

Pakistan's Economic Forecast for 2025

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Pakistan's Economic Forecast for 2025

Dr Usman W. Chohan

CASS Foresight & Outlook Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report forecasts key economic variables for Pakistan in 2025. It evaluates Inflation, Growth, Balance of Payments, Investment, and Debt levels, among other factors, thereby offering insights into the nation's short- and long-term economic trajectory amidst global turbulence. The report proceeds while keeping Pakistan's economic performance over the past decade in mind, noting that the twin disruptions of COVID-19 (2020-21) and Global Inflation (2022-24), have heightened economic volatility. The austerity measures tied to Pakistan's 2024 International Monetary Fund Agreement are also examined. As such, the report provides a nuanced perspective on navigating economic recovery and resilience in an increasingly unpredictable global landscape.

Keywords: Pakistan, IMF, Economy, GDP, Inflation, Emerging Market, Development, Projections.



INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to present forecasts for key variables in the Pakistan economy for the calendar year 2025. CASS has previously issued both economic forecasts,¹ as well as historical analysis on the economy,² and this is an important exercise in contemplating future scenarios in an age of increased global turbulence.

Some of the variables considered include GDP Growth, Inflation, Demographics, Investment, and Debt Levels — all of which shall matter for both the short- and long-term future economic trajectory of the country.³

The report proceeds by considering the previous ten-year record of the country for these variables, with two caveats in mind: first, that the twin disruptions of COVID-19 (2020-21) and Global Inflation (2022-24) have made the forecasting business in general a very tenuous one,⁴ as heightened volatility and unpredictability prevails in the global economy; and second, that there are considerable challenges confronting the world economy as a whole (wars, natural disasters, diseases, fast-moving technological breakthroughs), and not just Pakistan, which will bear down exogenously upon the country nevertheless.

² Usman W. Chohan, "Pakistan 2047: Optimizing our Future Economic Potential," (paper, Social Science Research Network, 21 May 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4813179; — "Pakistan 2047: The Future of our Industry," (paper, Social Science Research Network, 21 May 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4813187.

⁴ Usman W. Chohan, *Public Value and the Post-Pandemic Society* (London: Routledge, 2023).



¹ Aneeqa Safdar and Usman W. Chohan, "What Ails Pakistan's Economy? The Problems beyond Coronavirus," (paper, Social Science Research Network, 13 April 2020), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3573466; Usman W. Chohan, "Forecasting the Economic Impact of Coronavirus on Developing Countries: Case of Pakistan," (paper, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad, 2020), https://casstt.com/wpcontent/uploads/2023/02/SSRN-id3563616.pdf.

³ Usman W. Chohan, "Fiscal Sustainability: A Historical Analysis of Pakistan's Debt Conundrum," (paper, Social Science Research Network, 2019), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm%3Fabstract_id%3D3406537&ved=2ahUKEwi69NylqPi KAxWJUqQEHY9tH2cQFnoECBoQAQ&usg=AOvVaw33FrwD2OzjgvOLjHTxeP6f.

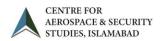
In that regard, although Pakistan's response to COVID-19 (2020-21) was sound,⁵ the response mustered for the Global Inflation crisis (2022-24) was more fragile and precarious. The currency devaluation, cost-of-living crisis, inflationary spikes, foreign reserve depletion, and GDP crunch, all left a severe dent from which Pakistan has yet to fully recover.⁶ The 2022 floods also caused severe economic devastation that left parts of the country (particularly rural riparian portions) struggling to fully recover.⁷

In early 2024, Pakistan concluded an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (2024), for a programme that brought considerable pressure to bear on the government for pursuit of an austerity-based reform agenda. While many of the measures in the programme do make eminent sense, in hindsight, the position of weakness from which the bargain was struck leaves much to be desired.

The second half of 2024 began to show that the Global Inflation crisis was subsiding,⁸ and that a better deal (a less exacting one in austerity terms) could have been struck. However, it would be premature to assume success at this stage.⁹ Any reforms that contribute to placing the country on a trajectory of sustainable and inclusive economic growth should be welcomed. There are certain assumptions that underlie this report which warrant mention:

- 1. Current forecast of 3.2% global GDP growth in 2025 is taken exogenously.¹⁰
- 2. Current forecast of 4.3% global inflation in 2025 is taken exogenously.¹¹

¹¹ International Monetary Fund, "World Economic Indicators 2024," https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/WEOWORLD [Accessed 15 January 2025].



⁵ Usman W. Chohan, "Analyzing Sound COVID-19 Policy Responses in Developing Countries: The Case Study of Pakistan," *Studia z Polityki Publicznej* 9, no. 2 (2022): 9-30.

⁶ Usman W. Chohan, "Save the Salaried Class," *Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies*, July 12, 2023, https://casstt.com/save-the-salaried-class/.

⁷ Chohan, *Public Value and the Post-Pandemic Society*.

⁸ Usman W. Chohan, "Fixing Pakistan's Budget," (paper, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad, 2024), https://casstt.com/fixing-pakistans-budget/.

⁹ Usman W. Chohan, "Winds of Change in the Economy," *Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies*, September 30, 2024, https://casstt.com/winds-of-change-in-the-economy/.

¹⁰ International Monetary Fund, "Pakistan: First Review Under the Stand-By Arrangement," press release, January 2024, https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2024/English/1PAKEA2024001.ashx&ved=2ahUKEwjSwJSQnfiKAx WSK_sDHSJuF_0QFnoECB8QAQ&usg=AOvVaw3WtG7AKV6WIkFO0ku0oCx6.

- 3. No *force majeure* natural calamity of the equivalent of the 2022 floods will occur.
- 4. Ongoing tensions in the Middle East will not escalate to the point of open war.
- 5. No epidemic with concomitant lockdown activity comparable to COVID-19 will occur.

With these considerations in mind, the report proceeds sequentially along each of the metrics pertaining to Inflation, GDP Growth, Balance of Payment, Investment, and Debt Levels. The forecasts are accompanied by pertinent commentary explaining both the historical trajectory as well the outward projections.

Methodology

This report deployed a mixed-methods approach to the economic forecasting that is based on **(A)** inputting macroeconomic subcomponents of aggregate demand, and **(B)** drawing qualitative inferences from the statements of multilateral institutions and the relevant government bodies.

For **(A)** the expenditure approach to aggregate demand is represented by the equation

GDP = C + I + G + (X - M)

to forecast Pakistan's key economic variables for 2025. This methodology decomposes Gross Domestic Product (GDP) into its core components: private consumption (C), investment (I), government spending (G), and net exports (X - M). Figures 3 (Real GDP), 5 (Exports & Imports), 7 (Savings Rate to GDP) are premised on this approach. The report's fundamental thesis is driven by the impact of falling inflation, and concomitant decline in interest rates, on any of C, I, G, and (X-M); and these are then cross-validated with expert forecasts (IMF, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and Finance Division [Pakistan]).

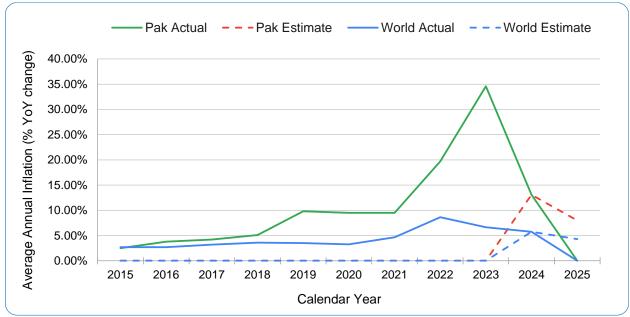
For (B), qualitative inferences are made on variables subject to (B1) exogenous imposition, including Figures 1 (inflation), 8 (FDI); and (B2) endogenous response, including Figures 2 (interest rates), 6 (exchange rates stability), and 9 (Debt). The qualitative inferences are vulnerable to significant adjustments due to international volatility (resurgent inflation, oil price fluctuations, international conflict), but they are cross validated with expert forecasts (IMF, World Bank, State Bank of Pakistan). Certain figures are for illustrative purposes and are taken from international projections (e.g. demographics as forecast by the World Bank). Overall, the forecasts are at best approximations that fall in-line broadly with multilateral bottom-up econometric models but are vulnerable to disruptive events.



PROJECTIONS

1. Inflation and Interest Rates

Figure 1: Average Annual Inflation Rates in Pakistan and the World (2015-2024) with 2025E Estimates



Sources: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Inflation Dataset" and International Monetary Fund. *Note:* Pak estimate by CASS, World estimate IMF.

Global inflation was persistently low prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, and there were even questions whether inflation could ever become a problem in the future.¹²

However, the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Global Inflation Crisis have demonstrated that a combination of supply chain disruptions, deglobalisation, industrial paralysis, international conflicts, and mass confinement can drastically impact economic stability and growth.

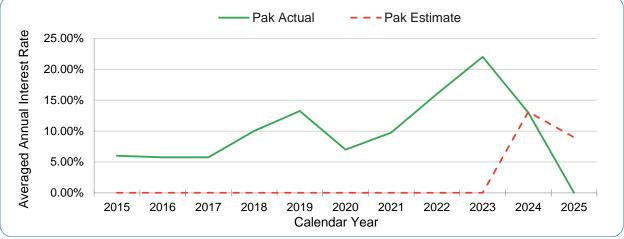
Global inflation spiked in 2022 following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war and took an undue toll on oil-importing emerging markets such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Oil imports drove a massive spike in inflation in Pakistan, which averaged 19.7% in 2022 and 34.6% in 2023. These are catastrophic numbers and caused immense

 ¹² Usman W. Chohan, "Modern Monetary Theory: An Introduction," (paper, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad, 2023), https://casstt.com/wpcontent/uploads/2023/02/EC017UC_-_Modern_Monetary_Theory_-_An_Introduction.pdf.

hardship for the common person in Pakistan. The government made many attempts to curb inflation, but the exogenous dependency on oil and non-oil imports meant that Pakistan imported its inflation in an order of magnitude greater than either its own past inflation readings or the world average for inflation. As domestic inflation figures fell in the second half of 2024, the government gained some breathing room, and things began to improve in terms of headline inflation numbers. The cost of living, however, is not the same as inflation, and the ordinary citizen continues to struggle.

The forecast of 2025E of 8% is derived from the ongoing monthly declines in inflation combined with the approximate inflationary target of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP targets the 5-7%). But there is a strong base effect at play: year-on-year figures will look small because of the extreme spikes they witnessed over the past two years. As the base effect wears off (in 2H2025), and as the SBP eases interest rates, average annual inflation is likely to be above the SBP target in the second portion of the year.





Source: State Bank of Pakistan, "Interest Rate Dataset." *Note:* Pak estimate by CASS.

In the previous decade, SBP had maintained a low interest rate to promote GDP growth and because their rate was still at a premium over near-zero global interest rates that had persisted since the 2008 financial crisis. In 2018 and 2019, part of the government's strategy included raising interest rates to attract international capital, particularly for overseas Pakistanis. COVID-19 led to drastic measures including a

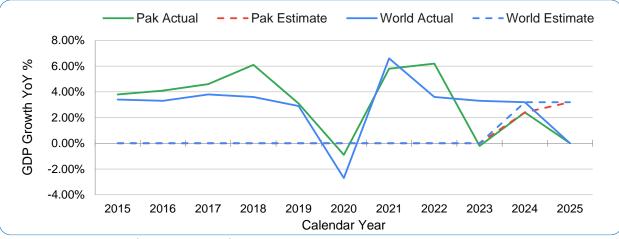


lowering of the interest rate and measures to protect targeted industries.¹³ But as the Global Inflation Crisis hit, the SBP reacted with extremely high interest rates, averaging 16% in 2022, a catastrophic 22% in 2023, and 13% in 2024 (which is the average of high interest rates in the first half and lower rates in the second). As we recall, businesses and industries largely shut down or scaled back operations under such conditions. However, fortunately, this was not a permanent state of affairs. In the second half of 2024, the SBP took a cautionary attitude towards reducing interest rates, even as inflation figures began sinking each month. The current SBP leadership is characterised by this cautious prudence, which will continue even as the headline inflation numbers stabilise by mid-2025. Due to the base effect, inflation numbers each month will seem low in the first half of 2025, well below SBP's inflation target of 5-7%. As the base effect diminishes, the SBP will have to strike a balance between inflation control and growth efforts, for which it has imposed significant strictures since 2022.¹⁴

Because of its conservative attitude, a lag in reaction, large base effect, the average annual interest rate of 2025 should be close to the 9% forecast.

2. GDP Growth

Figure 3: Annualised Real GDP Growth Rates in Pakistan and the World (2015-2024) with 2025E Estimates



Source: International Monetary Fund. *Note:* Pak estimate by CASS, World estimate IMF.

¹³ Usman W. Chohan, "TERF's Turf," *Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies*, July 19, 2023, https://casstt.com/terfs-turf/.

¹⁴ For example, delaying payments to importers or refusing to issue letters of credit (LoCs) on time.

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It must first be recognised that Pakistan's GDP composition lacks the most important driver of future growth: capital formation (investment). Even in recent decades, whenever Pakistan has had strong GDP growth, it has been driven by consumption and imports, rather than investment and exports. When COVID-19 hit, the world economy as a whole took a nosedive of almost -3% in 2020,¹⁵ but Pakistan's sound policy response meant that it braced for a slight decline that year (-0.9%). There was a rebound in 2021, but then Pakistan decoupled from the world economy with a decline of -0.2% while the world grew at +3.3%.

Investment should be a longer-term priority for the economy. In the shorter run, if economic conditions are to normalise in Pakistan due to interest rate reductions, inflation reduction, and import controls; then there is room for the economy to catch up to world growth rates, propped up by (1) strong remittances (driving consumption and foreign exchange), (2) industrial conditions improving, (3) and business activity resuming in a lower interest rate environment.

However, at the same time, the agricultural sector is giving signs of distress,¹⁶ and the IMF austerity conditions do weigh down on the country in a variety of ways:

- 1. Energy prices pressurising households,
- 2. Overall austerity clamping down on consumer spending, and
- 3. Insufficient overseas investment.¹⁷

Therefore, Pakistan is unlikely to surpass the global economic growth rate but is expected to track it closely. This is unfortunate, because Pakistan's per capita income is low, and it has much catching up to do before trailing the world economic growth rate would be satisfactory. In particular, Pakistan's population growth rate is very high by international standards, and that growth is occurring on top of an enormous existing base.

¹⁷ Overseas here signifies both international as well as overseas Pakistanis.

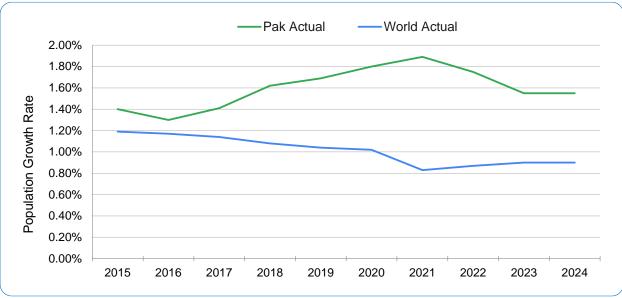


¹⁵ Usman W. Chohan, *Pandemics and Public Value Management* (London: Routledge, 2022).

¹⁶ The News, "Pakistan Faces Potential Wheat Shortfall as Farmers Reconsider Sowing," November 2, 2024, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1246530-pakistan-faces-potentialwheat-shortfall-as-farmers-reconsider-sowing.

An annual population growth rate of 1.5% adds approximately 3.6 million people—or 36 lakh—to Pakistan's population each year. This raises a critical question: who will provide them with employment, basic necessities, education, and other essential services? Year after year, the population continues to grow at a steady pace, while economic productivity struggles to keep up.

Figure 4: Population Growth Rate in Pakistan and the World (2015-2024)



Source: The World Bank, "World Bank Databank 2024." https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.

Pakistan experienced a 'baby boom' due to the COVID-19 Pandemic's lockdowns, while the world as a whole experienced a 'baby bust.' Global population rates are falling, while Pakistan's population growth rate remains well above the world's growth rate. This has consequences for GDP per capita income, when we forecast a GDP growth rate of 3.3% and a population growth rate of 1.5%, the net gain in per capita income is only 1.8%. This is why high investment rates are required.

3. Balance of Payments

Pakistan's exports over the past decade have hovered in the USD 30-40 billion range, which amounts to 8-10% of GDP.¹⁸ At the same time, Pakistan's imports have hovered

¹⁸ The world total is in the range of 25-35% exports-to-GDP in any year, since there are roughly USD 33 trillion worth of global exports and more than USD 100 trillion of global GDP.

in the USD 50-80 billion range, making its Balance of Payments (BOP) deficit very severe. Remittances have filled that gap and helped shoulder the burden to some extent, and they now exceed USD 36 billion per year.

It goes without saying that Pakistan must boost its exports significantly, but there are many hurdles to accomplishing this.¹⁹ There is also a new challenge on the horizon: US protectionism.

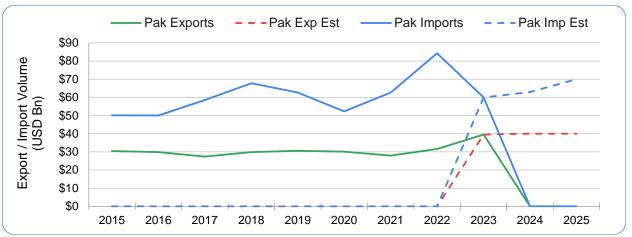


Figure 5: Pakistan Exports and Imports (2015-2024) in USD

Source: Trading Economics via World Bank Databank. *Note:* 2024 final figures are not yet available. 2025 estimate by CASS.

The Trump Administration 2.0 envisages tariffs and other protectionist measures to curb its own trade deficit.²⁰

The US alone accounts for 20-25% of Pakistan's exports in any given year, meaning that a new tariff regime in the US will be damaging for Pakistan's exports due to their price elasticity.²¹ This is why an immediate surge in 2025 exports cannot be expected.

²¹ The exception would be if the Trump Administration not only raised universal tariffs but also revoked its Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries that compete with Pakistan in key export areas such as textiles (e.g. Dominican Republic, Honduras).



¹⁹ Chohan, "Fixing Pakistan's Budget."; Safdar and Chohan, "What Ails Pakistan's Economy?"

²⁰ Usman W. Chohan "TRUMP: A Second Administration in Seven Economic Paradoxes," (paper, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Islamabad, 2024), https://casstt.com/trumpa-secondadministrationin-seven-economic-paradoxes/.

Far more reliance will be on the robust recent flow of remittances to address the gap. Yet as inflation falls and interest rates decline, there will be pressure on the government (including the Central Bank) to ease import restrictions, which are not bound by US protectionism. This risks a situation where the BOP situation worsens.

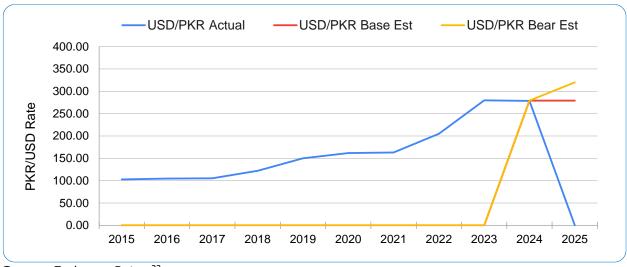


Figure 6: USD/PKR Exchange Rate (2015-Present)

In normal conditions, a worsening BOP situation would pressure on the Rupee. However, the rate has been carefully curtailed and managed within a narrow bandwidth since 2023, in order to kill the speculative attack by forex dealers.

The Rupee is not a free-floating currency, and it is very likely that it will be kept in a tight bandwidth going forward.

In 2015, the Pakistani Rupee stood at 100 to a dollar; by 2022, it had reached an alarming level of 300. The economic damage caused by a depreciating currency far outweighs any potential gains from the increased competitiveness of exports. Moreover, currency devaluation fuels economic uncertainty and erodes investor confidence, making it a challenging issue for any government.

²² Exchange Rates, "Exchange Rate History: USD-PKR," https://www.exchange-rates.org/exchange-rate-history/usd-pkr-2015.

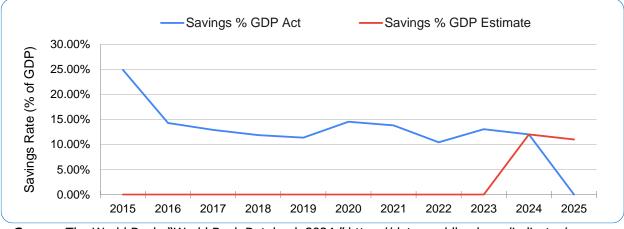


Source: Exchange Rates.²²

Thus, the PKR can be expected to remain around its current value (PKR 275-280) as a base case. The bear case in the chart (PKR 320) reflects the risk that depreciative pressures become too large for the government to withstand currency decline.²³

4. Investment

Figure 7: Pakistan Savings as % of GDP (2015-2024) with 2025E Estimates



Source: The World Bank, "World Bank Databank 2024," https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/.

As mentioned previously,²⁴ Pakistan's GDP growth has not been driven by strong capital formation (savings rates), and rather by consumption and imports. This is a very worrying statistic of 10-15%,²⁵ and it implies a lack of confidence in the future. The blips seen in 2020 and 2023 are not because of strong savings behaviour but rather by shrinking GDP (denominator).

Pakistan has witnessed significant capital and talent moving abroad in recent years, and this is part of the worry and the trend that must be stemmed. Fixing this will require many elements,²⁶ ranging from political stability to BOP equilibrium, to the rule of law, to overseas Pakistanis reinvesting in Pakistan.



²³ This may be due to shock to the foreign reserves amount, which may occur for a variety of reasons: excess burden of servicing foreign debt, reversals in remittances or a rise in oil prices.

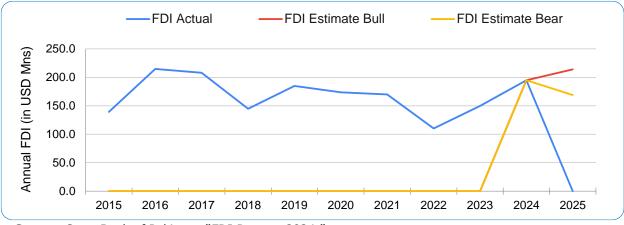
²⁴ Chohan, "Pakistan 2047: Optimizing our Future Economic Potential."

²⁵ By comparison, India's is approx. 25% and China's is 40%.

²⁶ Chohan, "Pakistan 2047: The Future of Our Industry."

The forecast for declining investment rate in the graph is merely a reflection of a higher forecast GDP (see Figure 3) rather than specific improvement in the savings rate.

Figure 8: Average Yearly FDI in Pakistan (2015-2024) with 2025E Estimates, in USD Millions



Source: State Bank of Pakistan, "FDI Dataset 2024."

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has remained within a narrow range of USD 0.1–0.25 billion annually over the past decade—a figure that translates to roughly USD 1 per person or even less. This persistently low level of investment should be a serious cause for concern, especially for a growing economy where FDI plays a crucial role in driving development. Fundamentally, Pakistan's approach to attracting and sustaining foreign investment has been flawed.

Successive governments have largely pursued FDI through engagements with large multinationals or government-to-government (G2G) agreements. This approach reflects a hierarchical mindset prioritising top-down interactions—rather than one driven by public value creation or entrepreneurial dynamism.

Various vehicles have been created in the past two years to facilitate foreign investment through 'one window' approaches, and by any reasonable measure, they have not yielded results yet.

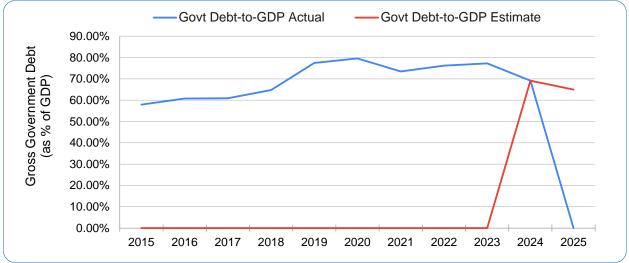
The best way to draw in FDI is through the intermediary linchpin overseas Pakistanis—who have all the right ingredients for driving investment: Human Capital, Financial Capital, and Network Capital.



If the focus is on their protection, empowerment, and inclusion, then FDI levels will be at an order of magnitude of the levels seen in Figure 8. Even if a generous forecast of USD 0.21 billion is granted as bull case²⁷ (Figure 8), this simply isn't the scale of activity required on the investment front - much less so if FDI trends follow a bear case of the average over the past decade.²⁸

5. Debt Levels

Figure 9: General Government Gross Debt-to-GDP Ratio for Pakistan (2015-2024) with 2025E Estimates



Source: International Monetary Fund, "DataMapper Tool 2025." https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper.

One of the most worrying issues is that of Pakistan's debt-to-GDP ratio, where the past five years in particular have seen levels above 70%, which would raise alarm bells in most other countries. Certainly, Pakistan must work towards lowering its debt-to-GDP ratio, and a significant effort within the IMF's programme pertains to managing this level and bringing it down adequately.

²⁸ The average annual FDI level over the previous decade USD 169 million.



²⁷ The bull case would be that FDI levels return to the peak over the last decade, at USD 216 million (2016).

Perhaps the harsh inducements of the IMF are not the most pleasant way to go about it, but it is likely that the ratio will fall in 2025 to the 64-67% range, partly because of forecast GDP growth, but also because the government has taken a variety of measures on this front (Figure 9).²⁹

There is a realisation now that we cannot kick the proverbial can down the road, and that debt to GDP must be brought down.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Pakistan's economic outlook for 2025 reflects a cautious and measured recovery in the midst of longstanding challenges. The 2020s, though only halfway complete, have already witnessed two major crises within just five years: COVID-19 and the Global Inflation Crisis. These events have pointed to a critical lesson for many countries, including Pakistan—that *delaying necessary action on debt management is no longer a viable option*.

For 2025, the projected GDP growth rate of 3.2% remains well below Pakistan's potential, particularly in terms of capital formation and investment. However, this potential is constrained not only by structural weaknesses but also by prolonged economic challenges such as inflation. Notably, a decline in inflation does not equate to a reduction in the cost of living—an issue that remains at the forefront of public concern. Meanwhile, a global environment of rising protectionism limits opportunities for export-driven growth and adds to the broader economic uncertainty. In short, while economic projections for 2025 are tenuous, they reflect the broader volatility of the times we live in.

²⁹ These measures include rolling over debts from sovereign creditors, negotiating with IPPs, shrinking the size of government, raising revenues through taxation, and the like. Not all of these measures have been equally successful, which is a reflection of political will and strong vested interests pushing against government reforms.





Dr Usman W. Chohan is an international economist and academic who was one of the founding Directors of CASS, now serving as Advisor to President CASS on Economic Affairs & National Development. He is among the Top 100 Authors across all subjects & disciplines (out of 1.2 million authors) on the Social Science Research Network (SSRN). At CASS, he has authored/edited eight books in the past five years, all published with Routledge. In the academic realm, his research has been cited widely, and Dr Chohan has testified before various authorities based on his technical expertise. He has been published in prestigious journals such as Policy & Society, International Journal of Public Administration, and Parliamentary Affairs.

Dr Chohan has a PhD in Economics from UNSW Australia and an MBA from McGill University (Canada), with coursework at MIT-Tsinghua. His previous practitioner experience includes working at the National Bank of Canada and the World Bank. He is also the President of the International Association of Hyperpolyglots (HYPIA). He appears frequently on domestic and international television, podcasts, and lecture series in various languages. He is also trained in South Asian musicology and plays the sitar. In addition, Dr Chohan has maintained an annual reading challenge of 100 books every year since 2011.

ABOUT CASS

Established in 2018, the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) in Islamabad is a non-partisan think tank offering future-centric analysis on aerospace and security issues. CASS engages with thought leaders and informs the public through evidence-based research, aiming to influence discussions and policies at the national, regional, and global level, especially concerning airpower, emerging technologies, traditional and non-traditional security.

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