

6.1.1. Ethnic minorities

The Constitution of Pakistan stipulates that ‘the State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representations in the Federal and Provincial services.’1210Pakistan is home to major ethnic groups1211 including Punjabis who make up the largest share of the population, followed by Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraiki, Muhajirs, and Baloch, with the other ethnic communities.1212 Each of the ethnic groups is further broken down into multiple subgroups and some groups may span more than one category.1213 . For further background information on ethnic minorities, see section 6.1 of the EUAA COI report Pakistan - Country Focus (December 2024).

○ a) Pashtuns

Pashtuns are an ethnolinguistic group in Pakistan, primarily residing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and northern Balochistan.1214 Native Pashto speakers account for approximately 45 million people in the country, 1215 with the ethnic group representing about 15.4 % of the total population.1216 A smaller proportion of Pashto speakers reside in Islamabad, Sindh, and Punjab.1217 While Pashtuns are a majority in Afghanistan, they remain a significant minority in Pakistan.1218

The majority of Pashtuns in Pakistan identify as Sunni Muslims1219 and are followers of the Hanafi school of thought (*madhhab*),1220 while a smaller Shia Pashtun population is concentrated mainly in the Kurram district of KP.1221 Pashtuns share a common social code, known as *Pashtunwali* that governs both ethical behaviour and custom. 1222 Pakistani Pashtuns maintain deep historical and cultural ties with Pashtuns in Afghanistan.1223 Pashtun tribes were divided in 1893 when the British established the Durand Line, the border between British India and Afghanistan.1224 In Pakistan, the main Pashtun tribes reside between the Sulaiman Mountain Range and the Indus River. In the hill areas, from south to north, these include the Kakar, Sherani, and Ustarana south of the Gomal River; the Mahsud, Darvesh Khel, Wazir, and Bitani between the Gomal River and Thal; the Turi, Bangash, Orakzai, Afridi, and Shinwari from Thal to the Khyber Pass; and the Mohmand, Utman Khel, Tarklani, and Yusufzai north and

northeast of the Khyber Pass.1225 The settled areas, by contrast, include lowland tribes subject to direct administration by the provincial government.1226 From south to north, the main tribes in these areas are the Banuchi and Khattak from the Kurram River to Nowshera, and the Khalil and Mandan in the Vale of Peshawar.1227

Pashtun parties and movements such as the1228 Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) oppose militancy and also criticise the human and economic costs of counterinsurgency measures;1229 the secular Awami National Party strongly opposes the TTP, which has killed many of its leaders, and also criticises military operations due to their high security and economic costs to its constituents.1230 On 30 March 2026, an international organisation working on Pakistan indicated in an interview with the EUAA that 'Pashtuns are generally not targeted in Pakistan on the basis of ethnicity alone; rather, targeting are linked to specific profiles, activities, and geographic contexts'.1231 The international organisation further noted that 'the most consistently identified groups who are targeted include members and supporters of the PTM, as well as Pashtun journalists, students, human-rights defenders, and political activists engaged in rights-based advocacy or criticism of state policies, who have reportedly faced surveillance, harassment, arrest, and prosecution by state actors, particularly following restrictions on assemblies and the proscription of PTM in 2024'.1232 Pashtuns seek accountability for violations committed during security operations in Pashtun regions, including Pakistan military operations such as drone strikes on civilian homes, the government's ban on the PTM on 6 October 2024, which was upheld by the Peshawar High Court in February 2026 ,1233 and the use of anti-terrorism laws to target Pashtun activists and peaceful protesters.1234

Pashtun majority areas are affected by militancy, especially the districts of northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including former FATA regions, where civilians, tribal elders, and community leaders involved in *jirgas* (tribal assembly1235) or local peacebuilding face threats from non-state armed groups such as TTP and ISKP, who perceive them as aligned with the state.1236 For more information, see section 4.2.2. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

In 2024, a PTM-led national *jirga* called for the demilitarisation of Pashtun-inhabited areas,1237 including KP and tribal areas,1238 which have witnessed military operations.1239 According to PTM leadership, more than 300 operations were conducted in 2025, while the Pakistani military maintains that these actions target alleged militant hideouts linked to the TTP.1240 Pashtuns accused the Pakistani security forces in KP of 'committing serious human rights violations under the pretext of anti-militancy operations.'1241 The Pakistan Army, which is largely dominated by the Punjabi ethnic group, 1242 has, according to a retired Indian Army officer, reportedly caused civilian casualties1243 including women, children, and the elderly, forcibly displacing families from their homes, seizing property, and arresting members

of the PTM.[1244] For more information on civilian casualties in KP province, see section 4.2.2. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

Pashtuns have continued to be subjected to enforced disappearance in the country,[1245] and human rights organisations documented a significant rise in extrajudicial killings in KP over the past six years, including more than 600 targeted killings by the state and its proxies.[1246] These human rights organisations have called for investigations into cases such as the torture and killing of Hazrat Naeem (known as Gilaman Wazir), a prominent Pashtun activist.[1247] Meanwhile, the September 2025 peaceful protests by the PTM[1248] against enforced disappearances, violence, and marginalisation were met with threats, arrests, and the use of force by the Pakistani army.[1249]

On 28 July 2025, a shooting during a Pashtun protest in Tirah Valley, KP, left between 5 to 7 people dead and around 20 injured, with one source attributing the shooting to the Pakistani Army, while others to security forces in general or unknown actors.[1250] By February 2026, the Pashtuns continued to be targeted[1251] including the killing of four Pashtun civilians and the injuring of

six by the Pakistani army during a military operation on 24 February 2026.[1252]

○ b) Baloch people

The Baloch people constitute a group of tribes, who reside primarily in Pakistan, and partly in Iran and Afghanistan.[1253] They are largely Sunni Muslims and followers of the Hanafi school of thought (*madhhab*).[1254] Baloch native speakers are an estimated nine million people in Pakistan, [1255] with the ethnic group representing 3.5 % of the total population.[1256] The majority of native Baloch speakers reside in Balochistan province, with smaller population living in KP, followed by Sindh, Punjab, and Islamabad each with smaller proportions.[1257]

Baloch people have long sought greater autonomy from Pakistan,[1258] with some seeking full independence.[1259] Since the province's integration into Pakistan in 1948, many Baloch groups have pursued a self-determination movement through political, diplomatic, and, at times, armed insurgency, including by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA).[1260]

Balochistan province remains underdeveloped, and Baloch people are perceived to be marginalised.[1261] For more information, see section 4.2.1. Balochistan. The Khiam

Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, a NGO promoting democracy, co-existence and respect for human rights,[1262] stated that the government continues extracting minerals in Balochistan for Islamabad's benefit, not local, with infrastructure projects involving Chinese companies and workers, causing displacement and increasing militarisation.[1263] Local resistance has faced heavy military crackdowns, surveillance and human rights abuses[1264] including enforced disappearance of thousands of Baloch people over the past two decades,[1265] collective punishments and gender based violence against Baloch women and girls, with 12 disappeared in 2025.[1266] Baloch political activists, students, journalists, human-rights defenders, and individuals perceived to support Baloch nationalist or separatist movements are targeted, with reported violations encompassing arbitrary arrest, detention under security legislation, enforced disappearance, and, in some cases, extrajudicial killing, largely attributed to state actors in the context of counterinsurgency operations in Balochistan.[1267] Meanwhile, some prominent Baloch activists have been placed on the Exit Control List, restricting their travel.[1268] In addition, several have also been placed under the Fourth Schedule of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act, with authorities designating 32 individuals from Khuzdar, Kech, and Chagai districts as 'proscribed individuals' through notifications issued on 2 and 16 October 2025, effectively subjecting them to heightened surveillance and restrictions.[1269]

In 2025, 1 355 Baloch people were subjected to enforced disappearance according to a report by PAANK, the human rights department of the Baloch National Movement,[1270] including 106 new cases reported in November by the Human Rights Council of Balochistan (HRBC), a non-profit human rights group based in Balochistan and Sweden.[1271] Among them were farmers, students, shopkeepers and labourers who were reportedly taken during raids, detentions, at checkpoints or through summons to military camps by the Frontier Corps, intelligence agencies, the Counter Terrorism Department and 'state-backed death squads' across districts such as Kech, Quetta, Panjgur and Gwadar.[1272] HRBC also noted a significant escalation in the enforced disappearance of women, including health workers, housewives, activists and a 15-year-old girl, with abductions carried out through house raids and late-night operations by security agencies including the Counter Terrorism Department, Frontier Corps and Military Intelligence.[1273]

As of 1 February 2026, provincial authorities claimed having established de-radicalisation centres in Balochistan to address the issue of enforced disappearances by placing suspects in legally supervised custody with access to medical care, family visits and judicial oversight.[1274] While authorities present these measures as targeting insurgency-related cases and addressing enforced disappearances,[1275] the issue is also reported to involve the disappearance of political activists in Balochistan, a concern repeatedly raised by human rights organisations.[1276] On 13 February 2026, a student from Panjgur district in Balochistan was reportedly subjected to enforced

disappearance after being arrested by the Pakistani army in Karachi on 30 December 2025.1277

In addition, in 2025, PAANK reported that an estimated 225 Baloch people were subjected to extrajudicial killings and 407 to torture by Pakistani authorities,1278 with some victims reportedly found dead in unmarked graves across Balochistan.1279 Meanwhile, the HRBC stated that in November 2025, 42 Baloch people were reported killed in targeted executions, custodial deaths, torture, honour killings and indiscriminate firing, with perpetrators not identified in 18 cases, and the remaining cases attributed to Frontier Corps (12), state-backed death squads (7), the Balochistan Liberation Front (2), intelligence agencies (1), and family members in isolated cases. 1280

In October 2025, Balochistan authorities placed 32 individuals, including women activists, on a terrorist watchlist under the Anti-Terrorism Act, subjecting them to severe restrictions, 1281 including heavy surveillance, severe limits on their freedom of movement and ability to take part in public life, restrictions on travel outside designated areas without express permission from local police, and powers granted to authorities to investigate and freeze their financial assets or those of their immediate family members.1282 As of 16 March 2026, many Baloch activists in detention report serious health issues and lack adequate medical care, while five activists continue to face repeated bail denials, trial in prison, and restricted access to medical treatment or independent observers following their arbitrary detention a year earlier.1283

In March 2026, a Baloch woman presented by Pakistani authorities in Quetta as a suspected suicide bomber was reported to having been subjected to enforced disappearance for over three months prior to her public appearance, raising concerns that statements made during incommunicado detention may have been obtained under coercion.1284 On 22 March 2026, a young man was reportedly abducted in Panjgur district, Balochistan, allegedly by a pro-government armed group known as the ‘death squad'.1285 In a separate incident, a young man was shot dead in Mastung district, Balochistan, after Frontier Corps personnel raided his home and forcibly took him outside.1286 By 1 April 2026, enforced disappearance of Baloch people continued in Balochistan, with Baloch rights activist Mahrang Baloch held in solitary confinement claiming that no home in Balochistan is safe due to ongoing state violence.1287 For more information, see section 4.2.1. Balochistan.

○ (c) Sindhis

The Sindhis reside primarily in the Sindh province of Pakistan,1288 bordering India and forming the country's third largest ethnic group, having a cultural heritage stretching back to the ancient Indus Valley civilisation and were historically recognised as a distinct political and territorial entity in Sindh, which lost its autonomy after the 1947 partition and has since been under Pakistan's military rule.1289 Native Sindhi speakers number an estimated 36 million, 1290 representing 14.1 % of the total population, 1291 with the majority living in Sindh province, followed by Balochistan, Islamabad, Punjab, and KP with smaller proportions.1292 Islam is the predominant religion in Sindh province, comprising approximately 91 % of the population, while Hinduism accounts for around 8 %.1293

Sindhis seek recognition of their distinct identity and greater autonomy within Pakistan, 1294 claiming that state policies have undermined Sindh's culture, language, heritage, and lands.1295 The Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM), a Sindhi nationalist movement, claims independence for the people of Sindh, a state under the name of 'Sindhudesh'.1296 JSMM's leader, Shafi Burfat, who runs the movement in exile, reported human rights violations in Sindh province and has been seeking the UN's recognition of Sindhudesh as an independent nation.1297

In September 2025, the Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization (UNPO) denounced the wide range of human rights abuses faced by Sindhis in Pakistan, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, political repression, and religious-based targeting,1298 including Hindu Sindhis.1299 For more information, see section Religious minorities, (a) Hindus.

On 7 December 2025, the celebration of the Sindh Culture Day turned into violent clashes with security forces during which participants raised demands for Sindhudesh, 1300 resulting in the arrest of 45 individuals.1301 On 22 January 2026, workers of Jeay Sindh Tehreek (JST) and Jeay Sindh Students Federation (JSSF) staged a protest and symbolic hunger strike in Hyderabad, Sindh, denouncing the torture of nationalist activists in prison and their transfer to other cities in Sindh.1302 In addition, Sindhis reportedly faced discrimination from both the state and society, and their dissent was reportedly suppressed through intimidation and hostility in political, media, and everyday contexts.1303 In 2025, Sindhi activists continued to be subjected to detention and enforced disappearance.1304

On 8 March 2026, the alleged enforced disappearance of a Sindhi nationalist leader, the Jamshoro district president for the Jeay Sindh Freedom Movement (JFSM), Saeed Tiyono's has triggered widespread outrage, with the JSFM accusing Pakistani state agencies of rights violations and calling for his release.1305

○ (d) Muhajirs

The Muhajirs are Muslims, predominantly Urdu speaking, who migrated to Pakistan during the 1947 partition of British India or are descendants of those migrants and settled largely in urban centres of Sindh province, particularly Karachi and Hyderabad.[1306] Muhajirs are estimated at approximately 30 million people,[1307] representing 7.6 % of the total population.[1308]

Despite their decades-long presence and their legal citizenship[1309] sources note that Muhajirs have never been accepted as legitimate citizens by the Pakistani army, and faced systemic discrimination in the country,[1310] and have often remained socially and politically marginalised in Sindh province, where even second- and third-generation communities are denied full acceptance as Pakistanis or Sindhis and are derogatorily referred to as '*Panahgir*' (refugees), '*Bhagoray*' (runaways), and 'Hindustani,' (Indian).[1311] They continue seeking for identity recognition and equal rights in the country.[1312]

In a 2025 statement, Altaf Hussain, founder of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), claimed that 'the Muhajirs are treated as outsiders in their homeland', called on the United Nations to recognise their right to self-determination, and indicated that state institutions have targeted Muhajir politicians, activists and members of civil rights groups through arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial violence and restrictions on education and employment.[1313] The MQM has been a major electoral force in Karachi and other urban centres, particularly Hyderabad, consistently mobilising Muhajir voters to secure significant representation in local, provincial and national legislatures, while conducting advocacy for Muhajir rights.[1314]

○ (e) Kashmiris

The population of Pakistan-administered Kashmir is estimated at about 4.5 million people[1315] including an estimated 1.5 million people residing near the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.[1316] The population of Kashmir is predominantly Muslim.[1317] Pakistan governs the northern and western regions, including Azad Kashmir, Gilgit and Baltistan, while India administers the southern and southeastern areas, such as the Kashmir Valley and its largest city, Srinagar, along with Jammu and Ladakh.[1318] For more information, see section 4.2.6. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).

Kashmiris continue to be affected by multiple wars and prolonged diplomatic confrontations between India and Pakistan,[1319] while numerous Muslim Kashmiris backing the insurgency to bring the Indian-administered Kashmir under the control of Pakistan or as an independent country.[1320] The April 2025 terrorist attack in the Indian-administered Kashmir area killing 26 people further created tensions in the region.[1321]

According to a statement submitted by the Centre Independent de Recherches et d'Initiatives pour le Dialogue (CIRID) submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in January 2025, Kashmiris face severe restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly, and political activity.[1322] The statement notes that Kashimiri opposition political leaders are subjected to arbitrary arrests, prosecution, and harassment.[1323] The CIRID underscores a context where the judiciary is presented as lacking independence and a regional context of heavy militarisation, contributing to arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and violence by the Pakistani security forces.[1324] The statement also mentions the 'chronic economic deprivation' endured by the Kashmiri populations and limited access to healthcare and education.[1325] In addition, travel abroad for work is reported to be increasingly restricted due to documentation controls, while limited domestic jobs, rising living costs, and growing poverty have worsened mental health challenges and drug abuse among an increasingly educated Kashmiri population.[1326] Section 7(3) of the Interim Constitution of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (1974) prohibits individuals or political parties from opposing the region's accession to Pakistan; reports indicate that those who speak out against alleged abuses and discrimination have been labelled as traitors and subjected to torture or extrajudicial killings amid the presence of militant groups and monitoring by security and intelligence agencies.[1327]

According to a statement submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in February 2025 by the *Centre d'Encadrement et Developpement des Anciens Combattant*, a non-governmental organisation in special consultative status, indigenous peoples and ethnic and religious minorities in Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir have been involved in violent clashes with local and national authorities since May 2023, triggered by a sudden surge in the prices of essential commodities, particularly electricity and wheat.[1328] In September 2025, over eight Kashmiris were killed in Pakistan-administered Kashmir following clashes with security forces, driven by widespread dissatisfaction with local governance, economic hardship, and demands for civil rights and structural reforms.[1329] Authorities reportedly cut off internet and phone services during the protests.[1330]

○ (f) Hazaras

Hazaras are comprised of both Pakistani[1331] citizens and Afghan nationals, with legal status determined by citizenship and documentation rather than ethnicity.[1332] They reside primarily in Balochistan province, [1333] in the city of Quetta (Hazara Town and Mariabad)[1334] coming originally from Afghanistan due to poverty and conflict, mainly between 1978 and 1992.[1335] They hold Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) and are recognised as citizens under the Pakistan Citizenship Act (1951).[1336] The latest available data from 2018 suggests that the Hazaras in Pakistan were estimated approximately at 500 000 people.[1337] Afghan Hazaras reside under varying legal arrangements, including Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC), other temporary documentation, or undocumented status, which directly affects their exposure to arrest, detention, or deportation. [1338]

Hazara people are predominantly Shia Muslims and are identifiable due to their distinct features and their Shia faith.[1339] Some Hazaras also identify as Sunni Muslims.[1340] For more information, see section (d) Shia Muslims.

Hazara communities have historically been targeted by Sunni extremist groups[1341] including LeJ and ISKP, who consider Shia Muslims as heretics.[1342] Despite fluctuations in large-scale attacks[1343] against Hazara communities, particularly in Quetta, including attacks in markets, buses, and places of worship by militant groups, [1344] 'persistent security threats, discrimination, and significant restrictions on freedom of movement, often requiring checkpoints or security escorts outside Hazara-majority areas', according to an international organisation interviewed by the EUAA on 30 March 2026.[1345] A news article from February 2026, report the killing of a Hazara man in Gulbahar, Pakistan.[1346] In April 2026, news articles reported on the killing of two Hazara men and the wounding of three others by armed assailants in Quetta,[1347] with sources reporting the attack as appearing to be targeted killing against the Hazara community.[1348]

○ (g) Kalash people

The Kalash population is an ethnic and religious minority residing in the Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in the Kalash valleys of Bumburet, Rumbur and Birir on Hindu Kush mountains, near the border with Afghanistan,[1349] and their population is estimated between 4 000 [1350] and 7 500 people.[1351] They have a distinct ancient Indo-Aryan culture, and a unique language[1352] with a polytheistic pagan religion closely linked to animism, the belief that all living things have a soul.[1353] The community has long been referred to as '*kafir*' ('infidels').[1354]

Kalash people, among other ethnic and religious minorities in Pakistan, are subjected to systemic discrimination and suffer from harassment, caught in fabricated blasphemy allegations, mob violence, lynchings, targeted killings, forced conversions, arbitrary detention, and destruction of property, including their places of worship and cemeteries.1355

While the community has long been deprived from a formal legal framework to safeguard their social and cultural rights, the KP Cabinet Committee on Legislation approved the draft Kalash Marriage Bill on 13 August 2025.1356 Kalash marriages have traditionally been conducted according to the community's own religious laws, customs, and rituals, with disputes usually resolved through local *jirga*, while the draft bill sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 for both men and women, and it 'acknowledges three culturally distinct forms of marriage within the Kalash community' including:

- 'arranged Marriage: A traditional union with the consent of both families, involving rituals such as *Khaltabari* and *Marrat*;
- love Marriage (*Alashing* Marriage): a Kalash girl chooses her partner independently, without parental consent. The marriage becomes valid once her parents or close relatives confirm her willingness and happiness within seven days;
- elopement (*Shisha-Istongas*): couples who elope and complete the *Marrat* ceremony are recognised as legally married under customary law;
- this categorisation respects traditional Kalash practices while providing a legal framework for registration and protection.'1357

Sources reported in April 2026 that the KP government has tabled the Kalash Marriage Bill 2026 for detailed review and consultation before its final approval.1358

The Kalash-inhabited valleys remain under threat from several Muslim groups, including the TTP, which regards the Kalash as infidels and has carried out repeated attacks to seize their land, while surrounding communities exert constant religious pressure by building mosques and madrasas on Kalash territory.1359 In addition, the Kalash people lack curriculum adapted to their children, most of whom attend public schools in non-Kalash villages, where Islamic instruction is compulsory.1360

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