**Missing persons**

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A missing person is someone who is reported missing, whose whereabouts are unknown to their family and friends. In wars or conflicts with India, contact with some members of the Pakistan army was lost and they were presumed martyred, with their bodies never recovered. The families of missing persons go through a state of agony and face the pain of uncertainty. They are unsure whether their loved ones are alive or dead. The issue of missing persons in Pakistan has been controversial, sensitive, and longstanding since the early 2000s. The majority of reported cases of missing persons come from erstwhile FATA and Balochistan. The issue has also become a political tool, with political parties, opposition parties, nationalist organizations, and groups often accusing state institutions of being responsible for the problem of missing persons.

In 2011, on the direction of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances was established. The commission was tasked with tracing the whereabouts of missing persons, and the police were directed to register FIRs (First Information Reports) and determine responsibility. A report issued by the commission of inquiry stated that they had received 9,133 complaints, and as of November 2022, 6,926 cases had been solved or disposed of. In January 2023, another commission was constituted in Balochistan under Home Minister Zia Langove, following the orders of the Balochistan High Court.

[LHC reserves verdict on Imran Khan's bail plea in cases registered since May 9](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-May-2023/lhc-reserves-verdict-on-imran-khan-s-bail-plea-in-cases-registered-since-may-9)

Unfortunately, the issue has been blown out of proportion for political gains, personal ambitions, and to tarnish state institutions. Exaggerated figures are circulated and claimed by opposition parties and nationalists, often using social media. The BNP(M), a coalition partner of the PTI government, left the coalition while accusing the government of not fulfilling the agreement on missing persons. According to media reports, the BNP(M) claimed there were around 5,000 missing persons, but they only provided a list of 1,000 individuals. It has been reported that some missing persons voluntarily disappeared for political and personal reasons without informing their families and friends. Other possibilities include enmity, abduction, and mental disorders. Some missing persons who are involved in anti-state activities are taken into custody or detained for interrogation through legal procedures, and they are also counted as missing persons. Some missing persons have been found to be involved in attacks on security forces and government or security installations. Additionally, some missing persons may have left Pakistan to seek political asylum or may be in foreign countries as illegal immigrants.

[Major transfers in Railways Department, notification issued](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-May-2023/major-transfers-in-railways-department-notification-issued)

According to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, the total number of missing persons in Pakistan is 2,210, contrary to exaggerated claims. The number of missing persons in the US is over 500,000, followed by the UK, Germany, India, and other countries. A significant number of missing persons have been recovered with the efforts of security agencies, commissions, and courts. The government of Pakistan and its agencies have taken serious steps to address the issue of missing persons in the best interest of the country. A bill to criminalize enforced disappearance was tabled in June 2021 and passed by the National Assembly in December 2023. However, the bill was not tabled in the Senate, so no progress was made on it. Legislation needs to be enacted to ensure that individuals are taken into custody through the proper legal system, with the knowledge of their family members.

The number of missing persons cases is declining, and it is heartening that the majority of missing persons are found and returned home. The government must address the grievances of the families of missing persons and take substantial steps to resolve this longstanding issue. Efforts must be made to satisfy the families of missing persons, and all possible assistance should be provided to them.