 35A provisions that granted the region internal autonomy and exclusive rights for its permanent residents.<sup>15</sup> Worsening the crisis, it was an attempt to alter Kashmir's status from a multilateral issue under UN resolutions to a bilateral Pakistan-India matter under the Simla Agreement, and ultimately to a unilateral decision by India.

Indian state's response to these movements has largely been coercive, marked by heavy military deployments and use of force. In cases like Kashmir, Manipur, Red Corridor, and Khalistan, security forces have been central to state's response. While this may have brought temporary order in some cases, it has mostly intensified resentment and perpetuated cycles of violence; recent offensives, such as "Operation Zero" (2025) against Naxalites, is a case in point.<sup>16</sup>

Politically, India has demonstrated selective willingness to negotiate. Peace accords and autonomy arrangements in Mizoram, Tripura, and Assam (partial) yielded some results. However, the state exploits internal divisions by supporting pro-centre governments, splinter factions, and surrender schemes more as control mechanisms than genuine reconciliation. For instance, around 300 people were killed in Assam (1998-2001) as police and army units exploited rehabilitation schemes, employing surrendered cadres to execute extrajudicial mass killings.<sup>17</sup>

Several movements have seen a mix of military responses, like "scorch earth policy" for Nagaland,<sup>18</sup> and political dialogue, yet they remain unresolved due to unmet demands.<sup>19</sup>

Legally, Indian state has expanded use of stringent laws, such as sedition clauses (1870-British colonial law),<sup>20</sup> Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958),<sup>21</sup> Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (1967),<sup>22</sup> Public Safety Act (1978),<sup>23</sup> National Security Act (1980),<sup>24</sup> and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1985),<sup>25</sup> to suppress movements. They enable prolonged detention and target activists, journalists, and minority voices. Legal repression, framed as national security, undermines civil liberties and fuels domestic and international concerns over democratic decline.<sup>26</sup>

Media censorship and internet blackouts are common. Mainstream Indian media often distorts or downplays movements, playing key role in shaping public opinion against them for political gains. By framing them as foreign-sponsored threats, e.g., branding Kashmir freedom struggle as “Pakistan-sponsored terrorism” and Naxalite as “Maoist extremism” the state controls narratives, masking its inability to address issues. This delegitimises genuine grievances, justifies crackdowns, and silences dissent, while media critics face harassment, censorship, or legal action.

Tensions have worsened under BJP-led government. A Hindutva-driven agenda has further sidelined and marginalised minorities. Use of harsh laws and stalled peace processes has made political resolution increasingly elusive. Rising communal polarisation continues to erode the social fabric. Since PM Modi took office, there has been a marked increase in hate speeches and crimes, press restrictions, and discriminatory laws. International watchdogs now categorise India as a “flawed democracy,” citing steady erosion of civil liberties and democratic norms.<sup>27</sup>

Despite this, global powers have largely overlooked India’s authoritarian drift, prioritising its role as a counterweight to China. But if India’s apparent economic momentum slows or its strategic utility declines, this overlooked vulnerability could invite global scrutiny and even external leverage in the form of strategic manipulation. All this is leading to regional instability, as seen in the form of uncalled-for Indian provocations in May 2025.

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- <sup>21</sup> The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) grants Indian security forces sweeping powers, including arrest without warrant and use of lethal force, in "disturbed areas." Widely enforced in regions like Kashmir and Northeast India, it is criticized for enabling human rights abuses and shielding personnel from accountability.
- <sup>22</sup> The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), enacted in 1967 and amended several times since, is India's primary counterterrorism legislation. Its stated aim is to prevent unlawful activities that threaten the sovereignty and integrity of the country. The law allows the government to designate individuals and organisations as terrorists, detain suspects for extended periods without formal charges or bail, and restrict civil liberties in the name of national security. UAPA has been increasingly used to suppress dissent, target activists, journalists, and minorities, and bypass fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. The law permits pre-trial detention up to 180 days.
- <sup>23</sup> Public Safety Act (PSA) was enacted in 1978. The Indian government's Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act allows for preventive detention without charge or trial for up to two years. It has been widely criticised for enabling arbitrary detention and bypassing standard legal safeguards, particularly targeting political dissidents and human rights defenders in Kashmir.
- <sup>24</sup> Indian government widely used National Security Act (NSA) in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s to detain suspected Khalistani sympathisers, activists, and even journalists without formal charges. It enabled arbitrary detention of individuals based on suspicion, often without transparent legal recourse, created a climate of fear, and curtailed civil liberties.
- <sup>25</sup> Enforced between 1985 and 1995, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) was India's first anti-terror law. It permitted prolonged detention without charge, confessions made to police as admissible evidence, and in-camera trials. TADA was repealed due to widespread concerns over human rights abuses and its use against minorities and political opponents.
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# The Shadow of Hindutva: Unveiling the Legal Marginalisation of Muslims in Modi's India

*Ms Noor ul Ain Tahir*

## Abstract

*The INSIGHT discusses the legal and political marginalization of India's Muslim population under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government. It highlights the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019, which grants fast-tracked citizenship to non-Muslim refugees but excludes Muslims, raising concerns about their disenfranchisement. Additionally, the article explores the implications of the National Population Register (NPR) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), which could disproportionately affect Muslims. The article also addresses the controversial abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, undermining Muslim rights, and the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2025, which threatens the religious autonomy of Muslim communities. Overall, these developments contribute to the erosion of Muslim rights in India, with significant implications for regional stability in South Asia.*

**Keywords:** India, Muslims, Hindutva, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Article 370, Kashmir.

India is home to about two hundred million Muslims, one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, but they are a minority in a predominantly Hindu country.<sup>1</sup> Since India's independence, this community has faced discrimination and violence, despite constitutional protections.<sup>2</sup> The risks have increased since the 2014 election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government,<sup>3</sup> whose leaders have often made statements promoting Hindutva supremacy. These comments have frequently triggered violence by party supporters, who have political protection.

This insight, therefore, examines how the legal and political sidelining of Muslims in Modi's India threatens their rights and has serious implications for regional stability in South Asia.

Since Modi's re-election in 2019, the government has legislated laws that undermine Muslim rights and threaten to disenfranchise millions. Key among these are the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 (CAA), the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A in Indian-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), and the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2025, among others.

Building on this trajectory, in 2019, the Modi administration enacted the CAA. Under the amended Section 2(1)(b) proviso, for the first time in India, a secular state, religion becomes a basis for acquiring citizenship.<sup>4</sup> The law specifically fast-tracks asylum claims of non-Muslim immigrants from neighbouring Muslim-majority countries, explicitly excluding Muslims from its purview. This concern becomes even more alarming when the CAA is considered alongside the government's plans to update the National Population Register (NPR).

**The prime objective of Modi's BJP is currently not just to make political gains through communal polarisation but to advance 'civilizational majoritarianism' and to complete the Hinduization of India.**

The NPR is a database that collects demographic data for each resident of India, including information such as the date and place of birth of parents, even if they are deceased, along with other identity details. Critics argue that this data collection could be used to determine who qualifies as a citizen,<sup>5</sup> as officials review the list and flag individuals as "doubtful residents" if their documents seem suspicious. These "doubtful citizens" will then be asked to produce documents to prove their citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Those who successfully verify their claim are listed in the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a nationwide effort to identify "illegal migrants." Those who cannot prove their citizenship will not be included in the NRC list, labelled as "foreigners," and face trials in Foreigners' Tribunals.<sup>7</sup>

This process has been carried out in Assam, where about two million people, mostly Muslims, were left off the final list in 2019 because of missing documents. This exclusion highlights a larger national problem, as many rural and marginalised residents often do not have historical records due to illegal migration.

Subsequently, the amended citizenship law, along with NPR and NRC, could disproportionately impact Muslim communities by making them displaced or categorizing them as “doubtful citizens,”<sup>8</sup> since they won't be able to use CAA, like non-Muslim Indians can easily do, to obtain citizenship.<sup>9</sup>

Another significant legislative change was the abolition of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in 2019, which removed the special status of Jammu and Kashmir—India's only Muslim-majority state—bringing it directly under the central government's control.<sup>10</sup> Since then, Indian authorities have suppressed the rights of people in the region, often claiming it is for security reasons. Immediately afterwards, Muslim political leaders were detained or placed under house arrest, creating a political vacuum that eliminated Muslim representation and replaced it with centralised rule that lacks widespread legitimacy.<sup>11</sup>

Article 35A, which originates from Article 370, was also abolished; it grants the Jammu and Kashmir legislature the authority to define the state's permanent residents and their special rights and privileges.<sup>12</sup> Since its abrogation, any Indian citizen can now settle, acquire property, and seek employment in Jammu and Kashmir, fuelling fears of demographic shifts and the erosion of Muslim landholding dominance. This abrogation appears to be an attempt to silence the voices of Jammu and Kashmir's residents and undermine the core principle of representative democracy.<sup>13</sup>

A similarly controversial law is the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which introduced changes to the management of waqf properties—charitable trusts essential to Islamic practice and welfare. Traditionally, they have served as a vital legacy of Muslim charity, dedicated to religious, educational, and social welfare purposes. Their management carries deep socio-religious significance, as they are viewed not just as assets but as sacred trusts meant to benefit the community in perpetuity.<sup>14</sup>

The Act's key provisions include the unprecedented inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf Boards, which weakens the religious independence of the Muslim community.<sup>15</sup>

It also revokes the recognition of 'waqf by user,' which acknowledges informal use of properties like mosques or graveyards without documentation.<sup>16</sup> This raises concerns that many religious sites could be at risk of state acquisition.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, restructuring waqf tribunals enables the government to appoint retired judges instead of judicial officers, which undermines the fairness of legal procedures.<sup>18</sup> Overall, these changes have raised fears among Muslims about marginalisation, threatening their religious autonomy, institutional control, and access to justice.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from legislation, BJP politicians have renamed districts and cities with Muslim names, replacing them with Hindu ones.<sup>20</sup> For example, in 2018, the BJP changed the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj, a name referencing the Hindu pilgrimage site there.<sup>21</sup> This erasure of Islamic names is another attempt to weaken Indian Muslims and deny them a place in the country's history.<sup>22</sup> Another concern among the Muslim community is the ban on Azaan in Mumbai. The move is seen as part of a broader issue: selective enforcement disguised as legal compliance.<sup>23</sup>

In short, the BJP's strategic goal is to promote its Hindutva political agenda. These policies help the BJP secure support from Hindu voters by portraying Muslims as outsiders and fostering fear of demographic shifts and religious separatism.<sup>24</sup> According to Christophe Jaffrelot, the prime objective of Modi's BJP is currently not just to make political gains through communal polarisation but to advance 'civilizational majoritarianism' and to complete the Hinduization of India.<sup>25</sup>

The BJP-led, Hindutva-driven government frequently uses these polarising policies to divert attention from growing internal dissent and governance problems. For instance, the 2019 Balakot airstrike, conducted shortly after the Pulwama terror attack and just before national elections, was widely interpreted as a politically motivated move to boost domestic support.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the May 2025 Operation Sindoor—a cross-border missile strike in response to the Pahalgam attack emerged amid escalating internal criticism, reinforcing the impression of using military action to divert attention.<sup>27</sup>

As internal fissures deepen, fuelled by Hindutva-led policies of the BJP, there is a growing danger that Modi may prefer to engage in regional chest thumping to divert attention of masses in the name of nationalism. This approach will likely create more regional instability.

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# Reimagining PTV: Lessons from Global Public Broadcasters

*Faiza Qureshi*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT critically examines the decline of Pakistan Television (PTV) in the face of digital disruption and media pluralism. Once a dominant state broadcaster, PTV now struggles with outdated content, limited global reach, and poor digital engagement. Drawing lessons from global public broadcasters like BBC and TRT, the paper advocates for structural reforms in finance, editorial independence, and content strategy to revive PTV's relevance and public service mission in a rapidly evolving media landscape.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV), Broadcasting, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Entertainment.

State broadcasters stand out for their non-commercial nature and mandate to promote national cohesion through information. Following this model, Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) began in 1964 and later expanded its mandate to include information, education, and entertainment programmes. For over three decades, PTV held a monopoly on national airwaves with diverse and responsible programming. However, post-2000 media pluralism shifted viewer preferences and introduced strong competition from private and digital platforms. Therefore, this insight analyses PTV's performance, vis-à-vis international peers and identifies challenges, based on expert opinion from seasoned media professionals.

Table 1: Structure of PTV

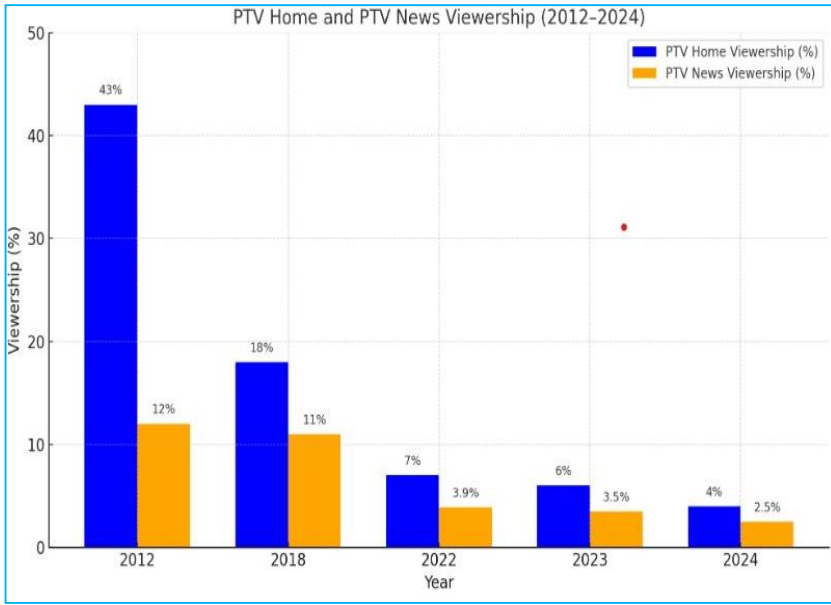
Structure of PTV	
<b>Name</b>	Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV)
<b>Status</b>	Corporation under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MOIB)
<b>Function</b>	Television Broadcast
<b>Mission</b>	To preserve, protect and promote Pakistan's national narrative through objective educational, informative and entertaining content beamed globally.
<b>Management</b>	<b>Head:</b> Managing Director PTV along with Board of Directors
<b>Type of Broadcast</b>	100% Terrestrial coverage with satellite transmission domestically and for other countries
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>Headquarters:</b> Islamabad <b>Production Centres:</b> 7 (Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Muzaffarabad, Multan) <b>Rebroadcast stations:</b> 95 (Punjab 16, Sindh 9, KPK 23, Balochistan 24, AJK 13, GB 10)
<b>Channels</b>	<b>8 Channels</b> (PTV Home, PTV News, PTV World, PTV Sports, PTV Bolan, PTV National, PTV Parliament and AJK TV) <b>1 PTV Films</b> <b>1 PTV FLIX</b> (OTT Platform)
<b>Genre</b>	News and Entertainment
<b>Number of employees</b>	4200
<b>Annual Budget</b>	License Fee + Advertisement revenue (Approx 17.5 billion Rupees annually)

Pakistan's TV landscape includes satellite and terrestrial broadcasting. There are over 120 private satellite channels, and PTV leads terrestrial broadcasting with eight HD channels, reaching the country through seven production centres and 95 rebroadcast stations. Managed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MOIB), PTV was primarily funded through a Rs35 license fee collected via electricity bills, generating around Rs10 billion annually, supplemented by fluctuating advertising revenue.<sup>1</sup>

**PTV's future depends on breaking free from financial and creative stagnation by streamlining costs, empowering editorial independence, modernising content and embracing digital innovation.**

However, collection was discontinued in June 2025. While PTV has a broad terrestrial and satellite footprint, it struggles to convert this reach into consistent audience engagement. In the 1990s, PTV held about 68% of total domestic TV viewership;<sup>2</sup> however, (as illustrated in Graph 1), this dominance has eroded over time. Between 2012 and 2024, PTV Home's audience share dropped from 43% to 4%, and PTV News declined by 75%.<sup>3</sup>

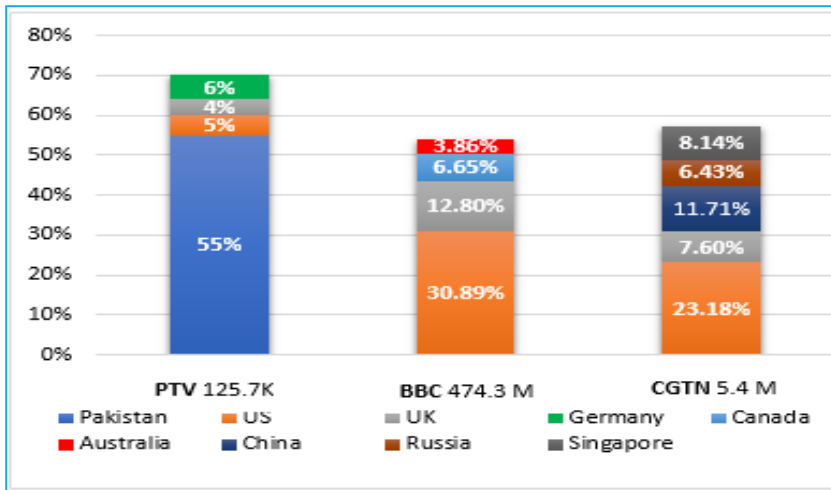
**Graph 1:** PTV Viewership over 2 Decades



**Source:** Self Extracted form Data Centers

In terms of international reach, PTV World is broadcast in over 50 countries, compared to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 200, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in 190, and China Global Television Network (CGTN) in 160. The website engagement analysis presents PTV as the least performing, with only 125,700 monthly visitors, 55% of whom are from Pakistan. In contrast, outlets like the BBC and CGTN receive far higher traffic, with less than 13% from the home country.<sup>4</sup> This underscores PTV’s limited global reach and lack of internationally relevant content.

**Graph 2:** PTV’s Web Traffic Comparison with Global Broadcasters



**Source:** Self-Compiled from Website Traffic Analysis

On YouTube, PTV shows very low audience engagement compared to both domestic and international competitors. Domestically, PTV is the lowest performing in the entertainment, news, and sports categories, while internationally, its digital presence remains nominal, in comparison to global broadcasters that often produce less content but achieve significantly higher viewership. For example, the BBC has uploaded only three times more content but gets about 461 times more views per video, averaging 239K views, while PTV receives just 519. Here, it is noteworthy that PTV treats its digital platforms primarily as archival repositories, whereas successful broadcasters curate special content for digital audiences.

In short, PTV’s performance has declined across both traditional and digital platforms. The challenge lies primarily in content quality, relevance, and ability to engage diverse audiences.

**Table 2:** Comparative Assessment of PTV vs Domestic and International Peers

Category	Channel	Subscribers	Total Views	Uploaded Videos	Average views
<b>DOMESTIC</b>					
Entertainment	PTV Home	1.19M	130.4M	9,385	13,898
	ARY Digital	63.2M	64.7B	174,168	371,551
	Geo Entertainment	68.1M	71.55B	169,643	421,627
News	PTV News	411K	31.8M	33,522	949
	ARY News	15.1M	9.10B	169,721	53,617
	Geo News	19M	10.26B	290,528	35,317
Sports	PTV Sports	163K	8.8M	2,195	4,010
	A Sports	1.04M	347.1M	3,337	104,018
	Geo Super	1.43M	450.8M	18,113	24,880
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b>					
International Broadcast	PTV World	140,000	4.9M	9,450	521
	BBC	18.4M	6.23B	26,003	239,529
	CGTN	3.29M	2.26B	139,496	16,205
	TRT	9.71M	2.50B	61,836	40,440
	DW	5.91M	2.82B	40,670	69,324

**Source:** Self Extracted from YouTube Channels

As per experts, the key contributors to PTV's decline are: gradual erosion of in-house production, restrictive editorial inefficiencies. policies, and systemic

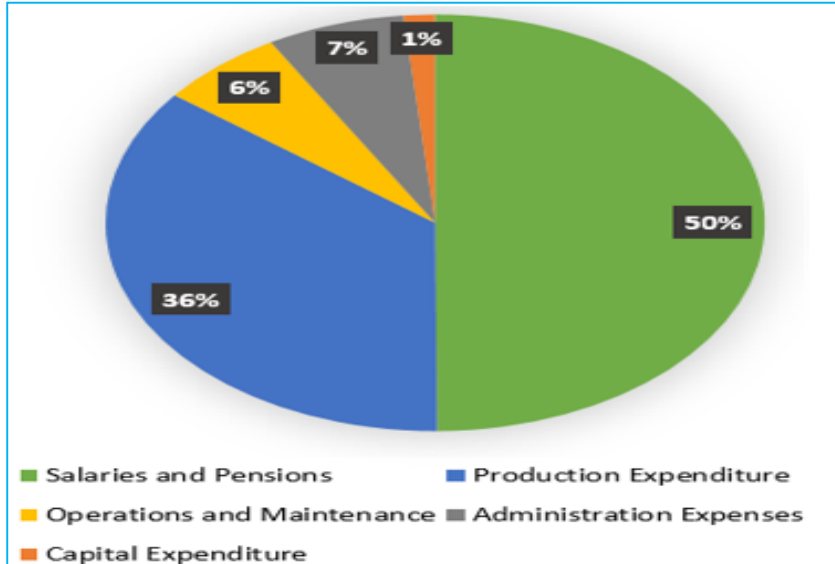
Once known for producing impactful content in entertainment, PTV's in-house entertainment production has now virtually ceased, reliant almost entirely on private production, except for live programming. At the same time, the high cost of privately produced dramas, averaging PKR 3 to 5 million per episode, remains well beyond PTV's budget, forcing it to rely on outdated or low-quality content.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, in the news domain, PTV's editorial policy is narrowly focused on government narratives, reflecting its institutional alignment with MOIB at the cost of editorial balance. In 2022–2023, PTV News aired 1,456 programmes on government activities, while coverage of other issues averaged only 300 each.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the absence of an independent editorial board exacerbates existing editorial imbalance and limits broader audience engagement.

Thirdly, broader public sector inefficiencies, such as bureaucratic delays and operational irregularities, have hampered PTV's ability to respond to market changes. For instance, the launch of its OTT platform, PTVFLIX, in April 2023, although intended to monetise archival content, quickly stalled due to unclear mandates and a lack of strategic planning, thus turning into another loss-making venture.<sup>7</sup>

Central to PTV's underperformance are deep financial imbalances. Over the past three years, it operated with an average annual budget of PKR 17 billion, nearly 50% of which is spent on salaries and pensions for over 4,200 employees, while just 35% was allocated to production and only 1.5% to infrastructure and technology. In contrast, the BBC spends only 18% on personnel and 51% on content production, reflecting a content-first strategy.<sup>8</sup> This imbalance reflects misplaced priorities, where PTV is geared more toward sustaining the institution than producing quality content, thus hampering its competitiveness in the evolving media environment.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 1:** Analysis of PTV's Financial Allocations 2022-2025



Source: PTV

In light of the above discussion, it is evident that PTV needs to reform two major sections: Financial health and content development. To improve its finances, PTV needs to rationalize its workforce and allocate budgets more effectively, with a strong focus on production quality. Drawing on international models, broadcasters like the BBC, CGTN, and TRT use non-permanent contracts for technical staff to reduce long-term costs, a strategy PTV can adopt to improve sustainability. PTV should also explore private investment to support terrestrial operations under a clear implementation framework.

To improve content quality, PTV needs a comprehensive approach. In the entertainment sector, PTV must revamp its in-house production and upgrade equipment to meet modern standards. Joint ventures with private producers can serve as a practical starting point. TRT provides a strong example; its globally acclaimed drama *Diriliş Ertuğrul*, a co-production with private partners, showcases that high-quality, audience-relevant content can boost both domestic viewership and international reach. For PTV, adopting a similar model could be key to restoring its entertainment relevance and appeal.<sup>10</sup>

In the news domain, with declining viewership, restoring public trust in PTV's news content is critical. A balanced editorial model, combining the BBC's independent board structure with TRT's strategic alignment to national priorities, offers a practical path forward. By ensuring editorial autonomy through an empowered board, PTV can enhance its credibility while fulfilling its public service role.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of digital engagement, globally, broadcasters like BBC, TRT, and CGTN have adopted a digital-first approach, using strong multi-platform strategies and mobile-friendly content, curated for online audience. PTV can follow this model to revamp its digital strategy and expand its outreach.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, in an era of growing misinformation and fragmented media spaces, the role of credible public broadcasters has become more critical than ever. PTV, with its historic status, diverse mandate, and national reach, is well-positioned to serve this role.

However, its viewership across traditional and digital platforms is on a decline, but it isn't irreversible. International models from BBC, TRT, and CGTN present a workable foundation for revival. Therefore, it is high time for PTV to reclaim its place as the state broadcaster.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Exporting Human Resource: Analysis of Pakistan Labour Supply

*Ms Rafia Ashar*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT examines Pakistan's labour export framework as a critical source of remittances, highlighting its heavy dependence on Gulf markets, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. While reforms, digital platforms, and awareness campaigns have improved access and processes, structural challenges persist, including outdated vocational training, limited market diversification, and regulatory weaknesses in overseeing Overseas Employment Promoters. Governance gaps, fraudulent practices, and weak coordination between training institutions and ministries undermine competitiveness, risking stagnation in manpower exports without targeted, integrated policy action.*

**Keywords:** Human Resource Development, Pakistan Foundation, Middle East, Manpower.

**F**undamentally, countries rely on three channels to earn foreign exchange; foreign direct investment (FDI), exports, and remittances. Among these, remittances play a significant role for developing nations like Pakistan, where the export of skilled and unskilled labour to international markets has become a key driver of economic growth. This insight will focus on the aspect of remittance flows through manpower export from Pakistan.

The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOPHRD) plays a central role in facilitating labour migration and ensuring the welfare of overseas Pakistanis and their families.

To streamline and regulate manpower exports, the ministry supervises key institutions, including the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE), the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF), and the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC).

In 2020, MOPHRD formulated the latest National Emigration & Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis, which established a structured approach to labour migration. Prior to this, labour migration was primarily facilitated by the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), which focused mainly on deploying workers to Gulf countries, alongside private recruitment agencies that lacked a proactive policy.

**The decline in Pakistan's labour export model stems from outdated vocational trainings, lack of diversified markets, and a persistent overdependence on traditional Gulf region.**

The latest policy interconnects the BE&OE, OPF, and OEC to ensure a coordinated effort in overseas employment. Pakistan regulates the emigration of its workforce for overseas employment through the 1979 Emigration Ordinance, administered by the BEOE.

The 1979 Emigration Rules and Regulations outline multiple pathways for Pakistanis to secure employment abroad. Workers can either obtain jobs through an Overseas Employment Promoter (OEP), which may be public or private through personal efforts (direct employment), or with the assistance of already employed overseas.

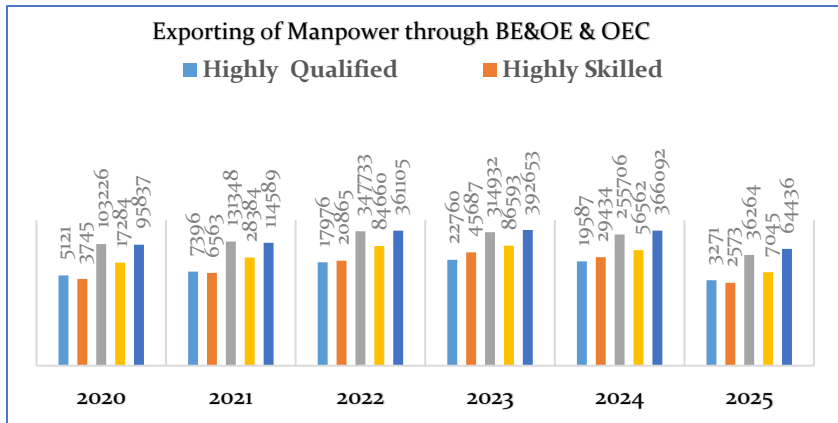
BEOE plays a key regulatory role as it is responsible for issuing licenses to private OEPs, monitoring their activities, and ensuring compliance with labour laws to safeguard migrant workers. As of February 2025, a total of 2,697 active licensed OEPs are registered with the Protector of Emigrants Offices, which oversee the legal clearance of departing workers.<sup>1</sup> For government-facilitated employment, the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) serves as the official manpower-exporting agency, primarily handling foreign government requests for Pakistani workers.

The Ministry categorises overseas workers into five distinct groups; as shown in the table below depending on their level of education, vocational training, and professional certifications.

Categories	Description	Examples
Highly Qualified	Workers with advanced academic degrees (Master's/PhD) or top-tier professional qualifications	Doctors, Engineers (postgraduate), Professors
Highly Skilled	Professionals with specialized technical training/certifications (not necessarily advanced degrees)	IT Specialists (Software Devs, Cybersecurity), Nurses, Aviation Technicians
Skilled	Workers with formal vocational training or mid-level certifications	Electricians, Welders (ITI/Diploma), Heavy Machinery Operators, Automotive Technicians, Chefs, Hotel Managers
Semi-Skilled	Workers with basic on-the-job training (no formal certifications)	Construction Helpers, Agricultural Workers, Factory Assembly Line Workers, Cleaners, Drivers
Unskilled	Workers with no formal education/training (manual labour)	Daily Wage Laborers (Construction/Framing), Janitorial Staff, Warehouse Packers

Based on these Classifications, the following graph shows the export of manpower over the last 05 years.<sup>2</sup>

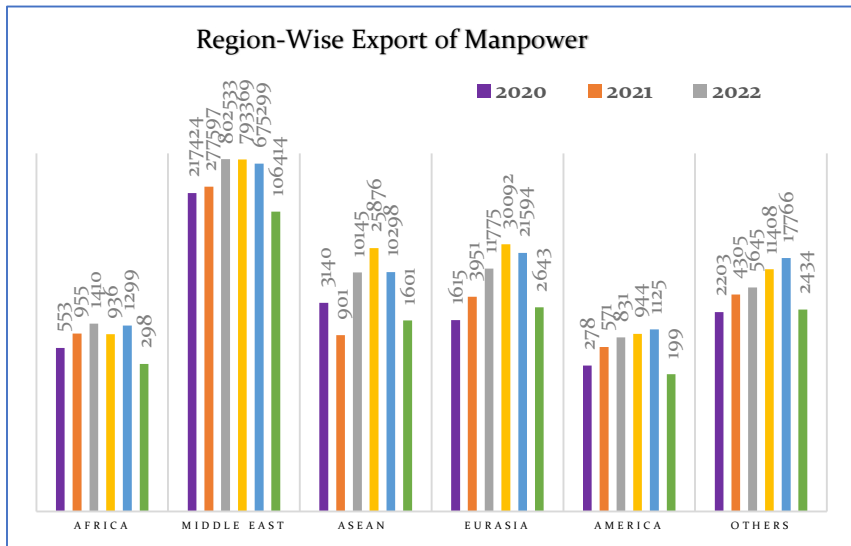
Figure 1



Source: BE&OE

The graph highlights **fluctuations in manpower exports**, with a steady increase in labour exports from 2020, peaking in 2022 & 2023, with unskilled and skilled workers making up the largest share, but it also indicates a sharp decline in 2025. However, the region wise supply of manpower indicates that the Middle Eastern region has been the top destination for Pakistani manpower, with KSA absorbing the highest number.<sup>3</sup> While Middle Eastern nations continue to be the primary labour markets, migration to non-traditional markets in Europe, Africa, and East Asia remains marginal as shown in the graph below.

Figure 2

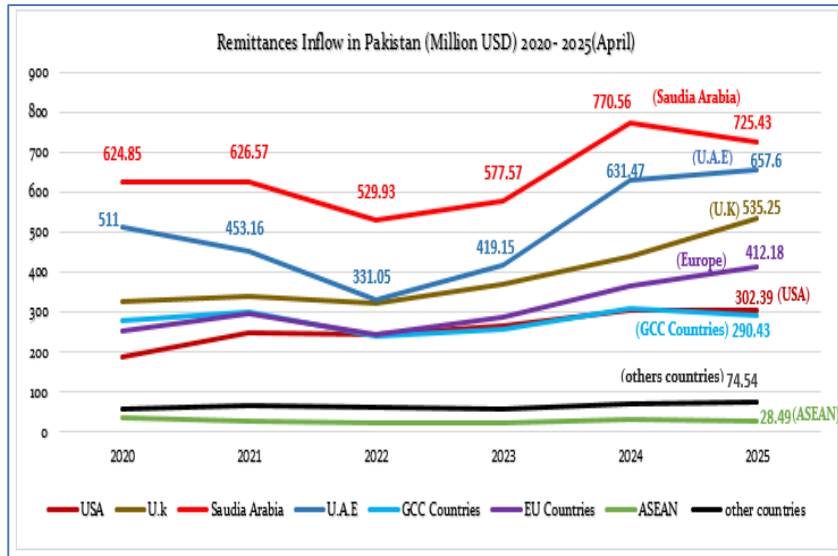


Source: BE&OE

The supply of manpower remained relatively high throughout 2024 after COVID, driven by several key factors. Notably, the government launched awareness programs aimed at encouraging labour deployment beyond the traditional Gulf markets. Additionally, the introduction of the Overseas Portal, a centralized, government-run platform; marked a significant improvement over the previously fragmented and disjointed online systems. This digital integration streamlined access to information and services for prospective migrant workers.

However, the decline in labour supply during 2025 is mirrored in remittance inflows, with the graph showing a peak in 2024. It also highlights that contributions from regions beyond the Gulf and the EU remain minimal.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2

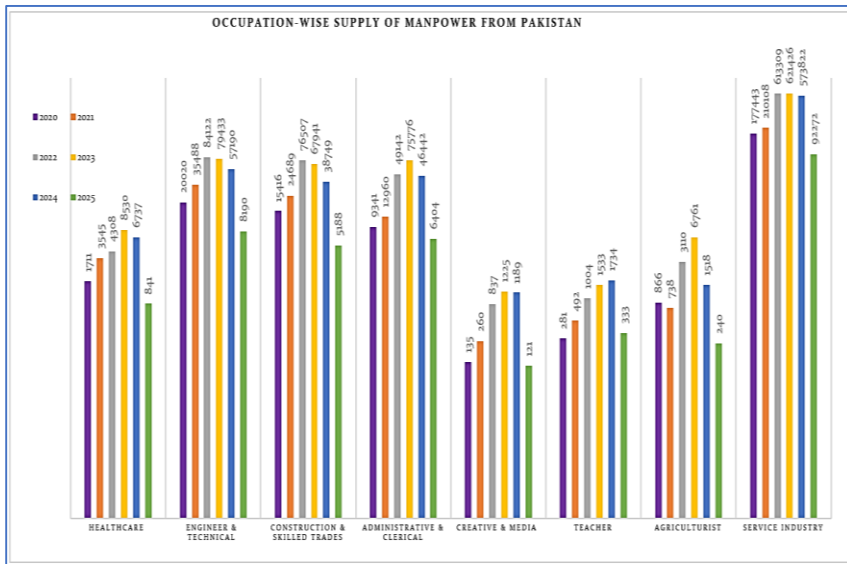


Source: SBP

The graph depicts that Pakistan receives the highest remittances from the Middle East (Notably from KSA, U.A.E) driven by a larger concentration of migrant labour in the region. The State Bank of Pakistan in a press release reported ‘Saudi Arabia as a top contributor as Pakistan remittances grow 38.6% and 3.8% on year-on-year and month-on-month basis’.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, other regions contribute relatively modest amounts, both in aggregate and on a per worker basis.

The majority of this workforce falls into the labourer category, with a significant portion being unskilled and lacking formal training. The following graph reflects that the service Industry (Notably labourers & Drivers) has the highest supply over all.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 4



Source: BE&OE

The above data highlights that majority of workers deployed abroad from Pakistan fall into the unskilled labour. It also indicates the lack of diversification in skilled professions, limiting the country’s ability to compete in the global job market. In addition, the government<sup>7</sup> asserts a disparity between the supply and demand of labour as in 2022, inefficiencies and the absence of a structured policy framework for human resource exports led to a backlog of 116,826 vacant job positions, some dating back to 2021. Pakistan’s labour export framework is marked by a divide between the process of Human Resource Development (HRD) and Human Resource Management (HRM).

Technical institutions like NAVTTC (National Vocational and Technical Training Commission) and TEVTA (Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority) are primarily responsible for HRD and conversely, MOPHRD oversees the management and deployment of this workforce abroad.

At the federal level, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MOFEPT) sets broader policies and strategies while the NAVTTC acts as a regulatory body. In provinces, TEVTA is responsible for implementing these policies. Pakistan has 3,740 technical institutions, of which 56% are private and 44% are public.<sup>8</sup>

It raises critical questions on the efficacy of technical institutes particularly regarding the relevance, alignment and quality of their training programs but also exposes a lack of coordination and foresight on the part of the Ministry in articulating foreign labour market demands to these training bodies. This points to a lack of an integrated approach between the ministry and the training bodies whether in identifying market needs or in designing and delivering targeted skill development programs.

Moreover, another pressing challenge is the malpractice of OEPs, who often misrepresent unskilled workers as skilled to secure foreign placements and extract higher fees. This deceptive practice not only exposes workers to exploitation and job insecurity abroad but also damage Pakistan's credibility in global labour markets. Incidents of workers going missing or becoming undocumented further highlight the gravity of the issue. For e.g, In April-May 2024, Europol exposed a network of Romanian and Pakistani nationals falsifying work permit applications, obtaining 102 through OEPs or fake consultancies in Pakistan. Around 76 reached Western Europe, while 26 were caught in Romania, Italy, or Austria.

Several Pakistani migrants went missing after arriving, becoming untraceable as they left legal routes and lost contact.<sup>9</sup> In April 2025, FIA arrested 3 agents involved in visa fraud schemes targeting individuals seeking employment in Romania. One victim was deceived into paying nearly PKR 1.95 million for a job offer that never existed, arranged through a fake OEP/ consultancy firm.<sup>10</sup>

The following table highlights the blacklist licences of OEP by BE&OE and complaints received against them.

**Figure 5**

Categories of Licences (2019-2025/June)											
Total Valid Licences		Invalid Licences			Expired licences			Blacklist/Cancelled licences			
2702		08			757			806			
Status-wise Complaints Statistics (2019-2025/June)											
Complaint Status	RWP	lahore	karachi	Peshawar	Quetta	Malakand	Multan	Sialkot	DG Khan	Sukkur	Abbottabad
Received	779	310	265	80	3	35	35	29	12	0	0
Settled/Closed	122	84	52	19	0	13	7	1	4	0	0
Under Process	657	226	213	61	3	22	28	28	08	0	0
Complaints Refer to Bureau/FIA (2019-2025/June)											
	Received	Settled/Closed	Under Process								
Bureau HQ	2293	2163	130								
FIA	859	847	12								

**Source:** BE&OE

The data reflect the persistent regulatory weaknesses in overseeing OEPs. Although a large number of licences remain active, a considerable share has either lapsed, been blacklisted due to serious violations. On the complaint front, the figures reveal alarming inefficiencies; a substantial backlog of unresolved or pending cases, many of which have escalated to higher authorities or entered legal proceedings. This pattern highlights the critical gaps in enforcement, accountability, and institutional responsiveness.

Several concerns have also emerged over governance and financial irregularities within MOPHRD, as well as technical institutions. Investigative reports have highlighted case s of embezzlement and mismanagement. <sup>11</sup> Similarly, NAVTTC has raised concerns about unregistered bodies issuing counterfeit certifications, undermining the credibility of technical and vocational training in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Transparency International Pakistan also pointed out the MOPHRD violations of public procurement rules, emphasizing lapses in transparency and accountability.<sup>13</sup>

The National Assembly Standing Committee on MOPHRD also expressed dissatisfaction over the ministry's inadequate implementation of anti-corruption measures, highlighting persistent issues in its subordinate departments.<sup>14</sup>

In nutshell, despite ongoing reforms & pro-emigration policy, Pakistan's labour export remains disproportionately concentrated in the Middle East, with only minimal progress in tapping into alternative markets. This also reflects a deeper policy disconnect as technical institutes lack the capacity to deliver quality, market-relevant training, while ministries failed to secure diversified demand or coordinate effectively. Such disconnect has also indirectly driven illegal migration; a challenge that could be significantly reduced through coherent and well-integrated labour export framework. Without a targeted structural approach, Pakistan's labour export strategy risks stagnation.

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## About Insight and Author

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# International Organisation for Mediation (IOMed): An Introduction

*Maham Ayaz*

## Abstract

*The International Organization for Mediation (IOMed), established in Hong Kong on May 30, 2025, is the first intergovernmental body dedicated solely to mediation for state-to-state, investor-state, and commercial disputes. Rooted in principles of sovereignty, equality, and impartiality, it offers a non-binding, dialogue-driven alternative to litigation and arbitration. This insight examines IOMed's geopolitical significance, its potential role in amplifying Global South voices, and its strategic relevance for Pakistan as a founding member.*

**Keywords:** International Organisation, Mediation, Internal Conflict of Justice, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

On May 30, 2025, the international legal landscape experienced a quiet yet potentially transformative shift. The International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) was officially established through a signing ceremony held in Hong Kong, with representatives from 85 nations across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe participating in the event.

During this ceremony, thirty-three countries, including Pakistan, signed the convention, thereby becoming founding signatory members.<sup>1</sup> This insight examines the workings and objectives of IOMed to evaluate its geopolitical importance and the implications of this new forum for countries such as Pakistan.

FOUNDING SIGNATORY MEMBERS	
Region	Countries
Asia	China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Laos, Cambodia, Timor-Leste
Africa	Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan
Latin America & Caribbean	Cuba, Dominica, Jamaica, Venezuela
Oceania	Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
Europe	Belarus, Serbia

Source: Based on information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and other credible sources.

IOMed is the first intergovernmental organization exclusively dedicated to the resolution of disputes through mediation. Currently, it concentrates on the peaceful resolution of three categories of disputes: state-to-state disputes, disputes between states and foreign investors, and commercial disagreements among and between parties.

IOMed operates on principles such as respect for state sovereignty, equality, impartiality, non-interference in internal affairs, the rule of law, and effectiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Its procedural process begins with the voluntary consent of all disputing parties—usually states, corporations, or individuals involved in transnational conflicts. Once the parties agree to refer their dispute to IOMed, mediators are selected from two specialized panels: the State-to-State Mediation Panel, which comprises experts in diplomacy and international law for intergovernmental disputes; and the General Mediation Panel, comprising professionals skilled in commercial, investor-state, and mixed disputes.

**IOMed institutionalises mediation at the intergovernmental level—an unprecedented move in global legal architecture.**

The parties, in consultation with the Secretariat, appoint one or more neutral mediators from these panels. If a settlement is reached through mediation, it is formalized and finalized. If the parties agree to its terms and decide to give it legal effect within their jurisdictions, it then becomes binding.

What truly distinguishes IOMed from other international dispute resolution organizations is its dedication to mediation as both a procedural and philosophical alternative to litigation and arbitration.<sup>3</sup> Litigation, as practiced by institutions like the International Court of Justice (ICJ), is a formal judicial process that produces binding judgments through adjudication.<sup>4</sup> Arbitration, employed by entities such as the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), involves arbitrators and decisions that are legally binding and enforceable in court. Both methods are adversarial, often involve complex legal procedures, and are firmly rooted in Western legal traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Mediation, by contrast, operates on the principles of mutual consent, dialogue, and non-binding outcomes.<sup>6</sup> IOMed institutionalizes this model at the intergovernmental level—an unprecedented move in global legal architecture. Instead of issuing enforceable verdicts, it helps facilitate negotiated settlements shaped by the parties themselves. This procedural difference reflects a more profound normative shift: IOMed's model values flexibility, cultural adaptation, and voluntary resolution.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the creation of IOMed indicates a larger structural shift. Unlike the ICJ and PCA, which are based in The Hague and aligned with Euro-American legal standards, IOMed is located in Hong Kong and influenced by an ethos of multipolarism.<sup>8</sup> Its strength is in its accessibility to states—especially from the Global South—that have long viewed existing mechanisms as expensive, unequal, or culturally distant.

The establishment of IOMed was led by China, representing a strategic move to strengthen the voice of the Global South within the international legal system. Its launch—occurring amid rising U.S.-China tensions—highlights a larger goal of positioning China as a leader in a multipolar global order.<sup>9</sup>

Besides promoting dispute resolution, IOMed serves as a geopolitical tool for China to enhance its influence in global governance and support its interests in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan's foreign policy has long prioritized peaceful dispute resolution and international cooperation, making its role as a founding member of IOMed both logical and strategic.<sup>11</sup> The organization's core principles closely align with Pakistan's diplomatic stance, especially in multilateral settings.

IOMed offers a potential platform for resolving long-standing disputes with India, particularly over the Indus Waters Treaty and Jammu and Kashmir, where dialogue has been stalled due to India's resistance to formal negotiations. In such situations, a non-binding, voluntary, and non-coercive forum like IOMed could serve as a valuable space for dialogue. That said, the effectiveness of IOMed in such matters ultimately depends on India's willingness to become a signatory to the convention.

Currently, IOMed remains in its early stages, with its institutional structures, credibility, and global recognition still developing. Its influence is limited, as many major world powers have yet to sign the convention. Additionally, several countries involved in China-led initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, have not become signatories.

Given its early stage, it is perhaps premature to make definitive judgments about its impact and significance. Ultimately, its relevance will depend on its capacity to mediate a high-profile case with neutrality and transparency. If IOMed can demonstrate impartiality, particularly in light of China's leadership, it may gain the credibility necessary to become a significant player in resolving international disputes.

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# Role of Internal Politics and Global Powers in the Sudan Conflict

*Marium Akhtar*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT examines the Sudan conflict through the lens of internal political rivalries and external power interventions. It highlights how historical civil wars, economic decline, and the fragmentation of Sudan have created persistent instability. The struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is compounded by the competing interests of global and regional actors, turning Sudan into a proxy battlefield. Ultimately, the paper underscores how external involvement, framed as reform and support, has deepened Sudan's political and humanitarian crises.*

**Keywords:** Sudan, River Nile, Civil War, Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), United Nations.

Once the largest country in Northeast Africa, unified Sudan was one of the most strategically important countries due to its geographic location, resources, and regional connectivity. However, it was divided in 2011, resulting in the creation of the Republic of South Sudan and the Republic of the Sudan (Sudan). South Sudan, with a population of approximately 12 million, ranks 38th in global oil production. Sudan, with a population of 51 million, ranks 16<sup>th</sup> in gold reserves and 46<sup>th</sup> in oil production. The River Nile tributaries flowing through it make it vital for regional water control and strategic influence; however, internal power struggles, economic decline, and foreign intervention fuel instability. The insight argues that foreign involvement under the pretext of support and reform has exacerbated the worsening internal conflict in Sudan.<sup>1</sup>

Unified Sudan was divided due to geopolitical rivalries compounded by ethno-religious conflicts and continuous power struggles. Two major civil wars, the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972) and the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005), were fought between the central government in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In 2005, the Central Government and the SPLA signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) brokered by the US, UK, and Norway, which ended the second Sudanese civil war. This led to a referendum in South Sudan, resulting in its independence in 2011, with Salva Kiir Mayardit becoming its President and remaining in power to this day.

**Sudan's prolonged instability reflects the convergence of internal fractures and external rivalries, turning it into a proxy battleground of African, Arab, and global interests.**

**Figure 1**



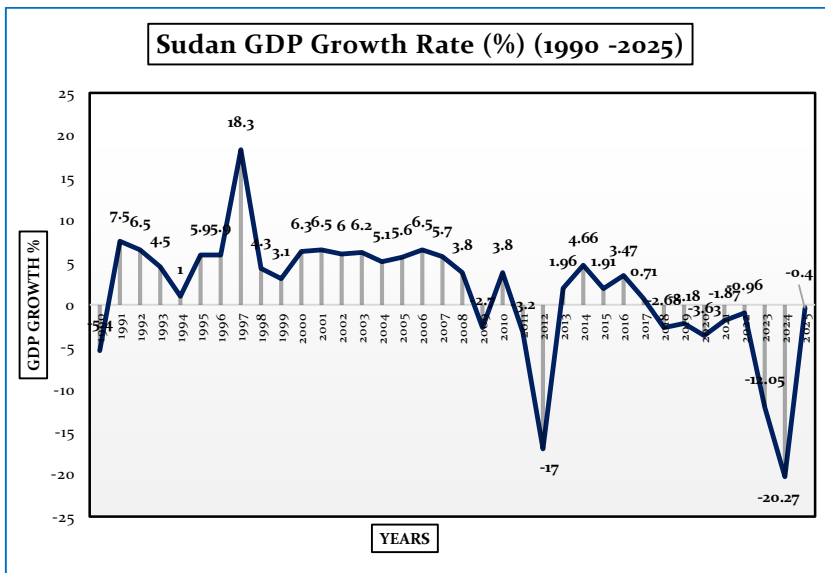
**Source:** <http://gisgeography.com/africa-map-countries-capitals/>

In 1989, General Omar al-Bashir seized power in Sudan through a military coup by ousting Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, who had been in office since 1986. His rule focused on restoring stability amid internal divisions, external pressures, and isolation. For this, his government turned to local alliances in response to rebellion and instability, such as the Janjaweed militia, which was later restructured and formalised as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Economically, GDP growth increased at the start of Bashir’s era (1991-1992), primarily due to the early reforms. Later, due to US-led sanctions and isolation, it dropped to 1% in 1994 before reaching a peak of 18.3% in 1997, driven by Chinese investment.<sup>2</sup>

This was followed by a decline in 1998-99, due to the initial phase of oil exports after infrastructural completion, followed by a steady growth observed from 2000 to 2007 as Sudan aligned with China and Iran. Thereafter, a downward trend has persisted to this day.

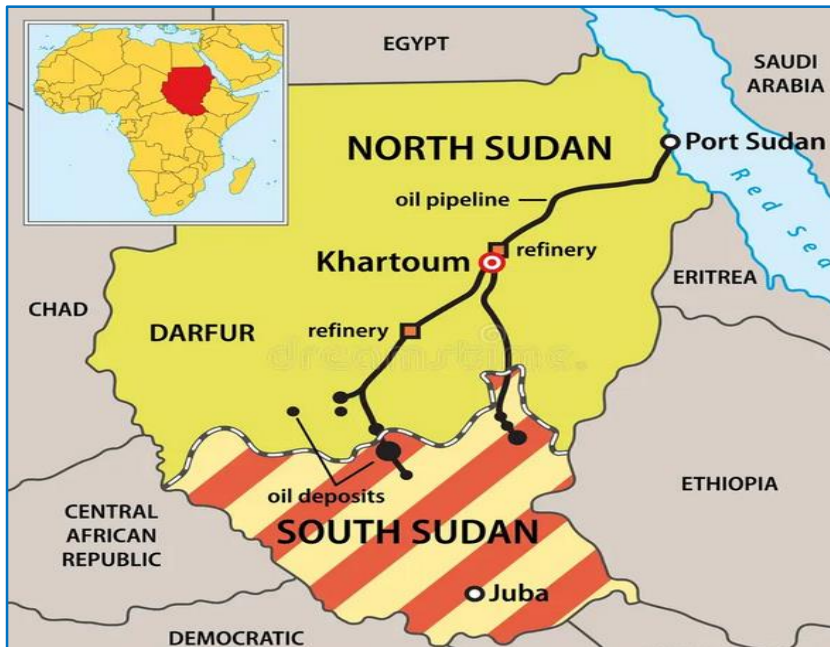
Figure 2



Source: World Bank Data Catalogue, <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/>

The 2011 split left unresolved border demarcation, oil transit, and revenue sharing issues, as 75% of the oil reserves remained in South Sudan, and most pipelines and refineries were in Sudan.<sup>3</sup> The map in Figure 3 highlights the oil infrastructure in Sudan and South Sudan, including oil fields, pipelines, and border lines.

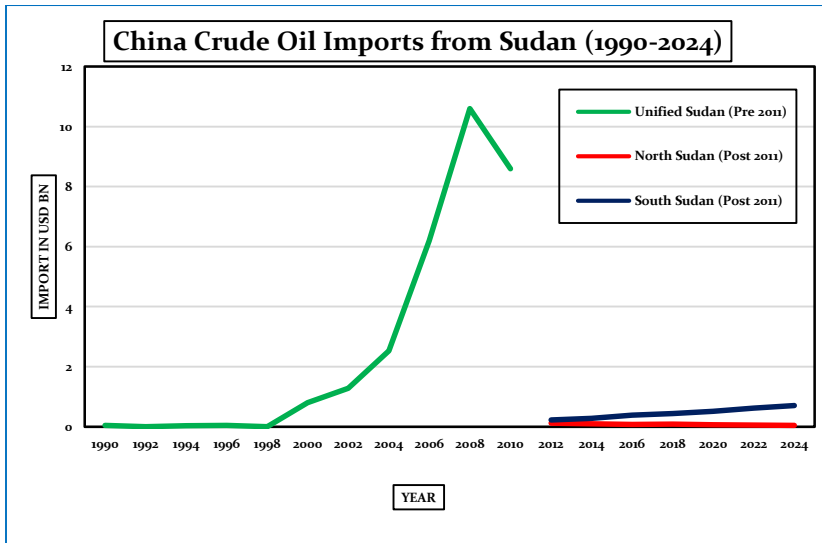
Figure 3



Source: <https://www.hukukihaber.net/sudan-vs-guney-sudan-yeni-boru-hatti-anlasmasi-imzaladi>

China had adopted a pragmatic, non-interventionist approach since the 1990s. After 1995, it heavily invested in Sudan's oil industry, with over 130 companies investing US\$13 billion across various sectors.<sup>4,5</sup> Chinese crude oil import patterns underwent significant changes before and after 2011 due to conflicts and instability in the region. A sharp decline occurred after 2011, mainly due to the loss of oil-rich South Sudan, political repression, and internal unrest.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 4



Source: Compiled by the Author

The recent instability in Sudan finds its roots in the ouster of Omar Al-Bashir. In 2018, Public and civil society protests started over economic grievances inspired by the Arab Spring and US-led Western pressure, enabling the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) to oust Bashir in a coup in 2019. A Joint Civil-Military Sovereignty Council was established, which was dissolved by SAF leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan in 2021, returning Sudan to military rule.

The post-Bashir Sudan re-engaged with the West, normalised ties with Israel in 2020, and was removed from the US terrorism list, boosting aid. In the same year, the United Nations established the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) to support the country's democratic transition. The mission ended in 2024 at Sudan's request, due to ineffectiveness and bias.<sup>7,8</sup> Meanwhile, US aid through USAID rose from \$134 million in 2018 to \$773 million in 2021.<sup>9</sup>

During the transitional period, the RSF, under the leadership of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), expanded both financially and militarily, mainly due to illicit trade and its control over gold mines.

Tensions escalated as the RSF's integration into the army failed, making the SAF view it as a threat to its power.<sup>10</sup> Resultantly, in April 2023, violent clashes erupted between the SAF and RSF, starting a civil war that devastated major cities, displaced 8 million people, and caused Sudan's GDP to contract by nearly 12% by the end of the year.<sup>11</sup> In April 2025, the RSF announced the formation of a parallel government to manage areas under its control. However, this move has been firmly rejected by Sudan's internationally recognised government.<sup>12</sup>

Sudan's internal politics are deeply entangled with global power rivalries, particularly between the US and China. Since the 1990s, China has remained a dominant economic actor, especially in the oil sector. After 2011, despite a decline in crude imports due to the loss of oil sources in South Sudan, it continued to invest in both states.

Conversely, the US has maintained a more interventionist approach.<sup>13</sup> Critics argue that Washington's policy has often destabilised regimes under the banner of counterterrorism and democracy, as seen in Iraq, Libya, and Syria.<sup>14</sup> The US-backed CPA and the 2011 referendum, though aimed at peace, ultimately created two fragile states.

Later in 2019, the US pushed for Bashir's ouster without establishing an alternative institutional framework, fueling a power struggle. More recently, it seeks to influence the Red Sea, while countering China's Belt and Road initiative and Russia's presence through strategic containment, diplomatic pressure, and targeted sanctions.<sup>15,16</sup>

The SAF is supported by Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. Their strategic interests include safeguarding Nile water access, countering Gulf rivals, influencing Africa, securing the Red Sea near the NEOM project, and pursuing a naval base in Port Sudan. On the other hand, the RSF is backed by the UAE, Chad, and the Libyan National Army, with interests in gold resources and the Red Sea routes.<sup>17</sup> These alignments show how regional states exploit Sudan's conflict for strategic and economic gain.

Sudan's prolonged instability reflects the convergence of internal fractures and external rivalries, making it a proxy battleground for African, Arab, and global interests. While the SAF and RSF compete for control and foreign actors influence, shaping its political future, people suffer the worst crisis. The country reflects a complex, multipolar world in which the sovereignty of fragile states weakens as they become entangled in the power plays of external actors.

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# New Frontiers of National Security – Borderless Digital World

*Hassan Waqar Raja and Dr Aisha Kashif*

## Abstract

*The INSIGHT explores the intersection of technology policymaking and national security within the digital landscape, emphasizing the role of social and technology platforms (STPs) in shaping political narratives and influencing international relations. It highlights Pakistan's need to rethink its technology policies, focusing on data protection, digital governance, and the integration of STPs into national security frameworks. By analyzing global trends and challenges, the Insight advocates for unified leadership and a comprehensive policy structure, particularly within Pakistan's National Security Division, to navigate the complexities of the borderless digital world.*

**Keywords:** Digital World, Ma'arka-e-Haq, Social & Technology Platforms (STAs), Digital Education.

**T**his insight reviews Pakistan's current technology policymaking. It emphasizes the strong connection between technology policymaking and our modern national security and economic interests. It also associates the success of new policy initiatives with national political unity and ownership.

In 2016, the World Economic Forum (WEF) identified social platforms as essential contemporary tools for shaping political narratives. The Social and Technology platforms (STPs) are multifaceted, financially robust, and technologically advanced **global non-state actors**, such as Google, Huawei, Meta, Microsoft, Temu, TikTok, and WhatsApp. They collect *cis and trans frontier* social, commercial, and personal data and are quintessential partners for states in their digital, economic, and social transformation agendas.

Over the past decade, the world has witnessed numerous instances of deliberate manipulation of perceptions and the weaponisation of citizens' beliefs and emotions through social platforms, causing disruptions in statecraft and social behaviours, such as general elections and civil unrest<sup>1</sup>. Another concern is the increasingly questionable role of STPs in recent interstate conflicts, e.g., the Russia-Ukraine War<sup>2</sup> and the Israel-Palestine conflict.<sup>3</sup>

In 2022, the US State Department established the Bureau of Cybersecurity and Digital Policy<sup>4</sup>, signalling the significance of technology policymaking in the future of US diplomacy.

In addition, political alliances such as BRICS<sup>5</sup> and the EU<sup>6</sup> are creating their playbooks for working with STPs to safeguard economic and security interests.

For the Global South, one of the most profound political challenges arising from the rise of social platforms is the increasing contestation between various actors and the state over its hegemony in ideological and domestic political narratives. This contention has transformed the national digital eco-chambers into battlegrounds mediated by STP's *community guidelines, i.e., Digital No-Go Areas for the state, lacking national legal oversight or regulatory control, and proprietary algorithms driven by commercial motivations, often leading to governance and social challenges.*

Furthermore, the role of STPs as data accumulators without national oversight presents a governance and legal challenge. The US restrictions on TikTok and Huawei, as well as Chinese restrictions on Meta and Google, respectively, represent this threat. In this context, the Internet *firewall* is a national right with a data protection regime as a national priority. However, they alone are insufficient to address the spectrum of issues at hand.

The origins of Pakistan's version of the Post Truth Era (PTE) can be traced back to 2013, with Ma'arka-e-Haq (Op Bunyan Ul Marsoos) being a watershed of the third (latest) phase.

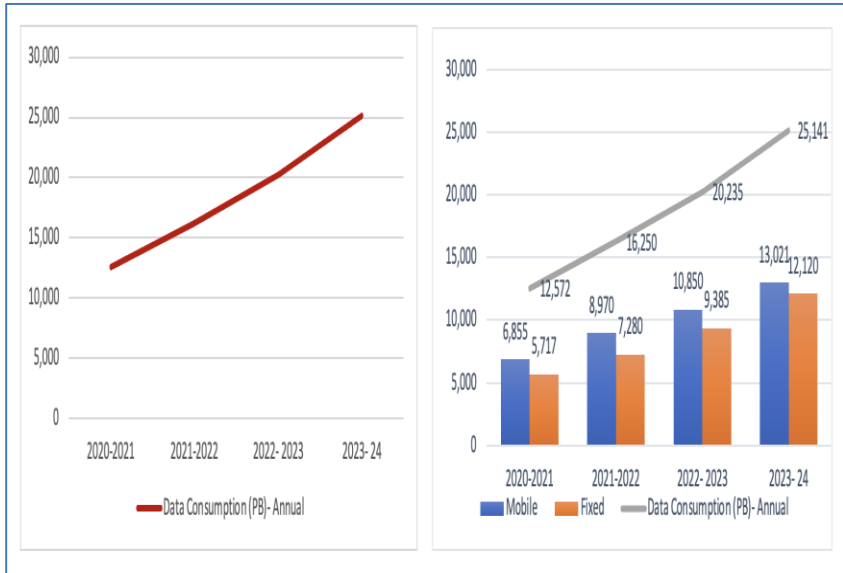
Historically, it has been driven by domestic political agendas, a policy context that continues to influence the mindset of decision-makers. The country's engagement with social platforms is publicly well-documented.

It is *kinetic and one-dimensional*, focusing on enforcement, such as PECA 2016 and subsequent amendments, blocking platforms, and crackdowns. It is thus not surprising that our internet and content governance reporting is an annual count of enforcement activities, as evident in the different reports of the PTA.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, our relationship with technology players is a continued policy and legal enigma. For example, Meta and Google are the top two commercial players in Pakistan's media market, with a reported market share of over one-fifth, totalling PKR 25.78 billion out of PKR 114 billion in 2024<sup>8</sup>. This is a mere US\$90 million at current currency conversion rates. The double irony here is that they are not registered with the media and telecom regulators, and our state and commercial sectors do not see eye-to-eye on the market share of these two players<sup>9</sup>.

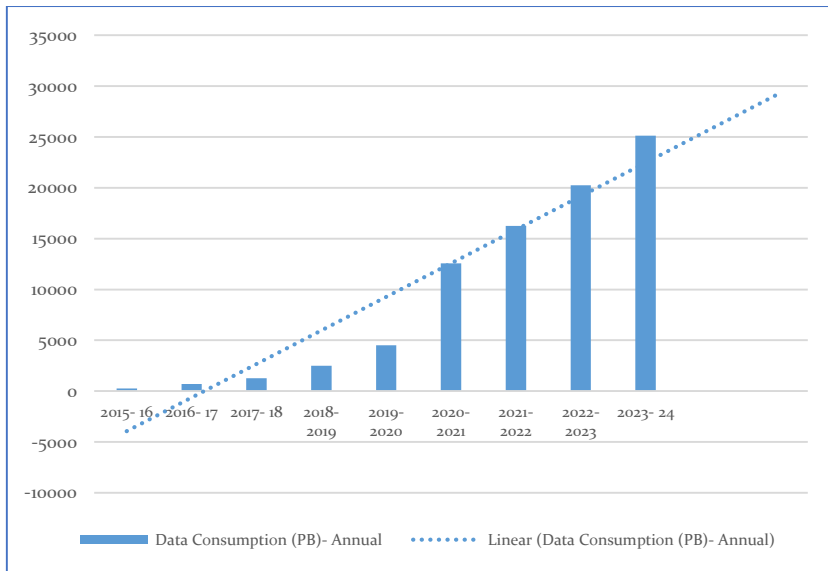
While these figures may be underreported, expecting these two larger entities to open offices in Islamabad, even to double the reported revenues, is commercially irrational. However, for them, the Pakistani market is a valuable data source with 150 million broadband users, which produced 25 thousand Petabytes (PB) of data in 2024 and has experienced a nearly 20% CAGR (Fig 1) in 2021- 2024, and around 60% CAGR 2016- 2024 (Fig 2) periods, respectively<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, WhatsApp is an interesting case that lacks national oversight but is widely used by both decision-makers and the public alike. It has only recently been banned by the US House of Representatives due to concerns over the opacity of its data handling protocols<sup>11</sup>.

**Figure 1:** Data Consumption in Pakistan FY 21- FY 24



**Source:** PTA Reports

Pakistan needs to integrate STPs into a comprehensive policy framework. The modern digital society is a dynamic interaction among the *State, Society, and the STPs*. The following five key policy vectors guide this relationship:

**Figure 2:** Data Consumption in Pakistan FY 16- FY 24

Source: PTA Reports

- **Data Protection laws & Regulations (DPLR).** They are a necessity for regulating both public and personal data. These may be the drivers of future digital data-centric and foreign Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) opportunities rather than the *Pakistan Cloud First Policy*.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).** Digitisation in the public sector and seamless information exchange between public entities in provinces and the federation are essential for governing a digital society. They need integration with the universal citizen identity already available with NADRA. This will enhance the public sector's revenue collection, public service delivery, and security. The recent Digital Nation Act 2025 aligns well here, but it might be somewhat too cumbersome.

- **Digital Governance through Policies, Laws, and Regulations.** Pakistan faces many contentious issues related to digital governance. Currently, five entities (PTA, PEMRA, SMPRA,<sup>12</sup> PDA,<sup>13</sup> and SBP<sup>14</sup>) regulate digital space with a continuing plethora of gaps and overlaps. This needs a rethink and an integration of these regulators into a single council, with representation from all stakeholder groups.
- **Digital Education Initiatives.** A well-trained workforce is a key factor in China's current technological prowess. Contrarily, SBP recently stated that only 10% of our IT workforce is employable.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, according to recent Harvard research, society's algorithmic knowledge plays a vital role in combating misinformation.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, a comprehensive education curriculum spanning from primary to professional education levels is required. Furthermore, there is a need to identify national priority areas for developing youth skills. Lastly, there is a need for local data and, more importantly, its analysis for planning social and policy interventions.
- **Digital Economy.** A subset of the economy and the outcome of the above four vectors, this can only flourish under unified leadership and a clear agenda. A starting point could be an empirical correlation of SIFC's tech priorities with the URAAN Pakistan's 5Es framework (particularly E-Pakistan) and their alignment with different current and upcoming regulatory schemes. A common agenda (standards, e-business, and other policies) for the next few years is required through a single council, as proposed earlier. Pakistan needs to rethink its technology policymaking and its domestic digital data as integral components of its national security. The state, as the principal orchestrator of this transformation via opportunity creation, enabling, facilitating, and lastly enforcing the lifecycle, requires a single ownership and steering structure to implement these vectors and other policy structures. Such a structure should be ideally located within the Prime Minister's office at the **National Security Division (NSD)**.

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# Impact of Pakistan's Shipping Potential on Maritime Trade

*Aamina Ikram*

## Abstract

*Pakistan's shipping sector, though central to its maritime trade, remains underdeveloped with PNSC operating a limited fleet that meets only a fraction of national demand. Heavy dependence on foreign carriers drains \$4-5 billion annually in freight payments, while inconsistent policies and weak private sector participation stifle growth. Recent initiatives, including fleet expansion plans, domestic shipbuilding projects, and containerised shipping services, show promise, but require a stronger legislative framework and stable incentives to unlock Pakistan's true blue economy potential.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan National Shipping Corporation, Blue Economy, Trade, Merchant, Marine Policy.

The World Bank defines the blue economy as a “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem”.<sup>1</sup> The shipping sector serves as the backbone of the blue economy, as over 80% of global trade is carried by sea.<sup>2</sup> This insight analyses the impact of Pakistan's shipping sector on its maritime trade performance.

Pakistan's 95% trade and 100% of its oil and coal imports rely on sea transport.<sup>3</sup> However, the annual revenue from Pakistan's blue economy is only US\$1 billion, or around 0.4% of the national GDP (significantly below the global average of 7%), against its estimated potential exceeding \$100 billion.<sup>4</sup> Ships serve as mobile storage units, enhancing the country's overall storage capacity and lessening reliance on foreign carriers.<sup>5</sup>

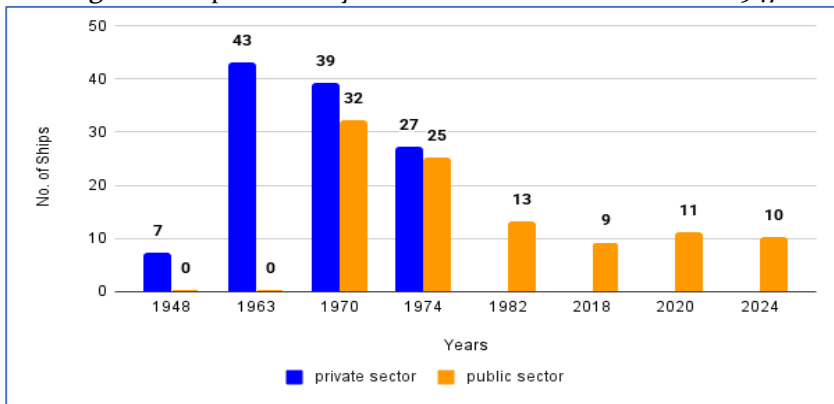
The Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) is the only national flag carrier. It falls under the administrative control of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MOMA) as an autonomous body. PNSC currently operates 10 vessels with a total capacity of 724,643 metric tons deadweight tonnage (DWT) for dry and liquid bulk cargo.<sup>6</sup> It is listed on the Pakistan Stock Exchange and primarily funds its operations through internal revenue.<sup>7</sup>

**With its current fleet size, PNSC is unable to meet the country's growing trade demands. Expanding its capacity is essential to reduce reliance on foreign shipping lines.**

In the 1970s, the National Shipping Corporation (NSC) operated 71 ships, which were primarily owned by the private sector (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> The industry faced a setback in 1974 when 26 ships from nine operators were nationalised to form the Pakistan Shipping Corporation (PSC).

In 1979, NSC and PSC were merged to form PNSC, the country's sole state-owned shipping entity. PNSC's fleet peaked with 60 ships in the 1980s but declined to 16 by the 1990s due to retirements, lack of new acquisitions, and limited private registrations.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to popular belief, PNSC's current fleet of 10 vessels carries about 724,643 DWT, more than its 1979 fleet of 48 ships, which had a total capacity of 579,486 DWT.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 1:** Ships owned by Public and Private Sectors Since 1947



Source: Self-compiled

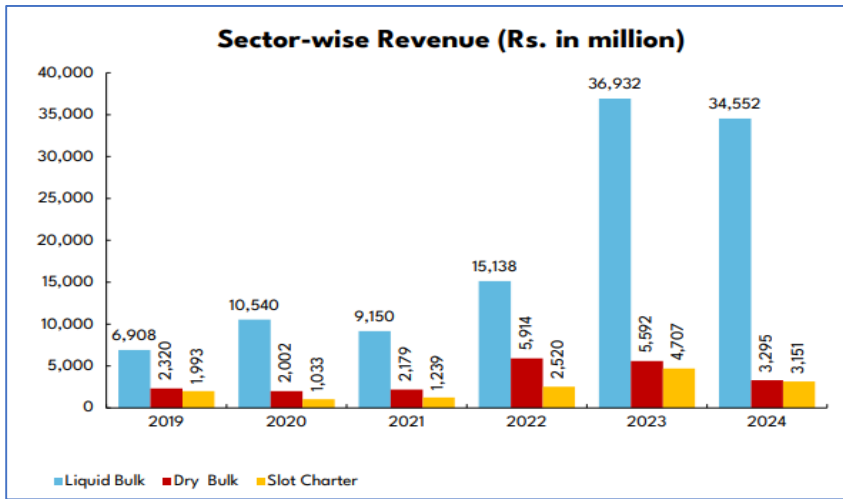
Pakistan's total merchandise trade (imports and exports) stood at \$85.45 billion in 2024.<sup>11</sup> However, PNSC manages only 11% of Pakistan's cargo by volume and 4% by value.<sup>12</sup> With over 90% of its trade transported by foreign shippers, Pakistan faces a significant foreign exchange drain of around \$4–5 billion in freight payments, which negatively impacts its foreign reserves.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, in the past five years, global geopolitical tensions have disrupted key international shipping routes. The disruptions in the Suez Canal caused over 2,000 ships, including those bound for Pakistan, to be rerouted via the Cape of Good Hope in late 2023. This led to an additional 10 days and \$1 million in fuel and insurance per vessel, causing freight costs to double or even triple.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in the aftermath of Pakistan-India military escalation of 2025, India's restriction on cargo originating from or destined for Pakistan compelled shipping lines to offload such cargo before docking at Indian ports. As a result, several shipping lines suspended Karachi calls, with an estimated weekly disruption of 6,000 to 7,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in export volume from Karachi.<sup>15</sup> Thus, there is a pressing need to build a sustainable and competitive national fleet that strengthens Pakistan's economic potential and national security.

The PNSC fleet operates in liquid and dry bulk only. Despite the higher national dry bulk trade (67.17 million tons) compared to liquid bulk (29.20 million tons) in 2024, PNSC's share in liquid cargo stood at 32%, while its share in dry bulk remained just 2%. This gap stems from PNSC's dry bulk vessels, which fall short of international standards in terms of deadweight capacity. For instance, PNSC's Supramax vessels carry approximately 52,951 tons, which is below the global average of 58,328 tons.<sup>16</sup> Figure 2 shows that liquid bulk consistently dominates PNSC's revenue, with a steep rise from Rs. 6,908 million in 2019 to Rs. 36,932 million in 2023. In contrast, dry bulk and slot charter revenues remain relatively modest. Additionally, PNSC currently does not operate any container vessels to facilitate general cargo trade.

Figure 2: Revenue Share



Source: PNSC

Another key obstacle to the growth of Pakistan’s shipping sector is the lack of investment from the private sector. Pakistani private shipowners collectively own eight ships, all of which are registered under the Flags of Convenience (FoC) countries and not PNSC.<sup>17</sup> These shipowners attribute their reluctance to invest under the national flag to inconsistent government policies, bureaucratic red tape, and extensive paperwork.<sup>18</sup> Pakistan’s low ranking (108th out of 190) on the Ease of Doing Business index further reinforces this hesitation.<sup>19</sup>

To increase participation, a very liberal Merchant Marine Policy (MMP) was introduced in 2001; however, full benefits remain unrealised due to gaps in policy implementation. Despite having a highly liberal and tax-friendly maritime policy on paper compared to regional peers, Pakistan’s shipping sector remains underdeveloped (Table 1).

The MMP lacks the binding legal authority of an act or ordinance. Its provisions are dependent on periodic decisions by the cabinet and the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC).<sup>20</sup>

For instance, the exemptions from customs duty, income tax, and sales tax on ship imports provided under the MMP expired in 2020 and were not renewed thereafter. Moreover, in the Fourth Amendment Finance Bill (2021), the government imposed a 17% sales tax on vessel acquisition, and has begun taxing seafarers' salaries.<sup>21</sup> While these fiscal steps may help address revenue needs and broaden the tax base, they come at the cost of undermining a strategic industry.

**Table 1:** Regional Comparison of Maritime Policies

Country	Tonnage tax	Tax on freight income	Ship acquisition tax	Flag flexibility	Total vessels
Pakistan	\$0.75/GRT for first five years	Exempt	Exempt (till 2030)	Very liberal	10
India	net tonnage formula	yes	Partial exemption	Moderate	1545
Bangladesh	None	yes	Full duty applies	Weak registry	567
Iran	No tonnage-tax regime in place	Treated as general income taxed at corporate rate	–	Strict Iranian-flag rules	972
Turkey	net-tonnage based regime	exempt	Stamp-duty exemption	Liberal Dual registry via TISR (foreign friendly)	1,181 ships under national flag
Vietnam	No	3% freight tax	2% excise tax	Weak (foreign ownership allowed only with commercial presence)	1,967 ships

**Source:** Self-compiled

In contrast, India, Bangladesh, and Iran have stable policies and tend to achieve more sustained fleet growth and global integration, even without heavy tax incentives. Similarly, Turkey's fee exemptions and Vietnam's capped costs attract more tonnage, while Pakistan's lack of fiscal incentives and sea blindness hinders private sector growth and fleet expansion.

Now, PNSC is implementing an ambitious plan to expand its fleet from 12 to 34 vessels by 2028, aiming to generate \$700 million in freight earnings over the next three years.<sup>22</sup> In parallel, the National Logistics Corporation (NLC) has launched Pakistan's first containerised flagship shipping service to Gulf countries.<sup>23</sup>

Complementing these initiatives, Pakistan is set to build its first major commercial cargo ship in 40 years, a \$24.75 million containership project revived through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), reflecting renewed momentum in domestic shipbuilding.<sup>24</sup>

These are good initiatives and need to be scaled up. The MMP (2001) must be upgraded into a binding legislative framework and extended for at least 30 years. Similarly, establishing a one-window operation for licensing, financing, and regulatory approvals similar to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) will further streamline the process and boost investor confidence.

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This INSIGHT was first published on the ISSRA website in September 2025 and in the Daily Pakistan Observer on 26 November 2025. It can be accessed at <https://www.issra.pk/insight/2025/impact-of-pakistans-shipping-potential-on-maritime-trade/insight.html>. The writer is a former Intern at ISSRA and can be reached at [aminaikram954@gmail.com](mailto:aminaikram954@gmail.com).





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