

5.5. Anti-Terrorism Acts

The term ‘terrorism’ is defined in section 6(1) of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), 1997, as ‘the use or threat of action […] to coerce and intimidate or overawe the Government or the public or a section of the public or community or sect […] for the purpose of advancing a religious, sectarian or ethnic cause’.1132 According to section 7(a), acts of terrorism causing the ‘death of any person […] shall be punishable, on conviction, with death or with imprisonment for life, and with fine’.1133 Similarly, ‘kidnapping for ransom or hostage-taking […] shall be punishable, on conviction, with death or imprisonment for life’ (section 7(e)).1134

In August 2025, President Zardari signed into law the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act 2025 1135 which reintroduces powers granted to the security forces under the expired sub-section (1) of section 11EEEE of the ATA, 1997.1136 This amendment allows the government and, if relevant, the armed and civilian forces to impose up to three months of preventive detention on individuals suspected of terrorism-related offences1137 (e.g., targeted killing, kidnapping for ransom, or extortion), provided that ‘sufficient grounds’ exist.1138 This sub-section section 11EEEE is to remain in effect for a period of three years.1139 This enactment followed the passing of the Punjab Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2025, in May 2025 and the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act, 2025, in June 2025, which amended the ATA by allowing preventive detentions on similar grounds1140 Pakistani authorities were reported to frequently invoke the ATA to detain dissenters,1141 protesters and human rights defenders. 1142 For further information, see section 6.1.7. Critical voices and individuals perceived as opposing the state.

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  Pakistan, Anti-Terrorism Act (as amended up to 2025), 1997, url, section 6(1)(a), (b), (c)

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  Pakistan, Anti-Terrorism Act (as amended up to 2025), 1997, url, section 7(a)

- 1134

  Pakistan, Anti-Terrorism Act (as amended up to 2025), 1997, url, section 7(e)

- 1135

  Express Tribune (The), Zardari assents 'draconian' anti-terror amendment into law, 31 August 2025, url

- 1136

Express Tribune (The), ATA rearmed with preventive detention clause, 14 August 2025, url

- 1137

  Pakistan, Anti-Terrorism Act (as amended up to 2025), 1997, url, section 11EEEE(1); UN OHCHR, Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, 18 November 2025, url, p. 2

- 1138

  Pakistan, Anti-Terrorism Act (as amended up to 2025), 1997, url, section 11EEEE(1)

- 1139

  Pakistan, Anti-Terrorism Act (as amended up to 2025), 1997, url, section 11EEEE(2A)

- 1140

  UN OHCHR, Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, 18 November 2025, url, p. 2

- 1141

  Amnesty International, Pakistan: Inclusion of Baloch activists on terrorist watchlist an affront to human rights, 23 October 2025, url

- 1142

  Malikzada, N., The True Cost of Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan, The Diplomat, 14 October 2025, url

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