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Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Pakistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic. In July the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the most National Assembly seats in the general elections, and in August PTI's Imran Khan became prime minister. While independent observers noted technical improvements in the Election Commission of Pakistan's management of the polling process itself, observers, civil society organizations and political parties raised concerns about pre-election interference by military and intelligence agencies that created an uneven electoral playing field. Some political parties also alleged significant polling day irregularities occurred.

The military and intelligence services nominally reported to civilian authorities but essentially operated without effective civilian oversight.

Human rights issues included credible reports of extrajudicial and targeted killings; forced disappearances; torture; arbitrary and lengthy pretrial detention; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; censorship, site-blocking, and arbitrary restrictions on journalists' freedom of movement; severe harassment and intimidation of and high-profile attacks against journalists and media organizations; government restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including overly restrictive nongovernmental organizations (NGO) laws; restrictions on religious freedom and discrimination against members of religious minority groups; restrictions on freedom of movement; corruption within the government; recruitment and use of child soldiers by nonstate militant groups; lack of criminal investigations or accountability for cases related to rape, sexual harassment, so-called honor crimes, female genital mutilation/cutting, and violence based on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation; legal prohibitions of consensual same-sex sexual conduct; forced and bonded labor and transnational trafficking in persons; and the worst forms of child labor.

There was a lack of government accountability, and abuses often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity among the perpetrators, whether official or unofficial. Authorities seldom punished government officials for human rights abuses.

Terrorist violence and human rights abuses by nonstate actors contributed to human rights problems. Military, police, and law enforcement agencies continued to carry out significant campaigns against militant and terrorist groups. Nevertheless, violence,

abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nonstate actors, both local and foreign, contributed to a culture of lawlessness. As of December 23, terrorism fatalities stood at 686, in comparison with 1,260 total fatalities in 2017, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, a database compiled by the public-interest advocacy organization Institute for Conflict Management, which collects statistics on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were numerous reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in connection with conflicts throughout the country (see section 1.g.).

On January 13, police in Karachi (Sindh) shot and killed a Pashtun man, Naqeebullah Mehsud, in what Karachi police authorities initially claimed was a counterterrorism operation. According to Mehsud’s family, he had been detained 10 days earlier. Pakistan’s National Commission for Human Rights--an independent government body charged with investigating alleged human rights abuses--concluded police staged a fake raid in order to carry out Mehsud’s extrajudicial killing. Furthermore, the report linked then-Senior Superintendent of Police for Karachi’s Malir District, Rao Anwar, to the deaths of at least 444 individuals in similar staged police encounters. The Supreme Court ordered Sindh’s Police Inspector General to conduct an immediate inquiry into the killing and Anwar’s role. Authorities removed Anwar from his position. He fled and was eventually arrested. He was subsequently released on bail, and his trial was ongoing as of December 3.

Physical abuse while in official custody allegedly caused the death of some criminal suspects. Lengthy trial delays and failure to discipline and prosecute those responsible for killings contributed to a culture of impunity. In February police officers in Rawalpindi reportedly entered a home without a warrant, detained a resident, and beat him to death while in custody at a police station. The four officers who entered the young man’s home without a warrant were suspended from duty pending an investigation of the incident, but it was unclear as of November whether any further action was taken in the case.

On January 10, police in Kasur (Punjab) reportedly fired live rounds into a crowd that stormed a police station in protest against a series of unsolved rapes and killings of children in the district. Two civilians died and one was wounded in the incident. Police officials claimed protesters shot first at police.

There were numerous reports of fatal attacks against police. On January 9, a vehicle rammed a police checkpoint outside the Balochistan Provincial Assembly, killing five police officers in the resulting explosion. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed

responsibility, saying the police--not the Assembly--were the intended targets. In March, three police officers were killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) targeted a police convoy in Punjab province. On April 24, 10 police officers died in three separate suicide attacks in Balochistan. Hizbul Ahrar, a TTP splinter group, claimed responsibility for all three attacks. In August, two terrorists attacked a police checkpoint in the Gilgit Baltistan region, killing three police officers.

Militants and terrorist groups killed hundreds and injured thousands with bombs, suicide attacks, and other violence (see section 1.g.).

b. Disappearance

There were kidnappings and forced disappearances of persons in nearly all areas of the country. The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances received an increased number of complaints compared with 2017. The commission had received 899 cases as of October 31, while there were a total 868 complaints in 2017. Some officials from intelligence agencies, police, and other security forces reportedly held prisoners incommunicado and refused to disclose their location.

On February 15, in Badin, Sindh, plainclothes security reportedly abducted Rafaqat Ali Jarwar, a senior journalist with *Daily Koshish*. According to media reports, Jarwar was formerly associated with a Sindhi nationalist group.

On June 6, prominent journalist and opinion writer Gul Bukhari was abducted in Lahore by unidentified assailants. Bukhari was released hours later, after news reports highlighted her disappearance and the case received significant attention on social media. She is known as a prominent critic of the military and security services, and was listed by the military as a social media threat to the state two days before her brief abduction. Bukhari did not identify her captors.

Media reported that in December 2017 civil society activist Raza Khan disappeared after cohosting a small public event in Lahore to discuss the government's capitulation to the demands of a hardline religious group, Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), in the wake of TLP's weeks-long, highly disruptive protest in Islamabad. Khan reportedly returned home in July.

Human rights organizations reported many Pashtun rights activists, and Sindhi and Baloch nationalists, disappeared or were arrested without cause or warrant. For example, in April the Progressive Youth Alliance alleged that 11 of its members were abducted following a series of Pashtun rights rallies in Karachi. Nationalist parties in Sindh also alleged that law enforcement agencies and security agencies kidnapped and killed Sindhi political activists.

Throughout the first half of the year, Pashtun rights activists used social media to highlight the arrests, enforced disappearances, and other forms of harassment by security agencies against members of the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, or PTM. Most of those detained were rank-and-file supporters of the group. Unofficial

estimates, however, suggest that the military released up to 300 individuals who had been detained without charge--in some cases for several years--in response to PTM's protest campaign against enforced disappearances. Observers believed authorities released detainees in response to activist demands, but it gave rise to further allegations that authorities had mistreated those in custody, and fueled calls for an end to enforced disappearances and for a more transparent legal process to formally charge or release those still in detention.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, headed by Supreme Court justice Javed Iqbal and retired law enforcement official Muhammad Sharif Virk, received 5,507 missing persons cases between 2011 and October 31. The commission had closed 3,633 of those inquiries, while 1,874 remained open.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the constitution prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, the criminal code has no specific section against torture. There were reports that security forces, including the intelligence services, tortured and abused individuals in custody.

According to the Committee against Torture of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in 2017 there were reports that state officials and forces practiced torture on a widespread scale. Human rights organizations noted the government's lack of serious efforts to curb the use of torture and claimed that perpetrators--mostly police, military, and intelligence agency members--operated with impunity. In August, however, authorities did dismiss two constables after a video surfaced showing the officers torturing girls accused of partaking in obscene activity.

There were reports police personnel employed cruel and degrading treatment and punishment. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported that police committed “excesses” in at least 52 cases as of May 6, compared with 127 total cases in 2017. Multiple sources reported that police excesses sometimes resulted in death or serious injury and was often underreported. On October 16, police reportedly arrested a man in Sargodha (Punjab) on robbery charges. He died later that day, and his grandmother stated in a police report that his death was the result of police brutality while in custody.

Some police agencies took steps to curb abuses. For example, in 2017 the Inspector General of the Islamabad Capital Territory Police appointed human rights officers in all 22 Islamabad police stations in an effort to prevent violations. Multiple police agencies include human rights in training curricula. More than 50,000 police countrywide have received human rights related training since 2011.

While the passage of the 25th Amendment to the country's constitution formally merged the Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA and PATA) and ended the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) of 1901, the FATA Interim Governance

Regulation (FIGR) that replaced it preserves the most draconian criminal justice elements of the FCR. For example, authorities may still apply collective punishment without regard to individual rights. Collective punishment is imposed incrementally, starting with the first immediate male family members, followed by the subtribe, and continuing outward. Human rights NGOs expressed concern about the concept of collective responsibility, as authorities used it to detain members of fugitives’ tribes, demolish their homes, confiscate or destroy their property, or lay siege to their villages pending surrender or punishment of the fugitives by their own tribes in accordance with local tradition.

As of November 30, the country had 5,339 troops and police performing peacekeeping duties around the world. During the year, the United Nations reported one possible new case of sexual exploitation and abuse implicating a Pakistani peacekeeper. The case involved allegations of transactional sex that occurred in 2017. An investigation into an alleged exploitative sexual relationship that began in June 2011 and continued until an unspecified date in 2012 was pending additional information as of December 28. Investigations into three reports were closed due to lack of evidence: one involved a 2016 report that a Pakistani deployed in Cote d’Ivoire raped a minor in 2014; one was related to a 2017 report of attempted sexual assault that allegedly occurred in September 2016; and the third involved allegations that Pakistani peacekeepers engaged in transactional sex from August 2015 to March 2016.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in some civilian prisons and military detention centers were harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding, inadequate food and medical care, and unsanitary conditions.

Physical Conditions: Prison conditions often were extremely poor. Overcrowding remained a serious problem, largely due to structural issues in the criminal justice system that led to a high rate of pretrial detention. According to a May, Cursor of Development and Education Pakistan study, conducted in cooperation with Pakistan’s National Counter Terrorism Agency and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the total nationwide prison population stood at 84,287 in 112 prisons across the country as of October 1, 2017. The official capacity of these prisons is approximately 54,000, putting the occupancy rate of the civilian prison system at approximately 150 percent.

Provincial governments were the primary managers of civilian prisons and detention centers.

Although quality and quantity of prison food improved, inadequate food and medical care in prisons continued to cause chronic health problems. Malnutrition remained a problem, especially among inmates unable to supplement their diets with help from family or friends. In many facilities sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and access to potable water were inadequate. Most prison facilities were antiquated and had no means to control indoor temperatures. A system existed for basic and emergency medical care,

but bureaucratic procedures slowed access. Prisoners with disabilities usually lacked adequate care. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported 20 deaths due to violence in prisons as of May 20. According to an April report on *Dunya News* TV, in 2017 at least 145 prisoners died in Punjab province prisons of natural causes, including diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis. One former prisoner who spent 15 years in a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province jail petitioned the Peshawar High Court to direct medical testing of the province's inmate population, claiming 12 inmates at the jail in which he was incarcerated were HIV positive, and approximately 50 had hepatitis. The former prisoner also petitioned for disclosure of the province's prison capacity and actual population, claiming the institution in which he was incarcerated had a capacity of 125 and a population of 640.

Representatives of Christian and Ahmadiyya Muslim communities claimed their members were often subjected to abuse in prison and violence at the hands of fellow inmates. Civil society organizations reported prisoners accused of blasphemy violations were frequently subjected to poor prison conditions. NGOs reported that many individuals accused of blasphemy remained in solitary confinement for extended periods, sometimes for more than a year. The government asserted this treatment was for the individual's safety, given the likelihood that prisoners accused of blasphemy would face threats from the general prison population.

Authorities held female prisoners separately from men. Nevertheless, NGOs reported transgender women were held with men and faced harassment. Balochistan had no women's prison, but authorities housed detained women in separate barracks.

Due to lack of infrastructure, police often did not segregate detainees from convicted criminals, although Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces were in the process of constructing new prisons focused on modern segregation mechanisms to address this issue, as well as overcrowding.

Prison officials kept juvenile offenders in barracks separate from adults. Juveniles and adults were in close proximity when waiting for transport but were kept under careful supervision at this time. According to the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, prisoners and prison staff subjected children to abuse, rape, and other forms of violence.

Administration: There was an ombudsman for detainees, with a central office in Islamabad and offices in each province. Inspectors General of prisons irregularly visited prisons and detention facilities to monitor conditions and handle complaints.

By law, prison authorities must permit prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhumane conditions. There were reports, however, that prisoners refrained from submitting complaints to avoid retaliation from jail authorities. The law also provides for visitation privileges, but overcrowding and lack of adequate visitor facilities in some prisons restricted detainees' ability to receive visits. In most cases, authorities allowed prisoners to observe their religious traditions.

Independent Monitoring: International organizations responsible for monitoring prisons reported difficulty accessing some detention sites, in particular those holding security-related detainees. Authorities did not allow international organizations access to detention centers most affected by violence in KP, FATA, and Balochistan. Authorities at the local, provincial, and national levels permitted some human rights groups and journalists to monitor prison conditions of juveniles and female inmates.

Improvements: Infrastructure improvements and new policies in existing prisons, along with the construction of new facilities, increased the frequency with which pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners were separated. In July the government broke ground on a project to construct a new training facility for the Sindh Prisons Department, to enable a larger training program in prison management. Digitized prison management information systems were installed in 48 Punjab and Sindh province prisons, up from 20 Punjab prisons in 2017. The government, in collaboration with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, worked to expand its use of computerized databases to more securely and accurately track prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court, but authorities did not always observe these requirements. Corruption and impunity compounded this problem.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Police have primary domestic security responsibility for most of the country. Local police are under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. Police resources and effectiveness varied by district, ranging from well-funded and effective to poorly resourced and ineffective. Paramilitary organizations—including the Frontier Corps, which operates in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the former FATA; and the Rangers, which operates in Sindh and Punjab—provide security services under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. The Frontier Corps reports to the Ministry of Interior in peacetime and the army in times of conflict. The military is responsible for external security but continues to play a role in domestic security.

The mid-year passage of the 25th Amendment to the country's constitution formally merged the Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA and PATA) into KP province, bringing the tribal areas into the country's political and constitutional mainstream. The FATA Interim Governance Regulation (FIGR) replaced the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in mid-year as the framework for law and order in the former FATA. Similar to the FCR, the FIGR is implemented through appointed deputy commissioners (formerly known as “political agents”) who report to the KP governor. The 25th Amendment gives the Peshawar High Court and the Supreme Court jurisdiction in the former FATA, but this new system had not been fully implemented by year's end. Under the FIGR, trial by a Council of Elders (known as a “jirga,” or assembly of community leaders that makes decisions by consensus) does not allow tribal

residents legal representation. If the accused is an adult man, he appears before the Council of Elders in person to defend his case. Parents normally represent their minor children, and men normally represent their female relatives. Observers criticized both the FCR and the FIGR for their harsh provisions.

Following its merger in KP province, police began to operate alongside paramilitary forces in the former FATA. Paramilitary forces present in the former FATA included the Frontier Corps, the Frontier Constabulary, “Khasadars” (hereditary tribal police), and the FATA Levies Force, which reported to deputy commissioners (the appointed administrative heads of each tribal agency). Tribal leaders convened “lashkars” (tribal militias) to deal with temporary law and order disturbances, but these operated as private militias and not as formal law enforcement entities. The KP provincial police force was in the process of recruiting and training additional personnel in order to extend its remit fully into the former FATA.

Civilian authorities’ failure to punish abuses contributed to a climate of impunity throughout the country. According to civil society sources, police and prison officials frequently used the threat of abuse to extort money from prisoners and their families. The inspectors general, district police, district nazims (chief elected officials of local governments), provincial interior or chief ministers, federal interior minister, prime minister, or courts can order internal investigations into abuses and order administrative sanctions. Executive branch and police officials have authority to recommend, and the courts may order, criminal prosecution.

The court system remained the only means available to investigate abuses by security forces. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), established in 2015, may not inquire into any complaints against intelligence agencies and must refer such complaints to the concerned competent authority. The NCHR may seek a report from the national government on any complaint made against the armed forces, and after receipt of a report, can either end the process or forward recommendations for further action to the national government.

During the year the federal government continued to use military and paramilitary organizations to augment domestic security. Paramilitary forces, including Rangers and the Frontier Constabulary, provided security to some areas of Islamabad and continued active operations in Karachi. The military-led Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad employed civilian and paramilitary cooperation against militants throughout the country.

In January 2015, in response to the December 2014 attack on the Peshawar Army Public School, Parliament approved a constitutional amendment allowing military courts to try civilians on terrorism, militancy, sectarian violence, and other charges. The military courts’ mandate to try civilians was set to expire in January 2017, but Parliament extended it until January 2019. Civil society members expressed concerns about the use of military courts for trying civilian suspects, citing lack of transparency and redundancy with the civilian judicial system.

Police often failed to protect members of religious minorities—including Ahmadiyya Muslims, Christians, Shia Muslims, and Hindus—from attacks. Activists from Christian, Sikh, Parsi, and Hindu communities reported widespread distrust of law enforcement within their communities. They explained that community members frequently refrained from reporting crimes, because they believed the police would not act. They also accused law enforcement of treating minorities particularly harshly when they are accused of crimes, and described how police meted out collective punishment on the Christian residents of a Karachi neighborhood in May, after a Christian committed a crime against an intelligence officer. Police carried out unauthorized searches of people and property, arrested Christians at random, and threatened physical and legal retributions against the community at large unless community members brought forward the perpetrator.

Police agencies continued to professionalize and modernize through training, including on human rights. Some local authorities demonstrated the ability and willingness to protect minorities from discrimination and mob lynching, at great risk to their personal safety.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

A first information report (FIR) is the legal basis for any arrest, initiated when police receive information about the commission of a “cognizable” offense. A third party usually initiates a FIR, but police can file FIRs on their own initiative. A FIR allows police to detain a suspect for 24 hours, after which a magistrate may order detention for an additional 14 days if police show detention is necessary to obtain evidence material to the investigation. Some authorities did not observe these limits on detention. Authorities reportedly filed FIRs without supporting evidence in order to harass or intimidate detainees or did not file them when adequate evidence was provided unless the complainant paid a bribe. There were reports of persons arrested without judicial authorization and of individuals paying bribes to visit prisoners.

The Ministry of Interior did not routinely provide notification of the arrest of foreigners to embassies or consulates. In 2015 the government began requiring that foreign missions request access to their arrested citizens 20 days in advance. Many foreign missions reported that requests for access to arrested citizens were unanswered for weeks or months. Foreign prisoners often remained in prison long after completion of their sentences because they were unable to pay for deportation to their home countries.

There was a functioning bail system. Human rights groups noted, however, that judges sometimes denied bail until payment of bribes. NGOs reported authorities sometimes denied bail in blasphemy cases on the grounds that defendants who faced the death penalty were likely to flee or were at risk from public vigilantism. Defendants facing lower-order blasphemy charges were often simultaneously charged with terrorism offenses, which are nonbailable. NGOs also reported that lawyers representing individuals accused of blasphemy often asked that their clients remain in custody to protect them from vigilante violence. Bail is not available in antiterrorism courts or in the military courts established under the 2015 amendment to the constitution.

The government provided state-funded legal counsel to prisoners facing the death penalty, but it did not regularly provide legal representation in other cases. The constitution recognizes the right of habeas corpus and allows the high courts to demand that a person accused of a crime be present in court. The law allows citizens to submit habeas corpus petitions to the courts. In many cases involving forced disappearances, authorities failed to present detainees according to judges’ orders.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports police arbitrarily detained individuals to extort bribes for their release or detained relatives of wanted individuals to compel suspects to surrender. Ethnic Rohingya in Karachi who lacked official identification documents reported arbitrary arrests and harassment by police authorities. They reported police, including officers from the Federal Investigation Agency, made the arrests to extract bribes.

Pretrial Detention: According to Cursor for Development and Education (CODE) Pakistan reports published in May, 66 percent of prisoners were either awaiting or undergoing trial as of October 1, 2017. CODE notes that Pakistani prison authorities did not differentiate between pretrial detainees and under-trial prisoners when collecting prison data. Police sometimes held persons in investigative detention without seeking a magistrate’s approval and often held detainees without charge until a court challenged the detention. Magistrates generally approved investigative detention at the request of police without requiring justification. When police did not develop sufficient evidence to try a suspect within the 14-day period, they generally requested that magistrates issue new FIRs, thereby further extending the suspect’s detention.

By law detainees must be brought to trial within 30 days of arrest. There were exceptions: a district coordination officer has authority to recommend preventive detention on the grounds of “maintenance of public order” for up to 90 days and may--with approval of the Home Department--extend it for an additional 90 days.

In some cases trials did not start until six months after a FIR, and at times individuals remained in pretrial detention for periods longer than the maximum sentence for the crime with which they were charged. Authorities seldom informed detainees promptly of charges against them.

Special rules apply to cases brought to court by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which investigates and prosecutes corruption cases. The NAB may detain suspects for 15 days without charge (renewable with judicial concurrence) and deny access to counsel prior to charging. Offenses under the NAB are not bailable, and only the NAB chairperson has the power to decide whether to release detainees.

Under the FIGR in the former FATA, the deputy commissioner has legal authority to preventively detain individuals on a variety of grounds and may require bonds to prevent undesired activities. Indefinite detention is not allowed, and detained persons may appeal to a tribunal. Prisoners have the right to compensation for wrongful punishment. Cases must be decided within a specified period, and authorities may release arrested persons on bail. Regulations require prisoners to be brought before FIGR authorities within 24 hours of detention, which curtails the ability of deputy

commissioners to arbitrarily arrest and hold persons for up to three years. The accused have the right of appeal under a two-tiered system: the first appeal is to a commissioner or additional commissioner, and the second is referred to the Peshawar High Court, which is the highest appellate forum under the FIGR.

In KP (including the former FATA), security forces may restrict the activities of terrorism suspects, seize their assets for up to 48 hours, and detain them for as long as one year without charges. Human rights and international organizations reported that security forces held an unknown number of individuals allegedly affiliated with terrorist organizations indefinitely in preventive detention, where they were often tortured and abused. In many cases authorities held prisoners incommunicado, denying them prompt access to a lawyer of their choice. Family members often were not allowed prompt access to detainees.

The 2011 Actions in Aid of Civil Power Regulation (retroactive to 2008) provides the military legal authority to detain suspected terrorists in the former FATA and PATA when called upon by the civilian government. Critics stated the regulation violates the constitution because of its broad provisions expanding military authority and circumventing legal due process. Under the regulation, detainee transfers to internment centers continued on a regular basis.

Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: There were reports of persons arrested or detained who were not allowed to challenge in court the legal basis or nature of their detention, obtain relief, or receive compensation.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but according to NGOs and legal experts, the judiciary often was subject to external influences, such as fear of reprisal from extremist elements in terrorism or blasphemy cases and public politicization of high-profile cases. Civil society organizations reported judges were reluctant to exonerate individuals accused of blasphemy, fearing vigilante violence. The media and the public generally considered the high courts and the Supreme Court credible.

Extensive case backlogs in the lower and superior courts undermined the right to effective remedy and to a fair and public hearing. Antiquated procedural rules, unfilled judgeships, poor case management, and weak legal education caused delays in civil and criminal cases. The Lahore High Court took steps to improve judicial efficiency. In 2017 the court’s chief justice introduced legal reforms intended to reduce strikes and formalized an alternate dispute resolution (ADR) system. ADR centers received 16,010 cases as of October 12, and had resolved 4,885.

The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the high courts does not extend to several areas that operated under separate judicial systems. For example, Azad Kashmir area (AK) has its own elected president, prime minister, legislature, and court system. Gilgit-Baltistan also has a separate judicial system.

Many lower courts remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from wealthy persons and influential religious or political figures.

There were incidents of unknown persons threatening or killing witnesses, prosecutors, or investigating police officers in high-level cases. On April 14, three Balochistan police officials were arrested for pressuring a rape victim to withdraw her allegations, after a medical examination corroborated the victim's allegations.

The use of informal justice systems that lacked institutionalized legal protections continued, especially in rural areas, and often resulted in human rights abuses. Large landholders and other community leaders in Sindh and Punjab and tribal leaders in Pashtun and Baloch areas sometimes held local council meetings (panchayats or jirgas) outside the established legal system. Such councils settled feuds and imposed tribal penalties, including fines, imprisonment, and sometimes the death penalty. These councils often sentenced women to violent punishment or death for so-called honor-related crimes. In the former FATA, such councils were held under FIGR or FCR guidelines. Assistant commissioners (previously known as assistant political agents), supported by tribal elders of their choosing, are legally responsible for justice in the former FATA and conducted hearings according to their interpretation of Islamic law and tribal custom.

Trial Procedures

The civil, criminal, and family court systems provide for a fair trial and due process, presumption of innocence, cross-examination, and appeal. There are no trials by jury. Although defendants have the right to be present and consult with an attorney, courts must appoint attorneys for indigents only in capital cases. Defendants generally bear the cost of legal representation in lower courts, but a lawyer may be provided at public expense in appellate courts. Defendants may confront or question prosecution witnesses and present their own witnesses and evidence. Due to the limited number of judges, a heavy backlog of cases, lengthy court procedures, frequent adjournment, and political pressure, cases routinely lasted for years, and defendants made frequent court appearances.

The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child noted that police lacked training to properly handle child delinquency, and cited reports of police brutality against juveniles. Many juveniles spent long periods behind bars because they could not afford bail.

In May, Parliament passed the Juvenile Justice System Act, replacing the 2000 Juvenile Justice System Ordinance. The new law mandates the creation of juvenile courts and “juvenile justice committees,” intended to expedite the administration of justice for minors by resolving cases that involve minor offenses without resorting to formal judicial proceedings. Despite a directive that these courts and committees be established within three months of the law's passage, as of November 28, the government had not done so.

Both the new law and the previous 2000 Juvenile Justice System Ordinance ban the use of the death penalty for minors, yet children were sentenced to death under the Antiterrorism Act. Furthermore, lack of documentation made determining the ages of possible minors problematic.

There were instances of lack of transparency in court cases, particularly if the case involved high-profile or sensitive issues such as blasphemy. NGOs reported the government often located such trials in jails due to concerns for the safety of defendants, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and witnesses. Although these safety concerns were well-founded, NGOs expressed concerns about both transparency issues and the lack of privacy for defendants to consult with their lawyers during jail trials.

The Antiterrorism Act allows the government to use special, streamlined antiterrorism courts (ATCs) to try persons charged with terrorist activities and sectarian violence. In other courts, suspects must appear within seven working days of their arrest, but ATCs are free to extend that period. Human rights activists criticized this parallel system, charging it was more vulnerable to political manipulation. According to a February report by the Research Society of International Law, when authorities were under political and media pressure to expedite cases they often referred them ATCs, even if they had no terrorism nexus. The frequent use of ATCs for nonterrorism cases led to significant backlogs, and despite being comparatively faster than the regular court system, ATCs often failed to meet speedy trial standards.

The government continued to utilize military courts to try civilians on terrorism and related charges. Trials in military courts are not public (see section 1.d.).

The Federal Shariat Court typically reviewed cases prosecuted under the Hudood Ordinance, a law enacted in 1979 by military leader Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq to implement a strict interpretation of Islamic law by punishing extramarital sex, false accusations of extramarital sex, theft, and alcohol consumption. Should a provincial high court decide to hear an appeal in a Hudood case, the Shariat Court lacks authority to review the provincial high court's decision. The Supreme Court may bypass the Shariat Appellate Bench and assume jurisdiction in such appellate cases. The Federal Shariat Court may overturn legislation judged inconsistent with Islamic tenets, but such decisions may be appealed to the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court and ultimately may be heard by the full bench of the Supreme Court.

Courts routinely failed to protect the rights of religious minorities. Courts discriminatorily used laws prohibiting blasphemy against Shia, Christians, Ahmadis, and members of other religious minority groups. Lower courts often did not require adequate evidence in blasphemy cases, and some convicted persons spent years in jail before higher courts eventually overturned their convictions or ordered their release.

In a landmark case, On October 31, the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. In the wake of widespread protests by antiblasphemy groups following the decision, the government agreed not to oppose a petition seeking additional review of her case, further postponing final resolution of

the case. Bibi was released from prison, but as of December 3 was widely believed to remain in government custody for her own protection, and the judicial review was pending.

In some cases, police arrested individuals after acts of vigilantism related to blasphemy or religious discrimination. In February an ATC convicted 31 individuals for their role in the 2017 mob lynching of university student Mashal Khan for allegedly committing blasphemy. The ATC sentenced the primary shooter to death, sentenced five others to life in prison, and 25 individuals to four years' imprisonment, although the Peshawar High Court later suspended the sentences and released on bail the 25 individuals.

Also see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/ (<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Some Sindhi and Baloch nationalist groups claimed that authorities detained their members based on political affiliation or beliefs. Under the 2009 Aghaz-e-Haqooq (“beginning of the rights”) Balochistan legislative package of reforms (intended to address the province's political, social, and economic problems), the government announced a general amnesty for all Baloch political prisoners, leaders, and activists in exile as well as those allegedly involved in “antistate” activities. In 2015 the federal and Balochistan provincial governments jointly announced a new peace package called “Pur Aman Balochistan” (“peaceful Balochistan”), intended to offer cash and other incentives for “militants” who wished to rejoin mainstream society. Despite the amnesty offers, illegal detention of Baloch leaders and the disappearance of private Baloch citizens continued. During an August 15 National Assembly session Akhtar Mengal, leader of the Balochistan National Party-Mengal, raised the issue of disappearances in Balochistan, claiming there were five thousand missing citizens in his province.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals may petition the courts to seek redress for various human rights violations, and courts often took such actions. Individuals may seek redress in civil courts against government officials, including on grounds of denial of human rights. Observers reported that civil courts seldom issued official judgments in such cases, and most cases were settled out of court. Although there were no official procedures for administrative redress, informal reparations were common. Individuals and organizations could not appeal adverse decisions to international human rights bodies, although some NGOs submitted human rights “shadow reports” to the United Nations and other international actors.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law requires court-issued warrants for property searches. Police sometimes ignored this requirement and on occasion reportedly stole items during searches. Authorities seldom punished police for illegal entry. Police at times detained family members to induce a suspect to surrender. In cases pursued under the Antiterrorism Act, law enforcement agencies have additional powers, including that of search and seizure without a warrant of property related to a case.

Several domestic intelligence services monitored politicians, political activists, suspected terrorists, NGOs, employees of foreign entities, and media professionals. These services included the Inter-Services Intelligence, Police Special Branch, the Intelligence Bureau, and Military Intelligence. There were credible reports authorities routinely used wiretaps, monitored cell phone calls, intercepted electronic correspondence, and opened mail without court approval.

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

The military and paramilitary organizations conducted multiple counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations to eradicate militant safe havens. The military's Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, launched in February 2017, continued throughout the year. Radd-ul-Fasaad is a nationwide counterterrorism campaign aimed at consolidating the gains of the 2014-2017 Operation Zarb-e-Azb, which countered foreign and domestic terrorists in the former FATA. Law enforcement agencies also acted to weaken terrorist groups, arresting suspected terrorists and gang members who allegedly provided logistical support to militants. In raids throughout the country, police confiscated caches of weapons, suicide vests, and planning materials. Police expanded their presence into formerly ungoverned areas, particularly in Balochistan.

Poor security, intimidation by both security forces and militants, and control by government and security forces over access by nonresidents to Balochistan and the former FATA impeded the efforts of human rights organizations to provide relief to victims of military abuses and of journalists to report on any such abuses.

On August 24, security forces fired on residents protesting military search operations in Hamzoni, North Waziristan district, killing two and injuring 11. The incident followed the imposition of a curfew in the aftermath of an IED attack targeting military personnel in the area on the previous day. Although the shooting occurred in a relatively remote area, Pashtun rights activists shared news of the protest through social media, culminating in a strongly worded Twitter exchange between the military's official spokesman and a recently elected Member of the National Assembly from North Waziristan (who is also a leader of the nascent Pashtun rights movement).

Militant and terrorist activity continued, and there were suicide and bomb attacks in all four provinces, the former FATA, and Gilgit Baltistan. Militants and terrorist groups, including the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and the Islamic State Khorasan Province targeted civilians, journalists, community leaders, security forces, law enforcement agents, and schools, killing and injuring hundreds with bombs, suicide attacks, and other forms of violence. Militant and terrorist groups often

attacked religious minorities. A low-intensity separatist insurgency continued in Balochistan. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in the fight against militant groups.

Militants carried out numerous attacks on political party offices, candidates, and campaign rallies leading up to the July 25 general elections. On July 10, a suicide bomber killed Awami National Party politician Haroon Bilour and 21 others at a campaign rally in Peshawar. On July 13, at an election rally in Mastung, Balochistan, a suicide bombing killed more than 130 persons. On July 22, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province’s Dera Ismail Khan district, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf provincial assembly candidate Kramullah Gadapur was killed in a suicide attack on his vehicle. A third suicide attack at a Quetta polling station on election day killed 31 individuals.

Political, sectarian, criminal, and ethnic violence in Karachi continued, although violence declined and gang wars were less prevalent than before security operations in the city. On March 13, however, gang members armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades attacked Sindh Rangers patrolling Karachi’s Lyari neighborhood. One Ranger was killed and four injured, while five gang members died in the firefight.

Killings: There were reports that government security forces caused civilian casualties and engaged in extrajudicial killings during operations against suspected militants throughout the country. There were numerous media reports of police and security forces killing terrorist suspects in “police encounters.” One prominent case involved the January 13 Karachi Police killing of a young Pashtun man, Naqibullah Mehsud, which both National Commission for Human Rights and Sindh Police investigations determined was an extrajudicial killing perpetrated in a staged counterterror operation. The senior police officer accused of ordering the operation was suspended and detained, but subsequently was released on bail. His trial was ongoing as of November 28.

Sectarian violence decreased significantly across the country, although some attacks continued, including a November 23 bombing of a Shia mosque in Hangu (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) that killed at least 33 individuals and marked the first major sectarian attack of the year. Targeted killings of religious minorities continued. There were reports of targeted killings of Shia individuals, including the custodian of a Shia congregation hall, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Dera Ismail Khan, a historically Shia area that in recent years absorbed an influx of Sunni households displaced by military operations. The Supreme Court ordered police to take additional steps to curb sectarian killings in the area. In April, six Shia Hazaras were killed in four targeted drive-by shooting incidents in Quetta, Balochistan. The rash of killings sparked sustained protest by Quetta’s ethnic Hazara community. Charan Jeet Singh, an interfaith activist and leader of the Sikh community in Peshawar, was killed in a targeted shooting on May 29. Unknown gunmen killed an Ahmadi man in his home on June 25, in what appeared to be a targeted killing due to his faith.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: Nonstate militant groups targeted noncombatants and killed civilians in various incidents across the country.

Child Soldiers: Nonstate militant groups recruited children as young as 12 to spy, fight, or die as suicide bombers. The militants sometimes offered parents money, often sexually and physically abused the children, and used psychological coercion to convince the children the acts they committed were justified. The government operated a center in Swat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) to rehabilitate, educate, and reintegrate former child soldiers.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: The terrorist groups TTP, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and related factions bombed government buildings and attacked and killed female teachers and polio vaccination workers. On January 18, unknown assailants killed a female health worker and her daughter as the two administered polio vaccinations to patients outside Quetta. In another incident just outside Quetta, in Yaro, a Frontier Corps was wounded on April 11 when a man opened fire on health workers administering polio vaccines. On April 23, two assailants attacked a female health worker with knives; she survived the attack. The TTP particularly targeted girls’ schools to demonstrate its opposition to girls’ education but also destroyed boys’ schools. Military operations created hardships for the local civilian population when militants closed key access roads and tunnels and attacked communications and energy networks, disrupting commerce and the distribution of food and water.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The law provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, but there were constitutional restrictions. In addition, threats, harassment, violence and killings led journalists and editors to practice self-censorship.

Freedom of Expression: The constitution provides for the right to free speech and the press, subject to “any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam” or the “integrity, security, or defense of Pakistan, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality.” The law permits citizens to criticize the government publicly or privately, but court decisions have interpreted the constitution as prohibiting criticism of the military and judiciary. Such criticism can result in legal, political, or commercial reprisal. Blasphemy laws restrict individual rights to free speech concerning matters of religion and religious doctrine. According to the penal code, the punishment for blasphemy ranges from life in prison to the death sentence for a range of charges, including “defiling the Prophet Muhammad.” The courts enforced the blasphemy laws, although no one has been executed for committing blasphemy to date, allegations of blasphemy have often prompted mob lynchings and vigilantism. The government restricted some language and symbolic speech based on hate speech and terrorism provisions.

Press and Media Freedom: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views. Journalists often criticized the government, but threats, harassment, and violence against journalists who reported on sensitive issues such as civil-military tensions or abuses by security forces occurred during the year. By law the government

may restrict information that might be prejudicial to the national interest. Authorities sometimes used these laws to prevent or punish media criticism of the judiciary and armed forces. Press outlets began reporting increased censorship and pressure to self-censor prior to national elections in July; such pressure continued after the elections.

There were more than 400 independent English, Urdu, and regional-language daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. To publish within AK, media owners had to obtain permission from the Kashmir Council and the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting controlled and managed the country's primary wire service, the Associated Press of Pakistan, the official carrier of government and international news to the local media. The military had its own media and public relations office, Inter-Services Public Relations. The government-owned Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation and Pakistan Television Corporation broadcast television programs nationwide and operated radio stations throughout the country. In the former FATA and PATA, authorities allowed independent radio stations to broadcast with the FATA Secretariat's permission. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) licensed 89 private domestic and 22 foreign television channels. There were 143 commercial FM radio stations, but their licenses prohibited news programming. Some channels evaded this restriction by discussing news in talk-show formats.

International media broadcasts were normally available. There were limitations on transmission of Indian media content, however. In 2016 PEMRA imposed a blanket ban on transmission of Indian media content. The Lahore High Court officially ended the ban in February 2017, but blockage of Indian television dramas continued until the Lahore High Court again ruled against the policy in July 2017. PEMRA again imposed a temporary ban on the screening of Indian films during the Eid holidays to encourage viewing of local films, and in October the Supreme Court overturned the Lahore High Court's earlier decisions, reinstating a blanket ban. The Supreme Court chief justice implied the media blockage was a justifiable response to India damming rivers that flow into Pakistan.

PEMRA issued editorial directives to television stations during the year and authorized its chairman to shut down any channel found in violation of the PEMRA code of conduct, primarily with regard to prohibiting telecasts of protests that might instigate violence. On August 29, following a Supreme Court order, PEMRA issued a notice banning the broadcast of commentary surrounding any court case prior to a court decision.

In January the Interior Ministry shut down the Islamabad office of Radio Mashaal, the Pashto language service of Radio Free Europe. The Ministry based its decision on an intelligence report claiming Radio Mashaal radio programs were “against the interests of Pakistan and in line with a hostile intelligence agency's agenda.”

Violence and Harassment: Security forces, political parties, militants, and other groups subjected media outlets, journalists, and their families to violence and harassment. Female journalists in particular faced threats of sexual violence and harassment, including via social media. Security forces allegedly abducted journalists. Media outlets that reported on topics the authorities view as sensitive were often the targets of

retribution. Additionally, journalists working in remote and conflict-ridden areas lacked basic digital and traditional security skills, which increased pressure to self-censor or not cover a story.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), state and nonstate actors physically attacked, harassed, intimidated, and kidnapped journalists and subjected them to other forms of pressure. CPJ did not confirm any targeted killings of journalists during the year, but was investigating the motives of suspected targeted killings. CPJ included the country in its annual “impunity index” because of the poor record of prosecuting the killers of journalists.

Journalists were killed during the year, but it was unclear whether their journalism was the motive for the killings.

On August 22, two men attacked journalist Muhammed Abid Hussain in Punjab’s Vehari district, reportedly in response to exposing his attackers’ criminal activity. Abid died of his injuries on August 23.

On October 16, Sohail Khan, a reporter for the Urdu daily *K2 Times*, was shot while driving in Haripur (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Police apprehended two suspects and indicated the killing may have been related to Khan’s reporting on the suspects’ drug trafficking activities.

In other instances, journalists were beaten, arrested, or disrupted while carrying out their work. On July 13, Punjab province police arrested and beat Kadafi Zaman, a reporter for a Norwegian television station, while he was covering a Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) political rally in Gujrat city. Authorities arrested him along with 38 other individuals, charged him with attempted murder and disruption of public order, and released him on bail after several days in jail.

On November 8, armed plainclothes security officers forcibly entered the Karachi Press Club, disrupting an event and taking photos of the interior of the building. The next day, security forces arrested journalist and Press Club member Nasrullah Chaudhry and charged him with assisting a terrorist operative, claiming the earlier Press Club raid was part of the search for Chaudhry. Journalists widely decried the raid as intimidation, noting that even during military dictatorships, press clubs were considered off-limits for security forces.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Media organizations generally reported that they engaged in self-censorship, especially in reporting news about the military. Journalists reported regular denial of official permission to visit conflict areas, or being required to travel with a military escort while reporting on conditions in conflict areas. They reported pressure to produce articles that were slanted toward the military viewpoint. Other reporting tended to be relatively objective with a focus on facts rather than deeper analysis, which journalists generally regarded as risky. Both local and foreign journalists complained of harassment and intimidation by government officials, particularly before the national elections in July. Blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws restricted publication on certain topics. Government censors reviewed foreign books

before they could be reprinted, but there were no reports of books being banned during the year. Imported movies, books, magazines, and newspapers were subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content. Obscene literature, a category the government defined broadly, was subject to seizure.

The government fined private television channels for alleged violations of the “code of ethics” and for showing banned content on-screen. Authorities reportedly used PEMRA rules to silence broadcast media by either suspending licenses or threatening to do so, and many outlets resorted to self-censorship, particularly when reporting on religious or security issues. The Central Board of Film Censors previewed and censored sexual content and any content that glorified Indian heroes, leaders, or military figures in foreign and domestic films.

Before the July national elections, media outlets seen as supportive of the PML-N faced distribution disruptions. The country’s oldest newspaper, English-language daily *Dawn*, published a controversial interview with former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on May 12. Beginning on May 15, *Dawn* reported bans on its distribution in much of Balochistan province, many cities in Sindh province, and in all military-administered areas. The Jang/Geo media group also reportedly faced harassment and newspaper distribution blockages. Unidentified individuals reportedly pressured newspaper vendors not to distribute the Urdu language *Jang* newspaper and its sister English language paper *The News*, and discouraged advertisers from advertising with the Jang/Geo group’s outlets. In many parts of the country, cable operators dropped the Geo news channel from their cable systems, or repeatedly changed its assigned channel.

National Security: Some journalists asserted authorities cited laws protecting national security to censor and restrict media distribution of material that criticized government policies, or military or public officials. The Electronic Media (Programs and Advertisements) Code of Conduct included a clause that restricted reporting in any area that was part of a military operation in progress.

Nongovernmental Impact: Nonstate actor violence against media workers decreased since 2013, but there is a history of militant and criminal elements killing, abducting, assaulting, and intimidating journalists and their families.

Internet Freedom

The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) is responsible for the establishment, operation, and maintenance of telecommunications and has complete control of all content broadcast over telecommunication channels. According to the PTA, as of August there were approximately 58 million broadband subscribers, representing approximately 27.8 percent internet penetration.

Since 2012 the government has implemented a systematic, nationwide content-monitoring and filtering system to restrict or block “unacceptable” content, including material that is deemed un-Islamic, pornographic, or critical of the state or military forces. The restrictive 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act gives the government sweeping powers to censor content on the internet, which authorities used as a tool for

the continued clampdown on civil society. The government blocked websites because of allegedly anti-Islamic, pornographic, blasphemous, or extremist content. The Ministry for Religious Affairs coordinates with the PTA in identifying purportedly blasphemous websites to be blocked. There were also reports the government attempted to control or block sites that advocated for Baloch independence. There were reports that the government used surveillance software. There was poor transparency and accountability surrounding content monitoring, and the government often used vague criteria without due process.

On June 4, the Director General of the military's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) revealed security services had been actively monitoring “antistate” social media accounts both domestically and internationally. During the presentation, ISPR presented a chart showing the profiles and twitter handles of journalists and bloggers considered threats to the state. In November, two prominent journalists and social media activists, Gul Bukhari and Taha Siddiqui, simultaneously received notices from Twitter warning them against publishing “objectionable content.” Both publicly blamed the government for instigating these official warnings in an attempt to censor their critical tweets. There were abduction attempts against both during the year. On August 18, the PTA publicly threatened to ban Twitter for failing to block “objectionable content” in response to requests from the government.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government generally did not restrict academic freedom but screened and censored cultural events. There was government interference with art exhibitions, musical, and cultural activities. Holding any such event requires a government-issued permit (a “no objection certificate”).

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and laws provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but these freedoms were subject to restrictions.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

By law district authorities may prevent gatherings of more than four persons without police authorization. The law permits the government to ban all rallies and processions, except funeral processions, for security reasons.

Authorities generally prohibited Ahmadis, a religious minority, from holding conferences or gatherings. Ahmadis cited the closure by Sialkot authorities of an Ahmadiyya mosque on May 14 and mob attacks on two other mosques in Sialkot and Faisalabad as evidence of the ongoing severe conditions for the community.

During the year the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, or PTM, mobilized its predominantly ethnic Pashtun supporters to participate in sit-ins and demonstrations to demand justice and to protest abuses by government security forces. Thousands of

individuals participated in peaceful protests across the country's main population centers, including Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Islamabad. Observers noted that authorities attempted to discourage protestors through arrests, intimidation, and harassment, but did not engage in any systematic acts of violence against PTM supporters.

Protests, strikes, and demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, took place throughout the country. The government generally prevented political and civil society groups of any affiliation from holding demonstrations in Islamabad's red zone--a restricted area that includes a diplomatic enclave and federal government buildings--citing security restrictions that limit all public rallies and gatherings in the area.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association subject to certain restrictions imposed by law. The government maintained a series of policies that steadily eroded the freedom of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) to carry out their work and access the communities they serve. INGOs, UN organizations, and international missions must request government permission in the form of no-objection certificates before they can conduct most in-country travel, carry out certain project activities, or initiate new projects.

The government adopted a new online registration regime for INGOs in 2015, and in September introduced a more restrictive operating agreement that INGOs must follow. The registration process entails extensive document requirements, multiple levels of review, and constant investigations by security and other government offices. The government denied registration applications of dozens of INGOs in 2017 and 2018. After a lengthy appeals process, in October the Ministry of Interior issued final rejection notices to 18 INGOs, denying their registrations and ordering them to close operations within 60 days. The rejection notices did not specify the reasons for rejection.

The years of uncertainty about registration status negatively impacted even those INGOs that have not received final rejection notices. They faced additional barriers to fundraising, opening bank accounts, and obtaining tax-exempt status from the Federal Board of Revenue. No-objection certificates were hard to obtain in certain provinces without an approved registration, thus hindering implementation and monitoring of activities, even for INGOs that had initiated the new registration process. INGOs also faced an uptick in visa denials for international staff. The government asked country directors and international staff, during visa applications and separate surveys, whether they were Indian or Israeli nationals. The lack of transparency and unpredictability of the registration process caused some INGOs to withdraw their registration applications and terminate operations in the country.

The government at both the federal and provincial levels similarly restricted the access of foreign-funded local NGOs through a separate registration regime, no-objection certificates, and other requirements. Authorities required NGOs to obtain no-objection certificates before accepting foreign funding, booking facilities or using university spaces for events, or working on sensitive human rights issues. Even when local NGOs

receiving foreign funding were appropriately registered, the government often denied their requests for no-objection certificates. Furthermore, domestic NGOs with all required certificates faced government monitoring and harassment.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/ (<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement and for uninhibited foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government limited these rights.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: The government provided temporary legal status to approximately 1.4 million Afghans formally registered and holding proof of registration cards. The PML-N and interim governments gave repeated, short-term proof of registration card extensions through September 30, which created an environment of uncertainty for proof of registration cardholders. In October the PTI-led government broke the trend of short-term extensions, approving a longer-term extension through June 30, 2019. Prime Minister Imran Khan pledged on September 16 to offer citizenship to Afghan refugees and Bengalis born in the country. The government formed a parliamentary committee to address this issue, which remained controversial.

There were reports that provincial authorities, police, and host communities harassed Afghan refugees. UNHCR reported that, from January to October, there were 828 arrests and detentions of refugees. All those arrested were released, 74 percent without charges, often following the intervention of UNHCR or its implementing partners. Arrests spiked in July, largely due to stringent security measures initiated by the government in preparation for the July 25 general elections.

In-country Movement: Government restrictions on access to certain areas of the former FATA and Balochistan, often due to security concerns, hindered freedom of movement. The government required an approved no-objection certificate for travel to areas of the country it designated as “sensitive.”

Foreign Travel: The law prohibits travel to Israel, and the country’s passports include a statement that they are “valid for all countries except Israel.” Passport applicants must list their religious affiliation and, if Muslim, affirm a declaration that the founder of the

Ahmadiyya movement was a false prophet. Ahmadi representatives reported authorities wrote the word “Ahmadi” in their passports if they refused to sign the declaration.

According to policy, government employees and students must obtain no-objection certificates from the government before traveling abroad. Authorities rarely enforced this requirement for students, however.

The government prohibited persons on an exit control list from departing the country. The stated purpose of the list was to prevent departure from the country of “persons involved in antistate activities, terrorism, or related to proscribed organizations and those placed on the orders of superior courts.” Those on the list had the right to appeal to the courts to have their names removed.

Exile: The government refused the return of some Pakistanis deported from other countries. The government refused these deportees entry as unidentifiable Pakistani citizens, despite having passports issued by Pakistani embassies abroad.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Large population displacements have occurred since 2008 as a result of militant activity and military operations in KP and the former FATA. Returns continued amid improved security conditions. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 29,000 of the total 5.3 million affected residents remained displaced as of May. The government and UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, and the UN World Food Program collaborated to assist and protect those affected by conflict, who generally resided with host families, in rented accommodations, or to a lesser extent, in camps. Several IDP populations settled in informal settlements outside of major cities, such as Lahore and Karachi.

The government required humanitarian organizations assisting civilians displaced by military operations to request no-objection certificates to access all districts in the former FATA. According to humanitarian agencies and NGOs, the certificate application process was cumbersome and projects faced significant delays. The government maintained IDP camps inside and near former FATA districts where military operations took place, despite access and security concerns raised by humanitarian agencies. Humanitarian agency workers providing assistance in the camps were exposed to danger when travelling to and within the former FATA. UN agencies maintained access to the camps and the affected areas mainly through local NGOs.

There were no reports of involuntary returns. Many IDPs reportedly wanted to return home, despite the lack of local infrastructure, housing, and available service delivery and the strict control that security forces maintained over returnees’ movements through extensive checkpoints. Other IDP families delayed their return or chose some family members to remain in the settled areas of KP where regular access to health care, education, and other social services were available. For IDPs who were unwilling or unable to return, the government coordinated support with the United Nations and

other international organizations. The World Food Program distributed a monthly food ration to IDPs in KP displaced by conflict and continued to provide a six-month food ration to IDPs who returned to their areas of origin in the former FATA.

Despite large-scale recurring displacements of individuals due to natural disasters and disruptions caused by terrorist activities and counterterrorist operations, the government had not adopted specific legislation to tackle internal displacement problems. In addition, the National Disaster Management Act of 2010 does not provide any definition of IDPs or their rights.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The country lacks a legal and regulatory framework for the management of refugees and migration. The law does not exclude asylum seekers and refugees from provisions regarding illegal entry and stay. In the absence of a national refugee legal framework, UNHCR conducted refugee status determination under its mandate, and the country generally accepted UNHCR decisions to grant refugee status and allowed asylum seekers who were still undergoing the procedure, as well as recognized refugees, to remain in the country pending identification of a durable solution.

Employment: There is no formal document allowing refugees to work legally, but there is no law prohibiting refugees from working in the country. Many refugees worked as day laborers or in informal markets, and local employers often exploited refugees in the informal labor market with low or unpaid wages. Women and children were particularly vulnerable, accepting underpaid and undesirable work.

Access to Basic Services: One-third of registered Afghans lived in one of 54 refugee villages, while the remaining two-thirds lived in host communities in rural and urban areas and sought to access basic services in those communities. Afghan refugees could avail themselves of the services of police and the courts, but some, particularly the poor, were afraid to do so. There were no reports of refugees denied access to health facilities because of their nationality.

The constitution stipulates free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of five and 16, regardless of their nationality. Any refugee registered with both UNHCR and the government-run Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees was, in theory, admitted to public education facilities after filing the proper paperwork. Access to schools, however, was on a space-available basis as determined by the principal, and most registered Afghans attended private Afghan schools or schools sponsored by the international community. For older students, particularly girls in refugee villages, access to education remained difficult. Afghans who grew up in Pakistan needed student visas to attend universities, but they qualified for student visas based on their proof of registration cards. Afghan students were eligible to seek admission to Pakistani public and private colleges and universities.

Durable Solutions: The government did not accept refugees for resettlement from other countries and did not facilitate local integration. The government does not currently accord the children of Afghan refugees Pakistani citizenship, but it did establish a parliamentary committee to evaluate the possibility of extending citizenship to Pakistani-born children of Afghan and Bengali refugees, as reported earlier.

The Ministry of States and Frontier Regions and Ministry of the Interior’s National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) signed a memorandum of understanding in May 2017 to document unregistered Afghans in the country. The memorandum established 21 documentation centers in areas with high concentrations of unregistered Afghans. Under it, NADRA agreed to issue new identity cards, called Afghan citizen cards, over a period of six months. The Afghan citizen cards provided undocumented Afghans legal protection from arbitrary arrests, detention, or deportation under the Foreigners Act and allowed cardholders to stay in Pakistan for the duration of the cards’ validity. If cardholders leave the country, they relinquish their status. The period for Afghans to apply for Afghan citizen cards concluded at the end of January, after which only new births to existing holders of Afghan citizen cards were recorded. Any undocumented Afghans encountered in the country after the registration period were vulnerable to detention and deportation under the Foreigners Act.

Stateless Persons

Statelessness continued to be a problem. There is no national legislation on statelessness, and the government does not recognize the existence of stateless persons. International and national agencies estimated there were possibly thousands of stateless persons as a result of the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, and the 1971 partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition, UNHCR estimated there were 300,000 Rohingya living in the country, a large percentage of whom were believed to be stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides the majority of citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Gilgit-Baltistan, AK, and the former FATA have political systems that differ from the rest of the country. Gilgit-Baltistan and AK did not have representation in the national Parliament.

Residents of the former FATA do not have a voice in federal decisions regarding the tribal areas; that authority resides with the KP governor, who is appointed by the president. Tribal residents did not have the right to choose their local government because unelected civilian bureaucrats managed the tribal districts under the FIGR and the FCR that preceded it. By year’s end, no local government elections have been held in the former FATA, although the government allowed political parties to operate freely in FATA under the 2011 Extension of the Political Parties Order 2002. Political observers

credited this order with laying the foundation for a more mature political system in the tribal agencies, culminating in the former FATA’s legal merger with KP province under the 25th Amendment.

AK has an interim constitution, an elected unicameral assembly, a prime minister, and a president elected by the assembly. In 2016 the AK held legislative assembly elections that resulted in a PML-N-majority government. Media reported that local observers concluded the elections were largely peaceful and free of allegations of vote rigging; the AK election commission deployed an additional 32,000 law enforcement officers to maintain law and order. Some AK political leaders reported an increased military presence on election day. The federal government, including the military, controlled and influenced the structures of the AK government and its electoral politics. Authorities barred those who did not support the AK’s accession to Pakistan from the political process, government employment, and educational institutions.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On July 25, the country held direct elections that resulted in a PTI-majority national government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan. According to Article 41 of the constitution, at the end of the sitting president’s five-year term the Electoral College (made up of the members of both houses of Parliament, and of the provincial assemblies) selects the next president by secret ballot. The Electoral College held presidential elections on September 4 and selected Arif Alvi (PTI) to succeed Mamnoon Hussain (PML-N), who completed his five-year term as president on September 9.

The Election Commission of Pakistan reportedly accredited approximately 50,000 domestic observers for the general elections. The Free and Fair Election Network, a coalition of more than 50 civil society organizations, fielded 19,000 observers and evaluated the voting process in 85 percent of polling stations nationwide. The EU also fielded an observation mission. The Free and Fair Election Network noted overall improvements in the Electoral Commission of Pakistan’s management of the polling process, but the failure of a new electronic system for transmitting results delayed the announcement of provisional results and raised speculation among the public and the media about the integrity of the vote count. EU observers assessed voting itself was “well-conducted and transparent,” but noted that “counting was sometimes problematic.” Civil society organizations and political parties raised concerns about pre-election interference, including restrictions on freedom of expression, creating an uneven electoral playing field. Some political parties also alleged polling day irregularities occurred.

Political Parties and Political Participation: There were no reports of restrictions on political parties participating in elections, with the exception of those prohibited due to terrorist affiliations. According to media reports, however, security agencies used pressure tactics—including threats of prosecution for corruption—to convince politicians associated with the former ruling party, PML-N, to switch affiliations prior to general elections. Media and analysts questioned whether the military and judiciary used selective prosecutions of political leaders on corruption charges as a tool to skew the

electoral playing field against PML-N. Judges ordered media regulatory agencies to enforce constitutional bans on content critical of the military or judiciary, compelling media to censor politicians’ speeches and elections-related coverage deemed “antijudiciary” or “antimilitary.” Organizations that monitor press freedom reported direct pressure on media outlets to avoid content regarding possible military influence over judicial proceedings against politicians, and to refrain from reporting on PML-N leaders in a positive way. In most areas, there was no interference with the right of political parties and candidates to organize campaigns, run for election, or seek votes. In Balochistan, however, there were reports security agencies and separatist groups harassed local political organizations, such as the Balochistan National Party and the Baloch Students Organization. Attacks on political party campaign offices, politicians, and supporters spiked due to the July general elections.

Participation of Women and Minorities: While no laws prevent women from voting, cultural and traditional barriers in tribal and rural areas impeded some women from voting. Authorities used quotas to assure a minimum female presence in elected bodies. There are 60 seats in the National Assembly and 17 seats in the Senate reserved for women. Authorities apportioned these seats on the basis of total votes secured by the candidates of each political party that contested the elections. Authorities reserved 129 of the 758 seats for women in provincial assemblies and one-third of the seats on local councils. Women participated actively as political party members, but they were not always successful in securing leadership positions within parties, with the exception of women’s wings. Women served in the federal cabinet.

The comprehensive Elections Act 2017, which was passed in 2017 and replaced eight older laws, stipulates special measures to enhance electoral participation of women, religious minorities, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities. Under the new law, women must constitute 5 percent of party tickets, and if less than 10 percent of women vote in any constituency, it is presumed that the women’s vote was suppressed and the results for that constituency or polling station may be nullified. The law was enforced for the first time in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, when the Election Commission canceled the district’s July 25 general elections results after women made up less than 10 percent of the vote. The law provides for mail-in voting for persons with disabilities. It requires expedited issuance of identification cards (which also serve as voter identification cards) for non-Muslims, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities.

The government requires voters to indicate their religion when registering to vote and requires Ahmadis to declare themselves as non-Muslims. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, and many were unable to vote because they did not comply.

The constitution reserves four seats in the Senate, one for each of the four provinces, for religious minorities, defined by the government as “non-Muslim.” These seats are filled through indirect elections held in the provincial assemblies. Ten National Assembly seats are reserved for members of religious minority communities. The authorities apportioned these seats to parties based on the percentage of seats each won in the assembly. Minorities held 22 reserved seats in the provincial assemblies: eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, two in KP, and three in Balochistan. Some members of

religious minority communities criticized the system of minority representation, whereby minority representatives at the provincial and federal levels are appointed by their political parties to reserved seats; they stated this system resulted in minority representatives serving the interests of their political parties rather than of minority communities.

Women and minorities may contest directly elected, nonreserved seats.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government generally did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices. Corruption was pervasive in politics and government, and various politicians and public office holders faced allegations of corruption, including bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft, and embezzlement.

Corruption: The National Accountability Bureau serves as the highest-level anticorruption authority, with a mandate to eliminate corruption through awareness, prevention, and enforcement. The National Accountability Bureau and other investigative agencies, including the Federal Board of Revenue, the State Bank of Pakistan, and the Federal Investigation Agency, conduct investigations into corruption, tax evasion, and money laundering.

Corruption within the lower levels of the police force was common. Some police charged fees to register genuine complaints and accepted bribes for registering false complaints. Bribes to avoid charges were commonplace.

Reports of corruption in the judicial system persisted, including reports that court staff requested payments to facilitate administrative procedures. Lower courts reportedly remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from higher-ranking judges as well as prominent, wealthy, religious and political figures.

There is a pervasive perception in society that corruption exists at all levels of government. The Supreme Court and the National Accountability Bureau initiated, reopened, or continued investigations into multiple prominent politicians throughout the year, including former prime minister Sharif and his politically active daughter, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shehbaz Sharif (who replaced Nawaz Sharif as head of the PML-N party), and former PML-N finance minister and Sharif confidante Ishaq Dar. In many of the cases, there appeared to be evidence of corruption. Media and analysts, however, questioned the seemingly selective nature of the prosecutions (which, they assessed, disproportionately targeted a single party), and the timing of arrests that occurred days before elections.

In November 2016 the Supreme Court convened a special bench to investigate allegations of corruption levelled against then prime minister Nawaz Sharif and members of his family. The charges stemmed from allegations related to the 2016 “Panama Papers” leaks, which named Pakistanis holding off-shore bank accounts. In July

2017 the Supreme Court disqualified then prime minister Sharif from his National Assembly seat, prompting his resignation. The court also ordered the National Accountability Bureau to prosecute the prime minister, members of his family, and the sitting finance minister. The trials before a national accountability court began in September 2017 and continued at year's end.

Financial Disclosure: By law, members of Parliament, civil servants, and ministers must declare their assets. Elected officials must also disclose their spouses' and dependent children's assets. Failure to disclose this information may lead to their disqualification from public office for five years. Heads of state, in contrast, are not required to declare their income and assets. The assets of judges, generals, and high-level officials were often concealed from the public.

Political parties and politicians must file annual financial accounting reports declaring their assets and liabilities. The law was not fully implemented, and lawmakers often disregarded it. It is the duty of the Election Commission of Pakistan to verify that political parties and politicians make their financial information publicly available; the commission posts a list of parliamentarians' assets annually.

Under the efficiency and disciplinary rules, an official must face an inquiry if accused of corruption or financial irregularities. A person convicted of corruption faces a prison term of up to 14 years, a fine, or both, and the government may appropriate any assets obtained by corrupt means.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Some domestic and international human rights groups operated without significant government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. The government increasingly restricted the operating ability of NGOs, however. Some groups that implicated the government, military, or intelligence services in misdeeds or worked on issues related to conflict areas or advocacy reported their operations were at times restricted. These groups faced numerous regulations regarding travel, visas, and registration that hampered their efforts to program and raise funds. International staff members of organizations, including those from the few successfully registered INGOs, continued to face delays or denials in the issuance of visas and no-objection certificates for in-country travel. The domestic NGO registration agreement with the government requires NGOs to “not use controversial terms like Peace and Conflict Resolution, IDPs, etc. in your annual reports or any other documents/correspondence/agreements,” and prevents NGOs from employing individuals of Indian or Israeli nationality or origin. Few NGOs had access to certain parts of KP, the former FATA, and certain areas in Balochistan.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The 2012 National Commission for Human Rights Bill authorized the establishment of an independent committee, the National Commission on Human Rights, and a standalone Ministry of Human Rights was

reconstituted in 2015. The Senate and National Assembly standing committees on law, justice, minorities, and human rights held hearings on a range of human rights problems.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is a criminal offense, with punishment that ranges from a minimum of 10 to 25 years in prison and a fine, to the death penalty. The penalty for gang rape is death or life imprisonment. The law does not explicitly criminalize spousal rape, and defines rape as a crime committed by a man against a woman. Although rape was frequent, prosecutions were rare. In 2016 Parliament passed an antirape law that provides for collection of DNA evidence and includes nondisclosure of a rape victim’s name, the right to legal representation of rape victims, and enhanced penalties for rape of victims with mental or physical disabilities.

The government did not effectively enforce the 2006 Women’s Protection Act, which brought the crime of rape under the jurisdiction of criminal rather than Islamic courts. By law police are not allowed to arrest or hold a female victim overnight at a police station without a civil court judge’s consent. The law requires a victim to complain directly to a sessions court, which is considered a trial court for heinous offenses. After recording the victim’s statement, the sessions court judge officially lodges a complaint, after which police may then make arrests. NGOs reported the procedure created barriers for rape victims who could not afford to travel to or access the courts. NGOs reported that rape was a severely underreported crime.

In 2016 the provincial government of Punjab passed the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act to provide greater legal protections for domestic abuse victims, including judicial protective orders and access to a new network of district-level women’s shelters, the first of which was inaugurated in Multan in March 2017. The center provided women a range of services including assistance with the completion of first information reports regarding the crimes committed against them, first aid, medical examinations, post-trauma rehabilitation, free legal services, and a shelter home.

There were no reliable national, provincial, or local statistics on rape due to underreporting and a lack of any centralized law enforcement data collection system.

Prosecutions of reported rapes were rare, although there were reports that rates increased in response to capacity building programs and campaigns to combat the lack of awareness about rape and gender-based violence among the general public and police. Police and NGOs reported individuals involved in other types of disputes sometimes filed false rape charges, reducing the ability of police to identify legitimate cases and proceed with prosecution. NGOs reported police sometimes accepted bribes from perpetrators, abused or threatened victims, and demanded they drop charges,

especially when suspected perpetrators were influential community leaders. Some police demanded bribes from victims before registering rape charges, and investigations were often superficial. Furthermore, accusations of rape were often resolved using extrajudicial measures, with the victim frequently forced to marry her attacker.

The use of post-rape medical testing increased, but medical personnel in many areas did not have sufficient training or equipment, which further complicated prosecutions. Most victims of rape, particularly in rural areas, did not have access to the full range of treatment services. There were a limited number of women’s treatment centers, funded by both the federal government and international donors. These centers had partnerships with local service providers to create networks that delivered a full spectrum of essential services to rape victims.

No specific federal law prohibits domestic violence, which was widespread. Forms of domestic violence reportedly included beating, physical disfigurement, shaving of women’s eyebrows and hair, and—in extreme cases—homicide. In-laws frequently abused and harassed the wives of their sons. Dowry and other family-related disputes sometimes resulted in death or disfigurement by burning or acid.

Women who tried to report abuse often faced serious challenges. Police and judges were sometimes reluctant to take action in domestic violence cases, viewing them as family problems. Instead of filing charges, police typically responded by encouraging the parties to reconcile. Authorities routinely returned abused women to their abusive family members.

To address societal norms that disapprove of victims who report gender-based violence and abuse, the government established women’s police stations, staffed by female officers, to offer women a safe place to report complaints and file charges. These women’s police stations, however, were limited in number and, as with most police stations, faced financial and human resource shortages.

The government continued to operate the Crisis Center for Women in Distress, which referred abused women to NGOs for assistance. Numerous government-funded Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Women across the country provided legal aid, medical treatment, and psychosocial counseling. These centers served women who were victims of exploitation and violence. Victims later were referred to dar-ul-amans, shelter houses for abused women and children, of which there were several hundred around the country. The dar-ul-amans also provided access to medical treatment. According to NGOs, the shelters did not offer other assistance to women, such as legal aid or counseling, and often served as halfway homes for women awaiting trial for adultery, even though they were the victims of rape and domestic abuse.

Government centers lacked sufficient space, staff, and resources. Many daru-ul-amans were severely overcrowded, with conditions that did not meet international standards. Some shelters did not offer access to basic needs such as showers, laundry supplies, or feminine hygiene products. In some cases, women were reportedly abused at the government-run shelters, their movements were severely restricted, or they were

pressured to return to their abusers. There were some reports of women exploited in prostitution and sex trafficking in shelters. Some shelter staff reportedly discriminated against the shelter residents, assuming that if a woman fled her home, it was because she was a woman of ill repute.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): No national law addresses the practice of FGM/C. According to human rights groups and media reports, many Dawoodi Bohra Muslims practiced various forms of FGM/C. Some Dawoodi Bohras spoke publicly and signed online petitions against the practice. Some other isolated tribes and communities in rural Sindh and Balochistan also reportedly practiced FGM/C.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Women were victims of various types of societal violence and abuse, including so-called honor killings, forced marriages and conversions, imposed isolation, and being used as chattel to settle tribal disputes.

A 2004 law on honor killings, the 2011 Prevention of Antiwomen Practices Act, and the 2016 Criminal Law Amendment (Offenses in the Name or Pretext of Honor) Act criminalize acts committed against women in the name of traditional practices. Despite these laws, hundreds of women reportedly were victims of so-called honor killings, and many cases went unreported and unpunished. In many cases, the male involved in the alleged “crime of honor” was allowed to flee. Because these crimes generally occurred within families, many went unreported. Police and NGOs reported that increased media coverage enabled law enforcement officials to take some action against these crimes.

On April 6, in Khairpur, Sindh, a man killed his pregnant sister after she married a man from another caste. The killing occurred the day before the victim was scheduled to appear before a local Jirga on accusations of “impurity.” On March 14, a man in Badin District in southern Sindh killed his wife, claiming she “did not maintain good character.” In July a police constable in KP’s Mustarzai village electrocuted his wife to death in an apparent “honor” killing. Authorities arrested the accused but it was unclear if a legal case was registered against him. In September, an 18-year-old girl and her 21-year-old boyfriend were beheaded by the girl’s father and uncle in what media reports described as an honor killing. Police arrested both suspects and registered a murder case against them.

There were reports that the practice of cutting off a woman’s nose or ears, especially in connection with so-called honor crimes, continued and legal repercussions were rare.

In 2017 Parliament passed the federal Hindu Marriage Act. The national law codified the legal mechanisms to register Hindu marriages and to prove the legitimacy of Hindu marriages under the law. Leaders in the Hindu community said they generally viewed the legislation as a positive step toward preventing forced marriages of Hindus to Muslims, but the law contained one worrisome provision allowing for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. A similar provision was included in Sindh’s 2016 Hindu Marriage Act.

The 2011 Prevention of Antiwomen Practices Amendment Act criminalizes and punishes the giving of a woman in marriage to settle a civil or criminal dispute; depriving a woman of her rights to inherit movable or immovable property by deceitful or illegal means; coercing or in any manner compelling a woman to enter into marriage; and compelling, arranging, or facilitating the marriage of a woman with the Quran, including forcing her to take an oath on the Quran to remain unmarried or not to claim her share of an inheritance. Although prohibited by law, these practices continued in some areas.

The law makes maiming or killing using a corrosive substance a crime and imposes stiff penalties against perpetrators. As with other laws, these measures are not applicable in the former FATA and PATA unless the president issues a notification to that effect. There were numerous acid attacks on women across the country, with few perpetrators brought to justice.

The 2012 National Commission on the Status of Women Bill provides for the commission’s financial and administrative autonomy to investigate violations of women’s rights. According to women’s rights activists, however, the commission lacked resources.

Sexual Harassment: Although several laws criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and public sphere, the problem was reportedly widespread. The law requires all provinces to have provincial-level ombudsmen. The Sindh, Punjab, and KP provinces, and Gilgit-Baltistan had established ombudsmen.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The law prohibits discrimination based on sex, but authorities did not enforce it. Women also faced discrimination in employment, family law, property law, and the judicial system. Family law provides protection for women in cases of divorce, including requirements for maintenance, and sets clear guidelines for custody of minor children and their maintenance.

The law entitles female children to one-half the inheritance of male children. Wives inherit one-eighth of their husbands’ estates. Women often received far less than their legal entitlement.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived by birth in the country, although for children born abroad after 2000, citizenship may be derived by descent if either the mother or the father is a citizen and the child is registered with the proper authorities (see section 2.d.).

Education: The constitution mandates compulsory education, provided free of charge by the government, to all children between the ages of five and 16. Despite this provision, government schools often charged parents for books, uniforms, and other materials.

Medical Care: Boys and girls had equal access to government facilities, although families were more likely to seek medical assistance for boys than for girls.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was widespread. Employers, who in some cases were relatives, abused young girls and boys working as domestic servants by beating them and forcing them to work long hours. Many such children were human trafficking victims.

Local authorities subjected children to harmful traditional practices, treating girls as chattel to settle disputes and debts.

In 2016 the government updated its definition of statutory rape and expanded the previous definition, which was sexual intercourse with a girl younger than 16, to include boys.

Early and Forced Marriage: Despite legal prohibitions, child marriages occurred. Federal law sets the legal age of marriage at 18 for men and 16 for women. The 2014 Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act sets 18 as the legal age of marriage for both girls and boys in Sindh Province. A February 2017 amendment to the penal code substantially increased punishment for violators of the law. Under the amendment, violators may be imprisoned for up to 10 years and no less than five years (up from imprisonment of up to one month), and may also be fined up to one million rupees (\$7,200), up from 1,000 rupees (seven dollars).

In 2014 the Council of Islamic Ideology declared child marriage laws to be un-Islamic and noted they were “unfair and there cannot be any legal age of marriage.” The council stated that Islam does not prohibit underage marriage since it allows the consummation of marriage after both partners reach puberty. Decisions of the Council are nonbinding.

According to a 2017 nationally representative Gallup survey, 24.7 percent of women were married before the age of 18. In rural areas, poor parents sometimes sold their daughters into marriage, in some cases to settle debts or disputes. Although forced marriage is a criminal offense and many cases were filed, prosecution remained limited.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: In 2016 Parliament amended the criminal code to protect children further from specific crimes of child pornography, sexual abuse, seduction, and cruelty. The 1961 Suppression of Prostitution Ordinance and portions of the penal code are intended to protect children from sexual exploitation though socioeconomic vulnerabilities led to the sexual exploitation of children, including sex trafficking, and authorities did not regularly enforce these laws. Child pornography is illegal under obscenity laws.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: According to NGO reports, more than 350 dead infants were discovered in garbage dumps between January 2017 and April 2018, and about 99 percent of the victims were infant girls. By law anyone found to have abandoned an infant may be imprisoned for seven years, while anyone guilty of secretly burying a deceased child may be imprisoned for two years. Murder is punishable by life imprisonment, but authorities rarely prosecuted the crime of infanticide.

Displaced Children: According to civil society sources, it was difficult for children formerly displaced by military operations to access education or psychological support upon their return to former conflict areas. More than 1,800 schools in the former FATA districts--to which large numbers of IDPs have returned--were reportedly closed due to damage or local communities' fear of terrorist attacks on schools. The government prioritized rehabilitating schools and enrolling children in these former conflict areas, however, and the overall number of out-of-school children decreased according to international organizations.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html> (https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html).

Anti-Semitism

There is a very small Jewish population in the country. Anti-Semitic sentiments were widespread in the vernacular press. Hate speech broadcast by traditional media and through social media derogatorily used terms such as “Jewish agent” to attack individuals and groups. During the year’s election campaign season, some religious political party leaders alleged that then candidate Imran Khan was “an agent of the Jewish lobby,” referencing Khan’s former marriage to Jemima Goldsmith. During protests in August and September against a planned Dutch cartoon contest focused on the Prophet Mohammed, some religious groups justified the country’s blasphemy laws by comparing them to Holocaust denial laws in Europe. During the protests, Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba, the student wing of the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party, proposed a Holocaust cartoon contest on social media, which resulted in its social media followers sharing images of Nazis and swastikas.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides for equal rights for persons with disabilities, but authorities did not always implement its provisions. After the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education was dissolved in 2011, its affiliated departments—including the Directorate General for Special Education, the National Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, and the National Trust for the Disabled—were transferred to the Capital Administration and Development Division. The special education and social welfare offices, which devolved to the provinces, are responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Each province has a department or office legally tasked with addressing the educational needs of persons with disabilities. Despite these provisions, however, most children with disabilities did not attend school, according to civil society sources.

Employment quotas at the federal and provincial levels require public and private organizations to reserve at least 2 percent of jobs for qualified persons with disabilities. Authorities only partially implemented this requirement due to lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms. Organizations that did not wish to hire persons with disabilities could instead pay a fine to a disability assistance fund. Authorities rarely enforced this obligation. The National Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled provided job placement and loan facilities as well as subsistence funding. Voting was challenging for persons with disabilities, however, because of severe difficulties in obtaining transportation and access to polling stations. The Elections Act 2017 allows for mail-in voting for persons with disabilities. In order to register for a mail-in ballot, however, persons with disabilities were required to obtain an identification card with a special physical disability symbol. According to disability rights activists, the multistep process for obtaining the special ID symbol was cumbersome and challenging. The Election Commission of Pakistan issued a directive for 2018 general election polling stations to be installed on ground floors when possible and to be equipped with ramps in order to facilitate access for persons with disabilities, but election observers reported that 72 percent of polling stations were not accessible for persons with disabilities.

On May 25, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act. The provincial law recognizes a wider range of disabilities, and guarantees the right to inclusive education at all levels in both public and private educational institutions. It also mandates that public spaces and new buildings conform to accessibility standards.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is a criminal offense. The penalty for same-sex relations is a fine, two years' to life imprisonment, or both. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, male transgender, and intersex persons rarely revealed their sexual orientation or gender identity. There were communities of openly transgender women, but they were marginalized and were frequently the targets of violence and harassment.

Violence and discrimination continued against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. The crimes often go unreported, and the police generally take little action when they do receive reports. Outreach by NGOs in KP, however, improved interactions between police and the transgender community there.

According to a wide range of LGBT NGOs and activists, society generally shunned transgender women, eunuchs, and intersex persons, collectively referred to as “hijras”--a word some transgender individuals view as pejorative, preferring the term “khawaja sira”--who often lived together in slum communities and survived by begging and dancing at carnivals and weddings. Some also were prostitutes. Local authorities often denied transgender individuals their share of inherited property, and admission to schools and hospitals. Landlords frequently refused to rent or sell property to transgender persons. On May 9, Parliament passed the landmark Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, which addresses many of these problems. The law accords the right of transgender individuals to be recognized according to their “self-perceived gender identity,” guarantees basic rights, and prohibits harassment of transgender persons, and outlaws discrimination against them in employment, housing, education, healthcare, and other services.

A 2012 Supreme Court ruling allows transgender individuals to obtain national identification cards listing a “third gender.” Because national ID cards also serve as voter registration, the ruling enabled transgender individuals to participate in elections, both as candidates and voters. The Election Commission of Pakistan and the National Database and Registration Authority, with support from international donors, conducted an identification card and voter registration drive prior to the July general elections. Thirteen transgender candidates ran in the elections, although none were elected. Election observers and the transgender community reported incidents of harassment of transgender voters on election day, and the Sindh Home Department reportedly confiscated the Election Commission of Pakistan accreditation cards of 25 transgender observers citing security concerns. A Free and Fair Election Network report, which included observations of 125 transgender election observers, noted that in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi law enforcement officials were largely helpful and gave preferential treatment to transgender voters. In Peshawar and Quetta, by contrast, transgender voters faced harassment.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

The country continued to have a concentrated HIV epidemic with an estimated prevalence among the general population at less than 0.1 percent. The epidemic was concentrated among key populations, primarily injecting drug users. For all key populations, stigma and discrimination by the general population and by health-care providers in particular remained a significant barrier to treatment access.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Societal violence due to religious intolerance remained a serious problem. There were occasionally reports of mob violence against religious minorities, including Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Hindus, and Shia Muslims.

Members of the Hazara ethnic minority, who are Shia Muslim, continued to face discrimination and threats of violence in Quetta, Balochistan. According to press reports and other sources, Hazara were unable to move freely outside of Quetta’s two Hazara-populated enclaves. Community members complained that increased security measures had turned their neighborhoods into ghettos, resulting in economic exploitation. Consumer goods in those enclaves were available only at inflated prices, and Hazaras reported an inability to find employment or pursue higher education. They also alleged government agencies discriminated against Hazaras in issuing identification cards and passports. To avoid causing violent incidents, authorities confined Shia religious processions to the Hazara enclaves.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The vast majority of the labor force was under the jurisdiction of provincial labor laws. The 2010 18th constitutional amendment, which devolved labor legislation and policies to the four provinces, stipulated that existing national laws would remain in force “until altered, repealed, or amended” by the provincial governments. Provinces implemented their own industrial relations acts in 2011. In 2012 Parliament passed a new industrial relations act that took International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions into account but applied them only to the Islamabad Capital Territory and to trade federations that operated in more than one province.

The role of the federal government remained unclear in the wake of devolution. The only federal government body with any authority over labor issues was the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, whose role in domestic labor oversight was limited to compiling statistics to demonstrate compliance with ILO conventions. At the provincial level, laws providing for collective bargaining rights excluded banking and financial-sector workers, forestry workers, hospital workers, self-employed farmers, and persons employed in an administrative or managerial capacity.

Without any federal-level entity responsible for labor, the continued existence of the National Industrial Relations Commission remained in question. The 2012 Federal Industrial Relations Act stipulates that the commission may adjudicate and determine industrial disputes within the Islamabad Capital Territory to which a trade union or federation of trade unions is a party and any other industrial dispute determined by the government to be of national importance. This provision does not provide a forum specifically for interprovincial disputes but appears to allow for the possibility that the commission could resolve such a dispute. Worker organizations noted the limited capacity and funding for labor relations implementation at the provincial level.

The law prohibits state administrators, workers in state-owned enterprises, and export processing zones, and public-sector workers from collective bargaining and striking. Provincial industrial relations acts also address and limit strikes and lockouts. For example, the KP act specifies that when a “strike or lockout lasts for more than 30 days, the government may, by order in writing, prohibit the strike or lockout” and must then refer the dispute to a labor court.

Federal law defines illegal strikes, picketing, and other types of protests as “civil commotion,” which carries a penalty of up to life imprisonment. The law also states that gatherings of four or more persons may require police authorization, a provision authorities could use against trade union gatherings. Unions were able to organize large-scale strikes, but police often broke up the strikes, and employers used them to justify dismissals. In January, during a protest by teachers seeking back wages, the police used force and detained 60 protestors. Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah described the police action as unacceptable. Marches and protests also occurred regularly, although police sometimes arrested union leaders.

Enforcement of labor laws remained weak, in large part due to lack of resources and political will. Most unions functioned independently of government and political party influence. Labor leaders raised concerns about employers sponsoring management-friendly or only-on-paper worker unions--so-called yellow unions--to prevent effective unionization.

There were no reported cases of the government dissolving a union without due process. Unions could be administratively “deregistered,” however, without judicial review.

Labor NGOs assisted workers by providing technical training and capacity-building workshops to strengthen labor unions and trade organizations. They also worked with established labor unions to organize workers in the informal sector and advocated policies and legislation to improve the rights, working conditions, and well-being of workers, including laborers in the informal sector. NGOs also collaborated with provincial governments to provide agricultural workers, brick kiln workers, and other vulnerable workers with national identification so they could connect to the country's social safety net and access the benefits of citizenship (such as voting, health care, and education).

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, cancels all existing bonded labor debts, forbids lawsuits for the recovery of such debts, and establishes a district “vigilance committee” system to implement the law. Federal and provincial acts, however, prohibit employees from leaving their employment without the consent of the employer, since doing so would subject them to penalties of imprisonment that could involve compulsory labor.

In May Parliament passed comprehensive legislation to counter human trafficking. The law defines trafficking in persons as recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining another person (or attempting to do so) through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of compelled labor or commercial sex. The penalty for trafficking in persons is up to 10 years in prison or a fine of up to one million rupees (\$7,200). If committed against a child or woman, the penalty must be at least two years or a fine of one million rupees (\$7,200). If there are aggravating circumstances, the penalty is up to 14 years and not less than three years a fine up to two million rupees (\$14,400). Lack of political will, the reported complicity of officials in labor trafficking, federal and local government structural changes, and a lack of funds contributed to the failure of authorities to enforce federal law relating to forced labor. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate.

The use of forced and bonded labor was widespread and common in several industries across the country. NGOs estimated that nearly two million persons were in bondage, primarily in Sindh and Punjab, but also in Balochistan and KP. A large proportion of bonded laborers were low-caste Hindus as well as Christians and Muslims with lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Bonded labor was reportedly present in the agricultural sector, including the cotton, sugarcane, and wheat industries, and in the brick, coal, and carpet industries. Bonded laborers often were unable to determine when their debts were fully paid, in part because contracts were rare, and employers could take advantage of bonded laborers' illiteracy to alter debt amounts or the price laborers paid for goods they acquired from their employers. In some cases, landowners restricted laborers' movements with armed guards or sold laborers to other employers for the price of the laborers' debts.

Ties between landowners, industry owners, and influential politicians hampered effective elimination of the problem. For example, some local police did not pursue landowners or brick kiln owners effectively because they believed higher-ranking police, pressured by politicians or the owners themselves, would not support their efforts to carry out legal investigations. Some bonded laborers returned to their former status after they were freed due to a lack of alternative employment options.

Boys and girls were bought, sold, rented, or kidnapped to work in illegal begging rings, as domestic servants, or as bonded laborers in agriculture and brick-making (see section 7.c.). Illegal labor agents charged high fees to parents with false promises of decent work for their children and later exploited them by subjecting the children to forced labor in domestic servitude, unskilled labor, small shops, and other sectors.

The government of Punjab funded the Elimination of Child Labor and Bonded Labor Project, under which the Punjab Department of Labor worked to combat child and bonded labor in brick kilns by helping workers obtain national identity cards and interest-free loans and providing schools at brick kiln sites. Since its 2014 launch, the project has reportedly succeeded in removing nearly 90,000 children from work in brick kilns and enrolling them in school. The KP, Punjab, and Sindh ministries of labor reportedly worked to register brick kilns and their workers in order to regulate the industry more effectively and provide workers access to labor courts and other services.

According to ILO officials, the KP and Punjab provincial governments have registered nearly all brick kilns in their provinces and Punjab has completed digital mapping of the kilns.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>) and the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings (<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings>).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The constitution expressly prohibits the employment of children younger than age 14 in any factory, mine, or other hazardous site. The national law for the employment of children sets the minimum age for hazardous work at 15, which does not comply with international standards. Provincial laws in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh set the minimum age for hazardous work at 18 or 19, meeting international standards. Despite these restrictions, there were nationwide reports of children working in areas the law defined as hazardous, such as leather manufacturing, brick making, and deep-sea fishing.

National law establishes 15 as the minimum age for nonhazardous work, but does not extend the minimum age limit to informal employment. For legally working-age children, the law limits the workday to seven hours, including a one-hour break after three hours of labor, and sets permissible times of day for work and time off. The law does not allow children to work overtime or at night, and it specifies they should receive one day off per week. Additionally, the law requires employers to keep a register of child workers for labor inspection purposes. These national prohibitions and regulations do not apply to home-based businesses. The Sindh Assembly, however, passed the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act on May 9, which extends the right to social welfare benefits, worker protections, and the minimum wage to home-based workers; mandates the creation of an employer-financed welfare fund and a council tasked with oversight of home-based employer and worker registration; and outlines a dispute resolution framework.

Federal law prohibits the exploitation of children younger than 18 and defines exploitative entertainment as all activities related to human sports or sexual practices and other abusive practices. Parents who exploit their children are legally liable.

Child labor remained pervasive, with many children working in agriculture and domestic work. There were also reports that small workshops employed a large number of child laborers, complicating efforts to enforce child labor laws, since by law inspectors may not inspect facilities employing fewer than 10 persons. Poor rural families sometimes sold their children into domestic servitude or other types of work, or they paid agents to arrange for such work, often believing their children would work under decent conditions. Some children sent to work for relatives or acquaintances in exchange for

education or other opportunities ended in exploitative conditions or forced labor. Children also were kidnapped or sold into organized begging rings, domestic servitude, militant groups and gangs, and child sex trafficking.

Coordination of responses to child labor problems at the national level remained ineffective. Labor inspection was the purview of provincial rather than national government, which contributed to uneven application of labor law. Enforcement efforts were not adequate to meet the scale of the problem. Inspectors had little training and insufficient resources and were susceptible to corruption. Authorities registered hundreds of child labor law violations, but often did not impose penalties on violators; when they did, the penalties were not a significant deterrent. Authorities generally allowed NGOs to perform inspections without interference.

See the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/ (<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/>).

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The 2010 passage of the 18th amendment to the constitution dissolved the federal Ministry of Labor and Manpower, resulting in the devolution of labor issues to the provinces. Some labor groups, international organizations, and NGOs remained critical of the devolution, contending that certain labor issues—including minimum wages, worker rights, national labor standards, and observance of international labor conventions—should remain within the purview of the federal government. Observers also raised concerns about the provinces’ varying capacity and commitment to adopt and enforce labor laws. Some international organizations, however, observed that giving authority to provincial authorities led to improvements in labor practices, including inspections, in some provinces.

In 2017 the government raised the minimum wage for unskilled workers from 14,000 rupees (\$100) to 15,000 rupees (\$108) per month, and all provincial governments’ budgets were required to follow that directive. The minimum wage was greater than the World Bank’s estimate for poverty level income. Authorities increased the minimum wage in the annual budget, and both federal and provincial governments issued notifications for such increases to go into effect. Minimum wage laws did not cover significant sectors of the labor force, including workers in the informal sector, domestic

servants, and agricultural workers; and enforcement of minimum wage laws was uneven. The government did not address minimum wage in its budget for 2018-19, a break from its past practice of increasing the minimum wage each year.

The law provides for a maximum workweek of 48 hours (54 hours for seasonal factories) with rest periods during the workday and paid annual holidays. The labor code also requires official government holidays, overtime pay, annual and sick leave, health care, education for workers’ children, social security, old-age benefits, and a workers’ welfare fund. Many workers, however, were employed as contract laborers with no benefits beyond basic wages and no long-term job security, even if they remained with the same employer for years. Furthermore, these national regulations do not apply to agricultural workers, workers in establishments with fewer than 10 employees, or domestic workers. Workers in these types of employment also lack the right to access labor courts to seek redress of grievances and were extremely vulnerable to exploitation. The industry-specific nature of many labor laws and the lack of government enforcement gave employers in many sectors relative impunity with regard to working conditions, treatment of employees, work hours, and pay.

Provincial governments have primary responsibility for enforcing national labor regulations. Enforcement was ineffective due to limited resources, corruption, and inadequate regulatory structures. The number of labor inspectors employed by the provincial governments is insufficient for the approximately 64 million-person workforce. Many workers, especially in the informal sector, remained unaware of their rights. Due to limited resources for labor inspections and corruption, inspections and penalties were insufficient to deter violations of labor laws.

The provincial government of Sindh enacted a comprehensive occupational health and safety law in 2017, similar legislation is absent in other provinces. Nationwide, health and safety standards were poor in multiple sectors. The country’s failure to meet international health and safety standards raised doubts abroad as to its reliability as a source for imports. There was a serious lack of adherence to mine safety and health protocols. Many mines had only one opening for entry, egress, and ventilation. Workers could not remove themselves from dangerous working conditions without risking loss of employment. Informal-sector employees, such as domestic and home-based workers, were particularly vulnerable to health and safety issues. There were no official statistics on workplace fatalities and accidents during the year. Factory managers were often unable to ascertain the identity of fire or other work-related accident victims because these individuals were contract workers and generally did not appear in official records.

In September nine miners were killed and three injured following the collapse of a roof of a coalmine in KP’s Kohat district. On August 12, in Balochistan, 13 miners died in a coalmine explosion, and two rescuers died from exposure to methane gas during the rescue attempt. During a one-month period from May to June, three significant mining accidents occurred in Balochistan, resulting in the deaths of 27 miners. Labor groups estimated 80 miners die every year in Balochistan’s mines. In Sindh, 13 laborers died at a warehouse when a boiler exploded, causing the roof to collapse. Two child laborers died in the incident.

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Austrian Red CrossAustrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

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