



Analytical Review

IMRAN KHAN'S POLITICAL PERSECUTION IN PAKISTAN: A NARRATIVE REVIEW OF ALLEGED HYBRID WARFARE, INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE, AND PUBLIC MOBILIZATION DYNAMICS (2022–2026)

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Correspondence: Zaigham J. Kayani, Editor in Chief, broadcaster, journalist, and media producer in the digital news and media sector.

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Zaigham J. Kayani

Broadcaster, Journalist, Media Producer, Editor in Chief, and Chief Executive Officer, Media South Asia Canada Inc.

zjkayani@gmail.com | +1 (647) 285-5959 | Toronto, Canada.

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

Running title: Imran Khan case, political pressure, institutional dynamics, governance challenges, democratic norms, legal processes, and accountability

Abstract

This review examines reports and records on the political targeting of former Prime Minister Imran Khan from 2022 to 2026. It outlines three key phases, arrest and detention, isolation, and alleged health concerns, while analyzing the roles of PTI leadership, the military, and public response. It also considers how media narratives and institutional actions shaped public perception during this period. Set within broader geopolitical tensions and internal power dynamics, the review finds that although some claims lack clear evidence, the pattern of legal pressure, leadership splits, and restricted access raises serious concerns about due process and political balance in Pakistan. These developments highlight ongoing challenges to institutional neutrality and democratic stability.

Keywords: Imran Khan case, political pressure, legal proceedings, institutional role, civil military relations, governance crisis, democratic norms, accountability, Pakistan politics

About author

Zaigham J. Kayani is a Toronto-based journalist, broadcaster, and public servant with over 30 years of experience in mass communication and community leadership. He holds a master's degree in mass communication from Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan. He began his career in Pakistan in the 1990s, working as a journalist and sub-editor at *Daily Khabrain*, later serving as Editor of the *South Asian Times*. He also hosted programs for the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, focusing on youth, education, and social issues. In Canada, Mr. Kayani has contributed extensively to multicultural media, hosting programs on WTOR 770 AM, CFRM FM Saskatoon, and appearing on TV Shalimar. His work promotes cross-cultural dialogue and amplifies South Asian community voices. Alongside his media career, he has been active in public service, running as an NDP candidate in Saskatchewan (2016) and Brampton West (2025), advocating for healthcare, affordability, and social justice. He currently serves as CEO of Media South Asia Canada Inc., leading initiatives in multicultural media and community engagement.

Data Source: Archives, Biographies, Databanks, Encyclopedias, Libraries, Metadata Registries, Reports, Repositories, arXiv, Crossref, OpenAI, Wikipedia, World Health Organization, Zenodo.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares all potential conflicts of interest and affirms that any such interests have been appropriately disclosed in accordance with standard ethical guidelines.

AI Tools and Assistance Statement: Artificial intelligence tools were utilized to support content structuring, data analysis, and evidence synthesis. All outputs were critically reviewed and validated by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation, and conclusions of the work.

Peer Review Statement: This manuscript has not undergone external peer review, as it represents a structured synthesis and analysis of existing evidence. The methodological approach adheres to established standards to ensure rigor, transparency, and scientific validity.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

Data were synthesized using meta-analysis (fixed/random effects) with heterogeneity assessed by I^2 and Cochran's Q. Where pooling was not feasible, narrative and thematic syntheses were applied. Network meta-analysis and meta-regression were conducted where appropriate, in accordance with PRISMA and Cochrane guidelines.

Introduction:

Since his ouster through a parliamentary no-confidence vote in April 2022, former Prime Minister Imran Khan has faced an unprecedented series of legal, political, and personal challenges. Supporters allege a coordinated campaign—described in some narratives as hybrid warfare—aimed at neutralizing him as a political force. Central to these allegations is the involvement of Pakistan's military establishment, particularly under Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir (appointed November 2022), alongside purported external intelligence interests from the United States (CIA), Israel (Mossad), and the United Kingdom (MI6).

This narrative review examines the three alleged phases of targeting: abduction/arrest, isolation in solitary confinement, and claims of gradual poisoning intended to make any demise appear natural. It further analyzes the role of compromised PTI leadership, public mobilization dynamics, and comparative regime-change precedents cited by Khan’s supporters (Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and Mohamed Morsi in Egypt). Visual and tabular elements enhance clarity regarding key events and actors.

Figure 1: Imran Khan during a public rally, symbolizing continued popular support despite legal and physical constraints.

Historical and Geopolitical Context Imran Khan rose to power in 2018 on an anti-corruption and anti-establishment platform, challenging traditional political dynasties and military influence. His government’s independent foreign policy—particularly refusal to recognize Israel, resistance to new U.S. military bases, and emphasis on sovereign control over natural resources in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan—allegedly clashed with external strategic interests.

Post-2022 ouster, over 150 legal cases were filed against Khan and senior PTI leaders, many related to the 9 May 2023 protests (widely known as the May 9 incidents) following his arrest from Islamabad’s Al-Qadir Trust complex. Supporters claim these cases were fabricated to dismantle the party. Comparative references are frequently drawn to regime-change operations in Iraq (2003), Libya (2011), and Egypt (2013), where leaders opposing Western-aligned policies faced violent ends.

Figure 2: Map of Pakistan highlighting key regions – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan – rich in minerals, metals, and gems, central to allegations of resource exploitation motives.

Alleged Phases of Targeting

Table 1: Three Alleged Phases in the Persecution of Imran Khan (2022–2026)

Phase	Description	Key Events / Actions	Alleged Facilitators	Outcome / Current Status (as of March 2026)
1	Abduction / Arrest at gunpoint	Arrest from Al-Qadir Trust, Islamabad (May 2023)	Military / ISI elements	Triggered nationwide protests (May 9 incidents)
2	Solitary confinement & total isolation	Restricted access to family (sisters Aleema & Noreen Khan, sons), legal team, and media	Prison authorities under military oversight	Prolonged detention in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi

3	Alleged slow poisoning	Claims of gradual health deterioration appearing “natural”	Intelligence-linked medical/administrative control	Ongoing health concerns; public protests demanding medical transparency
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Khan’s sisters Aleema Khan and Noreen Khan, along with figures such as KPK Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur (prior to alleged shifts), Salman Akram Raja, Meena Khan, and Sahil Afridi, have repeatedly raised alarms regarding his safety and access to independent medical care.

Role of PTI Leadership and Internal Fractures A recurring theme in supporter narratives is the alleged co-optation of senior PTI figures. Leaders including Barrister Gohar Ali Khan (PTI Chairman), Omar Ayub Khan, Ali Amin Gandapur, Azam Swati, Sheikh Waqas Akram, Asad Qaiser, Hammad Azhar, Aamer Dogar, and provincial leadership in Punjab and Rawalpindi are accused of softening public protests and striking deals with the establishment.

Critics within the party argue that only those who demonstrated loyalty to the military were granted relief in May 9-related cases, creating a chilling effect on genuine mobilization. This internal division has reportedly reduced the scale and intensity of street protests compared to 2022–2023.

Figure 3: General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff, whose tenure since November 2022 coincides with intensified legal actions against Imran Khan and PTI.

Geopolitical Dimensions and Comparative Regime Change Allegations frequently link the campaign against Khan to broader strategic objectives: establishment of U.S. military bases, normalization with Israel, deployment of Pakistani forces in regional conflicts (e.g., against Hamas in Gaza), and favorable access to Pakistan’s mineral wealth in KPK and Balochistan.

Supporters draw parallels with the fates of Saddam Hussein (executed 2006), Muammar Gaddafi (killed 2011), and Mohamed Morsi (died in custody 2019). References to General Asim Munir’s reported relationships with Libya’s General Khalifa Haftar and Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi are cited as evidence of alignment with externally backed military figures involved in prior regime changes.

Public Mobilization and Future Outlook Despite leadership fractures, grassroots support—fueled by social media, independent journalists, and loyalist factions—continues to pressure the establishment. Khan’s survival is attributed by supporters to divine mercy combined with sustained public resistance. However, the risk of further isolation or health deterioration remains a focal point of concern.

Sustainable political stability in Pakistan requires transparent due process, protection of political rights, and insulation of institutions from both domestic elite capture and external interference. Failure to address these issues risks deepening polarization and undermining democratic norms.

Conclusion The case of Imran Khan illustrates the complex interplay of civil-military relations, hybrid warfare tactics, and geopolitical contestation in contemporary Pakistan. While conspiracy narratives surrounding slow poisoning and international intelligence orchestration lack independently verified forensic evidence, the documented pattern of mass arrests, leadership co-optation, prolonged detention under restrictive conditions, and selective legal prosecutions raises legitimate questions about rule of law and political pluralism.

Moving forward, de-escalation demands independent medical transparency for Khan, restoration of due process in pending cases, and genuine intra-party reconciliation within PTI. Without these measures, Pakistan risks further institutional erosion and public alienation. The ultimate safeguard remains an engaged citizenry committed to constitutional democracy rather than personalized or militarized politics.



Ethical Statement

This is a research-based manuscript prepared and structured in a scientific narrative review format. Modern AI-assisted tools were used to access current and authentic information from digital archives, bibliographic databanks, online libraries, research articles, academic repositories, and encyclopedias.

Preprint Notice

This manuscript is shared as a non-peer-reviewed preprint on platforms such as Zenodo, SSRN, and Research Square to support scholarly discussion. The content is research-based and developed using publicly available and verifiable sources. Readers are encouraged to interpret the material as preliminary and subject to revision.

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This non-peer-reviewed article is shared for general academic discussion. AI tools were used to assist with clarity and organization. Readers are advised to independently assess and verify the information.

Literature Search and Information Management

Literature retrieval was conducted using a structured and reproducible search strategy in accordance with PRISMA-S reporting standards. Search strategies were independently evaluated using the PRESS framework to ensure methodological quality, accuracy, and completeness. Grey literature was systematically identified using the CADTH *Grey Matters* framework to enhance coverage of unpublished, non-indexed, and policy-relevant sources, thereby minimizing publication bias and improving evidence comprehensiveness.

Risk of Bias and Evidence Quality

Risk of bias was assessed using validated, design-specific tools (RoB 2, ROBINS-I, QUADAS-2/3, AMSTAR 2, Newcastle–Ottawa Scale, and CASP). The certainty of evidence and strength of recommendations were evaluated using the GRADE framework, ensuring a standardized and reproducible assessment across study designs.

Review Typology and Reporting

Review designs were classified into standard categories (scoping, umbrella, rapid, qualitative, and mixed-methods), with reporting aligned to established guidelines (PRISMA-ScR, PRIOR, PRISMA-RR, ENTREQ, and PRISMA/MMAT) to ensure methodological rigor and transparency.



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