

P A K I S T A N

SECTION A

Capital

Islamabad 524,500 (1998 est.)

Area

796,095 sq km (307,374 sq mi)

Form of government

Federal Republic

GDP—per capita

Purchasing power parity—\$2,000 (1999 est.)

Population

141,553,775 (July 2000 est.)

Ethnic composition

Punjabi	48%
Sindhi	12%
Siraiki (a Punjabi variant)	10%
Pashtun (Pathan)	8%
Baloch	3%
Other	19%

Official language

Urdu and English share the status of official language. However, Urdu is spoken by only 8% of the population while English is the lingua franca of the Pakistani elite and most government ministries.

Other languages

Punjabi, Sindhi, Siraiki, Pashtu, Balochi, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, Burushaski, and other 8%

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

The Constitution of Pakistan, which was adopted on April 10, 1973

Background notes

Pakistan was established in 1947, as a homeland for Muslims in Southern Asia, and about 97% of Pakistanis are Muslim. The founders of Pakistan hoped that religion would provide a coherent focus for national identity, a focus that would supersede the country's considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity. Although this aspiration has not been completely fulfilled, Islam has been a pervasive presence within Pakistani society, and debate continues about its appropriate role in national civic life.

There is immense regional diversity in Pakistan. Pakhtuns, Baloch, Punjabis, and Sindhis are all Muslim, yet they have diverse cultural traditions and speak different languages. Punjabis, the largest of these ethnic groups, predominate in the central government and the military. Baloch, Pakhtuns, and Sindhis find the Punjabi preponderance at odds with their own aspirations for provincial autonomy. Ethnic mixing within each province further complicates social and political relations. Added to the indigenous human mosaic, there are more than 7 million Muhajirs (refugees or immigrants from India and their descendants who speak Urdu as their native language).

These linguistic differences are a divisive force. Some twenty languages are spoken, and although Urdu is the official language, it is not the native tongue of the majority of the population. Islam provides a tenuous unity in relation to such diversity.

SECTION B

Where does one observe language to be a problem in the country?

Pakistan is, generally speaking, linguistically heterogeneous and no single language can be said to be common to the whole population.

Urdu is the youngest of the nation's languages and is not indigenous to Pakistan; it is very similar to Hindi, an official language of India. Although the two languages have a common base, in its literary form

Urdu emphasizes words of Persian and Arabic origin, whereas Hindi emphasizes words of Sanskrit origin. Urdu is written in a modified version of the Persian script (written from right to left), whereas Hindi is written in the Devanagari script from left to right.

The 1956 Constitution prescribed the use of English for official purposes for 20 years, and the 1962 Constitution made the period indefinite. The 1973 Constitution, however, designated a 15-year transition period to the Urdu language, after which English would no longer be used for official purposes. Urdu is the mother tongue of only a small percentage of the population of Pakistan; however, it is taught in the schools along with the respective regional language. It originated during the Mughal period (1526- 1858) and it literally means “a camp language”, because it was spoken by the imperial Mughal troops from Central Asia as they mixed with speakers of the local dialects of northern India. Increasingly, elements of Persian, the official language of the Mughal administration, were incorporated. Ultimately Urdu attained its stylized, literary form in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Devanagari script (used for Sanskrit and contemporary Hindi) was never adopted; instead Urdu has always been written using the Persian script. These two literary languages, Urdu and Hindi, arose from colloquial Hindustani, the lingua franca of modern India before partition.

Although Urdu is the official national language, it is spoken as a native tongue by only 8% of the population. Urdu symbolizes Muslim’s shared identity and serves as a link among the people of Pakistan. After independence, the Muslim League (as the All-India Muslim League was usually referred to) promoted Urdu as the national language to help a new Pakistan state develop an identity, even though few people actually spoke it. However, because many of the elite were fluent in English, English became the de facto national language. The pressure to elevate Urdu was unpopular in East Pakistan, where most of the population speaks Bengali (officially referred to as Bangla in Bangladesh since 1971). Language riots in Dhaka occurred in the early 1950s, leading to the elevation of Bengali as a second national language with Urdu until the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, when Bangladesh became independent and Bangla was designated the official language of the new country.

The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other

In the early 1990’s, there were over 1,500 newspapers and journals in the country, including publications in Urdu, English, and in regional languages as well. The major national daily newspapers in Urdu are “Jang”, “Nawa-i-Waqt”, “Jasarat”, “Masawat”, “Mashriq”, and “Hurriyat”.

The major national daily newspapers in English are "Dawn", "Pakistan Times", "Muslim", "Morning News", "Nation", "Frontier Post", and "News". "Herald" is an important English-language magazine.

In Pakistan, the Punjabi language is mainly spoken rather than written and it is used in predominantly rural rather than urban areas. Urdu, rather than Punjabi, is the first language taught in schools in Punjab, so that every educated Punjabi reads and writes Urdu. Instructions in the best schools continued to be in English until the early 1980's. To speak English was highly desirable because it facilitated admission to good universities in England, the USA and Australia. Later Urdu was promoted to be the language of instruction in government schools.

SECTION C

The use of language in everyday life, education, broadcasting and other

Updated (September 2002)

Language is a very important issue in modern Pakistan. It is a key to the distribution of power between the ethnic groups, the socio-economic classes and individuals inhabiting the country.

ENGLISH

English is inevitable as far as the modern, employment-based domains of power are concerned. Without speaking English one cannot get the most lucrative jobs, both in the state apparatus and the private sector in Pakistan. There are no reliable figures on the number of English speakers; however, the 1961 Census informed that 2.7 percent of the population could speak the language. This percentage should have increased because the middle class (salarariat) has amplified and the good jobs always require some competence in English.

If those, who have passed their matriculation examination where, English is a compulsory subject, are considered to have literacy in English, then the figure came to 19.56 percent in 1981 (Census 1981). Nevertheless, the majority of matriculates from vernacular-medium schools cannot speak English when they can barely read their textbooks. As such, the number of people with fluency in English drops again to 3-4 percent of the population.

URDU

On the contrary, Urdu is more widespread among matriculates when 20 percent of them are quite proficient in it. Students of religious seminaries and madrassas, soldiers, as well as otherwise illiterate working class living in the cities pick it up quickly and use it quite well. Urdu has disseminated so extensively because it is used for inter-provincial communication, entertainment, media, and, above all, lower middle-class jobs all over Pakistan (except in rural Sindh).

Urdu is also an "Islamic" language in the sense that under British rule it was adopted by the Islamic religious scholars, (ulema) and clergymen (maulvis) to disseminate Islam. Urdu is the language of religious tracts and sermons.

ARABIC

Arabic is understood only by a handful of religious people in the madrassas and a few academics and scholars connected with Islam or the Arabic language and literature. Although Muslims learn to read the Koran (according to the 1981 Census 18.37 percent of the population could read it) this reading is not more than recognition of the Arabic letters. They are not taught the meanings of the words nor they can read Arabic words written without the diacritical marks used in the Pakistani versions of the Koran.

PERSIAN

Persian too is understood only by a few experts. It is taken as an easy option by students in certain examinations leading to state employment but in general the students never get beyond memorization of several passages.

INDIGENOUS MOTHER TONGUES

The indigenous mother tongues are either not taught at all (Punjabi) or are taught inadequately (Pashto, which is a medium of instructions up to class 5 in some schools and an optional subject in higher levels) or only in a certain area (Sindhi, which is taught in Sindh). However, some people study them out of their own interest because books written in them, called chapbooks, are available in all the major cities of Pakistan. An American scholar William Hanaway and his Pakistani co-author Mumtaz Nasir listed 940 chapbooks in Punjabi, Siraiki, Hindko, Khowar, Pashto, Sindhi, Persian and Urdu. Films and songs in these languages, especially in Punjabi and Pashto, are quite popular too.

SCHOOLS VERSUS LANGUAGE

English, Urdu and Sindhi are media of instruction in schools corresponding to a class-based division of Pakistan society. The elitist English-medium schools, where the teachers really teach in English and the students come from backgrounds with exposure to English, are expensive and thus unavailable for lower-middle and working-class pupils. The Urdu and Sindhi-medium schools, as well as few schools where Pashto is the medium of instruction at the lower levels, are run by the state and are quite affordable for most Pakistanis. Even more affordable are the madrassas, teaching in Urdu and Arabic, because they provide not only free education but also free board and lodging. The madrassas of the Pashto-speaking areas use Pashto as the medium of instruction while those of the Sindhi-speaking parts use Sindhi. In Punjab and Balochistan, although Urdu is a formal medium of instruction, the explanation is often in the local languages.

Data about the number of schools according to their medium of instruction is not available.

LANGUAGE VERSUS JOBS

People need languages for being employed and thus achieve success in the society. There are many, mostly of the urban population, who at least partly derive their power from their ability to write in English and Urdu. This power is not directly proportional to one's competence in the languages but without the ability to read, write and speak them one cannot enter the elite cadres of the Pakistani salariat.

Thus language becomes a "coin" and what it buys is power. If one cannot write Urdu and English, he cannot get even a clerical job in Pakistan except in Sindh. If one can write Urdu but not English, he can get lower jobs in all the provinces of Pakistan. Better jobs, however, are reserved for those who can read and write English.

Source: World Congress on Language Policies, Barcelona, April 16-20, 2002, "Language Teaching and Power in Pakistan," by Dr. Tariq Rahman, Professor of Linguistics and South Asian Studies in the National Institute of Pakistan Studies at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, http://www.linguapax.org/congres/Tallers/article12_ang.html

APPENDIX A

MAP OF PAKISTAN



APPENDIX B

PAKISTAN - CONSTITUTION

adopted on April 10, 1973

Article 28

Subject to Article 251, any section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture shall have the right to preserve and promote the same and, subject to law, establish institutions for that purpose.

Article 251

1. The national language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.
2. Subject to clause 1, the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.
3. Without prejudice to the status of the national language, a provincial assembly may by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language.

Article 255

1. An oath required to be made by a person under the Constitution shall be made in a language that is understood by that person.

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