



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Covering 310,401 square miles (803,940 square kilometers), Pakistan is about the same size as Texas and Oklahoma combined. Northern Pakistan has some of the world's highest mountains, including K2 in the Karakoram range. South of Islamabad (the capital), the country is mostly flat. Most people live in the fertile Indus River Valley, which runs through the country's center. Territory is divided between the Northern Areas, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and four provinces (Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and the North-West Frontier Province). Pakistan's border with northern India is disputed, as each country claims the right to Kashmir but controls only a portion of it. Pakistan's portion (one-third of the territory) is called Azad Kashmir. The region is divided by a Line of Control de facto border. Earthquakes are common in Pakistan, and the Indus can flood during the rainy season (July–August). Except in the highlands, the climate is usually hot. Winter temperatures average about 50°F (10°C).

History. Arabs introduced Islam to the Indian subcontinent in the eighth century. Most of the area that is now Pakistan was conquered by Muslim warriors in the 900s. In the 16th century, Muslim power reached its peak under the Moghul Dynasty. Although many inhabitants converted to Islam, the majority remained Hindu. By the 1800s, the British East India Trading Company had become the dominant power in the area, and the last Moghul emperor was deposed in 1858. After World War I, British control of the subcontinent (basically present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) was contested by various independence movements that united for a time under Mahatma Gandhi. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, began advocating separate Muslim and Hindu nations in 1940.

As Britain prepared to grant independence to the area, Muslim leaders feared Hindus would control the new country. They pressed for independence from India. A choice was given to each region ruled by a native prince to join either India or Pakistan. Muslim regions chose the latter and, in 1947, became East and West Pakistan, separated by 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) of India.

East Pakistan (inhabited by Bengalis) declared independence in 1971, which prompted civil war. Indian troops defeated West Pakistani troops sent to quell the movement, and the Bengalis formed Bangladesh. In the power vacuum created by the army's defeat, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was elected leader of Pakistan. In 1977, General Mohammed Zia ul-Haq seized control of the government and jailed Bhutto, who was hanged in 1979. Zia postponed elections indefinitely, suspended civil rights, and established *shari'a* (Islamic law) as the basis of all civil law. In 1988, Zia was killed in a plane crash. Free elections were held, and Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, was elected prime minister. Over the next decade, the prime ministership alternated between Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League.

In the 1947 vote on which country to join, most people of Kashmir chose Pakistan, but their Hindu prince (after initially choosing neither country) made an agreement with India. The nations fought two wars over Kashmir, eventually agreeing to a cease-fire line in 1972. Violent separatist activity on India's side continued, fueling tensions between India and Pakistan because of Pakistan's support for the rebels. Peace talks opened in 1997 to resolve competing territorial claims. Progress was halted in 1998 when India tested its nuclear weapons and Pakistan responded by detonating weapons of its

own. Then, in 1999, India launched attacks on “infiltrators” who had crossed the Line of Control from Pakistan. Pakistan denied responsibility, and both nations began mobilizing for wider conflicts. Under international pressure, Prime Minister Sharif agreed to encourage a withdrawal from positions seized on India’s side. This made him unpopular with the military, which had been supporting the insurgents, and Sharif dismissed army general Pervez Musharraf in October 1999.

Within minutes of this dismissal, troops seized control of the government. Musharraf assumed power as chief executive and arrested Sharif. Musharraf did not declare martial law but did temporarily suspend the constitution and install an interim government. After Sharif was sentenced on various charges, he was allowed into exile. Musharraf won an April 2002 referendum extending his term in office an additional five years, despite charges that the referendum was unconstitutional. He permitted a return to civilian rule in late 2002 but amended the constitution to retain the right to dissolve an elected parliament. Musharraf’s military status made his re-election in 2007 constitutionally questionable. His victory was assured only after he declared emergency rule and dismissed unsympathetic Supreme Court judges. Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in December 2007. Soon after, opposition parties claimed victory in parliamentary elections. In August 2008, impeachment processes began against Musharraf on charges that included suspending the constitution and imposing emergency rule. Musharraf resigned a few weeks later and was replaced by Asif Ali Zardari, widower of Benazir Bhutto, in the September 2008 elections.

Tensions with India escalated following a terrorist attack on India’s parliament in 2001. India blamed Pakistan, which denied responsibility. By 2002, thousands of soldiers from both sides had been deployed along their shared border. Under international pressure, India and Pakistan made conciliatory gestures that led to a Kashmir cease-fire in November 2003. Peace negotiations were restarted, though it will be difficult to find a solution for Kashmir that both sides find acceptable.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Pakistan’s population of 164.7 million is growing by 1.8 percent annually. The majority of Pakistanis (65 percent) live in rural areas. The two largest cities are Karachi (14 million) and Lahore (5 million). Pakistan has four major ethnic groups. The Punjabi is the largest, comprising about 65 percent of the population. The other three groups are the Sindhi, Baluchi, and Pashtuns (also called Pakhtuns). Pakistan is also home to Muhajir (immigrants from India and their descendants) and a large population of Afghan refugees, most of whom live in camps on the border.

Language. Many languages are spoken in Pakistan due to the diversity of ethnic groups and the great difference between dialects in a single language. English is an official language, taught in school, and is used by the government and educated elite. Urdu, the other official language, is being encouraged as a replacement for English and is the nation’s unifying language. While only 8 percent of the population speaks Urdu as a native tongue, most people speak it in addition to their own language. Each province is free to use its own regional languages and dialects. Major languages correlate with the ethnic groups: Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi, Pashtu, and so forth.

Religion. The force uniting the diverse peoples of Pakistan is Islam, the state religion. About 97 percent of Pakistanis are Muslims. Most of these (77 percent) are Sunni Muslims, while

the remainder are Shi‘i Muslims. Islam pervades every facet of a Pakistani’s life, from birth to death, and people believe their destiny is subject to the will of *Allah* (God). Muslims accept major biblical prophets from Adam to Jesus, but they hold Muhammad as the last and greatest of *Allah*’s prophets. The *Qur’an* (Koran) is composed of *Allah*’s revelations given to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel and is the chief scripture of Islam. Christians comprise about 2 percent of the population, and a small Hindu community also exists in Pakistan. Freedom of worship is guaranteed, but non-Muslims vote separately from Muslims. Non-Muslim candidates are elected to parliament under a special quota system.

General Attitudes. Most Pakistanis are devout Muslims and live according to the philosophy that the will of *Allah* is evident in all things. *Inshallah* (God willing) is a term commonly employed to express hope for success on a project, for one’s family, or for a positive outcome to events. *Shari’a* (Islamic law) is used when practical, but Western legal and business practices also exist. This approach attempts to offer personal freedoms while maintaining religious values. Pakistan is a nation of diversity, and people often identify with their group before identifying with the country. Differences are evident between ethnic groups. Pashtuns and Baluchis are more conservative and traditional than the other major groups. Differences also exist between urban and rural populations, the latter being more conservative. Tensions between ethnic, religious, or political groups sometimes erupt into violent riots.

Personal Appearance. Although conservative Western-style clothing is worn in Pakistan, the national dress, the *shalwar qameez*, is more common. The outfit, typically made of cotton, consists of the *shalwar* (a pair of loose-fitting pants) and the *qameez* (a long tunic). Styles differ for men and women. Men wear solid, plain colors and add a vest or coat for formal occasions. Women prefer brighter colors and bolder patterns on a more tailored *shalwar qameez*. They wear a *dupatta* (scarf) around their heads and a long shawl around their shoulders. Women from more traditional families wear a *burqa* (a veil that covers most of the face). A man usually wears the head-dress of his ethnic group—some are turbans, others pillbox-type hats, and others *karakuli* (fez-type) hats. Despite the heat, Pakistanis cover their legs, arms, and heads in public. Women never wear shorts, and men wear them only for athletic events.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. A handshake is the most common greeting, although close friends may embrace if meeting after a long time. Women might greet each other with a handshake, hug, or kiss. It is inappropriate for a man to shake hands with or touch a woman who is not his close relative; however, he may greet a man’s wife verbally without looking directly at her.

Verbal greetings often include lengthy inquiries about one’s health and family; men might place the right hand over the heart during this part of the greeting. The most common greeting is *Assalaam alaikum* (May peace be upon you). The reply is *Walaikum assalaam* (And peace also upon you). “Good-bye” is *Khoodha haafis*. In more formal situations, people address others by title and last name. They use first names for friends and relatives.

Gestures. It is not proper for the bottom of one’s foot or shoe to point at another person. Therefore, people often squat or sit with both feet on the ground. If sitting on the floor, or if crossing the legs, one positions the feet so as not to point them directly at others. Items are passed with the right hand or both

hands. To beckon, one waves all fingers of the hand with the palm facing down. Using individual fingers to make gestures is impolite. Except in the conservative provinces of Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province, male friends may walk hand in hand or with their arms over each other's shoulders. It is inappropriate for members of the opposite sex to touch in public.

Visiting. Visiting between friends and relatives is an important social custom in Pakistan and occurs as often as possible. Hospitality is important and guests are made to feel welcome. In small groups, each person is greeted individually. Personal rapport is important. Visitors are often treated to coffee, tea, or soft drinks and may be invited to eat a meal. Visitors should accept this hospitality, although refusing politely with good reason is appropriate. Guests often bring gifts if well acquainted with the hosts or if the occasion calls for a present. Gifts might include something for the children, a decoration for the home, fruit, or sweets. More expensive gifts might embarrass the hosts. It is customary to socialize before a meal and then to leave soon after the meal is finished. In traditional homes, men do not socialize with women who are not their relatives. Rather, men receive their male guests in a special room to enjoy conversation and refreshments.

Eating. Whenever possible, the whole family eats together. In poorer households, family members share the same platter, each person eating from the portion directly in front of him or her. In urban areas, most people have dining tables, in which case they may eat with utensils or the hand. In rural areas, people primarily eat with the right hand and sit on the floor or ground. *Chapati* (a type of bread) is also used to scoop up food.

Fathers might feed young children and mothers feed infants. In large groups, men and women eat in separate areas. Extended families often gather for large meals. During the month of *Ramadan*, Muslims refrain from food and drink each day from sunrise to sundown. They eat together in the evenings, which are also occasions to visit or offer prayers. During *Ramadan*, it is polite for non-Muslims to not eat or drink in front of fasting Muslims.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The family is the center of social life and support. Although increased modernization has brought many women into public life, men continue to act as head of their homes. It is common for the extended family—a father and mother, their sons, and the sons' families—to live together in the same household. The presiding male of the family has significant influence over the lives of all family members, although women are increasingly taking on active decision-making roles. The elderly are highly respected. Family honor is very important to many ethnic groups, and some groups will kill a woman who has become pregnant out of wedlock or has otherwise brought shame to the family name. Islamic law permits a man to have as many as four wives if he can care for each equally, but very few actually have more than one. The average family works hard for a basic living, which does not often include the luxury of modern conveniences.

Nuclear families generally are large; the average woman bears five children in her lifetime. The government stresses family planning to help curb population growth. In the past, large and powerful feudal families had significant power over politics and the economy. As wealthy landowners, they still have considerable influence, although the military and bureaucracy have played equally powerful roles since independence.

Today, the people often turn to these feudal families when government bureaucracy fails.

Housing. A typical urban dwelling is a brick house or apartment. Three generations commonly share accommodations, as sons often bring their wives to live in their parents' house. Most homes in cities have electricity and plumbing, but many urban residents live in mud houses in overcrowded squatter settlements without these services. Rural houses are built of mud or brick and consist of a large courtyard with several rooms built around it. The extended family shares this compound; each nuclear family has its own rooms and a kitchen.

Dating and Marriage. Boys and girls have little contact with each other; generally, they attend separate schools (though coeducation does exist in Pakistan) and are not allowed to date, except among Westernized urban Pakistanis. Individual choice of marriage partners is far less common than arranged marriages. Formal engagements may last from a few months to many years, depending on the age of the couple when the arrangements are made. In many cases, the bride and groom meet for the first time on their wedding day. Pakistanis view marriage as a union of two families as much as a union of two people. Both families participate in the wedding preparations. A Muslim holy man, usually called a *Qazi*, completes the marriage contract between the two families. Wedding rituals are elaborate, with three days of expensive celebrations.

Life Cycle. Relatives, friends, and neighbors congratulate a family on the birth of a child. They bring traditional sweets and gifts for the baby and the mother. Likewise, the family distributes sweets among their neighbors and the poor. However, the newborn is not normally shown to anyone outside the immediate family for 40 days after the birth. As soon as possible, a *mullah* (Muslim religious leader) is invited to read the *azan* prayer to "open the baby's ears." On the seventh or ninth day after the birth, the baby's hair is cut and weighed, and the cost of the equivalent amount of gold is calculated. This amount of money is distributed among the poor. This rite, called *aqiqa*, is accompanied by the slaughter of a sheep (or two sheep if the newborn is a boy). The meat is distributed in three equal parts: one for the family, one for friends and neighbors, and one for the poor. For boys, circumcision is sometimes done on the same day as the *aqiqa*. A boy's transition to manhood is associated with the first time he shaves. A source of pride for the father, the event is considered cause for a celebration. Relatives bring gifts, and the father gives gifts to his sisters. A shaving kit is purchased for the young man.

In accordance with Muslim tradition, when somebody passes away, the body must be buried as soon as possible. In very rare cases, when the arrival of close relatives is expected, it is permitted to wait until the second day after the death. Pakistanis do not use coffins but wrap the body with white cloth. Family members do not eat until the deceased is buried. For three days after the funeral, the family does not cook; food is brought by relatives and neighbors. People visit to express their condolences and to read prayers from the *Qur'an* to ensure the deceased's peaceful transition to heaven.

Diet. The mainstay of the Pakistani diet is *chapati*. Also called *roti*, it is an unleavened bread similar to pita bread. Pakistani food generally is hot and spicy, and curry is one of the most popular spices. Islamic law forbids the consumption of pork and alcohol. There are strict civil laws regarding the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages. A type of yogurt is a common ingredient in meals. Rice is part of most meals and desserts. *Pillau* (lightly fried rice with vegetables) and *biryani*

Pakistan

(rice with meat and spices) are two customary dishes. *Kheer* is a type of rice pudding. The most common meats are lamb, beef, chicken, and fish. Only more affluent families eat these regularly; the poor eat meat only on special occasions. For marriage feasts, chicken curry is common. There are significant regional differences in cuisine. For example, while curries and heavy spices prevail in the south, barbecuing is more common in the north. The *kebab*, strips or chunks of meat barbecued over an open grill on a skewer, is prepared in various ways. Tea with milk is the most popular drink.

Recreation. Cricket, field hockey, and squash were introduced by the British and have become some of the most popular national sports. Sports developed in Pakistan include a type of team wrestling called *kabaddi* and polo, which was adopted by the British and exported to England. Pakistanis also enjoy soccer and tennis. Going to movies, watching television (or videos), having picnics, listening to native music, and visiting friends and family members are other forms of recreation.

The Arts. Islam greatly influences Pakistani art. *Qawwali* (which literally means “utterance”) is a song of worship traditionally performed by Islamic Sufi mystics and accompanied by instruments such as the *dholak* (drum) and the *rabab* (stringed instrument). Islamic art is based on intricate, brightly colored geometrical designs, which adorn common crafts such as woodwork, stonework, leatherwork, carpets, calligraphy, and basketry. Literature, particularly poetry, is one of the nation’s most respected art forms and readings are common. Folklore is abundant and varies by region. Pakistani painting is gaining prominence and began when important literary and religious works were illustrated with brightly colored designs.

Holidays. Secular holidays include Pakistan Day (23 Mar.), Labor Day (1 May), Independence Day (14 Aug.), Defense of Pakistan Day (6 Sept.), Anniversary of the Death of Quaid-e-Azam (Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the nation’s founder, 11 Sept.), Allama Iqbal Day (9 Nov.), and the Birth of Quaid-e-Azam (25 Dec.). Bank holidays are in December and July.

Islamic holidays are determined according to the lunar calendar. The most important include *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the three-day feast at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*; *Eid-ul-Azha* (Feast of the Sacrifice), which commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, as well as the *haj* (pilgrimage) to Makkah, Saudi Arabia; and *Eid-i-Milad-un-Nabi*, the birth of the prophet Muhammad. During *Ramadan* evenings, many towns sponsor fairs and other celebrations.

SOCIETY

Government. Pakistan is led by a president (currently Asif Ali Zardari) as chief of state. The prime minister (currently Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani) is head of government. Parliament consists of a 100-seat Senate in addition to a 342-seat National Assembly. Members of the Senate are elected by provincial assemblies to four-year terms. In the National Assembly, members are directly elected to four-year terms. Sixty seats in the National Assembly are reserved for women. Ten seats are reserved for representatives of minority groups. The voting age is 18.

Economy. Pakistan’s main industry is agriculture, which employs about 45 percent of the people. Pakistan emphasizes high-yield grains to keep pace with a growing population. Agriculture accounts for more than half of all export earnings.

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	164,741,924 (rank=6)
Area, sq. mi.	310,410 (rank=34)
Area, sq. km.	803,940

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	136 of 177 countries
Adjusted for women	124 of 156 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$2,370
Adult literacy rate	64% (male); 35% (female)
Infant mortality rate	79 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	64 (male); 65 (female)

Chief products include rice, cotton, wheat, sugarcane, fruits, and vegetables. Clothing and textiles are also important exports. At the time of independence, Pakistan had very little industry. Over the past several years, however, industrialization has grown substantially. Remittances from Pakistani workers in other countries are an important source of revenue.

Low tax revenues, a high budget deficit, widespread corruption, low foreign investment, and other concerns have significantly hindered development. Many families have difficulty meeting basic needs. Unemployment is high. The currency is the Pakistani *rupee* (PKR).

Transportation and Communications. Local transportation consists of donkeys and horse-drawn carts in rural areas. Buses, minibuses, taxis, and motorized rickshaws are available in cities. Many roads are in poor condition, although slightly more than half of them are paved. Roads in rural areas are not paved, and many areas are not accessible by car. Following the British tradition, traffic moves on the left side of the road. Pakistan has a domestic airline and a railway.

Most people do not own telephones; phones are available in hotels, shops, and restaurants. Mobile phones are becoming the preferred mode of business communication. There are several newspapers, and radio and television stations. In 2000, the government introduced the internet to more than one hundred Pakistani cities as part of a new information technology policy.

Education. Pakistan’s literacy rate is low, especially among women. Due to poverty and the lack of proper facilities, children either cannot attend school or drop out after only a few years to help the family. Still, government efforts have increased the number of primary schools available in rural areas. Primary schooling is free. At secondary levels, efforts are directed at training technicians to aid in expanding the nation’s industrial base.

Health. Medical services in Pakistan are limited. Fully equipped hospitals are located in urban areas but generally are understaffed. Outside the cities, medical care is scarce. The government is trying to increase the number of doctors available in the rural areas, but many seek more lucrative employment abroad. Some provinces are experimenting with using army personnel to aid with health care in rural areas. Water is not safe for drinking in most areas, and malaria is widespread.

AT A GLANCE

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