

Harnessing data for democratic development in South and Southeast Asia - Pakistan

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Introduction

LIRNEasia conducted the research with IDRC grant

Countries covered

- Thailand
- Philippines
- Indonesia
- India
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

Objectives

- Explore data governance policies
- Identify ecosystem gaps
- Disseminate knowledge to stakeholders
- Develop policy intellectuals

Pakistan's Data Governance framework

General Laws

- Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973
- Digital Nation Pakistan Act 2025
- Electronic Transactions Ordinance 2002
- Right of Access to Information Act, 2017
- The Elections Act, 2017
- National Database and Registration Authority Ordinance, 2000
- Official Secrets Act 1923
- National Archives Act, 1993
- Surveying and Mapping Act, 2014
- The General Statistics (Re-organization) Act, 2011
- Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017

Special Laws

- Federal Investigation Agency Act, 1974
- National Counter Terrorism Authority Act, 2013
- Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016

Sector Regulators

- State Bank of Pakistan Act 1956
- Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organisation) Act 1996
- The Exchange Commission of Pakistan Act, 1997
- Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance 2002
- Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002
- The Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan Act, 2012
- The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council Act, 2022

Frameworks & Initiatives

- Open Data Pakistan (HEC, LUMS, NCBC) / Open Government Partnership
- Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules, 2021
- Critical Telecom Data and Infrastructure Security Regulations 2020
- Enterprise Technology Governance & Risk Management Framework for Financial Institutions, 2017
- Cyber Security Framework - 2022

Policies

- Pakistan IT Policy & Action Plan 2000
- De-Regulation Policy 2003
- Mobile Cellular Policy 2004
- Broadband Policy 2004
- Telecommunications Policy, 2015
- National Cyber Security Policy 2021
- Digital Pakistan Policy
- Cloud First Policy 2022
- Pakistan Vision 2025
- Uraan Pakistan

Draft policies/Laws

- Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023
- National Artificial Intelligence Policy 2023
- Open Data for the Government of Pakistan 2019

Data Collection in Pakistan

Personal Data

- Public Sector
 - PBS, NADRA, ECP
- Specialized Personal Data
 - FBR, NACTA, FIA
- Corporate
 - SECP, Registrar of Firms/Trusts/NGOs, Cooperative Societies
- Private Sector
 - Telecom, Banking

Other Data

- Fiscal data
- Climate change data
- Public procurement data
- Survey of Pakistan
- National Archives
- Trade & regional agreements

Summary of research findings

Policy objectives

Economic swings

- private enterprise
- Nationalization
- Privatization
- mixed economy

Governance experiments

- Constitutions
- martial laws
- hybrid regime

Rights conflict

- Privacy law missing
- RTI law poorly implemented

Policy gaps

No comprehensive data standardization policy

No government data sharing platform

Lack of open standards

No FOSS program

Long-standing data collection, but no data protection law

Inefficient use of existing databases

Friction between policies

RTI Act 2017 vs Official Secrets Act 1923

RTI not applicable to Supreme Court

National Archives Act- exceptions on security grounds, not privacy

Sector-specific data localization requirements (e.g., SBP, PTA)

Privacy focus (PDP) vs AI data needs

Good practices

RTI as a constitutional right (2010)

Section 5 of RTI - Proactive disclosure

Finance Division as a model

- publishes economic data regularly
- Covers wide range of indicators:
 - economy
 - employment
 - climate etc.

Openness of policy development procedures

MoITTT leads in
open
consultations

PDP -
extensively
revised via
public feedback
over 3 years

Growing
confidence &
maturity in
policymaking

Policy development capacity

Mixed priorities dilute effectiveness

Capacity exists but political will is weak

Climate change: good policies, poor execution

Legal language favors state control over openness

- "public interest", "national security", "secret", "official secret", "prejudicial to public order, defence, safety or interests of the State"

Pakistan has no option but to move forward to generate more and more actionable data using digital technologies, disclose these datasets to the public for more democratic and inclusive governance

Thank You