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# Pakistan

**190.2 million est. pop. 2012**

*Pakistan is situated between India to the east, China to the northeast, Afghanistan to the northwest and north, Iran to the west, the Arabian Sea to the south, and is separated from Tajikistan by the narrow and rugged Wakhan Corridor (part of Afghanistan) to the north. Created in 1947, Pakistan is a relatively a new country, but it is home to the ancient Indus Valley and subsequent civilizations. It has a diverse geography and some unique species of fauna and flora. Pakistan is actively concerned with addressing environmental issues, though solutions require consideration of complex governmental and societal structures.*

Situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan (literally meaning “the Land of the Pure”) was created on 14 August 1947 out of Muslim-majority territories in the northeast and northwest parts of British India. As of 2012 it has an estimated population of 190.2 million people, making it the sixth most populous country on the planet after China, India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil (US CIA 2012). Initially consisting of two parts separated by approximately 1,600 kilometers of Indian territory, Pakistan split in 1971, when the eastern half seceded and became the Republic of Bangladesh. The western portion, officially called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of four provinces: Baluchistan; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), previously known as the North West Frontier Province; the Punjab; and Sind. The federal capital, Islamabad, is a separate administrative unit and lies in the central, northern part of the country. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan comprise seven tribal agencies and six frontier regions sharing borders with Afghanistan.

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The federally administered agencies of the northern areas of Gilgit and Baltistan have been given a status of a de facto province with more autonomy according to the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order in 2009 because of the people’s demand to make it a province (Khan 2009; Shigri 2009). As a consequence of the partition of British India into the states of India and Pakistan, the status of the Kashmir region is still disputed, according to the United Nations, regarding its annexing to either of the states (UNMOGIP 2012). It is divided into Pakistani-administered Kashmir—a protected quasi-autonomous state called Azad (Free) Kashmir—and Indian-administered Kashmir. The Kashmir region is the source of Indus River waters, which play an important role in the agriculture of both countries. In 1960, India and Pakistan entered into the Indus Waters Treaty to regulate the use of Indus waters.

Pakistan is a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the G20 developing nations. It has the seventh largest standing armed forces in the world and is a declared nuclear weapons state, being the first and only Muslim nation to have that status. Islam plays a major role in the country’s identity, politics, and day-to-day life, with Muslims making up 98 percent of the population. Pakistan is also a founding member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation).

## Climate and Geography

Pakistan’s climate is generally arid, characterized by little rainfall, hot summers, cool or cold winters, and wide climatic variations between extremes of temperature: at one end, the warm, humid coastal area along the Arabian Sea, and at the other, the frozen, snow-covered, relatively

inaccessible ridges of the Karakoram Range and other mountains in the far north.

Less than a fifth of Pakistan's land area has the potential for intensive agricultural use. Nearly all of the cultivable land is actively under cultivation, and although outputs are low by world standards, agriculture is considered to be the backbone of Pakistan's economy. Barley and wheat cultivation, along with the domestication of herd animals like sheep and goats, can be traced back to Mehrgarh in Baluchistan in 8000–6000 BCE. Irrigation was developed in the Indus Valley by around 4500 BCE and is still practiced through the canals from the Indus River and its tributaries, forming one of the world's largest canal systems (Wright 2009). The existence of animal-driven ploughs is evident from around 2500 BCE.

The Indus River plain consists of two major regions, corresponding roughly to the provinces of Punjab and Sind, which combine to be Pakistan's breadbasket. "Punjab" means the confluence of five rivers: the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej. During the British colonial period, the irrigation system was improved by digging more canals in the province, facilitating the emergence of extensive cultivation despite arid conditions. Engine tube wells are used in some areas in the absence of canals, whereas some of the areas, like the northern parts of Punjab, have arid agriculture. Pakistan is one of the largest producers and suppliers of wheat, rice, cotton, sugarcane, date palm, mango, and chickpeas in the world today (Board of Investment 2012). The crops are categorized into *Kharif* (autumn harvest or monsoon crop) and *Rabi* (winter or spring harvest) crops. Livestock is an integral part of Pakistan's economy. In some areas, such as in Baluchistan, farmers raise animals without any agriculture, making the livestock their only source of income.

The Baluchistan plateau, spotted with seismic fault lines, is an austere, dry place that has been compared with the surface of the moon. It has the lowest population-density rates in the country. People living closer to the rivers and in the coastal areas of Sindh and Baluchistan largely depend upon fishing for their living. Fish farming is also a growing industry in Pakistan not only in the coastal areas but also in Punjab and northern areas.

The northern highlands region features some of the most rugged and famous mountains in the world, including the world's second-highest peak, K2, and many peaks that are snow covered year round. The northern part of the country also has high-altitude species of fauna, including snow leopards and markhors (wild goats). The northern forests in the Hindu Kush and Karakoram ranges include alpine junipers. Some of this region was once part of the old Silk Road trading

system that traversed Central Asia more than a thousand years ago, whereas other parts were essentially cut off from the outside world because of the craggy and difficult terrain.

## Politics and Economics

Pakistan is constitutionally a parliamentary republic. Although the head of state is the president, the prime minister usually wields greater political influence. Three parallel legal systems exist: civil, religious, and military. The Council of Islamic Ideology, a constitutionally mandated organization, ensures that the country has no laws that are contradictory to the tenets of Islam.

For the first time in Pakistan history, an elected government of the Pakistan People's Party, along with its allies, is completing its tenure in 2012. Feudal and paternalistic relations continue to dominate political processes, however, especially in rural areas. Access to resources, services, jobs, state functionaries, and other benefits is mediated through powerful influential patrons who, in most instances, are men. Although distinctions based on *qaum* (tribe) remain significant social markers in the Punjab (Lyon 2004), particularly in rural areas, they have nowhere near the authority that tribal affiliation holds in the KPK and Baluchistan. In the latter areas, patrilineal lineages are the most significant bonds, with vendettas and feuds intrinsic features of social relations. Pakhtuns (the dominant ethnic group in the KPK) and Baluchis (the dominant ethnic group in the Baluchistan province) are irredentists, tribal members who recognize no legitimate authority other than that of their immediate tribal leader. Similarly, in Sind, socioeconomic ties traditionally revolve around a few large dominant *waderas* (landholding families). The remainder of people live in persistent poverty.

With independence, many people feared that Pakistan might cease to exist; East Pakistan's secession in 1971—aided by India—further aggravated that anxiety, increasing hatred against India and an ideological and political negotiation within the state (Talbot 1998). In the 1990s, political and ethnic radical movements were largely replaced by growing sectarian terrorism, and eventually anti-West and anti-United States sentiments in the 2000s. Pakistan was suddenly thrust to the center of the global political arena in the days following the terrorist attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001. Because it had been a frontline state in the US proxy war against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Pakistan now became a frontline state in the war against global terrorism, particularly against the Taliban-led government of Afghanistan and the al-Qaeda organization.

With Pakistan's unwavering support, military action succeeded in overthrowing the regime in Afghanistan in December 2001.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan's economy was constantly undergoing economic restructuring, albeit unsuccessfully in the area of bringing about viable reforms. The hyperinflation and economic stagnation that hit Pakistan's economy in late 1996 contributed to lowering people's already weak purchasing power; morale was further lowered as the government was forced to introduce austerity measures to prevent the economy from going into default. Despite all these issues, Pakistan's industry, especially in sporting goods, surgical instruments, mobile and telecommunication products, and agriculture, have seen a boom (Board of Investment 2012). As of 2012, however, the last few years have seen a severe energy crisis that has reduced the national growth.

With a low human-development position that underscores what the political and economic turmoil of the past few decades has wrought, Pakistan has a literacy rate of 57 percent (69 percent male and 45 percent female literacy rates) as of 2010 (Ministry of Finance 2010). Pakistan also has a high percentage (40 percent) of underweight children under the age of five years (FAO 2010).

## Society

Like its geography, Pakistan's cultural landscape is diverse. Having roots in one of the world's most ancient civilizations, the Indus Valley and then Indo-Greek Gandhara, Pakistani culture today has been shaped by various religious and ethnic factors. Its ancient society has been connected with the great civilizations of the world through trade, as revealed by archaeological evidence at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (Mughal 2011a; Wright 2009). This region has been influenced by Greek, Arabic, Persian, Central Asian, and British cultures during its history, and resultant cultural imprints can be found on Pakistani languages, food, dress, and other forms of tangible and intangible culture.

Pakistani social life revolves around family and the honor of women. A family's traditions have considerable bearing on its members, influencing perceptions of

proper gender roles, occupational choices, whether and how to pursue an education, and alliances with others. Large extended families of the past provided ample opportunity for socialization, sustenance, protection, and regulation. Isolated individuals living apart from relatives remain uncommon; even male workers who have migrated to cities generally live with a relative or a friend of a relative. Children live with their parents until marriage; sons and their families—except in the most congested urban areas in the country—tend to live with their parents for their entire lives.

After independence, the millions of Hindus and Sikhs who left for India were replaced by roughly seven million Muslim immigrants who fled from India to

Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947 (Talbot 1998), the majority of whom settled in

Punjab. This influx of immigration changed the demographic features of many cities, especially the then-capital, Karachi. The refugees, generally better educated than most native people, especially in Sindh, filled a vacuum in the commercial life.

Urbanization has been occurring at an unprecedented rate in Pakistan, and 35 percent of Pakistanis live in cities, according to 2005 estimates (*Daily Times* Staff Report 2007). Over half of all urban residents live in cities of more than a million people. More than 50 percent of the total urban population in 2005 lived in eight cities of Pakistan, namely Karachi, Lahore (the two largest cities), Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Hyderabad, Gujranwala, and Peshawar (*Daily Times* Staff Report 2007). The traditional

hold—both economic and political—that local landlords enjoy in rural areas, especially in Punjab and Sindh, virtually ensures the continuation of limited socioeconomic opportunities and mobility, which in turn are the greatest reasons for migration to urban areas.

Karachi has come to house the poorest slums in the country, particularly in the working-class neighborhoods of Orangi and Korangi. It was ravaged by violence in the 1990s as contending ethnic groups vied to solidify their local power and control. Since the eruption of the civil war in Afghanistan, the city of Karachi had also become a destination point for refugees from Afghanistan



escaping the turmoil in that country and the poverty and dependency of the refugee camps in KPK and Baluchistan.

## Environmental Issues

Pakistan has been subject to frequent natural disasters, especially earthquakes and floods. The 1935 and 1945 earthquakes in Baluchistan, the 1974 earthquake in Hunza Valley, and the 2005 large earthquake in the northern part of the country, including Kashmir, have affected millions of people and caused vast infrastructural damage (Khan 2010).

Global warming is another environmental issue affecting the natural balance in Pakistan. It has been noted that the Karakoram and Himalayan mountain ranges in the northern part of the country have grown wetter over the past century than they were over the preceding millennia. The melting of glaciers and heavy rainfall have caused the Indus River and its tributaries to overflow. Floods in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and in 2010 in various parts of the country, especially Gilgit-Baltistan, Punjab, Sindh, and central eastern parts of Baluchistan, have caused serious damage (Khan 2010).

Although the area had one of the best sewerage systems in the world during the ancient era of the Indus Valley civilization (Mughal 2011b), Pakistan is now suffering from a surfeit of solid and liquid excreta. This has caused an increase in the number of waterborne diseases like gastroenteritis. Low-lying land is generally used for waste disposal. Another issue is the contamination of shallow groundwater near urban industries that discharge wastes directly into the ground. This has largely affected the availability of clean drinking water. Air pollution from vehicles is also a major issue in big cities like Lahore and Karachi. Deforestation, soil erosion, and water shortage in dry conditions are some of the other major environmental problems that threaten humans, as well as other species.

The government of Pakistan has become increasingly concerned about environmental threats since the early 1990s and has addressed environmental concerns by starting programs such as the Pakistan Environment Protection Agency and the National Conservation Strategy. An Environmental Protection Act was passed in 1997 and recently a “green bench” of the Supreme Court has been announced to deal with the environmental issues (*The Nation* Staff Report 2012). According to the Joint Monitoring Program of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), access to an improved water source increased from 83 percent in 1990 to 91 percent in 2004 (WHO and UNICEF 2012a). Similarly, improved sanitation

coverage increased from 37 percent to 59 percent (WHO and UNICEF 2012b).

Pakistan has fourteen national parks, seventy-two wildlife sanctuaries, sixty-six game reserves, nine marine and littoral protected areas, nineteen protected wetlands, and a number of other protected grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, and natural monuments. The country is actively concerned with environmental issues at national and international levels, signing international treaties like the United Nation’s Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Pakistan has a legal framework for environmental protection but there is a need to improve its capacity to enforce these laws.

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*See also* Afghanistan; Agriculture, Small-Scale; Central Asia; Indus River; Middle East; Urbanization (Western Asia and Northern Africa)

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