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Introduction

This Country of Origin Information Report is a general report on the situation in Pakistan during the specified reporting period. It was drawn up based on the questions asked and points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR). The ToR were compiled by the Ministry of Justice and Security and adopted on 30 October 2023. They are available, together with the report, on the website of the Dutch Government.

This General Country of Origin Information Report describes the situation in Pakistan insofar as it is important for the assessment of asylum applications from individuals from Pakistan and for decision-making concerning the return of Pakistani asylum seekers who have been rejected.

This Country of Origin Information Report covers the period from September 2022 to May 2024. Relevant developments up to the date of publication of this Country of Origin Information Report have been included as far as possible. This report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document, does not reflect the government's vision or policy in relation to Pakistan and does not offer any policy recommendations. It does not contain any conclusions concerning immigration policy.

The Country of Origin Information Report does not claim to be exhaustive with regard to individual security incidents and human rights violations; the incidents specifically mentioned are cited for the purpose of substantiating a more general overview. The situations in Pakistan concerning the topics addressed in the Country of Origin Information Report can nevertheless differ from place to place and/or change very rapidly.

The Country of Origin Information Report has been compiled based on public and confidential sources, using information that has been carefully selected and analysed. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various agencies of the United Nations, international non-governmental organisations (I/NGOs), specialist literature and national and international media reporting.

The content in this Country of Origin Information Report is based on multiple sources, except where the facts are generally undisputed or when stated otherwise. The text represents a compilation of information from the sources. Where qualifications are used, these can be traced back to the sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in 6.3 of this Country of Origin Information Report.

This Country of Origin Information Report also draws on interviews with relevant and expert sources. Most of these interviews were conducted during a fact-finding mission to Pakistan in February 2024. Some interviews were held online. In addition, some of the information used was sourced from the foreign diplomatic representations of the Netherlands in Pakistan and elsewhere, as well as from conversations and correspondence. Information obtained on a confidential basis is used predominantly to support and augment passages founded on public information. Each of these sources is marked as a 'confidential source' in the footnotes and accompanied by a date.

Where information from a single confidential source is included, this is explicitly stated. This concerns information that is worth reporting, but could not be corroborated by other sources.

In this Country of Origin Information Report, references to 'Muslims' concern the group of those whom the Pakistani government regards as Muslims. Because Ahmadis are not recognised as such by the Pakistani government and are covered by other legislation, they are addressed separately throughout this document. Any discussions of the 'Afghan Taliban' refer to the *de facto* Afghan authorities. The *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) — also known as the 'Pakistani Taliban' — is referred to only as TTP in this Country of Origin Information Report. Any mention of only 'Taliban' refers to the Afghan Taliban.

The first chapter describes political and administrative developments and the security situation during this reporting period. The second chapter concerns Pakistani identity and nationality. The third chapter describes human rights situations in Pakistan and discusses the position of specific groups. The fourth chapter addresses the situations of internally displaced persons and refugees in Pakistan. The fifth chapter concerns the return of Pakistanis to Pakistan.

1 Political and security situation

This chapter describes the political and security situations in Pakistan during the reporting period. Several influential sectarian parties and groups are further highlighted, and an overview of targeted violent incidents is provided.

1.1 Political and/or administrative developments

1.1.1 Key political developments

The following is a chronological overview of key political developments in Pakistan occurring from September 2022 to May 2024.

Imran Khan and the PTI: Mass rallies and shooting

In April 2022, Prime Minister Imran Khan of the Pakistan *Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI) party was ousted following a vote of no confidence. He was succeeded by Shehbaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party. Imran Khan remained popular and retained a large, devoted core of followers. He held mass rallies in the months following his impeachment and campaigned for early elections. In October 2022, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) decided that Imran Khan should not be allowed to contest elections for five years because, according to them, he had broken the law by selling gifts received during his time as prime minister. On 3 November 2022, Imran Khan was injured when a gunman opened fire on a convoy of which he was part. He accused Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and senior military officials of involvement, which they denied.¹

Events of 9 May 2023

More and more legal charges were filed against Imran Khan. When he was in court in Islamabad on 9 May 2023 for a corruption case, he was arrested on another charge. This led to large-scale protests throughout the country. In some places, violence erupted between protesters and security forces. The army was deployed in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Some of Khan's supporters attacked military buildings, and the home of the top military commander in Lahore was looted.² The BBC learnt that, after the protests, the media were instructed not to report on activities of the PTI and not to mention Imran Khan's name. The army stated its desire to have the demonstrators who were arrested tried in court.³ See also 3.2.1.3 on the right to demonstrate and 3.2.1 on freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Convictions of Imran Khan

In the last two days of January 2024, Imran Khan was convicted in two court cases. He was sentenced to ten years in prison for leaking state secrets, and then, like his wife Bushra Bibi, to fourteen years for illegally selling state gifts. He and his wife were also sentenced to seven years each failing to observe the Islamic mandatory three-month period between Bushra Bibi's divorce from her ex-husband and her

¹ UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, pp. 4-5, 13 February 2024.

² BBC, *Pakistan: Imran Khan's supporters are silenced but determined*, 8 August 2023.

³ UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, pp. 5-6, 13 February 2024; BBC, *Pakistan: Imran Khan's supporters are silenced but determined*, 8 August 2023.

marriage to Imran Khan. Khan thus received three prison sentences within one week. He is said to have a total of more than a hundred charges against him.⁴

PTI supporters

Hundreds of PTI supporters were arrested following the violent protests around 9 May 2023. Some were actually tried in military courts.⁵ Additional information is presented in 3.1.18 on the treatment of PTI supporters.

Ban on the use of the cricket symbol and independent PTI candidates

In January 2024, the PTI lost an appeal in the Supreme Court against an ECP decision of December 2023. According to that decision, PTI candidates were not allowed to use the party's traditional cricket-bat symbol on ballot papers, as the PTI had allegedly failed to hold free and fair internal elections. The decision could have important implications in areas where people cannot read and therefore vote according to symbols. This forced PTI candidates to compete as independents, each with an individual symbol. This condition also prevented the PTI from winning any reserved seats in the parliament.^{6 7}

Election results

The PTI candidates, who had to run as independents, ultimately won 97 of the 265 seats. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by Khan's rival Nawaz Sharif, won 76 seats. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won 54 seats. According to the PTI and other observers, the elections on 8 February 2024 were not fair and electoral fraud had occurred. The mobile internet was switched off, thereby preventing people from finding their polling stations. X (formerly known as Twitter) was blocked for several days. As the votes were being counted, people took to the streets, leading to violence in some places.⁸

New coalition government

Because none of the parties had won a majority, a coalition government was formed between the PML-N and the PPP. On 11 March, Shehbaz Sharif of the PML-N was installed as prime minister. Asif Ali Zardari of the PPP was elected president.⁹ On X, the PTI called the coalition 'mandate thieves'.¹⁰

⁴ UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, p. 7, 13 February 2024; Guardian, *Imran Khan and his wife sentenced in 'un-Islamic' marriage case*, 3 February 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's Imran Khan, wife now get 7 years jail for marriage law violation*, 3 February 2024.

⁵ UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, p. 6, 13 February 2024; Guardian, *Imran Khan's political games leave him isolated as Pakistan army destroys party*, 3 June 2023.

⁶ Of the 336 total seats in the parliament, 266 were elected directly, but 60 are reserved for women, and 10 are reserved for non-Muslims. These seats are allocated according to the number of votes won by each party in the various provinces.

⁷ UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, p. 6, 13 February 2024; VOA, *Pakistan's PTI Barred From Using Cricket Bat Electoral Symbol*, 14 January 2024; NOS, *Gespannen aanloop verkiezingen Pakistan, leger lijkt keuze te hebben gemaakt*, 7 February 2024.

⁸ Al Jazeera, *Khan's PTI leads as final results in Pakistan election called*, 11 February 2024.; BBC, *Pakistan election: PMLN and PPP reach agreement on coalition government*, 20 February 2024.

⁹ AP, *Pakistan swears in newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's 19-member Cabinet*, 11 March 2024.

¹⁰ BBC, *Pakistan election: PMLN and PPP reach agreement on coalition government*, 20 February 2024.

Deteriorating relations with *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan and the announcement of the IFRP

Since the Afghan Taliban seized power on 15 August 2021, the relationship between Pakistan and the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan has deteriorated. There was a sharp increase in the number of attacks by the *Tehreek-e-Taliban* (TTP) and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and other groups in Pakistan. Islamabad accused the Taliban of giving safe haven to the TTP within its own territory.¹¹

PLEASE NOTE: Any discussions of the 'Afghan Taliban' refer to the *de facto* Afghan authorities. The *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) — also known as the 'Pakistani Taliban' — is referred to only as TTP in this Country of Origin Information Report. Any mention of only 'Taliban' refers to the Afghan Taliban.

Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)

Relations deteriorated even further when the Pakistani Ministry of Interior announced on 26 September 2023 a repatriation plan for illegal foreigners, known as the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP). The name gave the impression that it applied to all foreigners. In practice, however, only Afghans were deported. The plan described the 'repatriation' of Afghan nationals in three phases: first, undocumented Afghan nationals, followed by those holding an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) and then those holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) Card. On 3 October 2023, the government announced the official deadline of 1 November by which all 'illegal' foreigners had to have left Pakistan. According to figures from the IOM and the UNHCR, a total of 511,997 Afghans had returned by 3 February 2024. In March 2024, Pakistani media reported on preparations for the implementation of the second phase of the IFRP. These preparations included the forced deportation of ACC holders. Between 840,000 and 880,000 ACC card holders were reported to be in Pakistan.¹²

Tightening of legislation on blasphemy

The Pakistani parliament passed the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2023 on 17 January 2023. This bill constitutes an amendment to Section 298A of the Blasphemy Act. This article makes it a crime to insult or disrespect high-ranking religious personalities. Amongst other things, the proposed amendment increases the penalty in Section 298A to 'life imprisonment, which shall not be less than ten years'.¹³ The amendment has purportedly not yet entered into effect.

A detailed description of blasphemy laws, the amendment and number of convictions is presented in 3.2.3.

1.1.2 *Incidents of government crackdowns*

To the best of our knowledge, the following incidents have taken place since the general Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan of September 2022 with

¹¹ Al Jazeera, *Taliban's ties with Pakistan fraying amid mounting security concerns*, 17 August 2023.

¹² EUAA, COI QUERY RESPONSE – *Pakistan, 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' (IFRP)*, pp. 1-2, 14 December 2023; IOM-UNHCR, Flash update #15, 7 February 2024; Economic Times, *Pakistan to soon launch second phase of repatriation of documented Afghans*, 25 March 2024; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Pakistan's Campaign To Expel Millions Of Afghan Refugees Enters Second Phase*, 20 March 2024; Confidential source: 22 March 2024; Confidential source: 29 March 2024; Confidential source: 13 March 2024.

¹³ Library of Congress, *Pakistan: Amendment to Blasphemy Law Passes in Lower House of Parliament*, 14 February 2024; Dawn, *Senate passes bill to ramp up punishment for blasphemy to at least 10 years*, 8 August 2023.

regard to incidents carried out by the army, security and intelligence agencies, and the police.

Government crackdown against the PTI

According to one source, since the impeachment of the Imran Khan government in April 2022 and the violence that ensued, the army, security forces, intelligence agencies and police have focused on targeting the PTI and its followers.¹⁴ Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.18.

Government crackdown against the TTP

According to one source, the number of attacks by the TTP and other militant or terrorist groups — including the ISKP and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) — increased during the reporting period.¹⁵ According to the PICSS research institute, the number of militant attacks increased by 70 percent in 2023.¹⁶

In April 2023, authorities announced a tougher stance against militant groups. This marked a break with the previous government's policy of engaging in dialogue with the TTP. The government issued an ultimatum to the TTP and other militant groups, calling for unconditional surrender. Otherwise, they would risk a confrontation. This was followed by unconfirmed rumours about secret negotiations (see 1.2.2.1) This change of strategy strained relations with the *de facto* authorities of the Afghan Taliban (see also 1.1.3). Pakistan wanted the Taliban to take action against militant groups operating from Afghanistan against the Pakistani state.¹⁷

Government crackdown against separatist groups

During the reporting period, security forces carried out operations in places where separatist militants were believed to be hiding. This also resulted in civilian casualties. The government and the militants mutually accused each other of having caused this.¹⁸ The exact places where this occurred are not clear.

Increase in attacks from both sides

The rise in the number of attacks by militant organisations led to a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of the actions of the security forces. In 2023, security forces conducted 371 operations, which resulted in the death of 479 militants, injuries to 71 others and the arrest of 640 suspected militants. By way of comparison, 209 actions by security forces were recorded in 2022, resulting in the death of 323 suspected militants and the arrest of 280 people. In 2021, 207 actions by security forces were reported, resulting in the death of 188 suspected militants and the arrest of 222 others.¹⁹

Enforced disappearances

Abductions and enforced disappearances of individuals occurred in several places in the country (for further details, see 3.3.11).

¹⁴ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

¹⁵ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

¹⁶ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 1, 5 January 2024.

¹⁷ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 23, 5 January 2024; Al Jazeera, *Amid turmoil, Pakistan to launch operation against armed groups*, 7 April 2023.

¹⁸ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

¹⁹ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 22, 5 January 2024.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the state uses enforced disappearances as a means of suppressing dissent.²⁰

Some intelligence, police and security force officials held prisoners incommunicado and refused to disclose their location. On 29 May 2022, the Islamabad High Court ordered the federal government to declare former army chief and president General Pervez Musharraf and all successive 'senior executives' in default for giving 'tacit approval of enforced disappearances'. Following this, the federal government set up a committee (headed by the Minister of Justice) to 'draft policy' on enforced disappearances. A similar committee had been formed by the provincial government of Balochistan in August 2022 to investigate cases of missing persons.²¹

Impunity

According to various sources, state organisations can operate within a climate of impunity. Examples include torture and enforced disappearances, especially of political activists. Death squads purportedly exist in Balochistan, targeting opponents of the government and funded by the state. They are said to be responsible for many human rights violations and can apparently operate in impunity²² (see also 3.1.6.3 on Balochistan and 1.2.2 on military actions against armed groups).

According to one source, the Pakistani government has entrusted all matters concerning state security or counterterrorism to the army. For this reason, the army, security forces and law enforcers are not held accountable by the government. This also applies to obligations arising from international agreements (e.g. the UN Convention Against Torture²³). Although the Supreme Court has noted a lack of accountability in some cases, no action has followed.²⁴ One example involves the allegations brought by six Pakistani judges in March 2024. These judges accused the intelligence and security agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of interfering in judicial affairs and using 'intimidating' tactics, including covert surveillance and the abduction and torture of relatives. In a letter dated 25 March, judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) urged the Supreme Judicial Council to investigate the allegations against officials of the ISI, which is the primary intelligence agency of the Pakistani army. A committee of enquiry will be established.²⁵

Further details are presented in the following sections:

²⁰ HRCP, *HRCP launches fact-finding report on rights violations in Balochistan*, 19 April 2023, [HRCP launches fact-finding report on rights violations in Balochistan - HRCP \(hrnp.org\)](https://hrnp.org/2023/04/19/hrcp-launches-fact-finding-report-on-rights-violations-in-balochistan/); accessed 22 May 2024.

²¹ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Diplomat, *The Long History of Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan*, 4 January 2024; USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1b, pp. 3-4, 20 March 2023; HRCP, *HRCP launches fact-finding report on rights violations in Balochistan*, 19 April 2023, [HRCP launches fact-finding report on rights violations in Balochistan - HRCP \(hrnp.org\)](https://hrnp.org/2023/04/19/hrcp-launches-fact-finding-report-on-rights-violations-in-balochistan/); accessed 17 April 2024.

²² Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, pp. 135 and 260, 2023; VoicePK, *Operating With Impunity: Death Squads In Balochistan*, 16 July 2023; Asia Times, *Private militias behind violence in Balochistan*, 3 August 2023.

²³ HRW, *Pakistan: Make Torture a Crime*, 23 August 2022.

²⁴ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

²⁵ Al Jazeera, *Judges vs spies: Pakistan's jurists accuse intel agency ISI of intimidation*, 27 March 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan to investigate army's meddling in judiciary, law minister says*, 28 March.

3.3.9 on ill-treatment and torture, and 3.3.11 on enforced disappearances and abductions.

1.2.2 on military action against the TTP, and the map of military operations in Pakistan in 2023.

1.1.3

Relationship between Pakistan and the de facto authorities in Afghanistan

The relationship between Pakistan and the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan deteriorated during the reporting period. Islamabad blamed Kabul for the increase in the number of deadly attacks by the TTP, the ISKP and other groups in Pakistan. These attacks affected security forces and law enforcement officials, as well as civilians. Pakistan accused the *de facto* Afghan authorities of not doing enough to prevent armed groups from crossing the porous border. Pakistan condemned the 'involvement of Afghan nationals' in carrying out attacks on Pakistani territory. The Afghan Taliban denied these allegations, and dismissed any responsibility for security in Pakistan.²⁶

Relations have deteriorated further since the implementation of the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP) (see 4.1). The Pakistani government initially claimed that the plan covered all undocumented foreigners, but the plan covers only Afghans in Pakistan. Later, a reference was also made to the involvement of Afghan nationals in the increased number of attacks in Pakistan.²⁷

In January 2024, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the leader of the Deobandi²⁸ political party *Jamaat Ulema-e-Islami* (JUI-F), visited Kabul at the invitation of the Afghan Taliban. Rehman maintains good contacts with the Taliban. The aim was to ease tensions between the two countries.²⁹ The number of attacks in the border region between the two countries nevertheless increased.³⁰ For example, Pakistan carried out airstrikes on Afghan territory on 18 March 2024, killing eight women and children. According to Pakistani authorities, the attacks targeted the TTP and followed an attack in North Waziristan in which seven Pakistani soldiers were killed.³¹

²⁶ Al Jazeera, *Taliban's ties with Pakistan fraying amid mounting security concerns*, 17 August 2023; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

²⁷ 9dashline, *Pakistan-Afghanistan relations: going from bad to much worse*, 21 November 2023; EUAA, COI QUERY RESPONSE – Pakistan, 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' (IFRP), pp. 1-2, 14 December 2023

²⁸ Barelvi and Deobandi are two different Sunni movements. Roughly speaking, Deobandi is more conservative and demands stricter adherence to rules. Both Deobandi and Barelvi follow the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, but differ on expressions of faith and Sufism. In the past, Barelvis categorically rejected the reformer Shah Ismail and his followers, in addition to defending Sufi practices. The Deobandis rejected neither Shah Ismail nor Sufism as a whole, and they tried to maintain a balance. Source: New Age Islam, *Deobandis and Barelvis: Some Clarifications*, 2 April 2023.

²⁹ The Diplomat, *Pakistan's TTP Challenge and Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations*, 8 February 2024; The Diplomat, *Can Pakistan's Maulana Fazlur Rehman Mend Ties With the Taliban?*, 10 January 2024.

³⁰ BBC, *Pakistan accused of killing eight women and children in Afghanistan air strikes*, 18 March 2024.

³¹ Al Jazeera, *Cousins at war': Pakistan-Afghan ties strained after cross-border attacks*, 19 April 2024.

1.1.4 *The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, the Awami National League and other separatist groups*

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)

The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (Movement for the Protection of Pashtuns) fights for the rights of Pashtuns through peaceful means. The PTM is not 'anti-state' and believes in the constitution and the law. In 2013, under the leadership of Manzoor Pashteen, the Mehsud Tahafuz Movement (MTM) was formed. It was renamed PTM in 2018. In May 2019, in Kharqamar in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 13 or 14 PTM members were shot to death by the Pakistan army, and between 25 and 40 were injured. The PTM believes that no member of the Afghan Taliban should be allowed to settle in KP, in order to prevent 'Talibanisation'. It also demands that Pashtuns be given the same basic rights as all citizens of Pakistan. According to sources in the report from the German *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (BAMF), the PTM is a thorn in the side of the military, as they can no longer operate undisturbed in KP, as had previously been the case. Many young people across Pakistan — not just Pashtuns — support the PTM.³² This draws more attention to the actions of the army.

According to some sources, the state does not know how to deal with the fact that the PTM is not violent. The state's response to opposition is usually in the form of violence, but this is difficult in the case of a non-violent group. The state was said to intimidate leaders and supporters. The scale at which this occurs is not known. In August 2023, security forces arrested the PTM leader Ali Wazar and the human rights lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari for participating in a PTM meeting during which immediate action was demanded against extrajudicial killings and the enforced disappearance of thousands of people from KP. Mazari was purportedly arrested without a warrant.

Enforced disappearances were reported to be an easier way to deal with opponents than legal procedures, as disappearances leave no evidence of wrongdoing by the state. The PTM was said to have attempted to negotiate with the army. The leader Ali Wazar was arrested several more times. The PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen was also arrested several times and was held incommunicado. A trial against him started in March 2024, but he was not personally present.³³

According to one source, reporting on the PTM is prohibited in the media.³⁴ As noted by another source, however, English-language media (e.g. Dawn) apparently had somewhat more freedom than those in Pashto or Urdu.³⁵

The Awami National Party (ANP)

Officially founded in 1986, the ANP is a leftist, secular, Pashtun nationalist party that has traditionally had a base of support in Pashtun-majority areas in KP. The party is

³² Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderreport 64, Pakistan: Fact Finding Mission, Islamabad Mai/Juni 2023*, 5.5, December 2023; International Center on Non-violent Conflict (ICNC), *The Pashtun Protection Movement (PTM) in Pakistan*, 8 September 2021.

³³ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024; Dawn, *Manzoor Pashteen arrested again*, 6 January 2024; Business Recorder, *Hearing of case against Manzoor Pashteen adjourned until 19th*, 6 March 2024; People's Dispatch, *Pakistani rights activist Ali Wazir and lawyer Imaan Mazari jailed on terror charges*, 21 August 2023.

³⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁵ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

also politically active in the urban areas of Sindh. The ANP opts for the use of peaceful means.³⁶

The ANP has become increasingly weak politically over the past decade. The leadership is in the hands of one family, and some ANP supporters are said to be dissatisfied with the leadership of the current leader, Aimal Wali Khan. According to one source, the party was weakened, as splits have emerged. Parts of the party defected to the PTM. According to this source, the authorities no longer saw the party as a threat and therefore allegedly took no more action against it. In the February 2024 elections, the ANP won only a few seats. Leaders of the ANP accused the military of tampering with results. According to Aimal Wali Khan, in the time leading up to the 2024 elections, police and security forces had warned him that his life was in danger.³⁷

Other political parties and/or separatist groups facing problems with Pakistani authorities

Supporters of other groups facing problems with the Pakistani authorities include various Baloch parties, including the Baloch National Movement (BNM) and the Baloch Student Organization Azad (BSO-Azad). Further details on this are presented in 3.1.6.1. and 3.1.6.2.

1.1.5 *The Anjuman-e-Hussainia and the Allahmar Students Foundation*

No information was found on either the Anjuman-e-Hussainia or the Allahmar Students Foundation.³⁸

1.2 Security situation

As described above, violence by militant groups in Pakistan increased, and relations between Pakistan and the *de facto* Afghan authorities deteriorated. There were attacks on military targets in Pakistan.

According to the research institute PICSS, by 2023, the number of militant attacks increased by 70 percent, fatalities rose by 81 percent and injuries increased by 62 percent. Pakistani security forces foiled hundreds of potential attacks. At least 612 militants were killed, and 645 were arrested.³⁹

1.2.1 *Types of violence and actors/armed groups*

Increase in terrorist violence

The number of terrorism-related fatalities increased by 65 percent in 2023, relative to the previous year. Although more than 20 militant groups remained active in Pakistan in 2023, the main actors of terrorist violence were the TTP, the ISKP and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). These three groups carried out more than 78 percent of all terrorist attacks occurring in the country in 2023. With their attacks,

³⁶ Arab News, *Prominent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa party says province will not 'slip out' of its hands in national polls*, 4 January 2024; Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderreport 64, Pakistan: Fact Finding Mission, Islamabad Mai/Juni 2023*, December 2023.

³⁷ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Arab News, *Prominent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa party says province will not 'slip out' of its hands in national polls*, 4 January 2024.

³⁸ Confidential source: 29 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁹ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 1, 5 January 2024.

they caused more than 82 percent of all terrorism-related fatalities. The attacks by the BLA were concentrated in Balochistan. Attacks by the TTP and related organisations — including *Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan* (TJP) — occurred in four provinces of Pakistan, but most were concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The ISKP was almost as active as TTP was in parts of KP and Balochistan. According to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), a total of 306 terrorist attacks occurred, including 23 suicide bombings, killing 693 people and injuring 1124. As in previous years, security forces were the main target. In 2023, 330 people were killed and 518 were injured in attacks.^{40 41}

Increase in suicide attacks

One reason for the increased number of casualties was that there were more suicide bombings. In 2023, there were 853 victims of 31 suicide bombings. Of these victims, 287 were killed and 566 were injured.⁴²

Increase in sectarian violence

Sectarian violence — including lynchings, vandalism and mob violence — also increased in Pakistan. In 2023, a total of 43 people were killed and 61 injured in 16 incidents of such violence.⁴³ Numbers of victims of mob attacks are presented in 3.2.3.3.

1.2.1.1 *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP)

The TTP has increased the number of attacks since the previous reporting period. The TTP (along with related groups) also extended its reach to the provinces of Sindh and Punjab. The group was operationally stronger — purportedly because it had training and hideouts available in Afghanistan. It was also said to use modern equipment (e.g. night vision devices). This equipment might have been captured by the Afghan Taliban when the Americans left Afghanistan. According to one source, the TTP have all their resources (e.g. weapons) in Afghanistan. In addition to the US equipment, training camps and financing were said to be available as well.⁴⁴ These situations led to an increase in tensions between Pakistan and the *de facto* authorities of Afghanistan (see also 1.1.3).

As stated by the PIPS, the TTP adopted the operational and political tactics used by the Afghan Taliban against the US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan. With this approach, the group intensified not only terrorist attacks, but also efforts to spread its ideology and propagate a certain kind of nationalism.⁴⁵ 'Shadow governors' — analogous to the Afghan Taliban — were also appointed for various areas in Pakistan.⁴⁶

The TTP takes every opportunity to emphasise that the state oppresses certain groups (e.g. the Baloch people). In doing so, the TTP attempts to show that the

⁴⁰ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, pp. 11, 15, 16, 18, January 2024; Confidential source: 16 February 2024.

⁴¹ The figures cited by the various research institutes vary somewhat. This is because they use different research methods.

⁴² Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), *CRSS Annual Security Report 2023*, 31 December 2023.

⁴³ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 11, January 2024.

⁴⁴ Confidential source: 16 February 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁵ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 11, January 2024.

⁴⁶ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

fight against the security apparatus is justified. It would like to position itself as an armed resistance group against the establishment, and it therefore tries to distance itself from sectarian attacks. The TTP has become increasingly adept at using propaganda tools to spread messages. At the beginning of 2023, the group made significant changes to its media organisation, which is known as 'Umar Media'. With an organisational structure similar to that of the Afghan Taliban, the TTP appointed a 'Minister of Information', Mufti Ghufuran, to direct media-related activities, including those of Umar Media.⁴⁷

According to the CRSS, an Islamabad-based think tank, more than 500 soldiers and police officers were killed in 2023, mostly in attacks initiated by the TTP.⁴⁸

1.2.1.2 *Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)*

In 2023, Pakistan saw an increase in attacks carried out by the various branches of Islamic State (IS). The groups have mainly targeted public targets and religious minorities (in Pakistan and Afghanistan), as well as security forces. Two branches of IS were particularly active in the country. One was the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which was active primarily in the north-west, with a focus on Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. In addition to the targets listed above, the ISKP also carried out attacks on the religious-political JUI-F. The ISKP suspects this party of having ties to the Afghan Taliban. The other was *Islamic State Pakistan Province* (ISPP), which was active primarily in the south-west, and particularly Balochistan. During the reporting period, the ISPP became increasingly visible following a period of diminished activity. Further information on the ISPP is presented in 1.2.1.4. on new armed groups. The ISKP published significantly more propaganda material than before, reminiscent of the propaganda machine operating during the period of ISIS dominance in Syria and Iraq. The ISKP targeted audiences in their own language and based on local political dynamics. Publications were issued in a variety of languages, including Urdu, Arabic, Persian and English. One ISKP pamphlet encouraged TTP fighters to turn their backs on the Afghan Taliban and join the ISKP.⁴⁹

Attacks

In 2023, the Islamic State carried out a total of 41 attacks in Pakistan, 28 of which were attributed to the ISKP, with 13 attributed to the ISPP. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), this resulted in the death of 105 people, including 27 security officials, 78 civilians and two militants from a rival group.⁵⁰ In addition, 129 people were injured, including 20 security officers and 109 civilians. The most common tactics used in these attacks were targeted assassinations of their targets and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). This resulted in 25 killings and 11 attacks with IEDs. The most infamous incident

⁴⁷ Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 12, 5 January 2024.

⁴⁸ Confidential source: 26 March 2024; Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), *CRSS Annual Security Report 2023*, p. 13, 31 December 2023, [PAKISTAN'S VIOLENCE-RELATED FATALITIES MARK A RECORD 6-YEAR HIGH, 56% SURGE IN VIOLENCE RECORDED IN 2023: CRSS ANNUAL SECURITY REPORT | CRSS](#)

⁴⁹ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 12, January 2024; Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, pp. 16-17, 19, 5 January 2024; Dawn, *Why is the militant ISKP attacking the JUI-F in Bajaur?*, 2 August 2023.

⁵⁰ It is not known why a total of 105 is reported here, and not 107, which is the sum of the various figures.

was the suicide attack in Bajaur in July 2023, in which more than sixty civilians were killed and more than a hundred were injured.⁵¹

The total number of ISKP fighters is estimated at between 4,000 and 6,000. According to some sources, IS training camps are purportedly located in Balochistan.⁵²

Additional information is presented in 1.2.1.4, under the heading ISPP.

1.2.1.3 *Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)*

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is a banned nationalist separatist militant group fighting against Pakistani government control and the government's monopoly over land resources in Balochistan. The group wants self-determination for Balochistan and opposes Chinese investment there. According to the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), it was the militant group that carried out the greatest number of attacks in 2023: 24.^{53 54}

Since 2018, the BLA has carried out several attacks on Chinese targets, as it believes China is an accomplice in the oppression of the Baloch people by the Pakistani government. The Chinese are working on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In August 2023, the group ambushed a convoy of 23 Chinese engineers and took them under fire, with no fatalities. However, two attackers were killed. After this attack, the BLA issued an ultimatum demanding that China withdraw from Balochistan within ninety days. The ultimatum expired without a major attack on Chinese targets.⁵⁵ 'Withdrawal' should be understood in economic terms, given the Sino-Pakistani cooperation within the framework of the CPEC. In a video message in July 2023, the BLA expressed its desire to recruit more female fighters. The suicide attack by a female fighter in 2022 has attracted more women to the group.⁵⁶

1.2.1.4 New armed groups

Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP)

One relatively new group — which was not mentioned in the previous Country of Origin Information Report — is the *Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan* (TJP, Pakistani Jihad Movement). The militant Deobandi group was formed in 2023. The TJP seeks to create an Islamic state and implement Sharia law following the example of the

⁵¹ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 17, 5 January 2024.

⁵² International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), *ICCT Snapshot: Islamic State - Khorasan Province*, 12 January 2024; The BNM, *Chairman BNM Dr. Naseem Baloch Raises Concerns Over Active Daesh Camps in Balochistan at UN Side Event*, 30 March 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 51, September 2023; Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), *CRSS Annual Security Report 2023*, 31 December 2023.

⁵⁴ The figures cited by the various research institutes vary somewhat. This is because they use different research methods.

⁵⁵ Jamestown Foundation, *Rising Anti-China Sentiment in Balochistan Threatens Increased Attacks on Chinese Interests in Pakistan*, 12 January 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan security forces kill two after attack on Chinese convoy*, 13 August 2023.

⁵⁶ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 21, 5 January 2024.

Afghan Taliban. The group's leader is Maulana Abdullah Yaghistani,⁵⁷ according to the TJP spokesperson, Mullah Muhammad Qasim.⁵⁸

The group operates primarily in Balochistan and KP, and it has carried out attacks on Pakistani security forces and civilians. Several analysts believe the TJP has ties to the TTP.⁵⁹

The TJP claimed responsibility for the following attacks (amongst others):⁶⁰

- 23 February 2023 in Balochistan, in which two paramilitary personnel were killed;
- 6 March 2023 in Bolan, Balochistan, in which at least nine members of the Balochistan Constabulary⁶¹ were killed;
- 27-28 April 2023 in Lakki Marwat, in which a motorcyclist blew himself up in the vicinity of a security-troop checkpoint;
- 12 July 2023 in Balochistan, in which twelve members of the security forces were killed;
- 18 July 2023 in Hayatabad, Peshawar, a bomb attack on members of the Frontier Corps⁶² (FC);
- 4 November 2023 in Mianwali, Punjab, an attack on a training base of the Pakistani air force.

Islamic State Pakistan Province (ISPP)

The Islamic State Pakistan Province (ISPP) is an independent group that formally separated from the ISKP in 2019. The organisation was 'dormant', but it became more active during the reporting period. For example, it claimed responsibility for an attack in Balochistan that left at least 30 dead and 40 injured. Members of the ISPP include former members of *Lashkar-e-Janvi* (LeJ). In particular, they attack religious and ethnic minorities or groups — including Shiites, Hazaras (nearly all of whom are Shiite) and Barelvīs — and they also focus on the political-religious party JUI-F. They are active primarily in Balochistan.⁶³ In Pakistan, IS targets groups including non-Sunni Muslims (including Shiites and Suffi), Sikhs and Christian.⁶⁴

1.2.2 Military action against TTP and other militant groups

⁵⁷ The leader was purportedly schooled at Jamia Farooqi, a prominent Deobandi madrasa. The group's ideology is said to have been inspired by the ideas of Maulana Mahmud Hasan, a prominent Deobandi cleric and 'Indian freedom fighter'.

⁵⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP)*, 4 November 2023; The Economic Times, *Who is TJP, the group behind the Pakistan Air Force base attack, and why is it a concern for Pakistan?*, 5 November 2023.

⁵⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP)*, 4 November 2023; The Economic Times, *Who is TJP, the group behind the Pakistan Air Force base attack, and why is it a concern for Pakistan?*, 5 November 2023; Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 16, 5 January 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

⁶⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP)*, 4 November 2023; The Economic Times, *Who is TJP, the group behind the Pakistan Air Force base attack, and why is it a concern for Pakistan?*, 5 November 2023; Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 16, 5 January 2024.

⁶¹ The Frontier Constabulary is a paramilitary police force of the Pakistani federal government, which was deployed primarily in KP (and Balochistan).

⁶² The Frontier Corps is a paramilitary force in Balochistan and KP.

⁶³ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; CNN, *At least 30 dead in Balochistan explosions, day before Pakistan election*, 7 February 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

⁶⁴ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *The Islamic State Threat in Pakistan: Trends and Scenarios*, 3 August 2023.

Pakistan adopted a tougher stance in approaching militant groups during the reporting period. In April 2023, this strategic decision led to a decision to conduct operations across the country against various militant factions. This included targeting the TTP and its various affiliated groups.⁶⁵ The tougher approach was particularly prompted by a major attack on a mosque in Peshawar on 30 January 2023. More than a hundred people — mostly police officers — were killed, and at least 225 injured in the attack. Responsibility for the attack was subsequently claimed by *Jamaat-ul-Ahrar*, a splinter group of the TTP. The TTP nevertheless distanced itself, claiming that it would not attack mosques, seminaries and other religious sites.⁶⁶

Security forces and law enforcement agencies were deployed for the military operations. In 2023, they killed 410 militants in actions and confrontations with militants. They arrested 377 suspected terrorists and members of militant groups in 87 search-and-seizure operations.⁶⁷

According to some sources, the military action was not a formal operation; it was the military personnel reacting to military groups. The operations were carried out based on information from the intelligence service.⁶⁸

Homes are being searched, counter-operations are being carried out and death squads are said to be active throughout Balochistan. These are allegedly responsible for mass graves of Baloch dissidents, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other human rights violations. The death squadrons were reported to be operating outside the legal framework of the state, and they apparently have little or no accountability for their actions.⁶⁹ It is not known how many people make up these death squadrons, how many there are or how many casualties they have caused.

Military actions also result in civilian casualties. The army purportedly uses heavy-handed tactics and indiscriminate violence.⁷⁰

Military action against other militant groups

Information about action against separatist militant groups in Balochistan is presented in 3.1.6.

The map below shows the areas in which Pakistani security forces conducted operations in 2023. (PLEASE NOTE: This concerns not only operations against the TTP, but also against other militant groups.)

⁶⁵ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 23, 5 January 2024; Al Jazeera, *Amid turmoil, Pakistan to launch operation against armed groups*, 7 April 2023; Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

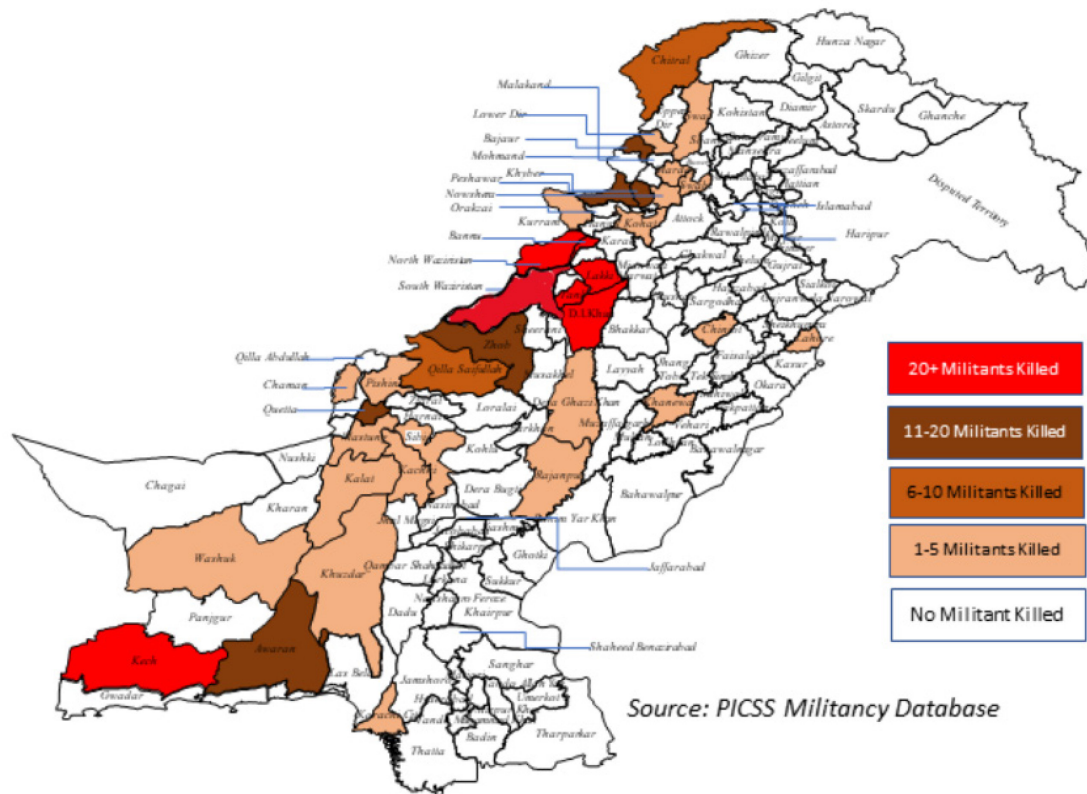
⁶⁶ NY Times, *In Pakistan, Fears That 'Terrorism Has Returned' After Bombing Kills 101*, 31 January 2023; Al Jazeera, *Death toll from Pakistan mosque bombing rises to 100*, 31 January 2023; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁷ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 12, January 2024.

⁶⁸ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 14, 5 January 2024.

⁶⁹ Confidential source: 27 February 2024; VoicePK, *Operating With Impunity: Death Squads In Balochistan*, 16 July 2023; Asia Times, *Private militias behind violence in Balochistan*, 3 August 2023.

⁷⁰ The Citizen, *A Tale of Struggle and Resilience for Pashtuns in Pakistan*, 17 February 2024.



SOURCE: Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 22, 5 January 2024.

1.2.2.1 Possible cooperation of the TTP with the army and the police?

Cooperation between TTP and the Pakistani army

It is not known whether and to what extent the Pakistani Army is cooperating with the TTP. According to one source, the ceasefire was officially broken in November 2022. It has been reported that negotiations have since been formally halted.⁷¹ According to one source, the army secretly allowed many TTP militants and their families to return to Pakistan from Afghanistan in 2021-22. The army's expectations that the TTP militants would give up fighting upon their return apparently proved wrong.⁷² According to another source, there are no working relations between the TTP and the army in Pakistan.⁷³

Towards the end of 2023, unconfirmed reports surfaced of secret negotiations between the TTP and Pakistan through a third country, even despite the clear position of the authorities not to hold direct talks with the TTP. The visit to Afghanistan of Moulana Fazlur Rehman, a prominent religious politician and head of

⁷¹ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁷² Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

⁷³ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

the *Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam* (JUI-F), was seen as part of wider efforts to solve the TTP problem through negotiations.⁷⁴

Cooperation between TTP and the Pakistani police

According to one source, there are no indications that the police and the TTP are cooperating. Police officers are the main victims of the TTP, as they are in the first line of law enforcement. Police officers are regularly killed in clashes with the TTP. On 30 January 2023, a hundred people — most of them police officers — were killed in an attack on a mosque in Peshawar (see 1.2.2). They must also make do with old-fashioned weapons (e.g. AK-47s), whereas the TTP has modern US weapons with night vision (see 1.2.1.1). The Pakistani army cannot compete with that.⁷⁵ According to another source, there are no working relations between TTP and the police in Pakistan.⁷⁶

1.2.2.2 Relations of the ISKP and the TTP in Pakistan with the ISKP and the Afghan Taliban

Relations between the ISKP and the Afghan Taliban

The ISKP and the Afghan Taliban have traditionally been enemies. This is rooted in political disagreements and the contradictions between the religious currents within the conservative Islam to which they adhere. One key disagreement concerns the existing world order: the ISKP would like to overthrow it, whereas the Afghan Taliban aspire to a role within this world order.⁷⁷

Relations between the ISKP and the TTP (Pakistan)

According to some sources, despite the animosity, there is cooperation between the ISKP and the TTP in Pakistan. Some TTP fighters have defected to ISKP. The two groups reportedly agreed on their respective 'tax rights' and recruitment areas in various parts of KP. They are also said to have logistical arrangements and carry out attacks together. This is because their common enemy is the army.⁷⁸

Relations between the TTP and the Afghan Taliban

The Afghan Taliban apparently conduct a policy that discourages the involvement of Afghans and Afghanistan in the fight with the TTP. In addition, they have never asked the TTP to abandon jihad. The TTP has an average of several thousand fighters in Afghan territory, with numbers fluctuating due to operations in Pakistan. The group is increasingly recruiting Afghans into its ranks. The Afghan Taliban attempted to improve relations with Pakistan (see 1.1.3) and issued a decree banning the participation of Afghans in the TTP's fight against Pakistan. An earlier decree banned foreign jihadists from using Afghanistan as a base for attacks on other countries. Attempts have been made to enforce these decrees. For example, on a few occasions, intelligence from the Taliban picked up TTP members returning

⁷⁴ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 23, 5 January 2024.

⁷⁵ Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

⁷⁶ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Afghanistan*, pp. 22-23, June 2023.

⁷⁸ International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), *The Islamic State in Khorasan between Taliban counter-terrorism and resurgence prospects*, 30 January 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

from raids in Pakistan. In practice, however, the *de facto* Afghan authorities are unable and unwilling to effectively rein in the TTP.⁷⁹

The Afghan Taliban have asked the TTP not to use Afghanistan as a base for incursions into Pakistan. In 2022, the *de facto* Afghan authorities attempted to mediate between the TTP and Islamabad, but these efforts were unsuccessful. In 2022 and 2023, the Afghan Taliban reportedly asked the TTP on several occasions to move its combat units to Pakistan.⁸⁰

1.2.3 *Attacks in Balochistan, Kashmir and Sindh*

Violence in Balochistan and Sindh increased during the reporting period. In contrast, there was less violence than before in Kashmir, and fewer major attacks occurred.

Attacks in Balochistan

The number of attacks in Balochistan had increased since the previous reporting period. They were carried out by various groups, including the BLA, ISKP, TJP, BLF, ISPP and Tehrik-e-Jihad.

Further information on developments in Balochistan is presented in 1.2.10.1 under the heading 'BLA', in 1.2.1.4 under the heading 'TJP' and in 3.1.6.

Attacks in Kashmir

No major attacks occurred in Kashmir during the reporting period. According to one source, there were fewer attacks because the Pakistani state has drastically reduced support to militant groups in Kashmir.⁸¹

Attacks in Sindh

Sindh experienced an increase in militant attacks in 2023. The PICSS research institute registered 35 attacks, in which 39 people were killed and 35 were wounded. Responsibility for some attacks was claimed by the TTP and the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA). The greatest number (31 of the 35) occurred in the provincial capital, Karachi.⁸²

These figures differ from those reported by the PIPS research institute, as mentioned in 1.2.4 under the heading 'Sindh'.

1.2.4 *Targeted incidents of violence*

Incidents of violence by militant groups

As in previous years, security and law enforcement personnel were the main targets of terrorist attacks in 2023. About 67 percent (205) of the total number of attacks recorded for that year targeted personnel, vehicles, convoys and posts or the services of security and law enforcement agencies. The attacks on security forces also resulted in civilian casualties. Civilians were struck in 19 attacks, while another 10 attacks targeted polio-vaccination teams and their security guards (primarily

⁷⁹ International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), *The Islamic State in Khorasan between Taliban counter-terrorism and resurgence prospects*, 30 January 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁸⁰ International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), *The Islamic State in Khorasan between Taliban counter-terrorism and resurgence prospects*, 30 January 2024.

⁸¹ Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

⁸² Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 34, 5 January 2024.

police). Meanwhile, terrorists carried out nine attacks on alleged pro-government collaborators and government institutions. Another nine attacks targeted Sunni religious leaders and communities, and five terrorist attacks targeted members of the Shiite community. Baloch insurgents carried out five attacks against non-Baloch workers and migrants in Balochistan (see the table 'Targets of terrorist attacks in 2023' in 1.2.4).

KP

About 75 percent of the total number of terrorist attacks in KP targeted security personnel and law enforcement agencies (primarily the army and police). These attacks were carried out mainly by the TTP and related organisations, as well as by the ISKP.⁸³ The attacks on security forces also resulted in civilian casualties.

Balochistan

In 2023, Baloch groups and religiously inspired militant groups carried out a total of 110 attacks in Balochistan. These attacks claimed 229 lives and injured 282 others. Several Baloch groups — mainly the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) — carried out 78 attacks in Balochistan, killing 86 people and injuring 137 others. The attacks largely targeted security forces. Religiously inspired militant groups (e.g. the TTP, Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan and ISKP) carried out 29 attacks in Balochistan. This left 139 people dead and 144 injured. The TTP and related groups carried out most attacks in northern areas, or largely Pashtun-populated districts, including on the border with Afghanistan and KP. The ISKP was more active in the centre of the province. Three attacks against members of religious minorities took place in 2023.⁸⁴

Sindh

According to the research institute Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), 15 terrorist attacks occurred in the province of Sindh in 2023, 14 of which took place in Karachi. In all, 16 people were killed and 26 others were injured in these attacks. Seven of the attacks in Sindh in 2023 were carried out by sub-nationalist insurgent groups, including four attacks by the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) in Karachi and Jamshoro, as well as three by the BLA and the BLF in Karachi. Seven sectarian-related terrorist attacks took place in Karachi, killing six and injuring two. The TTP carried out an attack on a police station in Karachi.⁸⁵ These figures differ from those reported by the PICSS research institute, as mentioned in 1.2.3 under the heading 'Attacks in Sindh'.

Punjab

Of the six terrorist attacks in Punjab in 2023, four were carried out by the TTP and *Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan*, targeting law enforcers and intelligence agents, officials and officers. The BNA claimed responsibility for one IED attack. One Sikh individual was shot to death by unknown attackers.⁸⁶

An overview of the militant groups and parties is presented below, along with their targets. This summary is not exhaustive.

⁸³ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 17, January 2024.

⁸⁴ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, pp. 17-18, January 2024.

⁸⁵ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 18, January 2024.

⁸⁶ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 18, January 2024.

Group	Targets
TTP	Security forces and law enforcers, Shiites, Ahmadis, Christians
ISKP and ISPP	Security forces and law enforcers, civilians, Chinese, non-Baloch settlers in Balochistan, village elders, Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, Shias, Hazaras, JUI-F, Barelvis, Sikhs, Sufis
BLA	Security forces and law enforcers, Chinese, non-Baloch migrants in Balochistan
BNA	Security forces and law enforcers
BLF	Security forces and law enforcers
Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ)	Shiites
Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP)	Shiites
Tehrik-e-Jihad Pakistan	Security forces and law enforcers
Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA)	Chinese, non-Sindh migrants, government forces and law enforcers
Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	Shiites (especially Hazaras), security forces and law enforcers
TJP	Civilians, security forces and law enforcement officers

1.2.4.1

Specification of incidents of violence

Below are several tables illustrating the number of targeted incidents of violence that occurred in 2023, where they took place and what the nature of the attacks was. The targets included both individuals and objects.⁸⁷

According to figures from the PIPS research institute, the following incidents of violence were carried out against the targets described in 2023:

TARGETS OF TERRORIST ATTACKS 2023

Targets	Number of attacks	Killed	Injured
Security forces and law enforcers	205	434	699
Teachers	2	0	0
Non-Baloch migrants	5	16	12
Gas pipelines	2	0	0
Government officials or institutions	9	2	11
Telephone masts	2	0	0
Village elders	4	5	2
Civilians	19	32	61
Shiites	5	18	32
Places of worship, shrines or madrassas	2	71	96

⁸⁷ Given that no comprehensive comparative data were available for the entire reporting period at the time of publication (September 2022–April 2024), the choice has been made to quote the figures for the year 2023.

Sunnis	8	9	3
Politicians	7	72	149
Christians or churches	1	1	0
Sikhs	3	3	1
Alleged spies or accomplices	9	12	1
Health services or their security	10	5	11
Chinese or CPEC workers	1	2	0
Railways	4	1	22
Companies, projects, workers	3	6	17
Non-Sindh migrants	1	1	0
Security officers	3	3	7
Total	306	693	1,124

SOURCE: Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 16, January 2024.

The geographic distribution of terrorist attacks in Pakistan in 2023 was as follows:

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN IN 2023

Region	Number of attacks	Killed	Injured
KP	174	422	782
Balochistan	110	229	282
Punjab	6	16	8
Karachi	14	16	26
Sindh (excluding Karachi)	1	0	0
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	10	26
Total	306	693	1,124

SOURCE: Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 18, January 2024.

The table below indicates the nature of incidents of violence in 2023:

NATURE OF INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Nature of the incident	Number of incidents	Killed	Injured
Terrorist attacks	306	693	1,124

Political/ethnic violence	2	0	11
Fighting between security forces and militants	24	55	3
Battles/attacks between tribes	2	8	0
Cross-border attacks	12	26	21
Operational attacks by security forces	129	425	51
Fighting between religious groups	4	19	26
Fighting between militants	1	1	0
Violence based on community or religion	10	3	16
Abduction by militants	1	0	0
Foiled attacks	7	2	2
Total	498	1,232	1,254

SOURCE: Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 19, January 2024.

1.2.5 Government protection against Islamic groups and religious parties

Protection of religious minorities

According to one source, the Pakistani government has no uniform or consistent policy to counter Islamic extremism and terrorism. With regard to protecting individuals or groups from violent groups, the government's approach varies. It often varies from group to group and from province to province. According to one source, the army does not see the protection of civilian institutions (e.g. religious institutions) as its job. Moreover, there are too many militant groups to implement an effective counter-terrorism policy.⁸⁸

According to one source, Pakistan lacks effective mechanisms to provide protection to individuals or groups targeted or threatened by Muslim extremist groups or religious parties. The Pakistani government is reluctant to take decisive action against Muslim extremist or militant groups. This is especially true for groups that

⁸⁸ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

commit violence under the guise of punishment for blasphemy, due to the sensitive nature of such acts.⁸⁹

A start was made to establish Special Protection Forces for Minorities in several areas. Additional information on this point is presented in 1.2.5.1.

Protection from attacks

At various times, the authorities have attempted to improve security at Shiite, Christian and Hindu places of worship, including around religious holidays or in response to specific threats.⁹⁰ Police are also positioned at principal churches on Sundays, and they sometimes guard places of worship.⁹¹

According to the US Department of State (USDOS) report on religious freedoms, representatives of Christian and Hindu communities in Sindh and Balochistan stated in 2022 that police generally provided adequate security for minority places of worship, especially on major holidays. For example, in April 2024, authorities deployed more than 100,000 police officers and paramilitary forces at mosques and markets across the country around the *Eid al-Fitr* holiday. In contrast, representatives of the Ahmadi community felt that their religious sites, including mosques and cemeteries, were still lacking police protection across the country. There were reports of incidents in which police supervised the destruction of tombstones on Ahmadi graves because verses from the Quran were inscribed on them.⁹²

The division of responsibilities for the protection of religious minorities between police, army and paramilitary forces is not clear. Hazaras also did not feel adequately protected. According to some sources, in Quetta, the Hazara community was ghettoised by the army, with the explanation that it was for purposes of protection. The paramilitary forces (led by the army) regularly charged high amounts to the Balochistan provincial government for providing 'security' to the Hazara. According to one source, the fact that Hazara neighbourhoods were protected by the police did not mean they were safe there. They could not protect themselves.⁹³

Protection against forced conversions

According to one source, the authorities do little to stop the forced conversions of Hindu and Christian girls (often underage) in Sindh, Punjab and elsewhere. It is not clear what the authorities are and are not doing. One influential cleric (name not known) in the conversion centres is believed to enjoy the protection of the military and intelligence services. According to one source, police often support the perpetrator rather than the victim. The 'certificate of conversion' is literally a trap, this source said, given that, in the Islamic faith, no one who has converted can convert back to Islam.⁹⁴ Such individuals are defined as apostates (see 3.1.12).

⁸⁹ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁹⁰ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023.

⁹¹ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁹² USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023; Confidential source: 28 March 2024; The Independent, *Pakistan deploys more than 100,000 police and paramilitary forces ahead of Eid al-Fitr*, 9 April 2024.

⁹³ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁹⁴ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

One example of a 'conversion centre' or conversion factory is the Dargah Bharchundi Sharif seminary⁹⁵ in Sindh, where members of religious minorities are converted to Islam.⁹⁶

Protection from mobs

The police sometimes try to intervene in incidents in which a mob attempts to lynch a person (e.g. in response to accusations of blasphemy). In various cases, however, the police are afraid of being accused of blasphemy themselves because they are protecting a suspect. In addition, they cannot always prevent violence, as happened in February 2023, when a police station in Punjab was attacked by an angry mob. The person who was suspected of blasphemy was inside the police station and was killed by the mob. One risk factor in mob attacks is unpredictability. A spark can burst into flames from one moment to the next.⁹⁷

1.2.5.1 Special Protection Force for Minorities

In February 2022, the Sindh police announced the formation of a new unit, the Special Protection Force for Minorities, with a mandate to protect churches, temples and gurdwaras throughout the province. The unit had an authorised size of 5,000 officers and started by hiring 2,800 officers from Karachi. In June of that year, 1,200 officers were said to have been recruited for the unit.⁹⁸

The unit is still in preparation. Police are also setting up similar units in other provinces, including KP, Punjab and Islamabad.⁹⁹

1.2.6 Sectarian¹⁰⁰ parties and groups

The number of attacks by militant extremist groups has increased since the previous general Country of Origin Information Report.

TLP

The main sectarian party in Pakistan is the *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP). In the elections of 8 February 2024, the TLP failed to win a single seat in the national parliament. Support for the party nevertheless grew from 2.1 million votes in 2018 to 2.8 million in 2024. The extremist Muslim party has many followers and a considerable amount of 'street power'. Closely linked to the TLP is the *Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah* (TLRY), which adheres to the same conservative Barelvi ideas. The leaders of both parties started their radical religious movement together in Karachi, but they parted ways over various disagreements. The TLP divides the world into 'us' and 'them'. Within this context, 'they' include Western powers who purportedly committed blasphemy or the elite who were said to be 'bad Muslims'. The TLP present themselves as the sole representatives of Barelvi thought. The TLP's implacable stance against blasphemy encourages citizens to carry out violent

⁹⁵ Islam also has seminaries or preparatory schools.

⁹⁶ RFE/RL, *Inside Pakistan's 'Conversion Factory' For Hindu Brides*, 20 April 2021.

⁹⁷ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Guardian, *Mob storms Pakistan police station and lynches man accused of blasphemy*, 12 February 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's blasphemy law: All you need to know*, 18 August 2023; BBC, *Pakistan woman in Arabic script dress saved from mob claiming blasphemy*, 25 February 2024.

⁹⁸ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023.

⁹⁹ Dawn, *Special police force to be established for protection of minorities, their worship places*, 25 January 2024; Times of India, *Islamabad Police forms special unit for protection of minority places of worship and communities*, 17 August 2023; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

¹⁰⁰ In Pakistan, religious movements (including the larger ones) are known as sects.

actions in a vigilante style. According to some studies, most TLP supporters are young people from poor and middle-class Barelvi families in Punjab. When asked by TLP leaders, the young supporters proceed to vandalise property, attack cars, burn car tyres and block major thoroughfares during protests. In recent years, several individuals claiming to be motivated by the speeches of the TLP leader Rizvi have committed killings of civilians. No further information is known about these individuals. Online, the party has built a strong following and regularly conducts anti-state, anti-Ahmadi and anti-Western campaigns on social media.¹⁰¹

According to one source, the inflammatory attitude of the TLP and other extremist groups has led to a hardening of the political climate and an increase in the number of lynch-mob incidents in response to accusations of blasphemy.¹⁰² Additional information on this point is presented in 3.2.3.2.

Campaigns can also be waged against Christians. The TLP has been accused of fuelling the violence in Jaranwala (see 3.1.10.1). The attackers were heard chanting slogans associated with the TLP. The TLP purportedly also forces Christians and Hindus to convert.¹⁰³ Following the death of the Christian Lazar Masih in late May due to mob violence, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) spoke of a 'wave of mob violence'. Eric Ueland, the vice-president of USCIRF, said that 'There has been an increase in blasphemy cases in Pakistan and USCIRF is deeply concerned that the pending amendment to the country's blasphemy law may exacerbate current trends'.¹⁰⁴

According to Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP), the incident pointed to a troubling pattern in Pakistan, in which blasphemy allegations lead to violence against Christians. Citing intelligence reports linking extremist groups to multiple accusations of blasphemy, HRFP has called for decisive action.¹⁰⁵

See also 3.2.3.2 on victims of lynchings and 3.1.10 on Christians.

1.2.7 *Madrassas and terrorist activities*

According to estimates, there are around 30,000 registered madrassas or Quranic schools in Pakistan, in addition to about 22,000 unregistered ones.¹⁰⁶

According to the 2022 USDOS terrorism report, some Quranic schools were continuing to teach 'extremist' doctrines. Some did not register with the government, could not document their sources of funding or did not comply with laws regulating the acceptance of foreign students. Pakistan aims to counter violent

¹⁰¹ Confidential source: 16 February 2024; The Diplomat, *Saad Hussain Rizvi's Soaring Popularity and Pakistan's Elections*, 20 October 2023; Confidential source: 12 March 2024; European Centre for Populism Studies (ECPS), *Contest between leaders of the Ummah: Comparing civilizational populisms of PTI and TLP in Pakistan*, 15 February 2023.

¹⁰² Confidential source: 1 March 2024; BBC, *Pakistan woman in Arabic script dress saved from mob claiming blasphemy*, 25 February 2024; NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024.

¹⁰³ Al Jazeera, *Pakistan Christians in fear after blasphemy allegations trigger violence*, 23 August 2023; The Diplomat, *Pakistan Condemns Mob Violence Against Christians*, 28 August 2023; The Print, *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan forces Christians to embrace Islam*, 20 September 2023.

¹⁰⁴ USCIRF, *USCIRF Troubled by Violence Against Christians in Pakistan*, 7 June 2024

¹⁰⁵ Times of India, *Pakistan: Report highlights alarming trends of religious persecution against Christians*, 18 June 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Pakistan Today, *The role of Madrassas in Pakistan: A challenge or an opportunity?*, 10 August 2023.

extremism through the *Paigham-e-Pakistan* initiative, which is coordinated by the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA). *Paigham-i-Pakistan* or *Paigham-e-Pakistan* (Message of Pakistan) is a fatwa of the Pakistani government that is intended to counter terrorism. Ulama have unanimously declared that terrorism, suicide bombing and killing a person are haram. In 2022, high-ranking religious authorities used this initiative to issue fatwas against terrorism.¹⁰⁷

The madrassa network in Pakistan is divided into several different movements:

- a) Wafaq ul-Madaaris al-Arabia (Deobandi)
- b) Tanzeem ul-Madaaris (Barelvi)
- c) Wafaq ul-Madaaris al-Salafia (Ahl-e-Hadith)
- d) Wafaq ul-Madaaris al-Shia (Shia)
- e) Rabita ul-Madaaris al-Islamia (Jama'at-e-Islami)¹⁰⁸

Some madrassas radicalise their students to such an extent that they are willing to resort to violence for their religion. Madrassa students are sometimes instructed that it is their responsibility to put an end to any 'immoral' behaviour. They must take up arms against any organisation that deviates from the right path. Young people are thus being groomed for jihad. This is purportedly being done at about a hundred madrassas across Pakistan.¹⁰⁹

According to one source, madrassa officials are usually not directly involved in recruiting young students for the TTP or other militant organisations. However, certain teachers and older students establish contacts between students and jihadist ideologies more easily, eventually leading them to join militant groups.¹¹⁰

According to another source, there are many madrassas that provide good care and education to children, but there are also militant ones that are said to be extremist. The source of their funding is unclear.¹¹¹ According to one source, Deobandi madrassas in particular are actively used to produce foot soldiers for the Afghan Taliban and anti-Shiite militant groups. The *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (F) (JUI-F) has a large network in Balochistan and KP. They also operate madrassas. Jamaat-e-Islami is also said to be involved.¹¹² The Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassa in KP has traditionally provided fighters for the Afghan Taliban and the TTP.¹¹³

The following are a few madrassas that have been reported to train jihad fighters:^{114 115}

- Jamia Darul Uloom Islamia, Quetta, Balochistan
Here, students were used as suicide bombers without their parents knowing about it.
- Jamia Matla ul-Uloom, Quetta, Balochistan
Here, fatwas were issued against Shiites.

¹⁰⁷ USDOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2022: Pakistan*.

¹⁰⁸ World Research of Political Science Journal, Natural Science Publishers, *Extremism in Pakistan's Society and the Role of Madrassas: A Critical Analysis*, 10 December 2022.

¹⁰⁹ World Research of Political Science Journal, Natural Science Publishers, *Extremism in Pakistan's Society and the Role of Madrassas: A Critical Analysis*, 10 December 2022.

¹¹⁰ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

¹¹¹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

¹¹² Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

¹¹³ World Research of Political Science Journal, Natural Science Publishers, *Extremism in Pakistan's Society and the Role of Madrassas: A Critical Analysis*, 10 December 2022.

¹¹⁴ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

¹¹⁵ Confidential source: 25 March 2024.

- Dar ul-Uloom Haqqania, Akora Khattak, KP¹¹⁶

This is known as 'Taliban University'. Two students were involved in the killing of Benazir Bhutto.

- *Madrasa Darul Uloom*, Muslim Bagh, Balochistan¹¹⁷

This school was constructed by the JUI-F leader Maulana Abdul Wasey.

1.2.8 *Forced recruitment/conscription*

It is not known whether forced recruitment or conscription took place by armed groups. According to one source, it is not very likely, and forced recruitment is not necessary, as there is a deep resentment against the state. In Balochistan, young people join armed groups of their own free will.¹¹⁸

Iran

According to some sources, Iran purportedly recruits in Pakistan and amongst Pakistani and Afghan refugees — including minors — residing in Iran. The scale at which this occurs is not known. Pakistani Shiite youth were recruited based more on religious ideology than on coercion. They were sent to Syria and Iraq, and particularly to the 'Zainabiyoun Brigade'. This recruitment is said to have diminished recently, but not stopped. Hazara refugees from Pakistan apparently did face threats of deportation if they did not join the brigade.¹¹⁹

1.2.9 *Recruitment by armed groups in Pakistan*

Armed groups use different recruitment techniques. Fighters join the respective factions for a variety of reasons.

In Balochistan, recruitment is accomplished primarily by referring to the motherland in brochures and speeches. Patriotic songs are sung as well. According to one source, BSO-Azad inspires well-educated young people to join. They are not brainwashed. In many cases, they hold grudges against the government because of enforced disappearances and electoral fraud, amongst other things.¹²⁰

According to one source, recruitment from the former Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) is often based on ideological similarities.¹²¹

1.2.9.1 *Role of madrassas in recruitment*

Some madrassas continued to teach extremist ideas. Pakistan aims to counter violent extremism through the *Paigham-e-Pakistan* (Message of Pakistan) initiative.¹²²

Information on the role of madrassas in forcible conscription for jihadist groups, along with the government's reaction is presented in 1.2.7 on madrassas.

¹¹⁶ EFE, *Pakistan's immigration control complicates enrolment at 'University of Jihad'*, 20 December 2023.

¹¹⁷ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

¹¹⁸ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

¹¹⁹ Confidential source: 27 February 2024; TRT World, *Pakistan's Shia mercenaries return from Syria, posing a security threat*, 2021; Confidential source: 26 March 2024

¹²⁰ Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

¹²¹ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

¹²² USDOS, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2022: Pakistan*.

1.2.9.2 *Recruitment for TTP*

According to one source, the TTP is not a single organisation, but an umbrella of several armed groups. In some cases, it consists of the same people who first fought for the Afghan Taliban. Some have returned with their families from Afghanistan, whilst others have been released from prison there. They are continuing to do what they did in Afghanistan: fight. Due to poverty and alienation, the TTP has no difficulty recruiting in Pakistan. This source noted that many people have lost faith in the system.¹²³ According to one source, armed groups are taking advantage of government weaknesses. Young people in that region suffer from extreme poverty and lack of educational opportunities. The IFRP (see 4.1) has also bred resentment.¹²⁴

The TTP's recruitment is conducted discreetly through various channels. Recruitment from the former FATA is often based on ideological similarities. The authorities have thus far been ineffective in countering the recruitment efforts of the TTP.¹²⁵

1.2.10 *Security situations in Balochistan*

In Balochistan, local Baloch nationalist groups — including the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) — are fighting for more autonomy. At the same time, religious-extremist groups, including the TTP, are trying to take advantage of the volatile environment. Despite ideological differences, the TTP and Baloch militant groups have found common ground in their opposition to the Pakistani state. The TTP has provided assistance to Baloch militants operating from Afghanistan. In 2022, two Baloch groups joined the TTP.¹²⁶

The Pakistani government strikes back against armed groups. Since the strategic decision to do so in April 2023, more operations have been conducted against various militant factions (see 1.2.2 and 3.1.6.4). There have been many cases of enforced disappearances. At the same time, it is attempting to develop the economy and create jobs. New investments are apparently being made in China's CPEC,¹²⁷ which is subject to broad opposition. Neighbouring countries, notably India and Iran, have been accused of supporting Baloch separatists.¹²⁸

The security situation in Balochistan deteriorated in 2023, due to a sharp increase in attacks by militants. In the province, 170 attacks took place, killing 286 people and injuring 298. Amongst those killed were 151 civilians, 114 security forces and 21 militants involved in the attacks. Of the 298 injured, 195 were civilians, 99 were security forces and four were militants. In addition, 15 people were abducted by the militants. Compared to 2022, 2023 witnessed a 65 percent increase in militant attacks, as well as a 133 percent increase in deaths. In 2022, there were 103 militant attacks in Balochistan, killing 123 and injuring 303. In 2021, there were 114 militant attacks in the province, resulting in 177 deaths and 346 injuries.¹²⁹

¹²³ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

¹²⁴ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

¹²⁵ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

¹²⁶ Friday Times, *The Security Situation In Balochistan: A Closer Look*, 11 January 2024; Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 21, 5 January 2024.

¹²⁷ The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a large-scale bilateral project to improve infrastructure in Pakistan for closer trade with China and to further connect the countries of the region.

¹²⁸ Friday Times, *The Security Situation In Balochistan: A Closer Look*, 11 January 2024.

¹²⁹ Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), *Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security Profile 2023*, p. 24, 5 January 2024.

Additional information on Balochistan and the human rights situation there is presented in 3.1.6.

1.2.10.1 *Overview of militant organisations in Balochistan*

Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is the largest banned nationalist separatist armed group fighting against Pakistani government control and the government's monopoly over land resources in Balochistan.¹³⁰ Along with the TTP and the ISKP, it carried out the most attacks in 2023.¹³¹

Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA)

The BNA was formed in January 2022 with the merger of two major armed groups: the Baloch Republican Army and the United Baloch Army. The Pakistani military claimed that the BNA was involved in dozens of 'terrorist' attacks in the country, including attacks on security forces. In April 2023, Pakistan's security forces arrested Gulzar Imam (also known as Shambay), the founder and leader of the Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA). In December 2023, another leader, Sarfraz Bangulzai, surrendered along with seventy troops. This was purportedly the first time a separatist leader had voluntarily surrendered to Pakistani authorities. The fighters were reportedly granted amnesty.¹³² According to one source, this marked the end of the BNA's existence.¹³³

The list of organisations banned by the Pakistani government was last updated on 7 November 2021.¹³⁴ The BNA was not established until after that time, and it was therefore not included in this list.

Baloch Liberation Front (BLF)

The Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) is a banned militant group led by Dr Allah Nazar Baloch, a former physician who became a guerrilla leader and gained popularity after a car bombing in 2004. The bombing killed three Chinese engineers and injured 11 others in Gwadar. The BLF has had a militant presence in the Makran Division and Awaran district in the coastal region for the past two decades.¹³⁵ The number of troops in the group is not known. According to one source, such information is not shared, and they operate in secret, away from cities.¹³⁶

Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LeB)

Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LeB) is a militant group in Balochistan that seeks national independence from Balochistan. The LeB became publicly known in 2012 after it claimed responsibility for several bombings in Lahore, Karachi and Quetta, killing or

¹³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 51, September 2023.

¹³¹ Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, p. 11, January 2024.

¹³² Al Jazeera, *Pakistan army says top Balochistan separatist leader arrested*, 7 April 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 50, September 2023; Nikkei Asia, *Anti-China Pakistan separatist group dissolves as leader surrenders*, 28 December 2023.

¹³³ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

¹³⁴ [Proscribed-OrganizationsEng-3.pdf \(nacta.gov.pk\)](#)

¹³⁵ Jamestown Foundation, *Possible Merger of Baloch Militant Groups Threatens Pakistani and Chinese Interests*, Publication: Terrorism Monitor Volume: 21 Issue: 23, 1 December 2023.

¹³⁶ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

injuring several people. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), the group is inactive.¹³⁷

Banned organisations

The following Baloch organisations are on the Pakistani authorities' list of banned organisations: the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), the Balochistan Republican Army (BRA), the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), the Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LeB), the Balochistan Liberation United Front (BLUF), the Balochistan Musalla Defah Tanzeem (BMDT), the Balochistan Bunyad Parast Army, the Balochistan Waja Liberation Army, the Baloch Republican Party Azad, the Balochistan United Army, the Balochistan National Liberation Army, the Baloch Student Organization Azad (BSO-A) and the United Baloch Army (UBA).¹³⁸ The most recent version of the list is dated 7 November 2021. Organisations established after this date are thus not included on the list.¹³⁹

Under Pakistan's 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act, any person who has (or has had) ties to a banned organisation can be subject to restrictions on travelling, speaking and doing business. These sanctions include a passport ban, the freezing of bank accounts, a ban on financial aid and credit, an embargo on arms licences and restrictions on employment.¹⁴⁰

1.2.10.2 Attitude of Pakistani authorities towards various Baloch separatist organisations

The Pakistani authorities are hostile to separatist groups in Balochistan. No information about this emerges in public, as media are unable to report freely. Additional information on this point is presented in 3.2.1 on freedom of expression. The Pakistani army, the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) and the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) claim to have killed dozens of militants in Pakistan in 2022.¹⁴¹ The army and security forces allegedly killed suspected separatists in fake encounters or subjected them to enforced disappearance.¹⁴² Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.6.4 on enforced disappearances.

Also known as 'staged encounters', fake encounters are gunfights between police and criminals. A 'real' encounter involves a confrontation between police and criminals. A staged or fake encounter involves killing a suspect who had previously been taken into custody by the police.¹⁴³

Information on the authorities' attitude towards BSO-Azad is presented in 3.1.6.2 on Baloch student organisations.

¹³⁷ [Terrorism in Pakistan | Terrorist Groups in Pakistan | SATP](#), accessed 8 April 2024.

¹³⁸ [Proscribed-OrganizationsEng-3.pdf \(nacta.gov.pk\)](#)

¹³⁹ [Proscribed-OrganizationsEng-3.pdf \(nacta.gov.pk\)](#)

¹⁴⁰ Open Sanctions, *Pakistan NACTA Proscribed Persons*, [Pakistan NACTA Proscribed Persons - OpenSanctions](#) accessed 23 May 2024.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 131, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 52, September 2023; Pioneer, *Balochistan: An undeclared war zone-I*, 4 December 2023.

¹⁴² Amnesty International, *Wordt Vervolgd, Op zoek naar mijn vader, mijn zoon, mijn vrienden. Waarom verdwijnen er duizenden mensen in het Pakistaanse Beloetsjistan?*, 3 April 2023; Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 135, 2023.

¹⁴³ The Express Tribune, *Encounters: a new way of policing?*, 10 February 2018

1.2.11 *Freedom of movement*

According to the USDOS human rights report, the government restricted access to certain — unspecified — areas of the former FATA and Balochistan, based on security situations. This hampered freedom of movement. The government required an approved No Objection Certificate (NOC) for travel to areas of the country designated as 'sensitive'.¹⁴⁴

1.2.12 *Exit visa*

Stamp from the Protectorate of Emigrants

In addition to a valid passport and a work visa, Pakistanis starting work abroad need a stamp from the Protectorate of Emigrants. According to the government, this stamp is intended to ensure that it has correct information on emigrants, as well as to cover them with life insurance and prevent illegal exit.¹⁴⁵ According to one source, it is meant to combat human trafficking.¹⁴⁶ It is not clear how long the stamp is valid.

Humanitarian Safe Passage Permit

A Humanitarian Safe Passage Permit is a type of exit visa granted to Afghans under the 'Afghan Evacuation and Relocation Programme'. This temporary exit visa is issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to Afghans who do not have a valid passport or visa for Pakistan, and it is valid for thirty days. Within this period, the person must have left the country to a third country.¹⁴⁷ Applicants must pay for the permit.¹⁴⁸ According to one source, this is a temporary new category of exit permit to facilitate resettlement in third countries.¹⁴⁹

Exit Permit

Non-Pakistanis who wish to leave the country but who do not have a valid visa can apply for an Exit Permit. This applies to people whose visas have expired or been rejected. The Exit Permit is valid for fifteen days. Within this period, the person must have left the country.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2D, 20 March 2023.

¹⁴⁵ Migrant Resource Center (MRC), *Work Abroad, Protection for labour migrants - process, costs and benefits, Protection for labour migrants - process, costs and benefits - MRC Pakistan*.

¹⁴⁶ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁴⁷ NADRA, *Humanitarian Safe Passage Permit*, [Humanitarian Safe Passage Permit - Pakistan Online Visa System \(nadra.gov.pk\)](https://nadra.gov.pk/Online_Visa_System)

¹⁴⁸ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

¹⁴⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁵⁰ Beporsed, *How to Apply and Obtain Pakistan Exit Permit?*, 31 October 2023.

2 Identity, nationality and documents

2.1 NADRA

2.1.1 *NADRA since the previous Country of Origin Information Report*

The National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) is the Pakistani authority that manages the system of the same name, in which all data on citizens are stored. It issues identity cards and other official documents.

As described in 2.1.8 of the previous Country of Origin Information Report, criticism has emerged against NADRA. For example, the system was purportedly so digitised that it would sometimes unintentionally block people. Reversing this was complicated.¹⁵¹

According to one source, NADRA is trying very hard to make the system accessible to all. In addition, everyone should be able to check their own documents using a barcode. Problems persist, however, and the system does not always work. Efforts are also being made to counter document fraud. In the past, it was purportedly possible to register false marriage certificates. It is said that this is no longer possible, as the rules are now stricter.¹⁵² It is unclear when this change took place.

2.1.2 *NADRA and Union Councils*

2.1.2.1 *Urban and rural areas*

According to one source, most local or regional Union Councils¹⁵³ have over time been linked to NADRA. Some Union Councils in rural areas nevertheless do not have a NADRA system. In these cases, Union Councils have their own registration systems in Urdu and in English. The document bears a Union Council stamp. This source noted that there is no need to have this document validated elsewhere afterwards.¹⁵⁴

In small villages in rural areas, the systems are often old. In some cases, NADRA paper might no longer be available on which to print the documents. They then print it on their own paper. According to one source, this may be problematic, as it is not known whether such documents are fraudulent or not.¹⁵⁵

2.1.2.2 *Marriage registration in NADRA*

According to one source, it is mandatory to register marriages in NADRA. All marriages registered in NADRA are valid. Ahmadi marriages are also registered in NADRA.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 35 and 40, September 2023.

¹⁵² Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁵³ The Union Council is the town hall of a town or village, (e.g. where the declaration of the birth of a child is made).

¹⁵⁴ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁵⁶ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

A NADRA marriage certificate can be obtained from NADRA, as well as from Union Councils or the Cantonment Boards^{157, 158}

2.1.3 *Ahmadi marriages*

A marriage certificate issued by the Ahmadi community can be legalised by the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁵⁹ According to one source, however, several incidents have been reported in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to certify marriage certificates. The same source said that there were also instances in which officials made the process time-consuming and complicated.¹⁶⁰

Ahmadi marriages are registered in NADRA. According to one source, it is not mandatory to register an Ahmadi marriage with NADRA, but it is necessary. When an Ahmadi marriage is registered in NADRA, it is accepted as legally valid.¹⁶¹ According to a source in the previous Country of Origin Information Report, registration is necessary, because it is required for certain administrative operations.¹⁶²

There is ambiguity concerning the impact of the non-recognition of the Ahmadi movement as Islamic on the validity of marriage certificates from the *Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya*. According to one source, the fact that Ahmadi marriages are not considered Muslim marriages does not affect their registration in NADRA.¹⁶³ According to another source, non-recognition leads to problems. Given that such marriages are not registered as Muslim marriages, a document from the *Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya* is needed to confirm the change in marital status (e.g. in case of divorce). When embassies or officials of foreign governments require NADRA marriage certificates, a legal opinion is sometimes provided explaining that Ahmadi marriages are not recognised as Muslim marriages.¹⁶⁴

2.1.3.1 *Logging on the NADRA website*

According to one source, as a rule, any Pakistani can log on to the NADRA website and view and print documents using a QR code.¹⁶⁵ According to another source, documents can also be sent by post.¹⁶⁶

2.2 **Identity documents**

2.2.1 *Pakistani passport*

¹⁵⁷ These are permanent military bases of the Pakistani army.

¹⁵⁸ NADRA Box, *How to get Marriage Certificate from NADRA in 2023*, 29 May 2023.

¹⁵⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁶⁰ Confidential source: 25 April 2024.

¹⁶¹ Confidential source: 25 April 2024.

¹⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 43, September 2023.

¹⁶³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Netherlands Worldwide, *Legalisation of documents from Pakistan for use in the Netherlands*, [Legalisation of documents from Pakistan for use in the Netherlands | NetherlandsWorldwide](#)

¹⁶⁴ Confidential source: 25 April 2024.

¹⁶⁵ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Confidential source: 14 May 2024.

A Pakistani passport always indicates the person's religion.¹⁶⁷

2.2.1.1 *Mandatory or voluntary declaration of religion on passport application*

The declaration of religion is mandatory; the space cannot be left blank. According to one source, in case of doubt, 'Muslim' is entered. The source of such doubt is unclear. There is no option to enter 'no religion'.¹⁶⁸

2.2.2 *Pakistani identity card*

A Pakistani identity card does not indicate the holder's religion. When applying for the card, however, religion must be declared. This information is kept in the system and is recorded on the chip of the digital Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC).¹⁶⁹

2.2.2.1 *Voluntary or mandatory declaration of religion upon application for the ID card*

A declaration of religion is mandatory on the identity-card application form. There is no option to enter 'other religion' or 'no religion', or to leave it blank. Applicants must select one of the following categories: Muslim, Christian, Ahmadi, Hindu, Sikh or Zoroastrian.¹⁷⁰ According to one source, no one would want to enter 'atheist' or 'no religion' (which is also not possible), as this would raise a risk of being accused of blasphemy.¹⁷¹

2.2.3 *Family Registration Certificate*

When applying for a Family Registration Certificate (FRC), all the individuals listed must be present in person.¹⁷² The FRC reflects the composition of the family, and it is a basic document that is required in order to obtain other documents. According to one source, however, only one of the parents needs to be present.¹⁷³ If a baby is to be added, the baby must be present for the photo to be taken.¹⁷⁴

2.2.4 *Document fraud*

NADRA uses biometric data in an effort to prevent document fraud. According to one source, birth certificates pose a problem in the system. In the past, many babies were born at home, and no midwife was present. In such cases, no birth certificate was issued either. Birth certificates are issued for hospital births, which are now more common. A birth certificate is necessary for the B-form (registration for children; required for various purposes, including school enrolment), as well as for

¹⁶⁷ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; See also: <https://www.edisontd.nl/> *Pakistan – Passport*, accessed 16 March 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, Section 2, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; NADRA, *Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC)*, [Computerized National Identity Card \(CNIC\) – PAK ID \(nadra.gov.pk\)](https://nadra.gov.pk/) accessed 16 March 2024.

¹⁷⁰ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023.

¹⁷¹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁷² Local Pakistan, *Family Registration Certificate (FRC)*, [Family Registration Certificate \(FRC\) – Local Pakistan](https://nadra.gov.pk/) accessed 16 March 2024; [Family Registration Certificate \(FRC\) – PAK ID \(nadra.gov.pk\)](https://nadra.gov.pk/); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 38, September 2023.

¹⁷³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁷⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 38, September 2023.

the FRC. These matters were previously arranged in a different manner. According to one source, if a person does not have a birth certificate, the only solution is to purchase a forgery.¹⁷⁵ This does not apply only to birth certificates. The number of 'genuine documents with false content' is very high in Pakistan. This is possible because the quality and prevention of corruption in notary bodies do not meet international standards. According to a report by the BAMF, false information is often used to obtain a visa.¹⁷⁶

2.2.4.1 *Most common forms of fraud for the purpose of asylum (or other) applications abroad*

According to one source, document fraud for the purpose of asylum (or other) applications abroad is said to be common, given the ease of forging documents in Pakistan. It is also possible to pay journalists to publish articles in the media or on social media. It is said that people stage riots or incidents to obtain false police reports.¹⁷⁷ This could serve to support an asylum claim.

2.3 Nationality

2.3.1 *Differences between men and women in acquiring citizenship*

The rules for obtaining Pakistani citizenship are different for men than they are for women. When a Pakistani man marries a foreign woman, this allows the wife to apply for and obtain Pakistani citizenship. When a Pakistani woman marries a non-Pakistani, he remains a foreigner. She remains a Pakistani. Since 2000, however, Pakistani women have been able to pass on citizenship to their children. Several court rulings have held that the inability of Pakistani women to pass on citizenship to their spouses constitutes a violation of Article 25 of the Constitution. The rule should be revised, and this was the subject of cases pending before several High Courts.¹⁷⁸

During the reporting period, provincial High Courts confirmed several times that the rule is contrary to the Constitution. Examples include rulings from June 2023 in Peshawar, March 2024 in Sindh and, somewhat earlier, in Lahore. The Federal Shariat Court had also declared that the same provision of the law violated Islamic commandments regarding gender equality and had asked the legislature to amend the law. However, the lawyer who won one of the cases opined that, in practice, spouses are still unable to obtain Pakistani passports. The reason is that the authorities are not sympathetic to granting Pakistani citizenship to the millions of Afghans who are in Pakistan.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁷⁶ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderreport 64, Pakistan: Fact Finding Mission, Islamabad, Mai/Juni 2023*, Section 6.2, December 2023.

¹⁷⁷ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁷⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 45 and 95, September 2023; Directorate General of Immigration & Passports, Ministry of Interior, Government of Pakistan, Frequently Asked Question, [Frequently Asked Questions - DGI&P \(dgip.gov.pk\)](https://dgip.gov.pk/Frequently-Asked-Questions), accessed 16 March 2024.

¹⁷⁹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *The Lucky Few: Pakistani Citizenship Still Elusive For Most Afghan Refugees*, 9 July 2023; Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan, p. 16, March 2023; Dawn, *Denying citizenship to foreign spouses of Pakistani women 'discrimination'*, 6 March 2024.

According to some sources, this indicated that the right to obtain Pakistani citizenship for a foreign spouse cannot be enforced without going to the court.¹⁸⁰ In any case, non-Muslim spouses are not allowed to marry Pakistanis who are Muslim. Under Islamic law, the non-Muslim spouse must first convert.¹⁸¹

2.3.2 *Residents without nationality*

Pakistan has residents without any nationality, including children. This concerns children of stateless parents (see 2.3.3 below).

Many stateless citizens have previously held Pakistani citizenship. The problem is usually that they can no longer prove this with documents. They are often dependent on NADRA. According to one source, however, discrimination exists within this organisation.¹⁸² The implications of this for the reliability of the NADRA system are unclear.

According to one source, stateless people mostly live under the radar and work in the informal economy.¹⁸³

2.3.3 *Registration of statelessness and numbers of other groups*

There are no official figures from the Pakistani government on the number of stateless people in Pakistan. A census was held in 2023, but no figures have been published yet.¹⁸⁴

As of March 2023, Pakistan estimates there were between 40,000 and 500,000 Rohingya, nearly a million undocumented Bengalis, about 775,000 to a million undocumented Afghans, and an unknown number of Biharis and other undocumented groups.¹⁸⁵ These figures also include stateless people.

2.3.4 *Ethnic groups and statelessness*

The various ethnic groups in Pakistan include those who are stateless or do not hold any nationality. The number of stateless people in Pakistan is not known.¹⁸⁶ There are large groups of undocumented persons in the country, many of whom are known to be stateless or at risk of becoming so. These groups consist primarily of Rohingyas, ethnic Bengalis, Afghan refugees and Urdu-speaking Biharis.¹⁸⁷ The causes vary by group and are often related to the legislation described below.

Rohingyas

¹⁸⁰ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

¹⁸¹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

¹⁸² Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

¹⁸³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

¹⁸⁴ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 4, March 2023; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 4, March 2023.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 4, March 2023.

Rohingyas often present themselves as Bengalis, due to discrimination against the former group.¹⁸⁸

Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.7 on Rohingyas.

Bengalis

Citizenship laws stipulate that any individuals who can prove that they lived in Pakistan before 1978 can obtain citizenship. The law has yet to be fully implemented, however, and it is estimated that between 70 and 80 percent of the approximately three million Bengali speakers do not have identity documents. In 1973, Bengalis received ID cards through a manual system. When the system was digitised, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and National Alien Registration Authority (NARA) were established in 2000. Bengalis then had to register as 'foreigners'. As a result, many Bengalis with valid Pakistani ID cards and passports were required to change over to NADRA cards for aliens. This forfeited their right to Pakistani nationality. Without the CNIC, they also have no access to basic services (e.g. healthcare).¹⁸⁹

Biharis

After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, refugees from India's Bihar province who went to East Pakistan were referred to as 'Biharis'. When East Pakistan gained independence in 1971, the new country was called Bangladesh. Thereafter, the term 'Bihari' was used by the Bengali to refer to all Urdu-speaking communities, including Punjabis, Sindhi and Baloch. In 1974, about 170,000 Bihari refugees were repatriated from Bangladesh to Pakistan and given land. These areas turned into slums, however, and they became targets of attacks by other ethnic groups. The data available on their citizenship status are unclear, as many have retained their pre-1974 Pakistani passports.¹⁹⁰

Afghans

By summer 2023, more than four million Afghans were estimated to be in Pakistan. In October 2023, there were about 3.7 million. Some of them were recent refugees who had come after the Afghan Taliban assumed power in August 2021. Many, however, were second, third and fourth-generation Afghan children who were born and raised in Pakistan, but had no legal status in the country.¹⁹¹ Pakistani law does recognise the right to citizenship for children born in Pakistani territory. In practice, however, this provision is not applied to Afghan families (see *ius solis* in 2.3.5).¹⁹² This issue once again became current with the International Foreigner Repatriation Plan (IFPR). Additional information on the IFPR is presented in 4.1.

2.3.5 *Acquisition (and re-acquisition) of Pakistani nationality legislation for specific groups*

¹⁸⁸ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

¹⁸⁹ Statelessness & Citizenship Review, *Invisible people, visible barriers -Healthcare Access for and among Ethnic Bengalis in Pakistan*, 15 December 2022; Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, pp. 5-6, March 2023.

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 7 March 2023

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 6 March 2023

¹⁹² VOA, *Pakistani Top Court Seeks Government Response on Afghan Expulsion Policy*, 1 December 2023.

Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951

According to the Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951, citizenship is acquired through several routes: citizenship by birth in the territory (*ius solis*), descent (*ius sanguinis*) and naturalisation. The provisions regarding *ius solis* and *ius sanguinis* are established in Sections 4 and 5 of the Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951.¹⁹³

The ***ius sanguinis*** provisions establish that a child born after 1951 to a Pakistani parent (regardless of how the parent acquired such citizenship) is a citizen by descent. If the child is born outside Pakistan to a Pakistani citizen by birth (*ius solis*), the child is automatically granted Pakistani citizenship. If the child is born outside Pakistan to a citizen by descent (*ius sanguinis*), the child is not a citizen until the birth is registered. This can be done at the nearest Pakistani consulate.¹⁹⁴ The ***ius solis*** provisions stipulate that a child born after 1951 in Pakistani territory has citizenship. Exceptions include children of diplomats and foreign occupiers of the country. In addition, the Citizenship Act also grants citizenship to people who moved to Pakistani territory immediately after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and people who were living in Pakistan on or before 16 December 1971, following the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan. The Citizenship Act grants citizenship to people whose parents and grandparents were born in Pakistani territory and who have not been residents of any country other than Pakistan since 1947.¹⁹⁵

Ius solis and children born in Pakistan to Afghan refugees

In practice, the *ius solis* rule does not apply to children born in Pakistan of Afghan parents. In 2023, Pakistani authorities stated in the IFPR that undocumented Afghan refugees would be required to leave Pakistani territory by 1 November 2023. Information on the IFPR is presented in Chapter 4.

In the past, the Islamabad and Peshawar High Courts have ruled that the *ius solis* rule was not applicable to children of Afghan refugees. There were sporadic exceptions to this.¹⁹⁶

In November 2023, human rights organisations filed a suit against the state due to the illegality of the deportations of Afghans with the IFPR. The lawyer Umar Ijaz Gilani argued that, by virtue of their birthright, children of Afghan families born in Pakistan could not be sent back. At the end of the reporting period, no verdict was known in this case.¹⁹⁷

Citizenship acquisition based on place of residence prior to 1978

In 1971, East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan and was renamed Bangladesh. A clause in the Citizenship Act of Pakistan entitles individuals who migrated to

¹⁹³ THE PAKISTAN CITIZENSHIP ACT, 1951 (II OF 1951), 13th April, 1951.

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 4, March 2023; THE PAKISTAN CITIZENSHIP ACT, 1951 (II OF 1951), 13th April, 1951.

¹⁹⁵ Statelessness & Citizenship Review, *Invisible people, visible barriers - Healthcare Access for and among Ethnic Bengalis in Pakistan*, p. 288, 15 December 2022; THE PAKISTAN CITIZENSHIP ACT, 1951 (II OF 1951), 13th April, 1951.

¹⁹⁶ Arab News, *Pakistan is my country': Court citizenship ruling gives hopes to millions of Afghan refugees*, 12 November 2022; VOA, *Pakistani Top Court Seeks Government Response on Afghan Expulsion Policy*, 1 December 2023.

¹⁹⁷ WIO News, *Pakistan Supreme Court begins hearing petition challenging deportation of Afghan refugees*, 2 December 2023; Tolo News, *Pakistan's Top Court Begins Hearing Challenge to Expulsion of Afghans*, 22 December 2024; VOA, *Pakistani Top Court Seeks Government Response on Afghan Expulsion Policy*, 1 December 2023; Dawn, *Afghan children born in Pakistan entitled to citizenship, says new plea*, 1 December 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's top court hears petition to halt deportations of Afghans*, 1 December 2023.

Pakistan prior to 1978 to citizenship.¹⁹⁸ In theory, anyone can become a Pakistani citizen if these individuals have documents proving that they lived in Pakistan before 1978. In practice, however, there are purportedly many bureaucratic and discriminatory bumps and barriers.¹⁹⁹

According to one source, stateless people in Pakistan have nowhere to go. On the one hand, they cannot acquire citizenship. On the other hand, they also have no country to which they can return.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ The year 1971 was adjusted to 1978 (see Dawn, *THE UNBEARABLE STATELESSNESS OF BEING*, 8 October 2023).

¹⁹⁹ Aaj English TV, *Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi*, 27 April 2023; Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, pp. 5 and 8, March 2023.

²⁰⁰ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

3 Human rights

3.1 Position of specific groups

3.1.1 Population of Pakistan

According to estimates of the *CIA World Factbook*, the population of Pakistan consisted of 247,653,551 people in 2023. According to the 2017 census in Pakistan, the population in that year stood at 207,684,626.²⁰¹ Of the 2023 estimate, 96.5 percent were Muslim (Sunnis: 85–90 percent; Shiites: 10–15 percent), and 3.5 percent adhered to another faith, including Christians and Hindus.²⁰²

According to figures from the human rights organisation Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), at least 96.2 percent of the population is Muslim, and 10–15 percent (of the total) is Shiite. Hindus make up 1.6 percent, Christians 1.59 percent, Ahmadis 0.22 percent and others 0.07 percent.²⁰³ Estimates of the number of population groups vary. Ahmadis do not always register. As a result, according to other sources, there are actually between at least 600,000 and five million Ahmadis in Pakistan.²⁰⁴

PLEASE NOTE: In this Country of Origin Information Report, references to 'Muslims' concern the group of those whom the Pakistani government regards as Muslims. Because Ahmadis are not recognised as such by the Pakistani government and are covered by other legislation, they are addressed separately throughout this document.

Shiites and Hazaras

Shiites live geographically scattered throughout Pakistan. The largest numbers live in Gilgit-Baltistan, where they constitute a majority. They also live in Karachi, Sanghar, Nawabshah and Hyderabad in Sindh. In Karachi, high concentrations of Shiites (predominantly Hazaras) are found in Abbas Town, Hussain Hazara Goth, Mughal Hazara Goth, Rizvia, Ancholi, Defence Housing Authority (DHA) Gizri, Pak Colony and Manghopir. Shiites live throughout Punjab, including Lahore. In southern Punjab, Sunni and Shia communities are more segregated. Most Shiites in KP live in Peshawar, Hangu, Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan.²⁰⁵

Most Hazaras are Shiite. Hazaras live primarily in the enclaves of Hazara Town and Mariabad, due to security situations (see 3.1.8.2). They also live in Sanjawi, Mach,

²⁰¹ CIA, *The World Factbook – Pakistan*, accessed 25 January 2024.

²⁰² Estimates from 2020. CIA, *The World Factbook – Pakistan*, accessed 25 January 2024.

²⁰³ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *A Breach of Faith, Freedom of religion or belief in 2021/22*, February 2023.

²⁰⁴ Bundesamtes für Migration und Flüchtlinge, *Länderreport 24 Pakistan- Lage der Ahmadis und Shiiten sowie Ehrverbrechen im Kontext der islamisch geprägten Strafgesetzgebung*, p. 4-5, Stand 05/2020.

²⁰⁵ Eurasia Review, SATP (South Asia Terrorism Portal), *Pakistan: Targeting Shias – Analysis*, 19 September 2023.

Zhob, Harnai, Loralai and Dukki in Balochistan.²⁰⁶ Smaller groups live in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad.²⁰⁷

Christians

Christians live scattered throughout the country, with a high concentration in Punjab, and especially Lahore. They also live in Karachi, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi and Peshawar, in addition to many small communities in central Punjab.²⁰⁸

Ahmadis

The main residential areas of Ahmadis are Sialkot, Quetta, Multan, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad. Khewra, Sargodha, Bhalwal, Shahpur and Gujranwala are mentioned as well. In Punjab, Chenab Nagar has always been regarded as the centre of the Ahmadi community. The city was once known as Rabwah, but the name was changed in 1999, against the wishes of the inhabitants.²⁰⁹

Hindus

The vast majority of Hindus in Pakistan live in Sindh.²¹⁰

3.1.2 *Groups actively targeting specific individuals/groups (through threats and/or violence)*

Violent actors

Several groups in Pakistan specifically target certain groups and/or individuals with threats or violence (for a description, see 1.2.1).

An overview of violence by these groups is presented in 1.2.4.

Government protection against groups

The government attempts to protect citizens in various areas and provinces from violence by militant and/or extremist groups. They also attempt to secure religious minorities and their places of worship. A Special Protection Force for Minorities was established. Additional information on protection by the government is presented in 1.2.5.

See also the sections on specific minorities (e.g. Ahmadis, Shiites, Hazaras and Christians).

3.1.3 *Moving to another part of Pakistan*

The ability to move to another area to evade threats from fanatical Islamist groups (e.g. the TLP) and armed groups (e.g. the TTP) depends on a person's individual circumstances.

²⁰⁶ Eurasia Review, SATP (South Asia Terrorism Portal), *Pakistan: Targeting Shias – Analysis*, 19 September 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 58, September 2023.

²⁰⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 59, September 2023.

²⁰⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 60, September 2022; Minority Rights Group, *Christians in Pakistan*, June 2018.

²⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on the position of Ahmadis and Christians in Pakistan 2017-2020*, p. 12, December 2020.

²¹⁰ India Today, *Over 22 lakh Hindus in Pakistan: National database report*, 10 June 2022.

For many Pakistanis, moving to another part of the country would not be a viable option, due to restrictions imposed by real estate, extended family ties, agricultural land ownership and other factors. It would be harder for them to find a job in a new place, as these jobs are usually given away to relatives (close or distant) or acquaintances. For those without a good education or sufficient financial resources, it is difficult to move. It is also easier for people to move to places where they fit within the ethnic group.²¹¹

According to one source, it further depends on the scope of influence of the group from which the threat emanates, as well as on whether it poses the same threat in a new place.²¹²

According to two confidential sources, a woman cannot move alone to a new place, as doing so would go against prevailing social norms. She needs support from family members.²¹³ Whether she will receive such support varies by region and depends on her social class. More freedom exists in the higher classes.²¹⁴ There is a distrust of single women, regardless of whether they are single, divorced, widowed or have a husband living at a distance. This makes them vulnerable to a variety of threats, including discrimination and social exclusion.²¹⁵

Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.14 on women, and particularly 3.1.14.1.

According to one source, Ahmadis are not safe anywhere, and it would make no sense to move to another part of Pakistan. This source stated that they would encounter the same hostility everywhere.²¹⁶ According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Ahmadis also remain a prime target for prosecution under blasphemy laws and specific anti-Ahmadi laws.²¹⁷ Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.11 on Ahmadis. According to another source, easily identifiable groups (e.g. Hazaras) are not safe anywhere (see 3.1.8.2)²¹⁸.

Another source argues that the likelihood of being threatened for being Shiite varies by region. For example, in KP, they are persecuted by the TTP and in Punjab, by the *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (SSP). Moving thus results in a different situation.²¹⁹

There have been cases of Christians being accused of blasphemy. They were advised not to avail themselves of bail, as it would be too dangerous to be outside the prison. They would then be attacked.²²⁰

3.1.3.1 Moving after threat due to TLP or blasphemy

²¹¹ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

²¹² Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

²¹³ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²¹⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²¹⁵ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²¹⁶ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2024 – Pakistan, Annual report on the human rights situation in 2023*, 11 January 2024.

²¹⁸ Confidential source: 1 March 2024

²¹⁹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²²⁰ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

According to one source, in some cases, moving may be helpful for those accused of blasphemy. It is not clear in which cases this applies. This could be to a place where relatives live. It could also be to a major city (e.g. Islamabad), as there is somewhat less social control there.²²¹

3.1.3.2 *Moving after threat by TTP*

According to one source, for example, a person threatened by the TTP in KP or Balochistan could move to Islamabad. In Peshawar, Quetta, KP and Balochistan, individuals wanted by the TTP would be easier targets than in, say, Lahore or Islamabad.²²²

3.1.4 *Declaration of religion upon enrolment in higher education*

According to one source, students must usually declare their religion when enrolling in university. This consists of indicating whether the person is Muslim or something else (e.g. Ahmadi or Christian). There are no separate categories for Sunni or Shiite.²²³ According to another source, religion must always be declared.²²⁴

Individuals belonging to religious minorities may encounter difficulties upon registration, due to their religion. For example, Ahmadis might encounter difficulties if they declare that they are Muslim or refuse to sign a non-Muslim declaration. This statement is mandatory for Ahmadis.²²⁵ On this point, see 3.1.11 on the position of Ahmadis, as well as information in the previous General Country of Origin Information Report.²²⁶

3.1.5 *Declaration of religion upon applying for employment*

Discrimination in job advertisements

For certain unpopular or 'dirty' jobs (e.g. street sweeper or cleaner), recruitment advertisements include a statement restricting application to non-Muslims ('Only Non-Muslims Apply'). There is also discrimination in the performance of jobs. According to one source, only Christian nurses will change diapers.²²⁷

In January 2023, the Supreme Court held that discriminatory advertisements and selection processes in which the job quota is limited only for low-level positions violate constitutional values and the fundamental rights of minorities.²²⁸ The actual changes brought about by this ruling are not known.

Quotas and discrimination in governmental and semi-governmental institutions

²²¹ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

²²² Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

²²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 50, September 2022; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²²⁴ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

²²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 50 September 2022.

²²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 66-70, September 2023.

²²⁷ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; LinkedIn: *Global Human Rights Defence, Pakistan: Discriminatory job offers in the Government of Sindh*, 23 June 2021.

²²⁸ Business Recorder, *SC directs provincial govts to maintain minorities' job quota at all levels*, 21 January 2023.

In 2009, the federal government in Pakistan passed a law requiring five percent of all jobs in federal and provincial governments, semi-autonomous institutions, public institutions and companies to be filled by members of religious minority groups (i.e. non-Muslims).²²⁹ In many cases, however, quotas reportedly remain unfilled, due to the predominantly low educational level of members of religious minority groups, as well as discrimination. According to one Christian leader, only four percent of all members of religious minorities have completed university education. This can be attributed to the low income level. Hindus and Christians become trapped in a vicious circle: because they are deemed fit only for cleaning work, they do not earn enough to send their children to a good school. In turn, this forces these children to do the same kind of work as their parents have done.²³⁰

In some cases, provincial governments make only low-skilled jobs available to religious minorities within the quota. For this reason, even people with a university education are unable to obtain employment at their level. In January 2023, the Federal High Court in Islamabad directed all provincial governments to ensure that employment quotas for minorities are maintained at all levels.²³¹ According to a confidential source, as of May 2024, this had not yet been implemented or followed up as the spirit of the scheme implies that it should have been.²³²

Ahmadis

In job applications, Ahmadis may be asked to sign a non-Muslim statement. They might encounter problems if they declare that they are Muslim or refuse to sign a non-Muslim declaration. This statement is mandatory for Ahmadis, and it must also be signed for a variety of administrative actions.²³³ Additional information on this issue is presented in 3.1.11 concerning Ahmadis.

3.1.6 *Balochistan*

The human rights situation in Balochistan is described in this section. Information on security situations in Balochistan is presented in 1.2.10.

3.1.6.1 *Baloch National Movement*

The Baloch National Movement (BNM) is an independence movement and political party that was established in 1987. The BNM seeks the independence of the province of Balochistan. Although the BNM is not a banned organisation, sources say members can face serious problems with the authorities, including torture, murder and enforced disappearances.²³⁴ According to one confidential source, sympathisers could therefore operate only covertly in Pakistan.²³⁵ According to another source, the risks faced by members or supporters depends on their level of activism. The more active individuals are, the more risk they face. The risk increases if the

²²⁹ Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA), *Pakistan's elusive govt job quotas for religious minorities*, 28 March 2023.

²³⁰ LinkedIn: *Global Human Rights Defence, Pakistan: Discriminatory job offers in the Government of Sindh*, 23 June 2021; Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA), *Pakistan's elusive govt job quotas for religious minorities*, 28 March 2023.

²³¹ Business Recorder, *SC directs provincial govts to maintain minorities' job quota at all levels*, 21 January 2023.

²³² Confidential source: 14 May 2024.

²³³ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023.

²³⁴ Confidential source: 20 October 2023; Confidential source: 19 October 2023; Confidential source: 18 June 2024

²³⁵ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

government is aware of the activism.²³⁶ The BNM has no representatives in the parliament of Balochistan province, nor in the federal parliament of Pakistan. The BNM has no significant political presence in present-day Pakistan.²³⁷

According to one source, the leaders or activists operate primarily in Europe, where they carry out small-scale awareness campaigns. They also investigate the abductions of Baloch political activists by security forces and publish their findings on their websites.²³⁸ For example, the BNM organised a number of events in Germany (in Cologne and Chemnitz) to draw attention to the enforced disappearances.²³⁹ It also held a protest demonstration in Geneva in September 2023 at the 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council concerning issues including the death of political activist Karima Baloch in Canada.²⁴⁰

As reported in the previous Country of Origin Information Report, the body of Karima Baloch, the former president of BSO-Azad and a human rights activist, was found in Toronto in December 2020. She had obtained asylum in Canada and had received death threats from unknown Pakistanis before her death.²⁴¹

3.1.6.2 *Baloch student organisations*

The best-known student organisation in Balochistan is BSO-Azad.

Baloch Student Organization Azad (BSO-Azad)

On its website, BSO-Azad writes that it is a 'political and democratic student organization'. Its main purposes consist of: 'to strive for welfare of students of Balochistan, and to struggle for the Baloch national liberation and restoration of independent and sovereign Baloch national state'. The organisation is active on social media and calls attention to matters including fighters who have disappeared or been killed. For example, it posted about #13novBalochMartyrsDay.²⁴² Each year on November 13, Baloch Martyrs' Day is observed, in commemoration of those who have fallen. It was started in memory of the Baloch warrior Nawab Mehrab Khan, who was killed on 13 November 1839.²⁴³

Enforced disappearances of students

In October 2023, dozens of Baloch and Pashtun students were detained in Punjab. The HRCP expressed deep concern over reports of Pashtun and Baloch students having been harassed and intimidated by law enforcement personnel at universities in Lahore after 28 October 2023, with at least two students having been forcibly disappeared. It was of the opinion that students from Balochistan and KP remain especially vulnerable in Punjab. According to the HRCP, 'This practice of subjecting

²³⁶ Confidential source: 18 June 2024

²³⁷ Confidential source: 20 October 2023; Confidential source: 19 October 2023; Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

²³⁸ Confidential source: 20 October 2023; Confidential source: 19 October 2023.

²³⁹ Times of India, *Baloch National Movement stages protest in Germany over human rights violations in Balochistan*, 25 October 2023.

²⁴⁰ WIO News, *Karima Baloch case: Husband claims Pak's ISI killed activist wife in Canada, slams Trudeau govt's inaction*, 30 September 2023; The BNM, *BNM Launches Three-Day Awareness Campaign in Geneva, demanding International Support for Baloch Freedom Movement*, 1 October 2023.

²⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 54, September 2023.

²⁴² <https://www.facebook.com/BalochStudentsOrganizationAzad/>; <https://bsoazad.org/>

²⁴³ Balochistan Post, 13 November – The Baloch Martyrs' Day, 14 November 2021.

students to ethnic profiling must end. All students must be equally allowed to pursue their education without the fear of harassment and enforced disappearance'.²⁴⁴ According to one source, Baloch students had also been detained in Islamabad during the reporting period.²⁴⁵

Supreme Court and Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances

In 2011, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances was set up at the direction of the Islamabad High Court to investigate the cases of missing persons and to determine the cause of their disappearance. Reports from this committee reveal that students at several universities and colleges had been detained by law enforcement agencies.²⁴⁶ The actual number of individuals involved and the period in which this occurred are not known.

On 22 November 2023, the Supreme Court ordered federal authorities to return 50 missing Baloch students within seven days — no later than 29 November. The students were said to have been picked up by law enforcers from their universities, from hostels or from their homes in previous years. This was nevertheless denied by security services. As of 29 November 2023, 22 of the 50 students had returned. Some of them had purportedly been dropped off near their homes or universities by plainclothes individuals using private vehicles. Human rights activists are of the opinion that it is an open secret that the students had been detained by security forces. The Supreme Court in Pakistan subsequently (in late November 2023) warned that the country's prime minister would face criminal charges if his government were to fail to recover the dozens of missing students of Baloch descent. They are believed to have been detained by law enforcement agencies in recent years because of their alleged links to various separatist movements.²⁴⁷ According to one source, in most cases, more missing people are said to not return than to return.²⁴⁸

3.1.6.3 *Enforced disappearances*

Enforced disappearances, especially of political activists, were particularly likely to be carried out in Balochistan. Families lived in fear that their missing relatives would be killed in 'fake encounters' (see 1.2.10.2) by the CTD.²⁴⁹

During 2022, cases regularly surfaced about the CTD's involvement in alleged fake encounters in which disappeared Baloch — who were already being held in detention centres of security forces — had been killed. Many of the victims, who had been accused of having ties to militants, turned out to be political activists or students.²⁵⁰ Estimates on the number of enforced disappearances are presented under the heading 'Numbers of enforced disappearances' below.

²⁴⁴ Dawn, *Baloch student picked up by police from Punjab University*, 28 October 2023;

²⁴⁵ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

²⁴⁶ University World News, *Court warns prime minister over missing Baloch students*, 30 November 2023.

²⁴⁷ University World News, *Court warns prime minister over missing Baloch students*, 30 November 2023.

²⁴⁸ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 135, 2023; Pioneer, *Balochistan: An undeclared war zone-I*, 4 December 2023.

²⁵⁰ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 135, 2023; Human Rights Council Balochistan, Hakkpân Balochistan, *Seven Missing Persons Killed by CTD in a Week; Families Demand Justice Amidst Growing Concerns*, 27 November 2023.

According to a report by Amnesty International, the army and security forces were said to pick up people from the streets or take them from their beds at night without a warrant to frighten Baloch separatists. The army claims to be using covert operations in Pakistan to eliminate 'militant organisations' from within. The operations take place within a climate of impunity.²⁵¹

According to the Amnesty report, little is known about what happens to people who disappear. The few who have returned have recounted how they had been put on a bus blindfolded and ended up in some kind of detention centre somewhere. The army's secret services have reportedly used force. They are said to have tortured suspects and asked them which rebel movement they belong to and where their leader is hiding.²⁵²

During a 'long march' and sit-in in Islamabad in late 2023/early 2024, protesters were harassed by police. Hundreds of women travelled about 1,800 kilometres from Balochistan to the capital Islamabad to protest the extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of young Baloch men. Water cannons were deployed on the protesters (most of whom were female), and arbitrary arrests were made. Supplies of food and blankets were also blocked.²⁵³ Amnesty International reported that more than three hundred people were arrested on 21 December 2023, including women, children, students, the elderly and a female journalist. Between 21 and 22 December 2023, 47 female protesters and 5 children were illegally detained for more than 24 hours at the women's G-7 police station in Islamabad. During this detention, the police undertook several attempts to forcibly transport some of these protesters to Quetta. According to Amnesty International, these attempts were foiled only after interventions by civil society organisations and journalists present on the ground.²⁵⁴

Numbers of enforced disappearances

The exact number of enforced disappearances that can be linked to actual or suspected Baloch separatism is difficult to estimate. There are no sources that have the total overview.

According to the USDOS human rights report, the figures from the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances are unreliable, and there were more cases than reported. Baloch activists complained that the commission served no purpose other than to identify the families and then harass them. According to human rights activists, the commission is purportedly a 'toothless tiger'.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Diplomat, *The Long History of Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan*, 4 January 2024; Amnesty International, *Wordt Vervolgd, Op zoek naar mijn vader, mijn zoon, mijn vrienden. Waarom verdwijnen er duizenden mensen in het Pakistaanse Beloetsjistan?*, 3 April 2023.

²⁵² Amnesty International, *Wordt Vervolgd, Op zoek naar mijn vader, mijn zoon, mijn vrienden. Waarom verdwijnen er duizenden mensen in het Pakistaanse Beloetsjistan?*, 3 April 2023.

²⁵³ Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Amnesty International condemns harassment faced by Baloch protestors in Islamabad*, 24 January 2024; Confidential source: 25 January 2024; Diplomat, *The Long History of Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan*, 4 January 2024; *Waging Nonviolence, How women in Pakistan are fighting enforced disappearances and killings*, 19 January 2024.

²⁵⁴ Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Amnesty International condemns harassment faced by Baloch protestors in Islamabad*, 24 January 2024.

²⁵⁵ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 136, 2023; USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1e, p. 16, 20 March 2023.

Figures on the number of missing persons vary. On 30 November 2022, the NGO Voice for Baloch Missing Persons stated that 309 Baloch people had disappeared in the province between January and July 2022. Since the year 2000, 6,734 people have purportedly been victims of enforced disappearance.²⁵⁶ On 14 November 2022, the Human Rights Council of Balochistan claimed that 492 people were subjected to enforced disappearance between January and October 2022.

According to the organisation Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, more than 45,000 people have been victims of enforced disappearances over the past two decades.²⁵⁷

Who is at risk of becoming a victim of disappearance

According to one source, members of nationalist, separatist and left-wing groups have traditionally been the most likely targets of enforced disappearances. According to another source, intellectuals and nationalists are amongst the categories that are at risk of disappearance.²⁵⁸ According to a subsequent source, they may be individuals suspected of joining a separatist group at some point. These may include members of cultural or social groups.²⁵⁹

According to one source, there is no definition of the typical disappearance victim. The intelligence agencies and their agents decide who to select. According to this source, risks of disappearance may include, but are not limited to: a critical post on social media against the army, secret service or other authorities; participation in Baloch protests; critical remarks in private conversations (if the conversation is reported to the authorities).²⁶⁰ According to another source, activists operating within the political or cultural sphere are at risk. Relatives may also be at risk as part of 'collective punishment' (see 3.1.6.5). According to this source, a post on social media can pose a risk, depending on the content and what the post triggers.²⁶¹

Other critics of the state, including political opponents and journalists are also at risk (see 3.2.1.4 on journalists, 3.2.1.1 on the monitoring of social media and online activities, and 3.1.18 on supporters of the PTI).

Death squads

Death squads are said to be operating in Balochistan, carrying out extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other human rights violations. They are purportedly paid and protected by the state and can therefore operate outside the law.²⁶²

3.1.6.4 *Pakistani government and actual or suspected Baloch separatists abroad*

²⁵⁶ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1e, p. 16, 20 March 2023.

²⁵⁷ Times of India, *Baloch National Movement stages protest in Germany over human rights violations in Balochistan*, 25 October 2023

²⁵⁸ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; New Arab, *A looming threat: In Pakistan, enforced disappearances silence dissent*, 23 July 2023.

²⁵⁹ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

²⁶⁰ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

²⁶¹ Confidential source: 18 June 2024

²⁶² Confidential source: 27 February 2024; VoicePK, *Operating With Impunity: Death Squads In Balochistan*, 16 July 2023; Asia Times, *Private militias behind violence in Balochistan*, 3 August 2023.

In 2020 (and thus before the current reporting period), two Baloch activists died. Additional information on this is presented in the previous General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan.²⁶³

According to some sources, however, it is highly likely that the Pakistani government is tracking and threatening Baloch separatists abroad. The army treats Baloch insurgents or suspected insurgents with more attention than other militant groups (e.g. TTP). According to these sources, relatives of BNM members and of activists living abroad were contacted in Pakistan by state representatives. Threats have been made along the lines of: 'Your relative is acting against the state; we will not allow this'.²⁶⁴

3.1.6.5 *Collective punishment for actual or suspected Baloch separatism*

Relatives of actual or suspected Baloch separatists have also been victims of enforced disappearances. This includes close relatives (e.g. sons), as well as cousins and other family members. It is not known how often this happens. According to various sources, the families left behind are suffering great stress. Close relatives may be victims of arrest or enforced disappearance. Family homes are also invaded or set on fire in the middle of the night. This is regarded as collective punishment for actual or suspected separatism. According to one source, village elders have been targeted in the past. This served as collective punishment, as they were responsible for the whole community. In some cases, villages were attacked by security forces because an alleged separatist was purportedly hiding out. This also resulted in civilian casualties.²⁶⁵

3.1.7 *Rohingyas*

There is a significant Rohingya community in Pakistan, mainly in Karachi. Estimates of the number of Rohingyas in Pakistan vary widely and range between 40,000 and 500,000 people.²⁶⁶

3.1.7.1 *Residence documents, naturalisation, access to basic services*

Beginning in the 1940s, Rohingyas came to Pakistan in several waves, mostly to flee persecution. Even though they have been living in Pakistan for several generations, they do not acquire Pakistani citizenship and, therefore, no identity cards, birth certificates or other documents. This has been the case in the past (see 3.1.7.2). This means they are excluded from certain services and facilities, such as education, healthcare or legally sailing their fishing boats. They also cannot buy or own property. It is difficult for Rohingyas to obtain residence documents. It is also unclear exactly which residence documents they need in order to access education and healthcare. In any case, children need a B-form for these purposes, and adults

²⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 54, September 2023.

²⁶⁴ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 24 April 2024; Confidential source: 18 June 2024

²⁶⁵ Baluch Sarmachar, *Gwadar: Babu Mehrab's Family Enduring Collective Punishment By Pakistani State*, 13 March 2023; Balochistan Post, *Collective punishment – TBP Editorial*, 26 April 2020; Confidential source: 5 April 2024; Confidential source: 28 March 2024; VoicePK, *Will women in Baluchistan be given collective punishment now? Activists demand answers*, 2 September 2023; Confidential source: 24 April 2024; Confidential source: 18 June 2024

²⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 54-55, September 2023; Human Rights Council at the 42nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review, *Joint Submission of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan*, p. 4, March 2023.

need a CNIC. They usually lack these documents, such that they have no access to basic services.²⁶⁷

Refugee status

Rohingyas cannot be registered as refugees and receive aid and protection from the UNHCR. According to Pakistani policy, they do not qualify as asylum seekers or refugees. They do not live in refugee camps.²⁶⁸

Difference between refugees and stateless persons

The main difference between refugees and stateless persons is that refugees have some form of legal or documented proof of citizenship of a particular state, while stateless persons do not. Refugees are still citizens of the country they left, while stateless people have no citizenship or legal belonging to any state. The legal and health challenges for stateless persons are often different from those for refugees.²⁶⁹

Stateless persons

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Rohingyas in Pakistan are stateless²⁷⁰ (see 2.3.4 on ethnic groups and statelessness). The Pakistani government has not specifically outlined what rights stateless people have, and communities such as the Rohingya fall through the cracks. They have no access to basic services including healthcare and education. A variety of people theoretically meet the basic requirements for Pakistani citizenship (as laid down in the Pakistani Citizenship Act of 1951). In practice, however, it is often not possible to obtain it due to the extremely complicated, inefficient and sometimes discriminatory bureaucratic registration process²⁷¹ (see also 2.3.5 on access to Pakistani citizenship).

3.1.7.2 *Access to Pakistani citizenship in the past*

According to several Rohingyas who were interviewed by journalists, only those who had come to the country before the civil war and secession of Bangladesh in 1971 could obtain a Pakistani ID card.²⁷² According to another source, Rohingyas who came to Pakistan between 1971 and 1980 could acquire citizenship along with other communities that had migrated from Bangladesh. After 1980, however, the government blocked them from this citizenship. Some nevertheless did manage to obtain ID cards and passports by bribing officials (see also 2.3.4).

Many Rohingyas are illiterate and unaware of their rights. As a result, they are unable to find their way through the multitude of related legal procedures in order to solve their problems. Some Rohingyas purchase false documents on the street.

²⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 54-55, September 2023; CNN, *Pakistan's stateless Rohingya*, 11 September 2017.

²⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 54-55, September 2023; CNN, *Pakistan's stateless Rohingya*, 11 September 2017.

²⁶⁹ Globalisation and Health, *Much room for change: access to surgical care for stateless individuals in Pakistan*, 28 November 2023.

²⁷⁰ HRW, *Pakistan Should Back Rohingya Rights Abroad and at Home- Longtime Refugees from Burma Denied Citizenship, ID Cards*, 12 September 2017.

²⁷¹ Globalisation and Health, *Much room for change: access to surgical care for stateless individuals in Pakistan*, 28 November 2023; CNN, *Pakistan's stateless Rohingya*, 11 September 2017; Al Jazeera, *Stateless and helpless: The plight of ethnic Bengalis in Pakistan*, 29 September 2021.

²⁷² CNN, *Pakistan's stateless Rohingya*, 11 September 2017.

Because they often cannot read what is written on these documents, they risk being swindled.²⁷³

Rohingyas and Bengalis

Pakistani people often regard Rohingyas as refugees and refer to them as 'Bengali'. They are easily recognised by their appearance, and they often hold the lowest-paid jobs.²⁷⁴

The situation concerning Pakistani citizenship differs for Bengal because of its secession from East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh in 1971. Under a clause in the Pakistani Citizenship Act, Bengalis who migrated to Pakistan before 1978 are entitled to citizenship. In theory, anyone who has documents to prove having lived in Pakistan before 1978 can become a Pakistani citizen (see 2.3.5). In practice, however, there are many bureaucratic and discriminatory obstacles.²⁷⁵

3.1.7.3 *Access to Pakistani citizenship at present*

As described in 3.1.7.1 under the heading 'Stateless persons', a variety of people theoretically meet the basic requirements for Pakistani citizenship (as laid down in the Pakistani Citizenship Act of 1951). In practice, however, it is often not possible to obtain it due to the extremely complicated, inefficient and sometimes discriminatory bureaucratic registration process.²⁷⁶

3.1.7.4 *Children of Rohingya parents with Pakistani citizenship*

Technically, a child can obtain an ID card if one of the parents has one. According to one source quoted in an article by Aaj English TV, however, this law is not being implemented seamlessly, due to systematic corruption and discrimination against the Bengali community by many people in Pakistani society who feel that Bengalis do not belong in Pakistan.²⁷⁷

Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.7.6 on CNIC.

3.1.7.5 *Rohingyas with Pakistani citizenship in Saudi Arabia*

It is not clear how many Rohingyas with Pakistani citizenship are in Saudi Arabia. According to an article by *Anadolu Ajansi* (AA), there are 250,000; according to a confidential source, there are no more than 12,000.²⁷⁸

The Rohingyas with Pakistani citizenship in Saudi Arabia reportedly moved to that country in the 1960s. According to AA, they should eventually acquire Saudi

²⁷³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 54-55, September 2023; Aaj English TV, *Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi*, 27 April 2023.

²⁷⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 55 September 2023

²⁷⁵ Aaj English TV, *Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi*, 27 April 2023; Dawn, *KARACHI: Illegal aliens asked to get NARA cards*, 26 March 2005; Al Jazeera, *Stateless and helpless: The plight of ethnic Bengalis in Pakistan*, 29 September 2021

²⁷⁶ Globalisation and Health, *Much room for change: access to surgical care for stateless individuals in Pakistan*, 28 November 2023.

²⁷⁷ Aaj English TV, *Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi*, 27 April 2023.

²⁷⁸ Anadolu Ajansi (AA), *Pakistan, Saudi Arabia discuss Rohingya issue*, 7 June 2023; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

citizenship, thus explaining why their passports were constantly renewed. Some Rohingya men married Saudi women. Children from such marriages are stateless.²⁷⁹ It is not clear when the passports were most recently renewed. According to AA, it was in 2012; according to a source, it was in 2019.²⁸⁰ According to one source, the cause of the non-renewal probably lies in corruption.²⁸¹ An investigation is under way, and Pakistani and Saudi authorities are working to find a solution.²⁸²

3.1.7.6 CNIC

To obtain a Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC), Rohingyas must prove that they were born in Pakistan, but many do not have birth certificates. Rohingyas who had previously held a CNIC were often unable to obtain a new one when it expired. The reason is not clear. To attend school, children need a B-form, which they usually do not have due to lack of other basic documents.²⁸³

Information on children with single parents who have an ID card is presented in 3.1.7.4 on the children of parents with Pakistani citizenship.

3.1.8 Shiites

3.1.8.1 Shiites in Pakistan

According to estimates, Shiites make up about ten to twenty percent of the total population of Pakistan. They live throughout Pakistan, but they constitute a majority only in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).²⁸⁴

In daily life, Shiites are often indistinguishable from Sunnis, except, for example, when they profess their faith and according to their surnames. Some Shiites hold high positions in Pakistani society.²⁸⁵ Hazaras are easily identified by their appearance and are mostly Shiites.²⁸⁶

Militant groups and accusations of blasphemy

Shiites have long been the target of violence in Pakistan. Militant groups including the ISKP, TTP, *Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat* (ASWJ) and Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) have carried out attacks on Shiite mosques and other targets. The largest attack in recent years took place before the reporting period and constituted a suicide attack by the ISKP on a Shiite mosque in Peshawar on 4 March 2022. The attack left 63 people dead and about 196 injured. According to one source, although the number

²⁷⁹ Anadolu Ajansi (AA), *Pakistan, Saudi Arabia discuss Rohingya issue*, 7 June 2023.

²⁸⁰ Anadolu Ajansi (AA), *Pakistan, Saudi Arabia discuss Rohingya issue*, 7 June 2023; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²⁸¹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²⁸² Anadolu Ajansi (AA), *Pakistan, Saudi Arabia discuss Rohingya issue*, 7 June 2023; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 54-55, September 2023.

²⁸⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 56, September 2023; Himal, *Fighting the erasure of anti-Shia violence in Pakistan*, 19 July 2023; Eurasia Review, SATP (South Asia Terrorism Portal), *Pakistan: Targeting Shias – Analysis*, 19 September 2023.

²⁸⁵ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 57-60, September 2023.

fluctuates, incidents of violence against Shiites have always occurred throughout the years.²⁸⁷

According to the HRCP, the number of blasphemy allegations against Shiites has increased. According to the estimates of one source, seventy percent of all accusations of blasphemy in 2022 were against Shiites.²⁸⁸ According to the Committee for Social Justice (CSJ), at least 329 people had been accused of blasphemy by 2023. Of these, 75 percent were Muslim and of the total number of Muslims, 50 percent were Shia.²⁸⁹

Government

According to media reports and other sources, in the weeks leading up to and during Muharram,²⁹⁰ federal authorities restricted the movements and activities of certain Sunni and Shiite clerics who were considered seditious. This was intended to keep the peace.²⁹¹ According to one source, the mobile network was shut down.²⁹² Representatives of the Shiite community nevertheless accused the authorities of bias by restricting their religious ceremonies and arresting members of the community.²⁹³ The number of individuals involved is not known.

The following is an overview of the number of Shiite victims of sectarian violence.

Year	Incidents	Fatalities	Injuries	Abductions
2019	5	13	20	0
2020	1	0	0	6
2021	1	1	0	0
2022	1	63	194	0
2023	4	14	15	0
2024	1	0	1	0

SOURCE: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), Pakistan – *Civilian Data: Attacks on Shias Pakistan*.²⁹⁴

3.1.8.2 Pakistan Hazaras

The Hazaras constitute a separate group amongst the Shiites. It is estimated that there are between 600,000 and one million Hazaras in Pakistan. Most of them are Shiite, and a small proportion are Sunni. The majority of Hazaras — about 500,000 — live in Quetta. Because Shiite Hazaras are both a religious and ethnic minority, they face discrimination based on their religion, as well as on their appearance and ethnicity.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁷ Eurasia Review, *SATP (South Asia Terrorism Portal), Pakistan: Targeting Shias – Analysis*, 19 September 2023; Eurasia Review, *Pakistan: Targeting Shias – Analysis*, 19 September 2023; Confidential source: 5 April 2024.

²⁸⁸ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; HRCP, HRCP alarmed by surge in blasphemy cases against Shia community.

²⁸⁹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 6, March 2024.

²⁹⁰ Muharram is the first month of the Muslim calendar, in which the Shiite commemoration Ashura takes place.

²⁹¹ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan, Section II, 2023*; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²⁹² Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

²⁹³ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan, Section II, 2023*.

²⁹⁴ South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), Pakistan – *Civilian Data: Attacks on Shias Pakistan*, Datasheet-civilian-Shia-pakistan (satp.org), accessed 24 March 2024.

²⁹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 57-60, September 2023.

The situation of Hazaras in Pakistan is described in the previous General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan.²⁹⁶

No large-scale attacks specifically targeting Hazaras occurred during the reporting period. Smaller attacks on Hazaras and attacks on Shiites other than Hazaras did occur. Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.8.1.

Of all Shiites in Pakistan, Hazaras are the most persecuted, as they are easily recognised based on their Asian facial features. Other Shiites are indistinguishable from Sunnis in appearance.²⁹⁷

It is not only the well-known terror groups (e.g. the ISKP) that are persecuting the Hazaras, but also local Sunni extremists who are also fighting Baloch separatists, for example.²⁹⁸

Since 2006, 386 Hazaras have been killed in Pakistan in 81 incidents.²⁹⁹ Hazaras also face discrimination, sectarian violence and lack of economic opportunities in daily life.³⁰⁰

Hazaras victimised since 2019³⁰¹:

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Number of Hazaras killed	20	0	0	1	1	22
Number of Hazaras injured	48	0	0	1	0	49

Hazara Division in KP

There is no relationship between Pakistani Hazaras and the region in KP that is known as the Hazara Division. The ethnic groups in this area are Hindkowans, Pashtuns and Kohistanis.³⁰²

Information on the regional distribution of Shiite communities in Pakistan is presented in 3.1.

3.1.9

Pashtuns

²⁹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 57-60, September 2023.

²⁹⁷ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderreport 64, Pakistan: Fact Finding Mission, Islamabad Mai/Juni 2023*, 5.3., December 2023.

²⁹⁸ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderreport 64, Pakistan: Fact Finding Mission, Islamabad Mai/Juni 2023*, 5.3., December 2023.

²⁹⁹ Eurasia Review, SATP (South Asia Terrorism Portal), *Pakistan: Targeting Shias – Analysis, 19 September 2023*. Data through 17 September 2023.

³⁰⁰ Dawn, *The last of the Hazaras*, 2 April 2023.

³⁰¹ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

³⁰² Commissioner Hazara Division, KP, *About Hazara Division*, https://chd.kp.gov.pk/page/abouthazaradivision/page_type/message#sthash.xHPVT0LB.dpuf, accessed 25 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

Pashtuns comprise about 15.4 percent of Pakistan's population. Stigmatisation, stereotyping and discrimination against Pashtuns can occur throughout Pakistan, including at the state level. In some cases, Pashtuns are stereotyped as supporters of the Afghan Taliban, as they share the same ethnic background. At the same time, Pashtuns are ubiquitous in society, and they hold many senior public positions.³⁰³

According to one source, Pashtuns faced discrimination everywhere except KP. The worst discrimination purportedly occurs in Punjab and Sindh. In those areas, it was difficult for students to find housing or jobs. Rumours suggest that Pashtun engage in criminal activities, pose a security threat and 'take jobs' from locals. According to one source, several anti-Pashtun incidents occurred in Sindh a few years ago, with Sindhis looting Pashtun businesses in Karachi and Hyderabad. Statistically, Karachi is the largest Pashtun city in Pakistan, as it is home to hundreds of thousands of Pashtuns, who do business there normally.³⁰⁴

Protection

According to one source, students try to evade discrimination and seek protection by uniting politically and by keeping in close contact with human rights organisations. This source noted that quotas for Pashtun students from Balochistan at universities in Punjab and in Karachi have increased, due to a policy of positive discrimination.³⁰⁵

The PTM is a peaceful organisation working for Pashtun rights. It denounces the impunity of the army and demands accountability for past abuses. The leader of the PTM, Manzoor Pashtun, has been repeatedly arrested and detained³⁰⁶ (see the passage on the PTM in 1.1.4).

3.1.10 Christians

3.1.10.1 Position of Christians

There are about 4.2 million Christians in Pakistan, comprising about 1.8 percent of the population. Christians in Pakistan have been victims of discrimination during the reporting period. They are both overt and subtle targets. According to the advocacy organisation Open Doors, the number of Christian (and other religious minorities) girls and women who have been abducted, abused and forcibly converted to Islam has increased (see the figures under the heading 'Forced conversions').³⁰⁷

According to Open Doors, Christians suffer from institutionalised discrimination. The authorities reserve professions that are considered low, dirty and degrading (e.g. working as a sewer cleaner or with a brick kiln) for Christians.³⁰⁸

³⁰³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 60-61, September 2023; The Citizen, *A Tale of Struggle and Resilience for Pashtuns in Pakistan*, 17 February 2024.

³⁰⁴ Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁰⁵ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁰⁶ The Citizen, *A Tale of Struggle and Resilience for Pashtuns in Pakistan*, 17 February 2024.

³⁰⁷ Open Doors UK, *How are Christians persecuted in Pakistan?*, [Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Pakistan - Open Doors UK & Ireland](#), accessed 26 March 2024.

³⁰⁸ Open Doors UK, *How are Christians persecuted in Pakistan?*, [Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Pakistan - Open Doors UK & Ireland](#), accessed 26 March 2024.

Churches have relative freedom with regard to services and other activities. According to Open Doors, however, they have been the target of bombings and are heavily guarded.³⁰⁹ The number of bombings that have occurred is unclear. According to figures from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), 23 churches were attacked in 2023, as well as 91 homes of Christian families.³¹⁰ According to the US Department of State (USDOS) report on religious freedoms, in 2022, representatives of Christian and Hindu communities in Sindh and Balochistan mentioned having adequate security for religious minority places of worship in general, especially on major holidays.³¹¹ According to one source, police are also positioned at principal churches on Sundays, and they sometimes guard places of worship.³¹² Further information on this point is presented in 1.2.5 on government protection against Islamic groups and religious parties.

Most Christians in the country live in Punjab province, thus explaining why most cases of threats and attacks are recorded there.³¹³

In several incidents, Christians have been victims of mob attacks. How many incidents were involved is not known. The largest during the reporting period occurred in August 2023 in Jaranwala.

Jaranwala

On 16 August 2023, a mob of about five hundred people attacked the Christian community in Jaranwala. This happened after two Christians were accused of 'desecrating' a Quran. Through the loudspeakers of mosques, Muslims were called upon to attack Christians. At least 24 churches, dozens of smaller chapels and many houses were set on fire and looted. Hundreds of Christians fled, and more than a hundred attackers were arrested. Although the police were accused of intervening late, they themselves said that they had done their best to control the situations as much as possible and prevent deaths.³¹⁴

In April 2023, the Christian Musarrat Bibi was falsely accused of burning a Quran. The woman was arrested despite being illiterate and unable to tell if the verses were Quranic. The case was eventually dropped when it became clear that the allegations had been made by rivals who were jealous that Bibi held a management position in the school canteen. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), it is exceptional for such a case to have been dismissed.³¹⁵

Additional information on this is presented in 3.2.3.2 on victims of lynch mobs.

Forced conversions

Young Christian girls may be victims of forced conversions. The same applies to Hindu girls. In Punjab province, most victims are Christian girls and in Sindh, the

³⁰⁹ Open Doors UK, *How are Christians persecuted in Pakistan?*, [Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Pakistan - Open Doors UK & Ireland](#), accessed 26 March 2024.

³¹⁰ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 3, March 2024.

³¹¹ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, 2023.

³¹² Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³¹³ Open Doors UK, *How are Christians persecuted in Pakistan?*, [Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Pakistan - Open Doors UK & Ireland](#), accessed 26 March 2024.

³¹⁴ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, pp. 1 and 3, December 2023; HRCF, *HRCF fact-finding mission to Jaranwala finds local Muslim religious leaders complicit in attacks*, 25 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan Christians in fear after blasphemy allegations trigger violence*, 23 August 2023.

³¹⁵ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 3, December 2023.

majority are Hindu. In such cases, a young girl is abducted and brought to a Muslim cleric, who converts her. He gives her a signed, stamped certificate of her conversion to Islam, and she is then married off to her captor. In some cases, girls have subsequently been cast aside after such forced marriages. Forced conversions were increasingly common during the reporting period, not only in Sindh, but also in Punjab. According to a team of UN experts, Christian and Hindu girls remain particularly vulnerable to forced religious conversion, abduction, human trafficking, child, early and forced marriage, domestic slavery and sexual violence. The experts expressed concern that the forced marriages and religious conversions of girls from religious minorities are being validated by courts. They often invoke religious laws to justify victims staying with their abductors instead of being returned to their parents. Perpetrators often escape accountability.³¹⁶

Sometimes, 'soft grooming' occurs. In such cases, young girls 'voluntarily' marry Muslim boys because it would purportedly raise their status within society. In the process, the very young girls are so heavily manipulated that they come to believe they will have a better life with a Muslim boy (e.g. less discrimination, more money, no longer being 'untouchable').³¹⁷ It is not known if there are cases in which girls stated they were satisfied with their choice.

At least 136 cases of abduction and forced conversion of minority girls and women were reported in 2023. Of these girls, 110 were Hindu and 26 were Christian. Most (107) of these cases took place in Sindh, with 28 in Punjab and one in Balochistan. In all, 102 girls were abducted and converted, and it is not known whether 34 abducted girls were ultimately also converted. The majority (77%) of the girls were younger than 18 years of age, and about 18% were younger than 14. The age of 9% was unclear.³¹⁸

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) reported that at least 124 cases occurred in 2022.³¹⁹ According to the CSJ, the increase in these numbers was due to impunity and lack of action by the authorities to counter it.³²⁰

Function within the church

According to one source, people holding public function within the church are the only Christians to be respected in Pakistan. They are seen as Christian leaders; they have status and they are invited to TV appearances and receptions.³²¹

According to one source, there is distrust of churches because they are said to be funded by Western 'agents'. The cause of discrimination against Christians is said to lie in the school system, teachers and the curriculum, where children see discrimination against minorities from an early age.³²²

³¹⁶ Confidential source: 29 February 2024; OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), *Pakistan: UN experts alarmed by lack of protection for minority girls from forced religious conversions and forced marriage*, 11 April 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

³¹⁷ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 3, December 2023; Confidential source: 29 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 March 2024; Nederlands Dagblad, *Gedwongen tot bekering. 'Nu ben je mijn vrouw'*, 1 February 2024.

³¹⁸ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 11, March 2024.

³¹⁹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 4, March 2023.

³²⁰ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 4, March 2024.

³²¹ Confidential source: February 2024.

³²² Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

3.1.10.2 *Preaching and evangelising in public*

Christians can preach in Pakistan. Permits for events in the church are usually granted, provided the neighbourhood is Christian.³²³

According to one source, evangelising can be dangerous in Pakistan. The danger is related to those whom one intends to convert. Converting Hindus to Christianity would not be a problem; converting Muslims would be. There are 'white' missionaries in Sindh. According to one source, in the north, people can be arrested for evangelising.³²⁴ It is not known if this is the case everywhere. According to another source, people cannot evangelise openly, as it could result in a fatwa with a death sentence. This is because Muslims who convert (particularly if they do so openly) risk being killed.³²⁵

3.1.10.3 *Dawat-e Islami and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan*

According to one source, the Muslim organisations *Dawat-e Islami* and *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP) 'invite' Christians to convert. At some point, their persistent insistence and 'invitation' turns into harassment.³²⁶ It is not known whether this also happens to other groups.

3.1.10.4 *Death threats in the absence of conversion*

There are few public sources on death threats in relation to conversions. Little is known, and most sources are confidential.

According to one source, the organisations use a variety of strategies for forced conversions.³²⁷ According to another source, every conversion of a Christian to Islam is accompanied by threats.³²⁸ In contrast, one source had not heard that *Dawat-e Islami* and the TLP threaten people with death if they do not convert to Islam. In some cases, however, people who are in debt are persuaded to convert to Islam under pressure. This practice is not restricted to these organisations, but can emanate from anyone.³²⁹ Some militant and/or extremist organisations have been reported to intimidate minorities in order to gain their support (e.g. in elections).³³⁰

3.1.10.5 *Numbers of casualties*

Between 1987 and 2022, at least 88 people were killed extrajudicially following accusations of blasphemy or apostasy. Of these, 23 (26 percent) were Christians. The 88 further included 46 Muslims, 14 Ahmadis, 2 Hindus, 1 Buddhist and 1 of an unknown faith.³³¹

Numbers of Christian victims	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023

³²³ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³²⁴ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³²⁵ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³²⁶ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³²⁷ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³²⁸ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³²⁹ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³³⁰ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³³¹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 10, March 2023.

Victims of deadly violent	0 ³³²	11 ³³³	7 ³³⁴	4 ³³⁵	11 ³³⁶
Accusations of blasphemy	1 ³³⁷	2 ³³⁸	38 ³³⁹	42 ³⁴⁰	26 ³⁴¹

3.1.11 Ahmadis

In this Country of Origin Information Report, references to 'Muslims' concern the group of those whom the Pakistani government regards as Muslims. Because Ahmadis are not recognised as such by the Pakistani government and are covered by other legislation, they are addressed separately throughout this document.

3.1.11.1 Position of Ahmadis

General information on the position of Ahmadis in Pakistan is presented in the Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on the position of Ahmadis and Christians in Pakistan dated December 2020 and the General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan dated September 2022.³⁴²

According to several sources, situations have deteriorated for Ahmadis over the past two years. Ahmadis have continued to be targets for accusations of blasphemy (in many cases, false).³⁴³ According to two confidential sources, there have been more targeted killings and mob attacks on Ahmadis in recent years.³⁴⁴ The number of years to which this refers is unclear. According to one source, social media have played a major role in fuelling hatred. According to the same source, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) is purportedly used to prosecute Ahmadis as a group.³⁴⁵ Several incidents targeting Ahmadis have taken place, including attacks on individuals, graves, mosques and other religious sites.³⁴⁶ According to one source, lawyers preferred not to assist Ahmadis, as they were afraid of having the entire Muslim community against them. For example, this was the case in an incident in which Ahmadis had slaughtered an animal for Eid. According to the authorities, Ahmadis are not allowed to do so, as they were not Muslims in their view. The perpetrators of mob attacks were quickly released on bail. A list of the names, addresses and ID cards of Ahmadis was said to be circulating on social media. According to the source, this poses a major security risk, as the list is available to

³³² Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

³³³ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 8, March 2023.

³³⁴ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 8, March 2023.

³³⁵ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 8, March 2023.

³³⁶ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024.

³³⁷ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

³³⁸ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

³³⁹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 4, March 2023.

³⁴⁰ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2022*, p. 4, March 2023.

³⁴¹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024.

³⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on the position of Ahmadis and Christians in Pakistan 2017-2020*, December 2020.

³⁴³ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2024 – Pakistan, Annual report on the human rights situation in 2023*, 11 January 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁴⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁴⁵ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

³⁴⁶ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's Ahmadis living in fear as graves, religious sites attacked*, 27 September 2023; Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, P.40, 2023; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

anyone wishing to do harm. The list has purportedly circulated in WhatsApp conversations between TLP members.³⁴⁷

According to reports and allegations on social media, several members of the Ahmadi community were arrested during Eid celebrations in June 2024 on charges of performing animal sacrifices, which are forbidden to Ahmadis under Pakistani law.³⁴⁸

Two confidential sources reported that Ahmadis are the most persecuted of all minorities. This is particularly the case in the province of Punjab, where TLP/TLYR is headquartered.³⁴⁹ It is not known whether all Ahmadis are equally vulnerable to persecution.

According to one source, known Ahmadis are definitely at risk of being recognised and attacked on the street. They are in danger of being mobbed.³⁵⁰ It is not known whether there are gradations in such risks.

According to the same source, Ahmadis are not safe anywhere in Pakistan, and there is no point in moving to any other part of Pakistan. They would encounter the same hostility and discrimination everywhere. This is the case even in Rabwah (or Chenab Nagar), the only city where Ahmadis are not a minority.³⁵¹

3.1.11.2 *Numbers of victims*

The following is an overview of the number of Ahmadis who have been victims of violence because of their religion.³⁵² The information was obtained from a confidential source. The table is divided into number of victims of violence, number killed and number accused of blasphemy. It is not known whether individuals accused of blasphemy are also counted in the categories 'Victims of violence' and 'Number killed' (and are thus counted twice).

The blasphemy figures in this table differ from the figures on blasphemy in 3.2.3. The figures presented there are from HRCP and CSJ, which use different survey methods and therefore vary.

NUMBER OF AHMADIS WHO HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, KILLED OR ACCUSED OF BLASPHEMY IN PAKISTAN

Year	Victims of violence	Killed	Accused of blasphemy
2019	12	3	8
2020	12	5	50
2021	21	3	110
2022	10	3	107
2023	5	1	110
Beginning of 2024	12	1	1

³⁴⁷ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

³⁴⁸ The Print, *Pakistan: Ahmadi community allegedly faces arrests over Eid rituals*, 20 June 2024.

³⁴⁹ Confidential source: March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁵⁰ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

³⁵¹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

³⁵² Confidential source: 7 March 2024.

SOURCE: Confidential source³⁵³

3.1.11.3 *Recognition of Ahmadi marriages*

Ahmadis still have their own system for registering marriages in Rabwah and their own marriage certificates.³⁵⁴

No new public information was found on the recognition of Ahmadi marriages. As was the case during the previous reporting period, there is ambiguity concerning the impact that the non-recognition of the Ahmadi movement as Islamic has on the legal validity of *Jamaate-Ahmadiyya* marriage certificates.

3.1.12 *Apostates and atheists*

This section discusses only actual or alleged apostasy and conversion from Islam to another faith. The Pakistani authorities regard the Ahmadi faith as different. It is for this reason that it is discussed separately here.

Pakistani society is highly hostile to apostates and converts from Islam to other faiths, and the dangers to those concerned are great. An apostate can very easily be charged for blasphemy under the blasphemy laws.³⁵⁵ This carries severe penalties, ranging up to the death penalty. Additional details on the blasphemy laws and number of convictions are presented in 3.2.3. Such individuals are also at risk of gang violence (see 3.2.3.2).

The risks to Ahmadis are even greater than the risks others face. This is because they are always regarded as apostates based on their religion. For this reason, many Ahmadis feel extremely unsafe in Pakistan (see also 3.1.11 on Ahmadis).³⁵⁶

According to some sources, there has been no change in the situations of atheists or apostates in the past two years.³⁵⁷ According to one source, officially, there are no atheists or apostates in Pakistan. Officials of NADRA would never want to enter 'atheist' into the system, for fear of their own safety.³⁵⁸

3.1.13 *LGBTIQ+ community*

3.1.13.1 *Position of the LGBTIQ+ community since the previous Country of Origin Information Report*

Under Pakistan's penal code, same-sex relationships are prohibited. Article 377 states that unnatural offences are punishable by imprisonment, up to life in prison. Unnatural offences include same-sex sexual acts.³⁵⁹ Under Sharia law, the death

³⁵³ Confidential source: 7 March 2024.

³⁵⁴ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

³⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 91 September 2023.

³⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 91, September 2023.

³⁵⁷ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁵⁸ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

³⁵⁹ UK visas and immigration, *Country policy and information note: Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, Pakistan*, April 2022 (accessible) — Updated 10 May 2024, 3.3.

penalty can be imposed, and social opinion about LGBTIQ+ people is generally negative. The widespread antipathy is exacerbated by laws against 'obscene acts' and 'unnatural offences'. In contrast, transgender people (known locally as *hijra* or *khawaja sara*) are regarded in a more complex manner, as both bearers of happiness and 'outcasts'. Although this results in somewhat more protection for their human rights, members of the transgender community are also at risk of threats, violence and even murder in Pakistan. There is little tolerance for gays and lesbians in the conservative, family-oriented society of Pakistan.³⁶⁰

Situations have deteriorated

According to one source, situations for the LGBTIQ+ community have deteriorated since the previous Country of Origin Information Report. Violence, social exclusion, harassment, discrimination and stigmatisation have persisted for LGBTIQ+ people. The incidents were often not reported, and the police generally took little action when they did receive reports. Landlords often refused to rent to members of the LGBTIQ+ community. One NGO working for their rights had to relocate four times within three months.³⁶¹ No figures are known about this deterioration.

Legislation

In May 2023, the federal Sharia court in Pakistan declared that individuals could no longer determine their sexual identity for themselves. That should be done by a medical committee. There is great concern about this within the LGBTIQ+ community.³⁶²

The self-assessment of sexual identity was enshrined in the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018. This law allows individuals to change their legal sex on official documents if it does not match the sex assigned at birth. They can also hold public office and vote.³⁶³

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) is being used to censor websites that raise LGBTIQ+ issues and depict members of the LGBTIQ+ community.³⁶⁴

Regions

Regional differences exist with regard to the treatment of the LGBTIQ+ community. According to the personal opinion of one source, the provinces can be roughly characterised as follows:³⁶⁵

³⁶⁰ Confidential source: 29 February 2024; Outright International, *Country Overview Pakistan*, [Pakistan | Outright International](#), accessed 28 March 2024; Amnesty International, *Een X in je paspoort kan al jaren in Pakistan. Maar voor wie precies?*, 2 October 2023; Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderkurzinformation Pakistan - SOGI (Sexuelle Orientierung und geschlechtliche Identität): Situation von LGBTIQ-Personen*, pp. 1-4, April 2024.

³⁶¹ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 6, 20 March 2023; Outright International, *Country Overview Pakistan*, [Pakistan | Outright International](#), accessed 28 March 2024; Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³⁶² Confidential source: 29 February 2024; Amnesty International, *Een X in je paspoort kan al jaren in Pakistan. Maar voor wie precies?*, 2 October 2023; Oxford Human Rights Club, *Balancing Gender Rights: Pakistan's Federal Shariat Court's Verdict on Self-Perceived Gender Identity*, 31 May 2023; Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Länderkurzinformation Pakistan - SOGI (Sexuelle Orientierung und geschlechtliche Identität): Situation von LGBTIQ-Personen*, p. 1, April 2024.

³⁶³ Outright International, *Country Overview Pakistan*, [Pakistan | Outright International](#), accessed 28 March 2024.

³⁶⁴ Outright International, *Country Overview Pakistan*, [Pakistan | Outright International](#), accessed 28 March 2024.

³⁶⁵ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

Sindh: more progressive; a *hijra* festival exists. Karachi: somewhat progressive.

Balochistan: situations have deteriorated for transwomen; there are no LGBTIQ+ organisations — only groups that work to fight AIDS. Not safe for LGBTIQ+ people.

Punjab: conservative culture.

KP: traditional and tribal. Tradition of dancing boys. Sexual exploitation of boys. Not safe for LGBTIQ+ people. There was an increase in violence and threats against transgender women. In 2022, at least seven transgender women in the province were killed.³⁶⁶

No other sources were found on the characterisation of the various provinces.

3.1.13.2 *Protection*

According to one source, members of the LGBTIQ+ community protected themselves by staying in a group and supporting one another. Little protection is to be expected from ordinary police. Within police stations, however, there is sometimes a victim-assistance desk, where people are addressed without the usual discrimination.³⁶⁷ The Tahafuz Center included the first transgender victim-support worker, who was herself a member of the transgender community. In February 2022, the Islamabad police established the Tahafuz Police *Khidmat Markaz* and Reporting Center to handle cases against transgender people. The Islamabad Transgender Protection Unit reported that 44 complaints were filed in 2022, more than half of which related to violence or harassment against transgender people.³⁶⁸ It is not known whether these complaints have been the subject of serious investigation.

3.1.13.3 *Access to medical treatment and care*

Trans people have difficulty finding medical care. Not many doctors are willing to treat trans people, and trans people are often afraid of the doctor's reaction in advance. Not many doctors are willing to perform transgender transformation surgeries. Although breast reductions in themselves are not illegal, they are performed within the context of transformation. Doctors fear losing their licences. For this reason, many transitions take place in a dubious manner. There are many bad doctors, and this increases the risk of infection. High fees are also demanded.³⁶⁹

3.1.14 *Women*

3.1.14.1 *Position of women*

The position of women has not changed much since the previous General Country of Origin Information Report. Their position within society has purportedly improved slightly (see below). At the same time, other developments can be observed, including an increase in the number of honour killings in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).

³⁶⁶ HRW, *Pakistan - Events of 2022, 2023*; HRW, *Pakistan - Events of 2023, 2024*; USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, p. 58, 20 March 2023.

³⁶⁷ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

³⁶⁸ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, p. 57, 20 March 2023.

³⁶⁹ Confidential source: 29 February 2024.

Pakistan has one of the lowest gender equality scores in the world. According to the World Economic Forum's World 2022 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan is ranked 142 of 146 countries in terms of economic participation and opportunities, educational level, health and survival, and the political emancipation of women.³⁷⁰

The participation of women in societal life in Pakistan is not very large, and it can be severely restricted, depending on social circumstances. Whereas women in some cities (e.g. Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad) often enjoy relative freedom, conservative communities in rural areas are much stricter. There have been reports of widespread sexual intimidation of women and girls in public spaces, schools and universities. Some Pakistani women hold high positions in public life, but these are few. According to the 2022 Global Gender Report, only 4.5% of all Pakistani women hold senior leadership or legislative positions.³⁷¹

According to some sources, situations are slowly and slightly improving. Although this is occurring in small steps, there is some overall progress. Participation in working life has increased slightly, especially in the informal sector, with women being able to work outside the home slightly more often. Even in traditionally conservative areas in Sindh, Balochistan, KP and parts of Punjab, such issues have now become more of a part of the societal debate. Women have traditionally been under-represented in leadership positions within the political and public spheres in Pakistan, but this is changing slowly. Social media has given women more of a voice. At the same time, this has led to a shift from physical harassment to online harassment.³⁷² Challenges faced by working women include the continuation of tasks at home and in the household, the difficulty of traveling to work safely, and the work culture and structures that have been established around men. Society often places too much pressure on women to be the main caregivers, while the father's role as a caregiver is undervalued. This leads to a skewed distribution of responsibilities within households, and it perpetuates gender inequality.³⁷³

The situations of women differ by region. In more conservative rural communities, women have fewer freedoms than they do in liberal urban environments. It is difficult for single women to find housing. Their situations also depend on their social class. There is greater freedom in the higher classes. According to one source, single women are extremely vulnerable. They need support from family members. There is a distrust of single women, regardless of whether they are single, divorced, widowed or have a husband living at a distance. In addition, slightly more divorces are reportedly initiated by women. They prefer to steer clear of polygamy and ill-treatment.³⁷⁴

3.1.14.2 Shelter options for women

³⁷⁰ DAWN, *Pakistan ranks 142 out of 146 in WEF's global gender gap report*, 21 June 2023; World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report*, 2023.

³⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 72, September 2023; USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 6 Women, 20 March 2023; Arab News, *Pakistani female executives highlight career challenges, advocate for resilience on Women's Day*, 8 March 2024.

³⁷² UN Women, *National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan 2023, a summary*, pp. 9, 10, 21, 26, 2023; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

³⁷³ Friday Times, *The Diary Of A Pakistani Working Woman*, 17 October 2023.

³⁷⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

In Pakistan, there are shelters for women seeking to escape domestic (or other forms of) violence.

According to one source, there are state-run shelters in major cities. Private shelters often have financial problems and low capacity. Some shelters for victims of violence are secret. Some resemble prisons, with restrictions on everything, including freedom of movement.³⁷⁵ According to various sources, there were not enough shelters for female victims of domestic violence or they did not have sufficient capacity. Government centres had insufficient space, staff and resources. Many overcrowded *dar-ul-aman* shelters did not meet international standards. Some shelters did not provide access to basic needs (e.g. showers, laundry or feminine hygiene products).³⁷⁶

3.1.15 *Blood feuds and honour killings*

'Honour killings' are common in Pakistan. For example, according to the annual report of the HRCP, there were 384 cases of honour killings in 2022.³⁷⁷ According to a confidential source, there were 490 honour killings in 2023.³⁷⁸ Additional figures are presented in 3.1.15.1.

In honour killings, family members kill other relatives believed to have brought shame to the family. Honour killings can happen in response to a variety of situations, including refusing an arranged marriage, entering into an unapproved romantic commitment, 'disobedient' behaviour or 'indecent' dress or behaviour, which can include posts on social media or having been raped or assaulted (which is seen as a scandal to the woman). Although young men are sometimes targeted for honour killings, most victims are female.³⁷⁹

In November 2023, a teenage girl in KP was allegedly shot to death by her father for having been seen on social media with a boy's arm around her. According to Al Jazeera, human rights organisations are said to be concerned about the high rate of femicide in the country. More than 5,000 women are said to have been killed since 2012. According to the HRCP annual report, there were 384 such killings in 2022, including 100 in KP. The government has tried to stop the killings by increasing the penalty to life imprisonment. Despite this, the killings continue.³⁸⁰

Several laws make honour killings a crime. Despite this, women have been victims of this practice. In many cases, such incidents have not come to light and have remained unpunished. Officials have often allowed male perpetrators to go free.

³⁷⁵ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁷⁶ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 6 Women, 20 March 2023; UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based violence*, Version 5.0, November 2022; Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁷⁷ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 19, 2023.

³⁷⁸ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

³⁷⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 80, September 2023; BBC, *Pakistan: Woman killed after being seen with man in viral photo*, 28 November 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistani girl killed after photos with boy's arm around her go viral*, 30 November 2023.

³⁸⁰ Al Jazeera, *Pakistani girl killed after photos with boy's arm around her go viral*, 30 November 2023.

Because honour killings are particularly prevalent within families, many cases were not known, as they were kept behind closed doors.³⁸¹

According to the HRCP, the number of honour killings in GB has increased in recent years. During an HRCP mission to GB, suspicions arose that the increase in suicides in the province is more likely to be related to honour killings. A large number of the 'suicides' involved women, thereby raising suspicions that honour killings had been categorised as suicides.³⁸²

3.1.15.1 *Figures on blood vengeance and honour killings since 2019*

2019

According to the annual report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), there were 326 honour killings of women and 162 of men in Pakistan in 2019. This brings the total number to 488. These figures are based on media reports.³⁸³ It is not known how many cases did not appear in the media.

2020

According to the HRCP annual report, 430 cases of honour killings were recorded in Pakistan in 2020, with 148 male victims and 363 female victims. The count was made based on articles in the media.³⁸⁴

2021

According to the HCRP, there were 478 cases of honour killings of women in 2021. This number was obtained from police reports.³⁸⁵ The total number was not mentioned in the report.

2022

According to the HRCP annual report, there were 384 cases of honour killings in 2022.³⁸⁶ Of these cases, 316 involved women. This information was obtained from police reports.³⁸⁷ The number of cases that were not reported is unknown.

2023

According to a confidential source, there were 490 honour killings in 2023.³⁸⁸ It is not known how many of these were women.

2024

The figures for 2024 are not yet known.

³⁸¹ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 6, 20 March 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 81, September 2023.

³⁸² Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 18 and p. 259, 2023.

³⁸³ HRCP, *State of Human Rights in 2019*, p. 296, 2020.

³⁸⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 81, September 2023; HRCP, *State of Human Rights in 2020*, p. 16, 3 May 2021.

³⁸⁵ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2021*, p. 19, 2023.

³⁸⁶ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 19, 2023.

³⁸⁷ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 23, 2023.

³⁸⁸ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

3.1.16 *Minors and unaccompanied minors*

3.1.16.1 *Permission to exit*

Minors need permission to travel out of the country. According to a confidential source, a child with a valid passport and visa will not be asked anything by customs officials. This is because parental consent and documents are required in order to obtain these documents.³⁸⁹

3.1.16.2 *Position of minors*

According to one source, the position of minors has not changed substantially since the previous Country of Origin Information Report.³⁹⁰

3.1.16.3 *Compulsory education and enforcement*

Children between the ages of 5 to 16 years are subject to compulsory education. This education is free of charge.³⁹¹ According to one source, there is hardly any enforcement of compulsory education, as there are not enough schools.³⁹²

3.1.16.4 *Authority over minors*

Under customary law, a child who has no father is looked after by a relative, according to one source.³⁹³

3.1.16.5 *Care for minors*

According to one source, if a minor's father is deceased, a relative will usually take care of the child. This could be an uncle, the grandparents or someone else. There is no legislation on this other than a requirement to register who the guardian is.³⁹⁴ According to another source, this must be a male relative, as children are considered 'orphans' if there is no male breadwinner (e.g. father, brother, uncle) in the home.³⁹⁵

3.1.16.6 *Care facilities*

According to one source, more care facilities for minor children have been added since 2022. There are private shelters, and donations are given.³⁹⁶

3.1.16.7 *Statutory legal authority*

³⁸⁹ Confidential source: 27 February 2024

³⁹⁰ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 83, September 2023; Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁹² Confidential source: 27 February 2024

³⁹³ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁹⁴ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁹⁵ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁹⁶ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

According to one source, adoption is a complicated and arduous process. Adopted children cannot inherit anything. Shelters arrange adoption processes in cooperation with the Social Welfare Department.^{397 398}

Guardianship

Guardianship and custody can be distinguished as follows.

Custody entails the education, care or foster care of the child, as well as the day-to-day care of the minor's emotional and personal affairs. The child must live with the custodian.

Guardianship involves the power to perform legal acts and agreements with responsibility for legal consequences.³⁹⁹

3.1.16.8 Foster care

According to one source, there is no formal system of foster care for minors in Pakistan. Relatives usually take care of children if their parents cannot care for them or if they have died.⁴⁰⁰

3.1.16.9 Government institutions

According to one source, both government and private shelters (often NGOs) take in unaccompanied minors. All of these shelters give food and clothing, and some provide medical care and a uniform. The quality and nutritional value of food vary from one institution to another, as do hygiene standards. Private institutions and facilities (e.g. SOS Children's Villages) have high standards. Madrassas provide education. At madrassas, prayers are offered five times a day, for which one must first wash. This is beneficial to hygiene.⁴⁰¹

There are no special shelters for returning minors.⁴⁰²

3.1.16.10 Sufficient places

It is not known whether sufficient places are available for minors in shelters.⁴⁰³

3.1.16.11 Psychological assistance

According to one source, psychological assistance is not a first priority.⁴⁰⁴ Some shelters have psychologists.⁴⁰⁵

Shelter facilities

³⁹⁷ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

³⁹⁸ For example, see: Travel.State.Gov, [Pakistan Intercountry Adoption Information \(state.gov\)](https://travel.state.gov/pakistan), accessed 28 March 2024.

³⁹⁹ <https://sahsol.lums.edu.pk/node/12832>; [Guardianship in Pakistan - 24justice.pk](https://24justice.pk) accessed 8 April 2024.

⁴⁰⁰ Confidential source: 27 February 2024

⁴⁰¹ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰² Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰³ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰⁴ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰⁵ Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

The author of the Country of Origin Information Report visited a shelter in Pakistan. The findings are presented below.

3.1.16.12 Access to education, medical care, food, clothing and hygiene

The shelter facility provides access to education, medical care, clothing, hygiene and food according to local standards. The children wear uniforms, sleep in dormitories and eat in a dining hall. There are sports facilities, and the school is on site. After primary school, children can go on to further education, such as domestic school (for girls) or military training (primarily for boys).⁴⁰⁶

3.1.16.13 Target group

The institution is for boys and girls between the ages of 5/6 years and 23 years. All religions are welcome. Children are considered 'orphans' if there is no male breadwinner (e.g. father, brother, uncle) in the home.⁴⁰⁷

3.1.16.14 Specific target groups

According to the institution, the shelter facility does not accommodate specific target groups, and no specific target groups are excluded.⁴⁰⁸

3.1.16.15 Care for returning minors

The institution declares that 'all orphans are welcome', including returning minors. The criteria for receiving care consist of requiring the children to be orphans and of a certain age.⁴⁰⁹

3.1.17 Caste system

3.1.17.1 'Bonded labour' (debt slaves)

In Pakistan, situations exist in which lower social classes perform a kind of modern slave labour that could be regarded as a system of bonded labour (serf labour or serfdom) based on financial debt. Workers perform labour to pay off their debt to the employer, but an amount is always added, such that they can never 'purchase their freedom'. 'Debt slaves' cannot simply flee to escape this situation. They are not free to go wherever they want — quite the contrary. If they run away, there is a risk that any relatives left behind will be mistreated. The workers are often poorly educated and live in disadvantaged, isolated areas (e.g. Balochistan). Because there is no prospect of other work, it usually seems as if there is no other choice. Workers are employed in coal mines, factories, agriculture, football production, brick baking and other jobs.⁴¹⁰

Since the previous reporting period, situations are said to have deteriorated further due to the 2022 floods, which caused many harvests to fail. This created mounting

⁴⁰⁶ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰⁷ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰⁸ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴⁰⁹ Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁴¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 88, September 2023.

debts and left farm workers prey to moneylenders demanding usurious interest rates. This has purportedly driven more people into serf labour.⁴¹¹

In the Global Slavery Index 2023, Pakistan is ranked 18th in the world (out of 160 countries) and 4th in the Asian and South Pacific region. The country with the most slavery is ranked 1st. More than 2.3 million people in Pakistan are said to be in situations of serfdom.⁴¹²

3.1.17.2 *Pakistani government versus bonded labour*

The Pakistani government has criminalised bonded labour, including through the Bonded Labour (Abolition) System Act of 1992. It was used as a base for drafting provincial legislation. Despite these legal instruments and social rights, workers often lack the ability to escape forced labour.⁴¹³

3.1.18 *PTI supporters*

After the violent protests around 9 May 2023, hundreds of PTI supporters were arrested. Some were actually tried in military courts. Others were released again without trial. Those arrested included several senior PTI leaders, including the former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and the PTI secretary-general Asad Umar.⁴¹⁴

In the weeks following the arrests, some PTI leaders announced that they were resigning and purportedly taking leave of politics. They were said to have been forced to resign. One person told the Guardian he had been tortured by military personnel while in custody until he pledged to leave politics.⁴¹⁵

Even after that, PTI supporters were arrested and harassed. Media spoke of crackdowns and raids, particularly in the time leading up to the election of 8 February 2024. PTI supporters were detained for days at a time. For example, more than five thousand people were arrested in Karachi after the *Teen Talwar* rally and subsequent violence. Raids were carried out throughout the city.⁴¹⁶

The authorities also took action against the protests following the elections. The PTI demanded the restoration of their 'stolen mandate' and the release of their leaders, including Imran Khan. On 10 March 2024, protests were held throughout the country. Demonstrators chanted anti-government slogans. In Lahore, the demonstrations became violent. The police beat demonstrators with sticks and shoved them into police vehicles. More than a hundred members throughout the country were arrested during the protests. A large share of them were released the

⁴¹¹ Al Jazeera, *Modern slavery: Pakistan's latest climate change curse*, 1 September 2023.

⁴¹² Global Slavery Index 2023, *Modern slavery in Pakistan - Country Snapshot*, accessed 12 January 2024.

⁴¹³ USDOS, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report – Pakistan*, Prosecution, 2023; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Breaking The Chains: How To Tackle Bonded Labour in Pakistan?*, 14 August 2023.

⁴¹⁴ UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, p. 6), 13 February 2024.

⁴¹⁵ Guardian, *Imran Khan's political games leave him isolated as Pakistan army destroys party*, 3 June 2023; UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, *Politics in Pakistan 2022-24 and upcoming elections*, p. 6), 13 February 2024.

⁴¹⁶ Dawn, *Crackdown on PTI continues as Karachi police pick up 39 more workers*, 1 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

following day. During protests in Lahore in February, dozens of supporters were arrested and detained for a short time.⁴¹⁷

Aleema Khan, Imran Khan's sister, stated that the authorities are systematically suppressing the PTI and its members. Security forces are said to have harassed Khan's relatives and party members. Some election candidates were abducted, harassed and subjected to maltreatment. A number of party leaders were purportedly detained. When they re-emerged a few days later, they declared that they would leave the party and distance themselves from Khan, according to Aleema Khan.⁴¹⁸

The journalist Fouzia Kulsoom Rana claimed that there had been a 'total blackout' of coverage of the PTI in the national media. The party had purportedly been denied permission to hold public meetings. The Pakistani government denied any efforts to sideline the PTI.⁴¹⁹

According to one source, within the current context, the PTI is being suppressed on political grounds by the Pakistani army, security forces and the current government, which is led by the PML-N. They harass PTI leaders and their relatives. This source further noted that a large number of leaders and activists, including women, are in jail or in hiding.⁴²⁰

A more extensive description of the PTI and recent events surrounding the party is presented in 1.1.1 and 1.1.2.

3.1.18.1 *PTI supporters and members abroad*

According to one source, the Pakistani diaspora includes a significant share of the PTI's constituency. In addition to its contributions to fundraising and the management of social media networks, it also engages in lobbying activities in influential capitals. Pakistani embassies in various countries are reportedly keeping a close eye on PTI supporters and leaders. These include individuals who are active on social media and who organise protests outside Pakistani embassies against the ongoing crackdown in Pakistan. These individuals could encounter problems upon returning to the country.⁴²¹

According to various sources, the Pakistani government monitors the social media of minorities and activists, including abroad.⁴²² This applies to the PTI as well. According to another source, there are strong indications that the Pakistani intelligence services are monitoring the activities of PTI leaders and supporters on social media. Any PTI members who speak out against the army in any way are likely to encounter problems upon returning to Pakistan. This source further noted that they (PTI members) do not seem to face any other threats.⁴²³ The factors that

⁴¹⁷ Al Jazeera, *Pakistan police crackdown on PTI protests over alleged rigging in election*, 11 March 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistani protesters block highways to demonstrate against election results*, 12 February 2024; France 24, *Thousands of Khan supporters block highways to protest Pakistan's election results*, 12 February 2024.

⁴¹⁸ Deutsche Welle, *Pakistan: PTI supporters decry pre-election crackdown*, 16 January 2024.

⁴¹⁹ Deutsche Welle, *Pakistan: PTI supporters decry pre-election crackdown*, 16 January 2024.

⁴²⁰ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁴²¹ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁴²² Confidential source: 26 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁴²³ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

lead to 'encountering problems' are not known. It is also not known how often this occurs.

3.1.18.2 *Relatives of PTI members and supporters*

According to Aleema Khan (the sister of Imran Khan) and a confidential source, security forces are said to have harassed Khan's relatives, party leaders and members.⁴²⁴ According to one source, authorities are targeting the relatives of PTI supporters in order to force them to give up the party or surrender to law enforcement agencies. In doing so, they allegedly apply tactics of harassment and intimidation.⁴²⁵ It is not known how often and in which cases this occurs.

3.1.19 *Human rights defenders*

Human rights defenders in Pakistan face risks. They could be subjected to attacks and assault, including extrajudicial killings and violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, sectarian violence, abduction and enforced disappearance, surveillance, threats and judicial harassment.⁴²⁶ It is not known how often and in which cases this occurs.

3.2 **Compliance and violations**

3.2.1 *Freedom of expression*

3.2.1.1 *Monitoring of social media, online media, traditional media and self-censorship (and the successful imposition thereof)*

Internet freedom in general

During the reporting period, internet freedom continued to be restricted. Online activists, dissidents and journalists were often harassed by the government. There were some cases of physical violence and enforced disappearances.⁴²⁷

The Pakistani government conducted digital surveillance during the escalating confrontation between the former prime minister Imran Khan and the military establishment. According to Freedom House, the authorities routinely used internet shutdowns, platform blockages, arrests and harsh sentences to clamp down on unwanted online expression.⁴²⁸

Regulations and authorities: PTA, PECA and other legislation

Several laws limit the rights of internet users. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), which was implemented in August 2016, grants to the government far-reaching censorship powers with regard to internet content. According to the USDOS, the authorities are using the law as a tool to suppress civil society.⁴²⁹ The PECA proposes severe penalties — including up to fourteen years in prison — for

⁴²⁴ Deutsche Welle, *Pakistan: PTI supporters decry pre-election crackdown*, 16 January 2024; Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁴²⁵ Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁴²⁶ Front Line Defenders, *Pakistan, #Pakistan | Front Line Defenders*, accessed 23 April 2024; USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, p. 48, 2024.

⁴²⁷ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, Overview, 2023.

⁴²⁸ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, Overview, 2023.

⁴²⁹ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C5, 2023.

acts of cyber terrorism, hate speech and defamation. The law penalises the creation or dissemination of electronic communications that glorify terrorism or information that may promote religious, ethnic or sectarian hatred. The penalty can range up to seven years' incarceration. Section 20 criminalises online defamation with a maximum prison term of three years, a fine of 1 million rupees (about 3,351 euros) or both. The section on criminal defamation has been used to target journalists, dissidents and victims of sexual harassment. Targets have included journalists who were critical of the state. It is not known how often this has occurred. Fake news has also been criminalised. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is conducting the investigations into the charges.⁴³⁰

Monitoring

The government closely monitors activists, bloggers, journalists and other media workers, as well as ordinary internet users. The government has used a systematic, nationwide system for monitoring and filtering content in order to restrict or block 'illegal' content. This has included material the government considers un-Islamic, pornographic or critical of the state or armed forces.⁴³¹

The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA), the regulatory body for online monitoring, coordinated closely with other ministries in enforcement efforts.⁴³² Companies are obliged to help the government monitor internet users. There is currently no data protection law in Pakistan. As a result, internet service providers, mobile service providers and private companies are not required to maintain or comply with any data protection policy.⁴³³

Content monitoring was not very transparent or verifiable, and observers felt that the government often used vague criteria without proper procedure. Lawsuits have been filed, thus leaving the status of these rules uncertain. In the meantime, the PTA has continued to exercise arbitrary powers to remove and block content.⁴³⁴ According to one source, authorities are closely monitoring social media. There was an instance in which someone posted about the Frontier Corps (FC) on Twitter (now X). He was arrested within ten hours.⁴³⁵ It is not known what was in the post or how long he was detained.

Mobile network shutdown

Around the violence on 9 May 2023 following the arrest of Imran Khan (see 1.1.1.), the mobile network in Pakistan was shut down for four days. Mobile and broadband services outside Imran Khan's home in Lahore were reportedly shut down in March 2023, when the government tried to arrest him.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁰ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C3, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 89, September 2023; Dawn English, YouTube, *What Is The Ambit Of PECA Section 20?*, 6 October 2023.

⁴³¹ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C5, 2023; RSF (Reporters without Borders), *Pakistan*, [Pakistan | RSE](#), accessed 15 April 2024.

⁴³² USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023.

⁴³³ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C6, 2023.

⁴³⁴ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, B3, 2023.

⁴³⁵ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁴³⁶ Dawn, *Pakistan ranked third in the world for imposing internet restrictions*, 25 July 2023; Surfshark, *42 internet restrictions recorded in the first half of 2023*, 19 July 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, A3 and B1, 2023.

The government then restricted internet access and blocked social media platforms to prevent expressions of support for former prime minister Imran Khan.⁴³⁷ For example, on 7 January 2024, access to the internet and major social media platforms was blocked or delayed during an online meeting of the PTI. The same had occurred on 17 December 2023, in anticipation of a digital meeting of PTI.⁴³⁸ The mobile network was also shut down around the elections. As a result, voters sometimes had difficulty finding their way to their polling stations. Only home Wi-Fi was operational.⁴³⁹

Mobile services were intermittently interrupted during the PTI's 'long march' in October 2022.⁴⁴⁰

In addition to the time around the protests of 9 May 2023 (see 1.1.1), temporary mobile network outages have occurred across the country during protests, elections, and religious and national holidays. Safety was often given as an explanation for the interventions.⁴⁴¹

For example, internet services were suspended for a long time for 'security reasons' in Gwadar (Balochistan) and Swat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). In January 2023, internet services in Gwadar were shut down for 10 days following clashes between police and protesters. They were demonstrating against the lack of basic services under the slogan 'Give Gwadar its Rights'. In October 2022, mobile and broadband services were cut off for more than a month in parts of the Swat Valley. As the reason for the disruption, the PTA cited a reported increase in militant groups in the area.⁴⁴²

Social media blocking

Social media were blocked in various ways and at various times. Around the protests on 9 May 2023 (see 1.1.1), access to Twitter (now X), Facebook, Instagram and YouTube was restricted in the country.⁴⁴³ This happened several more times, including around online meetings of the PTI on 17 December 2023 and 7 January 2024.⁴⁴⁴

Access to YouTube was intermittently interrupted in August and September 2022 during the streaming of speeches by Imran Khan. These interruptions took place under a ban on television broadcasting of Khan's speeches imposed by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority in August (PEMRA).⁴⁴⁵

Since the elections, X has been accessible only through VPN connections. The authorities have not given a reason for this. Despite an order of the Islamabad High Court, X has yet to be released. Pakistan's interior minister stated that the decision to ban X in Pakistan was taken in the interest of maintaining national security,

⁴³⁷ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, A3 and B1, 2023.

⁴³⁸ Voice of America (VOA), *Pakistan Restricts Internet Access Amid Rare Opposition Online Rally*, 17 December 2023; Confidential source: 12 January 2024.

⁴³⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁴⁴⁰ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, A3, 2023.

⁴⁴¹ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, A3, 2023; Dawn, *Pakistan ranked third in the world for imposing internet restrictions*, 25 July 2023; Surfshark, *42 internet restrictions recorded in the first half of 2023*, 19 July 2023.

⁴⁴² Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, A3, 2023.

⁴⁴³ Dawn, *Pakistan ranked third in the world for imposing internet restrictions*, 25 July 2023; Surfshark, *42 internet restrictions recorded in the first half of 2023*, 19 July 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, A3 and B1, 2023.

⁴⁴⁴ Voice of America (VOA), *Pakistan Restricts Internet Access Amid Rare Opposition Online Rally*, 17 December 2023; Confidential source: 12 January 2024.

⁴⁴⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, B1, 2023.

maintaining law and order and preserving the integrity of the nation.⁴⁴⁶ At the time of writing, X was still blocked.

In December 2023, religious scholars in Jamia Binoria Town in Karachi issued a fatwa condemning TikTok, categorically declaring its use as 'haram' (banned). The fatwa stated that TikTok is used mainly for illegal activities, such as sharing banned images, videos and music, distributing indecent content and promoting inappropriate humour.⁴⁴⁷

Content blocking

The authorities often blocked content that was critical of Islam or the military, or that posed a threat to national security. They also blocked sites with pornography or nudity and sites that promoted or offered tools for bypassing internet blocking.⁴⁴⁸ Freedom House indicates that the state and other actors have exerted illegal pressure on publishers and producers to remove content. These cases often went unreported. The PTA ordered social media platforms and hosts to remove content it deemed illegal.⁴⁴⁹

Technical attacks on the websites of NGOs, opposition groups and activists were common in Pakistan, although many attacks went unreported.⁴⁵⁰

There have been reports that the government was using surveillance software in the attempt to control or block websites advocating Baloch independence.⁴⁵¹

Punishments and harassment

According to Freedom House, people have often been punished for their online activities and received harsh penalties. During the reporting period, the death penalty was imposed in at least three cases of online blasphemy. It is not known whether these sentences have been executed. In previous cases where the death penalty was imposed, appeals were lodged (and are ongoing) or the sentence was upheld.⁴⁵²

Users faced intimidation, blackmail, hate speech and, in some cases, violence by the state. This was in reaction to online activism, reporting and debate, as well as to apolitical activities online. Freedom House claims that the military routinely abducted individuals because of their reporting or activism on social media.⁴⁵³

Self-censorship

Journalists in Pakistan have faced a wide range of security threats, including death threats, abduction, assault, violence and intimidation. According to the International

⁴⁴⁶ Confidential source: 9 April 2024; VOA, *Pakistan's prolonged ban on X exposes fear of dissent, critics say*, 20 April 2024; Confidential source: 19 April 2024.

⁴⁴⁷ Express Tribune, *Fatwa declares TikTok 'haram', calls for ban over content concerns*, 20 December.

⁴⁴⁸ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, B1, 2023; USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023; RSF, *RSF calls for urgent measures by Pakistan's new government to rebuild press freedom*, 6 March 2024.

⁴⁴⁹ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, B2, 2023.

⁴⁵⁰ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C8, 2023.

⁴⁵¹ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023.

⁴⁵² USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2A, 20 March 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C3, 2023; BBC, *Pakistan blasphemy: Student sentenced to death over Whatsapp messages*, 8 March 2024.

⁴⁵³ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C7, 2023.

Journalists' Network, this has created a culture of fear and self-censorship, thereby restricting reporting on sensitive issues, including human rights violations, religion, blasphemy, the military, separatist groups, women's rights and the rights of marginalised communities, corruption and political repression.⁴⁵⁴

Additional information on this is presented in 3.2.1.4 on journalists and 3.2.1.1 on the monitoring of social media and the internet.

Blasphemy charges due to online statements

Freedom House has reported several criminal prosecutions for blasphemy in which at least three people were given the death penalty. See the section on 'Punishments and harassment' above.⁴⁵⁵

Examples include a man in Lower Dir who was sentenced to death twice in November 2022 for blasphemy. He was also given 21 years in prison for other religious offences on social media. He had shared photos on WhatsApp. In other cases, people have been arrested for their shared videos or posts on Facebook. In April 2023, a woman was arrested for blasphemy after a crowd gathered in front of her house following a viral video of her on social media. Another woman was arrested in Lahore for making viral 'blasphemous' videos. In September 2022, a man was arrested for uploading 'sacrilegious' content to Facebook.⁴⁵⁶ It is not known how many cases are involved.

In December 2022, the FIA's cybercrime department stated that it was working with several religious groups to prosecute blasphemy cases. By December 2022, 62 people had been arrested for blasphemy on social media. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORA) reactivated its Web Evaluation Cell to identify and take action against cases of online blasphemy.⁴⁵⁷

Dissemination of disinformation and fake news

According to Freedom House, there were an increasing number of coordinated and inauthentic accounts manipulating online content and disseminating disinformation. Online journalists and activists, especially those who scrutinised the military or intelligence services, spoke of the existence of state-sponsored 'troll armies' that were deployed to silence dissenting opinions.⁴⁵⁸

3.2.1.2 *Outside Pakistan*

According to various sources, the Pakistani government monitors the social media of minorities and activists, including abroad⁴⁵⁹ (see also 3.1.18 on PTI supporters). Another source had never asked anyone whether this has occurred abroad as well, but was of the opinion that it may occur.⁴⁶⁰ This was not further substantiated.

3.2.1.3 *Right to demonstrate*

⁴⁵⁴ International Journalists' Network, *The dangerous reality for journalists in Pakistan*, 29 June 2023; Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, B4, 2023.

⁴⁵⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C3, 2023.

⁴⁵⁶ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C3, 2023.

⁴⁵⁷ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, C3, 2023; Express Tribune, *LEAs put 62 blasphemers behind bars*, 5 December 2022.

⁴⁵⁸ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2023 - Country Report on Pakistan*, B5, 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 26 March 2024.

⁴⁶⁰ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is enshrined in Article 16 of the Pakistani constitution. This right was significantly restricted by the authorities, according to the International Federation for Human Rights (IFDH) and the HRC. Dissenters and political opponents who participated in peaceful gatherings were often harassed, detained and imprisoned. It is not known how often this happened, how long they were detained and on what grounds. Demonstrations were dispersed violently, and journalists and others were physically attacked. This was done based on colonial laws that are still valid. The 1960 Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (MPO) has also been used several times in the past to restrict the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Holding a demonstration also required applying for a Non-Objection Certificates (NOC). These certificates were not always granted, as was the case for the PTI ahead of the elections.⁴⁶¹

According to Amnesty International, in 2022, the authorities drastically curtailed the right to peaceful assembly by harassing, arresting and detaining critics and political opponents. They also violently dispersed protests and attacked journalists and others.⁴⁶²

Arrests following the demonstrations on 9 May 2023 (see 1.1.1 on political developments) involved lengthy delays in trial proceedings. Court orders demanding the release of protesters who had been arrested were not followed. There were also cases in which suspects disappeared or could not appear in court.⁴⁶³

Following the protests, the parliament passed a resolution calling for the protesters to be tried in military courts under the Pakistan Army Act of 1952. Under Section 2(d) of this law, civilians could be tried in military courts, in violation of due process standards. According to FIDH and HRC, military courts in Pakistan are not independent and are primarily meant to maintain discipline within the armed forces. They are run by military personnel (not judicial officers) with no legal training, court cases are held behind closed doors and rulings are unsubstantiated.⁴⁶⁴ When Imran Khan was arrested again in early August 2023, large-scale protests failed to materialise. According to several experts quoted by the BBC, this was out of fear of retaliation and repression, as had occurred after 9 May 2023.⁴⁶⁵

3.2.1.4 Journalists

As described in the Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan dated September 2022, the media faced intimidation and violence.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR), *Joint submission for the adoption of the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LoIPR) by FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) and HRC (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan)*, United Nations Human Rights Committee - 139th Session, 14 August 2023; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁴⁶² Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2022/23, Pakistan*, 27 March 2023.

⁴⁶³ United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR), *Joint submission for the adoption of the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LoIPR) by FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) and HRC (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan)*, United Nations Human Rights Committee - 139th Session, 14 August 2023.

⁴⁶⁴ United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR), *Joint submission for the adoption of the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LoIPR) by FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) and HRC (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan)*, United Nations Human Rights Committee - 139th Session, 14 August 2023; BBC, *Pakistan: Imran Khan's supporters are silenced but determined*, 8 August 2023.

⁴⁶⁵ BBC, *Pakistan: Imran Khan's supporters are silenced but determined*, 8 August 2023.

⁴⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 87-91, September 2023.

According to the International Journalists' Network, kidnappings, attacks, harassment, arbitrary arrests and murders of journalists have increased since then. No figures were given. Pakistani authorities have stepped up pressure on publishers and media owners to silence voices that are critical of the government.⁴⁶⁷

During the reporting period, journalists in Pakistan faced a broad range of security risks, including death threats, abduction, assault, violence and intimidation. According to a report of the UNESCO observatory, 90 journalists were killed in the country between 2002 and 2022, including five in 2022. The result is a culture of fear and self-censorship, which restricts reporting on critical issues, including human rights violations, corruption and political repression. Despite the safeguards for freedom of expression and press freedom in the Pakistani constitution, legal and institutional barriers often prevent journalists from doing their jobs.⁴⁶⁸ Access to critical or objective information for the Pakistani public has been hampered as journalists increasingly practice self-censorship in their reporting.⁴⁶⁹

The online content of journalists and others is monitored. Additional information on this point is presented in 3.2.1.1.

Arrest of journalists

According to *Reporters Sans Frontières* (RSF), any journalist who crosses the red lines imposed by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) — a division of the intelligence agency — risks becoming the target of thorough surveillance. This may lead to abduction and incarceration in state prisons or less official prisons.⁴⁷⁰ In February 2024, the Pakistani journalist and video blogger Asad Ali Toor was arrested by federal authorities based on posts on social media. He was accused of organising a malicious campaign against the state through his social media platforms. Two days earlier, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) had detained Toor for more than eight hours, questioning him on the same charges, according to his lawyers. Demonstrations were held in front of the Press Club in Islamabad to demand his release. After twenty days, he was released on bail. At the time of writing, he was awaiting trial.⁴⁷¹

Killings of journalists

According to RSF, Pakistan is one of the deadliest countries in the world for journalists. Three to four killings occur each year, often linked to reports of corruption or illegal trafficking and which go completely unpunished. Further, as

⁴⁶⁷ International Journalists' Network, *The dangerous reality for journalists in Pakistan*, 29 June 2023.

⁴⁶⁸ International Journalists' Network, *The dangerous reality for journalists in Pakistan*, 29 June 2023; RSF (Reporters without Borders), *Pakistan*, [Pakistan | RSF](#), accessed 15 April 2024.

⁴⁶⁹ International Journalists' Network, *The dangerous reality for journalists in Pakistan*, 29 June 2023.

⁴⁷⁰ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *Pakistan*, [Pakistan | RSF](#), accessed 8 December 2023; RSF, *RSF calls for urgent measures by Pakistan's new government to rebuild press freedom*, 6 March 2024.

⁴⁷¹ VOA, *Pakistan Releases Journalist on Bail; X Platform Blockade Persists*, 15 March 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistani journalist arrested for social posts against government officials*, 27 February 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024; Dawn, *Journalist Asad Toor released from Adiala Jail after Islamabad court approves bail*, 16 March 2024; VOA, *Pakistan's prolonged ban on X exposes fear of dissent, critics say*, 20 April 2024.

reported by RSF, the intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is purportedly willing to silence journalists.⁴⁷²

In October 2022, the 49-year-old TV journalist Arshad Sharif, who was critical of the Pakistani government, was shot to death by police in Nairobi. This incident was referred to as a case of 'mistaken identity'. Pakistani investigators, however, determined that it was a 'planned killing'. Sharif had been living in exile since he fled the country to avoid detention on charges of sedition. His family claims the government was involved in his murder.⁴⁷³

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On the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, Pakistan rose from place 157 to 150 (from 180).⁴⁷⁴ This increase was not necessarily related to factors within Pakistan and may have been due to changes in other countries.

Other countries

According to various sources, the Pakistani government monitors the social media of minorities and activists, including abroad.⁴⁷⁵ According to one source, fearing problems upon arrival in Pakistan, journalists returning from abroad apply self-censorship. The source had nevertheless not heard of anyone reporting on this.⁴⁷⁶

3.2.2

Freedom of religion and belief

According to the USCIRF, conditions for religious freedom continued to deteriorate in 2022. Members of the Shiite, Ahmadi, Christian, Hindu and Sikh communities lived under constant threat of persecution through strict and discriminatory legislation (e.g. the anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws). There was also increasingly aggressive social discrimination due to an increase in radical Islamic influence. These discriminatory laws have allowed and encouraged radical Islamists to operate under conditions of impunity. According to the USCIRF, their targets in this regard openly consist of religious minorities and individuals of other faiths, including atheists.⁴⁷⁷ The USCIRF also reported that there is often no penalty for those expressing false accusations or committing 'vigilant' violence.⁴⁷⁸ The Pakistani government has sought to tighten blasphemy laws (on this point, see 3.2.3). In February 2023, the human rights organisation HRCP sounded the alarm over situations relating to

⁴⁷² Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *Pakistan*, [Pakistan | RSF](#), accessed 8 December 2023; Al Jazeera Media Institute, *Why is life so dangerous for Pakistani journalists?*, 4 June 2023; VOA, *Prominent Local Journalist Killed in Pakistan*, 14 August 2023.

⁴⁷³ International Journalists' Network, *The dangerous reality for journalists in Pakistan*, 29 June 2023; RSF, *Impunity looms one year after Arshad Sharif's murder in Kenya*, 23 October 2023; Al Jazeera Media Institute, *Why is life so dangerous for Pakistani journalists?*, 4 June 2023; The Guardian, *Pakistani journalist's killing in Kenya 'a pre-meditated murder'*, 9 December 2022.

⁴⁷⁴ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *Pakistan*, [Pakistan | RSF](#), accessed 8 December 2023.

⁴⁷⁵ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 26 March 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁴⁷⁶ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁴⁷⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *2022 annual report - Pakistan*, 2023.

⁴⁷⁸ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 1, December 2023.

religious freedom in Pakistan. It had identified forced conversions, desecration of places of worship and the marginalisation of the Ahmadi community.⁴⁷⁹

3.2.3

Blasphemy

Blasphemy is punishable by death and other severe penalties (e.g. life imprisonment). Blasphemy laws go much further than insults of the Prophet Muhammed. They also specify penalties for insults or disrespect aimed at high-ranking religious personalities. In many cases, accusations of blasphemy were used to settle personal vendettas. Accusations could also lead to lynchings.⁴⁸⁰

Increase in incidents of blasphemy and mob attacks

According to one source, the inflammatory attitude of the TLP and other militant and/or extremist groups has led to a hardening of the climate and an increase in incidents of mob lynching based on blasphemy accusations.⁴⁸¹

According to two sources, vigilant justice occurs, with people taking the law into their own hands and committing lynchings. The perpetrators are often not held accountable. For example, the perpetrators of the Jaranwala attack were soon free on bail (see 3.1.10.1 on Christians).⁴⁸²

Judges are also not exempt from accusations or threats relating to blasphemy. In February 2024, Chief Justice Faes Isa released on bail an Ahmadi who had been accused of blasphemy. Thousands of people then took to the streets of Karachi and online threats (including death threats) ensued against the judge and the person concerned.⁴⁸³

Protection

An official charge of blasphemy must be investigated by the judiciary.⁴⁸⁴ Further information on this point is presented in 3.3.8.4 on fatwas (an accusation of blasphemy can lead to a fatwa), under the heading of protection.

Police seek to protect individuals from mob attacks based on blasphemy accusations, but they do not always intervene. The police sometimes lack the capacity to intervene in a large angry crowd. In some cases, police fear being accused of blasphemy themselves when protecting a victim. In other cases, agents sympathise with blasphemy laws and do not wish to intervene.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁷⁹ Al Jazeera, Pakistan's top rights group raises 'alarm' on religious freedom, 8 February 2023; USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), *2022 annual report - Pakistan*, 2023; USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 1, December 2023.

⁴⁸⁰ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 1, December 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 91, September 2023; HRCF, *Amendments to blasphemy laws create further room for persecution*, 20 January 2023; Context, *Pakistan's WhatsApp death sentence case spotlights blasphemy law*, 18 March 2024.

⁴⁸¹ BBC, *Pakistan woman in Arabic script dress saved from mob claiming blasphemy*, 25 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024

⁴⁸² Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024

⁴⁸³ Wire, *The, Protests, Death Threats Against Pakistan Chief Justice As Bail Granted To Blasphemy Accused*, 24 February 2024; Arab News, *Thousands protest Pakistan Supreme Court minorities ruling*, 23 February 2024.

⁴⁸⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 97-98, September 2023.

⁴⁸⁵ BBC, *Pakistan woman in Arabic script dress saved from mob claiming blasphemy*, 25 February 2024; Guardian, *Mob storms Pakistan police station and lynches man accused of blasphemy*, 12 February 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's blasphemy law: All you need to know*, 18 August 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on*

Additional information on this point is presented in 1.2.5 under the heading 'Protection against mobs' and 3.3.8.4 on protection in case of fatwas (which are often based on accusations of blasphemy).

3.2.3.1 *Blasphemy convictions since 2019*

It is not possible to provide an exhaustive or complete list of all blasphemy convictions or cases since 2019. Figures on blasphemy cases vary, as organisations track numbers based on different sources of information (e.g. media reports, police summaries or prison population). Moreover, not all information is made public. A certain margin should therefore be applied to these figures.

The figures in this section come from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and other sources.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), an organisation that works for the rights of 'marginalised groups', adopts numbers of individuals accused of blasphemy in a legally pending case. The numbers are based primarily on media (or other) reports that are deemed reliable, as well as on other sources. They sometimes also mention figures on the prison population.⁴⁸⁶

The NGO HRCP usually bases its figures on police reports from the various provinces, as well as on reliable sources. The numbers refer to the number of prisoners, which therefore also include individuals who have been convicted.

According to human rights groups, a total of 2,100 people have been accused of blasphemy in Pakistan since 1987, thus covering a period of 37 years. Of these, 40 convicts were said to be on death row in December 2023.⁴⁸⁷

Figures on blasphemy from 2019 (from CSJ and HRCP)

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), an organisation that works for the rights of 'marginalised groups', adopts the following numbers of blasphemy cases. This refers to individuals accused of blasphemy in a legally pending case. It thus does not concern the number of convictions. The numbers are based in part on media (or other) reports that are deemed reliable.⁴⁸⁸

The NGO Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) usually bases its figures on police reports from the various provinces. The numbers refer to the number of prisoners, which therefore also include individuals who have been convicted. Because of the varying research methods, a certain margin must be maintained.

Number of blasphemy cases per year	Information from CSJ	Information from HRCP
2019	Unknown	Unknown ⁴⁸⁹
2020	208 ⁴⁹⁰	586 ⁴⁹¹

Pakistan, pp. 97-98, September 2023; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024; NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024.

⁴⁸⁶ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 8, March 2023.

⁴⁸⁷ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 1, December 2023.

⁴⁸⁸ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 8, March 2023.

⁴⁸⁹ The 2019 HRCP annual report gave no figures on this.

⁴⁹⁰ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 8, March 2023.

⁴⁹¹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HRCP), *State of Human Rights in 2020*, p. 15, 2021.

2021	84 ⁴⁹²	585 ⁴⁹³
2022	171 ⁴⁹⁴	35 ⁴⁹⁵
2023	329 ⁴⁹⁶	Not yet known

Blasphemy figures for 2022

Distribution of blasphemy cases amongst religious groups in 2022

The figures from the CSJ and HRCRP differ because of differences in research methods. It is therefore necessary to maintain a certain margin (see the explanation in the beginning of this section). According to the CSJ, 65 percent of the 171 blasphemy cases in 2022 took place in Punjab. The figures were divided amongst the various religious groups as follows:⁴⁹⁷

Number of blasphemy accusations by religious minority in 2022	Total 171
Muslim	88
Ahmadi	75
Christian	4
Hindu	2
Unknown	2

In its annual report, HRCRP lists the number of blasphemy cases, based on figures from the police in the respective provinces. The following figures are quoted for 2022:⁴⁹⁸

Figures on blasphemy cases by province in 2022	
Punjab	11 ⁴⁹⁹
Sindh	6 ⁵⁰⁰
KP	47 ⁵⁰¹
Balochistan	9 ⁵⁰²
Islamabad	9 ⁵⁰³
Jammu and Kashmir	unknown
GB	unknown

Blasphemy figures for 2023

⁴⁹² Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 8, March 2023.

⁴⁹³ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2021*, p. 18, 2022.

⁴⁹⁴ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 8, March 2023.

⁴⁹⁵ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 20, 2023.

⁴⁹⁶ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024.

⁴⁹⁷ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, pp. 7-8, March 2023.

⁴⁹⁸ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, various pages, 2023.

⁴⁹⁹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 37, 2023.

⁵⁰⁰ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 71, 2023.

⁵⁰¹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 107, 2023.

⁵⁰² Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 171, 2023.

⁵⁰³ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 155, 2023.

The figures from various organisations differ because of differences in research methods. It is therefore necessary to maintain a certain margin (see the explanation in the beginning of this section).

At a briefing before the Senate committee on human rights in October 2023, it was stated that 215 people were in jail on blasphemy charges. The largest number of these (78) were purportedly in Sindh. This was followed by 55 in KP, 18 in Punjab, 1 in Balochistan and 27 in Islamabad. According to the NCHR president, Rabiya Javeri Agha, 179 people were still involved in trials on charges of blasphemy. According to the briefing, the misuse of blasphemy to settle personal accounts continued to be a major concern.⁵⁰⁴

According to a survey of prisons in Punjab, as of 13 December 2023, the province had a total of 552 inmates who had been convicted of blasphemy.⁵⁰⁵

Distribution amongst religious groups in 2023

In 2023, of the 329 people who had been accused, a large number were Muslim (75 percent), and about half of them were Shiites. As in 2022, the highest number were in Punjab. Teachers constituted the professional group with the most accusations. The figures were distributed amongst the various religious groups as follows⁵⁰⁶:

Number of blasphemy accusations, by religious minority in 2023 ⁵⁰⁷	Total 329
Muslim	247
Ahmadi	65
Christian	11
Hindu	1
Unknown	5

The figures were distributed amongst the various provinces as follows:

Number of blasphemy accusations, by province ⁵⁰⁸	Total 329
Punjab	179
Sindh	79
Azad Jammu Kashmir	37
KP	32
Balochistan	1
GB	1

According to figures from the Punjab prison system, 587 people were detained on blasphemy charges as of 13 February 2024. Of these, 515 were on trial, 47 had been convicted, 19 could still appeal and 6 had already exhausted this option.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Dawn, *Over 200 people in jail in blasphemy cases throughout country, Senate body told*, 14 October 2023; USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, December 2023.

⁵⁰⁵ Punjab Prisons, Government of Punjab, *Crime Wise Population Statement*, item 55, 13 December 2023.

⁵⁰⁶ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, pp. 6-7, March 2024.

⁵⁰⁷ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024.

⁵⁰⁸ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 8, March 2024.

⁵⁰⁹ Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024.

Blasphemy figures for 2024

No figures on blasphemy allegations are yet known for 2024.

Penalties imposed for blasphemy

Convictions for blasphemy carried sentences ranging up to the death penalty. In September 2023, four people were sentenced to death for blasphemy. One received an additional fine of 100,000 Pakistani rupees (about 335 euros). Another person was sentenced to seven years' incarceration and a fine of 100,000 rupees. According to the NY Times, at least 330 people were convicted in 180 blasphemy cases in 2023.⁵¹⁰ The death penalty has never been carried out for blasphemy convictions.⁵¹¹

3.2.3.2 *Victims of lynchings for alleged blasphemy since 2019 and distribution amongst religious minority groups*

Increase

According to USCIRF Vice Chair Eric Ueland, 'There has been an increase in blasphemy cases in Pakistan and USCIRF is deeply concerned that the pending amendment to the country's blasphemy law may exacerbate current trends'.⁵¹² According to one source, lynchings and attacks by mobs have increased in recent years. The exact period that is involved is unclear. Such mob attacks are a manifestation of sectarian violence or may arise following accusations of blasphemy. Individuals were not the only targets; other attacks were aimed at the places of worship of minorities, graves and other religious sites.⁵¹³

Individuals committing crimes in a mob were often not held accountable. For example, the perpetrators of the Jaranwala attack were soon free on bail (see also 3.1.10 on Christians).⁵¹⁴

Figures on numbers killed in lynchings vary. According to information obtained by Al Jazeera,⁵¹⁵ at least 85 people have been killed in connection with blasphemy accusations since 1990.⁵¹⁶ According to other information, 89 people have purportedly been killed by mobs since 1947 (at least) for accusations of blasphemy.⁵¹⁷

2019

According to a confidential source, there were no lynchings for alleged blasphemy in 2019.⁵¹⁸

2020

⁵¹⁰ NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024; Arab News, *Pakistan court sentences four to death for blasphemy*, 23 September 2023.

⁵¹¹ Confidential source: 9 April 2024; AP, *Pakistani court sentences man to death and teenager to life in prison for insulting Islam's prophet*, 11 March 2024.

⁵¹² USCIRF, *USCIRF Troubled by Violence Against Christians in Pakistan*, 7 June 2024.

⁵¹³ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's Ahmadis living in fear as graves, religious sites attacked*, 27 September 2023.

⁵¹⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵¹⁵ Local media and investigators.

⁵¹⁶ Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's blasphemy law: All you need to know*, 18 August 2023.

⁵¹⁷ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 1, December 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's blasphemy law: All you need to know*, 18 August 2023; Dawn, *Mob storms police station, lynches 'blasphemy' accused*, 12 February 2023.

⁵¹⁸ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

According to a confidential source, there were no lynchings for alleged blasphemy in 2020.⁵¹⁹

2021

According to a confidential source, there was one lynching for alleged blasphemy in 2021.⁵²⁰

2022

According to HRCP, at least nine lynchings took place in 2022 for accusations of blasphemy. All took place in Sindh.⁵²¹

2023

In 2023, seven or eight people were lynched for accusations of blasphemy.⁵²²

In 2023, the following were amongst the mob attacks (some fatal) that took place in connection with blasphemy accusations⁵²³ (this list is not exhaustive):

- 11 February 2023: A mob dragged Muhammad Waris Issa, suspected of blasphemy, outside a police station in Nankana Sahib (Punjab). He was stripped and beaten to death. The man was a Muslim.⁵²⁴
- 1 July 2023: A man was beaten to death by an angry mob after he delivered a speech at a political rally in Sawaldher (KP). The mob deemed the speech blasphemous.⁵²⁵
- 25 July 2023: A mob vandalised an Ahmadi place of worship in Karachi.⁵²⁶
- 18 August 2023: A mob in Lahore attacked a factory belonging to an Ahmadi accused of blasphemy.⁵²⁷
- 16 August 2023: Hundreds of people attacked a Christian community in Jaranwala, Faisalabad district (Punjab).⁵²⁸

2024

The following were amongst the mob attacks occurring in the first half of 2024 (this list is not exhaustive):

- In Lahore in February 2024, a mob tried to lynch a woman who had Arabic calligraphy on her clothes. The crowd accused her of having Quranic verses on her attire and therefore blasphemy. It turned out to be the word *halwa*

⁵¹⁹ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

⁵²⁰ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

⁵²¹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 22, 2023.

⁵²² Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024; NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024

⁵²³ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2024 – Pakistan, Annual report on the human rights situation in 2023*, 11 January 2024.

⁵²⁴ Guardian, *Mob storms Pakistan police station and lynches man accused of blasphemy*, 12 February 2023; Week Magazine, *Mob storm police station, lynch man accused of blasphemy in Pakistan*, 12 February 2023.

⁵²⁵ Deutsche Welle, *Pakistan mob lynches demonstrator over alleged blasphemy*, 5 July 2023.

⁵²⁶ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2024 – Pakistan, Annual report on the human rights situation in 2023*, 11 January 2024.

⁵²⁷ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2024 – Pakistan, Annual report on the human rights situation in 2023*, 11 January 2024.

⁵²⁸ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2024 – Pakistan, Annual report on the human rights situation in 2023*, 11 January 2024.

(Arabic for 'beautiful'). A policewoman intervened and managed to pull the woman to safety.⁵²⁹

- In Karachi in February 2024, two policemen were taken hostage when about twenty people attacked an Ahmadi place of worship. The building's minarets were destroyed in the process.⁵³⁰
- On 25 May, Nazir (Lazar) Gil Masih, a 74-year-old Christian, was taken from his home by a mob and overpowered. He was accused of desecrating a Quran. He later died of his injuries.⁵³¹
- On 20 June, a mob in KP entered a police station, seized a man being held there and then lynched him on charges of desecrating the Quran. The police station and parked police vehicles were also set on fire.⁵³²

3.2.4 *Monitoring of mosque attendance*

According to several sources, Pakistan does not keep track of whether people visit the mosque.⁵³³ The extent of social control there is not known.

3.3 **Supervision and legal protection**

3.3.1 *Reporting a crime*

Crimes are reported at the police station. The victim must submit the report either orally or in writing. If the declarant cannot read and write, the handling agent can write down the declaration and then read it out loud.⁵³⁴ According to one source, name, CNIC number/details identity, address, name of father (if known) or spouse must be stated.⁵³⁵

The handling officer considers whether the charge is punishable under the Penal Code. If so, the officer prepares a First Information Report (FIR). Each FIR has a number, a year and various times when action was taken on the charges. The officer sends the FIR to senior police officers, and a copy is forwarded to the prosecutor. An Investigative Officer (IO) may be appointed to maintain contact with magistrates. If the report is not a criminal offence, it is not filed in an FIR, but in an official report.⁵³⁶

⁵²⁹ BBC, *Pakistan woman in Arabic script dress saved from mob claiming blasphemy*, 25 February 2024.

⁵³⁰ Voice PK, *Mob Attacks Ahmadiyya Worship Place in Karachi; Demolishes Minaret*, 29 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵³¹ EU Today, *Pakistani Christians Demonstrate in Brussels after Man Dies Following Mob Attack Over Blasphemy Allegations*, 16 June 2024; USCIRF, *USCIRF Troubled by Violence Against Christians in Pakistan*, 7 June 2024

⁵³² Independent, *A Muslim mob in Pakistan torches a police station and lynches a man after accusing him of blasphemy*, 21 June 2024.

⁵³³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024

⁵³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92, September 2023; Center for Peace Development Initiatives Pakistan (CPDI), *First Information Report (FIR)*

(*A Guide for Citizens*), *What_is_an_FIR.pdf* (cpdi-pakistan.org), accessed 15 January 2024.

⁵³⁵ 24justice, *Registering Online FIR in Pakistan*, FIR Online in Pakistan - 24justice.pk, accessed 15 January 2024.

⁵³⁶ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92 September 2023.

Online report

It is becoming increasingly possible to file reports online. For example, Punjab, Sindh, Islamabad, KP and Balochistan offer the opportunity to do so. The KP website asks for a CNIC number for this purpose. The system has yet to be fully implemented, however, and access to the digital system is thus limited. It is not clear when, where and what types of declarations are possible online.⁵³⁷

3.3.2 *Declaration processing, online and regular*

As far as is known, many of the legal proceedings have not changed since the previous reporting period.

According to Pakistani law, all reports of criminal offences must be processed. Everyone has the right to ask a lawyer to ensure that this is observed. This could be done with the help of an NGO. Individuals with political influence are able to hire their own well-qualified lawyers.⁵³⁸

According to one source, whether reports are handled sufficiently expeditiously depends on 'the education, knowledge of the law, sense of justice and sense of duty of the relevant police officer'.⁵³⁹ According to other sources, it depends on the status, power and finances of the person submitting the complaint.⁵⁴⁰

The handling IO is the person who has the most influence on the processing of the report. This officer must later write a conclusion on the FIR and can include other comments in it (e.g. 'this is fraud' or 'this is intended purely as harassment'). Arbitrariness on the part of the handling agent thus plays a major role in the processing of the complaint.⁵⁴¹

The declarant receives a written acknowledgement from the FIR in the form of a copy. According to one source, it is quite easy to have FIRs compiled based on false information. In such cases, the FIR is entered correctly, but the content is not correct. For example, this occurs in the case of fabricated charges against Ahmadis. It is purportedly also easy to obtain a declaration through bribery, threats, political influence or personal relationships.⁵⁴²

Review of the FIR

Each FIR has a number. The FIR is a public document and, by law, it should be open to inspection. In practice, however, this may not be the case. As a rule, FIRs are public, but they are not published. Public does not mean online. In some cases, they

⁵³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92, September 2023; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, Register online FIR, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Police (kppolice.gov.pk) and - PAS (kppolice.gov.pk), accessed 15 January 2024; 24justice, *Registering Online FIR in Pakistan*, FIR Online in Pakistan - 24justice.pk, accessed 15 January 2024; Zameen blog, *How to File an FIR in Pakistan*, 13 July 2022, accessed 20 June 2024.

⁵³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92-93, September 2023.

⁵³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92 September 2023

⁵⁴⁰ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024

⁵⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92 September 2023

⁵⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 92, September 2023; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

are shown to third parties upon special request. According to one source, it is possible to go to the police station and request inspection of a given FIR.⁵⁴³

It is unclear whether it is possible to view FIRs online. According to a law firm in Lahore, FIRs can be viewed on the Pakistan Citizen's Portal⁵⁴⁴ after entering a CNIC number. This nevertheless does not apply for all FIRs. Some are said to be confidential and not open to the public.⁵⁴⁵ It is not clear which FIRs are and are not public. According to a confidential source, there are no confidential FIRs.⁵⁴⁶

According to the Punjab police website, copies of FIRs can be requested. Requirements for such requests include a CNIC number, underlying documents and the reason for the request.⁵⁴⁷ It is not clear whether requests can be refused or how such applications proceed.

3.3.3 *Course and outcome of investigation*

During the investigation, the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been made are both kept informed of its progress and have free access to the police station. The IO can also maintain informal contact. The complainant can await a report in another country. The person against whom the complaint is made must remain within the jurisdiction.⁵⁴⁸ It is not clear what happens if the accused does not comply.

3.3.4 *Possibilities for protection by authorities*

If the police refuse to take up a complaint, there are several opportunities to seek protection. Victims can file complaints, or a justice of the peace may be appointed to take over the case. It is not clear to whom such complaints should be made. Many complainants seek the assistance of people with political influence (e.g. MPs or senior government officials). In many cases, such possibilities are obtained through bribery (e.g. from the IO or high-ranking officials). Legal action is also possible through the Code of Criminal Procedure (CRPC).⁵⁴⁹

3.3.5 *Seeking protection from authorities in practice*

Obtaining protection is often a financial issue. Hiring a good lawyer increases the likelihood of protection. There is no free legal aid in Pakistan. The complainant must pay for everything, including the transport of witnesses and the police.⁵⁵⁰ According to one source, it is difficult for a person who lacks funds to obtain protection and

⁵⁴³ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92, September 2023.

⁵⁴⁴ <https://web.citizenportal.gov.pk/>

⁵⁴⁵ Nazia Law Associates in Lahore, Online FIR Check by CNIC? What is basic Process?, 23 March 2023; (42) Online FIR Check by CNIC? What is basic Process? | LinkedIn; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 92, September 2023.

⁵⁴⁶ Confidential source: 14 May 2024.

⁵⁴⁷ Punjab Police Khidmat Markaz, *Our Services – Copy of FIR*, [Our Services \(punjab.gov.pk\)](https://punjab.gov.pk/), accessed 15 January 2024.

⁵⁴⁸ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 92, September 2023.

⁵⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 93, September 2023; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁵⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 93, September 2023.

receive justice.⁵⁵¹ According to one source, legal aid in rural areas is worse than it is in urban areas. In general, the more isolated the area, the more difficult access to legal protection is likely to be.⁵⁵²

According to the USDOS human rights report, many lower courts are corrupt, inefficient and susceptible to pressure from wealthy individuals and influential religious or political figures. There have been reports of staff members of lower courts demanding payment to facilitate administrative procedures.⁵⁵³

3.3.6 *The role of NGOs and international organisations in protection*

To some extent, NGOs and international organisations can help in obtaining protection. For example, they may provide legal aid, seek publicity in high-profile cases or organise press conferences. According to one source, however, these organisations have limited financial resources, and such assistance is often provided only by young, inexperienced lawyers.⁵⁵⁴

3.3.7 *Legislation*

3.3.7.1 *Amendments to blasphemy legislation since the previous Country of Origin Information Report*

For general information on blasphemy laws in Pakistan, see the September 2022 General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan.⁵⁵⁵ This General Country of Origin Information Report addresses developments occurring since then.

Blasphemy carries severe penalties, including death or life imprisonment. This goes much further than insults to the Prophet Muhammed. It extends to other expressions that could be deemed insulting to Islam.⁵⁵⁶

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are enshrined in Article 295 of the Penal Code.⁵⁵⁷ Article 295c states the following: 'Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine'.⁵⁵⁸

The death penalty has never been carried out for blasphemy convictions.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 93, September 2023.

⁵⁵² Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁵⁵³ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1E and 4, 20 March 2023.

⁵⁵⁴ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 93, September 2023.

⁵⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 98 and 99, September 2023.

⁵⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 98, September 2023.

⁵⁵⁷ [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act XLV of 1860\) \(pakistanpenalcode.org\)](https://www.pakistanpenalcode.org/act-xlv-of-1860/) accessed 16 January 2024.

⁵⁵⁸ [Pakistan Penal Code \(Act XLV of 1860\) \(pakistanpenalcode.org\)](https://www.pakistanpenalcode.org/act-xlv-of-1860/) accessed 16 January 2024.

⁵⁵⁹ Guardian, *Woman sentenced to death in Pakistan over 'blasphemous' WhatsApp activity*, 19 January 2022; NDTV, *Pak Student Sentenced To Death For "Blasphemy" Over WhatsApp Messages*, 9 March 2024.

The following is an overview of penalties under the blasphemy legislation:⁵⁶⁰

Article 295 - Injuring or defiling place of worship, with Intent to insult the religion of any class: Up to 2 years in prison, or a fine, or both
 Article 295A - Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting Its religion or religious beliefs: Up to 10 years in prison, or a fine, or both
 Article 295B - Defiling, etc., of Holy Qur'an: Life imprisonment
 Article 295C - Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet: Death or life imprisonment and a fine
 Article 298 - Uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings: One year in prison, or a fine, or both
 Article 298A - Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages: Up to 3 years in prison, or a fine, or both
 Article 298B - Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places: Up to 3 years in prison and a fine
 Article 298C - Person of Quadiani [Ahmadi] group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith: Up to 3 years in prison and a fine

Amendments to blasphemy legislation

On 17 January 2023, the Pakistani parliament passed the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2023. This bill constitutes an amendment to Section 298A of the Blasphemy Act. The article criminalises insults to or disrespect of religious persons – including the family of Prophet Muhammad, his wives and companions and the four caliphs. The draft bill was passed anonymously, and only 15 MPs were present. The amendment proposal increased the penalty in Section 298A to 'life imprisonment which shall not be less than 10 years'. It also amends the Criminal Procedure Act to eliminate the possibility of bail and specify that trials are to take place before a higher rather than a lower court. The bill was passed by the Senate in August 2023. The president must sign the law before it can take effect. In August, he sent the law back.⁵⁶¹ The status of the amendment is not clear. According to a confidential source, the amendment has not yet been formalised.⁵⁶²

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed deep concern over the bill. While the stated aim of the bill is to curb sectarian violence, the HRCP was of the opinion that it would exacerbate the level of threat to Pakistan's vulnerable religious minorities. Given the application of such laws in the past, the HRCP was of the opinion that the law was likely to be used disproportionately against religious minorities and other religious movements. The HRCP feared that increasing the penalty for alleged blasphemy would lead to more abuse of the law to fight personal vendettas.⁵⁶³ The USCIRF was also of the opinion that the Pakistani government has

⁵⁶⁰ UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Shia Muslims*, July 2021.

⁵⁶¹ Dawn, *President Alvi returns over a dozen bills*, 16 August 2023; Library of Congress, *Pakistan: Amendment to Blasphemy Law Passes in Lower House of Parliament*, 14 February 2024; NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024; Dawn, *Senate passes bill to ramp up punishment for blasphemy to at least 10 years*, 8 August 2023; USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 2, December 2023; USCIRF, USCIRF Troubled by Violence Against Christians in Pakistan, 7 June 2024

⁵⁶² Confidential source: 14 May 2024.

⁵⁶³ HRCP, *Amendments to blasphemy laws create further room for persecution*, 20 January 2023.

made attempts to strengthen legislation rather than taking steps to reduce violence.⁵⁶⁴

On 22 July 2020, the Punjab provincial assembly passed the *Tahafuz-e-Bunyard Islam* (Protection of Islam) Act. The purpose of the law was to stop the printing or publishing of religiously undesirable publications. The legislation was aimed mainly at preventing the defamation of and insults to the Prophet Muhammed. In doing so, the law addresses the religious sensitivities of Sunnis in Pakistan. The law grants far-reaching powers to the Directorate-General of Public Relations (DGPR), the communication arm of the Punjab provincial government. The DGPR is intended to guard against violations of the law and ensure that publishers and media follow the law. The institution may ban the printing, import or publication of a book if it determines that the book poses a threat to the national interest and to cultural, religious and sectarian⁵⁶⁵ harmony. The categories are not clearly defined and leave room for ambiguity. The DGPR has the right to enter the offices of publishers or media outlets without invitation, and it can confiscate any publication before or after printing. Violation of the law carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a maximum fine of 500,000 Pakistani rupees (about 1,675 euros). According to some sources, the law has entered into force.⁵⁶⁶ The law applies only in Punjab.

3.3.7.2 *Amendments to other legislation relating to religious groups (since the previous Country of Origin Information Report)*

As far as is known, there have been no amendments to other legislation of special interest to religious groups.

3.3.8 *Judicial process*

3.3.8.1 *Access to lawyers*

In Pakistan, by law, an accused has the right to a lawyer. In practice, however, this is usually not the case. If someone is taken into custody incommunicado without the knowledge of others, it is not possible to contact a lawyer. This can be done only if someone else knows that the person has been detained and where the person is. In addition, because it is not common to have a lawyer, the step of hiring a lawyer is simply not taken.⁵⁶⁷ As a result, few detainees are represented by a lawyer. It is not known how many there are. As a rule, the state must provide a lawyer. According to one source, such *pro bono* lawyers often do not have much experience. Many individuals do not have enough money to pay for a better lawyer.⁵⁶⁸ There are NGOs that provide free legal advice.⁵⁶⁹ There are not many of them, however, and, as far as is known, people who cannot read and write are unlikely to know about them.

⁵⁶⁴ USCIRF, *Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious Freedom in Pakistan*, p. 1, December 2023.

⁵⁶⁵ In Pakistan, religious movements (including the larger ones) are known as sects.

⁵⁶⁶ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Institute of South Asian Studies – National University of Singapore, *Sectarianism and Censorship in Pakistan: The Punjab Tahaffuz-e-Bunyard-e-Islam Bill 2020*, 9 October 2020; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan, p. 94, September 2023.

⁵⁶⁸ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁵⁶⁹ For example, see [Free Legal Aid in Pakistan \(ngobase.org\)](https://ngobase.org/), accessed 23 January 2024 [Legal Aid and Assistance - Legal Aid Society \(las.org.pk\)](https://las.org.pk/), accessed 24 January 2024.

3.3.8.2 *Consulting the registers of various bar associations*

Working as a lawyer in Pakistan requires membership of the Pakistan Bar Council. This is the umbrella organisation that covers the various provincial bar councils. These councils subsequently cover associations at the district level. Provincial bar councils issue permits for all levels.⁵⁷⁰

The websites of the Pakistan Bar Council, the Islamabad Bar Council and the Lahore Bar Association do not offer facilities for visitors who are not members to review cases (current or pending) online.⁵⁷¹ According to one source, the website is intended only for verifying who is registered with the respective bar council.⁵⁷²

3.3.8.3 Divorces and mixed marriages

In the previous General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan dated September 2022, the procedures concerning divorce and the circumstances surrounding mixed marriages are described in 2.1.10 and 3.3.8.⁵⁷³

During the reporting period, a court in Sindh issued a relevant ruling on divorce. In the process, a man was sentenced to three years in prison and a fine for 'sodomising'⁵⁷⁴ his wife against her will. In the media, the ruling was referred to as a 'landmark conviction on marital rape'. The man was found guilty under Section 377 on 'unnatural offences' of the Pakistan Penal Code. The wife's lawyer reasoned that, following an amendment to Section 375 in 2021, sodomy falls under the definition of rape (within marriage).⁵⁷⁵

For rulings concerning the legislation on mixed marriages (when one of the spouses does not have Pakistani citizenship), see 2.3.

3.3.8.4 *Fatwas*

Fatwas in general

The September 2022 General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan provides information on fatwas (see pages 96 and 97).⁵⁷⁶ No information has been found that gives reason to believe that those situations have changed.

Who pronounces fatwas

⁵⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 94, September 2023.

⁵⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 95, September 2023; <http://pakistanbarcouncil.org/>, <http://www.lahorebarassociation.pk/>, <https://iba.org.pk/>, accessed 24 January 2024; See [Judgments Links \(iba.org.pk\)](#) with links to resources including the online registers of federal supreme court cases [Judgment Search - Supreme Court of Pakistan](#) and the high court of Sindh [Online Case Hearing Details \(peshawarhighcourt.gov.pk\)](#), accessed 24 January 2024.

⁵⁷² Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁵⁷³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 41-43 and 95-96, September 2023.

⁵⁷⁴ This refers to anal intercourse.

⁵⁷⁵ Dawn Images, *Women across Pakistan are celebrating a marital rape case – here's why*, 24 January 2024; The Independent, *Man jailed for marital rape in landmark verdict in Pakistan*, 22 January 2024.

⁵⁷⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 96-97, September 2023.

A fatwa is a non-binding opinion, interpretation or academic opinion on an issue within the Sharia,⁵⁷⁷ rendered by a suitably qualified legal scholar. Fatwas are usually issued in response to queries from individuals or Islamic courts. No records are kept of exactly who issues fatwas.⁵⁷⁸ According to various sources, this could include a 'qualified legal scholar known as a mufti', a 'religious authority' or a 'recognised expert on Islamic law'.⁵⁷⁹ The *Dar-ul-Ifta*,⁵⁸⁰ a religious authority who explains the Sharia, can also issue fatwas. Muftis are part of the Dar-ul-Ifta.⁵⁸¹ According to one source, the federal Sharia court can issue fatwas.⁵⁸² The Council for Islamic Ideology⁵⁸³ purportedly also does this, although it does not fall under its mandate.⁵⁸⁴ According to one source, any Islamic scholar can issue an opinion on Sharia or issue a fatwa. If a mufti is not available, another person (e.g. a maulana or a malvi⁵⁸⁵) can do it. There are also fatwa centres.⁵⁸⁶

According to the official definition, therefore, a fatwa does not constitute a legal or religious basis for an accusation of blasphemy. According to one source, fatwas are opinions and cannot be used as evidence by the police or in a court case. In everyday parlance, however, a call to kill someone is often referred to as a fatwa.⁵⁸⁷

It is not known who can issue a fatwa with a death sentence. It is also not known how much value is attached to a fatwa or death sentence issued by a person other than a mufti.

In general, fatwas are not considered binding, although they are considered authoritative.⁵⁸⁸

Information on the procedure for issuing a fatwa is presented in the previous Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan (pages 96 and 97).⁵⁸⁹

Publication of fatwas

⁵⁷⁷ Islamic law.

⁵⁷⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 96, September 2023.

⁵⁷⁹ Larousse, Dictionnaire de la langue française, *fatwa*, <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/fatwa/32988>, accessed 22 January 2024; Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. 'fatwa'. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 29 Sep. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fatwa>. Accessed 22 January 2024; Musulmanes andaluces, *Qué es una fatwa?*, [Pagina nueva 1 \(musulmanesandaluces.org\)](https://www.musulmanesandaluces.org/), accessed 22 January 2024.

⁵⁸⁰ The Dar-ul-Ifta renders opinions on how Sharia can be interpreted in relation to the questions presented. It can also be referred to as the institute of Islamic jurisprudence.

⁵⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 96, September 2023.

⁵⁸² Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵⁸³ This is a constitutional body responsible for providing legal advice on Islamic issues to the government and parliament.

⁵⁸⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵⁸⁵ A maulana has usually completed a religious education, and a malvi usually has a lower level of education, if any at all.

⁵⁸⁶ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁵⁸⁷ Geo France, *Qu'est-ce qu'une fatwa?*, 18 August 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 97, September 2023.

⁵⁸⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 96, September 2023.

⁵⁸⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 96-97, September 2023.

There have been cases of fatwas issued by clerics targeting individuals. In some instances, a cleric would use the mosque loudspeaker to make an announcement or call about a particular person or deed. Based on such a call, third parties could file charges with the police (e.g. for theft or blasphemy). Blasphemy cases can also arise based on public instigation, when a mob decides to take the law into its own hands and goes in search of the person in question. In most cases, an accused person then receives no official evidence of the accusation, except when an official charge has been filed with the police.⁵⁹⁰ A fatwa can be written down in different forms. According to one source, a fatwa should be in a formal format: first the person's question, then the opinion according to the Quran. The question and the opinion should be published together, so that it is clear which answer belongs to which question. They should be inextricably linked on a newspaper page or on a website so that nothing can be changed. Some clerics nevertheless use a format other than the official one. Pakistani law does not address this. There are also modern forms of fatwas, including websites where questions can be put to clerics. One example is the British Fatwa Council.⁵⁹¹

In general, fatwas can be announced by a mosque or by a group of clerics. They are registered in a book and have a registration number.⁵⁹²

Form of fatwas

Pakistani law includes nothing about the form of fatwas in general. The most common form is a question with an opinion according to Islam. They can be published in a newspaper or on a website. Some clerics nevertheless use a different format. According to one source, a fatwa has the following details: name, father's name, CNIC, address, question, answer. The paper on which it is written is stamped.⁵⁹³ This does not concern fatwas with death sentences.

Notice of a fatwa against oneself

Individuals can learn of fatwas against themselves in several ways. When an official charge has been filed with the police, it is communicated. It is not known how this is done. In contrast, blasphemy cases arising based on public instigation can result in a fatwa in which a mob decides to take the law into its own hands. Obviously, no official proof of this is received. The person in question usually learns by word of mouth that a mob is on its way.⁵⁹⁴

Who issues fatwas with death sentences

Although a fatwa does not constitute a legal or religious basis for an accusation of blasphemy, in everyday parlance, a call to kill someone based on a blasphemy accusation is often referred to as a fatwa.⁵⁹⁵

According to one source, extremist groups usually use fatwas against people whose thinking they regard as not being in line with their version of Islam. In most cases,

⁵⁹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 97, September 2023.

⁵⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 96-97, September 2023.

⁵⁹² Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵⁹³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 97, September 2023.

⁵⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 97, September 2023; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁵⁹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 96-97, September 2023.

such fatwas are issued for reasons other than religious ones. Fatwas are most commonly used by Sunnis against religious minorities or other religious movements. In the past, there have been a few cases — a small number of which have taken place in Pakistan — in which Shiite clerics have issued fatwas against Sunnis.⁵⁹⁶ One example of a non-religious reason could be retaliation.

According to one source, the reality of issuing a fatwa with a death sentence is complex. In many cases, there is no formal charge.⁵⁹⁷ According to several sources, it is against the law to issue a fatwa with a death sentence. These laws include the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA, Section 6) and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA, Section 20). In addition, such fatwas have been said to be *haram* (forbidden), and a statement was issued on the subject stating that 'Islam never allows killing anyone'.⁵⁹⁸ It is not known who issued this statement or how authoritative it is.

It is not known how many fatwas with death sentences are issued and whether any action is taken against them.

Different currents

According to some sources, fatwas occur amongst both Sunnis and Shiites, but the vast majority involve Sunnis against Shias. Ahmadis would not issue fatwas with death sentences. They are usually victims of this practice themselves.⁵⁹⁹

Fatwas with death sentences since 2019 (and regions)

According to one source, there has recently been an increase in fatwas with death sentences, along with a gradual increase since 2012. Such fatwas are more common in certain regions, including Quetta, Jiglot and Aliabad in GB and Layyah and Jhangh in southern Punjab. This source noted that fatwas with death sentences have been widely issued in these areas.⁶⁰⁰ It is not known how many fatwas were involved or how large the increase has been.

Numbers of fatwa killings in recent years

It is not known how many people have been killed in recent years as a result of a fatwa, whether with or without a death sentence. It is known, however, that seven or eight people were killed by mobs in 2023 following blasphemy accusations⁶⁰¹ (see 3.2.3.2 on mob killings).

Fake fatwas

A fake fatwa can take different forms. For example, it could be a fatwa that was not drafted by an Islamic cleric. Alternatively, it could be a fake document containing a fatwa that was never issued. Other forms are conceivable as well. According to one source, it is possible that fake fatwas are being sold on paper, but it is also possible that they actually exist.⁶⁰² According to another source, fatwas do exist on paper,

⁵⁹⁶ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁵⁹⁷ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁵⁹⁸ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; [Anti-Terrorism-Act-1997.pdf \(nacta.gov.pk\)](#), accessed 8 April 2024; [Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 \(pakistancode.gov.pk\)](#), accessed 8 April 2024.

⁵⁹⁹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁰⁰ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁰¹ NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024; Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), *Human Rights Observer 2023*, p. 7, March 2024.

⁶⁰² Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

but most are fake.⁶⁰³ A subsequent source had heard of the existence of fake fatwas, as well as forged FIRs.⁶⁰⁴ It is not clear whether there is a difference for fatwas with death sentences.

Fatwas in local (or other) newspapers

According to some sources, a fatwa with a death sentence itself is not published in a local newspaper as it is against the law. The news about it, however, can be published.⁶⁰⁵ According to another source, publication of a fatwa against a person in a newspaper is done on non-*bona fide* grounds (e.g. to punish someone). This is purportedly an illegal activity.⁶⁰⁶

According to one source, it is illegal to publish a fatwa with a death sentence on a piece of paper.⁶⁰⁷

Fatwas published fraudulently in local (or other) newspapers?

According to one source, it is very easy to get a journalist to publish an article in exchange for payment. Journalists are extremely underpaid and need money to survive.⁶⁰⁸ This refers to an article, and not to the actual fatwa (see also 3.3.13 and 2.2.4.1). It is not known what the risk is when such an article is published.

Protection

Fatwas (including those with death sentences) can be issued based on accusations of blasphemy.

When a person is accused of blasphemy, the government may respond. An official charge of blasphemy must be investigated by the judiciary. The authorities can also protect a person from the mob, provided they are on the scene in time. In many cases, however, lynchings resulting from blasphemy allegations, fake news or false rumours arise spontaneously and escalate very quickly. The police do not always intervene, often for fear that they themselves will be seen as blasphemers if they prevent the lynching. This is because a fatwa is a religious recommendation. In some cases, it is also difficult to intervene, as the crowd is too large or overwhelming. According to one source, the police are sometimes helpless against mobs. In addition, police officers may personally be supporters of blasphemy laws. In some cases, the accused has been taken from the police station and killed. One example is the storming of a police station in Warburton, Nankana Sahib, 80 kilometres from Lahore in Punjab. The mob dragged a blasphemy suspect, Waris Issa, outside the police station. He was stripped and beaten to death. In another incident, a police station was set on fire. In the incident involving Arabic calligraphy on clothing in Lahore (see 3.2.3.2), the police made the woman apologise and state that she was a Sunni Muslim. According to one source, it sends the wrong message, even though this saved the woman. According to another source, the police do nothing but provide 'lip service'.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰³ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁶⁰⁴ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁰⁵ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁰⁶ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁶⁰⁷ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁶⁰⁸ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 97-98, September 2023; Guardian, *Mob storms Pakistan police station and lynches man accused of blasphemy*, 12 February 2023; Week Magazine, *Mob storm police station, lynch man accused of blasphemy in Pakistan*, 12 February 2023; Confidential source: 9 April 2024; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's blasphemy law: All you need to know*, 18 August 2023; Confidential

During the reporting period, lynchings took place as a result of blasphemy accusations. Additional information on this point is presented in 3.2.3.2.

3.3.9 *Maltreatment and torture*

The Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act was passed in 2022. The law is intended to provide protection to persons in custody against all forms of torture by public servants. Although experts state that the law was needed, there are demonstrable shortcomings. The law is not always applied in practice, and there is a need for a reliable implementation mechanism. For example, filing a First Information Report (FIR) for torture is purportedly so complicated that it is almost impossible for underprivileged individuals to file reports. Their torturers are therefore unlikely to experience any true consequences. There is purportedly impunity for government torture. In addition, individuals who report crimes are said to be at risk of being punished themselves (possibly multiple times).⁶¹⁰

3.3.10 *Unlawful appropriation of land (land grabbing)*

In 2023, Pakistan ranked 104th out of 129 on the International Property Index, which measures how property rights are respected in countries. In 2011, the country was ranked 111th. It is not known whether the shift was caused by changes in Pakistan itself or in other countries on the list.

According to one source, land grabbing is very widespread in Pakistan, and there are said to be daily reports of it in the press. The victims of land grabbing are usually poor, illiterate people. Pakistani law provides legal means to stop land grabbing, and the police, magistrates and the Land Revenue Department have a mandate to stop land grabbing. It is nevertheless difficult for someone who has no money and who cannot read to take advantage of these means.⁶¹¹

According to one source, the government itself (including the military) is guilty of land grabbing. This happens in rural areas, as well as in the development of urban projects.⁶¹²

3.3.10.1 *Land grabbing by region*

Punjab

source: 1 March 2024; NY Times, *Blasphemy Is a Crime in Pakistan. Mobs Are Delivering the Verdicts*, 2 March 2024.

⁶¹⁰ Friday Times, *Custodial Torture Act: The Good, Bad & The Paradoxical*, 10 February 2023; Paradigm Shift, *The Notorious Practice of Custodial Torture in Pakistan*, 23 July 2023; Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, pp. 260-261 and 17, 2023. Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (TI), *BTI 2024 Country Report on Pakistan*, p. 13, 2024; [62fcce84e1c58_437.pdf \(na.gov.pk\)](https://na.gov.pk/62fcce84e1c58_437.pdf), accessed 8 April 2024.

⁶¹¹ International Property Rights Index 2023, Pakistan, [Pakistan \(internationalpropertyrightsindex.org\)](https://internationalpropertyrightsindex.org) 1st place indicates the best results; 129th the poorest; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 101-102, September 2023; Arkaa Consultants, *Land Grabbing in Pakistan- Laws & Prevention Against Qabza Mafia*, 30 September 2022.

⁶¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 101, September 2023.

According to the HCRP, in 2022, blasphemy legislation was used in South Punjab to intimidate Christian and Hindu families in the process of land grabbing.⁶¹³

According to the World is One News (WION) medium, which is based in New Delhi, the Pakistani army has appropriated more than four hundred acres of land in Punjab, allegedly for a food-security project. Pakistani activists claim that the land taken was barren and could not be used for agricultural purposes.⁶¹⁴

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB)

Land grabbing has been a problem for years in GB. Protests against this practice were held in December 2022.⁶¹⁵

No information was found about the other provinces.

Seasonal

According to some scientists, seasonal land grabbing also occurs. Each year, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs purportedly issues special ten-day hunting licences to members of royal families from the Gulf states. They are said to hunt a particular species of bird.⁶¹⁶ This is temporary, however, and only during hunting season.

- 3.3.10.2 *Relevant developments since the previous Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan dated September 2022*
No information has been found that gives reason to believe that situations related to land grabbing have changed.

- 3.3.11 *Enforced disappearances and abductions*
Abductions and enforced disappearances of individuals took place throughout the country.⁶¹⁷

Most enforced disappearances took place in Balochistan and KP. In the periphery of Pakistan (e.g. Balochistan, North Waziristan and the former FATA), army-backed enforced disappearances are said to be a means of curbing nationalist resistance groups. This created tensions between the centre and the periphery of the country. Many Baloch and Pashtun activists have been missing for years, with no news about their welfare. It is not known how many people are involved. Members of nationalist, separatist and leftist groups have traditionally been the most likely targets of enforced disappearances.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹³ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, pp. 40 and 273, 2023.

⁶¹⁴ *World is One News* (WION), You Tube, *Pakistan army grabs government land to grow crops*, 25 September 2023.

⁶¹⁵ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, pp. 203 and 218, 2023.

⁶¹⁶ ResearchGate, *Transnational Seasonal Land Grabbing in Pakistan: Power Positions and Resistance*, December 2021, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*.

⁶¹⁷ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1b, pp. 3-4, 20 March 2023; Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, pp. 129 and 135, 2023; Dawn, *51 more enforced disappearances in 2023 bring overall figure to 3120*, 30 December 2023.

⁶¹⁸ New Arab, 'A looming threat': In Pakistan, enforced disappearances silence dissent, 23 July 2023.

Numbers

According to data from the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances⁶¹⁹ (COIED), more than eight thousand people have been victims of illegal abductions since 2001. According to various sources, however, the COIED figures are not correct, and there were more cases than those reported.⁶²⁰

According to the HRCP, Balochistan has the highest percentage of individuals still unaccounted for: 75 percent of the total. Baloch students have also disappeared from other provinces.⁶²¹

Numbers by province in 2023

According to the NGO Defence of Human Rights (DHR), there were 51 new cases of enforced disappearance in Pakistan in 2023. This brought the total to 3,120.⁶²² ⁶²³ It is not clear to which period this refers or why this figure does not correspond to the table below.

According to the DHR, the numbers of enforced disappearances per region are as follows:

Provinces	Disappeared	Released	Traced	Killed extrajudicially	Total
Balochistan	67	12	2	1	82
KP	792	121	151	27	1,091
Punjab	326	343	76	46	791
Sindh	134	70	8	10	222
Islamabad	47	32	7	3	89
Jammu and Kashmir	20	17	2	1	40
Total	1,386	595	246	88	2,315

Source:⁶²⁴

According to the HRCP, the numbers of enforced disappearances by province in the period 2011–2022 are as follows:

Province	Number reported since 2011	Returned	Internment centre and prison	Killed	Found/ traced	Ongoing cases as of 31 Dec 2023
Punjab	1,551	772	263	68	1,103	257
Sindh	1,757	758	305	6	1,124	174
KP	3,369	595	937	66	1,598	1,334
Balochistan	2,115	1,477	20	35	1,532	375

⁶¹⁹ [About Us – COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES \(coied.pk\)](https://coied.pk/)

⁶²⁰ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1e, p. 16, 20 March 2023; New Arab, *A looming threat: In Pakistan, enforced disappearances silence dissent*, 23 July 2023.

⁶²¹ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, pp. 129 and 135, 2023.

⁶²² Dawn, *51 more enforced disappearances in 2023 bring overall figure to 3120*, 30 December 2023.

⁶²³ The website of the DHRPK is not accessible. <https://dhrpk.com>

⁶²⁴ Dawn, *51 more enforced disappearances in 2023 bring overall figure to 3120*, 30 December 2023.

Islamabad	338	167	55	9	231	48
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	64	11	16	2	29	11
GB	9	-	1	-	1	3
Total	9,203	13,780	1,597	241	5,618	2,202

SOURCE: Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*.⁶²⁵

PLEASE NOTE: The tables indicate the cases in which it has been found out what happened to the disappeared person. Of the remaining cases, the underlying facts have not been discovered, or they have been closed for other reasons (e.g. withdrawn).

Additional information is presented in 3.1.6.4 on enforced disappearances in Balochistan.

3.3.12 *Jirga decisions*

A jirga is an assembly of tribal leaders who make decisions and provide advice on matters within their community. Jirga decisions are a kind of tribal jurisprudence, and they are not legally binding. They are accompanied by heavy social pressure, however, and they are therefore experienced as binding. In practice, they are followed and adhered to. It is not known how often this occurs. *Jirgas* are led by the Pashtunwali, the set of ancient codes and traditions of the Pashtun people. Islamic law was later added to traditional Pashtun law. For this reason, jirgas are most common in Pashtun areas, in northwest Pakistan, in KP and in the former FATA. *Jirgas* are occasionally found in Sindh and in Balochistan as well. According to one source, most jirgas are in the former FATA. In areas like Kohistan, jirgas have considerable power, and they take decisions on nearly all matters.⁶²⁶

The Supreme Court declared jirgas illegal in 2019. Despite this ruling, however, about 2–3 jirga decisions entailing death sentences continue to become public every year. It is possible that, because there are no reports of jirga decisions, more of them are issued than become known to the public. The fact that they are not reported in the media does not mean that they do not occur. It is not known how many death sentences are actually carried out. The cases are not documented in this way. According to the source, people are often simply killed, without the underlying reason being clear. In some cases, victims are still killed years after the initial jirga decision. It is not known how many cases are involved. During the reporting period, the police saved a girl from such a death sentence. The sex distribution of people condemned to death by jirgas has not been investigated.⁶²⁷ According to one source, death sentences are usually imposed on men.⁶²⁸ No information was found on protection by the authorities against illegal jirga decisions.

⁶²⁵ Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HCRP), *State of Human Rights in 2022*, p. 158, 2023.

⁶²⁶ Confidential source: 1 March 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, pp. 81 and 103, September 2023; USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 1E, 20 March 2023.

⁶²⁷ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁶²⁸ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

3.3.13 *Media reports and asylum cases*

According to one source, it is very easy to get a journalist to publish an article in exchange for payment. Journalists are extremely underpaid and need payments to survive. The source had not heard of any cases in which fake reports were used for asylum cases, but this does not rule out the possibility that it happens.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

4 Refugees

4.1 Legal provisions concerning aliens in Pakistan

Afghans in Pakistan

Period prior to the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)

Information on legal provisions concerning Afghans in Pakistan prior to the September 2023 announcement of the IFRP is presented in the General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan dated September 2022. The situation of Afghans in Pakistan changed after September 2023.

Period after the IFRP

On 26 September 2023, the Pakistani Ministry of Interior announced a repatriation plan for illegal foreigners, known as the 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' (IFRP).⁶³⁰ The plan describes the 'repatriation' of Afghan nationals in three phases: first, undocumented Afghan nationals, followed by those holding an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) and then those holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) Card. On 3 October 2023, the government announced the official deadline of 1 November 2023 for all 'illegal' foreigners to leave Pakistan voluntarily. According to the Pakistani government, this applied to 1.7 million undocumented⁶³¹ Afghans, who would otherwise be arrested and deported.⁶³² According to one source, the actual figures were probably lower.⁶³³

The Pakistani government's decree was widely criticised. Returnees were not allowed to take their possessions (e.g. livestock and cash) across the border. They were allowed to take an amount of only 50,000 Pakistani rupees (equivalent to about 160–173 euros). Aid agencies warned of a humanitarian disaster.⁶³⁴

Pakistan justified its decision by pointing to the increased number of attacks by militant groups. These groups were said to operate from Afghan territory, where the Afghan Taliban would provide them with a safe haven. The economic situation in the country and the assumption that many Afghans are involved in crime also led to this decision.⁶³⁵

According to figures from the IOM and the UNHCR, a total of 511,997 Afghans had returned by 3 February 2024. This total included 29,958 deportations, 26,071 facilitated returns of PoR holders and 455,968 'ordinary' returnees. For 89% of returnees, fear of arrest was the main reason for returning. Most returnees (91%) were undocumented Afghans, with PoR holders constituting 7% of all returnees and

⁶³⁰ PLEASE NOTE: Although the IFRP refers to 'illegal foreigners', in practice, it targets Afghans.

⁶³¹ The term 'undocumented' is used to refer to lacking valid identity documents.

⁶³² Al Jazeera, *Taliban urges Pakistan to grant more time for undocumented Afghans to leave*, 1 November 2023; EUAA, COI QUERY RESPONSE – *Pakistan, 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' (IFRP)*, p. 2, 14 December 2023; IOM-UNHCR, Flash update #15, 7 February 2024.

⁶³³ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶³⁴ BBC, *Afghan refugees fear as Pakistan prepares for deportations*, 1 November 2023; FAZ, *Rückkehr in ein Land am Limit*, 5 November 2023; EUAA, COI QUERY RESPONSE – *Pakistan, 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' (IFRP)*, p. 4, 14 December 2023.

⁶³⁵ Al Jazeera, *Taliban urges Pakistan to grant more time for undocumented Afghans to leave*, 1 November 2023; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

ACC holders 2%.⁶³⁶ About 30,000 of these Afghans (6%) were forcibly deported. Another 5% of the Afghans returned voluntarily through the UNCHR Voluntary Repatriation Programme.⁶³⁷

In November 2023, there was a spike in the number of arrests and detentions of Afghans who were being deported, after which these figures gradually declined. Since 1 January 2024, the figures on returns have been low. According to some sources, there was a pause in the deportation of ACC and PoR holders after the early days of the policy.⁶³⁸

According to figures from the IOM and the UNHCR, as of 15 April 2024, a total of 553,261 Afghans had returned since 15 September 2023. The number of returnees in March 2024 (17,137) had decreased by three percent compared to February (17,632). Total returns remained low compared to the first weeks of November 2023.⁶³⁹

Second phase of the IFRP

In March 2024, Pakistani media reported on preparations for the implementation of the second phase of the IFRP. This includes the forced deportation of Afghan Citizenship Card holders (ACC). There will probably be a period during which ACC holders will be granted time to leave 'voluntarily' before deportations begin, but it is unclear how long this period will be. The Pakistani Ministry of Interior has commissioned a survey of all ACC holders in the provinces. This process has purportedly been completed. There are apparently 840,000 ACC holders in Pakistan. According to some sources, the government is counting on the repatriation of 500,000 Afghans in the second phase. According to media reports, authorities are expected to use more intimidation this time to get Afghans to return 'voluntarily', rather than deporting people.⁶⁴⁰

Rohingyas in Pakistan

Most Rohingyas in Pakistan are stateless. As a result, they are not officially allowed to work, and they are excluded from certain services and facilities, including education and healthcare. It is not known why they cannot be registered with the UNHCR (see 3.1.7 on Rohingyas).

4.1.1

Legal residence

Since the IFRP, conditions for Afghans in Pakistan have changed (see 4.1). It is difficult for foreigners to obtain temporary legal residence in Pakistan. At some

⁶³⁶ IOM-UNHCR, *Flash update #15*, 7 February 2024.

⁶³⁷ Confidential source: 13 March 2024

⁶³⁸ Confidential source: February 2024; IOM-UNHCR, *Flash update #15*, 7 February 2024.

⁶³⁹ IOM, *Pakistan Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Flow Monitoring of Afghan Returnees (1-15 April 2024)*, 19 April 2024; UNHCR IOM, *Pakistan Flash update #17 on Arrest and Detention/Flow Monitoring*, 31 March 2024; VOA, *Pakistani Top Court Seeks Government Response on Afghan Expulsion Policy*, 1 December 2023; Dawn, *Afghan children born in Pakistan entitled to citizenship, says new plea*, 1 December 2023; Al Jazeera, *Pakistan's top court hears petition to halt deportations of Afghans*, 1 December 2023.

⁶⁴⁰ Economic Times, *Pakistan to soon launch second phase of repatriation of documented Afghans*, 25 March 2024; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Pakistan's Campaign To Expel Millions Of Afghan Refugees Enters Second Phase*, 20 March 2024; Confidential source: 22 March 2024; Confidential source: 29 March 2024; Confidential source: 13 March 2024; Confidential source: 10 April 2024; Dawn, *As Pakistan begins second phase of deportation, Afghan women fear what lies ahead*, 15 April 2024.

point, Afghans could register for a PoR card and an ACC card. This was a one-off option, and it is no longer possible. There is no refugee status in Pakistan. However, people can report to the UNHCR and obtain an informal registration document (see 4.2.2). In principle, they could also acquire Pakistani citizenship if they were to marry a Pakistani citizen. In practice, however, this is difficult. Additional information on the PoR Card is presented in 4.2.12.

In addition to Afghans with a PoR Card, there are ACC holders. These are Afghans who have lived in Pakistan for some time (in some cases, for generations) and have not been registered as refugees by the UNHCR. With an ACC, they could temporarily live legally in Pakistan. Although the ACC cards have expired, they are still being used. The mobility of ACC holders is unclear and, although it has improved somewhat, authorities are often unaware of the rights of ACC holders. They are not allowed to work.⁶⁴¹

Under the law, foreigners can acquire Pakistani *citizenship* if they are born in Pakistan (*ius solis*) or if they marry a Pakistani citizen. In practice, however, this usually does not 'happen by itself', and it requires a struggle. A foreign woman can acquire Pakistani citizenship when she marries a Pakistani man. In practice, however, a Pakistani woman cannot simply pass on citizenship to a foreign man. Provincial High Courts have recently granted Pakistani citizenship to Afghan men. This was done on a case-by-case basis, however, and following litigation. The Supreme Court has yet to rule on the matter.⁶⁴²

Additional information on this point is presented in 2.3.1 on the differences between men and women in acquiring citizenship.

For Rohingyas, it is difficult to obtain legal temporary residence. Citizenship is difficult for all groups (see 2.3.5 on the acquisition and re-acquisition of Pakistani citizenship).

4.1.2 *Possibility of working*

Undocumented individuals and ACC holders are not allowed to work. According to one source, as a rule, PoR holders are allowed to work. The problem for PoR holders, however, is that their PoR cards keep expiring and must be renewed again. They thus enter a cycle in which they must continually stop working temporarily, start again, stop, and so on.⁶⁴³ According to another source, in practice, they can work only in the non-public sector. It is unclear whether this is legal or tolerated. They are at risk of exploitation.⁶⁴⁴ According to yet other sources, PoR card holders are not allowed to work at all.⁶⁴⁵

Additional information on PoR card holders is presented in 4.2.12.

4.1.3 *Work for aliens in practice*

⁶⁴¹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 106 ACC, September 2023.

⁶⁴² Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁴³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁴⁴ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁴⁵ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

According to one source, in practice, many aliens work in the informal sector. They work as day labourers, in construction and trade or sell products in the local market. Many fruit and vegetable vendors are Afghan.⁶⁴⁶

4.1.4 *Freedom of movement with a residence permit*

Undocumented aliens cannot travel freely. For example, they are asked for their documents on public transport. Although the mobility of ACC holders has improved somewhat, authorities are often unaware of the rights of ACC holders⁶⁴⁷ (see 4.1.1). Aliens with PoR cards can move about freely.⁶⁴⁸

According to one source, freedom of movement is generally controlled for everyone, especially in such areas as Balochistan.⁶⁴⁹ Foreigners need a *No Objection Certificate* (NOC) in order to visit certain places. Such certificates can be obtained only with good local contacts.⁶⁵⁰ According to the USDOS human rights report, the government has restricted access to certain areas of the former FATA and Balochistan on the grounds of security situations. This has hampered freedom of movement.⁶⁵¹

4.1.5 *Distinction by nationality (practice and legislation)*

The legislation does not draw any distinctions between different nationalities. According to some sources, this is done in practice. Although the IFRP refers to aliens, only Afghans are repatriated under this plan⁶⁵² (see 4.1).

Within society, there is discrimination against various groups of foreigners. According to one confidential source, social cohesion between Afghans and Pakistanis has deteriorated since the passage of the IFRP. Afghans are portrayed negatively in the media, and more fake news is being spread.⁶⁵³ They are said to pose a security threat and 'take away' jobs from the local population.⁶⁵⁴

4.2 **Return, entry, refugees**

4.2.1 *Exit Control List*

Pakistan has an Exit Control List (ECL). Individuals on this list are not allowed to leave the country. The stated aim of the list is to prevent 'persons involved in antistate activities, terrorism, related to proscribed organizations, or placed on the orders of superior courts' from leaving the country. Those on the list have the right to appeal to the court to have their names removed.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁴⁶ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁴⁷ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁴⁸ UNHCR Pakistan, *Proof of Registration Card (PoR) cards*, accessed 6 March 2024.

⁶⁴⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁵⁰ Lonely Planet, *14 things you need to know before traveling to Pakistan*, 2 September 2023.

⁶⁵¹ USDOS, *2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Pakistan*, Section 2D, 20 March 2023.

⁶⁵² Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁵³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁵⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁶⁵⁵ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2D, 20 March 2023.

On 23 April 2022, the federal cabinet announced changes to the rules calling for names to be removed from the Exit Control List automatically after 120 days. The government retained the power to extend the exit ban for another 90 days. Individuals who are involved in terrorism cases, considered a threat to national security, under court order or involved in large-scale public fraud remain on the list.⁶⁵⁶ The current state of affairs is unclear.

According to civil society organisations, the authorities have also placed human rights activists and critics of the government and military on the list.⁶⁵⁷ One source stated that the ECL usually contains individuals who have been accused of terrorism.⁶⁵⁸ According to two sources, people may also be included based on politically motivated decisions.⁶⁵⁹ Given that the ECL is secret, there is no public list of names of people on the ECL.

It is not known how people can find out if they are on the list (other than by trying it out). In the case of legal exit, it is not known how it is verified whether a person is on the list.

4.2.2 *Registered and unregistered refugees*

Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and it has no national asylum policy. There are about 1.35 million refugees registered by the UNHCR in Pakistan. For the most part, these are Afghans who hold Proof of Registration (PoR) cards. In addition, there is a small group of refugees from Myanmar, Yemen, Somalia, Syria and other countries. Given that Pakistan has no asylum system, no reference can be made to official asylum seekers.⁶⁶⁰

According to one source, refugees who register with the UNHCR sometimes receive an informal registration certificate. This is done on an *ad hoc* basis, and not in all cases. In formal terms, this document is not recognised, and it provides no official rights or protection. In practice, however, it can be useful when contacting the authorities.⁶⁶¹ According to one source, registration ensures that people cannot be deported.⁶⁶²

According to Pakistan, there were about 1.7 million undocumented Afghans in Pakistan before the IFRP; the UN estimated the number at about 2 million. Of these, 600,000 had fled because of the seizure of power by the Afghan Taliban in August 2021.⁶⁶³

4.2.3 *Refoulement*

⁶⁵⁶ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2D, 20 March 2023.

⁶⁵⁷ USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Pakistan*, Section 2D, 20 March 2023.

⁶⁵⁸ Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁵⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 27 February 2024.

⁶⁶⁰ UNHCR, *UNHCR - Pakistan Country Factsheet*, December 2023.

⁶⁶¹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁶² Confidential source: 26 February.

⁶⁶³ BBC, *Afghan refugees fear as Pakistan prepares for deportations*, 1 November 2023; NY Times, *Driven Out of Pakistan, Afghans Face an Uncertain Future*, 30 October 2023.

Pakistan is not a party to the Refugee Convention.⁶⁶⁴ It also has no ban on refoulement.

4.2.4 *Forced deportations/returns*

With the implementation of the IFPR, a total of 511,997 Afghans returned, according to figures from the IOM and the UNHCR dated 3 February 2024. Of these, 29,958 were deportations.⁶⁶⁵ As of 4 April 2024, there were 545,118 returns, including 30,256 deportations⁶⁶⁶ (additional information is presented in 4.1).

According to several confidential sources, more than half a million Afghans have returned. Of these, 6 percent are classified as deportations. In technical terms, however, almost all are likely to have been forced to return. They were not physically deported, but forced in other ways (e.g. through economic measures and police harassment).⁶⁶⁷

The UNHCR has expressed concern about the IFPR. It has also issued a non-return advisory.⁶⁶⁸

4.2.5 *Asylum applications, asylum seekers with residence status and recognised refugees*

Pakistan has no national procedure to apply for asylum.⁶⁶⁹ For this reason, asylum seekers and recognised refugees also cannot be said to have official residence status. Refugees who register with the UNHCR sometimes receive a certificate of registration. This is done on an *ad hoc* basis, and not in all cases. This document is not officially recognised. In practice, however, it can be useful when contacting the authorities.⁶⁷⁰

4.2.6 *Rights of asylum seekers/refugees*

Pakistan has no official asylum system. Registration by the UNHCR does not confer any right to work. There are no facilities for housing, except in the refugee villages for PoR holders. In principle, refugees have access to healthcare. According to one source, however, there is discrimination. Access to education is problematic, as it requires legal documents.⁶⁷¹

4.2.7 *Living conditions of asylum seekers/refugees*

According to one source, the living conditions of undocumented people are often impoverished, unless they have their own financial resources. They often live in slums (e.g. in Karachi) in cities or on the outskirts. Some refugee camps have turned into villages (e.g. in KP and Balochistan). According to this source, it is often

⁶⁶⁴ UNHCR, *UNHCR - Pakistan Country Factsheet*, December 2023.

⁶⁶⁵ IOM-UNHCR, *Flash update #15*, 7 February 2024.

⁶⁶⁶ IOM, *Pakistan Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Flow Monitoring of Afghan Returnees (1-15 April 2024)*, 19 April 2024; UNHCR IOM, *Pakistan Flash update #17 on Arrest and Detention/Flow Monitoring*, 31 March 2024.

⁶⁶⁷ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; IOM-UNHCR, *Flash update #15*, 7 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁶⁸ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR concerned at adverse effects of Pakistan orders for undocumented foreigners to leave*, 21 November 2023.

⁶⁶⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁶⁷⁰ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁷¹ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

easier for refugees to blend in amongst the population and not stand out in urban areas.⁶⁷²

According to another source, public opinion towards Afghans has become more negative since the passage of the IFRP. For example, housing lessors have also become fearful of sanctions if they rent to Afghans.⁶⁷³

4.2.8 *Right of aliens to healthcare and education*

According to two sources, in principle, aliens have access to healthcare. According to one source, however, there is discrimination. Access to education is problematic, as it requires documents such as a B-form. Only access to some private schools is said to be possible. This nevertheless occurs on a highly *ad hoc* basis.⁶⁷⁴ According to another source, there are often no schools in the neighbourhood, or only primary education.⁶⁷⁵

According to one source, to have legal residence, foreigners must have a passport and a valid visa.⁶⁷⁶ The rights they derive from legal residence depend on their visas and/or their Pakistani identity documents (e.g. ACC or PoR).

4.2.9 *Role of the UNHCR*

According to one source, the UNHCR cannot help with obtaining documents. Undocumented individuals in Pakistan are at risk of arrest, detention and deportation.⁶⁷⁷

4.2.10 *New rules/developments since the previous General Country of Origin Information Report*

Since the previous General Country of Origin Information Report, the IFRP has had a major impact on foreigners in Pakistan. Additional information on this point is presented in 4.1.

4.2.11 *Border crossings between Pakistan and Afghanistan*

The main border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan are Torkham in KP and Chaman in Balochistan.

At the Torkham border, a passport and visa are required to enter Pakistan. In principle, the border crossing is usually open, but there can be long queues. The Chaman border keeps opening and closing again, thereby disrupting trade. Trucks encounter problems crossing the border. In addition, since the IFRP, Afghan lorry drivers have had much longer waiting times (as long as 6–8 months) for Pakistani visas than their Pakistani counterparts have for Afghan visas. This creates unfair competition between Afghan and Pakistani lorry drivers. A sit-in has been

⁶⁷² Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁷³ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁶⁷⁴ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁷⁵ Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

⁶⁷⁶ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁶⁷⁷ Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

held at the border crossing since October 2023 to protest the tightened visa regulations for trade.⁶⁷⁸

4.2.12 *Rights of PoR card holders*

A Proof of Registration (PoR) card is an identity document for Afghan refugees that grants the right to stay legally in Pakistan. The card is valid throughout Pakistan. Individuals holding PoR cards cannot be arrested on grounds of the Foreigners Act of 1946 or other preventive laws. The PoR card nevertheless provides no protection against criminal prosecution if the holder is involved in criminal activities or has violated Pakistani law. The PoR card is not a travel document, and it does not grant the right to cross international borders, including those between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The PoR card is intended only for Afghan refugees, and it grants the right to healthcare, education and freedom of movement within Pakistan. Holders of these cards also have access to various services, including a bank account, a telephone connection and the rental of a house⁶⁷⁹ (see 4.1.2).

Afghans who have never had a PoR cannot apply for a PoR card, nor can the relatives of PoR holders. On 10 November 2023, the validity of the existing PoRs was extended until 31 December 2023. The period of validity was subsequently extended again until March 2024, due to the new government taking office. At the time of writing, the card had expired again.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024; HRCP, *Sit-in against border restrictions at Chaman, Balochistan - An HRCP fact-finding report*, March 2024.

⁶⁷⁹ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024; UNHCR Pakistan, *Proof of Registration Card (PoR) cards*, accessed 6 March 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, p. 105, September 2023.

⁶⁸⁰ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; IOM-UNHCR, *Flash update #15*, 7 February 2024; UNHCR Pakistan, *Proof of Registration Card (PoR) cards*, accessed 6 March 2024; Confidential source: 9 April 2024.

5 Return

5.1 Return

5.1.1 *Forced returns*

There is little information on migrants returning to Pakistan.

According to the USDOS, the government has refused the return of some citizens who were deported to Pakistan from other countries. They were said to be 'non-verified' citizens, and some passports issued by Pakistani embassies and consulates abroad were said to be fraudulent.⁶⁸¹ It is not known what such fraud was supposed to involve.

One source reported not having heard of any concrete cases in which migrants who had returned (whether voluntarily or forcibly) encountered problems with the authorities. According to this source, chartered planes arrived with forced returnees from Europe, often in handcuffs. Upon arrival at the airport, they were questioned by the FIA. Although they had apparently not been subjected to particularly negative treatment by the FIA, they did fear interrogation. Individuals without documents were also allowed into the country if they could prove that they had Pakistani nationality.⁶⁸²

From the FIA, they received an 'out-pass' or landing permit. Only individuals travelling with fraudulent documents were questioned more extensively and could be arrested. One source claimed not to have heard of any ill-treatment of returnees.⁶⁸³

According to another source, most returnees had returned forcibly. Most were men, and most had no documents, except for a document stating that they had been deported. Upon return, they first went to the FIA, and then to their birthplaces or families. In general, the process upon arrival did not proceed smoothly. For example, fingerprints were taken in an unfriendly manner and, in some cases, officials demanded money from returnees.⁶⁸⁴

PTI leaders and supporters

According to another source, there are strong indications that the Pakistani intelligence services are monitoring the activities of PTI leaders on social media. The source noted that any PTI members speaking out against the army are likely to encounter problems upon returning to Pakistan.⁶⁸⁵ Additional information on this point is presented in 3.1.18.

5.1.2 *Return of asylum seekers who have been rejected*

Little is known about returning asylum seekers who have been rejected.

⁶⁸¹ USDOS, 2023 Country reports on human rights practices: Pakistan, p. 48, 2024.

⁶⁸² Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁸³ Confidential source: 26 February 2024; Confidential source: 28 February 2024.

⁶⁸⁴ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁶⁸⁵ Confidential source: 28 March 2024.

According to one source, upon arrival, the FIA did not look at the reason for departure, but wanted to know whether people were travelling with fraudulent documents. If caught with fraudulent documents, they faced more severe interrogation and risked arrest.⁶⁸⁶

According to another source, it made no difference whether migrants returned after a rejected asylum claim or for any other reason.⁶⁸⁷

Little specific information was found about Ahmadis or Baloch separatists (actual or alleged) and their families who had returned.

According to one source, there have been instances of Baloch separatists being deported from Germany to Pakistan after a rejected asylum request. Upon arrival at the Karachi airport, they disappeared. A year later, they reappeared but were afraid to recount what had happened. They nevertheless did say that they had been questioned about the activities of Baloch organisations in Germany. The interrogators wanted to know who was behind the organisation and what the management and finances looked like. This was several years ago (i.e. before the reporting period).⁶⁸⁸

It is not known whether the Pakistani authorities ask about the asylum motive used.

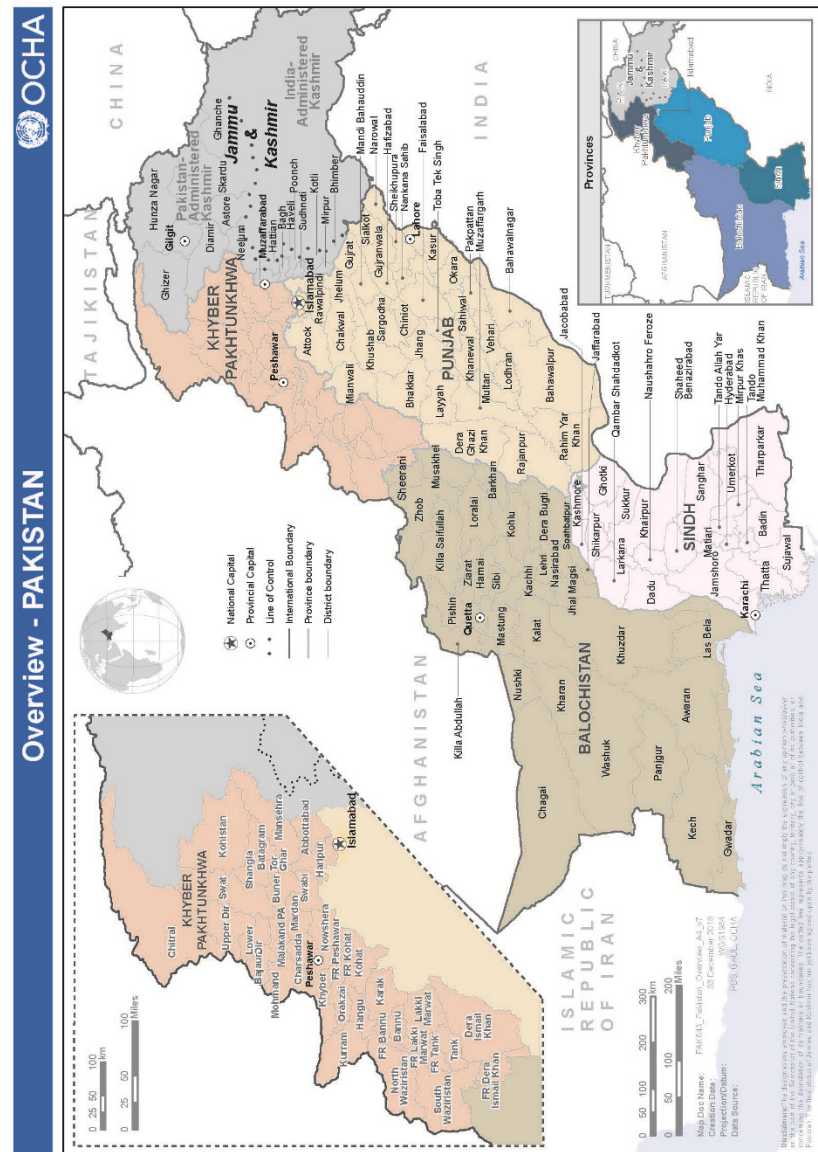
⁶⁸⁶ Confidential source: 28 February 2024; Confidential source: 26 February 2024.

⁶⁸⁷ Confidential source: 1 March 2024.

⁶⁸⁸ Confidential source: 24 April 2024.

6 References, map and list of abbreviations

6.1 Map of Pakistan



Source: OCHA, Pakistan Overview map, 3 December 2018

6.2 List of abbreviations and foreign terms

ACC - Afghan Citizenship Card
 Ahle Sunnat Wal-Jamaat – the Sunni party
 ANP - Awami National Party
 BLA - Balochistan Liberation Army
 BLF - Baloch Liberation Front
 BNA – Baloch Nationalist Army
 BNM - Baloch National Movement
 BRA - Baloch Republican Army
 BSO-Azad - Baloch Student Organization Azad
 CDP - Christian Democratic Party
 CII - Council of Islamic Ideology
 (C)NIC – (Computerized) National Identity Card
 COIED - Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances
 CPEC - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
 CPRC - Code of Criminal Procedure
 CRC - Child Registration Certificate, or B-form
 CRMS - Civil Registration Management System
 CSJ - Centre for Social Justice
 CTD – Counter Terrorism Department
 DFAT - Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
 ECL - Exit Control List
 ECP - Election Commission of Pakistan
 EUAA - European Agency for Asylum (previously EASO)
 FATA - Federally Administered Tribal Areas
 FC - Frontier Corps
 FIA - Federal Investigative Agency
 FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
 FIR - First Information Report
 FRC - Family Registration Certificate
 GB - Gilgit Baltistan
 Hizbul Ahrar - Party of the Free
 HRCP - Human Rights Commission Pakistan
 HRW - Human Rights Watch
 ICNL - International Center on Non-violent Conflict
 IEDs - Improvised Explosive Devices
 IFRP - Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan
 IMF - International Monetary Fund
 ISI - Inter-Services Intelligence
 ISKP - Islamic State Khorasan Province (also known as ISIS-K, ISK-P or IS-K)
 ISPP - Islamic State Pakistan Province
 ISPR - Inter-Services Public Relations
 IO - Investigative Officer
 IOM - International Organisation for Migration
 Jamaat - association or community
 JeM - Jaish-e Mohammad (Army of Muhammed)
 JeI - Jamaat-e-Islami– Islamic Association
 JuD - Jamaat-Ud-Dawa - Association for Proselytism
 JuA - Jamaat-ul-Ahrar - Association of the Free
 JUI-F - Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam
 KP - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
 LeI - Lashkar-e-Islam (Army of Islam)
 LeJ - Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Army of Jhangvi)

LeT – Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Righteous)
LGBTIQ+ - lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and intersex people, queers, asexual people and other forms of sexual orientation and gender identity that are not heterosexual or cisgender (+).
Madrassa - Quran school
MORA - Ministry of Religious Affairs and Inter-religious Harmony
MRC - Migrant Resource Center
NACTA - National Counter Terrorism Authority Pakistan
NADRA - National Database and Registration Authority
NCHR - National Commission for Human Rights
NGO - non-governmental organisation
NIAS - National Institute of Advanced Studies (Bangalore, India)
NICOP - National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistani
NOC - No Objection Certificate
NSC - National Security Committee
OFPRA - Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides
OHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PECA – Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act
PIPS - Pak Institute for Peace Studies
PML-N - Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz
POC - Pakistan Origin Card
PoR card - Proof of Registration card
PPC - Pakistan Penal Code
PTI - Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
PTM - Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement
Refoulement - Deportation
RSF - Reporters without Borders
SDGT - (List of) Specially Designated Global Terrorists
SSP - Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (Soldiers of the Companions of the Prophet) Pakistan
Paigham-e-Pakistan - Message of Pakistan. Fatwa against terrorism.
Tablighi Jamaat - Association of Preachers
TJP - Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan
TLP - Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan
TTP - Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UBA - United Baloch Army
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Union Council - town hall of a city or village
USCIRF - US Commission on International Religious Freedom
USDOS - US Department of State
VOA - Voice of America

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