



## COUNTRY PROFILE

It is axiomatic locally that, while most countries have an army, in Pakistan the army has a country. Since it secured independence from British rule following the Partition of India in 1947, Pakistan has effectively been in the grip of martial law, sometimes formally so and sometimes not – and it has been ruled directly by the army for almost half its life, with military coups in 1958, 1969, 1977 and 1999. In the most recent of these, General Pervez Musharraf dissolved the elected government of Nawaz Sharif and ruled until 2008 when he was overthrown following massive protests and thereafter embraced a comfortable exile in Dubai.

However, to say that democracy has held sway in Pakistan since 2008 would be extremely misleading. Government continues subject to the blessing of the

generals, and the country's main political parties seem to have accepted the reality that it is next to impossible to come to elected power without the backing of the armed forces.

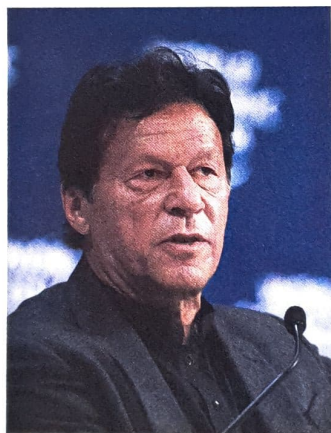
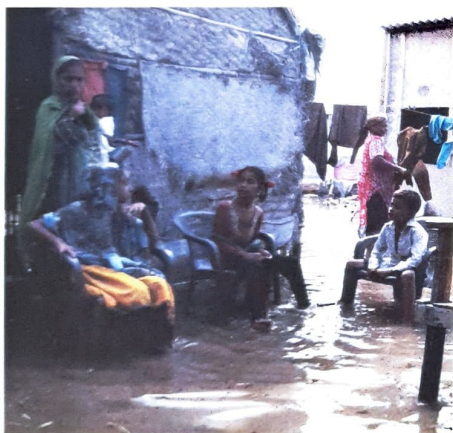
The most recent general election, in July 2018, is a case in point. Imran Khan, once a notable Test cricketer and

his victory and, whether or not the election was suspect, it is indisputable that since Khan took office the military has remained in the driving seat.

A telltale sign of this is the Pakistan Army (Amendment) Act, which was introduced at the start of 2020. On 19 August 2019 Khan summarily announced that he had extended the tenure of army chief of staff Qamar Javed Bajwa by three years – he had been set to retire that November. This was challenged in the courts, which rather remarkably ruled that the government needed to change the law, while extending Bajwa's term by six months to enable this to happen. The new Act allows the extension of an army chief's term by three years and removes the possibility of legal challenge. Despite widespread reservations about the army's recent conduct, opposition

# PAKISTAN

subsequently something of an international playboy before launching his political career, came to power at the head of a new party and promising a drive against corruption. Yet opposition parties allege that the army engineered





parties felt unable to vote against the measure in parliament.

Just as significant as its stranglehold on government is the dominance of the military in business terms. From sugar mills to banks, arms and ammunition factories to fertilizer plants, the military have their fingers in almost every lucrative sector of the economy. Among the many vehicles for this business power are the Army Welfare Trust, the Defence Housing Authorities, the Fauji Foundation ('Fauji' is the Urdu word for 'soldier') and the Bahria Foundation (run by the Navy).

Khan has shown no sign of grappling with the endemic problems that strangle Pakistan's economy and politics. In the past 60 years the economy has crashed and needed bailing out by the IMF no fewer than 13 times. Government debt

repayments and pension payments to retired staff currently exceed its net revenue. Energy prices have increased, the exchange rate has been allowed to depreciate by 25 per cent, and investment – already half that in the rest of South Asia – contracted further by 8.9 per cent during 2019.

Radical measures to challenge vested interests – not just the stranglehold of the military elite but also the power of religious extremists, with whom successive leaders have been anxious to curry favour – are desperately needed if the poor are to be given hope. Imran Khan promised a *naya* (new) Pakistan but has shown zero sign of making the tough choices that would be necessary to bring that into being. ●

KASWAR KLASRA

## AT A GLANCE

**LEADER:** Prime Minister Imran Khan.

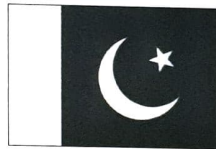
**ECONOMY:** GNI per capita in Pakistan \$1,590 (India \$2,020, UK \$41,770).

**Monetary unit:** Rupee.

**Main exports:** Textiles, rice, leather, fruit, sports and surgical goods. Textiles and clothing account for more than half of export earnings. The rupee has lost 35% of its value in a devaluation downward spiral. Foreign investment has long been problematic because of security concerns. But the 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor' is set to invest \$60 billion over the next few years in energy and infrastructure projects. Agriculture accounts for broadly 20% of production and 40% of employment.

**POPULATION:** 207.8 million. Population annual growth rate 2.1%. People per square kilometre: 261 (UK 271).

**HEALTH:** Infant mortality rate 57 per 1,000 live births (India 30, UK 4). HIV prevalence 0.1%. According to the World Bank's latest report, Pakistan's per-capita health spending is \$36.2 which is below the WHO benchmark for low-income countries of \$86. There were



0.6 hospital beds per 1,000 population at the last estimate (compared with a rich-country average of 2.9).

**ENVIRONMENT:** Pakistan stands 169th of 180 countries on 24 performance indicators related to environmental health and the ecosystem. The sea has intruded 200 kilometres inland from the coastal city of Karachi. Air and noise pollution are increasing exponentially.

**RELIGION:** Islam is followed by 97%, with small Christian and Hindu minorities. The overwhelming majority are Sunni Muslims, with Shias an estimated 6%.

**LANGUAGE:** Urdu and English are both official languages, with the latter the lingua franca of the elite and most government ministries. Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashto 8%, Urdu 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, other 8%.

**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX:** 0.560, 152nd of 189 countries (India 0.647, UK 0.920).

*Photos (clockwise from top left): A family outside their flooded house in Karachi, which was hit by super cyclonic storm Kyarr in October 2019; Imran Khan speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2020; Asia's biggest flower market in Lahore; students in Lahore participating in the Global Climate Strike in September 2019.*

PHOTOS, ALL FROM PA IMAGES: STR/XINHUA; VALERIANO DI DOMENICO/WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM/DPA; LAST TWO BOTH BY RANA SAJJID HUSSAIN / PACIFIC PRESS/SIPA USA.

## STAR RATINGS



### INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★☆☆

The top 10% of the population earn 27.6% and the bottom 10% just 4.1%. However, Pakistan's GINI coefficient is, at 30.7, relatively low – lower than that in the UK (34.1) and India (35.7) – indicating generally lower levels of inequality.



### LITERACY ★★★☆☆

58%, though the gender divide is particularly marked, with 46% of women being literate compared with 70% of men.



### LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★☆☆

67 years – 68 for women and 66 for men (India 69, UK 81).



### POSITION OF WOMEN ★☆☆☆☆

Pakistan is the sixth most dangerous country in the world for women, with the incidence of sexual assault and domestic violence rapidly rising. Instances of child marriage and forced marriage remain high. The employment-to-population ratio is 20% for females and 64% for males and jobs are often segregated by gender.



### FREEDOM ★★★☆☆

Despite coming to power as a supposed new broom, the Khan government has pursued opposition figures. Rana Sanallah, for example, a prominent parliamentary critic, was recently arrested for alleged drug trafficking. Media freedoms continue to disintegrate and human rights activists have been targeted.



### SEXUAL MINORITIES ★★☆☆☆

Homosexuality is illegal and can incur life imprisonment, though this is rarely enforced. However, transgender and intersex citizens have legal protections from discrimination and harassment.



### POLITICS ★★★☆☆

The Khan government is widely seen as subservient to the US, its policies more protective of US geopolitical interests than its own people's needs. This is one of many policy reversals the prime minister has engaged in since taking power, which has led to his being nicknamed 'U-turn Khan' by some. The government has manipulated the political process, undermined the rule of law and human rights violations remain commonplace, while the economy shows little sign of emerging from its current tailspin.

★★★★★ Excellent

★★★★☆ Good

★★★☆☆ Fair

★★☆☆☆ Poor

★☆☆☆☆ Appalling