4.2.6. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB)

○ (a) General description of the territories

The area of AJK is 13 297 square kilometres, and the area of GB is 77 676 square kilometres.[993] AJK and GB are in northeastern Pakistan.[994] GB shares internal borders with KP province in the west and AJK in the south. AJK further shares internal borders with KP and Punjab provinces in the west.[995] The Kashmir region is disputed between India, Pakistan and China but claimed in its entirety by both Pakistan and India.[996] Each of the two territories of Pakistan-administered Kashmir has an elected assembly and government with limited autonomy but lacks federal parliamentary representation and other rights granted to Pakistani provinces. Pakistani federal institutions hold significant control,[997] including over security, the courts, and key policy decisions.[998]

In terms of administrative units, AJK is divided into three divisions (Muzaffarabad, Poonch, Mirpur), which are further subdivided into ten districts.[999] Muzaffarabad is AJK's capital city.[1000] GB is divided into 10[1001] to 14 districts,[1002] depending on the source consulted. Gilgit is GB's capital city.[1003]

Pakistan's Population & Housing Census of 2023 lacks data for Pakistan-administered Kashmir.[1004] A March 2026 publication by the AJK government cites the 2023 census, reporting AJK's population at 4 333 000.[1005] Meanwhile, the government of GB states the region's population was approximately 2.3 million as of April 2024[1006].[1007]

AJK's social landscape is predominantly structured along clan lines known as *biradari* networks. The source lists Jats, Rajputs, Gujjars, Sudhans (also: Sudhozai), Awans, Syeds, as well as Mughals and Kashmiri Sheiks as the major communities in AJK. As for GB, the source described it as 'the most ethnically complex' area of the wider region, where tribes such as the Shins and Yashkuns, Burusho, Wakhi, Baltis, and Kohistanis lived.[1008] In AJK, where Urdu is the official language, other languages spoken are Gojri, Kashmiri, Pahari, Pothwari, Hindko, Dogri, and Punjabi.[1009] GB was described as

linguistically diverse, with Shina spoken most widely there. Additionally, Balti, Burushaski, Wakhi, and Khowar are reportedly also spoken in GB.1010 In terms of religious composition, Shias reportedly form the majority in GB.1011 No information could be found on the religious composition in AJK within the time constraints of research.

AJK was described as a mineral-rich region,1012 having among others copper, gold, silver, coal, ruby, sapphire, and tourmaline deposits.1013 AJK economy is based on agriculture, tourism and remittances. In addition, AJK has several hydropower projects, 1014 while GB reportedly has timber and minerals,1015 such as gold, copper, nickel and cobalt.1016

○ (b) Presence and general activities of the armed actors

In 2024, no militant attacks were reported in AJK and GB, while security forces carried out two operations in GB according to PICSS.1017 In 2025, PICSS documented a small number of violent incidents1018 including a significant but isolated targeted counter-militancy operation in May 2025 against suspected TTP operatives in Pooch district's Rawalakot. Militant groups reportedly continued to regard AJK as a potential operational area, and the TTP announced 'Kashmir' as a new *wilayat* (shadow province) in its 2026 appointments.1019 According to PIPS, two of three militant attacks in GB in 2025 and one abduction1020 in GB's Diamer district were attributed to the TTP and its affiliates. 1021 PICSS further reported one unverified claim of an Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP) attack in AJK.1022 According to PICSS, the Zainabiyoun Brigade was believed to be involved in sectarian assassination attempts of religious and judicial figures in Gilgit in 2025.1023

The Pahalgam terrorist attack in April 20251024 in Indian-administered Kashmir triggered an escalation of tensions between Pakistan and India.1025 The escalation which involved gunfire and mortar fire,1026 in turn reportedly spiked as a result of Indian airstrikes on parts of AJK and various cities in Punjab in early May,1027 resulting in civilian deaths and injuries.1028 India alleged that the attack was carried out by a splinter group of Pakistan-based LeT and suspected Pakistani intelligence service involvement, both of which Pakistan denied.1029 Pakistan responded to India's military operation with its own operation Bunyanul Marsoos, which included 'large-scale conventional strikes, drone deployments, and cyber actions',1030 including surveillance drones and loitering munitions1031.1032 India deployed drones that were partially intercepted by Pakistan.1033 The International Crisis Group described the

conflict as ‘the most serious confrontation’ between the two countries in decades,1034 and, in mid-February 2026, the private US-think tank Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) described these hostilities as ‘the most significant bilateral confrontations since 2019’.1035 A ceasefire was agreed on in mid-May 2025.1036 As of early 2026, the ceasefire was holding.1037

PICSS further explained that in GB, the security situation in 2025 reflected a gradual rise in challenges, such as militant violence, threats to strategic infrastructure and sectarian targeting.1038

○ (c) Recent security incidents and impact on the civilian population and infrastructure

Security incidents

As for 2025, PIPS documented one security operation in AJK and three militant attacks in GB, including two in Diamer and one in Gilgit districts.1039 CRSS recorded five attacks each in GB and AJK in 2025.1040 PICSS only documented five attacks in GB. 1041

According to a report by PICSS, AJK faced its ‘most severe episodes of unrest’ in late September and early October 2025, as demonstrations organised by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) turned into violent confrontations with law enforcement. Reportedly, daily life across AJK was impeded, with markets closed and transport suspended. PICSS further noted that the demonstrations and strikes, amid a communication blackout, led to civilian deaths and dozens of injuries. The events mirrored a growing public frustration over failures in governance, economic grievances, and the territory’s unresolved constitutional status. According to PICSS, similar patterns of unrest were observed in GB across the Line of Control (LoC), with the lack of meaningful autonomy in AJK and GB continuing to drive recurring protests. 1042 In March 2025, protests were reported in GB over the detention of local leaders under Pakistan’s Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA).1043

From 1 November 2024 to 24 April 2026 ACLED reported 39 security incidents in AJK and GB: 30 were coded as battles, with a prevalence in the AJK (21), 7 as explosions/remote violence and 2 as incidents of violence against civilians.1044

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Figure 8: Evolution of security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan between 1 November 2024 and 24 April 2026, based on ACLED data[1045]

Fatalities

From 1 November 2024 to 24 April 2026 ACLED reported 56 fatalities.[1046]

Civilian casualties

In 2025, PICSS reported no civilian casualties in AJK and GB,[1047] and in 2024, two civilian injuries resulting from security operations were recorded by PICSS in GB.[1048] The abovementioned escalation in tensions between Pakistan and India in May 2025 [1049] reportedly resulted in civilian casualties,[1050] including deaths.[1051] Casualties resulting from Indian airstrikes were recorded in early May 2025 in AJK’s Bagh and Muzaffarabad districts.[1052]

Civilian casualties during protests were reported in 2025 by PICSS.[1053] According to a Deutsche Welle (DW) article, protests by Shiites against the killing of Iran’s then Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in GB in early March 2026 turned violent, with Pakistani authorities deploying military and imposing a three-day long curfew in Gilgit and Skardu cities. Referring to police sources, DW noted that a minimum of 12 people were killed and another 80 were injured in GB.[1054]

Impact on infrastructure

The abovementioned escalation in tensions between Pakistan and India,[1055] which spiked in early May 2025,[1056] reportedly resulted in the destruction of homes, schools and hospitals in AJK. Furthermore, despite the ceasefire agreement reached in May 2025, India continued to enforce the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty that had been enacted previously. The source further reported the enforcement of the state of emergency in districts along the LoC and the closure of educational facilities.[1057] No information could be found on conflict-related impact on infrastructure in GB during the reference period.

Displacement and return

Indian airstrikes on parts of AJK in early May 2025[1058] reportedly resulted in internal displacement.[1059] Referring to official sources, the German BAMF reported the internal displacement of 1 186 families in AJK as a result of Indian shelling in the night of 8 to 9 May 2025.[1060] In May 2025, Islamic Relief Pakistan reported the displacement of 529 families (or 3 176 individuals) in Muzaffarabad, Bagh, and Haveli districts.[1061] No information could be found on conflict-related return movements from or into AJK and on conflict-related IDP or return movements from or into GB during the reference period.

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