

2. Background and political developments

2.1. Recent political developments

Throughout the referencing period, the federal government continued to be led by the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) in coalition with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and smaller allies,94 with the by-elections in November 2025 strengthening the position of the PML-N.95 Although public disagreements between the PML-N and the PPP were reported in 2025, sparked by a dispute concerning assistance frameworks for victims of flooding, the two parties maintained their cooperation within their coalition.96 At the same time, the opposition remained largely marginalised,97 as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) continued to be affected by arrests,98 convictions,99 disqualifications,100 and legal proceedings.101 In response, PTI lawmakers boycotted parliamentary sessions102 and organised public protests.103

In November 2024, thousands of supporters of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the PTI marched into Islamabad,104 with Amnesty International reporting the use of force by security forces, casualties, temporary restrictions on mobile internet services and mass arrests of 4 000 people.105 Further protests by opposition supporters took place in major cities on 8 February 2026, marking the second anniversary of the 2024 general election.106 In May 2025, the Supreme Court of Pakistan validated the conduct of military trials for civilians accused of involvement in the May 2023 unrest,107 reversing earlier restrictions, a decision criticised as undermining fair trial guarantees.108 Following judicial review in mid-2025 concerning the allocation of reserved seats to the PTI, these seats were reassigned in a manner that substantially increased the governing coalition’s parliamentary majority, enabling it to reach a two-thirds majority.109 In October 2025, large-scale protests led by Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) erupted in Punjab in response to a US-brokered ceasefire between Hamas and Israel and escalated into violent clashes with police.110 The federal government subsequently banned the TLP under anti-terrorism legislation, sealed its offices and froze its assets.111

On 12 November 2025, parliament adopted a constitutional amendment that expanded the formal authority of the army chief, including the establishment of a Chief of Defence Forces role, 112 and restructuring constitutional adjudication by transferring key powers from the Supreme Court to a newly established Federal Constitutional Court.113 Opposition lawmakers boycotted the vote.114 The amendment was interpreted as reinforcing the institutional role of the Pakistan Army in political affairs and limiting civilian judicial oversight.115

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