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## Advancing Human Rights Through Parliamentary Mechanisms: A Five-Year Institutional Review Of The Senate Of Pakistan (2020-2025)

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### ABSTRACT

The study examines how the Senate promotes human rights within Pakistan, using parliamentary records, reports of Senate committees and relevant policy papers from 2020 and 2025. Even though the Senate first became involved in human rights in the late 20th century, its responsibility has grown significantly in recent years. Issues the Senate has discussed include domestic violence, child protection, rights for people with disabilities, workplace harassment and defending against any discrimination based on race, religion, gender or gender identity, based on expert guidance and human rights rules worldwide. In addition, it joined forces with these organisations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Human Rights Council, to encourage diplomatic actions supporting human rights. Civil society and similar groups have been very important in supporting legislative efforts on marriage and legal aid. Even with these efforts, certain problems persist, for example, when it takes a long time to process bills, not much progress is made on transgender rights, budgets are not always sufficient, and it is often challenging to enforce delivered resolutions. Visible progress has been made, although real improvement needs strong legislative changes to improve how things are handled, increase oversight and hold the Senate more accountable for human rights.

### Introduction

Because attention on democracy and human rights is high globally, national parliaments are now important protectors of fundamental rights. More and more, scholars and multilateral bodies agree that strong parliamentary processes promote justice in society by incorporating rights-based approaches into how governments work (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). While legislating, parliaments also evaluate government decisions, connect with society and implement human rights laws concerning their own country. As the upper house of Parliament in Pakistan, the Senate is playing a key role in this shift, trying to match national needs with new human rights laws worldwide. From 2020 to 2025, the Senate of Pakistan became more proactive and watchful in matters related to human rights. Laws were made and considered on subjects like domestic violence, protecting children, rights for people with disabilities, harassment at school and at work and discrimination based on religion or gender. In addition, the Functional Committee on Human Rights made progress investigating torture in prisons, unexpected executions, poor prison conditions and maltreatment of minors and women. During this period, parliament asked many questions and passed

resolutions to resolve human rights problems (Senate of Pakistan, 2025).

At the same time, Pakistan made its viewpoints about human rights more noticeable, mainly thanks to the Senate's diplomacy. Senators were present at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to highlight the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the ongoing detention of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui and the wide-ranging hardship in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The Senate not only upheld Pakistan's principal foreign policy objectives but also began to take a lead in worldwide human rights support (United Nations, 2024). Civil society became important at the national level when influencing parliamentary action on human rights. Organizations like PODA have successfully recommended changes to marriage registration, requiring CNIC confirmation and education for the people who register marriages.

Moreover, the Senate's support for altering the Legal Aid and Justice Authority (LAJA) functions through laws indicates it supports joining efforts and participatory policy development (PODA, 2023). Yet, many of these achievements were limited because old challenges in Pakistan's parliamentary system were not overcome. Following the same old steps, blockades from pro-national parties against modernisation (mainly on transgender topics), limited funds, and the failure to take action on approved motions stopped a lot of human rights projects from reaching their goals. This change highlights a continuing mismatch between what is decided by legislators and what is carried out by the executive. This study reviews the Senate of Pakistan's contributions to human rights between 2020 and 2025. The study investigates how legislative laws, parliamentary committees, global platforms, and interactions among civil groups have formed the human rights system in Pakistan. The present study seeks to summarise where the Senate has come in human rights governance and identify ongoing gaps in this field.

## Research Methodology

This research studies institutions qualitatively to determine how the Senate of Pakistan promoted human rights from 2020 to 2025. The main sources are Parliamentary Year Reports, committee proceedings, Hansard and important human rights legislation. In addition, we looked at reports and submissions offered by non-governmental groups, particularly PODA and HRCP, to learn about how different legislative choices resulted from citizen-led actions. Actions by the Senate were assigned to four categories using thematic analysis: items produced in the legislature, work related to executive branch oversight, work involving international human rights and links with civil society. Data from the official website, plus articles, studies and reports by the Senate Committees and the IPU, together allowed the study to be both accurate and detailed. Although I can only use this method for the Senate's upper house and for official use, it helps me organize my thoughts on improvements in human rights by the Senate.

## Literature Review

The study combines various investigations and connects political science, legal studies, and human rights governance narratives to determine how the Senate and other parliamentary bodies affect human rights situations in national settings. Research, foundational ideas and an examination of institutions are combined to examine four main topics in the article: progress in human rights through legislation, monitoring by parliament, input from civil societies and taking part in global debates on human rights. It helps to understand how, in Pakistan and other transitional democracies, national parliaments put rights into practice, respond to global trends and handle the problems of institutional regulations.

According to existing research, parliaments play a key part in putting human rights into law, mainly when executive power and a slow court system make accountability more difficult (Norton, 2022). IPU's survey finds that parliaments are considered norm entrepreneurs because they ensure that international agreements such as CEDAW and CRC become enforceable at home (IPU, 2023). However, in Pakistan, many scholars believe that Parliament's procedures are unused because of politicized committee duties, insufficient actions by the executive and poor relationships across government branches (Waseem, 2020; Ahmed & Khalid, 2022).

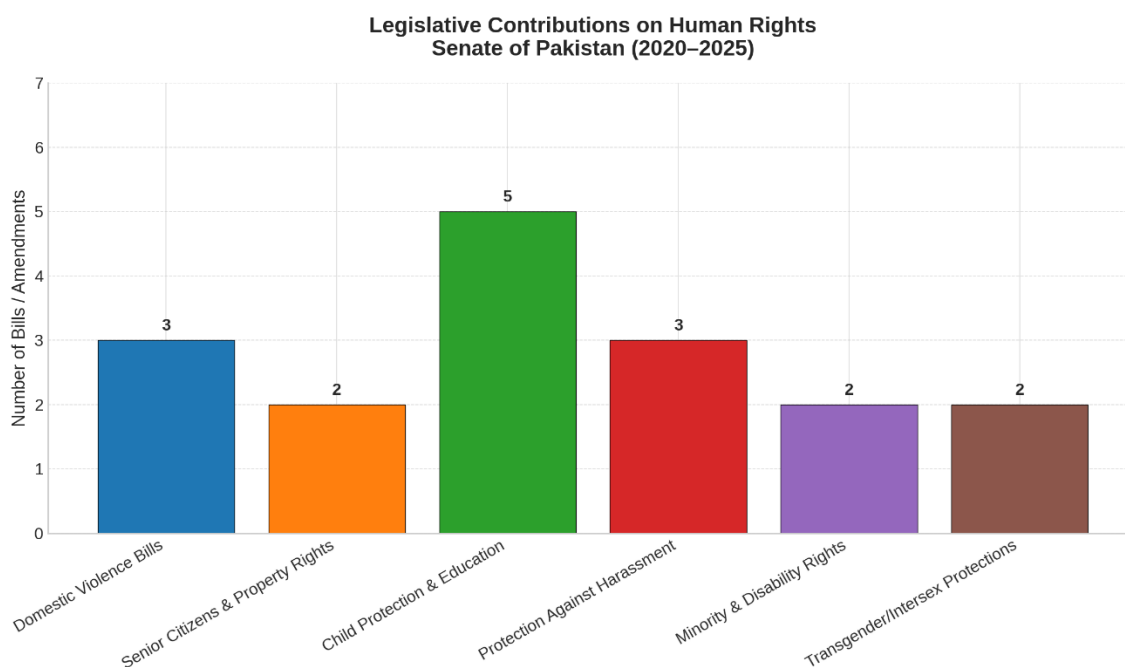
Civil society has come under close study, with some scholars noting that NGOs such as PODA, Shirkat Gah and AGHS Legal Aid Cell have impacted how parliamentary hearings work and bills are formed (Niaz & Hussain, 2021). Even so, there is still a huge difference between being talked about and passing laws (Bari, 2022). Both the UNDP and HRCP have pointed out that the Senate's committees, primarily the Human Rights Committee, have turned into important oversight bodies, probing custodial abuse, prisons and violence by the state. Still, action on the recommendations made by committees is not always taken, because the wishes of politicians limit their influence. It seems that Pakistan uses its position in the IPU and UNHRC mainly for image purposes, rather than to defend human rights, but its recently active stance on Gaza and Kashmir has highlighted the Senate's growing strength (UNHRC, 2024).

Based on previous works, Ahmad and Qamar (2024) examine the shifting influence of the Senate on Pakistan's politics in detail.

Their study indicates that the Senate can increase executive accountability by boosting its lawmaking and monitoring roles. Like the broader human rights governance field, this supports the arguments by Norton (2022) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023). Similarly, Ahmad and Qamar stress that improving the Senate's structure is essential, and both Waseem (2020) and Akhtar (2016) confirm that many of Pakistan's parliamentary institutions are having difficulties meeting their responsibilities. Ahmad and Qamar examine how the Senate fits into the Pakistani system and explore how legislative groups can ensure transparency and accountability. All in all, the studies examined demonstrate that the evolution of this field puts important duties on the Senate to defend human rights, but these duties are sometimes restricted. Reforms in recent years and active parliamentary efforts show progress, but lasting change will require better capacity, budgetary freedom and stricter accountability between parliamentary institutions.

### Legislative Contributions to Human Rights in the Senate of Pakistan (2020–2025)

From 2020 to 2025, the Senate of Pakistan concentrated on making laws to improve domestic human rights and protections. During this period, parliament passed and introduced multiple bills to deal with domestic violence, child protection, disability rights, protecting minorities, harassment in the workplace and gender identity. You can see below how parliament has worked to protect vulnerable community members.



**Source:** Senate of Pakistan Parliamentary Year Reports (2020–2025), compiled from official legislative records and committee summaries.

Between 2020 and 2025, the Senate of Pakistan passed legislation to protect human rights. Laws were introduced or amended as it was recognised that the state needed to assist those who faced greater dangers. In the early days, the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bills for the ICT let victims of abuse report their situation to official authorities for help. Because of these laws, domestic violence has become an issue for the community, as opposed to only an issue within families (Senate of Pakistan, 2021; 2022). Even though the laws are available, applying them is difficult since there aren't enough skilled workers and rural areas often lack proper shelter (HRCP, 2023).

Owing to the Senior Citizens' Act (2021) and changes to the law about women's properties, new regulations were offered to help older adults and safeguard women's assets. The purpose of these laws was to provide services for seniors and solve usual gender problems in property rights (Senate of Pakistan, 2021). At the same time, unless there are flexible admin systems everywhere in the federal territories, these efforts could fail because, unfortunately, HRCP (2023) states these systems are lacking throughout many areas. The idea of child rights was highly valued.

In 2020–2023 and 2022, the Islamabad Child Protection Bill and National Commission on the Rights of the Child (Amendment) Bills made the government monitor children's institutions more closely. After the Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bills

(2021, 2024) were introduced, schools focused on protecting instead of punishing students (Senate of Pakistan, 2022; 2024). All the same, attempts to apply these laws in schools have met strong resistance, so their effect has been less noticeable (UNICEF Pakistan, 2023).

The Senate added new student protections to the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act. Thanks to the extra sections in the laws, more victims who experience harassment can now be heard (Senate of Pakistan, 2022). Although violence in the home is declining, women are often prevented from seeking help by being afraid of being shamed and threatened by their abuser. The Senate approved the Protection of the Rights of Religious Minorities Bill (2020) and amended the ICT Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2024. The laws proved that Pakistan was dedicated to including and accommodating all people, which fits with its responsibilities under international human rights treaties like the CRPD. The fact that religious laws are not consistently upheld and disliked religious groups are still subjected to hate speech demonstrates what does not work well in deeply divided societies (Amnesty International, 2024).

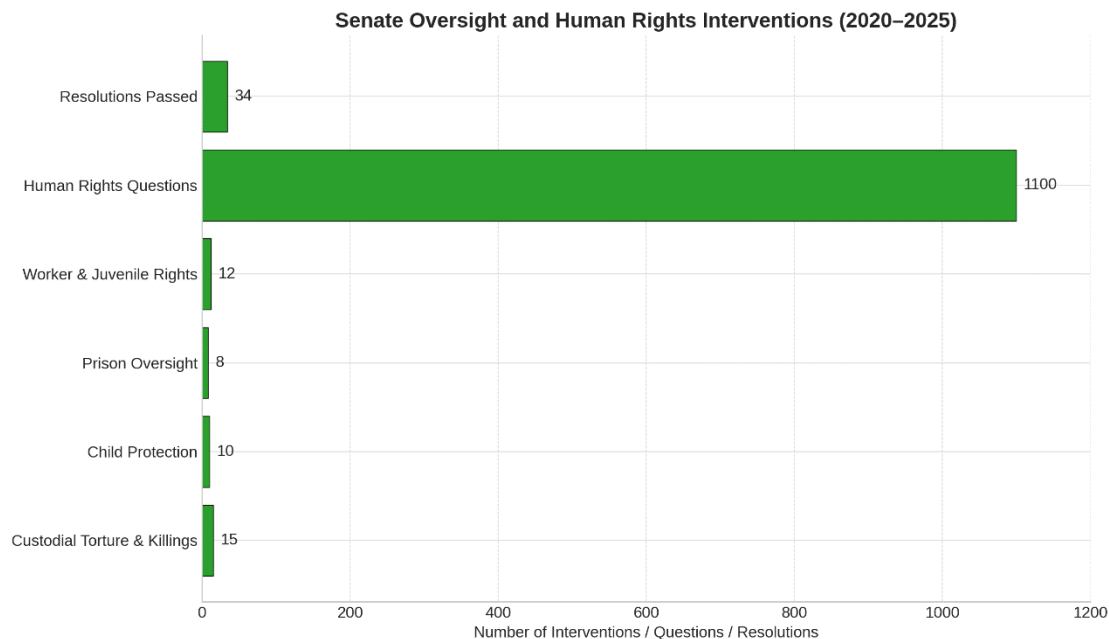
Opinions about gender identity laws were the subject of the most political debates. Attempts to modify the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 and enact the "Khunsa Persons" (Protection of Rights) Act, 2023, were part of India's discussions about gender, religion and identity. Members of the National Assembly mainly discussed the question of whether the rights of people with gender dysphoria should be included in the constitution and what religious people thought about the bill (Senate of Pakistan, 2023). Yet, the process has been stuck because people have received false rumours and resisted change (HRCF, 2024). For these years, the Senate clearly tried to protect human rights in several important ways. Balance matters in how legal powers are implemented, what percentage of the public knows the rules and how far different public agencies cooperate. If we do not enforce our laws, necessary reforms might seem only like formalities.

## Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms

From 2020 to 2025, the Senate of Pakistan took a bigger part in overseeing human rights, mainly using the Functional Committee on Human Rights. A regular focus of the committee was to address urgent and essential matters, including torture of inmates, illegal executions, lynching by mobs and systemic problems with keeping vulnerable populations safe (Senate of Pakistan, 2024). Such cases as child trafficking and neglected children, coupled with interagency actions, continued to be strengths of the agency.

The committee's review of prisons was also critical, shown by its visit to Adiala Jail in 2023, which resulted in advice to enhance inmate well-being, speed up reviews for death row cases and bring educational courses to prisoners (Senate of Pakistan, 2023). The committee was also concerned with worker rights and handled juvenile justice and educational abuse by conducting detailed studies and directing policies accordingly (HRCF, 2024). Other than committee involvement, members used devices such as starred questions and resolutions to highlight issues about human rights. From 2021 to 2025, 1,100 starred questions concerning human rights were admitted, illustrating how legislative initiatives increased around abuse, harassment and discrimination in government (Senate of Pakistan, 2024).

Several important resolutions were made during these years. Amnesty, among other acts, protested against abuses in Indian-occupied Kashmir, stood with those who suffered illegal detention, especially by helping repatriate Guantanamo Bay detainee Saifullah Paracha and worked for changes to domestic laws. The second batch contained proposals for raising the age at which girls can marry, having "Nikah" conducted only after showing a national identity card and legally recognising orphaned and unclaimed children (Senate of Pakistan, 2025; HRCF, 2023). They all demonstrate that the Senate is gaining strength in lawmaking and holding institutions to account while shaping public talk about human rights in Pakistan.



**Source:** Senate of Pakistan Parliamentary Year Reports (2020–2025), including committee summaries and legislative activity data compiled from official proceedings

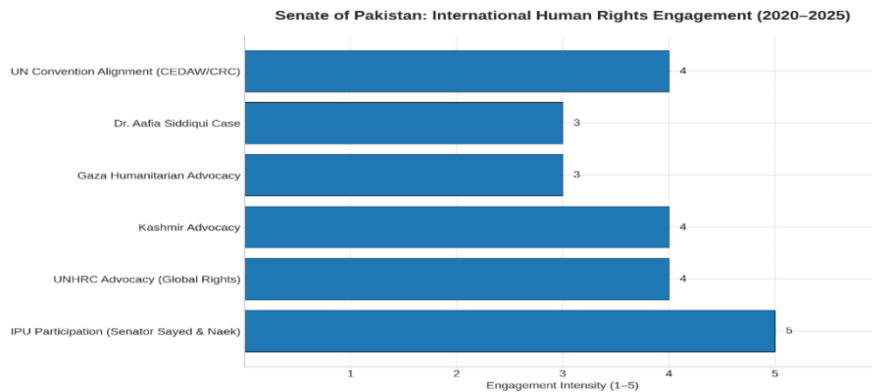
Using the chart above, it is evident that the Senate of Pakistan took on many oversight roles related to human rights from 2020 to 2025, increasing legislative involvement and adjustment to needs. This large number of state-related questions sent in by members of parliament makes it clear that more formal means are now used to investigate problems in rights, from cases of extra killings to exploitation at work. At the same time, actions by specific phase committees, covering custodial torture, child trafficking and juvenile justice, demonstrate an intense and focused way of acting. The scope of the Functional Committee on Human Rights grew so that it focused on prison reform, did field investigations, and backed civil society ideas, pointing to a change from reacting to preventing problems. Those 34 resolutions passed during the period contributed great significance, opposing international abuses and endorsing changes in internal laws. The data generally backs up the Senate's transformation into a group actively supporting human rights and justice.

### International Human Rights Engagement

Between 2020 and 2025, the Senate of Pakistan participated in human rights diplomacy and supported global rules and partnerships. Senators Mushahid Hussain Sayed and Farooq Hamid Naek held critical international events, speaking for Pakistan at the Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations Human Rights Council. Senator Sayed took the role of Vice President on the IPU Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians in 2024, and Senator Naek actively participated on the IPU Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights until 2025 (Senate of Pakistan, 2025). They went beyond symbols and helped shape discussions worldwide on the topics that mattered for Pakistan's foreign policy and human rights.

During these discussions, the Senate called attention to matters like the suffering in Gaza, the human rights of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, who is still held and the mistreatment of leaders in India-administered Kashmir. Pakistan's parliamentarians expressed worry about violations of international human rights, especially those affecting Muslim people, using statements, official engagements and human rights briefings (Senate of Pakistan, 2024). Additionally, these dialogues highlighted how passing laws in line with international human rights rules, such as CEDAW and CRC, is vital for each nation. By taking this approach, Pakistan joined global efforts in human rights and showed parliamentary diplomacy as an effective strategy used in rights-based foreign action (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2024).





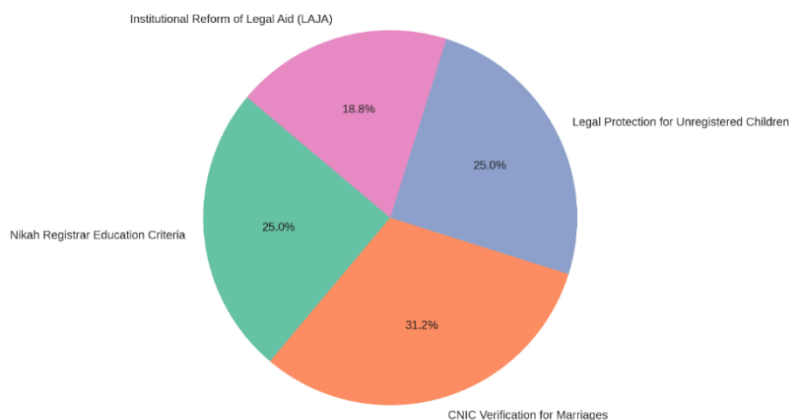
**Source:** Senate of Pakistan Parliamentary Year Reports (2020–2025); Human Rights and the Role of the Senate Reports; Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNHRC participation summaries.

The graph reveals how the Senate of Pakistan has worked on various international human rights issues from 2020 to 2025. Among Friends of Burma's main activities were diplomatic sessions in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), where Senators Mushahid Hussain Sayed and Farooq Hamid Naek took top roles. As a result, Pakistan could clearly state its views on matters like the Gaza troubles, the continued detention of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui and Indian restraints on human rights in Kashmir. It was also noteworthy that the Senate sought to bring national legislation into line with international agreements like "CEDAW" and the "CRC" to show its intention to include overseas standards in its legislation. The data reflects a balanced way of supporting justice for all countries while improving the nation's domestic legal system.

## Civil Society Collaboration and Policy Influence

Getting involved with civil society organisations has become more critical within the Senate of Pakistan's human rights framework from 2020 to 2025. Doing so showed an active approach where local details influenced decisions being made. Proposals from PODA and its allies were strongly supported, and these highlighted making minimum education necessary for "Nikah" registrars and ensuring "CNIC" checks for all marriage agreements. Such efforts were put in place to stop both minority and rural youth and those without identity papers from underage marriages. Besides that, the Senate thought it necessary to recommend changes in legal aid institutions and suggest that the "LAJA" be moved from the Ministry of Human Rights to the Ministry of Law and Justice. This shift aimed to simplify government services and allow marginalised people to use legal remedies more easily (Senate of Pakistan, 2025). The Senate's acceptance of civil society ideas marks a real move towards shared governance in policy-making.

Relative Influence of Civil Society Inputs on Senate Human Rights Policy (2020–2025)



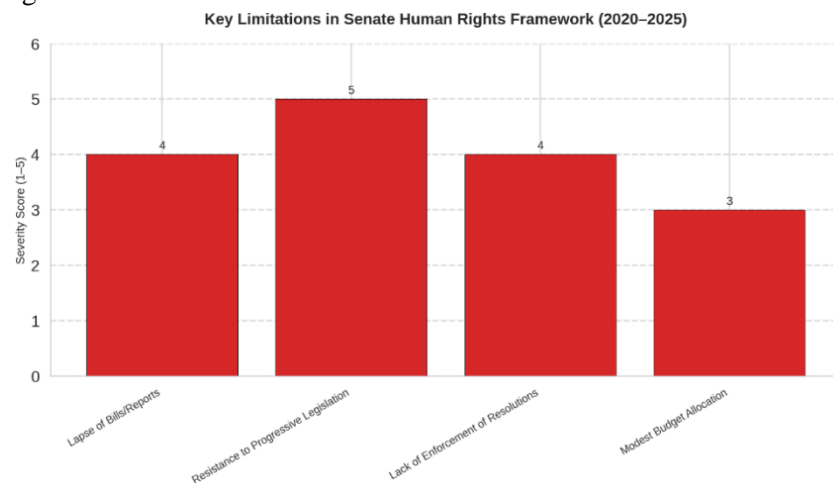
**Source:** Senate of Pakistan (2025), Human Rights and the Role of the Senate Report; Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) Policy Proposals (2023).

As shown in the graph above, stakeholders significantly influenced the Senate of Pakistan's human rights policy from 2020 to 2025. There was broad support among PODA and similar organisations for younger couples to hand over their CNICs when

registering their marriage. Ensuring that "Nikah" registrars met the necessary training and having more rights for children with no birth certificates proved that organisations became more open to changes that support all people's rights. The proposal arose from continuous attempts to make sure more vulnerable individuals can get justice. The diagram makes it easy to see how advocacy by citizens influenced the making of laws, and that public institutions now respond better to grassroots support.

### Limitations and Gaps Identified

Even with its achievements, what the Senate did for human rights between 2020 and 2025 was limited by certain factors. A common problem was that many bills and reports weren't processed on time due to government department delays, or the steps needed weren't carried out. Because of these shortcomings, turning committee findings into laws took much longer than expected. Notably, there was stiff resistance to new rules for transgender rights, which demonstrated how divided the society is and how much pressure conservative groups can influence political proceedings (HRCP, 2024). In addition, several human rights-related resolutions were passed, and most did not have any practical way for the executive branch to enforce them. Because of this gap, the Senate's role in oversight became less critical. A lack of sufficient funds for these initiatives impeded their success; only Rs. 495 million was allocated to 17 human rights projects in PSDP 2022-23, yet few resources were disbursed to deal with a wide range of issues (Senate of Pakistan, 2023). Such constraints make it clear that better institutions, standard agreements and extra resources are needed to ensure that momentum in human rights laws is not lost.



**Source:** Senate of Pakistan (2023), Parliamentary Year Report 2022–2023; Senate of Pakistan (2025), Human Rights and the Role of the Senate Report; Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2024), Legislative Effectiveness and Structural Barriers in Pakistan's Human Rights Framework.

As seen in the chart above, several severe structural and procedural difficulties discouraged the Senate of Pakistan from progressing on human rights from 2020 to 2025. Resistance toward new laws that support transgender people, primarily because of partisan disputes and strong conservative responses, was the biggest problem noted during the study. It was also found that bills and committee reports were regularly being put off because of the procedure, which meant that good legislation was often stalled, despite the strong guidance of committees. Many resolutions passed still lacked ways to be enforced, which meant that, even if the resolutions were important, they rarely led to actual government actions. A budget of Rs. 495 million for 17 projects in 2022-23 underlined the gap between what the legislature wants to do and the resources available. Therefore, there is a significant need to update the system, build agreements among political parties and improve resources so these laws become permanent.

### Conclusion

This study of the Senate of Pakistan from 2020 to 2025 demonstrates a gradually active and complex position in shielding and advancing human rights. By its actions in the legislature, by watching government actions, by being active internationally and by working with civil society organisations, the Senate has become the central hub for rights-based policy decisions in Pakistan. Many necessary steps were made in laws against domestic violence, child protection and workplace harassment, as well as with the Functional Committee on Human Rights helping in custodial abuse, changes to prisons and juvenile justice. The Senate's joining of IPU and UNHRC events highlighted its greater aim to match national policy with worldwide human rights standards.

At the same time, its partnerships with PODA and HRCP showed a stronger role for civil society in directing actions by the Senate. However, the study pointed out major weaknesses: slow procedures, poorly enforced resolutions, limited finances and significant opposition to new legislation helping gender diversity and minorities. As a result of the findings, it's clear that embedding human rights in Senate debates is essential, but making those ideas work on the ground and in law is patchy. Supporting implementation methods, strengthening committees, depoliticizing the rights discussion and making the executive responsible are vital to keeping progress alive. It is essential to set up steps that allow the Senate to truly carry out the work of making human rights laws comprehensive and enforceable for all Pakistanis.

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