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DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT PAKISTAN

25 January 2022

MAP



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ACRONYMS

ACC	Afghan Citizenship Card (issued by NADRA)
AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir (an area of Kashmir administered by Pakistan)
ANP	Awami National Party (a political party)
BLA	Balochistan Liberation Army (also called Baloch Liberation Army)
CII	Council of Islamic Ideology
CNIC	Computerised National Identity Card
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FIA	Federal Investigations Agency
FIR	First Information Report (an initial police record of a complaint or reported crime)
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State, also known as Daesh, ISIS or ISIL (a terrorist group)
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
JCSC	Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (a terrorist group)
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex
MNIC	Manual National Identity Card
MoI	Ministry of the Interior
MQM	Muttahida Qaumi Movement (a political party)
NACTA	National Counter Terrorism Authority
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NAP	National Action Plan
NICOP	National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis
PIPS	Pak Institute for Peace Studies
PKR	Pakistani Rupees, a unit of currency
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (a political party)
PoR card	Proof of Registration card (issued to Afghan refugees by UNHCR)
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party (a political party)
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (a political party)
SATP	South Asia Terrorism Portal
TLP	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (a fundamentalist religious movement, political party)
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (a terrorist group)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

GLOSSARY

<i>Diyat</i>	‘Blood money’ or financial compensation paid as an alternative to equal retaliation for murder, physical injury or property damage (see <i>Qisas</i>)
<i>Doxxing</i>	The unauthorised release of personal documents, especially online
<i>Hijra</i>	A male-to-female transgender identity often referred to by the broader term ‘transgender’ in English
<i>Hudood</i>	The Hudood Ordinances (1977) replaced moral laws in the Penal Code inherited from Britain
<i>Imambargah</i>	Shi’a place of worship
<i>Jihad</i>	Struggle or effort, also referring to holy war or a struggle/fight against the enemies of Islam
<i>Jirga</i>	A tribal council responsible for settling disputes by consensus in accordance with Pashtunwali; Jirgas are also known as <i>Panchayats</i>
<i>Madrasa</i>	Islamic School
<i>Pashtunwali</i>	An ethical code or system of law and governance followed by indigenous Pashtuns, mostly used in rural tribal areas
<i>Purdah</i>	A curtain used to separate women from the sight of unrelated men (also used figuratively)
<i>Qisas</i>	A punishment under Islamic law allowing equal retaliation (‘eye for an eye’) for murder, bodily injury or property damage
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>Tazkira</i>	Afghan National Identification Card
<i>Trolling</i>	making objectionable or threatening comments online to enflame emotions or intimidate
<i>Zakat</i>	A compulsory religious tax under Sunni Islam

Terms used in this report

high risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

official discrimination

1. legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
2. behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

societal discrimination

1. behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
2. ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers)

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has prepared this Country Information Report for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgement and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian government policy with respect to Pakistan.

1.2 The report provides a general rather than an exhaustive country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision-makers in Australia without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction Number 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under s 499 of the *Migration Act 1958*, states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination purposes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report draws on DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Pakistan and elsewhere. It takes into account information from government and non-government sources, including but not limited to: the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the European Asylum Support Office, the UK Home Office and the US Department of State; recognised human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; reputable international, South Asian regional and Pakistani think tanks and organisations such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, International Crisis Group and the Pak Institute for Peace Studies; relevant UN bodies and international organisations; Pakistani government and non-government organisations; and reputable news organisations. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This updated Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report about Pakistan published on 20 February 2019.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RECENT HISTORY

2.1 The Islamic Republic of Pakistan came into being on 14 August 1947 after the partition of India. Partition caused riots and mass population movement; approximately half a million people were killed in communal violence, and one million were left homeless.

2.2 Since partition, Pakistan and India have fought three wars, including the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971, which resulted in the separation of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh. Kashmir remains disputed, and there have been periodic military clashes in that area for decades (see [Security Situation](#)). The military holds powerful influence and has repeatedly seized power from civilian governments, most recently under General Pervez Musharraf from 1999 to 2008.

2.3 Following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, Pakistan played a key role in the War on Terror, facilitating the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and operations against Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. Observers accused Pakistan of playing a 'double game' by harbouring terrorists and extremists, including the Taliban and extremist Islamic groups targeting India. A terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014 killed 149 people, including 132 children, prompting then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to launch a National Action Plan to crack down on terrorist groups, cut off their funding and degrade their ability to carry out attacks. (See [Security Situation](#).)

2.4 Mr Sharif resigned in 2017 over corruption charges (see [Corruption](#)). Former professional cricketer Imran Khan was elected Prime Minister in July 2018. He led his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party to victory on promises to tackle corruption, reduce inequality and combat religious intolerance. Observers accuse Khan's government of restricting free speech, harassing opponents and failing to curb religious extremism. (See [Political System](#), [Race/Nationality](#), [Religion](#), [Political Opinion](#).)

DEMOGRAPHY

2.5 According to the 2017 census, the population of Pakistan is 207.7 million, with a 2.4 per cent annual growth rate. More than half the population lives in the province of Punjab, and 60 per cent of the total population lives in rural areas. There is a large and growing youth bulge; according to the United Nations Population Fund, a third of the population is aged 10-24 years. The largest cities are Karachi (16.5 million) and Lahore (13.1 million). The capital, Islamabad, has a population of 1.2 million. For ethnic demography, see [Race/Nationality](#). For religious demography, see [Religion](#).

2.6 Pakistan's two national languages are English and Urdu. Other major languages include Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi. English is widely used in government and the judiciary, and commonly spoken in cities and by the elite. It is also the language of instruction in many schools. While Urdu is widely spoken, it is the mother tongue of only 8 per cent of the population. Punjabi is the mother tongue of almost 40 per cent of the population.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.7 Pakistan is a lower-middle income country, with a GDP per capita of USD 1,349. Major economic sectors are services (61 per cent of GDP), agriculture (19 per cent), and manufacturing (14 per cent). The economy has grown slowly over recent decades and was lacklustre even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The official unemployment rate in 2020 was 4.5 per cent, and inflation was 10.7 per cent. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranked Pakistan 154 out of 189 countries on its Human Development Index in 2020, putting it in the medium human development category. In 2020, the World Bank ranked Pakistan 108 out of 190 economies for ease of doing business.

2.8 The pandemic and government measures to contain it have had a major impact on the economy. Growth fell to negative 0.47 per cent in fiscal year 2020, the first contraction in decades. The World Bank estimates half the working population either lost their jobs or faced reduced hours. In the same period, 40 per cent of households suffered moderate to severe food insecurity. The national poverty rate stood at 24 per cent in 2020. Assuming the pandemic is contained, the World Bank expects growth to gradually recover, but sectors such as agriculture will remain weak, and poverty is likely to remain high.

2.9 Pakistan's main welfare program is the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), launched in 2008. Its benefits are mostly disbursed as unconditional cash transfers to eligible women. As of January 2019, BISP had disbursed an average PKR 1000 (about AUD 8) to 5.6 million families (17 per cent of the population). Khan's government expanded the categories of assistance provided to the poorest people under a broader social protection scheme called Ehsaas. For example, needy families affected by COVID-19 have been able to access the Ehsaas Emergency Cash initiative, which the government says has disbursed an average of PKR 12,000 per family to 14.8 million families as of January 2022.

Health

2.10 The overall standard and availability of healthcare in Pakistan is low. The Lancet's Healthcare Access and Quality Index ranks Pakistan's healthcare system 154 out of 189 countries. According to the UNDP, Pakistan spends approximately 2.9 per cent of GDP per year on health, low by global standards. There is one doctor per 1,000 people, and even fewer nurses and midwives. Life expectancy is 67.3 years (68.3 years for women, 66.3 years for men). The infant mortality rate is 57.2 per 1,000 live births.

2.11 Healthcare in Pakistan is provided by a mix of public and private hospitals, clinics and GPs. Village-based 'Lady Health Workers' service many rural communities, and there is also a range of traditional healers and unlicensed medical practitioners. The quality and availability of healthcare is generally much better in cities than in rural areas.

2.12 As much as 70 per cent of healthcare costs are borne as out-of-pocket expenses by patients, and catastrophic healthcare expenditures can push households into poverty, especially in rural areas. Public healthcare services were decentralised in 2010. Quality and availability vary across the country. Since early 2021, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has provided free public health insurance for families living below the poverty line through its *Sehat Sahulat* scheme. The program is now being rolled out in Punjab. The scheme has been praised for improving access to healthcare for the very poor in these regions.

2.13 An estimated 200,000 people in Pakistan are living with HIV, of whom only 12 per cent are estimated to be receiving antiretroviral treatment. An HIV outbreak in Sindh in 2019 infected over 1,500 people. It was revealed a doctor had been reusing dirty needles. Pakistanis living with HIV often experience stigma and have a much higher rate of mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression, than other Pakistanis. The National HIV Program Manager told the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in 2017 that

people living with HIV were ‘often’ denied medical services, including dentistry, surgery and obstetric care, and that their HIV-positive status was sometimes disclosed without their consent.

2.14 Mental health disorders are reportedly common in Pakistan, and options for treatment are limited. According to a 2020 article in the medical journal *The Lancet*, Pakistan has fewer than 500 psychiatrists serving a population of 200 million. More than 90 per cent of people with common mental health disorders go untreated. Those who cannot access conventional psychiatric treatment sometimes turn to traditional spiritual healers known as *baba*, *pir* or *sufi*. COVID-19 has reportedly worsened the mental health situation in Pakistan.

2.15 The first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Pakistan in February 2020. Pakistan has experienced at least four waves of the disease and daily case numbers peaked at more than 12,000. As of January 2022, more than 1.3 million people had caught the virus and over 28,000 had died. Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh (particularly Karachi) have been especially hard-hit.

2.16 Since the beginning of the pandemic, the government has prioritised the economy and livelihoods alongside public health concerns. Prime Minister Khan said Pakistan could not afford the types of hard lockdowns used by wealthier countries, and the government instead relied on ‘smart’ lockdowns – short-term, localised restrictions – to slow infections. A total of 36 per cent of the population was fully vaccinated as of January 2022. To ease the burden on the public health system, the government has allowed Pakistanis to pay for private vaccinations, which critics claim is unfair on the poor.

Education

2.17 Article 25A of the Constitution states that the ‘State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years,’ but inadequate budgets, sociocultural barriers, and a lack of capacity and facilities affect the quality and availability of education. According to the World Bank, Pakistan spends only 2.9 per cent of GDP per year on education, well below the global average. The public education system was decentralised in 2010, and school budgets and quality vary greatly across the country.

2.18 An estimated 23 million children aged 5 to 16 do not attend school, the second-highest rate in the world. The situation is worse among girls and the very poor. According to the World Bank, 59 per cent of adults in Pakistan are literate (71 per cent of men, 46 per cent of women), compared to 74 per cent in India. The World Bank estimates an additional 930,000 schoolchildren will drop out of primary and secondary education because of COVID-19. It is estimated those who stay in school will lose an average of 0.3 to 0.8 years of learning as a result of school closures due to the pandemic.

2.19 Private schools have boomed since the mid-1990s. As of 2021, an estimated 42 per cent of Pakistani children who attend school go to a private institution (not including *madrassas*). Many of these schools are relatively inexpensive, charging as little as a few Australian dollars per month. Students at private schools generally outperform students at public schools, although the overall level of educational attainment in both remains very low by international standards.

2.20 About 2 million Pakistani students attend *madrassas*, Islamic schools which focus on religious instruction and may offer free food and board for students. *Madrassas* have been criticised for encouraging religious extremism. Since 2018, the government has been working to register *madrassas* and bring their curricula in line with the mainstream education system. The government has also been working on a Single National Curriculum for all students at public schools, private schools and *madrassas*.

2.21 Tertiary education in Pakistan is provided by a mix of public and private universities, and affiliated colleges which offer vocational and degree courses. Entrance is merit-based, although public institutions

reserve quotas for students from rural and underdeveloped areas, as well as recognised minorities. Nevertheless, minorities are disproportionately underrepresented in Pakistani universities.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.22 Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic with a bicameral legislature consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate. Under the constitution, all powers are vested in the Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Supreme Court, with powers and duties of other authorities defined by Acts of Parliament. The Prime Minister is elected by the National Assembly and leads the executive branch, while the President is a largely ceremonial figurehead. There are three levels of government: national, provincial and local.

2.23 While the military is theoretically accountable to the Prime Minister and, through that position, to the President, in practice the military exerts an outsized influence on all levels of Pakistani politics, especially domestic security and foreign policy.

2.24 Pakistan includes four provinces – Sindh (capital: Karachi), Punjab (capital: Lahore), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North-West Frontier Province and now including the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas; capital: Peshawar) and Balochistan (capital: Quetta). Islamabad has its own status as a 'Federal Capital Territory'. All four provinces have their own elected provincial assemblies and governments. A Chief Minister heads each provincial government. Each province also has a Governor, who is appointed by the President of Pakistan. The Kashmir region is disputed with India. Pakistan-administered Kashmir comprises Azad Jammu Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. Local government is made up of various district, municipal and village councils.

2.25 Until 2018, a swathe of territory along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) was governed under colonial-era laws called the Frontier Crime Regulations (FCR). These laws deprived residents of some fundamental rights, including freedom of movement and access to justice, and exposed them to collective punishment. The former FATA agencies are now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (see [Pashtuns](#)).

2.26 Of 342 seats in the National Assembly, 60 are reserved for women and 10 for non-Muslim minorities. In the 100-seat Senate, 23 senators are elected by each of the four provincial assemblies, four are from the former FATA and four are Islamabad Capital Territory representatives from the lower house. Of this 100, four seats are reserved for non-Muslim minorities and 17 are reserved for women.

2.27 All Pakistani citizens over 18 are eligible to vote, although some groups are excluded in practice (for example, [Ahmadis](#)). Pakistanis tend to vote according to ethnic, local or feudal ties rather than ideological, religious or sectarian allegiances. General elections were last held on 25 July 2018. Prime Minister Khan's PTI party won 149 of the 342 seats in the National Assembly, short of the 172 seats required to rule in its own right. With the support of minor parties, PTI controls 180 votes on the floor. Freedom House said the conduct of the 2018 election was generally credible but criticised the repression of opposition parties (especially the PML-N) in the lead-up, as well as media restrictions which they say made the election unfair. Freedom House rated Pakistan as 'Partly Free' in its 2020 Freedom in the World Report. In the March 2021 Senate election PTI became the largest party in the Senate, winning 18 of the 48 seats up for election. The next general election is scheduled for 2023.

Corruption

2.28 Corruption, both petty and serious, is a major problem in Pakistan. It is driven by low public sector wages and a culture of nepotism, patronage and kinship ties that overrides loyalty to the state or respect

for the law. Transparency International ranked Pakistan 124 out of 180 countries in its 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index. According to Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, 40 per cent of Pakistanis surveyed reported having paid a bribe to access public services in the 12 months prior to the survey, the worst result in the Asia-Pacific. This figure jumped to 68 per cent for people in contact with law courts and 75 per cent for people seeking help from the police. See also [Prevalence of Fraud](#).

2.29 High-level corruption is common in Pakistan, despite efforts to combat it. In April 2016, the 'Panama Papers' scandal led to the indictment and disqualification from office of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by the Pakistan Supreme Court. In 2020, former President Asif Ali Zardari was charged with money laundering and other crimes (he denies wrongdoing).

2.30 The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) is responsible for investigating corruption. Critics allege the NAB is politicised and pursues opposition figures while ignoring corruption within the ruling party (see also [Political Opinion](#)).

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.31 The Constitution of Pakistan theoretically guarantees fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, association and assembly, and outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth. However, these rights are frequently not respected in practice. Pakistan is party to international human rights instruments including:

- the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including its optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and
- the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Full implementation of these instruments lags.

2.32 In 2016, the Ministry of Human Rights launched a National Action Plan on Human Rights. The Action Plan is supported by a National Task Force under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Human Rights. Other bodies responsible for legislating on human rights include the Ministry for Law and Justice, the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, and the Council for Islamic Ideology (CII). The CII is a constitutional body that advises the legislature whether laws are in accordance with Islam and engages on 'sensitive' human rights issues where it holds an interest or the government requests review.

National Commission for Human Rights

2.33 Pakistan has a number of official human rights commissions, though several are dormant or do not meet international standards. The main one, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), was established in 2015. Its mandate includes investigating human rights complaints, providing policy advice, and monitoring the government's human rights efforts from branch offices across the country. Other specialised human rights commissions exist, including the National Commission for the Status of Women (NCSW), the Commission on Minority Rights and the National Commission on the Rights of the Child.

SECURITY SITUATION

2.34 Following improvement over recent years, the security situation in Pakistan has deteriorated since mid-2021. Causes of insecurity include domestic politics, religious extremism, ethnic conflicts, gender-based issues, sectarian hatred, economic hardship, petty and organised crime, tensions with India and the situation in Afghanistan.

2.35 Terrorist attacks increased in 2021, following a six-year downward trend noted by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) (see figure 1). There were 146 terrorist attacks in 2020, killing 220 people and injuring another 547. PIPS recorded 97 terrorist attacks from January-July 2021, which killed 300 people and injured another 765. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other domestic jihadist groups carried out most of these attacks. International jihadist groups and domestic ethnonationalist groups also carried out attacks. See also [Armed groups](#).

2.36 Most terrorist attacks target civilians or security forces, vehicles and outposts. Places of worship, schools, and other buildings have also been targeted. Attacks usually involve improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or gun attacks, although rocket, grenade and suicide bomb attacks also occur. Most attacks happen in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (especially North Waziristan) and Balochistan, although Punjab and Sindh (especially Karachi) are also targeted. There were no attacks in Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan or Azad Kashmir in 2020.

2.37 While the large-scale security operations carried out in 2014-17 have mostly wound down, Pakistan Armed Forces continue to conduct operations against terrorist groups who attack its interests and in response to specific threats and incidents. There has been an uptick in these operations commensurate with the recent increase in terrorist attacks. According to PIPS, security forces carried out 47 operations or raids in 2020 compared to 28 in 2019. Since 2018, Pakistan has taken concerted action to address terrorist financing and money laundering on the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Comparison of terrorist attacks and fatalities in Pakistan (Jan 2013 to Aug 2021)

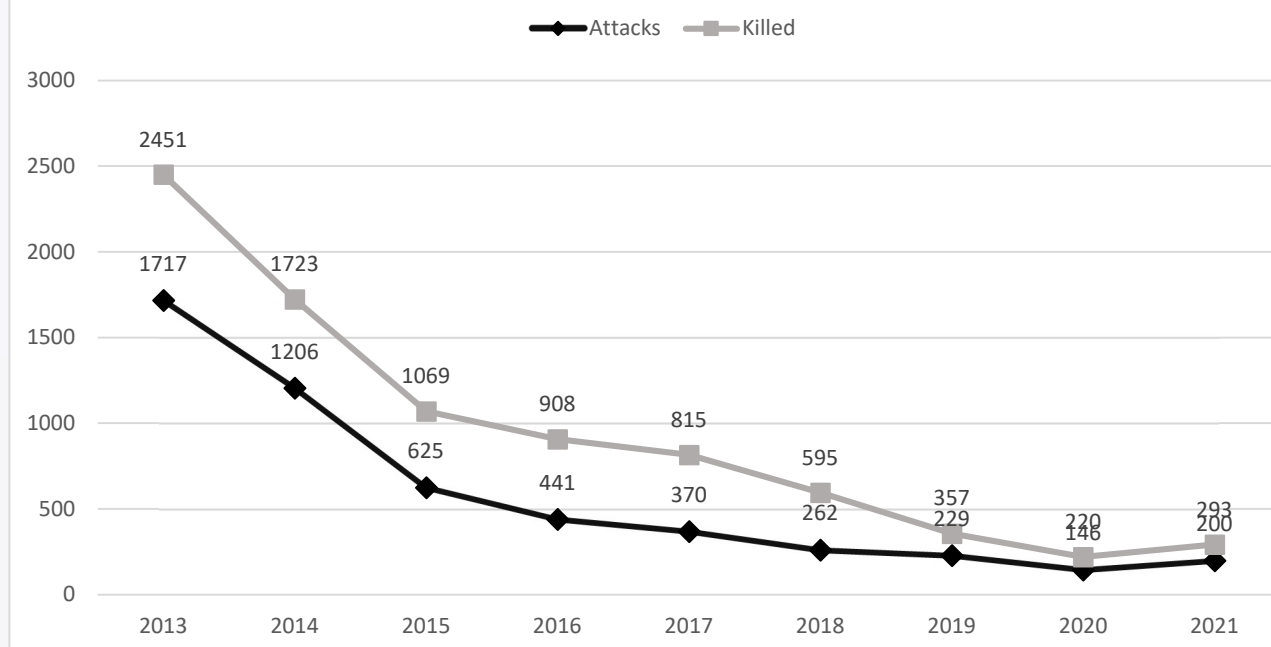


Figure 1. Terrorist attacks in Pakistan – Jan 2013-Aug 2021 (Data source: Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS))

Armed groups

2.38 Armed groups fit broadly within four main categories: domestic jihadist groups, global jihadist groups, India-focused extremist groups, and other groups including secular and ethnonationalist groups. These categories may overlap. In-country contacts told DFAT that militants in Pakistan were regrouping (especially under the umbrella of the TTP) and expressed concern that the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan throughout 2021 would increase violence in Pakistan. Many worried the Pakistani government's practice of 'mainstreaming' extremists – allowing former terrorists to return to communities or engage in politics – placed minorities and others at risk.

Domestic jihadist groups

2.39 A number of domestic jihadist groups and networks operate in Pakistan. Some are sectarian while others mainly oppose the Pakistani state. The most prominent is the TTP, an umbrella group established in 2007 that is responsible for some of Pakistan's most notorious terrorist attacks, including the attack on the Army School in Peshawar in 2014 and the attempted assassination of prominent female education advocate Malala Yousafzai in 2012. The TTP's short-term goal is to undermine the influence of the Pakistani state, especially in Pashtun areas. Its long-term goal is to overthrow the state and establish *Sharia* (Islamic law) and an Islamic caliphate. The TTP is independent from the Afghan Taliban, although they are ideologically aligned. Pakistan wants the Taliban to deny hostile militants a presence in Afghanistan. In October 2021, the government announced it was conducting negotiations with TTP elements. In November 2021, it announced it had agreed to a one-month ceasefire with the TTP.

2.40 TTP attacks within Pakistan have increased since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021. These attacks have occurred mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, but also Punjab and Sindh. After several years of declining influence under former leader Maulana Fazlullah, the TTP began regrouping in 2020 under the leadership of Noor Wali Mehsud. Since then, several splinter groups have re-pledged allegiance. Under the leadership of Mehsud, the TTP has moved away from targeting civilians – which was undermining its popular support – to focus on attacks against the Pakistani military and other government representatives. It has also continued to assassinate political and religious leaders and to target religious minorities, including [Shi’a](#), [Ahmadis](#) and [Christians](#). Besides conducting terrorist attacks, the TTP acts as an ‘alternative state’ in some parts of Pakistan, collecting taxes and customs duties, and acting as police and courts. Areas of particular TTP influence include (but may not be limited to) Waziristan and surrounding districts, Tank, Quetta, Kuchlak Bypass, Pashtun Abad, Ishaq Abad, Farooqia Town and parts of Karachi.

2.41 Various anti-Shi’a sectarian groups operate in Pakistan, among them Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), a radical Sunni militant group that follows the Deobandi school of Islam. LeJ seeks to eradicate Shi’a influence from Pakistan. The group has carried out numerous deadly attacks on Shi’a communities (including targeted attacks against [Hazaras](#)), places of worship and leaders, as well as against other religious minorities including [Christians](#), [Hindus](#) and [Ahmadis](#). The LeJ is closely aligned with Al Qaeda and shares Al Qaeda’s goal of driving Western influence from the region. It is primarily active in Punjab province, the former FATA, Karachi and Balochistan. It also trains fighters in Afghanistan. See also [Race/Nationality](#) and [Religion](#).

Global jihadist groups

2.42 Islamic State (IS) and Al Qaeda both have a presence in Pakistan and have carried out attacks there, either directly or through proxies. Both groups are motivated to expand their influence and recruit fighters to their cause. They have targeted Pakistani military and government representatives, and religious and ethnic minorities, and also carried out anti-Western attacks. Besides LeJ, Al Qaeda has frequently collaborated with the TTP to carry out attacks. Al Qaeda’s capability in Pakistan has been reduced, but the group is still active. Two suspected Al Qaeda terrorists were reportedly killed in an encounter with police in Dera Ghazi Khan in November 2020. Recent IS attacks in Pakistan include the bombing of a mosque in Quetta in January 2020 that killed 15 people, and an attack in January 2021 that killed 11 Hazara miners in Balochistan. Many fighters for Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP, the local branch of IS active in Pakistan and Afghanistan) are former TTP fighters, and the group has also carried out attacks in coordination with LeJ, including a 2016 attack on a Quetta police station.

Nationalist and ethnonationalist groups

2.43 India-focused Sunni extremist groups use Pakistan as a safe-haven, as well as for recruiting and fundraising. Their goal is to unite Indian-administered Kashmir with Pakistan under a radical interpretation of Islam. Since 2015 the capacity of these groups has been degraded by the Pakistani military, but they remain a threat to regional stability. These groups include Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The former claimed responsibility for an IED attack that killed 12 soldiers in Pulwama in 2019, while the latter was responsible for the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks that killed 164 people. According to Indian media, these groups continue to carry out targeted attacks against civilians and security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir, with ‘about 15’ such killings in October-November 2021. These groups do not generally carry out attacks within Pakistan but may seek to kill or intimidate rivals or ex-members, or engage in other illegal activity.

2.44 Ethnonationalist groups in Sindh and Balochistan carry out attacks against the Pakistani military and government, often causing civilian casualties. These include the Baloch Liberation Army and the Baloch

Liberation Front, both of which carried out multiple deadly attacks in 2020, as well as the Sindhudesh Liberation Army. The goals of these groups include independence or greater autonomy for their provinces.

Civil disorder

2.45 Political and religious groups stage protests across the country. These can draw large crowds and turn violent. International events can prompt demonstrations or violent protests. Demonstrations relating to blasphemy and other religious issues can also draw wide – and rapid – support. See [Religion, Political Opinion \(Actual or Imputed\), Protests](#).

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)

2.46 Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) is an influential Sunni extremist political party and sectarian religious movement founded by Khadim Hussain Rizvi in 2015. TLP rose to prominence in 2018 after organising massive street demonstrations to protest the acquittal of accused blasphemer Asia Bibi (see [Blasphemy](#)). Their goals include punishing ‘blasphemers’ (especially [Shi’a](#) and [Ahmadis](#)) and pursuing the imposition of *Sharia* law throughout Pakistan.

2.47 TLP has organised multiple large street protests and sit-ins, some of which have turned violent. They are also alleged to have been involved in extrajudicial killings and attempted assassinations. Their tactics have won concessions from the government, including the removal of Princeton economist Atif Mian from the Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council on the basis of his Ahmaddiya faith (see [Ahmadis](#)).

2.48 In April 2021, the government banned TLP and arrested its current leader, Saad Hussain Rizvi, in response to widespread violent protests demanding the expulsion of the French ambassador following the republication of cartoons of the prophet Mohammad in *Charlie Hebdo*, a French satirical magazine. Two police were killed and another 300 injured in the violence. Violence again broke out in November 2021 when TLP began a march on Islamabad to demand Rizvi’s release and an overturn of the ban on their organisation. Seven police were killed and dozens injured in clashes with protestors. The government capitulated, agreeing to reverse the ban and committing to release Rizvi.

Violent and organised crime

2.49 Violent crime occurs across Pakistan, including armed robbery, assault, carjacking and kidnapping. According to UN Office on Drugs and Crime data, Pakistan has a homicide rate of 3.1 murders per 100,000 population, about average for the region and lower than the global average of 6.1 murders per 100,000 population. Islamabad has a lower crime rate than other major cities due to its large security presence. Crime rates in Lahore and Karachi have also dropped in recent years due to police crackdowns. Violent crime in rural areas and in Gilgit-Baltistan is generally lower.

2.50 Criminal gangs exist in Pakistan. Their activities include drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, and child sexual exploitation. Some are politically connected.

Cross-border volatility

2.51 Violence occurs along Pakistan’s borders with India, Afghanistan and Iran, including mortar and artillery attacks, and gunfights. In 2020, the Indian Border Security Force clashed numerous times with the Pakistan Army, and killed Pakistani civilians; 45 Pakistanis died and 204 were injured in cross-border attacks

from India in 2020. There were 11 cross-border attacks from Afghanistan in 2020, involving the Taliban, Afghan National Army and Afghan border forces; 17 died and 18 were injured in these attacks.

2.50 With the Taliban seizing power in Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan bolstered security along its land border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has completed over 90 per cent of a border fence between the two countries, but its border with Afghanistan remains porous and susceptible to irregular migration and people smuggling, movement of terrorists and extremists, and transit of narcotics and other illicit goods. As the economic and human rights situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, further displacement of Afghans across the border to Pakistan is possible.

3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

RACE/NATIONALITY

3.1 Pakistan is home to five major ethnic groups and many smaller ones. According to the CIA World Factbook, the population is 44.7 per cent Punjabi, 15.4 per cent Pashtun, 14.1 per cent Sindhi, 8.4 per cent Saraiki, 7.6 per cent Muhajirs, 3.6 per cent Balochi, and 6.3 per cent others.

3.2 Article 28 of the Constitution provides that ‘any section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture shall have the right to preserve and promote the same and, subject to law, establish institutions for that purpose.’ Article 22(3)(b) provides that no citizen can be denied admission to a publicly-funded education institution on the grounds of race, religion, caste or place of birth. Similar provisions apply to discrimination in access to public places (Article 26) and public sector employment (Article 27). Article 25(1) states that ‘all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to protection of law.’ In practice, many people do experience discrimination on these grounds (see also [Religion](#)).

Hazaras

3.3 The Hazaras are an ethnic group of distinctive East Asian appearance, native to the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan. Their language, Hazaragi, is a variety of Persian that is mutually intelligible with Dari. There are an estimated 600,000 to 1 million Hazaras in Pakistan. Most are Shi’a Muslims of the Twelver Sect, although some belong to the Ismaeli sect and a small number are Sunni.

3.4 Large groups of Hazaras migrated to Pakistan from Afghanistan in the late 19th century, during the 1978-89 Afghan War, and following the Taliban takeover in 1996. Most live in enclaves in Quetta due to the [security situation](#) in Balochistan. Smaller populations live in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. Hazaras outside Quetta tend not to live in enclaves to reduce the risk of ethnic profiling, discrimination and attack. Hazaras participate in regional politics, and there are two MPs from the Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) in the Balochistan provincial assembly. Some Hazaras are documented Pakistani citizens or possess other forms of documentation that permit them to legally reside in Pakistan. Others are undocumented. Whether a Hazara is legally entitled to access public services and the like depends partly on their documented status (see also [Afghans](#) and [National Identity Cards](#)), although other factors may curtail access regardless, including the security situation for Hazaras in Pakistan.

3.5 Militant groups including, LeJ and IS (see [Armed Groups](#)) consider the Hazaras ‘infidels’ who are ‘worthy of killing’. A 2019 report by the NCHR said at least 2,000 Hazaras had been killed by militants in Pakistan since 1999 ‘in various incidents including bomb blast, suicide attacks and target killings’. No one has been held accountable for these attacks. Hazara political and religious leaders have been targeted for assassination. In April 2019, a bombing in Hazarganji market killed 24 people, many of them Hazaras. In January 2021, IS militants killed 11 Hazara miners in Mach. While there have been no attacks outside Balochistan since 2014, Hazaras have previously been targeted in Karachi, Peshawar and elsewhere. Militant groups retain the intent and capacity to attack Hazaras throughout Pakistan.

3.6 The Hazara community in Quetta lives in two enclaves: Hazara town and Mariabad. The Pakistani government provides security in these communities, including vehicle checkpoints and searches on entry and exit. Government forces also provide security for Hazara religious processions (see [Shi'a](#)) and Hazarganji market. Hazaras who leave Quetta are required to notify the security agencies. Local sources report Frontier Corps routinely harass Hazaras at checkpoints. Human Rights Watch has reported that retired members of the Frontier Corps have described Hazaras as 'agents of Iran' and 'untrustworthy'.

3.7 Medical, education and other services inside the enclaves are basic. Food and other essentials must be brought in from outside, and prices are reportedly double those elsewhere in Quetta. Those who can afford to travel to Karachi for medical treatment do so, while others must attend Quetta hospitals outside the enclaves, where they have been attacked in the past. Sectarian militants have also attacked Hazara religious processions, places of worship, and pilgrims on their way to Iran.

3.8 Schools exist within the enclaves, but there is little opportunity for higher education. Many Hazara students have abandoned the hope of higher education due to the risk of travelling. A small number of wealthier Hazaras send their children to study at universities in Lahore or Islamabad, where they reportedly feel safer.

3.9 Many Hazaras in Quetta provide services to their own communities within the enclaves; others move to other cities across Pakistan to work. Whether a Hazara can relocate strongly depends on their personal resources and family connections. In the past Hazaras were often employed in the military and public service, but few now apply for these jobs due to discrimination and fear of attacks. Since the IS attack in Mach in January 2021, Hazaras are reportedly too scared to work in the Baloch mining industry, previously an important source of income. High rates of unemployment and limited prospects have reportedly led to a sense of hopelessness among Hazara youth in Quetta.

3.10 While most Hazaras in Pakistan can obtain formal identification such as Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs), Hazaras claim National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) officials at times cause delays for Hazaras. Hazaras have suffered lethal attacks outside the NADRA office in Quetta while trying to obtain passports and CNICs. As a result, many Hazaras do not feel safe leaving the enclaves to apply for documentation.

3.11 DFAT assesses Hazaras who live in the enclaves in Quetta face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in the form of impeded access to higher education, medical services, employment and affordable food. Within and outside the enclaves, Hazaras face a moderate risk of official discrimination, including by government officials and security forces, in the form of obstruction at checkpoints and denial of or delay in access to identity documentation, employment and services. DFAT assesses such discrimination reflects widespread individual prejudice rather than official policy.

3.12 DFAT assesses Hazaras in Balochistan face a high risk of violence from militants on the basis of their ethnic and sectarian identity. Outside Balochistan the risk of violence for Hazaras is moderate. Hazaras face a higher risk of violence than other Shi'a due to their distinctive appearance and segregation. Outside Balochistan, DFAT assesses Hazaras face a low risk of societal or official discrimination, but notes relocation to these areas is difficult or impossible for many (see [Internal Relocation](#)).

Pashtuns

3.13 The Pashtuns are an ethnic group native to Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan. Pashtuns are stereotypically fair-skinned with light-coloured hair and eyes that distinguish them from other Pakistanis, although in reality Pashtuns are physically diverse. Pashtuns may also wear distinctive clothing, such as the red-and-black 'Pashteen hat', which has reportedly become a symbol of the [Pashtun Tahafuz Movement](#)

(PTM). Pashtun culture emphasises tribal and family relations, as well as customary norms known as *Pashtunwali*. Pashtuns speak an Eastern Iranian language called Pashto. Most, but not all, follow Sunni Islam (see [Turis, Bangash](#)).

3.14 There are an estimated 20-25 million Pashtuns in Pakistan, the second largest ethnic group after Punjabis (see [Demography](#)). Pashtuns traditionally live among their own tribes and sub-tribes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA, though many migrate to urban areas. The largest Pashtun community in the world lives in Karachi. Pashtuns also live in Balochistan, Islamabad, Lahore and elsewhere.

3.15 Pashtuns are represented at all levels of society in Pakistan. They dominate employment in the transport sector in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and are well represented in Pakistan's security forces. The governing PTI party has a strong support base among Pashtuns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pashtun-majority areas have historically experienced high levels of tribal, intra-communal and politically motivated violence, a high concentration of military operations, and conflict-related displacement. However, the overall security situation for all Pakistanis, including Pashtuns, has (until recently) been improving in line with increased security across Pakistan.

3.16 Until 2018, those living in the FATA were governed under separate, extra-constitutional arrangements, which denied them some fundamental rights (see [Political System](#)). Residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the former FATA, now have access to the regular judicial system, although the option remains to voluntarily refer disputes to traditional jirgas/panchayats under the *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Alternate Dispute Resolution Act (2020)* (see [Judiciary](#)). In 2017 civilians living in the FATA were injured and lost access to land due to landmines left over from security operations.

3.17 Across Pakistan, ethnic stereotyping and the association of Pashtuns with the TTP has led to official discrimination and ethnic profiling. In February 2018, the Punjab government issued a notice asking 'the population of Punjab to keep an eye out for suspicious individuals who look like Pashtuns or are from the former FATA, and to report any suspicious activity.' In areas where they are a minority, low-level societal discrimination against Pashtuns is common in the form of slurs and ethnic stereotypes. Pashtuns report frequent blocking of their CNICs when relocating (see [CNICs and SNICs](#)), which impedes access to property and assets. There are credible reports Pashtuns have been targeted for [enforced disappearances](#), especially in conflict-affected regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

3.18 DFAT assesses Pashtuns in conflict-affected areas such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan face a moderate risk of violence by state security forces, including enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings. Elsewhere in Pakistan, Pashtuns generally face a low risk of official and/or societal discrimination and a similar risk of violence to other ethnic groups in the same locations, although the risk increases if they come to the attention of the authorities for any reason. Pashtuns involved with the [Pashtun Tahafuz Movement \(PTM\)](#) or the [Awami National Party \(ANP\)](#) face specific, heightened risks, as do Shi'a Pashtuns (see [Turis, Bangash](#)).

Afghans

3.19 Successive wars, chronic instability and a lack of economic opportunities have driven millions of Afghans to Pakistan since the late 1970s. As of August 2021, there were approximately 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees and at least the same number of unregistered Afghans in Pakistan, more refugees than in any other country in the world except Turkey. Of this number, more than 80 per cent are Pashtun, while the remainder includes Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and others. Some have been in Pakistan for decades. Many younger Afghans were born in Pakistan. In 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan declared that the children of Afghans and other refugees who were born in Pakistan were constitutionally entitled to citizenship, but in practice NADRA continues to refuse to issue identity cards for these people. Under

Section 10 of the Citizenship Act of 1951, it is possible for foreign women, including Afghans, to obtain Pakistani citizenship by marrying a Pakistani, but the reverse is not true; that is, a Pakistani woman cannot transmit her citizenship to her foreign husband by marriage. See also [Documentation](#).

3.20 The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is porous and, given the high rate of document fraud (see [Prevalence of Fraud](#)), it can be difficult to verify whether someone is a Pakistani or an Afghan national. The legal status of Afghans in Pakistan varies. Some hold documents issued by the Pakistani government, while others are registered as refugees or asylum seekers with the UNHCR. Many are completely undocumented. Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

3.21 In 2007, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement which gave Afghan refugees the right to register and obtain a Proof of Registration (PoR) Card, identifying them as Afghan refugees eligible for protection and support through the UNHCR under Pakistani refugee laws. PoR holders are entitled to stay temporarily in Pakistan, enjoy freedom of movement, and have access to public health and education. They can rent property, open bank accounts and register births. They are allowed to attend Pakistani universities, but places are limited and very few have the means to do so. They cannot legally work, although many do work in the informal economy. They are ineligible for Pakistani government welfare payments, although some assistance is available through UNHCR programs.

3.22 In 2017, the government launched a further, six-month program to register undocumented Afghans by issuing them with a new Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC). The ACC is a temporary identity document for Afghans without other forms of identification and offers far more limited benefits than the PoR. ACC holders are entitled to stay temporarily in Pakistan and have freedom of movement but cannot access public health services or public education. Like PoR holders, they cannot legally work and, while many do work in the informal economy, they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. During the registration period any self-declared Afghan could apply for an ACC, but PoR card holders and single males under 18 were excluded.

3.23 Many Afghan refugees in Pakistan hold neither an ACC nor PoR. Some are registered as refugees or asylum seekers with the UNHCR and can legally stay temporarily in Pakistan, although this is not always understood or respected by security forces. Afghans registered with the UNHCR can theoretically rent property, register births and access health services and education, but this usually requires intervention by the UNHCR and is unattainable for many. Others have no Pakistani or UNHCR documents, although they may hold a *tazkira* (Afghan national identity document) or Afghan passport. These undocumented Afghans are in breach of the *Foreigners Act, 1946* and are liable to arrest, detention and deportation.

3.24 Afghans are often treated with suspicion by Pakistani security forces. According to the UNHCR, they are frequently targeted for arrest and detention, and are vulnerable to labour exploitation, including of children. Afghan women in Pakistan suffer high rates of early and forced marriage and gender-based violence. A 2017 Human Rights Watch report claimed abuse of Afghan refugees by Pakistani authorities was widespread and included 'extortion, arbitrary detention, house raids without warrants, unlawful use of force, and theft'.

3.25 With the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan in August 2021, there was a surge in Afghans seeking to cross into Pakistan. Pakistan tightened border restrictions, requiring valid visas or permission letters to cross the border. It discontinued accepting some documentation such as gate passes and Afghan identity documents (*tazkira*) from Kandahar/Spin Boldak. The border crossings at Torkham and Chaman largely remained open, albeit with crowding on the Afghan side. Pakistan has discouraged Afghans from entering Pakistan illegally and said it would return those doing so, noting that Pakistan was not in a position to host more Afghans.

3.26 DFAT assesses undocumented Afghans in Pakistan face a high risk of official and societal discrimination, including harassment by security services. DFAT assesses registered Afghans face a moderate risk of societal and official discrimination. Afghans of interest to the Pakistani government, irrespective of status, face a high risk of official discrimination and a moderate risk of violence by security forces.

3.27 See also latest [DFAT report on Afghanistan](#).

RELIGION

3.28 According to the 2017 national census, Muslims comprise 96.47 per cent of the population. Of this number, an estimated 80-90 per cent are Sunnis and 10-20 per cent are Shi'a. Hindus comprise 1.73 per cent of the population, Christians 1.27 per cent, Ahmadis 0.09 per cent (counted separately from Muslims in official figures), and others (including Sikhs, Parsis, Baha'i and Buddhists) 0.32 per cent. Minority groups dispute these figures, saying they undercount minorities.

3.29 Article 20 of the Constitution provides 'subject to law, public order, and morality, —(a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions'. Article 36 guarantees 'the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services'. The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. Articles 41(2) and 91(3) require that the president and prime minister be Muslim. Article 260 of the Constitution defines the term 'Muslim', and explicitly excludes from that definition several groups, including Ahmadis. The government sets a 5 per cent quota for hiring religious minorities (excluding Shi'a and Ahmadis) at the federal and provincial levels of government, but these targets are rarely met.

3.30 In 1979, President Zia ul-Haq introduced *The Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, 1979*, also known as the 'Hudood Ordinances', prohibiting consumption of alcohol, sex outside marriage and pornography. Non-Muslims are exempt from the alcohol ban; the other bans apply to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

3.31 Religious extremism and intolerance are on the rise in Pakistan. A record number of blasphemy cases were filed in 2020, and public and online hate speech has increased. While the number of sectarian attacks decreased from 2013-20, in line with an overall improvement in the security situation, violence has recently increased, and attacks on religious minorities, their places of worship and festivities continue. Multiple interlocutors told DFAT the government overlooked religious extremism to avoid antagonising powerful religious lobbies (such as the [TLP](#)).

Blasphemy

3.32 Blasphemy and other offences relating to religion are criminalised in Pakistan under Articles 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860). Article 295C outlaws the use of 'derogatory remarks' against the Holy Prophet. The punishment for blasphemy is death. Under Article 295B, 'defiling' a copy of the Quran is punishable by life imprisonment, and under Article 298A, defiling 'the sacred name of any wife, or members of the family, of the Holy Prophet, or any of the righteous Caliphs' carries a maximum punishment of three years in prison, which may also be accompanied by a fine.

3.33 Religious conversion from Islam (apostasy) while not illegal is often seen as blasphemous and can result in prosecution under blasphemy laws, or in familial or communal violence. Article 295A prohibits

insulting any religion, not just Islam, and carries a sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment, which may also be accompanied by a fine.

3.34 The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) reported 200 blasphemy cases in 2020, an all-time high which has been widely linked to rising religious intolerance. Of these 35 were sentenced to death. Religious minorities are disproportionately affected: in 70 per cent of the cases the accused was Shi'a, 20 per cent Ahmadi and 3.5 per cent Christian. False accusations of blasphemy are used to settle personal disputes, as in the case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010 after a dispute with Muslim neighbours in which they refused to share water with her because she was a Christian. Bibi was acquitted and released from prison in 2018 and fled to Canada. People have been charged with blasphemy for online speech; for instance, three men were sentenced to death by an Islamabad court in 2021 for sharing 'blasphemous' material on social media. In July 2021, an eight-year-old boy was charged with blasphemy in Eastern Punjab after allegedly urinating in a *Madrasa* library.

3.35 The conviction rate for blasphemy in the lower courts is high, and judges are often under enormous public pressure to deliver a guilty verdict. A Pakistani legal expert told DFAT most blasphemy convictions were overturned by the higher courts, but an accused blasphemer was likely to spend years in prison even if the accusation was eventually found to be baseless. Judges and defence lawyers are often reluctant to take on blasphemy cases due to the personal security risks involved, resulting in appeals being delayed until a new bench is constituted.

3.36 Accused blasphemers are at risk of extrajudicial killing, before, during, and after being taken into custody. In December 2021, a Sri Lankan man was beaten to death and his corpse set on fire after being accused of blasphemy due to removing posters from the wall of the factory in Sialkot, Punjab, where he worked. During the murder his killers chanted slogans popularised by [Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan \(TLP\)](#), an Islamic extremist group. Afterwards they posed for selfies with his corpse and shared video of his murder on social media. In August 2020 a US national on trial for blasphemy, Tahir Naseem, was gunned down in a Peshawar courtroom by a 15-year-old boy. Thousands rallied in the streets to support Naseem's killer, and politicians visited the killer's home and police posed for selfies with him. Extremist groups and individuals have targeted politicians, lawyers and judges who have spoken out against blasphemy laws. The former governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was assassinated by one of his bodyguards for calling for reform of blasphemy laws. Large numbers of people protested when his assassin (whom they considered a hero) was executed in February 2016.

3.37 DFAT assesses that people accused of blasphemy are at high risk of extrajudicial violence and the death penalty, and high risk of societal and official discrimination in the form of popular denunciation, unfair trials and inadequate state protection. The risks are especially acute for members of religious minorities, including Shi'a, Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus.

Forced conversion

3.38 Christian, Hindu and Sikh girls are targeted for forced and underage marriage and forced conversion. Abductions reportedly number in the hundreds each year and have involved girls as young as 12. Religious minorities are specifically targeted due to their economic vulnerability and a belief that their conversion to Islam is religiously desirable. Forcibly married and converted girls are frequently mistreated (see also [Women](#)). Those who escape and try to revert to their own religion sometimes face accusations of blasphemy. A small number may choose to convert due to economic or other pressures. In October 2021, a proposed bill that would have outlawed forced conversions was rejected by a parliamentary committee tasked with considering the issue after the Minister for Religious Affairs told the committee "the environment is unfavourable" for passing the law.

Ahmadis

3.39 The Ahmadis are members of an Islamic messianic movement that began in British-controlled India in the late 19th century. They take their name from their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who was born in 1835 and is regarded by his followers as the messiah and a prophet. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims and follow the teachings of the Quran, but many other Muslims consider Ahmadis heretics.

3.40 Estimates of the number of Ahmadis in Pakistan range widely between 500,000 and 4 million. Ahmadis are not readily identifiable by their appearance, language or names. Many Ahmadis do not publicly identify as such for fear of discrimination. Many maintain a low profile to avoid societal discrimination and violence and refuse to take part in the census.

3.41 Mistreatment of Ahmadis in Pakistan is pervasive and well-documented. Since 1974, Ahmadis have been explicitly identified in the constitution as non-Muslims. Under Ordinance XX, promulgated in 1984, Ahmadis are banned from publicly practising their faith; using non-Ahmadi mosques or public prayer rooms for worship; using Islamic texts for their prayers; performing the Muslim call to prayer; producing, publishing or disseminating religious materials; using Islamic greetings in public; seeking converts; and publicly quoting from the Quran. Ordinance XX also bans Ahmadis from identifying or 'posing' as Muslims.

3.42 Ahmadis face a wide range of official discrimination due to their designation as non-Muslims. This includes barriers to registering marriages, voting, and accessing education and other services. Applications for official documentation, including passports and CNICs, contain information about religious affiliation, and people who identify as Muslim must explicitly denounce Ghulam Ahmad as a false prophet and Ahmadiyya followers as non-Muslims. High school examinations and passport applications require similar declarations. Official documents refer to Ahmadis as 'Qadiani', a derogatory term Ahmadis find offensive.

3.43 Ahmadis have been subjected to violence and organised hate campaigns based on their faith. Their treatment has worsened in recent years. At least five Ahmadis were killed and another seven wounded in targeted attacks in 2020. [Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan \(TLP\)](#), a hardline Sunni religious group, has organised large public rallies to protest against any weakening of legal discrimination against Ahmadis, and religious scholars and lawyers have collaborated to bring blasphemy charges against Ahmadis. Community members claim Ahmadi businesses have been targeted by religious groups, and MPs and judges have spoken out against Ahmadis. Ahmadis experience discrimination and ostracism in employment and everyday life.

3.44 DFAT assesses that Ahmadis are at high risk of official and societal discrimination and moderate risk of violence throughout Pakistan.

Christians

3.45 According to the 2017 census there are about 2 million Christians in Pakistan, although NGOs claim the actual figure is higher. Most are descendants of low-caste Hindus who converted during the British era. Most Christians live in Punjab, with sizeable populations in Sindh, Islamabad and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistani law does not restrict Christians from practising their religion and they are generally able to do so without government interference, although they sometimes face difficulties in establishing new churches.

3.46 Christians are among the most economically vulnerable groups in Pakistan. Many live in slums and are employed as 'sweepers' (sanitation workers), household servants or bonded labourers in brick kilns. Christians face significant societal discrimination from the Muslim majority. Job advertisements, including those for municipal and other government agencies, often specify sanitation work can only be done by Christians or other 'non-Muslims'. Other forms of discrimination include refusal to touch or share facilities

with ‘unclean’ Christians, the use of derogatory terms such as ‘infidel’ or *Chura* (‘dirty’), and denial of emergency relief. Christians are also disproportionately targeted by [blasphemy](#) accusations.

3.47 Christians are targeted by militant groups in Pakistan. Police provide security for major Christian churches during Christmas and Easter, reducing but not eliminating the risk of violence. Four members of a Christian family were killed by an IS gunman in Quetta in April 2018, while an IS bombing at a Christian church killed nine people in December 2017. Christians are also victims of community violence, often sparked by religious or personal disputes. In February 2021, a 22-year-old Christian man, Saleem Masih, was beaten to death for ‘polluting’ water by bathing in it. In November 2020, a woman and her son were shot dead by a Muslim neighbour who claimed they ‘defiled’ an Islamic shrine with wastewater.

3.48 Christian girls are targeted for forced and underage marriage and forced conversion, and are also targeted by people traffickers. In 2019 a report by Associated Press revealed at least 629 women, most of them Christians, had been trafficked from Pakistan to China as forced brides since 2018. Many were allegedly raped and beaten, and some forced into prostitution. Christian pastors often acted as brokers for the trafficking. The Federal Investigation Agency arrested 31 Chinese nationals in connection with these crimes in October 2019, but they were later acquitted, allegedly under pressure from officials concerned about damage to the Pakistan-China relationship. Activists allege the trafficking continues.

3.49 DFAT assesses that Christians face a moderate risk of official discrimination (mainly in the form of employment discrimination) and societal discrimination, and a moderate risk of violence throughout Pakistan.

Hindus

3.50 According to the 2017 census, there are about 3.3 million Hindus in Pakistan. Most live in Hindu-majority communities in Sindh. They face similar issues to other religious minorities (see [Blasphemy](#)) and are also affected by prevailing community attitudes to India and the state of the bilateral relationship.

3.51 Hindus are generally able to practise their religion freely and to establish places of worship. The government has handed back some Hindu temples that were previously used as schools. Groups such as the [TLP](#) have protested against the establishment of new Hindu temples, and Hindu places of worship have been targeted by vandals and violent mobs. In January 2021, four boys were charged with vandalising a Hindu temple in Tharparkur, Sindh. The same month, 92 police stood by while a Muslim mob razed a Hindu temple in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Hindu traders are sometimes targeted for extortion by criminal gangs and militant groups. DFAT is unaware of recent attacks by militant groups on Hindus in Pakistan.

3.52 In general, Hindus do not face barriers to health services, education or social welfare on the basis of their religion, although like other religious minorities they report being denied senior government, police and military roles. Wealthy, high-caste Hindus experience relatively little societal discrimination, but scheduled-caste Hindus face many of the same social and economic challenges as Christians due to their shared historic origin as ‘untouchables’. Many are employed as ‘sweepers’ (sanitation workers), household servants or bonded labourers in brick kilns. They experience societal discrimination such as refusal to touch or share facilities with them and the use of derogatory terms such as *Chura* (‘dirty’).

3.53 Hindu girls are targeted for forced and underage marriage and forced conversion. Legislation has been passed to curb this, including the *Hindu Marriage Act (2017)*, covering the Islamabad Capital Territory, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, and the *Sindh Hindu Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2018*, which allows Hindu women to remarry and bans underage marriage (see [Forced Conversion](#)). There has been an uptick in voluntary conversions to Islam in recent years, driven in part by economic and other pressures.

3.54 DFAT assesses that wealthy, high-caste Hindus face a low risk of official and societal discrimination in Pakistan. Lower-caste Hindus face a moderate risk of official discrimination (in the form of employment discrimination) and societal discrimination. Hindus face a low risk of violence throughout Pakistan.

Shi'a

3.55 Pakistan is home to the world's second-largest Shi'a population (after Iran). An estimated 20-40 million Shi'a live throughout the country, constituting 10-20 per cent of the population. There are significant Shi'a communities in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Shi'a are in the majority in the sparsely populated autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan but are a minority in Pakistan's other regions.

3.56 Most Pakistani Shi'a (except [Hazaras](#)) are not physically or linguistically distinguishable from Sunnis, and national censuses do not distinguish between them. NADRA collects sectarian information during the application process for identity documents, but CNICs do not identify a cardholder's religion, and passports do not distinguish between Sunni and Shi'a. Some Shi'a may be identifiable by common Shi'a names, such as Naqvi, Zaidi or Jafri. Similarly, ethnic or tribal names can reveal a person's ethnicity or tribal affiliation: nearly all Hazaras and Turis are Shi'a, as are many Bangash. Ritual self-flagellation during Shi'a religious festivals can leave distinctive, permanent scars, which have been used by militants to identify Shi'a for execution.

3.57 Shi'a are generally able to establish places of worship and practise their religion without overt state interference. They are well represented in parliament and regularly contest elections for mainstream political parties. Shi'a and Sunnis can legally intermarry, although a 2018 report by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada found such marriages were 'not easy, and the difficulty factors may range from social disdain or discouragement to life threats, depending on the locality and region, social stratum, and particular family circumstances'.

3.58 Shi'a face rising religious intolerance and official discrimination in the form of blasphemy accusations. Over 70 per cent of blasphemy cases are against Shi'a. Anti-Shi'a sentiment is seen in politics: in July 2020, the Punjab Provincial Assembly passed a law to 'protect the foundation of Islam' which would criminalise Shi'a beliefs about the Companions of the Prophet (the Governor returned it for revision).

3.59 Sectarian tensions often flare during *Muharram*, when Shi'a mourn the killing of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson and his family, a key event in the Sunni-Shi'a schism. In 2020, over 40 Shi'a were charged with blasphemy following *Muharram*, including clerics accused of insulting the Companions of the Prophet during ritual processions. Thousands of Sunni protesters took to the streets in Karachi and Islamabad chanting anti-Shi'a slogans. There were targeted killings of Shi'a in multiple cities. The Karachi head of the TLP openly threatened beheadings for Shi'a 'blasphemers'. Videos of these incidents circulated on social media. Authorities have attempted to curb sectarian hatred during *Muharram*, for instance by banning firebrand Sunni and Shi'a clerics from leaving home and by cutting off mobile phone services in major cities during processions.

3.60 Shi'a have historically been targeted by sectarian terrorist groups such as the TTP, LeJ and IS (see [Security Situation](#)). These groups have attacked Shi'a individuals, places of worship, shrines and religious schools, as well as Shi'a travelling to Iran or Iraq for religious pilgrimage. The frequency of these attacks has steadily declined since 2013. Terrorist attacks targeting Shi'a killed five and injured 14 in 2020 (not including attacks targeting Shi'a Hazaras, see [Hazaras](#)), compared with 32 deaths in 2019 and 471 deaths in 2013. This is a result of the overall improvement in the security situation in Pakistan, as well as increased security provided by the Pakistani police for Shi'a places of worship and processions. Nevertheless, sectarian terrorist groups retain the capacity and intent to carry out attacks against Shi'a anywhere in the

country. At least three people were killed and 50 injured in the bombing of a Shi'a procession in Bahawalnagar, Punjab in August 2021.

3.61 DFAT assesses Shi'a in Pakistan face a moderate risk of sectarian violence, although the situation has improved considerably in recent years. Seventy per cent of [blasphemy accusations](#), which carry the [death penalty](#), are against Shi'a. They face a moderate risk of societal discrimination in the form of anti-Shi'a protests and community violence. Some Shi'a face specific, heightened risks (see [Hazaras](#), [Turis](#), [Bangash](#)).

Turis

3.62 The Turis are a Shi'a Pashtun tribe of around 500,000 people. Most Turis live in and around Parachinar and Kurram Agency in the former FATA (now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Turis are not generally distinguishable from other Pashtuns by appearance, but are identifiable by tribal names, accents, and residence in known Turi areas.

3.63 Turis have faced significant violence due to their sectarian affiliation, opposition to the Taliban and other Sunni militant groups, and territorial disputes with other Pashtun tribes. Groups such as the TTP have targeted Turis for their Shi'a faith (see [Shi'a](#)). From 2009 to 2014, militants frequently stopped and killed Turis travelling on roads in and around Kurram Agency. A series of terrorist bombings targeting Turis in Parachinar killed 120 people in 2017.

3.64 The security situation has improved considerably in recent years, although local experts say the underlying triggers for conflict in Turi areas remain. DFAT is aware of at least two sectarian attacks in Turi areas in 2020: an IED blast in an imambargah (Shi'a place of worship) in the Shorko area of Lower Kurram in May, which killed one person; and a blast at Turi Bazaar in Parachinar in July, which killed one person and injured 14 others.

3.65 Security operations in the former FATA between 2014 and 2017 damaged schools, healthcare centres and other infrastructure. While some reconstruction has occurred, local experts say medical, education and other services in the tribal areas remain inadequate. Turis can and do relocate to other parts of Pakistan, but like other groups their ability to do so is heavily dependent on financial means, as well as having personal, family and tribal networks in the new location. Turis relocating to other parts of Pakistan would not be immediately distinguishable from other Pashtuns by non-Pashtun ethnic groups.

3.66 DFAT assesses that Turis face a similar risk of official and societal discrimination to other Pashtuns based on ethnicity (see [Pashtuns](#)). Turis in Kurram face a moderate risk of sectarian violence from militant groups because of their Shi'a faith. Turis in other parts of the country face a similar risk of violence to other non-Hazara Shi'a (see [Shi'a](#)).

Bangash

3.67 The Bangash are a Pashtun tribe found in Kurram Agency and Kohat and Hangu districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Some Bangash tribes are Shi'a and some are Sunni or a mix of both. Risks to Bangash include inter-tribal violence, including an historical animosity with the [Turis](#). Some sources say this animosity has lessened or resolved in recent years, but DFAT was unable to find information on the situation on the ground from in-country sources.

3.68 DFAT assesses that Bangash living in tribal areas face a moderate risk of violence where they clash with other ethnic groups. Shi'a Bangash live in their own communities and this limits the possibility of

societal discrimination. In other parts of Pakistan DFAT assesses that Shi'a Bangash face a similar level of discrimination as other [Shi'a](#) and [Pashtuns](#).

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.69 Pakistani politics encompasses a broad range of political, ethnic and religious groups. Besides [Ahmadis](#) (who are effectively required to renounce their religion to stand) minority groups do not face formal restrictions to participation in federal or provincial parliaments, although informal barriers exist. The 10 seats reserved for non-Muslim minorities and 60 seats reserved for women in the National Assembly are allocated to political parties on a proportional basis. Some ethnic and religious minorities are elected to national and provincial parliaments in open seats. Critics of the reserved seats system say because non-Muslim and women candidates are directly selected by the major political parties, they are unaccountable and often ineffective advocates for their communities. Some also argue that the national census undercounts minorities, and that the number of seats allocated for minorities is therefore insufficient.

3.70 Freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan but is subject to 'reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, commission of or incitement to an offence.' The breadth of these caveats undermines the constitutional guarantee.

3.71 Critics accuse government agencies, in particular the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), of unfairly targeting political opponents through the legal system. Targets of the current government include prominent members of the PML-N and PPP opposition parties. Members of the ruling PTI party are rarely subject to investigation. In July 2020, the Supreme Court ruled the NAB had violated the rights to fair trial and due process of two PML-N politicians, Khawaja Saad Rafique and Khawaja Salman Rafique, after they were detained by the NAB for 15 months 'without reasonable grounds'. The FIA also targets journalists and human rights defenders who criticise the government, as well as their families. In October 2019, FIA officials detained the father of human rights activist Gulalai Ismail for 'hate speech and fake information against government institutions on Facebook and Twitter'. He was released on bail one month later. See also [NGOs](#) and [Media and Journalists](#).

3.72 Politically motivated violence has historically occurred across Pakistan, especially in Karachi and Balochistan, but has substantially reduced in recent years. The Pak Institute for Peace Studies Security Report listed four attacks on political leaders and workers in 2020, causing no fatalities and 39 injuries. Grenade and rocket attacks on PTI leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa failed to kill their targets. A clash between PPP and Grand Democratic Alliance supporters in Masurji Wah in Sindh injured five.

Awami National Party (ANP)

3.73 The Awami National Party (ANP) is a secular Pashtun nationalist political party. It was formed in 1986 and enjoys strong support in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Between 2008 and 2013, the ANP governed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and was a junior partner in the federal coalition government. Since 2018, ANP members have participated in large-scale demonstrations led by the PTM against human rights abuses against Pashtuns in the tribal regions of Pakistan.

3.74 The ANP is anti-Taliban, and TTP militants have attacked ANP members due to its secular ideology, support for the military and work to improve the Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relationship. In July 2018, a suicide bomb attack at an election rally in Peshawar wounded 69 and killed at least 20, including prominent

ANP politician Haroon Bilour. In June 2019, the Peshawar city district president of ANP, Sartaj Khan, was gunned down in Gulbahar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The ANP was also the target of TTP attacks ahead of the May 2013 elections. While security operations have weakened the TTP in recent years, they retain the capacity and intent to target ANP members and leadership (see [Armed Groups](#)).

3.75 DFAT assesses ANP members face a moderate risk of terrorist violence based on the ANP's opposition to the TTP. The risk may be higher for ANP leaders. ANP leaders may also be at risk of official harassment due to their association with the PTM protest movement.

Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM)

3.76 The Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM) is a Karachi-based secular political party which advocates for the rights of *Muhajirs* (Urdu-speaking Muslim migrants from India and their descendants). Formed in 1984, the MQM rose to become a major political force in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, MQM was involved in widespread political violence in Karachi as its militants fought government forces, breakaway factions and militants from other ethnic political movements. The US Department of State, Amnesty International and others accused MQM of assassinations, torture and other abuses. In September 2020, two MQM workers were sentenced to death for starting a fire at a garment factory that killed over 260 people in 2012, after the factory owner refused to pay a bribe.

3.77 In 2016, MQM leader Altaf Hussein made a speech from London that allegedly spurred violence in Karachi and resulted in a split between MQM-London and MQM-Pakistan. Soon afterwards, the paramilitary Rangers commenced operations in Karachi that significantly reduced political violence, but which MQM claims involved arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of its members. These abuses allegedly still occur. In June 2020, an MQM worker and a member of a Sindh nationalist group were found shot dead in Karachi. The MQM worker had gone missing in 2019. In December 2020, an MQM worker who went missing four years earlier was found dead on the outskirts of Karachi. His body was covered in bruises. The MQM has also been targeted by the TTP because of its secular ideology and support for the US-led 'War on Terror.'

3.78 DFAT assesses MQM members face a low risk of violence from militant groups and criminal elements in Karachi, and that this risk has significantly reduced since security operations began in 2013. DFAT assesses that MQM members who are associated with (or perceived to be associated with) political violence and/or criminal activities face a moderate risk of violence from security forces.

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)

3.79 The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) is a Pashtun human rights movement that rose to prominence following mass protests in 2018. PTM leaders have called on the Pakistani government to end extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of Pashtuns, remove landmines from the former FATA, and hold security forces accountable for past human rights abuses. The PTM opposes the Taliban and accuses the Pakistani government of collaborating with terrorists. In April 2018, over 60,000 Pashtuns joined a PTM-led demonstration in Peshawar to demand Pashtun rights. PTM has since held multiple protests in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Karachi.

3.80 PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen has been arrested multiple times on sedition and other charges. Two PTM leaders, Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, were elected to the national parliament in the July 2018 election but were later arrested and spent four months in jail. Another PTM leader, Arif Wazir, was killed by unidentified gunmen in Islamabad in May 2020.

3.81 Grassroots members of PTM also face harassment and violence. PTM protests are frequently suppressed by local authorities and have come under attack by militants. In May 2018, over 150 PTM members were arrested on sedition, terrorism and other charges ahead of a PTM rally in Karachi. In June 2018, at least two PTM activists were killed and 25 wounded when Taliban fighters attacked a PTM gathering in Wana, South Waziristan. While there is no official ban on media reporting of PTM events, journalists, academics and others have faced official harassment for publicly discussing the movement and its grievances. Media outlets report that stories about PTM are frequently censored.

3.82 DFAT assesses PTM leaders and members are at high risk of official discrimination and moderate risk of violence or enforced disappearance on the basis of their political opinion and perceived 'anti-state' activities. They are also at moderate risk of violence from militant groups. Journalists, academics and others who express solidarity with PTM are also targeted.

Peace committees

3.83 In some conflict-affected areas, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, local communities or the Pakistani government have empowered local councils called 'peace committees' (*aman jirga*) to help oppose militant groups such as the TTP. According to a 2017 working paper by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, members of these committees 'are appointed by the military or police in order to deal with security issues and to bring peace in an area, with the government giving them authority for out-of-court arbitration'. Villages may also form peace committees of their own accord. Despite their name, peace committees take many guises, ranging from 'keeping an eye on' terrorist activities to actual engagement against terrorist groups as armed tribal militias.

3.84 Multiple sources told DFAT that members of peace committees and their families were targeted for violence by militant groups (especially the TTP). Peace committees have themselves sometimes been accused of violence or human rights abuses (see [Judiciary](#), [Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment](#)).

3.85 DFAT assesses members of peace committees and their families are at moderate risk of violence by militant groups.

Protesters

3.86 Large-scale protests are a common event in Pakistan. Demonstrations relating to blasphemy and other religious issues can draw wide – and rapid – support and can turn violent (see [Religion](#), [Civil Disorder](#)). Large protests also occur over taxation and fuel, water and gas shortages, as well as political issues such as enforced disappearances and minority and women's rights. Professional groups also engage in mass protests. For example, lawyers protested the appointment of Pakistan's first female Supreme Court judge in September 2021 and doctors protested the unavailability of personal protective equipment in April 2020. Journalists protested in 2020 and September 2021 about restrictions on freedom of the press.

3.87 Authorities do not always respect the right to peaceful protest. Amnesty International accused the Pakistani government of using violent means, including baton charges and irritant spray to break up a peaceful protest by doctors in August 2021. Some protests have been cancelled by authorities during COVID-19 for legitimate public health reasons, although there are reports the government has also used COVID-19 as an excuse to quash protests by critics and political opponents. Authorities reportedly opened fire on protesters trying to force their way to the Chapman border crossing with Afghanistan in July 2020.

3.88 Mass protests are very common in Pakistan and are conducted with varying levels of violence by both protesters and police. The level of risk depends on the protest but the risk of violence by either side cannot be ruled out.

GROUPS OF INTEREST

Women

3.89 Pakistan has one of the worst records for gender equality in the world. According to the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan ranked 153 out of 156 countries for female economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

3.90 Article 25 (2) of the Constitution prohibits 'discrimination on the basis of sex,' subject to a caveat enabling the state to make laws to 'protect women and children.' Nevertheless, discriminatory laws exist: a man can legally seek a divorce at any time, while a woman cannot; the legal marriage age for men is 18, while for women it is 16 (except in Sindh where it is 18); and marital rape is not criminalised.

3.91 There has been significant legislative progress on women's rights at the provincial and federal levels in recent years. Laws against domestic violence in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as federal laws, have been introduced that criminalise honour killings and acid attacks. The enforcement and effectiveness of these laws varies. Some, such as the acid attack law, have been very effective: once common, acid attacks have decreased by about 80 per cent since 2014, according to in-country sources.

3.92 Women's participation in society in Pakistan can be heavily curtailed depending on their social circumstances. Observation of the *purdah* (literally 'curtain', an Islamic practice of segregating women from unrelated men) restricts many women's personal, social and economic activities outside the home. While women in cities such as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad often enjoy relative freedom, conservative rural communities are much stricter. There are reports of widespread sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, schools and universities. Some, mostly wealthy, Pakistani women have attained senior positions in public life, but their experience is not representative of the general population.

3.93 Rates of gender-based violence are high. The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18 found 27.6 per cent of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence, mostly at the hands of their husbands. NGOs claim the actual prevalence is much higher. NGOs and government officials report domestic violence has risen sharply during COVID-19.

3.94 Gender-based violence often goes unreported due to stigma and a lack of privacy for victims, even when they are wealthy and well-connected. Victims of rape often avoid reporting for fear they will be blamed or killed for 'dishonouring' their family, and because attending police stations may put them at risk of further violence. Extremely low conviction rates also discourage reporting of rape and other forms of GBV, as does a lack of female police officers. Domestic violence is commonly seen as a private family issue, and police are often reluctant to intervene. Federal and provincial governments have tried to improve official responses to gender-based violence, including through establishing GBV courts and women's police stations, available in some major cities. In May 2021, police opened a Gender Protection Unit with a 24-hour hotline in Islamabad, which handled more than 500 complaints in its first three months.

3.95 Without support it is extremely difficult for a woman to relocate to escape an abusive relationship. Women who leave their families face physical risk, stigma and steep economic barriers. State-run women's

shelters (*darul aman*) require a court order to enter and leave, and are described as having ‘prison-like’ conditions. Private and NGO-run shelters exist, but they are unable to meet demand. Families often pressure victims to return to their abusers; in some cases victims are lured into returning and are killed. In Punjab it is possible to obtain a restraining order under the *Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016*. Elsewhere in Pakistan a judge may issue a ‘protection order’ (denial of bail) to protect any victim or witness of a crime, but these are rarely granted.

3.96 So-called ‘honour killings’, in which family members murder relatives perceived to have brought dishonour on the family, are common in Pakistan. Human Rights Watch estimates there are about 1,000 honour killings in Pakistan each year. Honour killings can be carried out in response to behaviour including refusing an arranged marriage, forming an unapproved romantic attachment, or ‘immodest’ dress or behaviour, including social media posts. While young men can be targets of honour killing, most victims are female. Once a threat of honour killing is established, the victim remains at risk even if he or she relocates. In some cases, victims have been killed years after the initial transgression. In tribal areas honour killings are sometimes ordered by traditional *jirga* councils (see [Judiciary](#), [Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment](#)).

3.97 Forced and underage marriage is a widespread problem in Pakistan. Religious minorities are at particular risk (see [Christians](#), [Hindus](#)). A frequently-quoted estimate is that about 1,000 forced marriages take place in Pakistan each year. While the marriage age for girls is technically 16, Islamic jurisprudence provides for girls to be married once they reach puberty. Girls as young as 12 have been abducted, raped, threatened with violence and, in some cases, forcibly converted to Islam. In tribal areas, forced marriages are sometimes ordered by traditional *jirga* councils under a custom known as *badal-e-sulah*, where girls and young women are given away to settle blood feuds or land disputes among men.

3.98 Female journalists, activists and opposition politicians are frequently subjected to online harassment, including threats of physical and sexual violence, on the basis of their sex. Women who participate in the annual *Aurat* (Women’s) March have been condemned for promoting ‘vulgar’ behaviour and threatened with violence. In 2020, doctored photos of women holding placards deemed insulting to Islam were circulated online, drawing threats and hate speech. See also [NGOs](#), [Media and Journalists](#).

3.99 Militant groups such as the TTP have attacked female teachers and school students due to their ideological opposition to female education. The 2012 shooting of prominent female education activist Malala Yousafzai while she was travelling on a school bus in Swat was a direct response to a series of media interviews in which she argued that girls had a right to education and condemned the TTP. Attacks on girls’ schools continue, particularly in the former FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. A significant attack occurred against 12 schools in Gilgit Baltistan in August 2018.

3.100 DFAT assesses that women and girls in Pakistan face a high level of official discrimination in the form of inadequate state protection from gender-based violence. Women also face significant legal discrimination on issues such as inheritance, property rights, family law, and civil and traditional judicial processes. DFAT assesses that women and girls in Pakistan face a high risk of societal discrimination and violence, particularly domestic violence, because of their sex. Poor, marginalised, minority, and rural women are particularly vulnerable and lack access to support services.

Sexual orientation and gender identity

3.101 Sexual activity between men is illegal in Pakistan. Section 377 of the Penal Code outlaws consensual ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal’, punishable by prison sentences of 2-10 years. Uncertainty around the definition of ‘carnal intercourse’ makes it unclear whether

this provision applies to sexual activity between women. Section 377 is rarely enforced, although there are reports police threaten LGBTI people with it to extract bribes or sexual favours.

3.102 Homosexuality is deeply taboo in Pakistani society. While cities such as Karachi reportedly have an active underground LGBTI scene, people coming out as gay or lesbian in Pakistan are likely to face ostracism from their families, forced heterosexual marriage, discrimination, bullying and violence. There are reportedly pockets of acceptance among urban, upper-class communities, but even wealthy individuals face discrimination, and their families may force them into a heterosexual marriage to preserve the family's reputation. In April 2014, Muhammed Ejaz, a man from Lahore, killed three gay men he had met online. He told police he wanted to send a message about the evils of homosexuality.

3.103 There is a degree of acceptance of *hijra* (a male-to-female transgender identity often referred to by the broader term 'transgender' in English) in Pakistan, in part due to Islamic tradition, which includes mention of transgender people in scripture. Pakistan has enacted a number of laws protecting the rights of *hijra*, and the Council on Islamic Ideology, a consultative body, has spoken out against discrimination against them. *The Transgender Persons Protection of Rights Act (2018)* gives *hijra* full access to rights and documentation such as national identity cards, driver's licenses and passports, in accordance with their gender identity. The law prohibits discrimination and harassment of transgender people, and protects their rights to health and access to public places. Transgender people have successfully brought lawsuits against people and organisations who breach these laws. In 2019, a government health insurance scheme was extended to transgender people. Some 13 transgender candidates stood for election in 2018, and in 2019 Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights appointed a transgender woman to her department for the first time.

3.104 Despite these steps, transgender Pakistanis are often marginalised, discriminated against and abused. Transgender women are often rejected by their families and turn to sex work, or earn their income by begging or dancing at carnivals and weddings. Such work is highly visible and workers are vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. There are frequent media reports of transgender people being targeted through rape, honour killings and societal violence. Such incidents are especially common in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where 66 transgender people were killed between 2015 and 2019 without any arrests being made, according to Trans Action Alliance, an NGO. Notwithstanding the law, many transgender people reportedly still face barriers to accessing health, policing and other services.

3.105 DFAT assesses that gay and lesbian people in Pakistan face a high risk of official and societal discrimination and a moderate risk of violence. LGBTI people in general often attempt to reduce their risk of violence and discrimination by hiding their sexual orientation or gender identity from family and others. Transgender people face a high risk of violence and societal discrimination throughout the country. Despite laws to protect them, transgender people face a moderate risk of official discrimination at the hands of police and other officials on the basis of their gender identity.

Children

3.106 Domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children are widespread. Child rape is reportedly common, including customary rape of young boys, which particularly occurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal districts. The production and consumption of child pornography are common. Child protection measures, including juvenile courts, have been introduced in some parts of Pakistan, and *The Criminal Law Amendment Act (2016)* criminalises child sexual abuse and child pornography. Critics say these measures have yet to be effectively implemented.

3.107 Article 11(3) of the Constitution prohibits the employment of children under 14 in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment. Provincial laws against child labour include the *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Prohibition of Employment of Children Act (2015)* and the *Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour*

at *Brick Kilns Ordinance (2016)*. Nevertheless, child labour is widespread, including as rag pickers, carpet weavers, brickmakers and in agriculture. The International Labour Organization estimated in 2015 that 2.5 million Pakistani children aged between 10 and 14 were engaged in child labour. The Global Slavery Index estimates that over 3 million people, including children, are trapped in slavery in Pakistan, most due to debt bondage.

3.108 Sexual relations outside of marriage are prohibited under the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, and considerable social stigma attaches to children born out of wedlock, who are considered forbidden under Islam. Without a father's name, such children have no rights to inheritance and cannot be registered with NADRA unless formally under state guardianship in an orphanage. Abortion is illegal in Pakistan, and children born out of wedlock are reportedly sometimes killed.

3.109 DFAT assesses that, while juvenile status alone is not a determinant of risk, children of both sexes face a moderate risk of domestic and societal violence, and sexual abuse, in Pakistan. Poor, culturally and geographically isolated, disabled, illegitimate or orphaned children are particularly vulnerable and lack adequate access to support services and state protection. DFAT assesses children who are victims of violence can face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of state failure to prosecute offenders, and a high level of societal discrimination in the form of a lack of familial support to report violence.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

3.110 The political environment in Pakistan is generally hostile to international and local NGOs, which are often perceived as a national security threat. Those that can operate face challenges including onerous registration requirements, and restrictions on movement and funding sources. The situation has worsened in recent years. In 2019, memos leaked from the Ministry of Interior claimed international NGOs were involved in 'anti-state activities' and worked 'against Pakistan's security and solidarity'.

3.111 NGOs must register with the Ministry of Interior to operate in Pakistan. The ministry has the power to cancel or deny the registration of any NGO deemed not to be acting in Pakistan's strategic, security, economic or national interest. This restricts operations in sensitive geographic areas and limits the ability of NGOs to work on sensitive issues. Registration processes are opaque and onerous, and applications are frequently rejected without explanation. According to the US Department of State, international NGOs are required to obtain no-objection certificates (NOCs) before undertaking in-country travel, commencing certain project activities or initiating projects. Long wait times impede operations. International NGOs including Save the Children, the International Crisis Group and the Norwegian Refugee Council have been forced to cease operations in Pakistan in the face of these requirements. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International no longer maintain offices in Pakistan for the same reasons.

3.112 Human rights activists face threats of violence and harassment from the military, government and militant groups. In September 2020, a group of independent UN human rights experts called on the Pakistani government to end the secret detention of Idris Khattak, an activist and former consultant for Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International who had investigated disappearances in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to Amnesty International, activists, journalists and human rights defenders have been forcibly disappeared by authorities in Balochistan. Among them are Hasaan and Hizbullah Qambrani, who were picked up in February 2020 after participating in protests against enforced disappearances in Quetta. The pair were freed in May 2021 after the Baloch Missing Person's Camp met with Prime Minister Imran Khan to plead for their release.

3.113 DFAT assesses NGO workers, human rights activists and civil society actors face a high risk of official discrimination and a moderate risk of violence, especially in conflict areas (including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

the former FATA and Balochistan). NGO workers and activists that work on religiously sensitive issues face a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence, as well as violence from militant groups. Harassment and monitoring by security forces can occur anywhere in the country (see [Military and Intelligence Services](#)).

Media and journalists

3.114 Pakistan has traditionally had a vibrant media, with many independent broadcast, print and electronic outlets. But the space for free expression has narrowed significantly in recent years. The media faces intimidation and violence and comes under intense pressure to avoid sensitive topics, including criticism of the military, sensitive religious issues, and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). Criticism of the government, once considered a legitimate topic for reporting, is increasingly restricted. Reporters Without Borders ranked Pakistan 145 out of 180 countries in its 2021 Press Freedom Index. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists ranked Pakistan the 9th worst country in the world for journalist murders in its 2020 Global Impunity Index. There have been 15 unsolved murders of journalists in Pakistan since 2015.

3.115 Pakistani journalists have long experienced government (and military) interference, but sources told DFAT Imran Khan's government was subjecting them to unprecedented levels of harassment. Stories that would once have been considered routine – for instance about a dengue fever outbreak – are now censored for fear they will reflect badly on the government. The government has withdrawn advertising from uncooperative outlets, denying them a key source of revenue. As a result, an estimated 2,000-3,500 journalists have lost their jobs since PTI came to power in 2018. TV channels that air interviews with opposition politicians or report on the PTM have been taken off the air or had their signals jammed. In 2018, the military sabotaged distribution of *Dawn*, a major English-language newspaper, to prevent it from disseminating an article criticising the military. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) issues vaguely-worded warning notices threatening legal action if journalists report on controversial topics. Journalists say they often receive phone calls from authorities threatening them or their families if they do not desist from sensitive reporting. Media outlets and journalists that are careful to self-censor and avoid criticism of the government, military, or sensitive religious topics can otherwise operate with relative freedom.

3.116 Female journalists who criticise the government or challenge social or religious mores face particular threats, including threats of sexualised violence and acid attacks, doxxing (the unauthorised release of personal documents) and the release of private images. Male journalists tend rather to face attacks on their credibility or accusations they are in the pay of foreign powers or opposition parties. Both face frequent, virulent online trolling, some of which is allegedly coordinated by government agencies.

3.117 Journalists have been subjected to violence and enforced disappearance. In May 2021, prominent journalist Asad Ali Toor was beaten in his home by three armed men identifying themselves as belonging to the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). In April 2021, broadcast journalist Absar Alam was shot and wounded in an apparently targeted attack near his home in Islamabad. Alam had previously been charged with sedition and 'high treason' for using 'derogatory language' about the government on social media. In July 2020, TV journalist Matiullah Jan was kidnapped by unidentified men and held for 12 hours, during which time he was bound, gagged and beaten. In June 2018, Gul Bukhari, a British-Pakistani journalist and vocal critic of the military, was kidnapped and held by masked men in Lahore. No one has been held accountable for these attacks. Journalists also face threats and violence at the hands of militant groups. In September 2021, a spokesperson for the TTP warned journalists not to refer to them as 'terrorists' or they would be considered 'enemies'.

3.118 Online activists face harassment and violence. In 2017, five bloggers disappeared after publishing content critical of the government and military. After they were released, some fled the country and reported torture and detention by state intelligence agencies. The military and intelligence services denied involvement. The risk to online activists of official harassment is reportedly less when they have a small following, and greater when they are prominent and influential.

3.119 DFAT assesses journalists in Pakistan face a high risk of official discrimination in the form of censorship and harassment. Journalists who report on sensitive issues, including criticism of the military, government or militant groups, sensitive religious topics or the PTM, face a moderate risk of enforced disappearance and violence. Female journalists face a high risk of online harassment and sexualised threats, over and above the risks also experienced by their male colleagues. DFAT assesses that people who post articles on social media criticising the security forces or armed groups face a moderate risk of official discrimination and societal violence, although this depends in part on their prominence. Social media use and commentary is widespread, and low-level commentary by obscure activists is unlikely to attract attention.

Polio workers

3.120 The TTP has denounced polio vaccinations and regularly carries out attacks on polio workers, as does IS. These groups promote conspiracy theories about polio vaccinations, such as claiming they are a Western plot to sterilise or otherwise harm Muslims. Militant groups killed more than 100 people in attacks on polio workers between December 2012 and September 2016. Attacks were less frequent in 2020 but there was an uptick in attacks in 2021, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A policeman was injured and two gunmen shot dead during an attack on polio workers in Peshawar in September 2021. It was the second such attack in a week and occurred simultaneously with other similar attacks. Polio workers also experience frequent harassment and societal violence because of their work.

3.121 DFAT assesses polio workers face a moderate risk of violence and societal harassment due to their work.

4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

Extrajudicial killings

4.1 Article 9 of the Constitution provides that ‘no person shall be deprived of life or liberty save in accordance with law’. Under Article 3 (1) and (2) (a) of the *Protection of Pakistan Act (2014)*, officers in the security forces can lawfully shoot on sight a person who is committing or is likely to commit a ‘scheduled offence’ (such as bombings or killings committed as an act of insurrection against Pakistan; cyber and internet crimes; and crimes against ethnic, religious and political groups or minorities). They may also shoot on sight to prevent death or grievous hurt, provided the decision to shoot is a last resort and does not cause more harm than is necessary.

4.2 Suspects are often killed in ‘encounters’, widely understood as a euphemism for extrajudicial killings. In a typical encounter, suspects, who have sometimes previously been forcibly disappeared, are given (unloaded) weapons and driven to a location where they are either arrested or killed by police, ostensibly in the course of a gunfight. A 2019 report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (an NGO) found 3,345 people were killed in police encounters from January 2014 to May 2018. Another report revealed 171 encounter killings in the first six months of 2020. Police are rarely held to account for encounter killings, although a handful have faced criminal charges. In 2021, the US Department of State reported evidence of extrajudicial killings by security forces across Pakistan. Militants also carry out bombings and targeted assassinations against civilians and security forces (see [Armed Groups](#)).

Enforced or involuntary disappearance

4.3 Enforced disappearances have occurred in Pakistan for decades, but reportedly worsened after 2004. Before Imran Khan was elected he promised to end the practice, but rights groups say it has instead become more common under his government. The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) reported in 2020 it had received 1,144 cases of allegations of enforced disappearances from Pakistan between 1980 and 2019, of whom 731 remained missing. Since many cases are not referred to the WGEID the actual number is likely much higher.

4.4 Those targeted for disappearance include suspected militants, activists, students, opposition politicians, human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers. Disappearances can last as little as hours and as long as years. Some disappeared individuals are killed. Those released are often reluctant to talk about their captivity. Many are reportedly tortured and suffer permanent disabilities and long-term psychological trauma. Security services sometimes identify themselves to their victims and, in rare cases, have publicly admitted to holding disappeared individuals. In 2011 the government set up a Commission of Inquiry on

Enforced Disappearances to investigate cases and hold perpetrators to account; a 2020 report by the International Commission of Jurists found it had failed to bring a single perpetrator to justice. Militant groups also sometimes commit kidnappings and enforced disappearances (see [Armed Groups](#)).

Deaths in custody

4.5 The US Department of State's 2020 human rights country report for Pakistan states 'Physical abuse of criminal suspects in custody allegedly caused the death of some individuals'. In September 2019 a murder case was registered against three Punjabi police officers after a mentally ill man died in their custody. He was allegedly tortured to death. The same month another murder case was registered against another three Punjabi police officers after a man succumbed to injuries allegedly suffered during torture by police. According to media reports, he and nine other suspects had been illegally held for interrogation in a secret police cell in Gujjarpura. A bill outlawing torture and extrajudicial killings in custody – *The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Bill 2021* – was passed in July 2021. See also [Torture](#).

DEATH PENALTY

4.6 Under Pakistani law there are 27 offences that attract the death penalty, including murder, terrorism, rape, kidnapping, drug trafficking, adultery, blasphemy, treason and military offences. More than 500 people have been executed since an unofficial moratorium on executions was lifted in December 2014. The number of death sentences handed down has reduced since 2019, when 584 people were sentenced to death and 15 were executed. A total of 177 death sentences were handed down in 2020, but no one has been executed since 2019, reportedly due to pressure applied by the EU through its trade agreements with Pakistan. As of June 2021, there were about 3,800 prisoners on death row. The usual method of execution is hanging.

4.7 In February 2020, the National Assembly passed a non-binding resolution calling for public hangings of child sexual abuse perpetrators. The issue re-emerged in September 2020 when Prime Minister Khan called for public hangings for repeat or serious sexual offenders following the gang rape of a woman on a Punjab motorway. On 10 February 2021, Pakistan's Supreme Court handed down a landmark judgement holding that mentally ill prisoners could not be executed. The death sentences of several mentally ill convicts were immediately commuted to life imprisonment. Local and international observers say many death penalty trials in Pakistan lack due process and procedural fairness, especially in the lower courts. Many death sentences are overturned on appeal. See also [Blasphemy](#).

TORTURE

4.8 There are frequent, credible reports of torture by Pakistani security forces. The most common method is beating, but other methods include sexual violence and humiliation. There are also reports of torture involving electric shocks. In May 2017, the UN Committee against Torture reported evidence the Pakistani military, paramilitary and intelligence services frequently used torture and almost never faced punishment, and expressed concern that extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances may also have involved torture. See [Police and Paramilitary, Military and Intelligence Services](#).

4.9 A law outlawing torture and extrajudicial killings in custody – *The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Bill 2021* – was passed in July 2021. The law states any public servant involved in torture will face up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to PKR 2 million (about AUD 15,000). Public servants who 'commit the offence of custodial death or custodial sexual violence' will face life

imprisonment and a fine of up to PKR 3 million. Officials who negligently fail to prevent these crimes can also be punished with jail sentences and fines. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan welcomed the passage of the law but expressed concern it would be enforced by the FIA, which has itself been accused of torture. See also [Deaths in Custody](#).

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

4.10 Under the Hudood Ordinances, courts can theoretically sentence people to punishments including amputation, whipping and stoning, although whipping was abolished under the *Abolition of the Punishment of Whipping Act (1996)* and sentences of amputation or stoning have never been carried out. Under the *Anti-Rape Ordinance (2020)*, courts can order forced chemical castration for convicted rapists.

4.11 Traditional justice mechanisms such as *jirgas* (see [Judiciary](#)) can hand down punishments, including stoning, amputations, and ‘blackening’ of faces with ink as a form of public humiliation. While increasingly rare, some of these punishments (outside the court system) are still carried out. In 2019, police in Balochistan investigated reports a 10-year-old girl had been stoned to death on the orders of a *jirga* in Khirthar. The girl’s family claimed she had died in a landslide. In 2021, two alleged drug dealers had their heads shaved and faces blackened and were paraded on donkeys on the orders of an *Aman* (‘peace’) council in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In August 2017, a teenage couple in Karachi were electrocuted to death on the orders of a *jirga* after attempting to elope. *Jirgas* may also order forced marriages (and in some parts of Pakistan, rape or ritual humiliation of women) under a custom known as *badal-e-sulah*, where girls and young women are given away to settle blood feuds or land disputes among men (see [Women](#)).

Corporal punishment

4.12 Corporal punishment and physical abuse of children is pervasive in Pakistan. In January 2021, an eight-year-old boy was beaten to death by his teacher for failing to memorise a lesson at a *madrassa* in Punjab province. In June 2020, an eight-year-old girl working as a maid in Islamabad was beaten to death for letting her employers’ pet parrots escape. In February 2021, the *ICT Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill* was passed by the National Assembly, banning corporal punishment in the capital territory. Rights groups hope it will be extended to the rest of the country.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

STATE PROTECTION

5.1 Pakistan's formal legal framework provides for state protection of people's property, lives, places of worship and religious beliefs. However, DFAT assesses that state protection in Pakistan is limited due to under-resourcing, corruption, socio-economic factors at the individual level, and lack of political will. Some groups are denied adequate state protection on discriminatory grounds (for example, [Ahmadis](#)).

5.2 Despite measures introduced to curb violence across the country under the NAP – including strengthened powers for military and paramilitary security forces and the establishment of military courts – successful prosecution for politically motivated or sectarian violence is rare. This is due to ineffective police investigations, a lack of forensic capabilities and prosecution and judicial legal understanding, and threats against judges, lawyers, witnesses and their families.

Military and intelligence services

5.3 The Pakistani military is well-trained, well-equipped and politically powerful. According to the 2021 Global Fire Power Index, the nuclear-armed Pakistan Armed Forces is the 10th most powerful military in the world. The defence budget is over USD 12 billion. Not including paramilitaries, the military commands a force of 1.2 million personnel, 654,000 on active service and 550,000 reserves. Pakistan is also one of the world's largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions. Pakistan's military is all-volunteer, and there is no compulsory military service.

5.4 The military is widely regarded as the most capable institution in Pakistan. It holds considerable influence over domestic politics and dominates foreign and security policy. The military seized control of the government through coups d'état in 1958, 1977 and 1999 (see [Recent History](#)). Military personnel are well-paid and accorded high social status. Pakistanis generally regard the military as less corrupt than other institutions. The military employs minorities, including Pashtuns and Hazaras, although minority groups say there are unofficial ceilings on their promotion to higher ranks (for example, [Shi'a](#), [Hindus](#)). There is a relatively small number of women in the military, all in non-combat roles. There are very few women of senior rank.

5.5 There are widespread, credible reports of human rights abuses by the Pakistani security services, including the military and intelligence services. The ISI has been accused of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture. The ISI is also alleged to have high-level links with militant groups, including the Taliban, and to tolerate their presence in Pakistan as a hedge against India and Afghanistan. See [Extrajudicial Killings](#), [Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) and [Torture](#).

5.6 The security services (including the ISI, Intelligence Bureau and other agencies) operate a highly efficient surveillance state, including wire taps, spy software, and the monitoring of internet service providers (ISPs), which the government allegedly deploys against suspected terrorists, journalists, political opponents and others.

5.7 From January 2015 to March 2019, special laws (which have since lapsed) empowered military courts to conduct trials of civilians suspected of involvement in terrorism for a wide range of offences. These courts have been criticised by rights groups for failing to afford defendants due process and fair trials. See [Judiciary](#).

Police and paramilitary

5.8 Federal and provincial police services have primary responsibility for law enforcement, supported by other law enforcement agencies, including the IB, FIA, and National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). Provincial and autonomous regional authorities are directly responsible for law and order, and the federal government has jurisdiction over police in Islamabad and security forces in the former FATA.

5.9 According to the International Crisis Group, the number of police in Pakistan increased from 220,000 to 430,000 over the decade to 2015. In 2018, the total police force was estimated at 530,000. Police capacity and effectiveness in Pakistan is limited by a lack of resources, poor training, insufficient and outmoded equipment, and competing pressures from superiors, political actors, security forces and the judiciary. The public perception of police is generally poor, although it has reportedly improved in recent years.

5.10 Police work in Pakistan is poorly paid and dangerous. Individual police officers often augment their salaries with bribes. Terrorist attacks by militant groups frequently target police. A total of 28 police were killed and 26 injured in terrorist attacks and sectarian violence in 2020. There are no centralised or national law enforcement databases or criminal records, which makes it hard to track or locate offenders. Provincial police forces operate independently, with no nationwide coordination or training standards.

5.11 In addition to provincial police forces, several paramilitary forces operate in Pakistan. These include the Pakistan Rangers, which mainly operate in Punjab and Sindh provinces. The Rangers are notionally under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior but are headed by an army general and are, in practice, under the control of the military. The Rangers undertake border security operations along the Indian border, as well as internal law-and-order operations. The Frontier Corps perform a similar role to the Rangers in western border regions, including Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA.

5.12 The UN, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported widespread human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances by the police, Rangers and Frontier Corps. See also [Extrajudicial Killings, Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) and [Torture](#).

Judiciary

5.13 The Supreme Court of Pakistan sits at the apex of Pakistan's judicial system, followed by five provincial and regional high courts and numerous district courts. There is also a variety of specialist courts, including banking courts, drug courts, gender-based violence courts and children's courts. Judicial proceedings are usually conducted in Urdu, and stenographers transcribe into English. Supreme Court judgements are published in English.

5.14 The Constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary. In the lead-up to the 2018 general elections there were widespread claims of military interference with the Supreme Court to destabilise the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government, calling this independence into question.

5.15 Although subordinate to the Supreme Court, the Federal Sharia Court (FSC) is a parallel court responsible for ensuring laws are consistent with Islamic principles (see [Religion](#)). The FSC examines the

judgements of lower courts in cases arising from the Hudood Ordinances governing Muslim behaviour (see [Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)). The Council on Islamic Ideology (see [Religion](#)) is also influential, with the power to review legislation and make recommendations for legislative reform.

5.16 Defendants in criminal trials are entitled to the presumption of innocence and allowed legal representation. This is usually self-funded. Judicial practice in Pakistan favours witness testimony over forensic or other types of evidence. Perjury is common. Pakistan abolished trial-by-jury in the 1960s.

5.17 From January 2015 to March 2019, special laws (which have since lapsed) empowered military courts to conduct trials of civilians suspected of involvement in terrorism. A January 2019 statement by the military's Inter-Services Public Relations agency said 717 cases were referred to the military courts and 646 were disposed of. A total of 345 people were sentenced to death and 56 had been executed. Military courts lacked transparency, and civilians appearing before a military court were not afforded a fair trial by international standards.

5.18 The judicial system is overburdened with a backlog of cases. It is rare for a criminal case to be settled in less than two years, and DFAT is aware of cases where accused people have spent two decades in pre-trial detention only to be acquitted by the Supreme Court because of a lack of evidence. Conviction rates are very low (less than 10 per cent in criminal cases). Local sources claim media pressure is often required to resolve pending cases. Local and international observers report corruption in the judicial system, as well as intimidation of judges, particularly in religiously sensitive cases, such as those involving [blasphemy](#).

5.19 People in tribal areas may seek justice through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms as an alternative to formal justice mechanisms. These consist of committees made up of tribal elders, including *aman* ('peace') committees, *panchayat* and *jirgas*. These mechanisms do not follow internationally recognised standards for due process and procedural fairness, and prioritise the interests of the community over the legal rights of the individual. Their punishments can be cruel and unjust, especially towards women (see [Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), [Women](#)).

Detention and prison

5.20 Conditions in detention and prison facilities in Pakistan are extremely poor. Overcrowding is rife; as many as 15 prisoners sometimes occupy a cell designed for three people, and prisoners are sometimes forced to sleep in shifts because there is insufficient space for them all to lie down. Other issues include inadequate food, sanitation and medical care, inadequate light and ventilation, and lack of potable water. According to Amnesty International, the overcrowded state of Pakistan's prisons has put inmates at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. There are reports of torture and killings in detention (see [Torture](#), [Deaths in Custody](#)).

5.21 Pakistan has limited facilities for juvenile offenders, who are often incarcerated with adults. Sexual violence, especially towards juvenile males, is common. Female prisoners are held separately from males. Despite laws to protect *hijra* (see [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)), the US Department of State reported prisons held transgender women with men, and the men harassed the transgender women. A 2020 Human Rights Watch report found 134 women had children with them in prison, some as old as 9 and 10, despite the legal limit of 5 years. An estimated 70 per cent of the prison population is in pre-trial detention.

5.22 An ombudsman for detainees maintains offices in Islamabad and each of the provinces. Inspectors-general of prisons carry out irregular inspections of facilities to monitor conditions. Plans to reform the prison system have largely stalled, although the US Department of State noted in 2020 that the Punjab,

Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa prison departments had established prison academies where ‘modern prison management techniques’ were taught. Some human rights groups and journalists are granted access to monitor prison conditions, although international NGOs reported difficulty accessing detention facilities in conflict-affected areas and facilities where security-related detainees were held.

INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.23 Article 15 of the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of movement in Pakistan. Internal migration is widespread and common, but it depends on having both the financial means and family, tribal and/or ethnic networks to establish oneself in a new location. Single women find it especially difficult to relocate (see [Women](#)). For some groups (such as [Hazaras](#)), travel by road is unsafe in certain parts of the country, and those who must travel and can afford to fly do so.

5.24 Large urban centres such as Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore have ethnically and religiously diverse populations, and offer some anonymity for people fleeing violence by non-state actors (see relevant sections). Some groups, such as [Pashtuns](#), occupy enclaves in these cities, while others, such as [Ahmadis](#) and [Hazaras](#), avoid living in enclaves to reduce the risk of being targeted. Certain types of threats (such as honour killings) are persistent, and even if people relocate they can be tracked down and killed years later (see [Women](#)). DFAT assesses that groups facing official discrimination (see relevant sections) will face discrimination in all parts of the country.

TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

Entry and exit procedures

5.25 Under Article 2 of the *Exit from Pakistan (Control) Ordinance (1981)*, the Pakistani government can prevent any person, including those with valid travel documentation, from leaving the country. Pakistani citizens require a valid passport to enter or exit Pakistan under Articles 3 and 4 of the *Passports Act (1974)*. Under Articles 4 and 6, attempting to enter or depart Pakistan without valid documentation or on fraudulent documentation is punishable with up to three years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both. Those suspected of human trafficking or people smuggling may be prosecuted under the *Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2018)* and/or the *Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Acts (2018)*.

5.26 The government maintains an exit control list (ECL) and can prevent those on it from leaving the country, including those wanted for criminal offences. The ECL is highly politicised; sitting governments have frequently placed political rivals on the list. It may also be possible to have someone placed on the ECL through bribery. It is difficult but not impossible for people to leave the country illegally after being placed on the ECL. In September 2019, Pakistani human rights activist Gullalai Ismael fled to the US after being placed on the ECL for ‘anti-state activities’ and ‘inciting violence’. She would not reveal how she was able to leave Pakistan but told the New York Times she did not fly out of an airport.

5.27 Afghan citizens are required to present their passports with valid visas for movement across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border but, in practice, tighter restrictions since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 mean that even Afghans holding a valid Pakistan visa have often not been able to enter (see [Afghans](#)). A fence has been built along the border, but the length of the border and the rugged terrain mean that, in practice, undocumented movement occurs. Pakistani citizens from the Shi’a-majority Kurram Agency have historically transited through Afghanistan to reach Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Peshawar) to avoid militant groups in Kurram and Orakzai agencies. This has become harder following the fencing of the

border. Cross-border back-and-forth movement by holders of *tazkiras* (Afghan identity documents from Kandahar/Spin Boldak) occurs. Border crossings open and close frequently.

Conditions for returnees

5.28 Returnees tend to leave Pakistan on valid travel documents and therefore do not commit immigration offences under Pakistani law. Those who return voluntarily and with valid travel documentation are typically processed like any other citizen returning to Pakistan. The government issues 'genuine' returnees with temporary documents when they arrive. A genuine returnee is defined as someone who exited Pakistan legally irrespective of how they entered destination countries. Those who are returned involuntarily or who travel on emergency travel documents are likely to attract attention from the authorities upon arrival. Immigration officials will interview failed returnees and release them if their exit was deemed to be legal but may detain those deemed to have departed illegally.

5.29 People suspected of or charged with criminal offences in Pakistan are likely to face questioning on return, irrespective of whether they departed legally or not. DFAT understands that people returned to Pakistan involuntarily are typically questioned upon arrival to ascertain whether they left the country illegally, are wanted for crimes in Pakistan, or have committed offences while abroad. Those who left Pakistan on valid travel documentation and have not committed any other crimes are typically released within a couple of hours. Those found to have contravened Pakistani immigration laws are typically arrested and detained. These people are usually released within a few days after being bailed out by their families or having paid a fine, although the law provides for prison sentences. Those wanted for a crime in Pakistan or who have committed a serious offence abroad may be arrested and held on remand or required to report regularly to police.

5.30 Returnees are responsible for arranging their own onward transportation from their point of entry into Pakistan. Voluntary returnees may be eligible for assistance from the IOM and/or domestic NGOs. Returnees are typically able to reintegrate into the Pakistani community without repercussions stemming from their migration attempt, although involuntary returnees who took on debt to fund their migration tend to face a higher risk of financial hardship and familial shame. A small percentage of returnees do not reintegrate and go abroad again to seek asylum.

5.31 DFAT assesses that returnees to Pakistan do not face a significant risk of societal violence or discrimination purely as a result of their attempt to migrate, or purely because they have lived in a Western country. Nevertheless, DFAT notes societal or official discrimination or violence can still occur due to the reason they attempted to migrate, or because of behaviour or opinions they displayed while living abroad (see [Race/Nationality](#), [Religion](#), [Political Opinion \(Actual or imputed\)](#), [Groups of Interest](#)).

DOCUMENTATION

5.32 The most reliable forms of documentation in Pakistan are passports and Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs), predated by the MNIC (Manual National identity Card) and to be replaced by the SNIC (Smart National Identity Card). Other common forms of identification include domicile, birth, death and marriage certificates. Drivers' licences are a less reliable form of identification.

5.33 The Directorate General of Immigration and Passports issues passport documentation, and NADRA issues CNICs and SNICs. Both have offices across the country. All Pakistani citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to apply for passports and CNICs. The Pakistani government has dual nationality arrangements with 16 countries. Under Section 10 of the Citizenship Act of 1951, it is possible for foreign women to obtain

Pakistani citizenship by marrying a Pakistani man, but the reverse is not true; that is, a Pakistani woman cannot transmit her citizenship to her foreign husband by marriage. Pakistanis living overseas have the option to register with the government as non-resident 'Overseas Pakistanis'. This entitles overseas Pakistanis to a 'National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis' (NICOP) that can be used for visa-free entry to Pakistan, recognition of citizenship, opening a bank account and buying and selling property. Registration is via the NADRA website and processed in Pakistan, and not in overseas missions.

Birth certificates and school records

5.34 Birth certificates in Pakistan can be issued by NADRA, local government bodies (union councils) or hospitals. Hospital birth certificates are automatically issued to children born in hospitals, however no central database exists and no automatic registration process captures the many babies who are not born in hospital. While technically compulsory, large numbers of births are not registered. UNICEF estimated there were about 60 million unregistered children in Pakistan in 2019.

5.35 School records and matriculation certificates are often used in lieu of birth certificates. NADRA birth certificates are uniform across the country, but other types of certificates are not. NADRA certificates are computerised and contain a complete birth record in English and Urdu. NADRA certificates and local government certificates are stamped and signed by local officials. Children born in Pakistan to Afghan parents can receive Pakistani birth certificates with the assistance of the UNHCR. In 2018, Prime Minister Khan declared that the children of Afghans and other refugees who were born in Pakistan were constitutionally entitled to citizenship, but in practice NADRA continues to refuse to issue identity cards for these people.

National Identity Cards

5.36 CNICs and SNICs are the most common form of identification in Pakistan. They are required to obtain a passport or drivers' licence, engage in formal employment, register as a voter, access services such as bank accounts, obtain a SIM card, open new water, electricity or gas accounts, purchase land or vehicles, and gain entry to college or university. NADRA began a program in 2012 to replace all CNICs with SNICs, with a view to completion by 2020. However, as SNICs are more expensive and are linked to other basic services such as bill payment, mail and taxation, many Pakistanis do not obtain SNICs. CNICs and SNICs both remain valid.

5.37 To obtain a CNIC or SNIC, applicants need to submit the CNIC or MNIC number of a blood relative along with their own birth certificate, school, university certificate or citizenship certificate. An applicant who was previously registered and had an MNIC is required to submit the original or a copy of their MNIC. An applicant who has turned 18 and holds a child registration certificate (CRC) must submit the CRC or a copy.

5.38 It is possible to apply for identity documents through NADRA's Pak-Identity online issuance service, but applicants seeking a CNIC for the first time are required to present in-person at any NADRA registration centre to submit their paperwork, have their photograph taken, and provide their signature and an impression of their thumb. Pakistanis living abroad can apply online for a NICOP, which will be delivered to them via courier.

5.39 Applicants with an existing computerised CNIC can apply online to renew, replace or modify their CNIC, without having to attend a NADRA office, although they may be required to attend in-person to have certain documents certified. Applications to renew, replace or modify non-computerised CNICs must be

made in-person at any NADRA office. DFAT is aware of reports CNIC applicants have been told they must travel to a NADRA office in their district of origin to apply, but this is not official policy. In some cases it may be necessary for applicants to travel to their district of origin to obtain other documents required for a CNIC application. For example, a birth certificate can only be issued by the union council of the district of origin.

5.40 CNICs record the following information about the holder: legal name; gender (male, female or transgender); father's name (or husband's name for a married female); identification marks; date of birth; CNIC number; family registration ID number; current address; permanent address; date of issue; date of expiry; signature; photo; and thumbprint. CNICs do not display information on the holder's religion, but NADRA collects this information during the application process. CNICs are valid for five or ten years; CNICs issued to citizens over the age of 65 are valid for life.

5.41 SNICs contain similar information to CNICs, and have a smart chip containing biometric information and a number of additional security features. While the document itself is highly secure, rigorous identity checks are not undertaken in the issuance process for SNICs.

5.42 NADRA can block a CNIC, PoR card or ACC for suspicious use – or allegedly for certain groups as a form of harassment (see [Afghans](#)). DFAT understands individuals have found it impossible to reverse a decision to block a card, and blocking is a precursor to cancelling a card.

Passports

5.43 Pakistan issues machine-readable ordinary, official and diplomatic passports. These contain biometric and security features, including a photograph of the holder, fingerprints, and watermarks. Passports contain information about the holder's religion. Manual passports are no longer issued.

5.44 All Pakistani citizens are eligible to apply for a passport, although some groups face discriminatory barriers to doing so (see [Ahmadis](#)). Generally, the only supporting documentation required is the applicant's CNIC. Pakistani diplomatic missions in other countries, including Australia, can issue passports to Pakistani citizens. The government issued its first transgender passport in 2017, which indicates gender with an 'X' (see [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)).

Marriage certificates

5.45 Marriage certificates (for Muslims called *nikah namas*) are common identification documents. *Nikah namas* contain the signatures of the bride and groom, two witnesses and a marriage officiator. They are typically handwritten in Urdu. *Nikah namas* are registered with the local union council. NADRA then issues a fully computerised marriage registration certificate, with information in both Urdu and English. NADRA also issues a family registration certificate.

5.46 Non-Muslim religious leaders can issue marriage certificates for their communities, although some groups face difficulties updating their CNICs after marriage (see [Christians](#), [Hindus](#), [Ahmadis](#)).

Other documentation

5.47 NADRA issues NICOPs for Pakistanis living abroad. NADRA also issues Pakistan origin cards providing expatriate Pakistanis with visa-free entry, indefinite stay rights, exemption from foreigner registration requirements, property rights and the right to open a bank account.

5.48 NADRA issues child registration certificates (CRCs) as identity documents for children under the age of 18. Children under 10 do not require supporting documentation to obtain a CRC, but those over 10 are required to provide a copy of a birth certificate or school record.

5.49 NADRA issues family registration certificates (FRCs), which contain information on each family member. New FRCs are issued upon marriage and amended upon the birth of a child. A domicile certificate is a document containing information about a person's place and date of birth. These certificates are legally obtainable only by people resident in Pakistan but are easy to obtain illegally. NADRA or the deputy commissioner of a district can issue domicile certificates. Between 2002 and 2009, local governments also issued domicile certificates.

5.50 Police issue documentation containing information about a person's criminal record. Officials typically check with local police from the applicant's district before issuing the certificate, but Pakistan has no centralised criminal database, so these documents are not reliable.

5.51 PoR and ACC cards are valid forms of identification for Afghans living in Pakistan (see [Afghans](#)).

PREVALENCE OF FRAUD

5.52 Document fraud is widespread in Pakistan, other than for identity documents issued by NADRA, which are generally reliable. CNICs, SNICs and passports contain security features which have reduced the incidence of document fraud. Authorities have put in place measures to combat the fraudulent issuance of documents and can cancel fraudulent CNICs.

5.53 Due to the relative ease in acquiring fraudulently obtained genuine documents, such documents are common in Pakistan. Genuine documents such as CNICs and passports can be obtained with fraudulently altered or counterfeit feeder documents. Fraudulent documents in Pakistan can include, but are not limited to, academic degrees and transcripts, bank statements, agreements, references, and ownership deeds.

5.54 Union councils and NADRA can verify whether documents are genuine, but they may not be able to identify fraudulently obtained genuine documents. NADRA issues birth certificates, but fraudulently obtained, fraudulently altered or counterfeit certificates are still available from hospitals. FIRs (First Information Reports, an initial police record of a complaint or reported crime) use standard forms with the relevant information written in by hand and are relatively easy to counterfeit. Reports exist of police accepting bribes to verify fraudulent FIRs. DFAT does not consider the existence of an FIR as conclusive evidence the events described in the FIR actually occurred.

5.55 As self-declaration as an Afghan is the only requirement to apply for an ACC, it is possible for an individual not in either the NADRA or MORR databases to fraudulently obtain an ACC (see [Afghans](#)).