Pakistan's AI Ambitions: Realistic or Not?

Outline

1) Introduction.

Thesis Statement:

Pakistan is seeing an ambitious push for AI integration in the policy circles. Policies have been approved, funds made and oversight bodies formed; however, a deeper look at Pakistan's AI ambitions reveal a divide between ambitions and reality. The reality reveals infrastructural gaps, outdated laws and regulatory hurdles, expounding how these AI ambitions are divorced from reality.

2) Pakistan's AI goals are strong; its crucial to see whether it has equally strong infrastructure to implement them

3) Pakistan's AI Ambitions are not Realistic (Thesis)

a) Lack of necessary awareness and skills amongst general public

b) Present infrastructure is not ready to support AI integration

c) Available data models are low quality and are not compatible with proposed goals.

d) Pakistan lacks a data protection law that fits international standards
e) Current AI policy is weak regarding regulatory issues.

4) Pakistan's AI Ambitions and Goals are Tailored to Local Contexts and Holistic Enough to Drive AI Revolution (Anti-thesis)

a) Government is pursuing a training program for awareness and training
b) E-governance initiative has greatly improved digital infrastructure in the post-COVID era
c) AI-Data Centers and government supported tech companies will provide local AI models.
d) Collaborative work with international stakeholders is in progress to formulate [illegible]
e) AI council has been formulated to cater to regulatory issues

Your thesis was that AI ambitions are not realistic.

5) Despite these efforts, the goals seem too ambitious to be achieved easily. (Synthesis)

a) How the trained professionals will contribute to tangible economic outcomes is unclear
b) Electricity outages and internet

black-outs will still jeopardize the plans

c) how government will finance these data centers has not be clarified; could lead to future financial hurdles

d) Data protection laws often lack implementation powers in Pakistan

e) An AI Council with no teeth will not help much.

6) Conclusion

Improve points of your synthesis
Use transition devices to bring coherence
Structure of your essay is fine
Try to give more compelling arguments

Commenting on the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the former CEO of IBM, Ginni Rometty says: "AI will not replace humans, but those who use AI will replace those who don't." Pakistan is one of the few countries in Asia that realizes this potential and is trying hard to harbour it. Pakistan is seeing an ambitious push for AI integration in the policy circles. Policies have been made, funds approved, and oversight bodies formed; however, a deeper look at Pakistan's AI ambitions reveal a divide between ambitions and reality. The reality reveals infra-structural gaps, outdated laws and regulatory hurdles, expounding how these AI ambitions are divorced from reality. The primary need for realizing the country's AI potential is public awareness and readiness, which is lacking. Infrastructural readiness is yet another hurdle. Quality of data models and absence of robust data protection laws is also worrisome. In terms of policy, Pakistan lacks regulatory safeguards. In response to

all of these concerns, AI optimists expound that the goals and ambitions set so far are tailored to Pakistan's context and realistic enough for AI revolution. They highlight the vastly improved digital infra-structure and burgeoning IT sector as the base for their optimism. They are also hopeful that collaborative work with international experts along with committed efforts of the government will provide a push strong enough to drive AI revolution. Even if one believes that these aspirations will translate into reality, it is hard to ignore certain policy loopholes. First, it is hard to ignore the lack of long term policy and infrastructural gaps that Pakistan faces. Second, there is the issue of financial management. Lastly, the issues of regulatory hurdles also remain unresolved. With such realities, it is hard to say that Pakistan's AI ambitions are realistic.

With the approval of Pakistan's AI Policy (2025) by federal cabinet, the country is abuzz with debates and discussions on whether the

country is about to be changed by AI or if this is a policy based on lofty target. AI optimists are lauding the policy for its vision and the government's will for change. The ambitions and goals set at this stage can act as blueprint for drastic transformation in country. However, it is also crucial to view these ambitions under a critical lens to ensure that they rooted in reality and easily achievable. Any set of AI ambitions or goals that are divorced from reality can lead to loss of potential and momentum.

The most valid argument that critics of Pakistan's AI policy cite is the lack of necessary skills and awareness in the general public. For any sort of AI-led transformation to take place, the involvement and readiness of general public is crucial. Unfortunately in Pakistan, even general awareness of technology is low. With such a background, it is hard

to achieve a large scale AI-led revolution that reaches general populace, transforms economy or benefit the public. The coverage of telecom services in Pakistan currently stand at 80.3% (PTA, July, 2025). Twenty percent of Pakistan still lacks basic telecom services. With such a scenario it is hard to think of an AI environment that will benefit the masses.

A look at the current IT infrastructure also reveals that it is not ready to support AI integration on large scale. Pakistan's AI policy (2025) envisions training of one million AI professionals till 2030. Howevere, it fails to explain how it is going to do so when major universities in Pakistan lack advanced computing systems and connectivity networks. With such an education and training ecosystem, training of students in AI will produce graduates with inadequate skills only. According to the experts at Switch (2025), what the country needs to focus on prior to largescale training of AI experts is

the upgradation of computer labs in top universities and improvement of infrastructure at AI datacenters and labs across Pakistan. Without these changes, AI revolution will remain a mere dream.

Another reason why Pakistan's AI ambition seem unrealistic is the poor quality of data models available in the country. AI policy (2025) aims to produce 50,000 civic products and 1000 AI-based solutions by 2030. Given the quality of data models available in Pakistan (which are either in English or in poorly-integrated Urdu), the attainment of these goals seems impossible. According to the CEO Switch, Danielle Sharaf, most companies in Pakistan use Meta's Llama or Chatgpt to built tool. Both of these models are in English and not compatible for the products and solutions that Pakistan aims to launch. Besides these models, the local ones are too poor in quality and need to be improved drastically.

In the realm of data protection and secure AI, Pakistan lacks a robust framework that can fit the standards used internationally. When it comes to expanding the use of AI to Pakistani populace, safety and security are the biggest concerns. So far Pakistan lacks such robust data protection laws. The laws drafted for this purpose are pending and have failed to get attention of legislature since 2017. The only functional law we have in this realm is PECA (2016) and The Electronic Transactions Ordinance (2002), both of which are outdated and ill-equiped to deal with data protection integrated with AI systems.

Regulatory loopholes are yet another area that make Pakistan's AI policy seem unrealistic. The policy fails to elaborate on how it plans to oversee the development of AI ecosystem. In such a condition, it is unclear who will oversee the ethical use of datasets and who will ensure that no conflict of interest

occurs. According to the experts, the absence of regulatory safeguards and rules for algorithmic fairness can lead an AI ecosystem that is marred with closed datasets and regulatory hurdles. (Pakistan's AI Policy 2025: Bold on Vision, Thin on Law, Heavy on Hope, The Nation, September 2025). AI is not a system that works in silos, it needs interoperability and secure interoperability demands the presence of robust data protection laws. Without such laws, AI ambitions of Pakistan will fail to achieve large-scale transformation.

Countering these arguments, AI enthusiasts say that Pakistan's AI ambitions are highly realistic and the policies/frameworks laid so far are tailored to Pakistan's context. They are hopeful that a strict adherence to the AI policy will lead to large-scale AI transformation. In the realm of awareness and training, the government is pursuing a broad agenda. It

aims to train 1 million students in AI. This program will be pursued via university programs and specialized AI data centers established across major cities of Pakistan. The ministry of information technology has also launched a Google course "AI Seekho Program" which will offer certificate courses to AI enthusiasts (AI Seekho Program, Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, 2025). In addition to this, community based AI initiatives like Taleemabad are also working in Pakistan to raise awareness and train the youth in AI technology. Initiatives like these are holistic enough to meet the goals envisioned under AI policy (2025).

To counter the arguments against poor digital infrastructure in Pakistan, it is often stressed how much of an improvement Pakistan has made in E-governance in Post-Covid era. Most of the departments of government now have digital platforms with elaborate datasets. Service delivery in the sector of health, education, social services and banking has also

been enhanced. NADRA, today, has some of the most elaborate datasets in South Asia. If NADRA opens up and allows interoperability, it can lead to incredible AI applications and solutions. In short, the improvement of E-governance infrastructure in Pakistan is an encouraging sign and it can provide datasets for AI transformation.

The problem of local language models can be solved via collaborative effort of government and government funded tech companies. This is something that the government is already working on. The creation of local AI models will allow companies to create agentic models and software based solutions for local communities in their native languages and in Urdu. Two companies that are already working in this area are Zillexia and LUMS AI initiative. (Pakistan's AI Future: Challenges, Policy and Innovation, Dawn News English, 2025). Both of these initiatives are government funded. Expansion and fast-tracking of initiatives like these can spur

the creation and availability of local AI models.

To deal with the issue of data protection and privacy concerns in AI usage, the government is working on urgent basis with international collaborators to design strong data protection laws. The government is working on this issue on priority basis and has designated 'secure AI' as a crucial pillar in its AI policy ~~policy~~. During 2024 and 2025, the Ministry of IT and Telecommunication has held several discussions and meeting with Google on this issue (Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, 2025). It wants Google to provide guidance and technical assistance in drafting strong data protection laws that are in line with international standards. As envisioned in AI policy (2025), Pakistan will achieve a secure AI ecosystem till 2030.

As far as the regulatory issues are concerned, Pakistan has created an AI council to oversee, regulate,

and enforce the working of AI ecosystem based on principles of fairness and ethicality. This AI council will consist of experts in the field who will work to oversee implementation of laws and ensure that no conflict of interest occurs. According to Dr. Anil Salman, CEO National AI Policy Committee, AI innovation is a major pillar of AI policy and to erect this pillar on strong foundations, regulatory environment is necessary. He asserts that the government is working for AI regulation on priority basis. With the regulatory mechanism in place, the AI transformation will be fast-paced and smooth.

Although these explanations sound convincing, there are still many loopholes and gaps in the AI ambitions of Pakistan. First, there is no clear policy on how Pakistan will tap the potential of the AI trained professionals. Even when the goal of training 1 million AI professionals is met,

how will the government employ them to lead largescale transformation is not clear. In this aspect AI policy (2025) seems like a mere set of aspirations. How government will use this human resource and provide 3.5 million new jobs for it is not clear. (Danielle Sharaf, Founder of Switch, 2025). Without a clear roadmap, the AI policy will not translate into tangible gains.

It is also crucial to remember that internet outages and electricity blackouts can still jeopardize the plans. In this regard, Pakistan's ambitions are clearly divorced from reality. Stats suggest that only 21% of Pakistani population has 16-23+ hours of electricity access and only 18% has 8 hours of access (Pakistan Energy Survey, World Bank, 2024). In the case of internet connectivity, only 143 million have broadband connectivity. The rest of 98 million are without it (PTA, 2025). In addition to that, the system is marred with unannounced electricity and internet

blackouts. With an ecosystem like this, envisioning an AI-led transformation is clearly not realistic.

Even if the government succeeds at jumpstarting AI data centers and creating local AI models, they will need continuous availability of finances to produce tangible outcomes. In this area too, the policy shows myopic planning. How government will procure funding for these initiatives is not clear at the moment. History of such policies in Pakistan reveals that financial hurdles often lead to slowing down of momentum after first few months of enthusiasm. In the absence of robust financial planning, it is difficult to see how government will achieve the projected 15-17% growth in GDP via AI integration till 2030.

Lastly, it is vital to note that even if a dedicated AI council is created for regulatory supervision, it will not have

teeth to enforce its decisions. Any such council will fail to provide stringent regulation of AI transformation. It will lack statutory authority to regulate, audit and enforce. It is also thought that without power to enforce decision, AI council will become a mere coordination forum (AI in Pakistan, IPRI, 2025). If government decided to elevate the powers of the proposed AI council, it will grant powers to it to actually influence AI transformation. Without it, it will be a mere coordination body.

AI is truly a transformative technology and with the right policy and roadmap that is rooted in reality, it can help transform Pakistan's digital landscape. The ambitions of Pakistan, however, are highly unrealistic and far-fetched. It lacks a long-term plan for translating the investment in AI into financial gains. It has an infrastructure that's fragmented and in poor quality. The issues of interoperability and regulation are also

there. With these basic issues, it is hard to envision how a drastic AI led transformation is possible. The way forward is to realize that lofty ideals will not produce tangible gains and only lead to disappointment and lost momentum. In summation, what the country needs is the reevaluation of its AI ambitions and their re-alignment with ground realities. Unrealistic AI ambitions will only cause loss of human potential, of scarce resources and disappointment.