



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Pakistan is about the same size as Turkey or the U.S. states of Texas and Oklahoma combined. The Karakoram range in northern Pakistan has some of the world's highest mountains, including K2, the world's second-highest peak. 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. Pakistan's border with northern India is disputed, as both Pakistan and India claim the right to Kashmir but each controls only a portion of it. Pakistan's portion (about one-third of the total territory) is divided into two administrative territories: Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. The region is divided by a de facto border known as the Line of Control.

Earthquakes are common in Pakistan, and the Indus River and its tributaries can flood during the rainy season (July-August). Except in the highlands, the climate is usually hot. Winter temperatures average about 60°F (16°C).

History

Islam and Early Empires

Arabs introduced Islam to the Indian subcontinent in the eighth century. Most of the area that is now Pakistan was conquered by Muslim warriors between AD 1000 and 1300. 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. The last Moghul emperor was deposed in 1857.

British Colony

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. Muhammad 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 the Princely States (areas of India that weren't under direct British control) to join either India or Pakistan. Muslim-majority regions chose the latter and, in 1947, became East and West Pakistan, separated by 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) of India.

Creation of Pakistan

East Pakistan (inhabited by Bengalis) declared independence in 1971, which prompted civil war. Indian troops intervened and defeated the West Pakistani troops sent to quell the movement, and an independent Bangladesh emerged. In the power vacuum created by the army's defeat, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was elected leader of Pakistan. In 1977, General Muhammad 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'ah (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 position of prime minister alternated between Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League.

Disputed Kashmir and Tensions with India

In the 1947 vote on which country to join, Kashmir was caught in between Pakistan and India because it had a Muslim majority but was headed by a Hindu prince. Pakistan sent a militia to force Kashmir to accede to Pakistan. The Kashmiri prince called on India for help but was denied assistance until Kashmir agreed to accede to India. Kashmir eventually did agree to join India. The dispute was brought before the United Nations Security Council in 1948, which resulted in Kashmir being recognized as a "disputed territory," the fate of which would be decided by local plebiscite. No such referendum was ever held, and India and Pakistan fought three wars over Kashmir before agreeing to a cease-fire line (the Line of Control) in 1972. Nevertheless, violent separatist activity in Indian-controlled Kashmir continued, fueling tensions between Pakistan and India because of Pakistan's alleged support for the Indian separatists.

Relations deteriorated further in 1998 when India tested its nuclear weapons and Pakistan responded by detonating weapons of its own, although both nations eventually agreed to stop nuclear testing. And since the beginning of the 21st century, terrorists with ties to Pakistan have carried out numerous deadly attacks throughout India, continually thwarting hopes for renewed peace talks. Tensions between India and Pakistan continue, often resulting in military clashes, especially in the disputed region of Kashmir.

Internal Challenges

Pakistan also faces many internal challenges, particularly political instability. Since its founding in 1947, the country has had only two democratic transfers of power, and three successful military coups have resulted in military rule, most recently from 1999 to 2008, when General Pervez Musharraf led Pakistan. Since 2008, the nation has been under civilian rule, but the military continues to exert a great deal of power and influence. Also, government corruption is endemic: Prime Minister Sharif was forced to resign in 2017 after being accused of corruption. Internal security remains a challenge, as Pakistan grapples with domestic Islamist militant groups that frequently target government institutions, religious minorities, and other civilians with deadly attacks. And in recent years, a stagnating economy has triggered a severe economic crisis.

THE PEOPLE**Population**

Pakistan's two largest cities are Karachi and Lahore. Pakistan is home to several different ethnic groups. The Punjabi is the largest, making up about 45 percent of the population. The second and third largest groups are the Pashtun (15 percent) and the Sindhi (14 percent). Smaller groups of Saraiki, Mujahirs (immigrants from India and their descendants), Baluchi, and Kalash also live in the country. A large population of Afghan refugees lives 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 considered 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. The majority (between 85 and 90 percent) are Sunni Muslims, while roughly 10 to 15 percent are Shi'i Muslims. Islam is an important part 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 of God's prophets. The Qur'an (Islamic holy book) is composed of God's revelations communicated to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel and is the chief scripture of Islam. Small Hindu and Christian communities also exist in Pakistan. Freedom of worship is guaranteed by the constitution, although non-Muslim Pakistanis often face discrimination.

General Attitudes

Most Pakistanis are devout Muslims and live according to the philosophy that the will of God is evident in all things. Insha' Allah (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'ah (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 generally 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.

Common Urdu Saying

Sabar ka phal meetha hota hai. ("The fruit of patience is sweet.")

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 (baggy trousers) 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 wrapped around their shoulders. Women from more traditional families

wear a burqa (head-to-toe covering). A man usually wears the headdress 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 some urban men may only wear them in casual settings.

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 family and health; 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 Wa 'alaikum assalaam (And peace also upon you). Khoda hafiz (May God protect you) is a common parting phrase. In more formal situations, people address others by title and last name. Pakistanis generally use first names for friends and relatives.

Common Urdu

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 for conversation and refreshments.

Eating

Whenever possible, the whole family eats together. Many rural families eat on the floor. Members share food from 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 (flatbread) 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 (for iftar, or fast-breaking), which are also occasions to visit or offer prayers. During *Ramadan*, it is polite for non-Muslims to avoid eating or drinking in front of fasting Muslims.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

The family is the center of social life and support. Family honor is very important to many ethnic groups. It is common for the extended family—a father and mother, their sons, and the sons' families—to live together in the same household. Occasionally, sons move out of the home to find employment in a far-away city. If the pay is sufficient, he can move his wife and children to the city with him. If the pay is meager, however, his family remains with his parents. Nuclear families generally are large; the average woman bears three children in her lifetime.

Parents and Children

Children begin helping with chores at a young age. Parents are responsible for rearing their children and providing education and health care up to and after their marriage. This societal structure also means that children will bear their parents' expenses (especially medical) in their old age. Usually, at least one son (with his wife and children) lives in the family home to take care of his parents. In cases where the parents aren't financially capable of providing for their children, a wealthier relative from the extended family will help provide for them. Inheritance is divided according to religious law. Parents may distribute their children's shares while still alive, or division of the estate will be handled after the parents' death.

Gender Roles

Men act as head of their homes and have significant influence over the lives of all family members. In less traditional families, men and women are both the main decision makers. Women are primarily responsible for household duties like cooking, cleaning, laundry, and child care. In rural areas, women work in the fields and look after animals in addition to household chores.

Increased modernization has brought more women into public life. Women's social status has been evolving, albeit

slowly; for example, women are increasingly entering the workforce as teachers, lawyers, doctors, and entrepreneurs. Sixty seats are reserved for women in the National Assembly and seventeen seats in the Senate. Pakistani women face many social challenges, such as gender inequality, early marriages, and limited access to education. Violence against women, including domestic violence and honor killings, is rampant.

Housing

Urban

A typical urban dwelling is a brick house or apartment. Apartments are most popular in Karachi and parts of Lahore. Brick and cement are common building materials, and plywood is favored over more expensive woods for things like doors and furniture. Most homes in cities have electricity and plumbing, but many urban residents live in mud houses in overcrowded squatter settlements without these services.

Three generations commonly share accommodations, as sons often bring their wives to live in their parents' house. Additional storeys to a house are built to accommodate more people without needing more land. Except in more affluent areas, little attention is paid to construction regulations or approved building plans. Encroachment of houses into adjoining lots and throughways narrows streets and causes commuting problems.

Building codes are in place to protect homes from destruction during natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. Nevertheless, enforcement of these building codes is not consistent, and people build despite them.

Rural

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. In these villages, people live close to agricultural fields and keep dairy animals and poultry.

Ownership

Many Pakistanis dream of achieving home ownership in their lifetime, but the cost of owning or building a home is often very high. Recent increases in real estate and building material costs have made home construction difficult. Financial institutions like the state-owned House Building Finance Corporation and private banks are willing to finance those interested in home ownership, but the terms, interest, and guarantees required are more than many residents can afford.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

In many parts of Pakistan, young men and women have little contact with each other. Generally, they attend separate schools, and in all but the least traditional circles, dating is extremely rare. Although less common, a young couple who meets at college or a workplace can share their desire to date with their parents, who would then arrange for the relationship to progress to engagement and marriage.

Members of the opposite sex may interact only under close supervision. Immense social pressure prevents activities at which the genders would mix. Families may consider

romantic advances toward their women as an attack on the family honor. Even the country's laws prohibit unmarried couples from being alone together. Police may stop any couple and ask for legal proof that they are married.

One area in which the genders may interact is the workplace, as a growing number of women work outside the home. Although men and women may interact in professional settings, they are careful to maintain an appropriate distance from one another. People of opposite genders see one another socially only at gatherings like family functions, marriages, funerals, and get-togethers of family friends.

Marriage Arrangements

Most marriages are arranged. Parents often decide whom their sons will marry, but if the girl's family is from a higher social or financial class, the decision to marry may rest with them. Although not set forth by religion, subtle societal pressures prevent families from marrying outside of their caste, an ethnic designation that is viewed as very important. Cousin marriage is a means of ensuring that a family marries within their caste.

Many families turn to a wacholan (professional matchmaker) to suggest potential marriage partners. A young man's parents usually set up a meeting with the parents of a potential daughter-in-law. At this meeting, usually held at the young woman's home, the man's parents meet the woman and her family. If they are interested in pursuing the marriage, they will then invite the woman's parents to their home to meet their son. The couple may see photos of one another, talk on the phone, or even date, with supervision, before the wedding. Very traditional families often have the couple meet for the first time on their wedding day. Formal engagements may last from a few months to many years, depending on the age of the couple when the arrangements are made.

Marriage in Society

Pakistanis tend to view marriage as a union of two families as much as a union of two people. Marriage ages differ significantly between the genders. For men, between 28 and 35 is considered the ideal age at which to marry. Women are generally expected to marry between 16 and 25. Daughters are often considered a liability to their families, and many families attempt to marry them off as soon as possible. Though permitted by Islam, polygamy is rarely practiced in Pakistan. Same-sex marriage and sexual relations between same-sex partners are illegal, and there are no civil rights laws protecting LGBTQ individuals from discrimination.

Haq mehr, a payment by the groom to the bride's family, is arranged as part of the marriage contract. Dowry, on the other hand, is money paid by the bride's parents to her at marriage. Items normally included in a dowry may consist of jewelry, furniture, appliances, clothes, and crockery. The bride brings all of these things to her husband's home, and the inability of a bride's family to pay it makes finding a match for her difficult. Although dowry is civilly discouraged and has no Islamic religious basis, cultural pressures exist for parents to pay this money. Ideally, dowry is meant for the use of the couple and family in cases of financial need.

Weddings

Wedding rituals are elaborate, with three days of expensive celebrations. Both families participate in wedding

preparations. The day before the wedding, celebrations begin with mehndi (also known as henna), where elaborate patterns of plant dye are applied to the bride's hands. Women in the wedding party may also get mehndi done for the celebration. Mehndi is followed by dancing and singing. On the day of *baraat* (wedding procession), the groom and the wedding guests go to the bride's home or to a banquet hall along with guests, amid fanfare. It is customary (though increasingly less common) for the groom to ride a decorated horse trained to dance to the music played by a brass band. More often, the groom rides the horse for a short time, but rides in a car to the bride's house or the banquet hall.

Marriage contracts are recorded with the *nikah* (marriage) register at the local government level. A *qazi* (Islamic judge) completes the marriage contract between the two families by reciting from the Qur'an (Islamic holy book) and asking the bride and groom in the presence of witnesses if they enter willingly into the marriage. The details of the *haq mehr* are outlined, and at the acceptance of the bride and groom, the marriage contract is signed by them and the witnesses. The *qazi* offers prayers for their well-being and the success of their marriage. After the marriage ceremony, a reception follows, where a dinner is served. At the end of the night, the bride moves in with the groom's family. On the day following the wedding, the groom's family hosts a *walima* (feast) and thanks the guests for their presence.

Divorce

Divorce is fairly rare, especially in rural areas. There is a strong social stigma associated with divorce, and many people, particularly women, rely on the financial security associated with marriage. In the case of divorce, women are legally entitled to receive money from their husbands, in addition to keeping the *haq mehr* payment, to support themselves and their children. A man can initiate a divorce by saying the word *talaq* (divorce) three times. The man may change his mind prior to the third utterance, after which the divorce is final. While custom dictates that a woman forfeits her right to divorce at marriage, she can decide to pursue a divorce through family court. The process of initiating a divorce is more difficult for women, and requires establishing in family court a history of abuse, insanity, or impotence. It is common for divorced men to remarry; however, divorced women usually find it more difficult.

Life Cycle

Birth

Married couples are commonly pressured by family to have children as soon as possible. Despite the societal pressure for large families, the government stresses family planning to help curb population growth. Pakistani families are often very concerned with having a male child, and most continue to have children until they have a boy. Conception is celebrated privately among immediate family. Sweets are served, and elders in the family bless the mother with good wishes. Public announcement of the pregnancy is delayed as long as possible in the belief that doing so will protect the mother and child from bad omens. Pregnant women might wear amulets, believing they must protect themselves from a variety of dangers. They avoid standing under an old tree because it

may be inhabited by harmful evil spirits. Exposure to light during a lunar eclipse is thought to risk damaging the unborn child's health. These commonly held beliefs affect the mobility of a pregnant mother.

A family's first pregnancy is celebrated in a special manner. Traditionally, in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy, relatives and close friends were invited to a *godh bhara*i (baby shower), where food was served. Relatives placed seven different types of fruit (symbolizing prosperity) in the lap of the expectant mother and expressed their well-wishes for her. Placing different kinds of fruit on the mother symbolized a wish for blessings of all kinds to be bestowed on her. Today, urban women often throw baby showers that are more similar to ones held in the West.

Soon after birth, the baby is fed something sweet, preferably honey, by a relative. According to tradition, the characteristics—good and bad—of the person who first feeds the child are passed on to that child. The person with the best characteristics of head and heart is chosen to feed the baby first. The baby is named by the elders of the family (usually the paternal grandparents), and the occasion is celebrated among immediate family members by distributing sweets among family members and alms to the poor.

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. As soon as possible, a mullah (Muslim religious leader) is invited to recite the *azan* (Islamic call to 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 *aqiqah*, 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 *aqiqah*.

The newborn is not normally shown to anyone outside the immediate family for 40 days after the birth. For these 40 days, the mother is fed foods meant to replenish her energy. According to tradition, a mother and child are more prone to falling ill during this period. It is safe for the mother and the child to leave the house after 40 days. At 40 days after the birth, the mother performs ablutions (a ritual purifying bath).

Mothers get a 90-day maternity leave with full pay, while fathers who are civil servants get full pay for 10 days.

Milestones

A boy's transition to manhood occurs when his underarm hair is shaved with a razor by a barber. The barber is given money and gifts, which can be as elaborate as a gold razor. As the cost of gold has climbed, however, it is more common for the barber to be paid with gifts or money. This milestone is celebrated with a party that includes singing, dancing, and food, and a shaving kit is purchased for the young man. In more urbanized areas, the passage to adulthood is instead marked by the first time a boy shaves his face. A source of pride for the father, the event is considered cause for a celebration.

Death

In accordance with Muslim tradition, when somebody passes away, the body must be buried as soon as possible. In very rare cases (such as when the arrival of close relatives is expected) it is permitted to wait until the second day after the death. When a Muslim dies, the body is washed according to Islamic tradition and wrapped with a white cloth called a kafan. Pakistanis do not use coffins. Before the body is buried, male mourners gather, usually at a mosque, and offer a prayer called Namaz-e-Janaza (funeral prayer) under the guidance of an imam (prayer leader). After the prayer, the body is buried at a cemetery in the presence of male relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Women go to the home of the deceased to express their condolences, but they do not attend the funeral prayer at the mosque or accompany the body to the gravesite.

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 (Islamic holy book) to ensure the deceased's peaceful transition to heaven. Another gathering is held 40 days after the burial. People gather to read the *Qur'an*, offer prayers for the salvation of the deceased, and eat together. Each year, the barsi (anniversary of the death) is commemorated in a similar fashion.

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 dishes. Plain yogurt is a common ingredient in meals. Rice is part of most meals and desserts. Pillau (lightly fried rice with vegetables) and biryani (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. Islamic law forbids the consumption of pork and alcohol, and there are strict civil laws regarding the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Recreation

Sports

Cricket, introduced by the British, is the most-watched and most-played sport in the country. Matches are played frequently among different districts and clubs. Pakistanis also intently watch live broadcasts of games abroad. Illegal betting on cricket matches has become a popular activity. In addition to official venues, cricket is played by locals in fields, in streets, and even on rooftops. If people can't afford cricket equipment, they will play with *washing bats* (wooden sticks used to wash clothes) and tennis balls.

Other popular sports include soccer, tennis, field hockey,

and squash. These sports are played by boys and girls.

A type of traditional wrestling called malakhra (also known as kushti) is a feature during fairs and festivals across the country.

Polo, which was adopted by the British and exported to England, is played mainly by the affluent. A freestyle form of polo played in northern Pakistan draws tourists from all around the world. While poor people in Pakistan do not play polo, there are no fees to attend the freestyle polo matches, and they are watched by people of all social levels.

Leisure

Many Pakistanis enjoy playing card games, chess, and ludo (a board game where players try to move their tokens across a board according to dice rolls) either indoors or outdoors. Having picnics, listening to native music, and visiting friends and family members are other forms of recreation.

Going to the movies and watching television or videos are also very popular. Pakistanis often enjoy going out to eat. Most people prefer Pakistani food, but Chinese food, pizza, and fast-food restaurants are also popular. Pakistani or Indian soap operas, movies, news channels, and sports coverage are offered by satellite providers at rates affordable enough for even slum dwellers.

Vacation

Pakistan's picturesque mountains in the north as well as ideal weather conditions lure a large number of tourists during the year. Summer vacation from school allows families to travel places together. Most Pakistani families stay in the country for vacation, but wealthy families may visit destinations such as the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Thailand.

The Arts

A number of performing arts, such as music and theater, are very popular. Music is a permanent feature of films, and forms of music such as ghazal, geet, and kafi are widely popular across the country. Qawwali (which literally means "utterance") is a song of worship traditionally performed by Islamic Sufi mystics and accompanied by instruments such as the tabla and dholak (types of drums) and the harmonium (a keyed instrument similar to a reed organ). Pakistan has a thriving film industry and is also developing its cable and satellite television industry.

Islamic art is based on intricate, brightly colored geometrical designs, which adorn common crafts such as woodwork, stonework, leatherwork, carpets, calligraphy, and basketry. Poetry is one of the nation's most respected literary forms, and poetry readings are common. Folklore is abundant and varies by region. Pakistani painting, which includes miniature oil paintings, non-figurative works, multimedia, landscape, and calligraphy, is gaining prominence.

Holidays

Secular holidays include Pakistan Day (23 March), Labor Day (1 May), Independence Day (14 August), Defense of Pakistan Day (6 September), Anniversary of the Death of Quaid-e-Azam ("The Great Leader," referring to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the nation's founder, 11 September), Iqbal Day (9 November), and the Birth of Quaid-e-Azam (25 December).

Bank holidays are in December and July. Islamic holidays are determined according to the lunar calendar, which means the dates change every year. Nonreligious holidays are determined according to the Gregorian calendar.

Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr is a three-day feast held at the end of Ramadan (a monthlong period of fasting from sunrise to sunset), and is the most celebrated Islamic holiday in Pakistan. During *Eid al-Fitr*, people wake up early, dress in new clothes and shoes, eat sweet foods, and go to the mosque for prayers. Prayers are performed by the congregation, which is led by an imam (prayer leader). The *imam* also delivers a sermon prepared for the occasion and prays for the well-being of everyone present. After prayers, people typically embrace and wish each other a happy Eid. Those who can afford to do so give alms (money offerings) to the poor so they can buy food and clothes for their families. People invite friends and relatives to their homes for feasts.

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) occurs in the last month of the Islamic calendar and commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. The holiday also coincides with the end of the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. This holiday begins with communal prayers, after which sacrificial animals are slaughtered by butchers. Qurbani (animal sacrifice) is obligatory for all adult Muslims with a certain level of wealth. People can purchase a share in a large animal (such as a cow, bull, or camel) or slaughter a single goat or sheep. The meat is divided into three portions: one for the use of the one making the offering (enjoyed at a family feast), one to be distributed among the poor, and the final to be sent to the homes of relatives. Hides of slaughtered animals are sold to raise funds for charities.

Ashura

Pakistan publicly observes Ashura, a day of mourning that commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn, grandson of the prophet Muhammad, nine days after the beginning of the Islamic New Year. On this day, prayers are offered for the salvation of martyrs killed in the Battle of Karbala (AD 680). *Ashura* is commemorated by reenacting the events surrounding the martyrdom of Husayn. Some Shi'is practice *ma'atam* (ritual flagellation) as part of processions. Food is also prepared and distributed among family and the poor.

Prophet Muhammad's Birthday

The prophet Muhammad's birthday is another major Islamic holiday. Celebrations begin with prayers and recitations of *na'at* (poetry that praises the prophet Muhammad). Houses, buildings, streets, and bazaars are decorated, and many people join processions arranged for the holiday. Food is cooked and distributed along with sweets to relatives, neighbors, friends, and the needy.

Other Islamic Observances

Local governments may also declare holidays for the urs (anniversaries of deaths) of Sufi (Muslim mystic) saints. People visit shrines of the saints and place wreaths of flowers, recite the Qur'an (Islamic holy book), and pray. Festivals and fairs may also occur near the shrines.

Some local areas may extend celebrations for days after holidays such as *Shab-e-Meraj* ("Night of Ascension,"

commemorating the prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven) and *Shab-e-Barat* ("Night of Deliverance," when Allah determines the destiny of people). During these holidays, which occur in the months preceding *Ramadan*, people stay up all night praying, and many fast on the following days.

SOCIETY

Government Structure

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic led by a president as head of state. The prime minister is head of government. Parliament consists of a 100-member Senate in addition to a 342-member National Assembly. Members of the Senate are elected by provincial assemblies to six-year terms, with 17 seats reserved for women. In the National Assembly, members are directly elected to five-year terms, with 60 seats reserved for women and 10 seats reserved for representatives of non-Muslims. Non-Muslims have limited political participation. The country is divided into four provinces (Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Islamabad Capital Territory, and two administrative entities.

Political Landscape

Pakistan has a competitive multiparty system. Major political parties include the center-right Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), the center-left Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and the centrist Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Movement for Justice). A number of smaller and independent parties are also represented in the parliament. Despite progress in recent years, the Pakistani government faces many challenges, including corruption, poverty, terrorism, extremism, and political instability. The civilian-led government is also strongly influenced by Pakistan's powerful military.

Government and the People

Pakistan's constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly, expression, speech, and religion; however, these rights are sometimes limited in practice. Ethnic and religious minorities such as Hindus, Afghan refugees, and members of the LGBTQ community often face discrimination and, in some cases, violence. Many Pakistanis expect their government to provide better infrastructure, education opportunities, jobs, and security. Pakistanis often feel like their politicians do not keep their promises. Elections are generally considered free and fair; however, voting fraud has been reported in recent elections. The average voter participation rate for parliamentary elections is around 53 percent. The voting age is 18.

Economy

One of Pakistan's main industries is agriculture, which employs about 42 percent of the people. Pakistan emphasizes high-yield grains to keep pace with a growing population. Chief products include cotton, wheat, rice, sugarcane, fruits, and vegetables.

At the time of its independence, Pakistan had very little industry. Over the past several years, however, industrialization has grown substantially. Clothing and

textiles are important exports that make up most of the country's export earnings.

Low tax revenues, a high budget deficit, electricity shortages, corruption, and inadequate foreign investment have significantly hindered development. The average family works hard for a basic living, which does not often include the luxury of modern conveniences. Many families have difficulty meeting basic needs. Unemployment and underemployment are high. Remittances from Pakistani workers in other countries are an important source of revenue for many families. The currency is the Pakistani *rupee* (PKR).

Transportation and Communications

Local transportation consists of donkeys and animal-drawn carts in rural areas. Buses, minibuses, taxis, motorbikes, and motorized rickshaws are available in cities. Many roads are in poor condition, although the majority 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. International airports are located in major cities like Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore.

Most homes do not have landlines; phones are available in hotels, shops, and restaurants. Cellular phones, however, are rapidly becoming the preferred mode of communication. There are several newspapers and radio and television stations. Press freedoms are very limited, and most media is censored by the government. Few Pakistanis have access to the internet, though the increasing use of smartphones is starting to change this.

Education

Structure

Education in Pakistan is divided into primary, middle, secondary, higher secondary, and higher education. Primary school education begins at preschool age and goes through fifth grade. Government schools are numerous but have limited resources. Private schools follow European educational structure, employ some foreign instructors, and hold O- and A-levels (higher education entrance exams). Some young men choose to attend a madrasah (Islamic religious school).

Access

Public education is free and compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 16; however, attendance is not closely monitored. Public spending on education in Pakistan is among the lowest in the region: about 3 percent of the gross domestic product is spent on education. Literacy rates, especially among women, are likewise very low compared to the rest of the world. The quality of the education at government schools is low, but most people cannot afford private school tuition, except the wealthy elite. Due to poverty, high school fees, and the lack of proper facilities, many children either cannot attend school or drop out to help the family after only a few years. Still, government efforts have increased the number of primary schools in rural areas.

School Life

Government-school classes are taught in Urdu. Courses are taught in English at private schools. There are also non-elite

private schools, but they lack qualified English instructors. Higher secondary school performance determines the career paths that are available to a student. Efforts are directed at training technicians to aid in expanding the nation's industrial base. Because so much emphasis is placed on the results of tests, parents are very concerned with their child's results. To earn the best score possible, students memorize their lessons from books and photocopied notes. High scores in higher secondary school enable a student to pursue engineering, medicine, accounting, and professional degrees.

Higher Education

Pakistan has many public and private universities. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) is responsible for funding, accrediting, and regulating higher education institutions. The number of PhDs awarded from Pakistani universities has increased significantly in recent years. Though most universities are attended by both men and women, students of opposite genders tend to keep separate, due more to social pressure than regulation.

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 rural areas, but many doctors 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. Pakistan remains one of the few countries in the world with an incidence of polio, though rates have declined significantly since the 1990s. In response to the CIA's use of a fake polio vaccination campaign in 2011 to catch Osama bin Laden, the Pakistani Taliban attacked vaccination teams, banned vaccine programs, and scared parents into believing vaccines would sterilize their children. However, in recent years, Pakistan's efforts to eradicate the disease have been largely successful.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Pakistan, 3517 International Court NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 243-6500; web site www.embassyofpakistanusa.org.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Islamabad
Population	242,923,845 (rank=5)
Area (sq. mi.)	307,374 (rank=35)
Area (sq. km.)	796,095
Human Development Index	161 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	135 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$5,200
Adult Literacy	69% (male); 46% (female)
Infant Mortality	53.98 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	64 (male); 69 (female)
Currency	Pakistani Rupee

CultureGrams™

ProQuest
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042
Fax: 1.800.864.0019
www.culturegrams.com

© 2023 ProQuest LLC and Brigham Young University. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without strict written permission from ProQuest.