

PRACTICAL CIVIC HANDBOOK

Citizen Rights and Responsibilities

A practical guide for citizens of Pakistan

This handbook explains the constitutional rights, legal and civic responsibilities, democratic participation, voting, access to information, environmental duties and responsible digital conduct of citizens in Pakistan.

Cross-checked on 11 July 2026 against the latest official Constitution edition listed by the National Assembly, amended up to 21 November 2025 and incorporating the Twenty-Seventh Amendment.

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Important Note

Legal caution

This handbook is prepared for public awareness and education. It is not a substitute for legal advice on a specific dispute or case. Laws, rules and institutional procedures may change, so current guidance should be obtained from the relevant public authority or a qualified lawyer before formal action is taken.

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1. Introduction

Citizenship creates a legal and social relationship between an individual and the State. A citizen receives protection, freedoms and opportunities under the Constitution and law. In return, the citizen is expected to obey the law, respect the rights of others and contribute responsibly to society.

Rights allow people to live with dignity and freedom. Responsibilities help ensure that one person does not exercise a freedom in a way that unlawfully harms another person or weakens public order.

Core principle

A democratic society works best when citizens know their rights, fulfil their duties, participate in public affairs and use lawful methods to hold public institutions accountable.

- Understand their constitutional rights.
- Fulfil legal and civic responsibilities.
- Participate peacefully in public affairs.
- Respect differences of religion, language, culture, sex and opinion.
- Challenge unlawful action through lawful procedures.

2. Who is a citizen?

A citizen is a person who legally belongs to a country and is entitled to the rights and protection provided by its Constitution and laws. Citizenship in Pakistan is governed by law, including the Pakistan Citizenship Act, 1951.

Some constitutional protections apply to every person within Pakistan, while others are specifically granted to citizens. For example, Article 9 protects every person against deprivation of life or liberty except in accordance with law, while Articles 15 to 20 expressly grant several freedoms to citizens.

- Live in the country in accordance with law.
- Receive the protection of law.
- Participate in public and political life.
- Register and vote when legally eligible.
- Own property and conduct lawful business, subject to law.
- Seek administrative or judicial remedies when rights are violated.

3. Understanding rights and responsibilities

3.1 What is a right?

A right is a legally or constitutionally protected freedom, entitlement or safeguard. Examples include life and liberty, equality before law, fair trial, freedom of speech, religious freedom, education and access to information.

3.2 What is a responsibility?

A responsibility is a legal obligation or a standard of conduct expected from a citizen. Obeying the Constitution and law is a constitutional obligation. Voting responsibly, protecting public property and helping the community are civic responsibilities.

3.3 How they work together

Right	Related responsibility
Freedom of speech	Use facts, avoid unlawful threats, harassment and incitement.
Peaceful assembly	Remain peaceful, unarmed and compliant with lawful public-order requirements.
Use of public facilities	Protect public property and use shared resources responsibly.
Clean environment	Avoid pollution, waste and unlawful disposal of hazardous material.
Right to information	Ask clearly for existing records and respect lawful exemptions.

4. Constitutional rights

Fundamental Rights are mainly contained in Articles 8 to 28 of the Constitution. Article 8 provides that a law inconsistent with these rights is void to the extent of the inconsistency, subject to the Constitution itself.

4.1 Protection of law - Article 4

Every citizen has the inalienable right to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with law. No detrimental action may be taken against a person's life, liberty, body, reputation or property except in accordance with law. A person cannot be stopped from doing what the law does not prohibit or compelled to do what the law does not require.

4.2 Life and personal liberty - Articles 9 and 9A

No person may be deprived of life or liberty except in accordance with law. Article 9A also gives every person the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Article 9A was inserted by the Twenty-Sixth Constitutional Amendment in 2024.

4.3 Safeguards on arrest and detention - Article 10

An arrested person must generally be informed of the grounds of arrest and may consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice. The person must ordinarily be produced before a magistrate within twenty-four hours, excluding necessary travel time. The Constitution contains exceptions and separate rules for preventive detention.

4.4 Fair trial and due process - Article 10A

A person is entitled to a fair trial and due process when civil rights and obligations are determined or a criminal charge is decided. This includes a meaningful opportunity to know the case, present a defence and have the matter decided by an impartial authority according to law.

4.5 Freedom from slavery, forced labour and trafficking - Article 11

Slavery, forced labour and trafficking in human beings are prohibited. A child below fourteen years may not be employed in a factory, mine or other hazardous employment.

4.6 Protection in criminal matters - Articles 12 and 13

The Constitution protects against retrospective punishment, double punishment for the same offence and compelled self-incrimination.

4.7 Human dignity and privacy - Article 14

The dignity of every person and, subject to law, the privacy of the home are inviolable. No person may be tortured for the purpose of extracting evidence.

4.8 Freedom of movement - Article 15

Every citizen may remain in Pakistan, enter and move freely throughout Pakistan and reside or settle in any part of the country, subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the public interest.

4.9 Peaceful assembly - Article 16

Citizens may assemble peacefully and without arms, subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of public order.

4.10 Freedom of association - Article 17

Citizens may form associations or unions, subject to constitutional and legal restrictions. Citizens not in the service of Pakistan may form or join political parties, subject to law.

4.11 Lawful profession, trade and business - Article 18

Every citizen may enter a lawful profession or occupation and conduct a lawful trade or business, subject to qualifications, licensing and regulations permitted by law.

4.12 Freedom of speech and press - Article 19

Citizens have freedom of speech and expression, and the press has constitutional freedom, subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law for the grounds stated in the Constitution, including public order, security, decency, morality, contempt of court and the commission of or incitement to an offence.

4.13 Right to information - Article 19A

Every citizen has the right to access information in matters of public importance, subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law. Provincial and federal right-to-information laws provide procedures for requesting records.

4.14 Freedom of religion - Articles 20 to 22

Subject to law, public order and morality, citizens may profess, practise and propagate their religion. Religious denominations and sects may establish, maintain and manage their institutions. The Constitution also protects people in relation to religious taxation and religious instruction.

4.15 Property rights - Articles 23 and 24

Citizens may acquire, hold and dispose of property, subject to the Constitution and reasonable restrictions imposed by law. Deprivation or compulsory acquisition of property must be according to law and the constitutional framework.

4.16 Equality - Article 25

All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and permits special provision for the protection of women and children.

4.17 Education - Article 25A

The State must provide free and compulsory education to all children from five to sixteen years of age in the manner determined by law.

4.18 Public places, public service, language and culture - Articles 26 to 28

The Constitution provides safeguards against specified discrimination in access to public places and appointments in the service of Pakistan. Communities with a distinct language, script or culture may preserve and promote it and establish institutions for that purpose, subject to law.

Rights at a glance

Article	Right	Practical meaning
4-5	Protection of law and constitutional duty	Lawful treatment, loyalty to the State and obedience to the Constitution and law.
9-10A	Life, liberty, environment and fair process	Protection of person, arrest safeguards, clean environment and fair trial.
11-14	Human dignity and criminal safeguards	No slavery or forced labour, no retrospective or double punishment, dignity and privacy.
15-20	Civil freedoms	Movement, assembly, association, profession, expression, information and religion.
23-28	Property, equality, education and culture	Property protection, equal treatment, education, public access, service safeguards and cultural rights.

5. Responsibilities of citizens

5.1 Loyalty to the State

Article 5 states that loyalty to the State is the basic duty of every citizen. Loyalty includes respect for Pakistan's sovereignty, constitutional order and lawful democratic institutions.

5.2 Obedience to the Constitution and law

Obedience to the Constitution and law is an inviolable obligation of every citizen wherever they may be and of every other person within Pakistan. Citizens should use lawful procedures to challenge official decisions and must not take the law into their own hands.

5.3 Respect for the rights of others

A citizen must respect the life, dignity, privacy, property and freedom of other people. This includes women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, religious minorities, political opponents, workers, neighbours and road users.

5.4 Responsible voting

Voting is a civic responsibility, although it is not compulsory under general election law. An eligible citizen should check registration, study candidates, reject bribery and intimidation, protect ballot secrecy and use legal remedies for electoral disputes.

5.5 Payment of lawful taxes and dues

Citizens and organisations who fall within tax laws should register where required, keep proper records, submit truthful declarations and pay lawful taxes and public dues on time. The exact obligation depends on the applicable law and the taxpayer's circumstances.

5.6 Protection of public property

Roads, schools, hospitals, public transport, water systems, parks, government records and public equipment belong to the community. Damage or misuse places an additional cost on all citizens.

5.7 Environmental care

Citizens should avoid dumping waste, polluting water, burning harmful material, wasting water and energy, or damaging trees and public green areas. Serious pollution should be reported to the relevant authority.

5.8 Peace and social harmony

Responsible citizens reject violence, mob justice, sectarian hatred, racial hostility, harassment, intimidation, discrimination and destruction of religious or cultural property.

5.9 Cooperation with lawful authorities

Citizens should provide truthful information when legally required and cooperate with emergency, rescue, electoral and law-enforcement authorities. This does not remove the right to challenge unlawful conduct or seek legal advice.

5.10 Community participation

Citizens strengthen society by helping vulnerable people, supporting education and health initiatives, reporting broken services, volunteering in emergencies and keeping neighbourhoods clean and safe.

6. Citizenship in a democracy

Democracy is more than periodic elections. It requires continuing public participation, constitutional accountability, access to information and respect for institutions.

- Vote and remain engaged between elections.
- Contact elected representatives and submit written representations.
- Follow Assembly proceedings and committee work.
- Request public information through the applicable law.
- Participate in peaceful civic organisations and consultations.
- Evaluate representatives by legislation, oversight, public service and conduct.

7. Responsible freedom of expression

Citizens may criticise public policy and official performance. Strong criticism is lawful when it remains within the Constitution and law. Before publishing or forwarding material, a responsible citizen should ask:

1. Is the information authentic?
2. Is the source reliable?
3. Could it unlawfully harm another person?
4. Does it expose private information without a lawful reason?
5. Could it create panic, hostility or violence?
6. Is the criticism based on verifiable facts?
7. Is there a more constructive way to present the concern?

Digital caution

Forwarding a false or harmful message is not a neutral act. The person who shares it may contribute to reputational, financial or physical harm.

8. Voting and political participation

Before an election

- Check voter registration and electoral area.
- Study the candidates, records and programmes.
- Reject vote buying, pressure and false information.
- Report credible violations through the Election Commission's channels.

On election day

- Carry the identification required by law.

- Follow lawful instructions of polling staff.
- Maintain order and ballot secrecy.
- Do not campaign where it is prohibited.
- Do not attempt to vote more than once.

After an election

- Respect the lawful process.
- Monitor the work of elected representatives.
- Continue civic engagement between elections.
- Use authorised legal procedures for complaints.

The Election Commission states that a Pakistani citizen who meets the age, residence and legal-capacity requirements may be enrolled, and only a person registered on the electoral roll may vote. Registration can be checked by sending the CNIC number without hyphens to 8300.

9. Right to information and public accountability

Article 19A recognises access to information in matters of public importance. In Punjab, the Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 provides a procedure for requesting records from provincial public bodies.

A useful request should identify the public body, describe the record clearly, state the relevant period and provide contact details. The right is generally used to obtain existing information. It does not normally require an institution to create a new report, answer a hypothetical question or provide material protected by a lawful exemption.

Practical request format

Ask for a defined record, such as a sanctioned estimate, contract, inspection report, attendance record, notification or expenditure statement, and specify the period or project concerned.

10. Equality, inclusion and respect for diversity

Equality requires fair treatment and equal protection of law. It also permits special measures to remove disadvantage or protect vulnerable groups.

- Equal respect for women and men.
- Safe participation of women in public life.
- Protection of children from abuse and exploitation.
- Accessible services for persons with disabilities.
- Respect for religious minorities and regional cultures.
- Fair treatment regardless of social or economic status.

11. Environmental responsibility

Article 9A establishes the right of every person to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Citizens, businesses and public institutions should consider air and water pollution, unsafe waste disposal, industrial emissions, hazardous chemicals, noise, loss of trees and contamination of drains and canals.

When reporting serious environmental harm, record the date, location, activity, responsible body if known and lawful evidence. Avoid confrontation that could place anyone in danger.

12. Digital citizenship

- Use strong passwords and security controls.
- Protect CNIC, banking and family information.
- Verify news before forwarding it.
- Obtain consent before sharing private images.
- Avoid harassment, impersonation and fraudulent activity.
- Respect intellectual property and confidential records.
- Keep lawful evidence of online threats or scams.
- Teach children safe internet use.

13. Protecting and enforcing rights

Step 1: Secure immediate safety

Contact the relevant emergency service where there is an immediate threat. Punjab Police lists 15 as the police emergency number.

Step 2: Record the facts

Note the date, time, place, names, designations, witnesses, reference numbers, documents and lawfully obtained evidence.

Step 3: Contact the responsible department

Submit a clear written complaint and keep proof of submission.

Step 4: Use administrative remedies

Depending on the issue, approach the departmental complaint authority, regulator, information commission, Election Commission, Ombudsman, police or another competent body.

Step 5: Obtain legal advice

Seek a qualified lawyer where liberty, property, employment, family rights, constitutional remedies or criminal allegations are involved.

The Ombudsman Punjab may entertain complaints concerning maladministration by provincial government agencies within its legal mandate. Courts and specialised bodies have separate jurisdictions, procedures and time limits.

14. Practical situations

Situation	Rights and responsible action
Criticism of a public project	Right: expression and access to public information. Responsibility: use accurate facts, avoid threats and request official records through lawful procedures.
Planning a public gathering	Right: peaceful assembly. Responsibility: remain unarmed, follow applicable legal requirements and avoid violence or damage.
Waste dumped into a canal	Right: clean and sustainable environment. Responsibility: document the matter lawfully, avoid dangerous confrontation and report it to the competent authority.
A child is not attending school	Right: free and compulsory education from five to sixteen. Responsibility: parents, guardians and authorities should support enrolment, attendance and safety.
A false online allegation	Right: dignity, privacy and lawful remedy. Responsibility: preserve evidence, avoid retaliatory abuse and use platform, administrative or legal complaint procedures.
A public office refuses a record	Right: access to public information subject to law. Responsibility: submit a clear request to the designated officer and use the prescribed complaint or appeal process.

15. Citizen self-check

- ☐ I know my basic constitutional rights.
- ☐ I obey the Constitution and law.
- ☐ I respect the dignity and rights of others.
- ☐ I verify information before sharing it.
- ☐ I protect public property.
- ☐ I reject discrimination, hatred and violence.
- ☐ I fulfil applicable tax and civic obligations.
- ☐ I keep my voter registration accurate.
- ☐ I vote according to informed judgment.
- ☐ I use lawful complaint procedures.
- ☐ I support education and child protection.
- ☐ I protect the environment.
- ☐ I participate constructively in community affairs.
- ☐ I hold representatives accountable by peaceful and lawful means.

16. Key constitutional articles

Article	Right	Practical meaning
4	Protection of law	Lawful treatment and protection against arbitrary action.
5	Loyalty and obedience	Duty of loyalty to the State and obedience to the Constitution and law.
8	Fundamental Rights	Inconsistent laws void to the extent of inconsistency.
9-10A	Person and process	Life, liberty, environment, arrest safeguards and fair trial.
11-14	Dignity and criminal safeguards	Forced labour, retrospective punishment, double punishment, self-incrimination, dignity and privacy.
15-20	Civil freedoms	Movement, assembly, association, business, expression, information and religion.
23-25A	Property, equality and education	Property rights, equal protection and education for children aged five to sixteen.
26-28	Access and culture	Public places, service safeguards and preservation of language and culture.

17. Official sources

The legal points in this handbook were cross-checked against the following official sources. The Constitution is the controlling source for constitutional wording; legislation and institutional procedures should be checked in their current official form.

1. Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Fourteenth Edition 2025, amended up to the Twenty-Seventh Amendment. https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/6926e060076ed_467.pdf
2. National Assembly downloads page, listing the Constitution as amended up to 21 November 2025. <https://na.gov.pk/en/downloads.php>
3. Election Commission of Pakistan: eligibility to be a voter. <https://ecp.gov.pk/election-laws-eligibility-to-be-a-voter>
4. Election Commission of Pakistan: voter-registration check through SMS 8300. <https://ecp.gov.pk/check-your-registration>
5. Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013. <https://www.punjablaws.gov.pk/lawspdf/2547.pdf>
6. Federal Board of Revenue: Taxpayers' Services and taxpayer education. <https://www.fbr.gov.pk/facilitation-taxpayer-education/142248/131266>
7. Ombudsman Punjab: mandate and complaint jurisdiction. <https://ombudsmanpunjab.gov.pk/mandate>
8. Punjab Police: emergency helplines. https://www.punjabpolice.gov.pk/emergency_help