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Pakistan: Situation and treatment of Shia [Shi'a, Shi'i, Shiite] Muslims, including Hazaras and Turi, particularly in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and Hyderabad; treatment of Shia returnees and whether they are targeted for extortion and blasphemy charges upon their return to Pakistan; state response to violence against Shias (2020–December 2023) [PAK201761.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Shia Muslims

1.1 Demographics

According to sources, the percentage of Shias in Pakistan is estimated to be between 10 and 20 percent (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.28) or between 15 and 20 percent of the population (*The Guardian* 2020-10-21). A report by International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) on sectarian violence in Pakistan indicates that Shias are estimated to make up 20–25 percent of the country's Muslim population and constitute Pakistan's largest sectarian minority (2022-09-05, 26). The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* notes that figures on the Muslim population breakdown between the Sunni and Shia population "vary" (US 2022-06-02, 4).

A 2022 country report on Pakistan by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) states that there are "significant" Shia communities in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.55). The same source adds that Shias are a majority in the Gilgit-Baltistan autonomous region but are a minority elsewhere in

Pakistan (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.55). A 2019 DFAT report indicates that

Pakistani Shi'a live throughout the country in urban centres, including Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan, Jhang and Sargodha. ...

Significant numbers of Shi'a live in Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; in Kurram and Orakzai districts in the former FATA [Federally Administrated Tribal Areas] [1]; in and around Quetta and the Makran coastline in Balochistan; in parts of southern and central Punjab; and throughout Sindh. Although some Shi'a live in enclaves in these cities [Hazaras and Turis], Shi'a and Sunni communities are generally well integrated. (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.90-3.91)

The same source also notes that in Karachi, "concentrations" of Shia, "particularly" Hazaras, can be found in Abbas Town, Hussain Hazara Goth, Mughal Hazara Goth, Rizvia, Ancholi, Defence Housing Authority (DHA) Gizri, Pak Colony and Manghopir (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.105). The same report adds that Shias live throughout Punjab, including in Lahore, but that in southern Punjab, Sunni and Shia communities are "more segregated," while communities in cities are "much more integrated" (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.106). The report further states that "most" Shias in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa live in Hangu, Kohat, Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan, explaining that "[m]ost Shi'a in Peshawar are long-term residents of the Old City, while many Shi'a in Hangu, Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan are Turi or Bangash Shi'a from Kurram and Orakzai agencies" (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.108). According to the same source,

[a]pproximately two million people live in Gilgit-Baltistan, a sparsely populated autonomous region in the north. The population comprises Shi'a (approximately 39 per cent), Ismaili Shi'a (18 per cent), Sunnis (27 per cent), and Nurbakshis, who adhere to a Sufi tradition combining aspects of Shi'a and Sunni theology (16 per cent). (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.112)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.2 Distinguishing Features

The 2022 DFAT report provides the following:

Most Pakistani Shi'a (except Hazaras) are not physically or linguistically distinguishable from Sunnis, and national censuses do not distinguish between them. NADRA [National Database and Registration Authority] collects sectarian information during the application process for identity documents, but CNICs [Computerized National Identity Cards] 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. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.56)

The 2019 DFAT report explains the following:

Shi'a in Pakistan are most prominent during Shi'a religious events and pilgrimages to Iraq and Iran. Shi'a commemorate the Day of Ashura [Ashoura] with reenactments of the martyrdom and processions, during which Shi'a men and women dressed in black parade through the streets slapping their chests and chanting. Self-harm, such as flagellation performed during Ashura processions, can leave permanent marks. Shi'a and Sunni mosques are clearly distinguishable. (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.92)

The same source adds the following:

Shi'a mosques and places of worship, or *imambargahs*, feature different Muslim iconography, including the Shi'a sword, horses, images of Ali and Hussein, and "U-shaped" crescent moons. Shi'a and Sunni mosques have different prayer times, and worshippers use different hand positions while praying. Shi'a mosques are located throughout Pakistan. Shi'a can pray in Sunni mosques and vice versa, although this rarely happens. Both sects share a number of famous religious sites, including Sufi shrines. (Australia 2019-02-20, para. 3.94, italics in original)

Other sources also explain that Ashura, in the month of Muharram [Moharram], is an important date for Shias, commemorating the death of Husayn [Hussein] ibn Ali, during which self-flagellation is common (Business Insider 2015-10-04; Field 1996, 14). Other sources also note variations in prayer practices, including hand placement (NBC 2016-01-04; Rubin 2015, 329).

2. Situation and Treatment of Shia Muslims

A 2012 demographic study report by the Pew Research Centre, a non-partisan think-tank based in Washington, DC (Pew Research Center n.d.), states that "[i]n some countries in the Middle East and North Africa with predominantly Sunni populations, such as Egypt and Morocco, the prevailing view is that Shias are *not* members of the Islamic faith"; the study found that 53 percent of Pakistani respondents [2] agreed that Shias are Muslim, while 37 percent said that they are not (Pew Research Center 2012-08-09, 83, 88, emphasis in original). An opinion article in the *New York Times* by Wajahat Ali, the author of a book on Islam in America (W. W. Norton & Company n.d.), notes that "[h]ardline religious leaders

and scholars" in countries including Pakistan have viewed "marginalizing Shiites as integral to Sunni identity" (Ali 2022-08-16). The same source adds that globally some "Sunni Muslim extremists" also "denigrate" Shiites with terms including "'disbeliever' and 'apostate'" (Ali 2022-08-16). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), in Pakistan "Shi'a are still regarded as apostates by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals" (2018-06). The same source indicates that Shias have been "subjected to various forms of hate speech, most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media," and are "vilified as a community for their religious beliefs" (MRG 2018-06). An article by MRG and the Imam Al-Khoei Foundation [3], citing data from the Pakistan Hate Speech Monitor [4], indicates that from August to September 2020 there was a "massive wave of anti-Shi'a hate speech online" (MRG & Imam Al-Khoei Foundation 2020-10-20).

Sources indicate that Shias are "well represented in parliament and regularly contest elections for mainstream political parties" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.57) or that "many" Shias have attained "influential, high-profile positions" (MRG 2018-06). According to the 2022 DFAT report, Shias are "generally able to establish places of worship and practise their religion without overt state interference" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.57). The same source notes, however, that Shias "face rising religious intolerance and official discrimination in the form of blasphemy accusations" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.58, 3.61).

Sources indicate that in July 2020 the Punjab Assembly passed the Protection of the Foundation of Islam Bill (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.58; *The Diplomat* 2020-09-17), which endorsed the Sunni interpretation of Islam as the "only acceptable version" (*The Diplomat* 2020-09-17). The 2022 DFAT report notes that the Governor "returned it for revision" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.58).

Sources report that Shias are excluded from the country's 5 percent minimum quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal and provincial levels of government (US 2022-06-02, 9; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.29).

The Crisis Group report, citing its interview with a human rights lawyer and chair of the Shia Democratic party, notes that "many conceal typically Shia surnames on curriculum vitae or in other documents to avoid discrimination" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 16, footnote omitted).

An article by the *Diplomat*, a print and online magazine focused on the Asia-Pacific region (*The Diplomat* n.d.), reports that in April 2020, a "coordinated campaign on Twitter began trending," in which COVID-19 was referred to as the "'Shia virus'" (*The Diplomat* 2020-04-28). An article by Naya Daur Media (NDM), a "progressive" Pakistani digital media platform affiliated with the Islamabad-based non-profit organization Peace and Justice Network (NDM n.d.), states that a March 2020 order

issued by Quetta's Water and Sanitation Authority specifically restricted its Hazara employees to remain in "their areas" as part of its COVID-19 pandemic response measures (NDM 2020-03-14).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, who has published a book on Islam and democracy in Pakistan, noted that within Pakistan's "large cities"—including Lahore, Karachi, Faisalabad, and Peshawar, amongst others—Shias face "some community-by-community" or "neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood risk" (Professor 2023-12-02). Additional information regarding the situation and treatment of Shias in the cities of Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and Hyderabad could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 Blasphemy Accusations Against Shia Muslims

The 2022 Australian DFAT report notes that over 70 percent of all blasphemy cases—which carry the death penalty—are against Shias (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.58, 3.61). The Crisis Group report similarly states that blasphemy laws are "increasingly used to target" Shias (2022-09-05, ii). The same source indicates that Pakistan's Shia minority "feels increasingly beleaguered and in danger" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, ii).

A Pakistani legal expert explained to DFAT that the higher courts overturned "most blasphemy convictions," but that the accused was "likely" to be jailed for "years" before the case was determined to be "baseless" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.35). The 2022 DFAT report notes that individuals who have been accused of blasphemy are "at risk of extrajudicial killing, before, during and after being taken into custody" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.36). The Crisis Group report similarly states that although death sentences for blasphemy violations are "seldom carried out and convictions often overturned on appeal," a blasphemy accusation "can stigmatize the alleged culprit and lead to vigilante killings before cases even conclude" (2022-09-05, 12). The same source adds that people "acquitted [of blasphemy] are often forced to leave the country" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 12).

The 2022 DFAT report further states that the goals of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan [Tehreek-i-Labbaik, Labaik] (TLP), "an influential Sunni extremist political party and sectarian religious movement," include "punishing 'blasphemers'," especially Shias (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.46). The Crisis Group report notes that the "most pernicious influence" of TLP—which has "incit[ed] or conduct[ed] some of the worst sectarian and vigilante violence" since 2017—stems from its use of "the blasphemy issue to raise its profile, expand its support base and incite sectarian violence" (2022-09-05, ii, 12).

The 2022 DFAT report notes that a "record number" of blasphemy cases were filed in 2020 (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.31). According to a report on blasphemy cases [5] by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) [6], 234 people were accused of blasphemy or killed because of alleged blasphemy in 2020, of whom 152 were Shia; in 2021, Shias accounted for 2 of the 61 people so targeted (CRSS 2022-01-26). The CRSS report further notes that in 2020, there were a total of 178 blasphemy accusations in Punjab, 23 in Sindh, 9 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 7 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and 1 in the Islamabad Capital Territory (2022-01-26). The same source indicates that in 2021 there were 33 blasphemy accusations in Punjab, 13 in the Islamabad Capital Territory, 9 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 6 in Sindh, and 1 each in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (CRSS 2022-01-26).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* notes that

[h]uman rights activists reported numerous instances of societal violence related to allegations of blasphemy ... and of societal harassment, discrimination, and threats of violence directed at members of religious minority communities. Sunni groups held large sectarian rallies in Peshawar and Karachi in September and October, with speakers warning religious minorities, including Shia and Ahmadi Muslims, of dire consequences if anything they said was deemed blasphemous against the Prophet Mohammed's companions. (US 2022-06-02, 2)

The same source reported the following specific incidents related to blasphemy allegations:

On March 24, media reported an unknown man attacked and killed ... a religious scholar from the Shia community in Jhang, Punjab over blasphemy allegations. ...In March, police arrested a suspect, who subsequently confessed to [the] killing.

...

On August 19, police fired teargas shells and live rounds into the air in Hyderabad, Sindh to disperse a mob protesting because they believed a Shia man had committed blasphemy. The community pressured police to file a blasphemy case against the man. In another instance, on May 6, a group of Sunni religious leaders filed a blasphemy case against [a] Shia scholar ... in Karachi The next day police opened an investigation into [the Shia scholar] for alleged blasphemy. The investigation was ongoing at year's end. (US 2022-06-02, 29–30)

2.2 Violence Against Shia Muslims

Sources report that "armed" (US 2022-06-02, 29) or "anti-Shi'a" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.41) sectarian groups target religious minorities

including Shia Muslims (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.41–2.42; US 2022-06-02, 29).

According to sources, the frequency of attacks by sectarian groups against Shias has declined (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.60; Crisis Group 2022-09-05, i) since 2013 (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.60). The 2022 DFAT report states that the decline is due to "the overall improvement in the security situation in Pakistan" and an increase in police security provided for Shia processions and sites of worship (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.60). The same source adds, however, that sectarian violence has risen since 2020 and that "[m]ultiple" sources they spoke with indicated that the government "overlooked religious extremism to avoid antagonising powerful religious lobbies (such as the TLP)" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.31). The Crisis Group reports notes that "sectarian animosity is spreading into larger parts of the Sunni Islamist milieu" (2022-09-05, i).

The information in the following paragraph was provided by CRSS's annual security report for 2021:

Sectarian violence "got worse" in 2021, causing 26 deaths in Balochistan, 20 in Punjab, 7 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 6 in Gilgit-Baltistan, 5 in Sindh, and 1 in Islamabad. In 2021, there were four sectarian violence "operations" perpetrated against Shias, resulting in 73 casualties including 11 fatalities and 62 injuries. Additionally, there was one "operation" perpetrated against Hazara Shias, resulting in 15 casualties, including 11 fatalities and 4 injuries (CRSS 2022-05-18, 29, 30).

Sources report that the following sectarian groups target religious minorities, including Shia:

- Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (US 2022-06-02, 29; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.40)
- TLP (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, i; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.46)
- Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) (US 2022-06-02, 29)
- Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham; Islamic State (IS); Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL); Daesh] (ISIS) (US 2022-06-02, 29; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.42, 3.31)
- Salafi Islamic State Khorasan Province [Islamic State Khorasan Province; Islamic State Khorasan; the Islamic State's Khurasan Chapter; ISIS-K] (ISKP) (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, i; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.42; US 2022-06-02, 29)
- Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Lej) (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.41)
- Al Qaeda (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.42).

According to the 2022 DFAT report, Lej is "a radical Sunni militant group" seeking to "eradicate Shi'a influence from Pakistan" (Australia 2022-01-25,

para. 2.41). The same report indicates that LeJ has conducted "numerous deadly attacks on Shia communities (including targeted attacks against Hazaras), places of worship and leaders"; the LeJ is "primarily active" in Punjab province, the former FATA, Karachi, and Balochistan (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.41). According to Crisis Group, LeJ's leadership has been "decimated" by Pakistani security operations; Pakistani intelligence and counter-terrorism officials cited in the report state that "[m]any" "rank and file" members of the LeJ have since joined "like-minded" groups, including the TTP, while others have migrated to ISKP (2022-09-05, 6).

Crisis Group notes that ISKP has "claimed sectarian attacks" in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan (2022-09-05, i). The same source cites current and retired Punjab police officials as indicating that ISKP is present in "several" northern and western Punjab districts, including Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Dera Ghazi Khan and "low-level sectarian clashes now occur regularly" there (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 7). The same source adds that the ISKP is "primarily an urban phenomenon seemingly comprised of de-centralised units that target Shia sites" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 18).

Sources report that in March 2022, a suicide bombing attack on a Shia mosque took place in Peshawar (*The New York Times* 2022-03-05; AFP 2022-03-05; *The News on Sunday* 2022-03-13), resulting in the deaths of 67 people (*The News on Sunday* 2022-03-13). According to sources, the ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack (*The New York Times* 2022-03-05; *The News on Sunday* 2022-03-13; AFP 2022-03-05). The Crisis Group report notes that the bombing was the first "major anti-Shia attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in several years and one of the worst in [Pakistan's] history" (2022-09-05, 1). The same source cites its interviews with Pakistani counter-terrorism officials who "believe that small, dispersed cells likely orchestrate attacks" such as the Peshawar bombing (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 6).

According to the MRG and Imam Al-Khoei Foundation article, the month of Muharram in 2020 [August–September 2020] saw a "wave of anti-Shi'a rhetoric and violence," which included blasphemy allegations, arrests, and the killings of 4 Shias (MRG & Imam Al-Khoei Foundation 2020-10-20). The Crisis Group report states that during Muharram in 2020, TLP and other Barelvis [7] supporters chanted "anti-Shia slogans" outside *majalis* (gathering places to commemorate the killings of the Prophet's family) (2022-09-05, 15). The 2022 DFAT report notes that "over" 40 Shias were charged with blasphemy in 2020 following Muharram and further states that "targeted killings" of Shias took place in multiple cities (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.59). An October 2020 *Guardian* article on the Karachi protests notes that over 50 Shias across Pakistan had been "booked under blasphemy and antiterrorist charges" over the preceding month, with the youngest among them three years old (2020-10-21). The same source states that police in Punjab "beat up and arrested" 22 Shias,

including seven women, who were commemorating a Shia martyr (*The Guardian* 2020-10-21).

Sources indicate that demonstrations took place in Karachi and Islamabad during Muharram of 2020 (MRG & Imam Al-Khoei Foundation 2020-10-20; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.59), with participants chanting anti-Shia slogans (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.59) or calling Shias "'infidels'" (MRG & Imam Al-Khoei Foundation 2020-10-20). The MRG and Imam Al-Khoei Foundation article notes that the demonstrations were organized by "mainstream religious groups" and "proscribed militant outfits" (MRG & Imam Al-Khoei Foundation 2020-10-20). Sources note that the Karachi head of the TLP called for the beheading of Shia "'blasphemers'" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.59) or of individuals "play[ing]" with Sunni religious sentiments (AFP 2020-09-12).

Sources report that there was a bombing attack in August 2021 on a Shia procession in Bahawalnagar, Punjab (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.60; US 2022-06-02, 28), resulting in "[a]t least" 3 people dead and 50 injured (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.60). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* adds that this was the third "sectarian strike" in the region in a two-month span, including an earlier attack on a Shia site of worship (US 2022-06-02, 28).

2.3 Shia Muslims Returning from Abroad

According to the Professor, Shia returnees from abroad do not face "particular difficulties or dangers" after returning to Pakistan (2023-12-02). However, the same source added, this circumstance "must be qualified" for particular locations where "attacks have occurred" against Shias in recent years, including Balochistan (especially Quetta), Gilgit-Baltistan (especially Gilgit and surrounding areas), Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (particularly Kurram and elsewhere along the Afghanistan border), southern Punjab, and "anywhere" that ISKP, LeJ, or TTP operate (Professor 2023-12-02).

The information in the following paragraph was provided during an interview with the Research Directorate by an associate professor of religion at Clemson University in the United States whose research specializes in Islam in contemporary South Asia and who has published a book on the intersection of Islam and the state in present-day Pakistan:

The Associate Professor had never heard of Shias returning to Pakistan from places including Canada, the US, Europe, or Australia facing "increased discrimination" upon their return. However, Shias returning from religious pilgrimages or seminary study in locations "marked as 'predominantly Shia'"—especially Iran or Iraq, but also including Lebanon—can "suffer discrimination or targeting, including violence" upon their return because their "markedness of being Shia is heightened" by their religiously-inspired travels abroad; the Associate Professor is aware of

some such cases of adverse treatment. A Shia returnee from abroad who does not return with a "heightened sense of their Shia identity" would not face any increased vulnerability to "violence" than Shia Muslims in Pakistan otherwise would (Associate Professor 2023-12-07).

A 2021 article by *The Diplomat* provides the following information regarding Shias who are "disappeared" upon their alleged return from Syria:

It is not clear why and on what grounds Shias are being 'disappeared.' The abductors —presumably the security agencies—claim that the missing persons were involved in the Syrian civil war and sectarian violence in the country. According to an unofficial and unverified estimate, between 700 and 5,000 Pakistan Shias from Karachi, Parachinar, and Gilgit-Baltistan, recruited by Iran, went to Syria to fight against the Islamic State. The security agencies fear that Shias who returned from Syria pose a threat to Pakistan's stability.

Under this pretext, the security agencies have picked up Shias who returned from Syria. Police and the paramilitary often raid homes and tell the families that their loved ones will be sent back once the investigation is done. But the people are moved to undisclosed locations, with no information given to their families. Family members are left to search at local police stations, hospitals and even morgues for some news of their loved ones.

More concerningly, some of those who have been 'disappeared' never went to Syria, Iraq, or Iran. The reason for their abduction is still a mystery for the families. For example, [...] a resident of Karachi, who was a puncture repairer on the edge of poverty, has been missing for the last six years, his family presuming him detained by security forces. He had never been to Syria. Nor [two] residents of Karachi, who were picked up by the law enforcement agencies in 2017. Similarly, [a resident of] Karachi, has been missing for the last two years. [The individual], who played for the junior national hockey team, had never been to Syria and did not have any criminal record. (2021-04-06)

According to a 2019 article by ThePrint, an Indian independent news organization based in New Delhi (ThePrint n.d.), between 120 and 160 Pakistani Shias have been "'detained' and subsequently reported 'missing'" over the preceding "several" years, "[m]any" of whom were "taken away" upon their return from Iran, Iraq, or Syria (ThePrint 2019-07-02). The same source reports of a 28-year-old Shia man "led away by a dozen armed men" in January 2017, upon his return from a "pilgrimage to the Sayyidah Zaynab shrine in Damascus" in Syria (ThePrint 2019-07-02). The article also notes the June 2019 "arres[t]" of a 64-year-old individual at the Karachi airport upon his return from Karbala in Iraq (ThePrint 2019-07-02). A 2018 BBC article indicates that in November 2016, a Shia man

from Karachi was "led away in handcuffs by more than a dozen armed men," some with their "faces covered with masks, others ... in police uniform," two days after he and his wife had returned from a pilgrimage to Karbala, Iraq (2018-05-30). The same 2018 article adds that 140 Pakistani Shias have "'disappeared'" over the previous two years, including over 25 Karachi residents, and that community leaders in Karachi report that they "have been told the men are suspected of links to a secretive militia in Syria, the Zainabiyoun Brigade," which is "thought to be made up of around 1,000 Pakistanis Shias fighting on behalf of the regime of [Syrian] President Bashar al-Assad" (BBC 2018-05-30).

When asked if Shias returning from abroad would be uniquely vulnerable to extortion, the Associate Professor indicated that anyone returning from abroad is a "potential target for extortion due to perceived wealth"—particularly within the context of Pakistan's contemporary "unprecedented economic" downturn—and that Shias would not be especially targeted in this regard; the source was not aware of any cases of Shia returnees targeted for extortion upon their return, because they are Shia (2023-12-07).

When asked if Shias returning from abroad would be uniquely vulnerable to blasphemy charges, the Associate Professor indicated that while Shias are "disproportionately targeted in blasphemy accusations," they have not encountered any data suggesting that Shia returnees from abroad are particularly at risk of such accusations (2023-12-07).

3. Hazaras

3.1 Demographics

According to MRG, Hazaras are "an ethnic group predominantly based in Afghanistan, but also with a large population in Pakistan" (2018-06). The 2022 DFAT report notes that "[m]ost" Hazaras are Shia Muslims, "some" are Ismailis [Ismaelis] and "a small number" are Sunnis (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.3).

Sources note that population estimates range from 600,000 to 1 million (MRG 2018-06; Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.4), with the majority of Pakistani Hazaras—approximately 500,000—living in the city of Quetta (MRG 2018-06). The 2022 DFAT report notes that "[m]ost live in enclaves in Quetta due to the security situation in Balochistan" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.4); Hazara Town and Mariabad are the two Hazara enclaves in Quetta (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.6). According to a report on Hazaras by Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), citing other sources, Hazaras reside in different areas of Pakistan, including Parachinar [Parachinar], Karachi, Sanghar, Nawabshah, Hyderabad, "different parts of Punjab and Gilgit Baltistan," as well as in Quetta, Sanjawi [Sinjawi], Much, Zhob, Harnai, Loralai, and Dukki in Balochistan (Pakistan 2018-02, 4). According to the same source, citing the World Hazara Council, the population of Hazaras is "approximately between"

400,000 and 500,000 in Balochistan (Pakistan 2018-02, 4). The 2022 DFAT reports notes that "[s]maller" populations of Hazaras live in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.4). The same source notes that the Hazara population outside of Quetta "tend not to live in enclaves to reduce the risk of ethnic profiling, discrimination and attack" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.4).

According to MRG, Hazaras have "clearly identifiable features" (2018-06). The report on Hazaras by the NCHR similarly notes that Hazara people have "unique facial features [that] distinguish them from others" (Pakistan 2018-02, 3). According to the 2022 DFAT report, "[t]he 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" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.3).

According to the 2022 DFAT report,

[s]ome 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 ... , although other factors may curtail access regardless, including the security situation for Hazaras in Pakistan. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.3–3.4)

3.2 Situation and Treatment of Hazaras

MRG notes that the freedom of mobility of the Hazara community has been "heavily restricted due to threat of attack," that the community in Quetta has been "effectively ghettoized" to Hazara Town and Alamdar Road, and that insecurity has "affected other areas of their everyday life, including access to education and employment" (2018-06). According to the Pakistani NCHR report,

[t]he existing situation of [the] Hazara community is precarious, [as they] are facing enormous difficulties in exercising their fundamental human rights i.e. right to life, freedom of movement, right to higher education, and right to participate in the earning of their daily living and access to necessities of life. They are also having limited social opportunities due to fear of violence. (Pakistan 2018-02, 5)

The 2022 DFAT report provides the following information about the two Hazara enclaves in Quetta:

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. ...

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.

Many Hazaras in Quetta provide services to their own communities within the enclaves. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.7–3.9)

According to a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), a "non-political, not-for-profit," "independent human rights body" (HRCP n.d.), on a fact-finding mission conducted in August 2019 in Pakistan's Balochistan province,

[i]n Quetta, the Shia Hazara community resides primarily on Alamdar Road and Hazara Town. Their movement outside these areas is managed by security forces, including the [Frontier Corps]. Their access to education and employment remains limited, their businesses have suffered and many other aspects of their lives have been affected severely. There is insufficient access to well-functioning hospitals and universities in these areas. A campus of Balochistan University was to have been set up on Alamdar Road, but there has been no progress in this regard. HDP [Hazara Democratic Party] leaders were of the view that this was because no land was available; they claimed that the authorities of the cantonment area, which is adjacent to Alamdar Road, should be approached and asked to provide land to make the prospect of a campus viable as soon as possible. (HRCP 2019, 8)

The Pakistani NCHR report indicates that Hazaras have worked in and contributed to various fields, "including defense, administration, trade, politics, education, [and] sports" (Pakistan 2018-02, 4). The same source also notes that during interviews, Hazara interviewees expressed that attainment of higher education and access to hospitals were difficult to pursue due to safety concerns and affordability (Pakistan 2018-02, 9–10). The source adds that the Hazara "try to hide their identity" when outside of their communities, that "economic activity is now confined to Hazara[-]populated areas" and that isolation has "impacted the psychological well-being of Hazaras" (Pakistan 2018-02, 10, 12, 13). The 2022 DFAT report notes that,

[some Hazaras] 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. ... High rates of unemployment and

limited prospects have reportedly led to a sense of hopelessness among Hazara youth in Quetta. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.9)

The Pakistani NCHR report states that

During the [NCHR's] field work, a Hazara student expressed that, "[a] Hazara cannot visit the whole city of Quetta without inviting danger to his life." They feel threate[ne]d and targeted while going to Iran for pilgrimages. They also feel fearful to go to shopping centers and earn [a] livelihood in Quetta as their movement is limited to a few safe areas of Quetta. (Pakistan 2018-02, 5)

According to the 2022 DFAT report,

The Pakistani government provides security in [the two Hazara enclaves in Quetta], including vehicle checkpoints and searches on entry and exit. Government forces also provide security for Hazara religious processions ... and [the] Hazarganji market [8]. Hazaras who leave Quetta are required to notify the security agencies. Local sources report Frontier Corps routinely harass Hazaras at checkpoints. ...

... Sectarian militants have ... attacked Hazara religious processions [and] places of worship, and pilgrims on their way to Iran. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.6, 3.7)

The HRCR report indicates that

[o]bstacles to what should be tasks the average Pakistani citizen might take for granted – such as having passports and national identity cards issued – remain a key problem for the Shia Hazara community. Government authorities ask them to prove that they are indeed "Pakistanis" and that they have not "emigrated" from Afghanistan. The community believes this is indicative of systemic discrimination. (2019, 9)

According to the 2022 DFAT report,

[w]hile most Hazaras in Pakistan can obtain formal identification such as ... [CNICs], Hazaras claim ... [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. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.10)

3.3 Violence Against Hazaras

The 2022 DFAT report states that there are militant groups in Pakistan who have the interest and capacity to attack Hazaras nationwide (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.5). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* indicates that sectarian attacks against Shias particularly

targeted Hazaras (US 2022-06-02, 29). According to the 2022 DFAT report, militant groups such as LeJ and ISIS deem the Hazaras to be "'infidels'" "'worthy of killing'" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.5). The same source adds that although there have been no attacks outside of Balochistan since 2014, Hazaras have been targeted in cities including Karachi and Peshawar in the past (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.5).

Sources indicate that 11 Hazara miners were killed in Balochistan in January 2021 (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.42; US 2022-06-02, 29). According to sources, "ISIS-K militants claimed responsibility" (US 2022-06-02, 29) or "IS militants" carried out the killing (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.5). The 2022 DFAT report notes that since the attack, "Hazaras are reportedly too scared to work in the Baloch mining industry" which had previously served as "an important source of income" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.9). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* states that members of Quetta's Hazara Shia community "staged a protest against the government's failure to protect the community in Balochistan" (US 2022-06-02, 29).

4. Turis

4.1 Demographics

According to the 2022 DFAT report,

[t]he 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. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.62)

The Crisis Group report also notes that the Turis are a Shia tribe located in the Kurram tribal region, an area which has seen years of "violent Sunni-Shia conflict" (2022-09-05, 17).

4.2 Situation and Treatment of the Turis

Information on Turis in Pakistan was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the 2022 DFAT report,

[s]ecurity 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. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.65)

4.3 Violence Against the Turis

According to the 2022 DFAT report,

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

...

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. (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.63–3.64)

5. State Response

5.1 Anti-Terrorism Operations

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* states that

[t]he government continued to implement its National Action Plan against terrorism, by countering sectarian hate speech and extremism and by conducting military and law enforcement operations against violent groups. ... Civil society groups continued to express concerns about the safety of religious minorities. Multiple civil society groups and faith community leaders stated the government had increased efforts to provide enhanced security at religious minority places of worship. (US 2022-06-02, 3)

According to the Crisis Group report, however, Pakistan's approach to counterterrorism has made "short-term" gains, but has "neglected long-term strategies to deny civic space to violent sectarian outfits" (2022-09-05, 23). The same source adds that in "many instances, government policy has amplified rather than tamped down sectarian rhetoric" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 23). The Crisis Group report further indicates that

the state's response to sectarian killings, whether targeted attacks by groups like [LeJ], and now ISKP, or Labaik-inspired lynchings remains largely reactive and often focused, as in the [LeJ] case, on lethal force. Few efforts have been made to deprive hardline sectarian groups of platforms that reach a large audience. In some cases, as with Labaik, the state has also been hesitant to take action if sectarian mobilisation relates to alleged blasphemy at home or abroad. Summarising the state's

performance, a former police inspector general who remains closely involved in policy dialogue, said: "Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy has seen some successes, but violent extremism in society has risen." (2022-09-05, 18–19)

Sources report that in April 2021, the leader of the TLP was "arrested" (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.48) or "detained" for "inciting violence" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 11). The 2022 DFAT report adds that the government also simultaneously "banned" the TLP (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.48). According to sources, following violent unrest in which [at least four (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 11)] police officers died, authorities agreed to release the TLP leader (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.48; Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 11), and "several other" TLP "members charged with terrorism and other crimes" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 11). The 2022 DFAT report adds that as part of the government's "capitulat[ion]," it agreed to reverse its ban on TLP (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.48).

A 2020 article by Agence France-Presse (AFP) states that a "years-long operation" by Pakistani security forces since 2013 has "brought a considerable lull in the violence" in Karachi, "but scattered attacks still take place" (2020-09-12). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5.2 Protection of Ashura Processions

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021*,

[i]n August and September, the state provided increased security throughout the country for the Shia community's Muharram processions. Police authorities said 19,000 police and paramilitary force personnel deployed in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi to secure the processions. (US 2022-06-02, 21)

The same source adds the following:

In July, a judicial commission on religious minorities established a special national police unit to protect religious minorities and their places of worship, a move welcomed by most religious minority communities. In mid-November, police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province reported the government there had established a new special security unit to protect religious sites and religious minority communities throughout the province. (US 2022-06-02, 21)

The 2022 DFAT report notes that authorities' attempts to limit "sectarian hatred" in the month of Muharram include "banning firebrand Sunni and Shi'a clerics from leaving home" and shutting down cellphone services in major cities during the processions (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 3.59).

The Crisis Group report, citing its interview with a senior counter-terrorism official in Islamabad, notes that police "continue to file first information reports [FIRs] against the organisers of Shia processions" (2022-09-05, 16). The same source adds that police have shut down majalis in homes for lacking an official permit, despite no such authorisation being required for events hosted at private residences (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 16).

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021*,

[o]n August 11, the Sindh provincial government barred 309 "firebrand" speakers and religious scholars from leaving their home districts for 60 days ... in the month of Muharram, more than double the number barred in 2020. These 309 individuals included both Shia and Sunni clerics who in the past had made controversial statements that the ministry said led to sectarian tensions. The Rawalpindi district administration banned 39 Islamic Ulema religious figures belonging to different sects from entering the district during Muharram

According to media reports and law enforcement sources, in the weeks leading up to and during Muharram, authorities at the federal level also restricted the movement and activities of clerics on the Ministry of Interior's Schedule 4 [9] listing to keep the peace. Shia community representatives, however, accused authorities of bias by restricting their religious ceremonies and arresting community members. In October, Shia leaders said Karachi police beat and harassed mourners participating in a religious procession during the Shia *Chehlum* holiday. (US 2022-06-02, 16, italics in original)

5.3 Treatment by Authorities

The information in the following paragraph was provided by the Crisis Group report, citing interviews with sources in Lahore and Islamabad:

"Misapprehensions" of a "Shia militant threat" by Pakistani security officials have given rise to a "crack down" on Shias; these officials believe that Shias who joined Iran-backed militias fighting in Syria and Yemen have returned to Pakistan "ready to retaliate against jihadist attacks." Although there was no increase in sectarian attacks following the return of these Shia fighters, security officials "detained scores" of Shias following time abroad in Iran and Iraq under allegations they "posed a security threat." Shia social activists were "victims of enforced disappearances," and the "targeting of Shias by state and non-state actors has left a deep mark on the community." Following demonstrations by Shia activists in Karachi in 2019, many detainees were released; there are now fewer than 50 people "missing"—some of whom are thought to have died in detention—from a high of several hundred. Activists and lawyers

of released detainees recounted examples of physical and psychological "torture" (Crisis Group 2022-09-05, 16, 17).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were a "swathe of territory along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border," which now are part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Australia 2022-01-25, para. 2.25).

[2] The Pew Research Centre demographic study interviewed 1,450 individuals in Pakistan and calculated a margin of error of 5.6 points (Pew Research Center 2012-09-08, 120).

[3] The Imam Al-Khoei Foundation is "an international charitable voluntary foundation" which is particularly focused on the welfare and needs of Shias worldwide (Religious Education Council of England and Wales 2017-07-11).

[4] The Pakistan Hate Speech Monitor is a tool used to collect hate speech data on social media and is created by Minority Right Group International (MRG) and their local partners in Pakistan (CREID 2020-09-17).

[5] The report on blasphemy cases by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) compiled the number of blasphemy cases through secondary sources, such as newspapers (CRSS 2022-01-26).

[6] The Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) is a "think tank/advocacy center" based in Islamabad that is "committed to the cause of independent research and nonpartisan analysis, and informed advocacy" on Pakistan (CRSS 2022 05 18, 32).

[7] International Crisis Group explains that Barelvīs are "believed" to be Pakistan's largest Sunni sub-sect; Barelvīs politics are formed by the rejection of blasphemy laws reform and the Ahmadi's claim to a Muslim identity (2022-09-05, 26).

[8] The Hazarganji bazaar in Quetta is frequented by Hazara shopkeepers purchasing stock for their own stores and the area has been the target of bombings and "similar attacks" (*Dawn* 2019-04-13).

[9] The Fourth Schedule is "a list of proscribed individuals who are suspected of terrorism or sectarian violence under the Anti-Terrorism Act

(ATA, 1997" (SATP [2022])).

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