4.1.2. Protesters

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: October 2026

This profile covers the situation of protesters as persons who publicly advocate for a given issue by standing in public spaces, taking part in demonstrations, shouting, carrying signs, etc(6). This profile also addresses the phenomenon of riots as violent demonstrations, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society.

This profile should be read in conjunction with 4.1.3. Human rights defenders and activists.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI products: COI Update 2026, 1.; Country Focus 2026, 4.2.6., 6.1.1., 6.1.7.; Country Focus 2024, 6.4.1.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

While the Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly, in practice protests are frequently subject to restrictions. Protests occur nationwide, often mobilising large crowds and, at times, escalating into violent unrest, including attacks on police vehicles, ambulances, and schools.

Particularly significant were the nationwide protests following the arrest of Imran Khan in May 2023, which triggered widespread mobilisation across major urban centres. Subsequent protests, led primarily by PTI supporters (see PTI and MQM-L members and supporters) as well as other political and ethnic groups, also took place regularly. Protests continue to take place in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, for example following the designation in June 2026 of the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) as a proscribed organisation under the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Anti-Terrorism Act, 2014.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Acts to which protesters could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution. Protests are regularly met with violence by law enforcement agencies. More specifically, reports describe extrajudicial killings, torture, ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, excessive use of force, arbitrary arrest – including mass arrest – and detention, as well as indiscriminate violence by security forces, even against peaceful protesters.

In itself, the authorities' response to acts committed during riots (such as attacks on police vehicles, ambulances, and schools), when conducted in accordance with

international legal standards, does not amount to persecution. However, other acts to which individuals who committed violent acts during riots could be exposed are of such a severe nature that they would amount to persecution. More specifically, rioters have been subjected to custodial torture.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for protesters to face persecution should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Political background:** those who protest on behalf of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) or Baloch parties face a particularly high risk. Additionally, as PTI is the main opposition party, those who protests on behalf of the party face a higher risk than those protesting without any visible affiliation. See also PTI and MQM-L members and supporters, and Human rights defenders and activists.

- **Topics:** protesters speaking out against human rights violations (such as against enforced disappearances in Balochistan), against military operations by the authorities (such as security operations in KP and Balochistan), and/or for separatism (such as in Balochistan), face a high risk.

- **Visibility:** visibility to the authorities is a critical factor impacting the risk of persecution. Protesters who are visible and identifiable to the authorities during protests (such as the leaders of the protests) or who are known to be involved in organising protests face a high risk.

- **Frequency of participation in demonstrations:** the frequency with which an individual participates in protests directly influences the risk of persecution. While not all protesters are arrested, those who are involved in several demonstrations face a higher risk of being identified and targeted.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant under this profile this is highly likely to be for reasons of **political opinion**, as the persecution is directly connected to the expression of political views that are perceived by state authorities as challenging their control over power.

Short of a nexus, the cases of individuals subjected to the authorities' response to acts committed during riots (such as attacks on police vehicles, ambulances, and schools) should be examined under Article 15(b) QR: torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

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Adaptation based on Cambridge Dictionary.

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