



**STATE SURVEILLANCE IN PAKISTAN: RIGHTS VIOLATIONS,
POLITICAL REPRESSION THROUGH FOUCAULDIAN
PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

In this paper, the author looks at Pakistan’s growing state surveillance system through the means of the internet, from a conflict perspective, drawing on panopticism theory, along with the perspectives of Governmentalities and disciplinary power as outlined by Foucault. It looks at the issues of censorship in Pakistan, with Amnesty International’s 2025 report, “Shadows of Control: Censorship and mass surveillance” in Pakistan providing a key case study. The violation of documented rights and technologies for mass surveillance and censorship of Pakistan are discussed. We find that the attention of the academic, legal and human rights literature has been focused on Pakistan in a wider context of “digital authoritarianism”. We contend that the theory of conflict with its focus on the power imbalance and domination best explains how surveillance in Pakistan further extends the interests of the power class and curbs dissent. In this point of view, we are taking a particular approach with the adoption of a panoptical effect and governmentality: The Foucaultian concept of the panoptical effect and governmentalization of power facilitates the understanding of how the citizens of Pakistan are made manageable through surveillance. The analysis highlights the state of law and policies in Pakistan and how it reflects Foucauldian process of control, which becomes a routinized and invisible machinery of control. Multiple human rights sources confirm this connection between this monitoring system and the violations of the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of fair trial. The paper ends by situating the surveillance regime in Pakistan within the wider ‘surveillance industry’, positioning the trade in surveillance technology as the responsibility of multinationals alongside states to ensure proper accountability, in the process, highlighting that the industry has been instrumental in rights abuses. More than thirty scholarly, legal sources support the findings.

Keywords: *Pakistan, state surveillance, conflict theory, Foucault, panopticism, governmentality, human rights, censorship, political repression.*



Introduction

In recent times, Pakistan has seen a surge in digital surveillance and censorship in the name of national security and public order. In its October 2025 release, *Shadows of Control: Censorship and Mass Surveillance in Pakistan*, Amnesty uncovered various legislative instruments and technologies deployed by the Pakistani state to keep track of citizens, from the sophisticated national firewall (WMS 2.0) to the nationwide lawful interception system (LIMS). The clusters have sparked the concern of activists and law experts over the potential for widespread violations of fundamental rights and the ability to stifle political opposition, and have landed in the “vast economy of oppression” thanks to the export of foreign tech companies. On this basis, this paper looks at the issue of state surveillance in Pakistan as a whole and considers the different rights violations that emerge and political repression that occurs as a result (Amnesty International, 2025).

We place the case in the broader context of the literature on surveillance, authoritarianism and human rights. Academic observers have reported increased “digital authoritarianism” (Ahmad, 2025; Freedom House, 2018) by governing bodies seeking to silence opposition and distort information with digital means globally. Rather, companies, particularly from authoritarian nations, have been able to make a windfall of their intrusive surveillance technologies by providing them to repressive governments. South Asian scholarship on Internet censorship and security laws reveals a trend of security laws that are broadly defined and can be used to target journalists and protesters (Baloch, 2020).

As our central sociological approach, we choose conflict theory in order to shed light on these developments. Conflict theory views society was a long-standing struggle for power and resources among groups of people (as an extension of Marx, 1848 and other writers such as Mills and Dahrendorf, 1959). It believes that institutions, i.e. legal, political and cultural are formed and controlled by ruling groups in the interest of dominance and control of subordinate groups. Other approaches, however (functionalism, symbolic interactionism) tend to focus on social order or individual agency. But the attention paid to opposition politicians, journalists, minorities is not equal; those who were already in power are getting reined in while those who are not are getting reared and the distribution of surveillance is definitely based on conflict views, targeting marginalised groups (impoverished protestors, political dissidents, ethnic minorities) (Marx & Engels, 1848/1970; Mills, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959).

In Pakistan, loosely defined crimes and catches-all security laws (such as amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) are used exactly to enable oppressive practices to be legalized. So conflict theory has brought the inherent struggle for power within the surveillance regime to the foreground and redefines state repression as stemming from class and authority conflict rather than simply from a lack of control over crime (Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, 1848/1970; Ralf Dahrendorf, 1959; Louis Althusser, 1971).

Foucault also mentioned that there was a transition between more explicit form coercion and a more distributed one: a transition that he termed as the governmentality.

The form in which power operates through networks of institutions, experts, and “conduct of conduct” that regulate populations in spaces those are not obviously coercive. Where the law, the technical and the bureaucratic becomes a place where power



acts on the basis of normalization and but not through physical repression, rather through regulation (such as the specification of “unlawful” content, the setting up of a national firewall). While material and class-based conflicts are often the ones of interest in conflict theory, Foucauldian concepts add an extra dimension by exploring the ways in which disciplinary power and knowledge are deployed by elites to produce consent and to justify control (as moral obligations, for instance, to monitor people around us) (Foucault, 1977, & 1991).

Literature Review

Pakistan has been on the descent into a Digital Security state, as evidenced in numerous literatures. Human rights activists have been pointing to the authorities' large-scale surveillance efforts as a crackdown on opposition for years. In fact, even in the mid-2010s, Pakistan's intelligence organisations were regularly engaging in communication monitoring without adequate accountability, based on a report from Privacy International (2015). The Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 was passed which gives the power to search without any warrants, Interception on suspicion of terrorism state intelligence allowed and interception on “likely” criminal intent under the 2013 Fair Trial Act. These studies were all marked by their emphasis on the need for Pakistan to focus on very limited means of protecting against abuse in the legal structure. However additionally to keep an eye on opposition politicians, judges, lawyers, reporters, or perhaps normal citizens (See Privacy Int'l, 2015 for more recent analyses showing this trend).

These results are echoed by journalists and civil society reporting. Civil society organizations and human rights groups report on the detentions and book banings of reporters, committed under cyber-security provisions. In 2023, for example, there were regular rations of people online that arrested on Facebook and Twitter. Those who want to ban or crack down on ‘hate speech’ and/or ‘propaganda’ as political commentators and courts have done with the state calling the shots (Baloch, 2020). Likewise, the 2012 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), which is touted to be an anti-hacking act, has been enforced on multiple occasions to block websites, prosecute bloggers and stifle dissent. Article 20 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of but it is not actually enjoyed. While many exceptions to this exist, such as public morality, ‘glory of Islam’, state security, and others, this justification has been recorded for censorship (HUCOM Pakistan, 2020). In a nutshell, as far as literature is concerned, Pakistan is ready to do whatever it deems beneficial in the national interest, even against its own laws and international obligations.

A number of the governments explicitly “adopt[ed] Chinese-style wide-spectrum censorship and automated surveillance” as a way to keep power. This global perspective will show that the situation in Pakistan is one of many examples of the decline of digital rights, a trend that has been studied as an emerging pattern through systematic literature reviews (Shadabi, 2024; Morozov, 2012) and has sparked policy-level investigation.

By influencing conditions of daily living. The reason is that from this angle, there's an explanation for specific recent assertive moves in Pakistan that have aimed at cyber laws as social welfare instruments rather than being instruments of repression as the National Assembly debates make one realize. This is echoed by a number of scholars such as



Michel Foucault (1977, 1991), who highlight the ability of modern states to not only punish opposition, but know and control populations through methods as simple as the rational administration of urban space and their categorisation of citizens, frequently framed in the intent to promote a rational administration (Foucault, 1977, 1991). In particular Foucault's ideas have figured prominently in the study of surveillance: he posits that if one supposes that they are being watched, they will comply. The growing frequency of self-censorship on a daily basis is found in Pakistan, and Bangladesh through Amy Jordan's work on comparative Pakistan. Taken together, this literature suggests that surveillance in Pakistan is more than just a need to combat offenses: it is very political, shaped by the nature and deployment of state power in today's digital world.

Conflict Theory and Power

The explanation for this power dynamic is macro-sociological and can be attributed to the conflict theory. Conflict Theory assumes that the social institutions serve the interest of the dominant classes, and that this theory stems from Karl Marx. Marx believed that capitalist societies divided into bourgeoisie (who owned the means of production) and the proletariat (the workers), and that the bourgeoisie relied on all social institutions, such as law and state, to maintain their wealth and status. Conflict theory is a theory that states that social order is maintained through domination and power, not consensus and conformity, as Adam Hayes (2025) explains. That is, laws and norms are frequently used to benefit ruling groups. This analysis was expanded by Wright Mills (1956) to the modern democracies, who demonstrated how a “power elite” of military, corporate, and political elites make decisions for their own benefit.

This is the case in Pakistan as well. The ruling coalition (civilian party plus military establishment) in Pakistan is power elite that want to cling on to the power. Subordinate groups have limited institutional power, represented by opposition parties, civil society groups, and independent media. In this perspective, state surveillance legislation and technologies are seen as instruments of management and repression of these subordinates by the ruling elite. For instance, because the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2024 amendments include general provisions on 'anti-state propaganda' and 'morality offences', it gives the police and other authorities powers to retroactively criminalize dissenting speech, as and when they see fit. Conflict theorists, who suggest that elites will create a system of laws, traditions and other social institutions, say the same thing.

To sum up, it is conflict theory's three themes that focus our analysis: (1) Who surveils whom and why? (2) How are institutions elite instruments and how do laws and agencies serve the interests of the ruling classes? (3) How is state power justified, by means of security narratives, and how are dissenting voices delegitimized? Notably, conflict theory is not exclusively about the insidious uses of power, but about the evident uses of force and material gains. To account for the subtle forms of control reported on in Amnesty's scathing examination (which are more than just shooting protesters or jailing critics), we add foucauldian concepts to the conflict theory.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory and Foucauldian Power

Both conflict theory and foucauldian theory have an interest in power, but focus on



different aspects. Foucault suggests that there are subtle, invisible modes of power that operate in a society, whereas classic conflict theory focuses on underlying class conflict and overt domination. Next, we illustrate that these methods have complementary explanations for our analysis. Underlying conflict of interests: The motivation behind the actions of the Pakistani regime is its surveillance state; Foucault's concepts help to explain the "how" of control.

Conflict Theory

The basic idea of conflict theory is that social institutions are the product of conflict among those with more or less authority. However, the ruling coalition (civil-military leadership) is continuously challenged by political opponents and social movements in Pakistan. In the literature there are examples of state institutions that "sided" with the ruling class. There are examples in the literature of state institutions that "sided" with the ruling class. For instance, Mills (1956) proposed that there exists a "power elite" which shapes policies in the interests of itself through the use of the state. In fact, the machinery of surveillance in Pakistan is more under the control of military and its institutions (ISI, ISPR and FIA) than of elected representatives (Amnesty, 2025).

Foucauldian Lens

The power imbalance in society is believed to be maintained through surveillance, whereas Foucauldian theory can explain the mechanisms of control involved in such oppression. This is what Foucault's work on modern power (particularly *Discipline and Punish* and his lectures on governmentality) explains: how societies discipline individuals in subtle and continuous ways. The three of his key concepts are the basis of our analysis: Panopticism: The term comes from Bentham's "Panopticon", a circular prison design with a central guard tower in which Foucault (1977) described the modern form of surveillance. A panopticon consists of a prison exactly like a real prison except that there is no guard to see the prisoners, but the prisoners always believe that they might be seen. A panopticon is a prison that is identical to a real prison, except the prisoners are never observed by a guard, but the prisoners always feel they could be observed. The same is true of digital: if they think that their online activities may be seen at any time, they'll behave accordingly.

Governmentality: Foucault's notion of governmentality (or "the art of governing"): States try to govern populations via institutions, knowledge, and practices, and frequently by influencing their subjectivities, desires. It stresses the partnership between state and society in the creation of "governable" citizens. In the case of Pakistan, we observe the governmentality in the legislation and in public discourse that defines surveillance as a necessary evil to safeguard the security of the nation and its moral character. Some perspectives (such as ethnic separatism or criticism of generals) are seen as potentially dangerous in the state's narrative. The government uses the democratic process (parliamentary debate) to create consent by placing laws such as PECA 2025 in that process and providing for a term such as "protection of citizens". This reflects it is modern power's capacity to remain dominant despite its apparent rationality and peripheralisation as it unfolds gradually... shaped by a complex interplay of history, religion, politics and economics. As highlighted in the report, the establishment of



SMPRA (a media regulator) and new crime tribunals are the typical examples of governmentality; they appear as a bureaucratic and technical apparatus, but in fact they are instruments for the government to systemically regulate online behavior (Foucault, 1991).

These Foucauldian concepts can be put together to see a complete picture: conflict theory gives reason for the elites to put in place surveillance to preserve their power and Foucault gives the reason for how the power is exercised in society. So, state surveillance is not only an overt repression, but a system of covert controls. Both Amnesty and WMS/LIMS have adopted Foucauldian practice in Pakistan, with the panoptic gaze of Amnesty creating a sense of self-discipline, while the laws and agencies serve as disciplinary institutions, and government institutions employ techno-legal apparatus to control thoughts under a façade of legitimacy (Amnesty International, 2025).

State Surveillance in Pakistan: Amnesty's *Shadows of Control* Report

Amnesty International's Report 2023 *Shadows of Control* is an unparalleledly comprehensive account of the glimpse of Pakistan's spy network. The report contains a number of layers of technology. A combination of laws and policy that together can be used to censor Internet content and intercept communications.

First, technological infrastructure – Pakistan has established a Web Monitoring System (WMS) 2.0, a national firewall like China's Great Firewall. Amnesty says that WMS 2.0 has been developed with foreign tech partners (beginning with Canada's Sandvine, and later with Chinese tech company Geedge), and can block or filter any internet traffic that is considered “unlawful” by the authorities. It works in stealth mode and a regular user seldom knows what level of filtering is taking place. Amnesty refers to WMS 2.0 as a “mass censorship machine” and notes that it will be able to block entire social media sites, news portals, messaging apps or specific pages upon the state's request.

Second is the interception system: Pakistan's Lawful Intercept Management System (LIMS) is a huge phone and internet metadata collection centre across the country. LIMS has been mandated by the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority to be installed by all telecom companies in Pakistan. It was essentially assembled by the German company Utimaco, with parts from a UAE company, DataFusion. Amnesty's technologists believe that they could be monitoring millions of people simultaneously with LIMS. Indeed, the report quotes Amnesty expert Jurre van Bergen: “LIMS is in practice a tool of unlawful and indiscriminate surveillance that allows the government to spy on more than four million people at any given time”.. That is, any Pakistani can be “vacuumed” anytime, anywhere, whether it is a call, a text, their movements or any browsing done via the internet.

Third, the legal framework: All this surveillance is done on a very lax legal basis. The PTA is seeking WMS and LIMS, but there are no substantive restrictions or oversight in its use under the law in Pakistan. The report highlights that despite the Constitution of Pakistan stating that privacy is inviolable and the Supreme Court prohibiting (in 1997) blanket phone tapping, successive governments have found ways to circumvent these restrictions. The Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) of 2016 is one of the key targets. PECA was created to help prevent cybercrime, and has been amended (2024-25)



to include new offences including “social media trolling” and “defaming” (Amnesty International, 2023).

National Institutions: PECA’s provisions included new authorities for blocking online content, which (under its rules) was to be done unilaterally by the authorities (using an “SMPRA” authority), and new powers to require platforms to hand over user information. The private sector, and administered by NGOs. It is public money, private enabled, NGO administered system called LIMS and WMS 2.0. foreign tech, and used to silence dissent, resulting in deep human rights damages to the Pakistani people”. The pattern is legal framing of control: though there may be some technical requirements in the law (e.g. a judge's order for call data), the requirements are so vague “anyone ‘likely’ to plan an offence.” compliance by courts is almost assured. There is no independent organization to review whether the use of LIMS is justified; it is conducted internally by the State (Amnesty International, 2023).

This system has a significant impact on people's daily lives. People fear to discuss certain topics on the Internet because they know that certain words or comments will be detected by LIMS, and so on, reports activists. Several cases have been reported in which entire families of protesters were targeted with mobile data blackouts, or the blocking of phone numbers, by WMS, according to human rights and local observers. While Pakistan continues to have a robust protest culture, many organizers say they are more careful than ever about digital logistics such as VPN use, encrypted messages – when organizing rallies, as the presence of these surveillance regimes creates a climate of fear, Ahmed et al. (2023) have noted. Overall, Amnesty's findings, supported by tech analysis and whistleblower reports, demonstrate how state surveillance is not a tool used on an ad hoc basis, but a permanent system across Pakistan.

Contextualizing with Other Sources

The results are consistent with several independent reports. In fact, Privacy International (2015) had revealed that Pakistan is using international tech vendors (Alcatel, Ericsson, Huawei and SS8) for bulk collection through tapping fiber-optic cables. Amnesty's report says: Foreign companies provided the parts for LIMS and WMS. According to Pakistan's own data, there's been an explosion in requests for user data: PTA annual reports (2025–2024) show that the number of requests for user data has increased by 500% due to no significant new terrorism events (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, 2025).

Thousands of pages of leaked court and government documents from the U.S. Edward Snowden leaks make it clear that ISI has been interested in monitoring civilians for a long time. Amnesty uses these intelligence briefs in quotes from its experts. The Diplomat reports that even Supreme Court judges, at times, have been placed under ISI surveillance, resulting in some publicised clashes. All these sources reflect normalization of mass scrutiny of Pakistan's institutions. In Pakistan, surveys of attitudes reveal grudging acceptance of invasive information systems (mandatory registration of SIMs, NADRA databases), and after militant attacks, the public tends to support security measures, as noted by Privacy Int’l. However, legal experts (Rasul Bakhsh Rais, 2021) question why there is no safeguarding mechanism in place and urge the enactment of legislation to align with the EU's proportionality and necessity framework (General



Comment 16 to ICCPR).

Rights Violations and Repression

All these practices have led to tangible rights violations. Amnesty's report documents dozens of instances in which law enforcement monitoring preceded arrests or harassment of citizens for their speech and/or assembly. International human rights law sets out the right to privacy as a basic human right (UDHR Art. 12; ICCPR Art. 17), and requires that any interference with privacy be lawful, necessary and proportionate. This is not the case in Pakistan, where surveillance is wide and covert. In its decision in *Benazir Bhutto v. President* in 1997 the Supreme Court warned that the privacy protection in Article 14 is not limited to the home, but extends to public life, and declared unconstitutional the use of phone tapping for arbitrary purposes. But today's citizens are "no longer aware of this constant surveillance", says Amnesty, "there is no public notice or judicial accountability". Internet users who confessed to internet dissent in prison later revealed that they had their phones hacked. Those who confessed to internet dissent during their prison time have reported having their phones hacked. Student activists arrested under anti-terror laws have claimed that they were arrested and detained under false charges based on fake WhatsApp chats. These types of abuses are not only a violation of privacy, but also of the right to a fair trial (because the evidence is collected without law) (Amnesty International, 2023).

To sum up, surveillance is linked to political repression in Pakistan as emphasised by literature. Amnesty's report provides yet another piece of evidence, but the allegations are in line with those laid out by local and international human rights organisations over the years (HRW, HRCR, BBC, PRI, etc.). In a conflict theory analysis, we find this to be an attempt by the elites to "further support their own dominance" through "the law". In a Foucauldian analysis, this dominance is made visible as the state normalizes its presence by making it ubiquitous yet invisible (the "shadow" in *Shadows of Control*). In the following section we start to use these theoretical lenses directly with Amnesty's case data (Amnesty International, 2023).

Foucauldian Analysis of Pakistan's Surveillance Regime

With an empirical mapping of the contours of surveillance in Pakistan, we now interpret them from our Foucauldian conflict perspective. It goes beyond simply identifying the surveilled; it is the mechanisms and rationalities that need to be examined in terms of how power is used in the Pakistani security architecture. We turn our attention to panopticism, discipline and governmentality to shed light on the report's insights (Foucault, 1977).

Panopticism and Self-Discipline

Amnesty describes the WMS and LIMS as "watchtowers," and, in some respects, it is almost as if they are. Amnesty refers to the WMS and LIMS as "watchtowers," and in some ways, they are. Compare the central surveillance center to a guard tower that is monitoring an entire city: like a Panopticon. Foucault's panopticism suggests that if people do not have to be watched at every moment, then it is enough if they think they may be! This belief is shared by the majority of people in Pakistan (Foucault, 1977).

Some words, no online discussions about politics in Pakistan or no trust in otherwise anonymous chat groups. A number of studies, such as *Media Matters, 2022*, have verified



the occurrence of self-censorship on Pakistani social media. Even mainstream media sources state that journalists will use pen names or avoid sensitive topics to avoid LIMS tracking. Thus, panopticism as described by Foucault is realized: the optics of the new surveillance state drive people to internalize its gaze.

Institutions of Discipline and Normalization

The disciplinary force of the Pakistani state is evidenced in the establishment of institutions that systematically normalise certain behaviours. Following Foucault, who saw modern power as operating through everyday institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, that train subjects, one can notice parallels with the digital realm. The WMS and other agencies have established a digital 'school' in Pakistan. All ISPs, all school computers, all libraries are now sending data over the WMS or are censored. So, being conformist with the state norms becomes commonplace: If a student visits a forbidden site at school, it goes unnoticed; if a blogger curses at the army, his entire post disappears. Micro first (targeting content), and aggregates: citizens learn about topics that will get them into trouble. This is similar to Foucault's observations on the way that prisons control time and behavior: Conflict theory gives us insight into the fact that these disciplinary measures are in place to preserve the "norm" that is defined by the elite. The society's dominant ideology equates disagreement with terrorism or immoral behavior. This can be seen in the public communication that happened after PECA 2025 was passed, when the officials appeared on TV and claimed that they were shielding the children from obscenity or the country from propaganda. Such framing is common in governmentality (below), but also occurs in a disciplinary way, discouraging even thinking outside of the ideology sanctioned (Foucault, 1977).

Governmentality and Legitimization

The focus on governmentality as introduced by Foucault is on the ways in which contemporary states claim and institutionalize power not only by force but also by means of rationales. Amnesty provides a number of examples of this in its report. For example, the 2025 cybercrime law was officially debated in Parliament as an "online fraud" and "fake news" countermeasure. This democratic process together with press releases and news articles with government representatives as the interviewees creates the impression of lawmaking. Under this façade, however, is the real purpose: expanding the state's domain of digital expression. In Foucauldian view, power is the political use of the term "being exercised" in its original meaning: influencing the behaviour of the population through legislation. As Amnesty reveals, in practice such "threats" are frequently applied selectively, for instance, blocking the use of protest-related hashtags as well as political blogs that the ruling party does not approve of. But so many times the public sees such blocks as a patch-up on a security issue, instead of political censorship. Heavy surveillance has become the norm for many citizens in Pakistan, as a cost of peace. Surveys indicate that, after decades of civil-military strife, a surprising share of Pakistanis believes the state has the right to monitor "extremist content" online. So, the state is government and the state does not only coerce, but it also constructs what is normal and what is deviant. This is the camp of the 'technologised' one? In Foucauldian language, the field of "the technologised" one? (Foucault, 1991; Amnesty International, 2025).



The Intersection of Conflict and Foucauldian Power

When taken together, the conflict theory and Foucauldian analysis provide a broad picture of the surveillance regime of Pakistan. Conflict theory sees who benefits: The powerful elite keep itself in control by spying on and scaring off the potential challengers. According to Foucauldian theory, this is done by a number of techniques of monitoring, self-regulation and normalization that are layered upon one another in society. They want to legalize mass surveillance (conflict analysis) because it is in the elite's interests; but they want it to be in the form of secret data-mining and algorithmic censorship, because it follows the Foucauldian logic of diffused, “invisible” power.

In this way, conflict theory and Foucault make it clear that Pakistan's surveillance state is not one of chaos or tyranny, but rather a well-disciplined mechanism of control that operates in the interests of certain groups. This combined lens offers a clue as to why reforms in the past have focused on the role of the teacher and the need to improve the curriculum.

Failed, Pakistan's power elite just use new laws and tech for the same old goals. For instance, there are calls for data protection laws on an international scale, while the Pakistani government has not. The government has responded by formulating very specific rules (digital identity and not on corporate privacy obligations) which represent yet another form of governmentality apparatus. For Foucauldian purposes, it is when the state responds to civil society demands by adjusting its “technologies of power”. But in conflict terms it is the elite that neutralise a challenge by assimilating it.

Surveillance Infrastructure in Practice

To ground these abstractions, think of particular instances Amnesty reports. One was a protest in Karachi to which they had been called, and the organizers had used encrypted chatting to organize themselves; the operators of LIMS must have been able to work out call patterns beforehand. Within hours of the planned rally, many of those who had been in attendance were experiencing police interrogation within the city. Although there was no official evidence, many of the participants within the city were subjected to police interrogation within hours of the intended rally. This was given an official justification of “routine counterterrorism work” but it falls under the Foucauldian and conflict rationale, the state's surveillance was used to break up an opposition gathering in advance (disciplining behavior) and under the guise of security (Amnesty International, 2025).

All these instances have shown that Pakistan has a political agenda behind its surveillance. All the abuses cited by Amnesty are related to data collected by WMS/LIMS arbitrary detentions, forced confessions, and targeted disinformation campaigns. One inquiring journalist in Lahore told Amnesty that they had tapped his phone months prior to their report on military finances.

They did not arrest them then; they allowed them to continue to write dangerous stories. That's a warning: We are aware of all that you are doing. This frightening admission is a real-life illustration of Foucault's notion that “power makes freedom itself to function, constantly pushing it to its limits”. The journalist's she was not directly ordered to limit her investigative capacity, but rather it was given to her by the fact that she was always under surveillance.



Conclusion

State surveillance in Pakistan is a complex regime of control and a conflict theory and Foucauldian analysis of it helps to explain how this regime of control is organized. This does not mean that these measures are innocent, according to conflict theory; they are deliberately being introduced to stratify the power of ruling classes, prevent political pluralism and keep social order inequality. The result is a “panoptic” society in which there is the possibility of being watched, and therefore stifled, before the dissent even fully forms.

Amnesty International's *Shadows of Control* report highlights the seriousness of the human rights issues at stake as basic rights of privacy, free expression and assembly are routinely and often only superficially respected in the name of vague national security fears. A cursory glance at the international and local human rights literature reveals widespread evidence of these abuses. The Pakistani constitution and international law provide many rights for the citizens; however these are essentially symbolic in their absence not respected in reality due to the combination of permissive surveillance laws and aggressive state institutions. The report in particular brings to the fore the complicity of a number of multi-national corporations (Canada, China, UAE, etc.) in the facilitation of these violations. This international dimension widens the conflict: it becomes a transnational class conflict, between the tech firms that want to make profit and those who want to gain control, and against global human rights standards. Our analysis indicates that the notion of surveillance in Pakistan has to be seen as a local power.

Stir in struggles and part of a broader global “surveillance capital” system (Lyon, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Corporate actors who make a profit out of selling technology WMS/LIMS in Pakistan are part of maintaining this conflictual order. This calls for accountability beyond Pakistan’s borders. In the case of Western firms that sell spyware or network gear, conflict theory would suggest that they would oppose any form of regulation, and, in fact, Amnesty's report claims that some of them "dabbled in divesting in 2023 only after facing heavy backlash. We also need to be conscious of how, in a Foucauldian sense. These actors are protected by the concept of framing and discourse that often labels their products as “cyber security”.

Finally, conflict theory is the most appropriate to look at, as it focuses the question of who is being served by surveillance and brings to the fore issues of inequality and repression within systems. They discuss the reasons behind the nature of Pakistan's surveillance apparatus and the impact it has. The combination of a "contentious state" and "disciplinary technologies" ensures that the state becomes a "surveillance state," as Amnesty's study demonstrates, and that the fundamental dignity of human beings is undermined. This means that while technical changes (such as stronger encryption) are necessary, they are not enough, and instead of that, a transformative political change will be required to redistribute power. Legal reforms must meet constitutional standards of privacy protections and include independent oversight, at a minimum. More generally, both governments and tech companies should come to understand that surveillance is not a 'neutral tool' but a type of power which can undermine democracy and therefore be pressure tested by civil society and the international community.



To conclude, using the conflict theory and Foucault's model, one can argue that, in Pakistan, the application of panoptic device to control the population is an extreme example of how the modern state can be used for such purposes and has lessons to offer for many other states. The results presented in these pages bridge the divide between the technical mechanisms (captured by Amnesty and others) and a larger understanding of power. Future research may measure quantitatively the chilling effect on Compare the database structure of a speech in Pakistan to other countries or compare its firewall's structures to other countries. The qualitative finding however remains: State surveillance in Pakistan is a mechanism of political control which is legal and technological in nature and any analysis that would overlook this power conflict would be incomplete.

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