



**DEVELOPMENT
SYNERGIES
INTERNATIONAL**



Population Explosion

“A Threat to National Security”

Centre for Innovation in Public Health: Data Collaboration Centre

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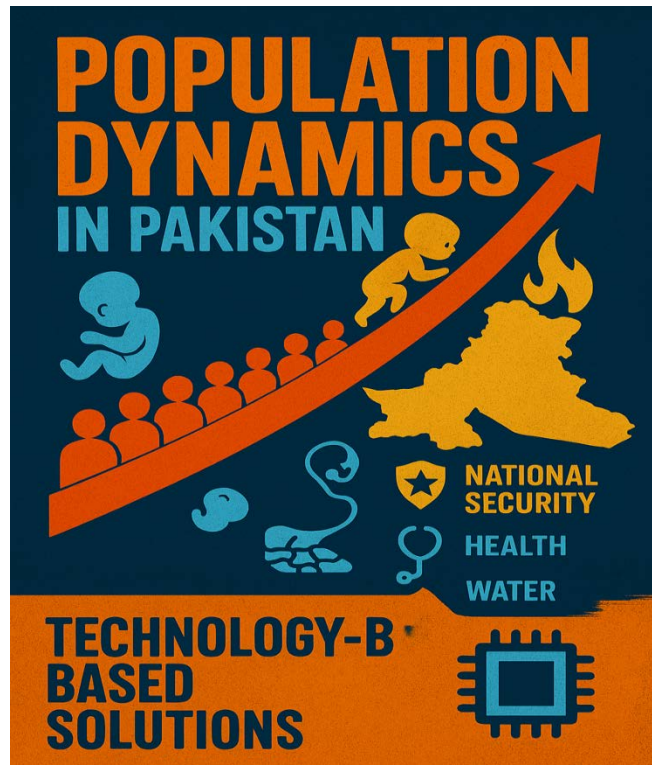
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1. Introduction: Demography as Destiny

Pakistan today stands at a demographic turning point, one that will either secure or sabotage its developmental future. With an estimated 255 million people in 2025, Pakistan ranks as the 5th most populous country globally, yet its population debate remains politically marginalized and socially stigmatized.

Despite decades of international donor support, national programs, and countless family planning pilots, population growth continues to outpace economic gains, pushing the state toward crisis in every key sector, including education, health, employment, and environmental sustainability.

More than just numbers, population dynamics reflect how society values its women, plans its future, and manages its resources. The country's total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.6 births per woman remains well above the replacement threshold of 2.1. At the current growth rate of 2.55%, Pakistan adds nearly 4 million people every year, eroding whatever marginal progress is made on poverty alleviation and public service delivery.



2. Historical Trends and Regional Comparisons

In 1947, Pakistan's population stood at a modest 32 million. In less than eight decades, it has ballooned nearly eightfold, outpacing infrastructure, service delivery, and human capital development. By contrast, countries with similar economic and cultural trajectories have managed their demographic transitions more successfully.

Bangladesh, once a part of Pakistan and long considered its poorer cousin, now boasts a TFR of 2.0 and a contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) of 62%, thanks to integrated community-based programs and strong political leadership. India has also reached replacement-level fertility at 2.1, supported by sustained investment in women's education and healthcare systems. Sri Lanka, despite its smaller size, remains a demographic success story in the region.

In 1960, Bangladesh had 16 million more people than Pakistan.

In 2023, Pakistan has 76 million more people than Bangladesh.

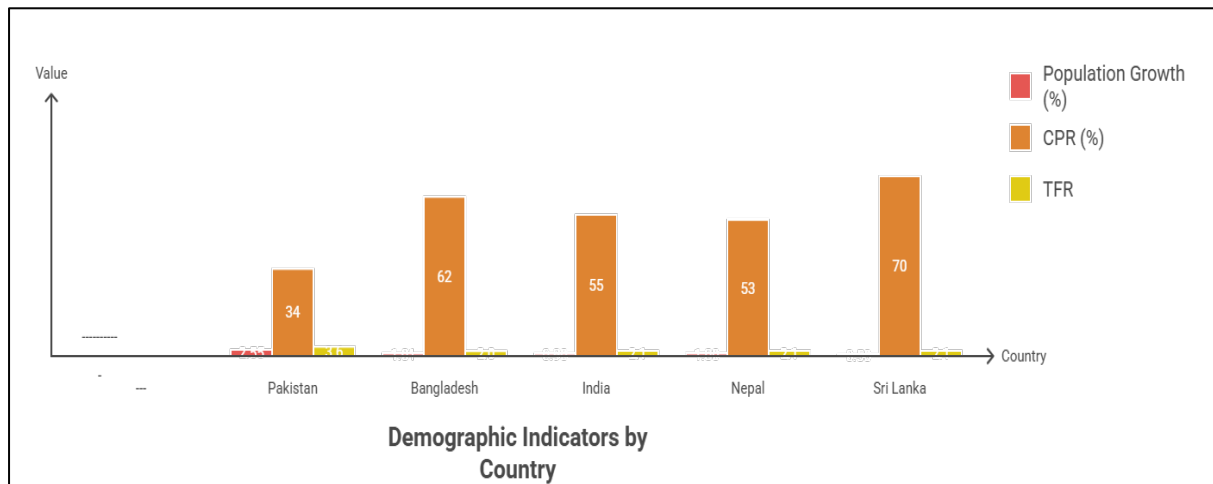


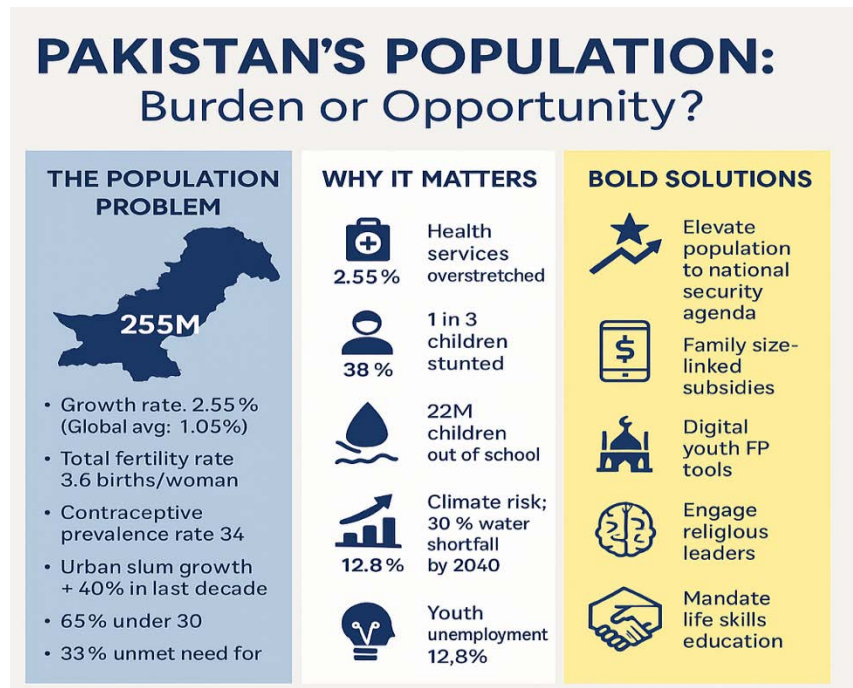
Figure 1 Regional Comparison of Fertility Indicators (2023–24)

3. Policy Perspective

Pakistan is in the making of its national health and population policy 2025-2034. National population policies have often been **reactive, donor-driven, and disconnected from cultural context and political will**. National security issues pertaining to health, supply chains, procurement & stockpiling, survival in biological and climatic disasters and responsiveness to health and human emergencies should remain federally governed, and financially coordinated while exercising provincial autonomies like any developed country in the East or the West. Laws, constitutions, amendments and legal frameworks are living documents and pathways to benefit populations. Likewise, Pakistan’s 18th Amendment needs to defragment the fragmented service deliveries of primary, secondary, tertiary healthcare with public, private and para-statal healthcare models. Using science of policy and implementation, Pakistan needs to exercise strategies to bring at par provincial governments especially the South and North regions on human and operations capacities to assist our exploding population of 250 million people be managed in a socially just way.

4. Family Planning an instrument & population growth as a deterrent

Over the eleven years 2011-2021, through the public sector, Pakistan produced 73,910,386 couple-years of protection (CYP), an average of 6.7 million CYP per year. Over the last three years from 2022 to 2024, the public sector produced 30,621,825 CYP, with an average of 10.2 million CYP per year. This, however, has not reflected positively in the overall contraceptive prevalence rate, where 33% contraceptive use by modern methods, reflecting a **66% gap for provision of family planning services**. The investments in the FP program need to align to provision of the method mix and using digital solutions to ensure provision of right set of information, access, and availability.



5. Urbanization, Youth Bulge and Service Pressures

Pakistan is experiencing a silent demographic transformation: a massive rural-urban migration. Urbanization has increased from **17% in 1950 to over 38% in 2025**, with projections suggesting that **by 2045, over half the population will live in urban centers**. However, Pakistan's cities are growing without planning. The result is a proliferation of slums, informal housing, poor sanitation, and overstretched health and education services, particularly in megacities like Karachi and Lahore.

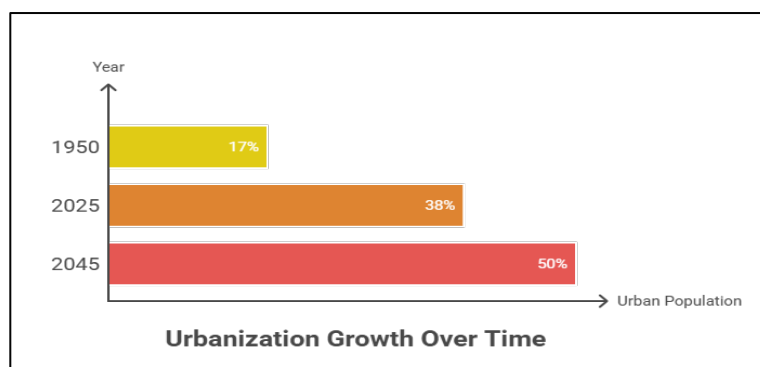


Figure 2: Urbanization Growth Over Time

Simultaneously, 65% of Pakistan’s population is under the age of 30, yet youth unemployment exceeds 12.8%. The education system is ill-equipped to absorb the growing number of school-age children; **22 million children are currently out of school**, many of them girls. Maternal health remains dire, with 186 deaths per 100,000 live births, and 1 in 3 children under five is stunted, reflecting chronic malnutrition.

6. The Climate-Population Nexus

Pakistan is one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries. Rapid population growth intensifies climate impacts: water scarcity, deforestation, soil degradation, and air pollution. **Per capita water availability has dropped from 5,300 m³ in 1951 to under 900 m³ in 2025**, below the scarcity threshold of 1,000 m³. In flood-prone regions, such as Sindh and Balochistan, unplanned population density worsens disaster outcomes. High population growth increases carbon emissions, demands more fossil fuels, and drives unsustainable urban sprawl all while shrinking fiscal space for climate resilience.

7. Why Addressing Population Dynamics Matters

Population dynamics are intrinsically linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Unchecked population growth undermines nearly every SDG, including:

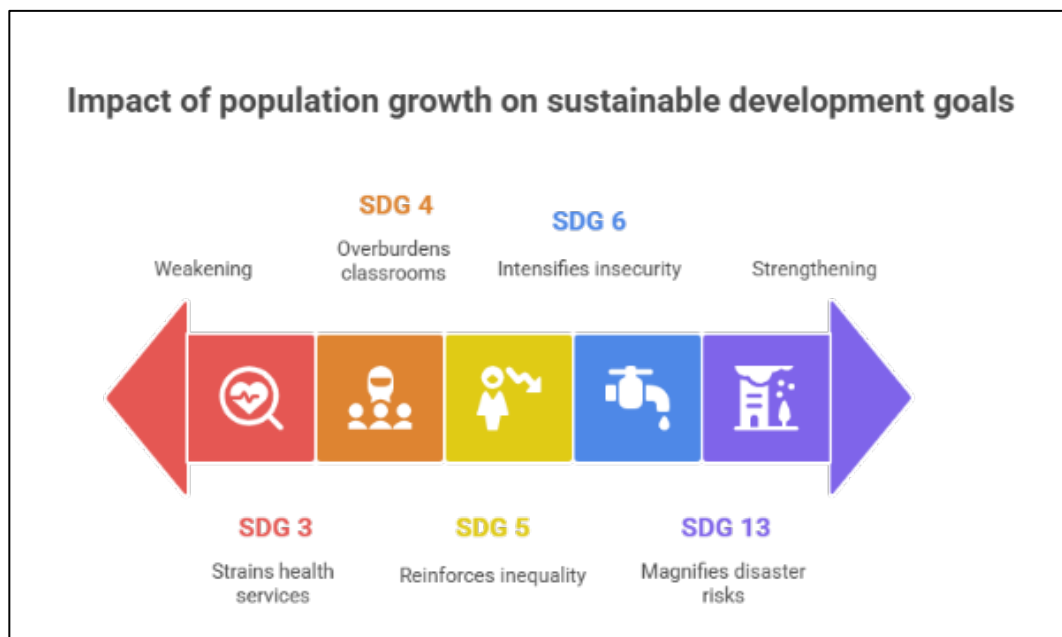


Figure 3: Impact of population growth on sustainable development goals

Moreover, population growth exacerbates social unrest, gender inequality, and intergenerational poverty. It is no longer a sectoral issue, it is a threat to national security, governance, and sustainability.

8. Reframing Population Growth as a National Security Imperative

Pakistan must urgently reframe population growth not merely as a demographic or development concern, but as a pressing national security issue. The rapid increase in

population undermines the state's ability to equitably manage its critical resources including land, water, energy, jobs, and public services, fueling instability, resource-based conflict, and chronic underdevelopment.

Unchecked growth places unsustainable pressure on the country's fragile infrastructure and institutions. Job markets are unable to absorb the millions entering the labor force each year, leading to economic disenfranchisement and social unrest. At the same time, water availability has fallen below crisis levels, intensifying competition between agricultural, industrial, and domestic users in already volatile regions.

A National Population and Resource Security Task Force, National Security Council, should be established to:

- Integrate population dynamics into national security and disaster risk planning
- Align population control with labor market policies and green job creation strategies
- Embed water governance and urban planning reforms within demographic planning
- Coordinate cross-sectoral interventions between health, education, climate, and finance ministries

Inaction will not only stall progress, but it will also destabilize the future. Managing population growth is no longer optional; it is essential to safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty, economic resilience, and internal cohesion.

9. Out-of-the-Box Solutions

What is needed is a disruptive, unapologetic and political approach to managing population growth. Here are six urgent strategies:

- i. **Recognize Population Growth as a National Security Imperative**
Establish a high-level coordination mechanism under the National Security Council to prioritize population control in resource management, economic planning, and climate resilience.
- ii. **Link Welfare to Family Planning**
Redesign existing schemes like BISP to offer conditional benefits tied to family planning milestones (e.g., birth spacing, child immunization, contraceptive use).
- iii. **Mainstream Male Engagement**
Use mass media, digital platforms, and local councils to promote male responsibility in reproductive health, supported by religious leaders who interpret Islam in favor of planned parenthood.
- iv. **Digitize Access and Education**
Roll out MHealth apps and telehealth platforms that deliver reproductive counselling and commodity access, especially for adolescents and youth.
- v. **Compulsory Population and Life Skills Education**
Incorporate reproductive health and population literacy into national curricula as mandatory "life skills" education from secondary school onwards.
- vi. **Mobilize Private Sector and Tech Ecosystems**
Engage pharmaceuticals, logistics, mobile networks, and media through CSR incentives to broaden access to affordable, quality family planning services.

RECOGNISE POPULATION GROWTH AS A NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVE

The rapid increase in population undermines the state's ability to equitably manage its critical resources—land, water, energy, jobs, and public services—and threatens stability.

Unchecked population growth causes:



Job markets can't absorb the millions entering the labour force each year



Water availability has fallen below crisis levels, intensifying



Insecurity deepens as resources grow scarcer and conflict rises



NATIONAL POPULATION AND RESOURCE SECURITY TASK FORCE

Integrate population dynamics into national security and disaster risk planning

Align population control with labour market policies and green job creation

Embed water governance and urban planning reforms in demographic planning

Coordinate cross-sectoral interventions between health, education, climate, and finance ministries

INACTION WILL NOT ONLY STALL PROGRESS—IT WILL DESTABILISE THE FUTURE

10. The Cost of Inaction

If current trends continue unchecked, by 2050 Pakistan may exceed 400 million people. This would mean:

- A doubling of pressure on already fragile infrastructure
- Mass migration from rural to urban areas, worsening urban poverty
- Unemployment levels potentially surpassing 20%
- Chronic underinvestment in girls' education and women's health
- A collapse in climate resilience systems

Putting bluntly, **failing to address population dynamics is failing the next generation.**

11. Conclusion: Political Courage and Human-Centered Policy

Addressing population growth in Pakistan requires not just policy, but political courage. It demands that we frame family planning not as a Western agenda, but as a moral imperative to ensure a dignified life for every citizen. The choice is stark: invest now in evidence-based, rights-driven population policies, or confront a future of deepening inequality, instability, and irreversible decline.



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