INDEX TO DOCUMENTATION OF COUNTRY CONDITIONS REGARDING PERSECUTION OF HIV POSITIVE INDIVIDUALS IN PAKISTAN

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- “The country continued to have a concentrated HIV epidemic among injecting drug users, while the estimated prevalence in the general population was less than 0.1 percent. The epidemic was concentrated among injecting drug users (21 percent). Stigma and discrimination by the general population and by health-care providers against persons living with HIV in particular remained a significant barrier to treatment access. . . . Transgender advocacy organizations and activists report that HIV is particularly prevalent in their community, with little medical help.” (p. 44)

- “While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not
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<td>effectively enforce those laws and regulations. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted.” (p. 50)</td>
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<td>• “The country continued to have a concentrated HIV epidemic with an estimated prevalence among the general population at less than 0.1 percent. The epidemic was concentrated among key populations, primarily injecting drug users. For all key populations, stigma and discrimination by the general population and by health-care providers in particular remained a significant barrier to treatment access.” (p. 47)</td>
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<td>• “While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted.” (p. 52)</td>
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<td>• “The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) said that nearly 150,000 people were living with HIV in Pakistan . . . . However, officials said that the majority of cases go unreported due to social taboos about sex and the victims’ fears of discrimination.” (p. 278)</td>
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<td>• “The ‘taboo’ nature of same-sex activity results in a lack of investment in treatment options for HIV/AIDS in Pakistan.” (p. 53)</td>
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|      | • “The country continued to have a concentrated HIV epidemic with an estimated prevalence among the general population at less than 0.1 percent. Estimates indicated that 93 percent of those living with HIV were in two provinces: Punjab (50 percent) and Sindh (43 percent). The epidemic was concentrated
among key populations, primarily injecting drug users. For all key populations, stigma and discrimination by the general population and by health-care providers in particular remained a significant barrier to treatment access.” (p. 46)

- “While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted. The nature of penalties for violations was insufficient to deter violations.” (p. 52)


- “Cases of discrimination often went unreported due to the stigma faced by HIV/AIDS patients.” (p. 51)

- “While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, and gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations. Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted. The nature of penalties for violations was insufficient to deter violations.” (p. 58)

INTERGOVERNMENTAL SOURCES


- “At a press conference on June 14 the authorities presented the findings of a preliminary investigation into the outbreak. . . . [T]he preliminary investigation found that strengthening community education is critical to raise awareness about HIV prevention and to tackle stigma and discrimination. The conclusions of a rapid assessment on HIV-related knowledge presented at the press conference found that information about HIV is very limited among the affected communities. Many parents and caregivers learnt about HIV only on the day their children were diagnosed or because of media reports about the increase in cases. A lack of accurate information created panic and some families with children diagnosed with HIV have been shunned and isolated.” (p. 2)

- “‘Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV (PLHIV) and those at increased risk of transmission is still unremitting in Pakistan, including in health care settings,’ said Dr Baseer Khan Achakzai, National Programme Manager, said. He stated that in addition to social rejection and exclusion, PLHIV were also often denied health care in health care facilities. PLHIV have reported dentists refusing to work on their teeth, and surgeons refusing to do surgery, while pregnant women living with HIV have reported being denied obstetric care. In addition, PLHIV have also reported that their HIV status was also disclosed without their consent, he said.” (p. 1)

- “Dr Achakzai also emphasized that [t]he negative treatment PLHIV experience within the health care system may discourage them from engaging with HIV care and treatment or indeed seeking health services in general. Individuals who are exposed to or at risk of acquiring HIV may not seek HIV testing due to fear of maltreatment at the testing site or their anticipation of maltreatment in subsequent health services. Furthermore, PLHIV may choose to seek care in HIV services far from their places of residence, resulting in more challenges regarding care and treatment retention.” (p. 2)

- “Dr Ardakani stressed the fact that a large gap in diagnosis exists in Pakistan today, with only 3 out of 10 PLHIVs knowing their HIV status, and that a similar gap exists regarding treatment — it is estimated that only 7% of PLHIVs receive antiretroviral therapy. This low case identification and treatment was due to factors such as the limited availability of HIV testing and treatment services, inappropriate approaches to service delivery for people at risk of HIV, the reluctance of health care providers to offer an HIV test to their clients, and stigma and discrimination.” (p. 3)

- “Dr Mamadou L. Sakho, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Country Director, stated that the widespread HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health care settings in Pakistan impeded access to services and also undermined efforts to achieve the highest attainable standards of health for all.” (p. 3)

- “Ms Fahmida, UNAIDS spoke on Stigma and Discrimination in Health care settings. She said, ‘Stigma and Discrimination in Health Care settings has many forms which includes denial of health care services to key population and unjust behaviors to service provision, lack of respect and behaviors that stop people
living with HIV and AIDS and key populations to avail testing and treatment services. UNAIDS and WHO calls for concrete actions under the leadership of NACP to establish mechanisms within health care settings to address stigma faced by key population.”” (p. 4)

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- “Perhaps the most heartbreaking part of living with HIV, even more than facing the spectre of an early death, is being shunned into isolation for the years one has left. For some families in one village near Rato Dero, where hundreds of children were infected with the incurable virus through no fault of their own, that prospect has come to pass. Still reeling from the ramifications of the tragedy, the parents of the HIV-infected children now find their own near and dear ones ganging up against them, demanding they leave their hometown or live with a social boycott.”” (p. 1)

- “Despite many vigorous uninterrupted campaigns by health authorities, the parents of these HIV-positive children are being constantly pressured by the rest of the village into keeping them away from the remaining ‘healthy’ kids. ‘All of us parents of HIV-positive children have been asked to leave the village and establish a separate one,’ revealed a distraught Shahzado Khan Shar, a 32-year-old police constable. ‘Our own relatives even. They hate us,’ he told The Express Tribune as he broke down in tears. ‘Where should we go with our innocent kids?’” (p. 2)

- “Narrating the isolation he and others in his predicament were already facing, Shar said his own relatives have stopped even shaking his hand. ‘I am not HIV-positive but the other villagers believe I will infect them simply because my son now lives with this disease.’ ‘They throw away kitchen utensils which we use and our children are not allowed to play with the ‘healthy’ kids,’ he said, heartbroken. ‘Even those who understand that they will not be infected by eating with us or by touch alone hate our children. Instead of receiving moral support, all we face is contempt.’ ‘Most of us, the parents of these kids, are facing mental, social and financial problems ever since the [Rato Dero] outbreak happened. But it is the social isolation that kills us. It is killing us daily,’ Shar added. ‘We die every time we face the attitude which our fellow villagers have developed for us. We are devastated.’” (p. 2)

- “Outside Subhani Khan Shar, the parents of HIV-positive children in other parts of Rato Dero are also being made to feel like outcasts. Some families have even moved out and migrated to smaller towns as a result of silent pressure. ‘The
other parents tell their kids not to play with my son,’ lamented Dil Murad Ghanghro, who runs a small spare parts shop on Larkano Road just outside Rato Dero town. ‘My son is too young to understand social gap being created now,’ he said as he kissed and embraced his two-and-a-half-year-old son, Abdul Samad. . . . Dr Imran Akbar Arbani who visits and interacts with the parents of HIV-positive children told The Express Tribune that such families were connecting with each other after being shunned by their own blood relatives.”


- “The daughter of Mr. Shaikh, the journalist, has become an outcast in the community, he said. Education about the virus is sparse, and many fear contracting it by touch. Relatives won’t hug the girl, and other children will not play with her. At school, the sick children are segregated from the healthy, forced to sit on one side of the classroom. ‘My wife and I, fortunately, we are literate. We hug and love our daughter. But our relatives stopped touching her and are now reluctant to visit us,’ said Mr. Shaikh, whose daughter is now responding well to treatment.” (p. 4)

- “The effect on Ratodero’s social fabric has been grim. In May, one man strangled his H.I.V.-positive wife to death. And in June, residents in another town discovered their neighbor tied to a tree by her family, after she had tested positive for the virus. The family said they had bound her to prevent her from spreading the virus to the rest of the town. After public outcry and police intervention, the family untied her. She now lives in an isolated room in the house, her every movement monitored by her family.” (pp. 6-7)


- “For years, health researchers have been warning of the potential threat of an HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country, but an ostrich-like attitude and inability to talk about things as they are has resulted in the issue aggravating over the years. Because HIV/AIDS is still associated with what is condemned as socially deviant sexual activity, stigma surrounds the topic in our largely conservative society. HIV/AIDS was understood to be more prevalent amongst marginalised communities without access to treatment, such as the transgender population, drug addicts and commercial sex workers, but there is reason to believe it is increasingly spilling into the general population.” (p. 1)
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<td>“‘Lack of awareness is a [major] problem,’ Wahid explained. ‘Infected people don’t have enough courage to open up . . . and they prefer to stay undiagnosed because of the stigma attached with HIV/AIDS. An incident that happened last week . . . a husband killed his wife after she [was] found [to be] HIV positive. Upon being interviewed, he said he did this to save other family members because the disease is contagious and spread by touching and eating together.’” (p. 1)</td>
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<td>“Closer to Larkana, she added, local officials have confirmed what’s being described as an ‘honor killing’ of an HIV-positive person after the current outbreak became public.” (p. 1)</td>
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<td>“Officials say the HIV epidemic in Pakistan remains largely concentrated among the key populations, including people who inject drugs, the transgender community, sex workers and their clients and men who have sex with men . . . . The fear of maltreatment, and punitive actions by law enforcers impacts the willingness of these populations to pursue testing, which remains a major challenge facing national efforts to treat and prevent the spread of HIV, she lamented.” (pp. 1-2)</td>
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<td>“HIV has never been a priority program in the national health system and the recent abolition of the federal health ministry and the devolution of its functions to the provinces, which lacked preparedness and capacity, have led to the increase in infections, say WHO experts in the country.” (pp. 2-3)</td>
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<td>“U.N. officials say the Pakistan government urgently needs to redouble efforts to ‘de-stigmatize HIV testing, advocate for confidential, non-discriminatory, community based care models and raise awareness about disease transmission, prevention treatment’ to achieve reductions in new infections in affected populations.” (p. 3)</td>
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<td>• “Nazir Masih, 58, an HIV/AIDS patient, became an outcast when he socially disclosed he was suffering from the deadly disease. . . . ‘My friends and neighbours started avoiding me. Our family would be treated with discrimination at all social gatherings; we were never invited to parties and social gathering. My entire family was being punished for my mistakes.’ He says he felt like an outcast, which ultimately led to three failed suicide attempts on his part. ‘There were no medications or guidelines available for HIV carriers in Pakistan and my life was doomed in every sense,’ Nazir recalls.” <em>(pp. 1, 3)</em></td>
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Dated: [DATE]  

Respectfully submitted,  

[FIRM]  

*Pro Bono* Counsel for Respondent ____________

By: ____________________________  

[NAME]  

[FIRM]  

[ADDRESS]  

[PHONE NUMBER]  

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TAB 1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic. In 2018 the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the most National Assembly seats in the general elections, and PTI’s leader, Imran Khan, became prime minister. While independent observers noted technical improvements in the Election Commission of Pakistan’s management of the polling process itself, observers, civil society organizations, and political parties raised concerns regarding pre-election interference by military and intelligence agencies that created an uneven electoral playing field. Some political parties also alleged significant polling day irregularities occurred.

Police have primary domestic security responsibility for most of the country. Local police are under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. Paramilitary organizations--including the Frontier Corps, which operates in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and the Rangers, which operate in Sindh and Punjab--provide security services under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. The Frontier Corps’ primary mission is security of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and the Corps reports to the Ministry of Interior in peacetime and the army in times of conflict. The military is responsible for external security but continues to play a role in domestic security, including as the lead security agency in many areas of the former FATA. While military and intelligence services officially report to civilian authorities, the military and intelligence services operate independently and without effective civilian oversight.

Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government or its agents, including extrajudicial killings; forced disappearance; torture; arbitrary detention; arbitrary or unlawful government interference with privacy; the worst forms of restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including violence against journalists, censorship, and site blocking; substantial government interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, such as overly restrictive nongovernmental organization (NGO) laws; severe restrictions of religious freedom; significant restrictions on freedom of movement; acts of corruption within the bureaucracy; unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers by nonstate militant groups; trafficking in persons; crimes involving violence targeting members of racial and ethnic minorities; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex persons by nonstate actors; the existence or use
of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and the use of forced or compulsory child labor.

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

Terrorist violence and human rights abuses by nonstate actors contributed to human rights problems, although to a lesser extent than in previous years, consistent with an overall decline in terrorist activity. Military, police, and law enforcement agencies continued to carry out significant campaigns against militant and terrorist groups. Nevertheless, violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nonstate actors, both local and foreign, contributed to a culture of lawlessness. As of September terrorism fatalities stood at 315, in comparison with 697 total fatalities in 2018, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, a database compiled by the public interest advocacy organization Institute for Conflict Management, which collects statistics on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia.

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

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

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

On February 2, Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), a social movement for Pashtun human rights based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, alleged police tortured and killed PTM activist and professor Arman Loni during a sit-in protest in Loralai, Balochistan. Pashtun political parties, including Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party and Awami National Party, organized protests in Balochistan and KP in response to the killings. Abdul Qayyum Uthmankhel, head of PTM Loralai Wing and an eyewitness to Arman Loni’s killing, filed charges against the assistant superintendent of police, Attaur Rehman, and the Loralai police registered the case on April 2, two months after the incident. On May 17, PTM issued a statement that paramilitary forces had kidnapped Abdul Qayyum and left him at a roadside after torturing him. On May 19, the PTM staged a sit-in protest in Balochistan’s Chaman area against the incident.
In July 2018 an antiterrorism court in Karachi released on bail former senior superintendent of police in the Malir District of Karachi Rao Anwar, placing him on a no fly list while his trial is ongoing for the killing of a Pashtun man, Naqeebullah Mehsud, in what Karachi police initially claimed was a counterterror operation. The Supreme Court subsequently upheld Anwar’s travel ban after he appealed to have his name removed from the no-fly list. Authorities filed murder charges in the case against 23 police officers, of whom 13 are in custody, seven have absconded, and five are on bail, including Anwar. On January 24, an antiterrorism court in Karachi declared Mehsud innocent of the terrorism charges that Anwar brought against him as superintendent of police.

Physical abuse while in custody allegedly caused the death of some criminal suspects. Lengthy trial delays and failure to discipline and prosecute those responsible for killings contributed to a culture of impunity.

There were numerous reports of fatal attacks against police. On January 29, three suicide bombers attacked the office of the deputy inspector general of police in Loralai, Balochistan, and killed nine individuals that included five civilian employees, three police officers, and a police recruitment candidate and injured 21 others. The attack occurred when several hundred candidates were taking a written test for recruitment into the police department. The Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP) claimed responsibility but made no further comment.

Militants and terrorist groups killed hundreds and injured hundreds more with bombs, suicide attacks, and other violence. Casualties declined compared with previous years (see section 1.g.).

b. Disappearance

There were kidnappings and forced disappearances of persons in nearly all areas of the country. As of October 1, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances had received 593 cases; there were 1,098 complaints in 2018. Some officials from intelligence agencies, police, and other security forces reportedly held prisoners incommunicado and refused to disclose their location.

On March 30 and April 1 respectively, unknown individuals abducted two journalists from Karachi’s Shia community, Matloob Hussain Mosavi, who worked for the newspaper *Daily Jang*, and Syed Ali Mubashir Naqvi, who worked for Abb Tak news channel. In May police claimed they had arrested Mosavi and four other
persons for alleged involvement in sectarian killings. The Shia Missing Persons Relatives Committee rejected these claims and stated the suspects had been missing for months without formal charges. Both individuals’ whereabouts remain unknown.

In April police released Rafaqat Ali Jarwar, a senior journalist with the newspaper *Daily Koshish*, 14 months after plainclothes security forces had reportedly detained him.

In August Inter-Services Public Relations, the media wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces, confirmed that a military court sentenced an army major to a life sentence and expelled him from military service for abducting in 2016 a boy in Nushki, Balochistan, receiving a 6,864,000 Pakistani Rupees ($44,000) ransom from the victim’s family. An appeals court and Chief of Army Staff Qamar Javed Bajwa upheld the decision. The boy’s captors did not release him, and his whereabouts remained unknown as of September.

Human rights organizations reported many authorities disappeared or arrested Pashtun rights activists, and Sindhi and Baloch nationalists without cause or warrant.

Authorities continued their efforts against members of PTM. Beginning in May, the director general of the Inter-Services Public Relations, Major General Asif Ghafoor, announced that PTM’s “time is up.” In the following months, security officials killed 13 PTM protesters during a clash at a military checkpoint in the Khar Qamar area of Waziristan. The military alleged the protesters attacked the checkpoint, but video on social media and eyewitness accounts appeared to corroborate PTM’s assertion the protesters were peaceful. Following the events at Khar Qamar, the government cracked down on PTM, arresting or detaining many of the group’s senior leadership as well as rank-and-file supporters. PTM activists successfully challenged dozens of arrests in court, only to have some of those arrested go missing following their release from jail. While the government agreed PTM had legitimate grievances, it contended external forces used PTM as a tool to feed ethnic divisions in the country.

On May 14, security forces arrested Muhammad Naseem and his fiancée, Hani Gul, without a warrant. Gul attested that security forces blindfolded her and drove her to an undisclosed detention center where she was beaten and forced to confess affiliation with the Baloch Liberation Front, a claim she has since denied. Naseem likely remained in detention and his location was unknown to date. Gul alleged
that officials harassed and intimidated her to withdraw her subsequent case regarding Naseem’s illegal detention from the Sindh High Court.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances received 6,372 missing persons cases between 2011 and September 30. The commission had closed 4,140 of those inquiries, while 2,232 remained open.

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

Although the constitution prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, the penal code has no specific section against torture. The penal code prohibits criminal use of force and assault; however, there were reports that security forces, including the intelligence services, tortured and abused individuals in custody.

According to the Committee against Torture of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in 2017 there were reports that state officials and forces practiced torture on a widespread scale. Human rights organizations noted the government’s lack of serious efforts to curb the use of torture and claimed that perpetrators--mostly police, military, and intelligence agency members--operated with impunity.

Media and civil society organizations reported cases of individuals dying in police custody allegedly due to torture in Punjab Province in August and September. In Lahore on August 26, officials of the anticorruption department unearthed a torture cell allegedly operated by the Gujjarpura station house officer and three constables that kept suspects in custody on the pretext of interrogation. Officials recovered six men from the cell, but one later died from injuries sustained during torture. According to media, the abductors chained and abused the prisoners every night to coerce their families to pay money for their release. The Punjab Inspector General of Police opened investigations into these cases and arrested some of the police officers involved, although the status of the cases was unclear at year’s end.

On September 1, in Faisalabad a Punjabi man named Salahuddin Ayubi, who, according to his family, had a mental illness, died in police custody after a video showing him making faces at a security camera while robbing an automated teller machine (ATM) went viral. National media shared camera footage from the ATM, and photos purporting to show torture marks on Ayubi’s body circulated on social media. Authorities filed murder charges in the Lahore High Court against City A-
Division’s Station House Officer Mehmoodul Hassan and investigation officers Subinspector Shafaat Ali and Assistant Subinspector Matloob Hussain. The investigation was ongoing, according to media reports.

There were reports police personnel employed cruel and degrading treatment and punishment. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported that police committed “excesses” in at least 82 cases as of September 2, killing 29 persons and injuring 38. Multiple sources reported that police excesses were often underreported.

**Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

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

**Physical Conditions:** Prison conditions often were extremely poor. Overcrowding remained a serious problem, largely due to structural issues in the criminal justice system that led to a high rate of pretrial detention. According to the Federal Ombudsman, as of November the total nationwide prison population stood at 77,275 in 114 prisons across the country. The capacity of these prisons is 57,742, putting the occupancy rate at 130 percent over capacity.

Inadequate food and medical care in prisons continued to cause chronic health problems. Malnutrition remained a problem, especially for inmates unable to supplement their diets with help from family or friends. In many facilities, the sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and access to potable water were inadequate. Most prison facilities were antiquated and had no means to control indoor temperatures. A system existed for basic and emergency medical care, but bureaucratic procedures slowed access. Prisoners with disabilities usually lacked adequate care. Representatives of Christian and Ahmadi Muslim communities claimed that prison inmates often subjected their members to abuse and violence in prison. Civil society organizations reported that prison officials frequently subjected prisoners accused of blasphemy violations to poor prison conditions. NGOs reported that many individuals accused of blasphemy remained in solitary confinement for extended periods, sometimes for more than a year. The government asserted this treatment was for the individual’s safety, in view of the likelihood that prisoners accused of blasphemy would face threats from the general prison population.
Authorities held female prisoners separately from men. Nevertheless, despite the passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, which provides for separate places of confinement, NGOs reported that prison officials held transgender women with men, and the men harassed the transgender women. Balochistan had no women’s prison, but authorities confined women in separate barracks.

Due to lack of infrastructure, prison departments often did not segregate detainees from convicted criminals.

Prison officials kept juvenile offenders in barracks separate from adults. According to the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, prisoners and prison staff subjected children to abuse, rape, and other forms of violence.

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

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

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

Improvements: During the year Punjab, Sindh, and KP’s Prison Departments continued construction of their own prison academies, focusing on modern prison management techniques that promote human rights and counter violent extremism. The Prison Department of Sindh laid the foundation and erected the structure for the student accommodations of its prison academy; the academy is constructed to
impart modern prison management techniques that promote human rights and counter violent extremism. Twenty-three prisons in Punjab transitioned from their paper files system to a modern, computerized database that enables prison officials to more safely, securely, and accurately track prisoners. The Prison Management Information System database also enables the separation of high-threat prisoners from petty offenders and vulnerable groups in the country’s overcrowded prisons.

In June the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed the Prison Act of 2019, the first update since the Prison Act of 1894. The law provides inmates with access to schools and colleges, improved medical care, enhanced family visitation rights, and the provision of television, computers, and air conditioning in correctional facilities. Sindh Province was the first and only province to have revised the Prison Act.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

On August 5, the KP provincial government issued the Actions (In Aid of Civil Power) Ordinance of 2019 (AACP) as a response to the Peshawar High Court’s 2018 ruling that struck down the FATA Interim Governance Regulation (FIGR) and previous legislation that applied only to the former FATA. The ordinance gives the military authority to operate not only in the former FATA but also in KP as a whole. Under the AACP, the military may indefinitely detain civilians without charge in internment camps, occupy property, conduct operations, and convict detainees solely using the testimony of one soldier. Both before and after the ordinance’s passage, the military was immune from prosecution in civilian courts for its actions in the province. The AACP also provides that the military is not required to release the names of detainees to their families, who are therefore unable to challenge their detentions in a civilian court. A provincial appeals court ruled the ordinance unconstitutional, but the Supreme Court suspended this ruling. The appeal remained with the Supreme Court at year’s end. Pending the outcome of this appeal, the military retains control of detention centers and law enforcement activities in much of the former FATA. The government contends that the ordinance is necessary to preserve law and order while it builds up the capacity of the provincial police force to take over for the military during the ongoing merger between the former FATA and KP.
On October 24, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) officials detained Muhammad Ismail, father of rights activist and vocal critic of the country’s military, Gululai Ismail. The FIA stated it detained Muhammad Ismail for “hate speech and fake information against government institutions on Facebook and Twitter.” On November 25, the Peshawar High Court issued an order granting conditional bail to Muhammad Ismail, after which he was released from detention.

**Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

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

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

A functioning bail system exists. Human rights groups noted, however, that judges sometimes denied bail until payment of bribes. NGOs reported authorities sometimes denied bail in blasphemy cases because defendants who faced the death penalty if convicted were likely to flee or were at risk from public vigilantism. Officials often simultaneously charged defendants facing lower-order blasphemy charges with terrorism offenses, which are nonbailable. NGOs also reported that lawyers representing individuals accused of blasphemy often asked that their clients remain in custody to protect them from vigilantante violence. Bail is not available in antiterrorism courts.
The government provided state-funded legal counsel to prisoners accused of crimes for which conviction included the death penalty, but it did not regularly provide legal representation in other cases. The constitution recognizes the right of habeas corpus and allows the high courts to demand that a person accused of a crime be present in court. The law allows citizens to submit habeas corpus petitions to the courts. In many cases involving forced disappearances, authorities failed to present detainees according to judges’ orders.

In some instances, police held detainees incommunicado. NGOs reported that on August 10, Karachi police arrested a local newspaper editor, who had been covering police corruption and organized crime, and held him for three days barring outside communication. His family did not know of his whereabouts during this period.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Reports found that police arbitrarily detained individuals to extort bribes for their release or detained relatives of wanted individuals to compel suspects to surrender. Ethnic minorities and refugees in Karachi who lacked official identification documents reported arbitrary arrests and harassment by police authorities. They reported police, including officers from the Federal Investigation Agency, a border control, criminal investigation, counterintelligence and security agency, made the arrests to extract bribes.

**Pretrial Detention:** According to provincial prison departments, as of August an estimated 62 percent of detainees were either awaiting or undergoing trial. Reports indicated that prison authorities did not differentiate between pretrial detainees and prisoners being tried when collecting prison data. Police sometimes held persons in investigative detention without seeking a magistrate’s approval and often held detainees without charge until a court challenged the detention. Magistrates generally approved investigative detention at the request of police without requiring justification. When police did not produce sufficient evidence to try a suspect within the 14-day period, they generally requested that magistrates issue another judicial remand, thereby further extending the suspect’s detention.

By law detainees must be tried within 30 days of arrest. There were exceptions: a district coordination officer has authority to recommend preventive detention on the grounds of “maintenance of public order” for up to 90 days and may--with approval of the Home Department--extend it for an additional 90 days.
Some individuals remained in pretrial detention for periods longer than the maximum sentence for the crime with which they were charged. Authorities seldom informed detainees promptly of charges against them.

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

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

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

**e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but according to NGOs and legal experts, the judiciary often was subject to external influences, such as fear of reprisal from extremist elements in terrorism or blasphemy cases and public politicization of high-profile cases. Civil society organizations reported judges were reluctant to exonerate individuals accused of blasphemy, fearing vigilante violence. Media and the public generally considered the high courts and the Supreme Court more credible, but media discussed allegations of pressure from security agencies on judges of these courts. On September 11, Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa warned that public perceptions of selective accountability in high-profile corruption cases had grown and should be addressed.

Extensive case backlogs in the lower and superior courts undermined the right to effective remedy and to a fair and public hearing. Antiquated procedural rules,
unfilled judgeships, poor case management, and weak legal education caused delays in civil and criminal cases. According to Chief Justice Khosa, 25 percent of judgeships were vacant in March. Khosa further stated that 1.9 million cases were pending in the judicial system, of which an estimated 40,000 were pending in the Supreme Court. In February Khosa said the Supreme Court would increase its use of video links to hear testimony and reduce delays of trial. The Lahore High Court took steps to improve judicial efficiency. In 2017 the court’s chief justice introduced legal reforms intended to reduce strikes and formalized an alternate dispute resolution (ADR) system. As of February, 36 ADR centers across Punjab Province received 30,688 references out of which 14,239 references were successfully mediated while mediation failed in 4,296 cases.

In April the Federal Judicial Academy hosted a National Judicial Conference on Expeditious Justice, announcing a “model court” project initiated across the country. At the direction of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the government established so-called model courts in each province to focus solely on backlogs of murder and narcotics cases, many decades old. Officials instructed judges presiding over these model courts to conduct trials on a day-to-day basis, until they cleared the case backlogs. The government established 116 model courts throughout the country (36 in Punjab, 27 in Sindh, 27 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 24 in Balochistan, and two in the Islamabad Capital Territory).

According to the Ministry of Law and Justice, as of June, there were 1.8 million backlogged civil dispute cases. In the past two years, the ministry has cleared 450,000 cases through the ADR system, most of which involve family law. A typical civil dispute case may take up to 10 years to settle, while the ADR process may reduce this time to approximately three to five months. The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the high courts does not extend to the Azad Kashmir area (AK), which has its own elected president, prime minister, legislature, and court system. On January 17, the Supreme Court ruled it had jurisdiction over the Gilgit-Baltistan courts and residents of Gilgit-Baltistan could appeal their courts’ decisions in the Supreme Court. Before this judgment, Gilgit-Baltistan also had a separate judicial system.

Many lower courts remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from wealthy persons and influential religious or political figures. The Supreme Court overturned several criminal convictions on grounds of false testimony. In a March judgment against a police officer whose 2007 false testimony in a criminal case led to the execution of an innocent man, the Supreme Court ruled penalties for perjury would apply in criminal cases.
There were incidents of unknown persons threatening or killing witnesses, prosecutors, or investigating police officers in high-level cases.

The use of informal justice systems that lacked institutionalized legal protections continued, especially in rural areas, and often resulted in human rights abuses. Large landholders and other community leaders in Sindh and Punjab and tribal leaders in Pashtun and Baloch areas sometimes held local council meetings (panchayats or jirgas) outside the established legal system. Such councils settled feuds and imposed tribal penalties, including fines, imprisonment, and sometimes the death penalty. These councils often sentenced women to violent punishment or death for so-called honor-related crimes. In May the Punjab Assembly passed the Local Government Act and the Panchayat and Village Councils Act, which together formalized a two-tier system of a directly elected town council paired with assemblies (panchayats) composed of the town or neighborhood’s residents. The law authorizes panchayats to perform public services and any responsibilities delegated to them by the town council. In May there were unconfirmed media reports a panchayat in Gujrunwala (Punjab) ordered or permitted the gang rape of a woman whom the panchayat found guilty of illicit relations with a man.

Despite the repeal of the FIGR and the Frontier Crimes Regulations legal code, in the former FATA, such judgments are a common practice. On January 16, the Supreme Court ruled that the way jirgas and panchayats operated was unconstitutional and violated the country’s international human rights commitments. The court restricted the use of these informal justice mechanisms to arbitration, mediation, negotiation, or reconciliation of consenting parties in a civil dispute.

Trial Procedures

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

The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child noted police lacked training to properly handle child delinquency, and cited reports of police brutality against juveniles. Many juveniles spent long periods behind bars because they could not afford bail. According to an NGO, juveniles are at risk for sexual and physical assault by police, adults, and other juveniles as soon as they enter the judicial system, including transportation to detention. Juveniles do not have separate facilities from adult detainees.

In May Parliament passed the Juvenile Justice System Act, replacing the 2000 Juvenile Justice System Ordinance. The act mandates the creation of juvenile courts and “juvenile justice committees,” intended to expedite the administration of justice for minors by resolving cases that involve minor offenses without resorting to formal judicial proceedings. Despite a directive that the government create these courts and committees within three months of the law’s passage, implementation has been slow. As of September the government had established three child courts in Lahore and two in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On June 19, Chief Justice Khosa stated the government should establish child courts in every district. Civil society groups working on the issue welcomed this commitment but cautioned that the government should phase the implementation to afford effective and sustainable child courts, with juvenile needs in mind.

Both the act and the previous 2000 Juvenile Justice System Ordinance ban the application of the death penalty for minors, yet courts sentenced convicted children to death under the Antiterrorism Act. Furthermore, lack of documentation made determining the ages of possible minors difficult. In April the Sindh Provincial Government established 172 juvenile courts in the province under the 2018 Juvenile Justice System Act by designating all district and session judges and additional judges of Sindh as juvenile courts.

There were instances of lack of transparency in court cases, particularly if the case involved high-profile or sensitive issues such as blasphemy. NGOs reported the government often located such trials in jails due to concerns for the safety of defendants, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and witnesses. Although these safety concerns were well-founded, NGOs expressed concerns regarding transparency issues.
The Antiterrorism Act allows the government to use special, streamlined antiterrorism courts (ATCs) to try persons charged with terrorist activities and sectarian violence. In other courts suspects must appear within seven working days of their arrest, but ATCs are free to extend that period. Human rights activists criticized this parallel system, charging it was more vulnerable to political manipulation. Authorities continued to expedite high-profile cases by referring them to ATCs, even if they had no connection to terrorism. The frequent use of ATCs for nonterrorism cases, including for blasphemy or other acts deemed to foment religious hatred, led to significant backlogs, and despite being comparatively faster than the regular court system, ATCs often failed to meet speedy trial standards.

Through March the government utilized military courts to try civilians on terrorism and related charges. Trials in military courts were not public. On March 31, the constitutional amendment establishing and empowering these military courts expired by virtue of a sunset clause. Parliament failed to enact legislation extending the military courts’ jurisdiction. At least one news outlet reported 185 cases were pending at the time of expiration of the courts’ jurisdiction.

The Federal Shariat Court (FSC) has exclusive appellate jurisdiction over all cases involving the application and interpretation of the Hudood Ordinances, enacted in 1979 by military leader Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq to implement a strict interpretation of Islamic law by punishing extramarital sex, false accusations of extramarital sex, theft, and alcohol consumption. The FSC also has power to revise legislation it deems inconsistent with Sharia law. Individuals may appeal FSC decisions to the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. A full bench of the Supreme Court may grant a further appeal.

Civil society groups stated courts often failed to protect the rights of religious minorities against Muslim accusers. While the numerical majority of those imprisoned for blasphemy were Muslim, religious minorities were disproportionately affected, relative to their small percentage of the population. Lower courts often failed to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases, and most convicted persons spent years in jail before higher courts eventually overturned their convictions or ordered their release.

On January 29, the Supreme Court upheld its landmark 2018 ruling overturning the conviction of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. On May 7, Bibi left the country because death threats from the
antiblasphemy group Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan and others made it unsafe for her to remain.

In some cases, police arrested individuals after acts of vigilantism related to blasphemy or religious discrimination. In September police arrested seven persons in cases related to attacks on Hindu temples and properties after a Hindu teacher was accused of blasphemy in Ghotki, Sindh.

Also see the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at [https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

**Political Prisoners and Detainees**

Some ethnic and religious groups claimed authorities detained their members based on political affiliation or beliefs. Under the 2009 Aghaz-e-Haqooq (“beginning of the rights”) Balochistan legislative package of reforms, the government announced a general amnesty for all Baloch political prisoners, leaders, and activists in exile as well as those allegedly involved in “antistate” activities. Despite the amnesty offers, illegal detention of Baloch leaders and the disappearance of private Baloch citizens continued. On June 28, Balochistan Province Home Minister Mir Ziaullah Langove claimed that as many as 200 missing persons had returned to their homes in the province since January. The NGO Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, however, could only confirm 100 persons had returned home between January and June. In July, reports indicated 12 more missing persons returned to their homes in various areas of Balochistan, although the practice of disappearing persons for political dissent continued, with some contacts noting it had escalated across the province.

**Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

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

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

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

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

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

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

On May 26, security forces fired on PTM protesters, including two parliamentarians, in North Waziristan, killing at least 13 and injuring dozens. Authorities arrested both members of Parliament following the incident and
accused them of leading an assault on a military checkpoint. Video of the incident released on social media appears to corroborate the PTM contention that protests were peaceful until police fired on demonstrators; traditional media and politicians remained mostly silent. Authorities released the two parliamentarians on bail after nearly four months in jail; however, they still face capital charges in relation to the military’s claim that PTM protesters assaulted security officers.

Militants and terrorist groups, including the TTP, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and the Islamic State Khorasan Province targeted civilians, journalists, community leaders, security forces, law enforcement officers, and schools, killing and injuring hundreds with bombs, suicide attacks, and other forms of violence. Militant and terrorist groups often attacked religious minorities. On February 18, unidentified assailants shot and killed Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP) leader Abdul Habib in Karachi. On June 29, a suicide motorcycle gunman killed Awami National Party (ANP) Peshawar district president Sartaj Khan. His killing followed two separate bombings in the former FATA that failed to kill two other senior ANP leaders. On August 3, unidentified assailants killed Muhammad Abdul Hayee Jatoi, a local leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal, and his son in Quetta, Balochistan. On August 15, unknown assailants killed Khalilur Rehman, a 38-year-old PTI worker in Karachi. Rehman also served as the Orangi town bureau chief for the weekly newspaper Tribal Times, based in the former FATA. On August 16, a timed device detonated in a Quetta mosque frequented by members of the Afghan Taliban, killing Hafiz Ahmadullah, brother of Afghan Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, and three others. A low-intensity separatist insurgency continued in Balochistan. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in the fight against militant groups.

Militants carried out numerous attacks on political party offices and candidates, including assaults leading up to the July 20 special elections in the former FATA.

Political, sectarian, criminal, and ethnic violence in Karachi continued, although violence declined and gang wars were less prevalent than before security operations in the city. In February the Sindh Rangers, a paramilitary force technically under the army’s control and operating under a mandate renewed every 90 days by the provincial government, announced the arrest of eight suspected hitmen involved in attacks on Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and PSP workers.

Killings: There were reports government security forces engaged in extrajudicial killings during operations against suspected militants throughout the country. On
January 19, the Punjab Police Counterterrorism Department (CTD) reportedly shot and killed a couple and their teenage daughter in what the CTD labeled an “intelligence-based operation.” The Punjab law minister reportedly lamented the “collateral damage” and promised that the Punjab government would bear the education expenses of the family’s surviving children.

There were numerous media reports of police and security forces killing terrorist suspects in “police encounters.” The trial against Rao Anwar, accused of the extrajudicial killing of Naqibullah Mehsud in a staged counterterror operation in 2018, continued at year’s end.

Security forces in Balochistan continued to disappear pretrial terror suspects--along with human rights activists, politicians, and teachers. The Baloch Human Rights Organization noted 45 individuals had disappeared, and assailants had killed 15 persons in seven districts in July alone.

On April 12, a blast at a vegetable market in Quetta targeting the Shia Hazara population, killed 20 and injured at least 48. Frontier Corps paramilitary soldiers--assigned to guard the Hazara shoppers--were among those killed and wounded. On August 6, a blast targeting the Shia Hazara community in Quetta killed one person and injured 10. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.

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

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

Other Conflict-related Abuse: In April armed assailants shot and killed a police officer assigned to protect a team administering the polio vaccine to children in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The same week, an assailant in Lahore stabbed and injured two workers while they administered the polio vaccine to children. On April 24, unidentified suspects killed a female antipolio immunization campaign worker and injured another one in Chaman, Balochistan. The suspects fled the scene after shooting the two workers. Authorities suspended the vaccination campaign in the area after the incident.
The TTP particularly targeted girls’ schools to demonstrate its opposition to girls’ education but also destroyed boys’ schools. Military operations created hardships for the local civilian population when militants closed key access roads and tunnels and attacked communications and energy networks, disrupting commerce and the distribution of food and water.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

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

Freedom of Expression: The constitution provides for the right to free speech and the press, subject to “any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam” or the “integrity, security, or defense of Pakistan, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality.” The law permits citizens to criticize the government publicly or privately, but court decisions have interpreted the constitution as prohibiting criticism of the military and judiciary. Such criticism may result in legal, political, or commercial reprisal. Blasphemy laws restrict individual rights to free speech concerning matters of religion and religious doctrine. According to the penal code, the punishments for conviction of blasphemy include the death sentence for “defiling the Prophet Muhammad,” life imprisonment for “defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Quran,” and 10 years’ imprisonment for “insulting another’s religious feelings.” The courts enforced the blasphemy laws, and although authorities have not executed any person for committing blasphemy to date, allegations of blasphemy have often prompted vigilantism and mob lynchings. The government restricted some language and symbolic speech based on hate speech and terrorism provisions.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: Threats, harassment, and violence against journalists who reported on sensitive issues such as civil-military tensions or abuses by security forces occurred during the year. Both the military, through the Director General--Inter-Services Public Relations, and government oversight bodies, such as the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)--enforced censorship. By law the government may restrict information that might be prejudicial to the national interest. Authorities used these laws to prevent or punish media criticism of the government and armed forces. To publish within
Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, media owners had to obtain permission from the Kashmir Council and the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. There were limitations on transmission of Indian media content. In February the Ministry of Information introduced restrictions to control “hate speech” including in social media. Rights activists reported the government had contacted Twitter asking them to take down accounts of activists deemed problematic.

Media outlets claimed the government pressured stations into halting broadcasting of interviews with opposition political party leaders. On July 1, former president Asif Zardari of the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party was seconds into an exclusive interview with a leading television news anchorperson, Hamid Mir of GEO-TV, when two stations simultaneously cut short their broadcasts. On July 11, an interview with opposition leader Maryam Nawaz of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) on Hum News was cut short. On July 26, television outlets halted live coverage of opposition leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s speech at a party rally in Karachi attended by approximately 20,000 supporters.

PEMRA issued editorial directives to television stations during the year and authorized its chairperson to shut down any channel found in violation of the PEMRA code of conduct, primarily with regard to prohibiting telecasts of protests that might instigate violence. Starting in 2018 the Interior Ministry shut down the Islamabad office of Radio Mashaal, the Pashto language service of Radio Free Europe. The Ministry based its decision on an intelligence report claiming Radio Mashaal radio programs were “against the interests of Pakistan and in line with a hostile intelligence agency’s agenda.” The ban remained in effect at year’s end.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces, political parties, militants, and other groups subjected media outlets, journalists, and their families to threats and harassment. Female journalists in particular faced threats of sexual violence and harassment, including via social media, where they have a particularly strong presence. Security forces allegedly abducted journalists. Media outlets that reported on topics authorities view as sensitive were often the targets of retribution. Additionally, journalists working in remote and conflict-ridden areas lacked basic digital and traditional security skills, which increased pressure to self-censor or not cover a story.

According to sources, journalists were subjected to a variety of pressure tactics, including harassment and intimidation. The Committee to Protect Journalists did not confirm any targeted killings of journalists during the year. Assailants killed journalists during the year, but it was unclear whether their journalism was the
motive for the killings. On May 4, an assailant killed Awaz Ali Sher Rajpar, a journalist affiliated with Sindhi daily Awami, in an attack on the Pad Eidan Press Club in Naushehro Feroze, Sindh. Rajpar had unsuccessfully requested police protection after a suspect in a corruption case threatened him because of his reporting of local corruption. Police arrested Rajpar’s first cousin, and authorities attributed his death to a family dispute.

On February 9, authorities arrested Rizwan-ur-Rehman Razi, a television journalist for Din News, for “defamatory and obnoxious posts” on his Twitter account against the “judiciary, government institutions and intelligence agencies.” Observers of the arrest allege authorities beat Razi.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Media organizations generally engaged in self-censorship, especially in reporting news regarding the military; journalists stated they were under increased pressure to report the predetermined narrative during the year. Journalists reported regular denial of permission to visit conflict areas or being required to travel with a military escort while reporting on conditions in conflict areas. They reported pressure to produce articles with a military viewpoint. Other reporting tended to be relatively objective with a focus on facts rather than deeper analysis, which journalists generally regarded as risky. Both local and foreign journalists complained of harassment and intimidation by government officials. Blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws restricted publication on certain topics. Government censors reviewed foreign books before they allowed reprinting, but there were no reports of the government banning books during the year. Imported movies, books, magazines, and newspapers were subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content. Obscene literature, a category the government defined broadly, was subject to seizure.

The government fined private television channels for alleged violations of the “code of ethics” and for showing banned content on-screen. Authorities reportedly used PEMRA rules to silence broadcast media by either suspending licenses or threatening to do so, or by without notice reassigning the cable channel number of a targeted outlet so that its programming would be hard or impossible to find on most televisions. Many outlets resorted to self-censorship, particularly when reporting on religious or security issues. The Central Board of Film Censors previewed and censored sexual content and any content that glorified Indian heroes, leaders, or military figures in foreign and domestic films.
The government continued to use network access as a tool to exert control over media outlets. Media outlets seen as supportive of the PML-N faced distribution disruptions.

The Jang/Geo media group also reportedly faced harassment and newspaper distribution blockages. Unidentified individuals reportedly pressured newspaper vendors not to distribute the Urdu language Jang newspaper and its sister English language paper The News, and discouraged advertisers from advertising with the Jang/Geo group’s outlets. Cable operators dropped the Geo news channel from their cable systems, or repeatedly changed its assigned channel.

Media outlets reported the government increasingly used the infrastructure of the media system as well as government advertising, which makes up a large portion of media revenue, to suppress information deemed threatening. Media houses, acting as a government-influenced media syndicate, fired outspoken journalists deemed to be a threat. The government pressured distributors into restricting distribution or changing channels of outlets journalists deemed problematic, incentivizing media companies to censor their content.

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

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

Internet Freedom

The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) is responsible for the establishment, operation, and maintenance of telecommunications and has complete control of all content broadcast over telecommunication channels.

Since 2012 the government has implemented a systematic, nationwide content-monitoring and filtering system to restrict or block “unacceptable” content, including material that it deems un-Islamic, pornographic, or critical of the state or military forces. The restrictive 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) gives the government sweeping powers to censor content on the internet, which
authorities used as a tool for the continued clampdown on civil society. In March the FIA registered a case against senior journalist Shahzeb Jillani in Karachi under the PECA, accusing him of “defamatory remarks against the respected institutions of Pakistan” and cyberterrorism. Jillani alleged law enforcement agencies were directly involved in kidnapping citizens. In May a Karachi court dismissed charges against him, declaring the FIA failed to produce substantial proof against him.

The government blocked websites because of allegedly anti-Islamic, pornographic, blasphemous, or extremist content. The Ministry for Religious Affairs is responsible for reviewing and reporting blasphemous or offensive content to the PTA for possible removal, or to the Federal Investigative Agency for possible criminal prosecution. There were also reports the government attempted to control or block websites that advocated Baloch independence. There were reports the government used surveillance software. There was poor transparency and accountability surrounding content monitoring, and observers believed the government often used vague criteria without due process.

According to Coda Story, an online news platform, the country acquired the services of a Canada-based company to help build a nationwide “web monitoring system” that employs Deep Packet Inspection to monitor communications and record traffic and call data on behalf of the PTA.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government generally did not interfere with academic freedom but restricted, screened, and censored certain cultural events with perceived antistate content. The government interfered with art exhibitions as well as musical and cultural activities. Holding such an event requires a government-issued permit, which the government frequently withheld.

On October 27, Karachi authorities shut down the art installation “Killing Fields of Karachi,” which featured 444 small concrete tombstones that each represented an alleged victim of former police officer Rao Anwar, who has been accused of being directly or indirectly involved in the killings of 444 persons in police encounters. The installation also included a documentary featuring the father of Naqeebullah Mehsud, who died in an allegedly fake police encounter that Anwar orchestrated.

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

**Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

Although the former FATA is under the same legal framework as the rest of the country, civil and military authorities continued to impose collective punishment through the West Pakistan Maintenance of Peace order, and Section 144 of the criminal code. These statutes effectively allow authorities to continue the longstanding practice of suspending the right to assemble or speak in the newly merged areas. By law district authorities may prevent gatherings of more than four persons without police authorization. The law permits the government to ban all rallies and processions, except funeral processions, for security reasons.

Authorities generally prohibited Ahmadi Muslims from holding conferences or gatherings. Ahmadis cited the refusal of local authorities to reopen Ahmadi mosques damaged by anti-Ahmadi rioters in past years as evidence of the ongoing severe conditions for the community.

During the year PTM mobilized its predominantly ethnic Pashtun supporters to participate in sit-ins and demonstrations to demand justice and to protest abuses by government security forces. Following the government’s pledge to take a harder line against PTM, the number of protests and rallies fell across the country. PTM activists continued to operate, although under much greater scrutiny after the arrest of most of the movement’s key leaders.

**Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for freedom of association subject to certain restrictions imposed by law. The government maintained a series of policies that steadily eroded the freedom of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and domestic NGOs to carry out their work and access the communities they serve. INGOs, UN organizations, and international missions must request government permission in the form of no-objection certificates (NOCs) before they may conduct most in-country travel, carry out certain project activities, or initiate projects. Slow government approvals to NOC requests, financial sustainability, and operational uncertainty significantly constrained INGO activity.

The government adopted a new online registration regime and a more restrictive operating agreement for INGOs in 2015. The registration process entails extensive
document requirements, multiple levels of review, and constant investigations and harassment by the security apparatus and other government offices. In April, 20 INGOs whose applications for registration were denied by the Ministry of Interior in 2018, appeared before an interagency committee to appeal those initial rejections. The hearings did not provide the reasons for the original rejections to the INGOs, nor an opportunity to discuss how to adjust their programs to secure a successful appeal. The ministry has not announced the final decisions on the appeals.

The years of uncertainty regarding registration status negatively impacted even those INGOs that had not received final rejection notices. Those INGOs without a clear registration status found it difficult to develop long-term plans and attract long-term funding and must rely on local partners or centrally managed funding from their overseas headquarters. They faced additional barriers to fundraising, opening bank accounts, and obtaining tax-exempt status from the Federal Board of Revenue. No-objection certificates were hard to obtain in certain provinces without an approved registration, thus hindering implementation and monitoring of activities, even for INGOs that had initiated the new registration process. In cases where INGOs secured registration, they still faced staffing limitations and government interference in their programmatic activities and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local partners. INGOs also faced an uptick in visa denials for international staff and consultants. The lack of transparency and unpredictability of the registration process caused some INGOs to withdraw their registration applications and terminate operations in the country.

The government at both the federal and provincial levels similarly restricted the access of foreign-funded local NGOs through a separate registration regime, no-objection certificates, and other requirements. Authorities required NGOs to obtain no-objection certificates before accepting foreign funding, booking facilities or using university spaces for events, or working on sensitive human rights issues. Even when local NGOs receiving foreign funding were appropriately registered, the government often denied their requests for no-objection certificates. Domestic NGOs continued to face regular government monitoring and harassment, even if in possession of all required certifications.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report at https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.
d. Freedom of Movement

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

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

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

Foreign Travel: The law prohibits travel to Israel, and the country’s passports include a statement that they are “valid for all countries except Israel”. Passport applicants must list their religious affiliation, and those wishing to be listed as Muslims, must swear they believe Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the founder of the Ahmadi movement as a false prophet. Ahmadi representatives reported authorities wrote the word “Ahmadi” in their passports if they refused to sign the declaration.

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

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

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

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

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

There were no reports of involuntary returns. Many IDPs reportedly wanted to return home, despite the lack of local infrastructure, housing, and available service delivery and the strict control that security forces maintained over returnees’ movements through extensive checkpoints. Other IDP families delayed their return or chose some family members to remain in the settled areas of KP where regular access to health care, education, and other social services were available. For IDPs who were unwilling or unable to return, the government coordinated support with the United Nations and other international organizations. The UN World Food Program distributed a monthly food ration to IDPs in KP displaced by conflict and continued to provide a six-month food ration to IDPs who returned to their areas of origin in the former FATA.

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

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: The government provided temporary legal status to approximately 1.4 million Afghans formally registered and holding proof of registration cards. In June the PTI-led government continued its trend of granting longer-term extensions, approving a one-year extension through June 30, 2020. The country also hosts 878,000 Afghans with Afghan Citizen Cards but does not grant them refugee status. The government typically extends the validity of the Afghan Citizen Cards in short increments. In October the government granted a two-month extension through the end of the year.

Although fewer in number than in previous years, there were reports provincial authorities, police, and host communities continued to harass Afghan refugees. UNHCR reported that from January to October there were 1,234 arrests and detentions of refugees. UNHCR reported arrests and detentions were down 63 percent through September.

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

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

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

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

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

g. Stateless Persons

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

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides the majority of citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Gilgit-Baltistan and AK have political systems that differ from the rest of the country, and neither have representation in the national parliament.

Elections and Political Participation
Recent Elections: In July 2018 the country held direct elections that resulted in a PTI-majority national government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan. EU observers assessed voting was “well-conducted and transparent” but noted “counting was sometimes problematic.” Civil society organizations and political parties raised concerns regarding pre-election interference, including restrictions on freedom of expression, allegedly creating an uneven electoral playing field.

In September 2018 the Electoral College (made up of the members of both houses of Parliament, and of the provincial assemblies) held presidential elections and selected PTI member Arif Alvi to succeed Mamnoon Hussain of the PML-N. Following the passage of the 25th amendment merging the former FATA with the rest of KP Province, on July 20, the government held special elections. These elections gave residents of the former FATA representation in the KP provincial assembly for the first time in their history. Politically, the only remaining hurdle for full integration of the former FATA with KP is elections for local leaders.

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

Participation of Women and Minorities: The Elections Act of 2017 stipulates special measures to enhance electoral participation of women, religious minorities, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities. By law women must constitute 5 percent of party tickets, and if less than 10 percent of women vote in any constituency, authorities may presume that the women’s vote was suppressed, and the results for that constituency or polling station may be nullified. The government enforced the law for the first time in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,
when the Election Commission canceled the district’s 2018 general election results after women made up less than 10 percent of the vote.

Cultural and traditional barriers in tribal and rural areas impeded some women from voting. Authorities used quotas to assure a minimum level of participation of women in elected bodies. There are 60 seats in the National Assembly and 17 seats in the Senate reserved for women. Authorities apportioned these seats based on total votes secured by the candidates of each political party that contested the elections. Women and minorities also may contest directly elected seats, but both women and minorities have struggled to be directly elected outside of the reserved seats. Authorities reserved 132 of the 779 seats for women in provincial assemblies and one-third of the seats on local councils. Women participated actively as political party members, but they were not always successful in securing leadership positions within parties, apart from women’s wings. Women served in the federal cabinet.

The law provides for mail-in voting for persons with disabilities. It requires expedited issuance of identification cards (which also serve as voter identification cards) for non-Muslims, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities.

The government requires voters to indicate their religion when registering to vote. Ahmadis are required to either swear Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam and denounce the Ahmadi movement’s founder, or declare themselves as non-Muslims, in order to vote. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, and many were unable to vote because they did not comply.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

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

Corruption: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) serves as the highest-level anticorruption authority, with a mandate to eliminate corruption through awareness, prevention, and enforcement. The NAB and other investigative agencies, including the Federal Board of Revenue, the State Bank of Pakistan, the

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

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

The government continued its corruption investigations and prosecutions of opposition political party leaders during the year, with high-profile actions brought against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and former president Asif Ali Zardari. Opposition parties alleged these prosecutions selectively targeted their leadership.

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

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

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

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights
Some domestic and international human rights groups operated without significant government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. The government increasingly restricted the operating ability of NGOs, however, particularly those whose work revealed shortcomings or misdeeds of the government, military, or intelligence services, or that worked on issues related to conflict areas or advocacy. These groups faced numerous regulations regarding travel, visas, and registration that hampered their efforts to program and raise funds. International staff members of organizations, including those from the few successfully registered INGOs, continued to face delays or denials in the issuance of visas and no-objection certificates for in-country travel. The domestic NGO registration agreement with the government requires NGOs not to use terms the government finds controversial--such as Countering Violent Extremism; Peace and Conflict Resolution; IDPs; reproductive health; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI) persons--in their annual reports or documents. The agreement also prohibits NGOs from employing individuals of Indian or Israeli nationality or origin. Few NGOs had access to certain parts of KP, the former FATA, and certain areas in Balochistan.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The 2012 National Commission for Human Rights Bill authorized the establishment of an independent committee, the National Commission on Human Rights. The first commission’s term expired in June, and authorities had not established a second commission as of September. A standalone Ministry of Human Rights was reconstituted in 2015. The Senate and National Assembly standing committees on law, justice, minorities, and human rights held hearings on a range of human rights problems.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is a criminal offense, with punishment for conviction that ranges from a minimum of 10 to 25 years in prison and a fine, to the death penalty. The penalty for conviction of gang rape is death or life imprisonment. The law does not explicitly criminalize spousal rape and defines rape as a crime committed by a man against a woman. Although rape was frequent, prosecutions are rare. The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Rape) Act of 2016 provides for collection of DNA evidence and includes nondisclosure of a rape victim’s name, the right to legal representation of rape victims, relaxed reporting requirements for female victims, and enhanced penalties for rape of victims with mental or physical disabilities.
The government did not effectively enforce the 2006 Women’s Protection Act, which brought the crime of rape under the jurisdiction of criminal rather than Islamic courts. The law prohibits police from arresting or holding a female victim overnight at a police station without a civil court judge’s consent. The law requires a victim to complain directly to a sessions court, which tries for heinous offenses. After recording the victim’s statement, the sessions court judge files a complaint, after which police may make arrests. NGOs reported the procedure created barriers for rape victims who could not travel to or access the courts. NGOs continued to report that rape was a severely underreported crime.

The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act provides legal protections for domestic abuse victims, including judicial protective orders and access to a new network of district-level women’s shelters. Centers provide women a range of services including assistance with the completion of first information reports regarding the crimes committed against them, first aid, medical examinations, post-trauma rehabilitation, free legal services, and a shelter home. The Punjab government funds four women’s career centers in Punjab universities, 12 crisis centers that provide legal and psychological services to women, and emergency shelters for women and children. In March the Punjab government established a women’s hostel authority to assist women in finding safe, affordable, temporary lodging while looking for work.

Lahore uses a specialty court designed to focus exclusively on gender-based violence (GBV) crimes. The Lahore Gender-Based Violence Court receives the most serious cases in the district, such as aggravated rape, and offers enhanced protections to women and girl.

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

Prosecutions of reported rapes were rare, although there were reports that prosecution rates increased in response to police capacity building programs and public campaigns to combat the lack of awareness regarding rape and GBV. Police and NGOs reported individuals involved in other types of disputes sometimes filed false rape charges, reducing the ability of police to identify legitimate cases and proceed with prosecution. NGOs reported police sometimes accepted bribes from perpetrators, abused or threatened victims, and demanded victims drop charges, especially when suspected perpetrators were influential community leaders. Some police demanded bribes from victims before registering
rape charges, and investigations were often superficial. Furthermore, accusations of rape were often resolved using extrajudicial measures, with the victim frequently forced to marry her attacker.

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

No specific federal law prohibits domestic violence, which was widespread. Police may charge acts of domestic violence as crimes pursuant to the penal code’s general provisions against assault and bodily injury. Provincial laws also prohibit acts of domestic violence. Forms of domestic violence reportedly included beating, physical disfigurement, shaving of women’s eyebrows and hair, and—in extreme cases—homicide. Dowry and other family-related disputes sometimes resulted in death or disfigurement by burning or acid.

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

To address societal norms that disapprove of victims who report GBV, the government established women’s police stations, staffed by female officers, to offer women a safe place to report complaints and file charges. There was an inadequate number of women’s police stations, and they faced financial shortfalls and appropriate staffing shortages.

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

Government centers lacked sufficient space, staff, and resources. Many overcrowded dar-ul-amans did not meet international standards. Some shelters did not offer access to basic needs such as showers, laundry supplies, or feminine hygiene products. In some cases individuals reportedly abused women at the government-run shelters, and staff severely restricted women’s movements, or pressured them to return to their abusers. There were some reports of women exploited in prostitution and sex trafficking in shelters. Some shelter staff reportedly discriminated against the shelter residents, assuming that if a woman fled her home, it was because she was a woman of ill repute.

Media reported that Pakistani women and girls were trafficked to China, some as child brides. On December 5, the Associated Press reported that Pakistani investigators had compiled a list of up to 629 girls and women being trafficked to China but that officials with connections to China hindered efforts to investigate the trafficking. The embassy of China in Islamabad denied the reports.

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

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

A 2004 law on honor killings, the 2011 Prevention of Antiwomen Practices Act, and the 2016 Criminal Law Amendment (Offenses in the Name or Pretext of Honor) Act criminalize acts committed against women in the name of traditional practices. Despite these laws, hundreds of women reportedly were victims of so-called honor killings, and many cases went unreported and unpunished. In many cases officials allowed the male involved in the alleged “crime of honor” to flee. Because these crimes generally occurred within families, many went unreported. Police and NGOs reported that increased media coverage enabled law enforcement officers to take some action against these crimes. Media reported that assailants
killed 78 persons, including 50 women, in “honor” killings in the first six months of the year.

In February Zulfiqar Wassan killed a 14-year-old girl, Rimsha Wassan, in Khairpur, Sindh. After police apprehended Wassan, they discovered that he was involved in three other “honor” killing cases. On July 1, police arrested a man and several of his family members in Multan, Punjab, after the man reportedly shot and killed his wife, their two children, and six of her family members as revenge for his wife’s suspected affair. The District Police Officer reported that the man was unrepentant for what was “clearly an honor killing.” As of September the cases were pending with the trial court.

There were reports that the practice of disfigurement, including cutting off a woman’s nose or ears or throwing acid in the face, in connection with domestic disputes or so-called honor crimes, continued and legal repercussions were rare.

The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act (applying to all other provinces) codify the legal mechanisms to formally register and prove the legitimacy of Hindu marriages. The 2017 Hindu Marriage Act allows for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. Some activists claimed the latter provision weaken the government’s ability to protect against forced marriage and conversion. The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages. The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act 2018 allows local government officials to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh Anand Karaj marriage registrar.

The 2011 Prevention of Antiwomen Practices Amendment Act criminalizes and punishes the giving of a woman in marriage to settle a civil or criminal dispute; depriving a woman of her rights to inherit movable or immovable property by deceitful or illegal means; coercing or in any manner compelling a woman to enter into marriage; and compelling, arranging, or facilitating the marriage of a woman with the Quran, including forcing her to take an oath on the Quran to remain unmarried or not to claim her share of an inheritance. Although prohibited by law, these practices continued in some areas. In March a local jirga gave a seven-year-old girl as compensation for an honor killing case in Pano Aqil, Sindh. Police recovered the girl after a video showing her crying for justice went viral.
The law makes maiming or killing using a corrosive substance (such as acid) a crime and imposes stiff penalties against perpetrators. There were numerous acid attacks on women across the country, with few perpetrators brought to justice.

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

Sexual Harassment: Although several laws criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and public sphere, the problem was reportedly widespread. The law requires all provinces to have provincial-level ombudsmen. The Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan Province had established ombudsmen. On April 1, Balochistan appointed advocate Sabira Islam as the first provincial ombudsperson.

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

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

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

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived by birth in the country, although children born abroad after 2000 may derive their citizenship by descent if either the mother or the father is a citizen and the child is registered with the proper authorities.

Education: The constitution mandates compulsory education, provided free of charge by the government, to all children between ages five and 16. Despite this provision, government schools often charged parents for books, uniforms, and other materials.
**Medical Care:** Boys and girls had equal access to government facilities, although families were more likely to seek medical assistance for boys than for girls.

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

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

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

**Early and Forced Marriage:** Despite legal prohibitions, child marriages occurred. Federal law sets the legal age of marriage at 18 for men and 16 for women. The 2014 Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act sets 18 as the legal age of marriage for both girls and boys in Sindh Province. A 2017 amendment to the penal code substantially increased punishment for conviction of violating the law. A convicted individual may be imprisoned for up to 10 years and no less than five years (up from imprisonment of up to one month) and may also be fined up to one million Pakistani rupees ($6,430), up from 1,000 Pakistani rupees (six dollars).

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

In rural areas, poor parents sometimes sold their daughters into marriage, in some cases to settle debts or disputes. Although forced marriage is a criminal offense and in many filed cases, prosecution remained limited.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** Various local laws exist to protect children from child pornography, sexual abuse, seduction, and cruelty, but federal laws do not prohibit using children for prostitution or pornographic performances, although child pornography is illegal under obscenity laws. Legal observers reported that authorities did not regularly enforce child protection laws.
Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: Parents occasionally abandoned unwanted children, most of which were girls. By law anyone found to have abandoned an infant may be imprisoned for seven years, while anyone guilty of secretly burying a deceased child may be imprisoned for two years. Conviction of murder is punishable by life imprisonment, but authorities rarely prosecuted the crime of infanticide.

Displaced Children: According to civil society sources, it was difficult for children formerly displaced by military operations to access education or psychological support upon their return to former conflict areas. Nonetheless, the KP government has reconstructed some of the 1,800 schools in the former FATA districts, where large numbers of internally displaced persons have returned. The government prioritized rehabilitating schools and enrolling children in these former conflict areas, and the overall number of out-of-school children decreased, according to international organizations.


Anti-Semitism

Most of the historic Jewish community has emigrated. Anti-Semitic sentiments were widespread in the vernacular press. Hate speech used by some politicians and broadcast in some print media and through social media used derogatory terms such as “Jewish agent” to attack individuals and groups or referred to “Zionist conspiracies.”

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report at https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides for equal rights for persons with disabilities, and provincial special education and social welfare offices are responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities; nonetheless, authorities did not always implement its
provisions. Each province has a department or office legally tasked with addressing the educational needs of persons with disabilities. Despite these provisions, most children with disabilities did not attend school, according to civil society sources.

Employment quotas at the federal and provincial levels require public and private organizations to reserve at least 2 percent of jobs for qualified persons with disabilities. Authorities only partially implemented this requirement due to lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms. Organizations that did not wish to hire persons with disabilities could instead pay a fine to a disability assistance fund. Authorities rarely enforced this obligation. The National Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled provided job placement and loan facilities as well as subsistence funding. Access to polling stations was challenging for persons with disabilities because of severe difficulties in obtaining transportation. The Elections Act 2017 allows for absentee voting for persons with disabilities. In order to register for an absentee ballot, however, persons with disabilities were required to obtain an identification card with a special physical disability symbol. According to disability rights activists, the multistep process for obtaining the special identification symbol was cumbersome and challenging.

The Sindh Provincial Assembly implemented new procedures regarding the Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2018, including the issuance of special identity cards to persons with disabilities to provide for legal protections. On November 9, the Sindh Provincial Assembly approved an amendment to the Motor Vehicles Ordinance of 1965 that allows individuals with hearing disabilities to obtain drivers licenses and waived license fees.

On August 8, the Gilgit Baltistan Assembly approved the Disability Act 2019 Gilgit Baltistan.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Some Sindhi and Baloch nationalist groups claim that authorities detain their members based on political affiliation or belief. Nationalist parties in Sindh further allege that law enforcement and security agencies kidnap and kill Sindhi political activists.

On February 6, a local government chairperson, Abdul Rahim Shah, shot Sindhi political activist Irshad Ranjhani on a road in Karachi. Shah claimed he shot at Ranjhani in self-defense during an armed robbery attempt. A former police
officer, Riaz Hussain, denied Ranjhani timely access to medical care, which led to his death. The video of the incident showed police officers interrogating and mistreating an injured Ranjhani while in custody. On February 11, police arrested Shah and suspended Riaz Hussain for delaying medical treatment by taking the victim to a police station rather than a hospital for urgent medical care. In April police and other witnesses told a court that police allowed Shah to shoot Ranjhani in the head for a fifth time during transit from the police station to the hospital.

Sectarian militants continue to target members of the Shia Hazara minority in Quetta, Baluchistan. As a result they are largely confined to two Hazara-populated enclaves, which significantly restricts their ability to move freely, find employment, and pursue higher education.

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

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

Violence and discrimination continued against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. The crimes often go unreported, and police generally take little action when they do receive reports. On April 1, Inspector General of Police (IGP) announced that the government would provide 5 percent of the office jobs in the Sindh police force to members of the transgender community. On April 13, unidentified assailants stabbed and killed a 30-year-old transgender person in Karachi. Her death followed the death and apparent torture on March 26 of an elderly member of the transgender community. Outreach by NGOs in KP, however, improved interactions between police and the transgender community there. A local NGO reported that prison officials in KP house transgender prisoners separately, and that the provincial government formed a jail oversight committee to improve the prison situation. Local NGOs working in the Islamabad Capital Territory and Punjab have conducted transgender sensitization training for police officers.

According to a wide range of LGBT NGOs and activists, society generally shunned transgender women, eunuchs, and intersex persons, who often lived
together in slum communities and survived by begging and dancing at carnivals and weddings. Some also were prostitutes. Local authorities often denied transgender individuals their share of inherited property, and admission to schools and hospitals. Property owners frequently refused to rent or sell property to transgender persons. In 2018 Parliament passed the landmark Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, which addresses many of these problems. The law accords the right of transgender individuals to be recognized according to their “self-perceived gender identity,” provides for basic rights, and prohibits harassment of transgender persons, and outlaws discrimination against them in employment, housing, education, healthcare, and other services. There is no such law, however, protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, or bisexual individuals.

A 2012 Supreme Court ruling allows transgender individuals to obtain national identification cards listing a “third gender.” Because national identity cards also serve as voter registration, the ruling enabled transgender individuals to participate in elections, both as candidates and voters.

**HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

The country continued to have a concentrated HIV epidemic among injecting drug users, while the estimated prevalence in the general population was less than 0.1 percent. The epidemic was concentrated among injecting drug users (21 percent). Stigma and discrimination by the general population and by health-care providers against persons living with HIV in particular remained a significant barrier to treatment access. An estimated 14 percent of persons living with HIV know their status, and approximately one tenth of them were on antiretroviral treatment, according to the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS. Transgender advocacy organizations and activists report that HIV is particularly prevalent in their community, with little medical help.

**Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Societal violence due to religious intolerance remained a serious problem. There were occasionally reports of mob violence against religious minorities, including Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, and Hindus. Shia Muslim activists reported ongoing instances of targeted killings and enforced disappearances in limited parts of the country.

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

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

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

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

In July the Balochistan High Court ordered the cancellation of the registration of all trade unions formed by government employees, ruling that such workers are not allowed to form a union under the Balochistan Industrial Relations Act of 2010. The registrar of Balochistan trade unions thereafter cancelled 62 trade unions’ registration. The affected unions’ appeal at the Supreme Court was pending at year’s end.
Without any federal government entity responsible for labor, the continued existence of the National Industrial Relations Commission remained in question. The 2012 Federal Industrial Relations Act stipulates that the commission may adjudicate and determine industrial disputes within the Islamabad Capital Territory to which a trade union or federation of trade unions is a party and any other industrial dispute determined by the government to be of national importance. This provision does not provide a forum specifically for interprovincial disputes but appears to allow for the possibility that the commission could resolve such a dispute. Worker organizations noted the limited capacity and funding for labor relations implementation at the provincial level.

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

Federal law defines illegal strikes, picketing, and other types of protests as “civil commotion,” which carries a penalty if convicted of up to life imprisonment. The law also states that gatherings of four or more persons may require police authorization, which is a provision authorities could use against trade union gatherings. Unions were able to organize large-scale strikes, but police often broke up the strikes, and employers used them to justify dismissals. In March and May, Sindh schoolteachers and nurses staged protests against recruitment and promotion rules. Police used force against the protest, causing injury to dozens of protesters, and arresting several of them. On July 17, police beat and used water cannons to halt a public protest by nurses from public sector hospitals across Sindh for increased salaries and better facilities. Police detained 20 protesters but released them later. Marches and protests also occurred regularly, although police sometimes arrested union leaders.

Enforcement of labor laws remained weak, in large part due to lack of resources and political will. Most unions functioned independently of government and political party influence. Labor leaders raised concerns regarding employers sponsoring management-friendly or only-on-paper worker unions--so-called yellow unions--to prevent effective unionization.
There were no reported cases of the government dissolving a union without due process. Unions could be administratively “deregistered,” however, without judicial review.

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

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

The law defines trafficking in persons as recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining another person (or attempting to do so) through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of compelled labor or commercial sex. The penalty for conviction of trafficking in persons is sufficient to deter violations. With regard to sex trafficking, however, by allowing for a fine in lieu of imprisonment, these penalties were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes, such as rape. Lack of political will, the reported complicity of officials in labor trafficking, as well as federal and local government structural changes, contributed to the failure of authorities to enforce federal law relating to forced labor. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate.

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

Ties among landowners, industry owners, and influential politicians hampered effective elimination of the problem. For example, some local police did not pursue landowners or brick kiln owners effectively because they believed higher-ranking police, pressured by politicians or the owners themselves, would not support their efforts to carry out legal investigations. Some bonded laborers returned to their former status after authorities freed them, due to a lack of alternative employment options. In Sindh the landmark Bonded Labor Act of 2015 has no accompanying civil procedure to implement the law. Of the 27 district vigilance committees charged with overseeing bonded labor practices, only seven had held meetings as of July.

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

The government of Punjab funded the Elimination of Child Labor and Bonded Labor Project, under which the Punjab Department of Labor worked to combat child and bonded labor in brick kilns. They did this by helping workers obtain national identity cards and interest free loans and providing schools at brick kiln sites. On March 29, the Lahore High Court ordered the labor secretary to enact measures to pay the school fees of children working in brick kilns. On July 1, the Punjab government issued a notification that set brick kiln laborers’ wages, as well as conditions of overtime work and paid holidays. The KP, Punjab, and Sindh ministries of labor reportedly worked to register brick kilns and their workers in order to regulate the industry more effectively and provide workers access to labor courts and other services.

Also see the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report at https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/ and the Department of Labor’s
Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law does not prohibit all of the worst forms of child labor. The constitution expressly prohibits the employment of children younger than age 14 in any factory, mine, or other hazardous site. The national law for the employment of children sets the minimum age for hazardous work at 15, which does not comply with international standards. Provincial laws in KP, Punjab, and Sindh set the minimum age for hazardous work at 18 or 19, meeting international standards. In May the Punjab government announced the first phase of the Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019, which prohibits hiring a child younger than 15 as a domestic worker. Despite these restrictions, there were nationwide reports of children working in areas the law defined as hazardous, such as leather manufacturing, brick making, and deep-sea fishing.

By law the minimum age for nonhazardous work is 15, but the law does not extend the minimum age limit to informal employment. The law limits the workday to seven hours for children, including a one-hour break after three hours of labor, and sets permissible times of day for work and time off. The law does not allow children to work overtime or at night, and it specifies they should receive one day off per week. Additionally, the law requires employers to keep a register of child workers for labor inspection purposes. These national prohibitions and regulations do not apply to home-based businesses or brickmaking.

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

Child labor remained pervasive, with many children working in agriculture and domestic work. There were also reports that small workshops employed a large number of child laborers, which complicated efforts to enforce child labor laws. Poor rural families sometimes sold their children into domestic servitude or other types of work, or they paid agents to arrange for such work, often believing their children would work under decent conditions. Some children sent to work for relatives or acquaintances in exchange for education or other opportunities ended in exploitative conditions or forced labor. Children also were kidnapped or sold.
into organized begging rings, domestic servitude, militant groups and gangs, and child sex trafficking.

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

Also see the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at [https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings) and the Department of Labor’s *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* at [https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods).

**d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

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

**e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

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

The minimum wage as set by the government exceeds its definition of the poverty line income for an individual, which is 9,300 Pakistani Rupees ($60) per month.
The minimum wage is 15,000 ($96) Rupees per month. The minimum wage was greater than the World Bank’s estimate for poverty level income. Authorities increased the minimum wage in the annual budget, and both federal and provincial governments issued notifications for such increases to go into effect. Minimum wage laws did not cover significant sectors of the labor force, including workers in the informal sector, domestic servants, and agricultural workers; and enforcement of minimum wage laws was uneven.

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

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

In September the government of Punjab Province exempted factories in the province from labor law inspections. Punjab has approximately two thirds of the country’s textile factories.

In December the Sindh Assembly passed the Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Bill, which recognized rights of women who work in farming, livestock, and fisheries. The law provides for minimum wages, sick and maternity leave, set working hours, written work contracts, the right to unionize, and access to social security and credit, among other protections.
The provincial government of Sindh Province enacted a comprehensive occupational health and safety law in 2017, but it had not been implemented by year’s end. Similar legislation is absent in other provinces. In September the Punjab government enacted the Medical Teaching Institute (Reform) Ordinance, which amended several existing pieces of healthcare legislation and instituted boards of governors composed of private sector professionals for state run teaching hospitals.

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

On March 9, six workers died when a construction lift buckled, causing the work crew to fall from the 13th floor of a 23-story building under construction in Karachi. According to reports, the lift and trolley did not comply with workplace standards. Labor rights activists observed that workers often have to work in dangerous conditions and the private sector construction companies failed to provide workers with health and safety facilities. On July 14, nine coal miners died in the collapse of a coalmine triggered by an electrical fire, with only one worker rescued two days after the incident. According to news reports, 164 miners died in Balochistan’s mines in 2018.
TAB 2
PAKISTAN 2018 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

Terrorist violence and human rights abuses by nonstate actors contributed to human rights problems. Military, police, and law enforcement agencies continued to carry out significant campaigns against militant and terrorist groups.
Nevertheless, violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nonstate actors, both local and foreign, contributed to a culture of lawlessness. As of December 23, terrorism fatalities stood at 686, in comparison with 1,260 total fatalities in 2017, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, a database compiled by the public-interest advocacy organization Institute for Conflict Management, which collects statistics on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia.

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

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

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

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

Physical abuse while in official custody allegedly caused the death of some criminal suspects. Lengthy trial delays and failure to discipline and prosecute those responsible for killings contributed to a culture of impunity. In February police officers in Rawalpindi reportedly entered a home without a warrant, detained a resident, and beat him to death while in custody at a police station. The four officers who entered the young man’s home without a warrant were suspended from duty pending an investigation of the incident, but it was unclear as of November whether any further action was taken in the case.
On January 10, police in Kasur (Punjab) reportedly fired live rounds into a crowd that stormed a police station in protest against a series of unsolved rapes and killings of children in the district. Two civilians died and one was wounded in the incident. Police officials claimed protesters shot first at police.

There were numerous reports of fatal attacks against police. On January 9, a vehicle rammed a police checkpoint outside the Balochistan Provincial Assembly, killing five police officers in the resulting explosion. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility, saying the police—not the Assembly—were the intended targets. In March, three police officers were killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) targeted a police convoy in Punjab province. On April 24, 10 police officers died in three separate suicide attacks in Balochistan. Hizbul Ahrar, a TTP splinter group, claimed responsibility for all three attacks. In August, two terrorists attacked a police checkpoint in the Gilgit Baltistan region, killing three police officers.

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

b. Disappearance

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

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

On June 6, prominent journalist and opinion writer Gul Bukhari was abducted in Lahore by unidentified assailants. Bukhari was released hours later, after news reports highlighted her disappearance and the case received significant attention on social media. She is known as a prominent critic of the military and security services, and was listed by the military as a social media threat to the state two days before her brief abduction. Bukhari did not identify her captors.
Media reported that in December 2017 civil society activist Raza Khan disappeared after cohosting a small public event in Lahore to discuss the government’s capitulation to the demands of a hardline religious group, Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), in the wake of TLP’s weeks-long, highly disruptive protest in Islamabad. Khan reportedly returned home in July.

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

Throughout the first half of the year, Pashtun rights activists used social media to highlight the arrests, enforced disappearances, and other forms of harassment by security agencies against members of the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, or PTM. Most of those detained were rank-and-file supporters of the group. Unofficial estimates, however, suggest that the military released up to 300 individuals who had been detained without charge—in some cases for several years—in response to PTM’s protest campaign against enforced disappearances. Observers believed authorities released detainees in response to activist demands, but it gave rise to further allegations that authorities had mistreated those in custody, and fueled calls for an end to enforced disappearances and for a more transparent legal process to formally charge or release those still in detention.

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

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

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

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

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

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

While the passage of the 25th Amendment to the country’s constitution formally merged the Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA and PATA) and ended the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) of 1901, the FATA Interim Governance Regulation (FIGR) that replaced it preserves the most draconian criminal justice elements of the FCR. For example, authorities may still apply collective punishment without regard to individual rights. Collective punishment is imposed incrementally, starting with the first immediate male family members, followed by the subtribe, and continuing outward. Human rights NGOs expressed concern about the concept of collective responsibility, as authorities used it to detain members of fugitives’ tribes, demolish their homes, confiscate or destroy their property, or lay siege to their villages pending surrender or punishment of the fugitives by their own tribes in accordance with local tradition.

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

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

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

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

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

Although quality and quantity of prison food improved, inadequate food and medical care in prisons continued to cause chronic health problems. Malnutrition remained a problem, especially among inmates unable to supplement their diets with help from family or friends. In many facilities sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and access to potable water were inadequate. Most prison facilities were antiquated and had no means to control indoor temperatures. A system existed for basic and emergency medical care, but bureaucratic procedures slowed access. Prisoners with disabilities usually lacked adequate care. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported 20 deaths due to violence in prisons as of May 20. According to an April report on Dunya News TV, in 2017 at least 145 prisoners died in Punjab province prisons of natural causes, including diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis. One former prisoner who spent 15 years in a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province jail petitioned the Peshawar High Court to direct medical
testing of the province’s inmate population, claiming 12 inmates at the jail in which he was incarcerated were HIV positive, and approximately 50 had hepatitis. The former prisoner also petitioned for disclosure of the province’s prison capacity and actual population, claiming the institution in which he was incarcerated had a capacity of 125 and a population of 640.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

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

The mid-year passage of the 25th Amendment to the country’s constitution formally merged the Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA and PATA) into KP province, bringing the tribal areas into the country’s political and constitutional mainstream. The FATA Interim Governance Regulation (FIGR) replaced the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in mid-year as the framework for law and order in the former FATA. Similar to the FCR, the FIGR is implemented through appointed deputy commissioners (formerly known as “political agents”) who report to the KP governor. The 25th Amendment gives the Peshawar High Court and the Supreme Court jurisdiction in the former FATA, but this new system had not been fully implemented by year’s end. Under the FIGR, trial by a Council of Elders (known as a “jirga,” or assembly of community leaders that makes decisions by consensus) does not allow tribal residents legal representation. If the accused is an adult man, he appears before the Council of Elders in person to defend his case. Parents normally represent their minor children, and men normally represent their female relatives. Observers criticized both the FCR and the FIGR for their harsh provisions.

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

Civilian authorities’ failure to punish abuses contributed to a climate of impunity throughout the country. According to civil society sources, police and prison officials frequently used the threat of abuse to extort money from prisoners and their families. The inspectors general, district police, district nazims (chief elected officials of local governments), provincial interior or chief ministers, federal interior minister, prime minister, or courts can order internal investigations into abuses and order administrative sanctions. Executive branch and police officials have authority to recommend, and the courts may order, criminal prosecution.
The court system remained the only means available to investigate abuses by security forces. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), established in 2015, may not inquire into any complaints against intelligence agencies and must refer such complaints to the concerned competent authority. The NCHR may seek a report from the national government on any complaint made against the armed forces, and after receipt of a report, can either end the process or forward recommendations for further action to the national government.

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

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

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

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

**Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Special rules apply to cases brought to court by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which investigates and prosecutes corruption cases. The NAB may detain suspects for 15 days without charge (renewable with judicial concurrence) and deny access to counsel prior to charging. Offenses under the NAB are not bailable, and only the NAB chairperson has the power to decide whether to release detainees.
Under the FIGR in the former FATA, the deputy commissioner has legal authority to preventively detain individuals on a variety of grounds and may require bonds to prevent undesired activities. Indefinite detention is not allowed, and detained persons may appeal to a tribunal. Prisoners have the right to compensation for wrongful punishment. Cases must be decided within a specified period, and authorities may release arrested persons on bail. Regulations require prisoners to be brought before FIGR authorities within 24 hours of detention, which curtails the ability of deputy commissioners to arbitrarily arrest and hold persons for up to three years. The accused have the right of appeal under a two-tiered system: the first appeal is to a commissioner or additional commissioner, and the second is referred to the Peshawar High Court, which is the highest appellate forum under the FIGR.

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

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

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

**e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In a landmark case, On October 31, the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. In the wake of widespread protests by antiblasphemy groups following the decision, the government agreed not to oppose a petition seeking additional review of her case, further postponing final resolution of the case. Bibi was released from prison, but as of December 3 was widely believed to remain in government custody for her own protection, and the judicial review was pending.
In some cases, police arrested individuals after acts of vigilantism related to blasphemy or religious discrimination. In February an ATC convicted 31 individuals for their role in the 2017 mob lynching of university student Mashal Khan for allegedly committing blasphemy. The ATC sentenced the primary shooter to death, sentenced five others to life in prison, and 25 individuals to four years’ imprisonment, although the Peshawar High Court later suspended the sentences and released on bail the 25 individuals.

Also see the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

**Political Prisoners and Detainees**

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

**Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

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

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

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

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

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

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

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

Militant and terrorist activity continued, and there were suicide and bomb attacks in all four provinces, the former FATA, and Gilgit Baltistan. Militants and terrorist groups, including the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and the Islamic State Khorasan Province targeted civilians, journalists, community leaders, security forces, law enforcement agents, and schools, killing and injuring hundreds with bombs, suicide attacks, and other forms of violence. Militant and terrorist groups often attacked religious minorities. A low-intensity separatist insurgency continued in Balochistan. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in the fight against militant groups.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

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

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

Press and Media Freedom: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views. Journalists often criticized the government, but threats, harassment, and violence against journalists who reported on sensitive issues such as civil-military tensions or abuses by security forces occurred during the year. By law the government may restrict information that might be prejudicial to the national interest. Authorities sometimes used these laws to prevent or punish media criticism of the judiciary and armed forces. Press outlets began reporting increased censorship and pressure to self-censor prior to national elections in July; such pressure continued after the elections.

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

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

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

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

Violence and Harassment: Security forces, political parties, militants, and other groups subjected media outlets, journalists, and their families to violence and harassment. Female journalists in particular faced threats of sexual violence and
harassment, including via social media. Security forces allegedly abducted journalists. Media outlets that reported on topics the authorities view as sensitive were often the targets of retribution. Additionally, journalists working in remote and conflict-ridden areas lacked basic digital and traditional security skills, which increased pressure to self-censor or not cover a story.

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

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


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

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

On November 8, armed plainclothes security officers forcibly entered the Karachi Press Club, disrupting an event and taking photos of the interior of the building. The next day, security forces arrested journalist and Press Club member Nasrullah Chaudhry and charged him with assisting a terrorist operative, claiming the earlier Press Club raid was part of the search for Chaudhry. Journalists widely decried the raid as intimidation, noting that even during military dictatorships, press clubs were considered off-limits for security forces.
Censorship or Content Restrictions: Media organizations generally reported that they engaged in self-censorship, especially in reporting news about the military. Journalists reported regular denial of official permission to visit conflict areas, or being required to travel with a military escort while reporting on conditions in conflict areas. They reported pressure to produce articles that were slanted toward the military viewpoint. Other reporting tended to be relatively objective with a focus on facts rather than deeper analysis, which journalists generally regarded as risky. Both local and foreign journalists complained of harassment and intimidation by government officials, particularly before the national elections in July. Blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws restricted publication on certain topics. Government censors reviewed foreign books before they could be reprinted, but there were no reports of books being banned during the year. Imported movies, books, magazines, and newspapers were subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content. Obscene literature, a category the government defined broadly, was subject to seizure.

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

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

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

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

**Internet Freedom**

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

Since 2012 the government has implemented a systematic, nationwide content-monitoring and filtering system to restrict or block “unacceptable” content, including material that is deemed un-Islamic, pornographic, or critical of the state or military forces. The restrictive 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act gives the government sweeping powers to censor content on the internet, which authorities used as a tool for the continued clampdown on civil society. The government blocked websites because of allegedly anti-Islamic, pornographic, blasphemous, or extremist content. The Ministry for Religious Affairs coordinates with the PTA in identifying purportedly blasphemous websites to be blocked. There were also reports the government attempted to control or block sites that advocated for Baloch independence. There were reports that the government used surveillance software. There was poor transparency and accountability surrounding content monitoring, and the government often used vague criteria without due process.

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

**Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

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

**b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

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

**Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

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

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

During the year the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement, or PTM, mobilized its predominantly ethnic Pashtun supporters to participate in sit-ins and demonstrations to demand justice and to protest abuses by government security forces. Thousands of individuals participated in peaceful protests across the country’s main population centers, including Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Islamabad. Observers noted that authorities attempted to discourage protestors through arrests, intimidation, and harassment, but did not engage in any systematic acts of violence against PTM supporters.

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

**Freedom of Association**

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

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

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

The government at both the federal and provincial levels similarly restricted the access of foreign-funded local NGOs through a separate registration regime, no-objection certificates, and other requirements. Authorities required NGOs to obtain no-objection certificates before accepting foreign funding, booking facilities
or using university spaces for events, or working on sensitive human rights issues. Even when local NGOs receiving foreign funding were appropriately registered, the government often denied their requests for no-objection certificates. Furthermore, domestic NGOs with all required certificates faced government monitoring and harassment.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement

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

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

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

There were reports that provincial authorities, police, and host communities harassed Afghan refugees. UNHCR reported that, from January to October, there were 828 arrests and detentions of refugees. All those arrested were released, 74 percent without charges, often following the intervention of UNHCR or its implementing partners. Arrests spiked in July, largely due to stringent security measures initiated by the government in preparation for the July 25 general elections.
In-country Movement: Government restrictions on access to certain areas of the former FATA and Balochistan, often due to security concerns, hindered freedom of movement. The government required an approved no-objection certificate for travel to areas of the country it designated as “sensitive.”

Foreign Travel: The law prohibits travel to Israel, and the country’s passports include a statement that they are “valid for all countries except Israel.” Passport applicants must list their religious affiliation and, if Muslim, affirm a declaration that the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement was a false prophet. Ahmadi representatives reported authorities wrote the word “Ahmadi” in their passports if they refused to sign the declaration.

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

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

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

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

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

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

There were no reports of involuntary returns. Many IDPs reportedly wanted to return home, despite the lack of local infrastructure, housing, and available service delivery and the strict control that security forces maintained over returnees’ movements through extensive checkpoints. Other IDP families delayed their return or chose some family members to remain in the settled areas of KP where regular access to health care, education, and other social services were available. For IDPs who were unwilling or unable to return, the government coordinated support with the United Nations and other international organizations. The World Food Program distributed a monthly food ration to IDPs in KP displaced by conflict and continued to provide a six-month food ration to IDPs who returned to their areas of origin in the former FATA.

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

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The country lacks a legal and regulatory framework for the management of refugees and migration. The law does not exclude asylum seekers and refugees from provisions regarding illegal entry and stay. In the absence of a national refugee legal framework, UNHCR conducted refugee status determination under its mandate, and the country generally accepted UNHCR decisions to grant refugee status and allowed asylum seekers who were still undergoing the procedure, as well as recognized refugees, to remain in the country pending identification of a durable solution.
Employment: There is no formal document allowing refugees to work legally, but there is no law prohibiting refugees from working in the country. Many refugees worked as day laborers or in informal markets, and local employers often exploited refugees in the informal labor market with low or unpaid wages. Women and children were particularly vulnerable, accepting underpaid and undesirable work.

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

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

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

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

Stateless Persons

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

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

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

Residents of the former FATA do not have a voice in federal decisions regarding the tribal areas; that authority resides with the KP governor, who is appointed by the president. Tribal residents did not have the right to choose their local government because unelected civilian bureaucrats managed the tribal districts under the FIGR and the FCR that preceded it. By year’s end, no local government elections have been held in the former FATA, although the government allowed political parties to operate freely in FATA under the 2011 Extension of the Political Parties Order 2002. Political observers credited this order with laying the foundation for a more mature political system in the tribal agencies, culminating in the former FATA’s legal merger with KP province under the 25th Amendment.

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

Elections and Political Participation

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

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

Political Parties and Political Participation: There were no reports of restrictions on political parties participating in elections, with the exception of those prohibited due to terrorist affiliations. According to media reports, however, security agencies used pressure tactics--including threats of prosecution for corruption--to convince politicians associated with the former ruling party, PML-N, to switch affiliations prior to general elections. Media and analysts questioned whether the
military and judiciary used selective prosecutions of political leaders on corruption charges as a tool to skew the electoral playing field against PML-N. Judges ordered media regulatory agencies to enforce constitutional bans on content critical of the military or judiciary, compelling media to censor politicians’ speeches and elections-related coverage deemed “antijudiciary” or “antimilitary.” Organizations that monitor press freedom reported direct pressure on media outlets to avoid content regarding possible military influence over judicial proceedings against politicians, and to refrain from reporting on PML-N leaders in a positive way. In most areas, there was no interference with the right of political parties and candidates to organize campaigns, run for election, or seek votes. In Balochistan, however, there were reports security agencies and separatist groups harassed local political organizations, such as the Balochistan National Party and the Baloch Students Organization. Attacks on political party campaign offices, politicians, and supporters spiked due to the July general elections.

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

The comprehensive Elections Act 2017, which was passed in 2017 and replaced eight older laws, stipulates special measures to enhance electoral participation of women, religious minorities, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities. Under the new law, women must constitute 5 percent of party tickets, and if less than 10 percent of women vote in any constituency, it is presumed that the women’s vote was suppressed and the results for that constituency or polling station may be nullified. The law was enforced for the first time in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, when the Election Commission canceled the district’s July 25 general elections results after women made up less than 10 percent of the vote. The law provides for mail-in voting for persons with disabilities. It requires expedited issuance of identification cards (which also serve as voter identification cards) for non-Muslims, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities.
The government requires voters to indicate their religion when registering to vote and requires Ahmadis to declare themselves as non-Muslims. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims, and many were unable to vote because they did not comply.

The constitution reserves four seats in the Senate, one for each of the four provinces, for religious minorities, defined by the government as “non-Muslim.” These seats are filled through indirect elections held in the provincial assemblies. Ten National Assembly seats are reserved for members of religious minority communities. The authorities apportioned these seats to parties based on the percentage of seats each won in the assembly. Minorities held 22 reserved seats in the provincial assemblies: eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, two in KP, and three in Balochistan. Some members of religious minority communities criticized the system of minority representation, whereby minority representatives at the provincial and federal levels are appointed by their political parties to reserved seats; they stated this system resulted in minority representatives serving the interests of their political parties rather than of minority communities.

Women and minorities may contest directly elected, nonreserved seats.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

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

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

Corruption within the lower levels of the police force was common. Some police charged fees to register genuine complaints and accepted bribes for registering false complaints. Bribes to avoid charges were commonplace.
Reports of corruption in the judicial system persisted, including reports that court staff requested payments to facilitate administrative procedures. Lower courts reportedly remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from higher-ranking judges as well as prominent, wealthy, religious and political figures.

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

In November 2016 the Supreme Court convened a special bench to investigate allegations of corruption levelled against then prime minister Nawaz Sharif and members of his family. The charges stemmed from allegations related to the 2016 “Panama Papers” leaks, which named Pakistanis holding off-shore bank accounts. In July 2017 the Supreme Court disqualified then prime minister Sharif from his National Assembly seat, prompting his resignation. The court also ordered the National Accountability Bureau to prosecute the prime minister, members of his family, and the sitting finance minister. The trials before a national accountability court began in September 2017 and continued at year’s end.

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

Political parties and politicians must file annual financial accounting reports declaring their assets and liabilities. The law was not fully implemented, and lawmakers often disregarded it. It is the duty of the Election Commission of Pakistan to verify that political parties and politicians make their financial information publicly available; the commission posts a list of parliamentarians’ assets annually.
Under the efficiency and disciplinary rules, an official must face an inquiry if accused of corruption or financial irregularities. A person convicted of corruption faces a prison term of up to 14 years, a fine, or both, and the government may appropriate any assets obtained by corrupt means.

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

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

Government Human Rights Bodies: The 2012 National Commission for Human Rights Bill authorized the establishment of an independent committee, the National Commission on Human Rights, and a standalone Ministry of Human Rights was reconstituted in 2015. The Senate and National Assembly standing committees on law, justice, minorities, and human rights held hearings on a range of human rights problems.

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

Women

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

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

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

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

Prosecutions of reported rapes were rare, although there were reports that rates increased in response to capacity building programs and campaigns to combat the lack of awareness about rape and gender-based violence among the general public and police. Police and NGOs reported individuals involved in other types of disputes sometimes filed false rape charges, reducing the ability of police to identify legitimate cases and proceed with prosecution. NGOs reported police sometimes accepted bribes from perpetrators, abused or threatened victims, and demanded they drop charges, especially when suspected perpetrators were influential community leaders. Some police demanded bribes from victims before
registering rape charges, and investigations were often superficial. Furthermore, accusations of rape were often resolved using extrajudicial measures, with the victim frequently forced to marry her attacker.

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

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

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

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

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

Government centers lacked sufficient space, staff, and resources. Many daru-ul-amans were severely overcrowded, with conditions that did not meet international standards. Some shelters did not offer access to basic needs such as showers, laundry supplies, or feminine hygiene products. In some cases, women were reportedly abused at the government-run shelters, their movements were severely restricted, or they were pressured to return to their abusers. There were some reports of women exploited in prostitution and sex trafficking in shelters. Some shelter staff reportedly discriminated against the shelter residents, assuming that if a woman fled her home, it was because she was a woman of ill repute.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The 2012 National Commission on the Status of Women Bill provides for the commission’s financial and administrative autonomy to investigate violations of women’s rights. According to women’s rights activists, however, the commission lacked resources.
Sexual Harassment: Although several laws criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and public sphere, the problem was reportedly widespread. The law requires all provinces to have provincial-level ombudsmen. The Sindh, Punjab, and KP provinces, and Gilgit-Baltistan had established ombudsmen.

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

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

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

Children

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

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

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

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

Local authorities subjected children to harmful traditional practices, treating girls as chattel to settle disputes and debts.
In 2016 the government updated its definition of statutory rape and expanded the previous definition, which was sexual intercourse with a girl younger than 16, to include boys.

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

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

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

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

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

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


Anti-Semitism

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

Trafficking in Persons

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

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

**Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

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

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

**Section 7. Worker Rights**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

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

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

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

Boys and girls were bought, sold, rented, or kidnapped to work in illegal begging rings, as domestic servants, or as bonded laborers in agriculture and brick-making (see section 7.c.). Illegal labor agents charged high fees to parents with false promises of decent work for their children and later exploited them by subjecting the children to forced labor in domestic servitude, unskilled labor, small shops, and other sectors.
The government of Punjab funded the Elimination of Child Labor and Bonded Labor Project, under which the Punjab Department of Labor worked to combat child and bonded labor in brick kilns by helping workers obtain national identity cards and interest-free loans and providing schools at brick kiln sites. Since its 2014 launch, the project has reportedly succeeded in removing nearly 90,000 children from work in brick kilns and enrolling them in school. The KP, Punjab, and Sindh ministries of labor reportedly worked to register brick kilns and their workers in order to regulate the industry more effectively and provide workers access to labor courts and other services. According to ILO officials, the KP and Punjab provincial governments have registered nearly all brick kilns in their provinces and Punjab has completed digital mapping of the kilns.

Also see the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ and the Department of Labor’s Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

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

National law establishes 15 as the minimum age for nonhazardous work, but does not extend the minimum age limit to informal employment. For legally working-age children, the law limits the workday to seven hours, including a one-hour break after three hours of labor, and sets permissible times of day for work and time off. The law does not allow children to work overtime or at night, and it specifies they should receive one day off per week. Additionally, the law requires employers to keep a register of child workers for labor inspection purposes. These national prohibitions and regulations do not apply to home-based businesses. The Sindh Assembly, however, passed the Sindh Home-Based Workers Act on May 9, which extends the right to social welfare benefits, worker protections, and the minimum wage to home-based workers; mandates the creation of an employer-financed welfare fund and a council tasked with oversight of home-based employer and worker registration; and outlines a dispute resolution framework.
Federal law prohibits the exploitation of children younger than 18 and defines exploitative entertainment as all activities related to human sports or sexual practices and other abusive practices. Parents who exploit their children are legally liable.

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

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

See the Department of Labor’s Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

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

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

In 2017 the government raised the minimum wage for unskilled workers from 14,000 rupees ($100) to 15,000 rupees ($108) per month, and all provincial governments’ budgets were required to follow that directive. The minimum wage was greater than the World Bank’s estimate for poverty level income. Authorities increased the minimum wage in the annual budget, and both federal and provincial governments issued notifications for such increases to go into effect. Minimum wage laws did not cover significant sectors of the labor force, including workers in the informal sector, domestic servants, and agricultural workers; and enforcement of minimum wage laws was uneven. The government did not address minimum wage in its budget for 2018-19, a break from its past practice of increasing the minimum wage each year.

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

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

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

In September nine miners were killed and three injured following the collapse of a roof of a coalmine in KP’s Kohat district. On August 12, in Balochistan, 13 miners died in a coalmine explosion, and two rescuers died from exposure to methane gas during the rescue attempt. During a one-month period from May to June, three significant mining accidents occurred in Balochistan, resulting in the deaths of 27 miners. Labor groups estimated 80 miners die every year in Balochistan’s mines. In Sindh, 13 laborers died at a warehouse when a boiler exploded, causing the roof to collapse. Two child laborers died in the incident.
TAB 3
STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN 2018

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) continues to be the top infectious killer worldwide, claiming over 4,500 lives a day. Pakistan, with 267 cases per 100,000 population, is ranked 5th amongst eight countries on WHO’s list of high TB burden countries accounting for two-thirds of the world’s cases. Pakistan also has to position itself to tackle the emerging threat of Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR) TB and already has an estimated 27,000 cases of that strain.

The WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2018 (2017 figures) show that 525,000 people were affected by TB—359,224 cases notified and 165,776 people not notified or not diagnosed. These comprised 291,000 males, 235,000 females, and 57,000 children. A total of 56,000 people died of the disease, including 2,200 infected with HIV. The majority of cases were attributed to undernourishment.

So far, the National TB Control Programme (NTP) claims to have achieved over 80 percent Directly Observed Treatment System (DOTS) coverage in the public sector and provided care to more than half a million TB patients. However, under DOTS, the patient is directly observed by a healthcare visitor in taking treatment and there is doubt over whether the management of public sector hospitals have properly implemented this.

According to WHO, the national TB budget for 2018 was US$118 million (3% domestic, 54% international, 43% unfunded). The Global Fund for HIV, TB & Malaria provided 70 percent of medicines.

HIV/AIDS

A report submitted by the NHS ministry in the Supreme Court in October stated that 60,000 people in the Punjab had AIDS, 52,000 in Sindh, and 17,000 each in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad. The data was prepared for a suo motu case on the high rate of HIV/AIDS in Jalalpur Jattan which, according to the report, had 130 people with the disease.

The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) said that nearly 150,000 people were living with HIV in Pakistan, out of which 25,000 people were registered with NACP while a large number of patients were receiving treatment from NACP centres.

However, officials said that the majority of cases go unreported due to social taboos about sex and the victims’ fears of discrimination. Official estimates show that Pakistan has seen a 45 percent increase in new HIV infections since 2010. WHO said that Pakistan was registering approximately 20,000 new HIV infections annually, the highest rate of increase among all countries in the region, adding that mortality among
Pakistanis living with the virus, which causes the deadly AIDS disease, is also rising, in spite of the availability of lifesaving antiretroviral therapy.

According to a government report, certain parts of the Punjab, including Lahore, Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan, Rawalpindi, Gujrat, Faisalabad, and Sargodha are among the vulnerable areas. Towards the beginning of the year, an outbreak of HIV/AIDS in a small village in the Sargodha area caused alarm—35 cases were confirmed out of 2,717 tests carried out after elders brought the matter to the attention of the Punjab government.

In November the Sindh AIDS Control Programme (SACP) reported that 22 people had died from HIV/AIDS in the Sindh province during the year, of which 19 were male and the remaining three were female patients. The SACP recorded 2,462 new HIV/AIDS cases at six HIV/AIDS Treatment Centres from January to November and out of them, 2,112 were men, 220 women, 58 transgender persons, 42 boys, and 30 girls.

Also in November, the number of HIV/AIDS patients in Balochistan was reported to have crossed the 5,000 mark, with 231 deaths. The same report mentioned that around 71 prisoners incarcerated in different jails had been found to be infected with HIV/AIDS.

Approximately 50 NGOs, members of the Provincial HIV/AIDS Consortium, are believed to be involved in creating awareness of HIV/AIDS in the public but they are reaching less than 15 percent of the population at risk.

Cancer

A huge number of Pakistanis—1,48,041—are diagnosed with cancer annually, making the country 7th among those with the largest number of patients around the world. According to the Pakistan Health and Research Council, around 148,000 new cancer cases are diagnosed annually in Pakistan. There are insufficient facilities and medical staff to deal with the vast number of people requiring treatment.

There are reportedly 40,000 deaths annually from breast cancer, with one in nine women at risk. Approximately 83,000 new cases are reported every year.

The Chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) said 900,000 cancer patients get treatment every year from the 18 hospitals established by PAEC, which received Rs30 billion from the government for upgradation of hospitals and maintenance of equipment.

The health department in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in September stated that their public/private initiative for free cancer treatment had received
TAB 4
DFAT assesses that women and girls in Pakistan face a high risk of societal discrimination and violence, particularly domestic violence, because of their sex. Women who are economically disadvantaged, culturally or geographically isolated are particularly vulnerable, and lack access to support services.

## People who identify as LGBTI

### 3.217 Sex between men is illegal in Pakistan. Section 377 of the Penal Code outlaws consensual ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal’, punishable by prison sentences ranging from two years to life. Uncertainty around the definition of ‘carnal intercourse’ makes it unclear whether this provision applies to sexual relations between women. Section 377 has rarely been enforced, although police reportedly threaten men with prosecution as a means of extracting a bribe. DFAT is aware of reports of lesbian women living together discreetly without risk; local sources say less societal shame is associated with having a lesbian child than a daughter having sex with a male out of wedlock, although stigma remains common.

### 3.218 While sex between males is common, homosexual identity is not. Strong and widespread cultural, religious and social intolerance of homosexuality means it is not widely discussed or acknowledged in Pakistan. Same-sex attracted people are often rejected by their families, and can be thrown out of home and forced into sex work. They face significant societal discrimination and, in some cases violence. In April 2014, Muhammed Ejaz, a man from Lahore, killed three gay men he met online. He reportedly told police he wanted to send a message about the evils of homosexuality. Several community organisations in major urban centres provide medical and support services to the LGBTI community. The ‘taboo’ nature of same-sex activity results in a lack of investment in treatment options for HIV/AIDS in Pakistan (see [Health](#)).

### 3.219 People identifying as LGBTI from wealthy and influential families in large urban centres face less discrimination and violence than poor people in rural areas. Nonetheless, even wealthy individuals face high levels of discrimination, and their families often force them into a heterosexual marriage to preserve the family’s reputation and social standing.

### 3.220 The government formally recognises people identifying as transgender as ‘third gender.’ The [Transgender Persons Protection of Rights Act](#) (2018) gives individuals identifying as transgender full access to rights and documentation such as national identity cards, driver’s licenses and passports, in accordance with their self-perceived gender. The Act provides for inheritance laws to apply according to an individual’s self-perceived gender as marked on their CNIC. A biological male who self-identifies as female will therefore lose some inheritance and property rights. Transgender Muslims may not undertake Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), and a biological male who elects for an ‘X’ CNIC or passport may lose his inheritance under [sharia](#).

### 3.221 Many transgender individuals live together in poorer communities within large urban centres. The US State Department reported in 2016 that many transgender people earned their income by begging or dancing at carnivals and weddings. Such work is highly visible and workers are vulnerable to physical and sexual violence.

### 3.222 In January 2018, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government distributed health care [Sehat Insaf](#) (also referred to as [Sehat Sahulat](#)) card to members of the transgender community in Peshawar, which entitles the holder to PKR 540,000 (AUD 5,900) per person per year of health services at public and private sector hospitals free of charge. However, later media reports the Sehat Insaf cards are inactive and do not work when submitted in the hospital for treatment due to a lack of funds attached to the cards. Transgender people are eligible for assistance under the Benazir Income Support Scheme (BISP). Notwithstanding government support, transition health care remains poorly regulated, posing a risk to individuals. DFAT is aware of reports of illegal gender reassignment surgery supported by unregulated hormone drugs.
TAB 5
PAKISTAN 2017 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan is a federal republic. In May 2013 the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party won a majority of seats in parliamentary elections, and Nawaz Sharif became prime minister for the third time. While judged to be mostly free and fair, some independent observers and political parties raised concerns about election irregularities. On July 28, the Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from office over corruption allegations. Parliament elected Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as the new prime minister on August 1. Asif Ali Zardari completed his five-year term as president in September 2013 with Mamnoon Hussain (PML-N) succeeding him. Orderly transitions in the military (chief of army staff) and the judiciary (Supreme Court chief justice) solidified the democratic transition.

Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most significant human rights issues included extrajudicial and targeted killings; disappearances; torture; lack of rule of law, including lack of due process; poor implementation and enforcement of laws; and frequent mob violence and vigilante justice with limited accountability. Additional problems were arbitrary detention; lengthy pretrial detention; a lack of judicial independence in the lower courts; governmental infringement on citizens’ privacy rights; harassment of journalists, and high-profile attacks against journalists and media organizations. Government restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, and freedom of religion and discrimination against religious minorities, and sectarian violence continued. Corruption within the government and police; lack of criminal investigations or accountability for cases related to rape, violence based on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, sexual harassment, so-called honor crimes, and female genital mutilation/cutting remained problems. Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is a criminal offense; however, the government rarely prosecuted cases. Child labor resulting in frequent exposure to violence and human trafficking—including forced and bonded labor—persisted.

There was a lack of government accountability, and abuses often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity among the perpetrators, whether official or unofficial. Authorities seldom punished government officials for human rights abuses.
Terrorist violence and human rights abuses by nonstate actors contributed to human rights problems in the country. The military sustained significant campaigns against militant and terrorist groups. Nevertheless, violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nonstate actors, both local and foreign, contributed to a culture of lawlessness in some parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). As of the end of October, terrorism fatalities stood at 1,084, in comparison with 1,803 fatalities in the full year 2016, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), a database compiled by the public-interest advocacy organization Institute for Conflict Management that collects statistics on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia.

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

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

There were numerous reports authorities committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in connection with conflicts in Punjab, Balochistan, FATA, Sindh, and KP (see section 1.g.).

Physical abuse while in official custody allegedly caused the death of some criminal suspects. Lengthy trial delays and failure to discipline and prosecute those responsible for killings contributed to a culture of impunity.

On June 27, the Frontier Corps fired into a crowd in Parachinar, Kurram Agency, killing four. The crowd was staging a sit-in, protesting the perceived failure of authorities to protect Parachinar from terrorism. Following the incident, the chief of army staff (the army’s highest-ranking military official), General Qamar Javed Bajwa, personally visited Parachinar, ordered the removal of the Parachinar Frontier Corps commandant, and opened an investigation into the occurrence.

There were continued allegations of politically motivated killings in Balochistan and Sindh. On July 6, unidentified gunmen killed Balochistan National Party leader Malik Naveed Dehwar and his guard, Mohammad Zareef. On April 27, local authorities recovered the mutilated bodies of five abducted Baloch activists, including Baitullah Mehmood Baloch, a leader of the Baloch National Movement. The perpetrators were unknown.
The SATP reported that journalists, teachers, students, and human rights defenders also were targeted by state and nonstate actors in Balochistan. According to the SATP, at least 183 civilians were killed due to terrorist-related violence in Balochistan, compared with 251 in 2016.

There were reports of politically motivated killings by political factions or unknown assailants in Sindh. In July unidentified gunmen killed two Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP) activists--Abdul Hameed (alias Mulla) and Rashid Khan--in Karachi. PSP’s chairman blamed the London faction of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement political party for their deaths.

The provincial governments and political parties in Sindh, Balochistan, KP, and Punjab remained targets of attack by militant and other nonstate actors.

Following its announced formation in February, the Ansar ul-Sharia Pakistan (ASP, also known as Jamaat-ul-Ansar al-Sharia Pakistan) was allegedly involved in at least seven attacks that killed a retired colonel, six police officers, and a private security guard in Sindh and a bombing that targeted security forces in Balochistan. On August 12, ASP killed Deputy Superintendent of Police (Traffic) Hanif Khan, 56, and his driver, Constable Sultan Ishtiaq, in Karachi. ASP spokesperson Abdullah Hashmi stated the attack was “revenge” for alleged torture of militants in jail. The Sindh police Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) continued to investigate the case, although no arrests had been made. Authorities claimed ASP was responsible for the attempted assassination of Sindh Assembly opposition leader Khwaja Izharul Hassan.

There were numerous reports of attacks against police. On June 23, a blast near the inspector general of police’s office in Quetta killed at least 11 individuals, including seven police officers. According to Punjab provincial officials, police were the main targets of a July 24 suicide attack in Lahore that killed 26, including nine police officers.

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

b. Disappearance

There were kidnappings and forced disappearances of persons from various backgrounds in nearly all areas of the country. Some police and security forces reportedly held prisoners incommunicado and refused to disclose their location.
In January, five social media bloggers disappeared, triggering a public outcry against the government, which was widely believed to be responsible for the abductions. Several weeks later, four of the five bloggers reappeared; as of December, one of the bloggers, Samar Abbas, was still missing. In October, one of the four bloggers who returned home publicly claimed he was tortured by a state intelligence agency during his disappearance.

Media reported that on December 2, Raza Khan disappeared after cohosting a small public event in Lahore to discuss issues such as the government’s recent capitulation to the demands of a hardline religious group that held a weeks-long protest in Islamabad. Press reports indicated that according to a friend who also attended the meeting, the issue of the misuse of blasphemy laws was also raised. According to media reports, Khan’s brother reported his disappearance to local police.

The Karachi-based political party Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) alleged that the paramilitary Sindh Rangers kidnapped, tortured, and killed some of its members in security operations in Karachi. MQM claimed 21 such cases took place in July.

Human rights organizations reported many Sindhi and Baloch nationalists had disappeared. Nationalist parties in Sindh also alleged that law enforcement agencies kidnapped and killed Sindhi political activists.

Leading members of Jiye Sindh Qaumi Mahaz and Jiye Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM), prominent nationalist parties, reportedly were missing. Sindhi nationalist and political activist Dodo Chandio disappeared July 11 along with his fellow activists Mehran Chandio, Asif Buledi, Nadeem Kolachi, and Saif Jatoi. On August 5, family members of a self-exiled separatist JSMM leader, Shafi Burfat, were taken from their residence. JSMM president Qambar Shahdadkot, party member Ejaz Tunio, central committee member Sabir Chandio, and party supporters Murtaza Junejo, Hidayat Lohar, Khadim Hussain Ariojo, and Mohammad Ayub Kandhro also went missing from Sindh Province. Eight advocates for the recovery of victims of involuntary disappearance in Sindh were themselves forcibly disappeared: Abbas Lund, journalist Ghulam Rasool Burfat, writer Inamullah Abbasi, Raza Jarwar, Partab Shivani, Naseer Kumbhar, Punhal Sario, and Shoaib Korejo. The last four returned home, while locations of the others remained unknown.
On June 12, police and other security agencies allegedly abducted Nasrullah Baloch, the chairman of the International Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, an activist group focused on victims of enforced disappearances in Balochistan, along with three associates, all of whom remained missing.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, headed by Supreme Court justice Javed Iqbal and retired law enforcement official Muhammad Sharif Virt, received 4,608 missing persons cases between 2011 and December 30. The commission claimed to have closed out 3,076 of those cases, while 1,532 remained open. While media and international attention focused heavily on enforced disappearances in Balochistan and Sindh, data from the commission showed the number of persons reported missing was highest in KP (751 missing), followed by Punjab (245 missing), Balochistan (98 missing), Sindh (50 missing), FATA (48 missing), the Islamabad Capital Territory (45 missing), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) (14 missing), and Gilgit Baltistan (five missing) as of July.

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

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

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, the absence of proper complaint centers and the absence of a particular section in the criminal code that defines and prohibits torture contributed to such practices. The commission maintained the government undertook no serious effort to make torture a crime and that perpetrators, mostly police or members of the armed forces, operated with impunity.

There were reports police personnel employed cruel and degrading treatment and punishment. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reported that police committed “excesses” in at least 114 cases as of late December, compared with more than 147 cases in 2016. Multiple sources reported that torture occasionally resulted in death or serious injury and was often underreported.

On October 11, the newspaper *Dawn* reported that Punjab Police from Bahu Chowk police station beat to death an eighth grade student, Arsalan Mushtaq, in
Jhabran Mandi. Police allegedly struck the boy’s head with a pistol, bundled him into a van, and later left his body on the side of the road.

The practice of collective punishment continued in the Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA and PATA), as provided for in the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) of 1901, which governs FATA. In 2011 the government amended the FCR to exempt women, all individuals over age 65, and children below age 16 from collective punishment. Authorities apply collective punishment incrementally, starting with the first immediate male family members, followed by the subtribe, and continuing outward. Although this graduated approach reduces its scope, the FCR assigns collective punishment without regard to individual rights. Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed concern about the concept of collective responsibility, as authorities used collective responsibility to detain members of fugitives’ tribes, demolish their homes, confiscate or destroy their property, or lay siege to their villages pending surrender or punishment of the fugitives by their own tribes in accordance with local tradition. From November 2016 to June, the political administration of Mohmand Agency suspended all mining at the Ziarat marble mine due to alleged support of militants by the Safi tribe. In July the political agent of Khyber Agency suspended compensatory payments to the Sipah tribe after an attack on security forces. The political administration of South Waziristan Agency arrested and jailed 97 men including doctors, teachers, and students after a fire incident at Agency Headquarters Hospital in which two ambulances, a medical store, and National Database and Registration Authority offices were burned. The men remained in police custody despite protests and demonstrations staged by local political parties and student associations.

As of August the country had 7,009 police, military experts, and soldiers performing peacekeeping duties around the world. The United Nations reported that as of October 15 it received two allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against Pakistani peacekeepers for one incident alleged to have occurred in September 2016, and one allegedly continuing exploitative sexual relationship that lasted from an unspecified date in 2011 to June 2012. One pending allegation reported in 2016, which allegedly involved rape of a minor by military personnel deployed to the UN Operation in Cote d’Ivoire, was still under both Pakistani government and UN investigation as of October 15.

**Prison and Detention Center Conditions**
Conditions in some prisons and detention centers were harsh and life threatening. Problems such as overcrowding and inadequate medical care were widespread.

Physical Conditions: Prison conditions often were extremely poor. Overcrowding was common. The Society for Human Rights and Prisoners’ Aid-Pakistan (SHARP) estimated the total nationwide prison population fluctuated between 95,000 and 107,000 while claiming that the normal capacity of prisons was approximately 36,000. The Inspector General’s Office reported prison capacity of 52,784.

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

Although quality and quantity of prison food improved, inadequate food and medical care in prisons continued to cause chronic health problems and malnutrition among inmates unable to supplement their diets with help from family or friends. In many facilities sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and access to potable water were inadequate. Most prison facilities were antiquated and had no means to control indoor temperatures. A system existed for basic and emergency medical care, but bureaucratic procedures slowed access. Foreign prisoners often remained in prison long after completion of their sentences because they were unable to pay for deportation to their home countries. From January to May, 16 prisoners died in Karachi Central Prison and Malir Jail. Prison medical records listed the cause of death for the majority of the deceased as “heart failure.” According to press reports and prison hospital sources, prison medical facilities are in poor condition with limited medicine available.

Prison security remained a concern. On June 14, two members of the banned Lashkar-e-Jhangvi terrorist group--Shaikh Muhammad Mumtaz and Muhammad Ahmed Khan--escaped from Karachi Central Jail and were not recaptured as of December 6. They had been arrested by the Sindh Police CTD for alleged involvement in the killings of more than 60 individuals, mainly members of the Shia community and law enforcement officials. In a follow-up investigation, CTD highlighted prison officials’ fear of jihadi elements and MQM detainees, claiming they allowed prisoners to “virtually run” Karachi Central Jail.

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

 Authorities held female prisoners separately from men. NGOs reported transgender women were held with men and faced harassment. Balochistan had no women’s prison, but women were housed in separate barracks in prisons located in Khuzdar, Gaddani, Quetta, and Loralai.

 Due to lack of infrastructure, police often did not segregate detainees from convicted criminals. Prisoners with mental disabilities usually lacked adequate care.

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

 Administration: According to SHARP, there was adequate manual recordkeeping on prisoners, but there was a need for computerized records.

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

 By law prison authorities must permit prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhuman conditions. According to SHARP, however, prisoners often refrained from submitting complaints to avoid retaliation from jail authorities.

 Independent Monitoring: International organizations responsible for monitoring prisons reported difficulty accessing detention sites, in particular those holding security-related detainees. Authorities did not allow international organizations access to detention centers most affected by violence in KP, FATA, and
Balochistan. Provincial governments in Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan, and the AJK permitted some international organizations to monitor civil prisons, but leaders of monitoring organizations noted their operations were becoming more restricted each year.

Authorities at the local, provincial, and national levels permitted some human rights groups and journalists to monitor prison conditions of juveniles and female inmates.

**Improvements:** Infrastructure improvements and new policies in existing prisons, along with the construction of new facilities, increased the frequency with which pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners were separated. A digitized prison management information system was operational in 20 Punjab province prisons. The government, in collaboration with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, took steps to expand the system to an additional 24 prison facilities in Punjab.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

**Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

Police have primary domestic security responsibility for most of the country. Local police are under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. Police effectiveness varied by district, ranging from good to ineffective. The Rangers are a paramilitary organization under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, with branches in Sindh and Punjab. The Frontier Corps is the Rangers’ counterpart in Balochistan and the tribal areas; it reports to the Ministry of Interior in peacetime and military in times of conflict. The military is responsible for external security but continues to play a role in domestic security.

The FCR provides the framework for law and order in FATA, implemented through appointed political agents who report to the governor of KP. The court system and judiciary do not have jurisdiction in FATA. Under the FCR, the trial by jirga (an assembly of community leaders that makes decisions by consensus) does not allow residents legal representation. If the accused is an adult man, he normally appears before the jirga in person to defend his case. Parents normally
represent their minor children, and men normally represent their female relatives. Observers often criticized the FCR for harsh provisions. In 2011 authorities amended some of these provisions, including modifying the collective responsibility of a tribe, restricting the arbitrary nature of the powers of political agents or district coordination officers, and granting citizens limited rights to challenge the decisions of political agents in a codified tribunal system.

In lieu of police, multiple law enforcement entities operated in FATA. They included the paramilitary Frontier Corps, the Frontier Constabulary, “Khasadars” (hereditary tribal police), and the FATA Levies Force--which reported to political agents (the appointed administrative heads of each tribal agency)--to help maintain order. Tribal leaders convened “lashkars” (tribal militias) to deal with temporary law and order disturbances, but they operated as private tribal militias and not as formal law enforcement entities. The military assumed interim responsibility for security from the Frontier Corps in Parachinar, Kurram Agency, FATA, on June 30, after three separate bombings killed more than 120 people. The bombings had prompted a seven-day protest against the perceived failure of the Frontier Corps to protect the citizens of Parachinar.

Failure to punish abuses contributed to a climate of impunity throughout the country. According to civil society sources, police and prison officials frequently used the threat of abuse to extort money from prisoners and their families. The inspectors general, district police, district nazims (chief elected officials of local governments), provincial interior or chief ministers, federal interior minister, prime minister, or courts can order internal investigations into abuses and order administrative sanctions. Executive branch and police officials have authority to recommend, and the courts may order, criminal prosecution. The court system remained the only means available to investigate abuses by security forces. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), established in 2015, may not inquire into any complaints against intelligence agencies and must refer such complaints to the competent authority concerned. The NCHR may seek a report from the national government on any complaint made against the armed forces, and after receipt of a report, it can either end the process or forward recommendations for further action to the national government.

During the year the government continued to use the military to support domestic security. Paramilitary forces, including Rangers and the Frontier Constabulary, provided security to some areas of Islamabad and continued active operations in Karachi. On February 22, following several high-profile terrorist attacks, the military launched Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, using expanded civilian and
Paramilitary cooperation against militants throughout the country. Representing an upgraded effort to combat terrorism, the operation also included deployment of the paramilitary Ranger corps into Punjab Province.

In January 2015, in response to an attack on the Peshawar Army Public School, Parliament approved a constitutional amendment to allow military courts to try civilians on terrorism, militancy, sectarian violence, and other charges. The amendment included a provision under which the mandate of the courts to try civilians would expire in January 2017. The government, however, reauthorized the amendment, extending the mandate of the courts until January 2019. Civil society members expressed concerns about the use of military courts for trying civilian suspects, citing lack of transparency and their redundancy with the civilian judicial system.

Police often failed to protect members of religious minorities—including Ahmadiyya Muslims, Christians, Shia Muslims, and Hindus—from attacks. Mob violence often accompanied blasphemy allegations, and individuals accused of blasphemy from both majority and minority communities were killed during the year. In one high-profile case, a mob in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killed university student Mashal Khan on April 13 after rumors circulated on his campus that he had committed blasphemy; police officers were present at the killing but took no action to stop it.

Shia organizations complained that the government failed to provide adequate security to pilgrims traveling through Sindh and Balochistan en route to Iran.

There were improvements in police professionalism and instances of local authorities protecting minorities from discrimination and communal violence. In August police rescued a Christian teenager accused of blasphemy from a vigilante mob in Alipur Chatha, Punjab. According to local human rights organizations, the mob was beating the accused until the police intervened and took him into protective custody while his blasphemy charges were pending.

**Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

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

The Ministry of Interior frequently did not provide notification of the arrest of foreigners to their respective embassies or consulates. In 2015 the ministry introduced a new requirement that foreign missions request access to their arrested citizens 20 days in advance.

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

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

**Arbitrary Arrest:** There were reports police arbitrarily detained individuals to extort bribes for their release or detained relatives of wanted individuals to compel suspects to surrender. Ethnic Rohingya in Karachi who lacked official identification documents reported arbitrary arrests and harassment by police authorities.

**Pretrial Detention:** Police sometimes held persons in investigative detention without seeking a magistrate’s approval and often held detainees without charge until a court challenged the detention. Magistrates generally approved investigative detention at the request of police without requiring justification. When police did not develop sufficient evidence to try a suspect within the 14-day
period, they generally requested that magistrates issue new FIRs, thereby further extending the suspect’s detention.

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

In some cases trials did not start until six months after a FIR, and at times individuals remained in pretrial detention for periods longer than the maximum sentence for the crime with which they were charged. SHARP estimated that more than 70 percent of the prison population was awaiting trial. Authorities seldom informed detainees promptly of charges against them.

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

Under the FCR in FATA, the political agent has legal authority to detain preventively individuals on a variety of grounds and may require bonds to prevent undesired activities. Indefinite detention is not allowed, and detained persons may appeal to the FCR tribunal. Prisoners have the right to compensation for wrongful punishment. Cases must be decided within a specified period, and authorities may release arrested persons on bail. Regulations require prisoners to be brought before FCR authorities within 24 hours of detention, which curtails the ability of political agents to arbitrarily arrest and hold persons for up to three years. The accused have the right of appeal under a two-tiered system, which starts with an appellate authority consisting of an FCR commissioner and an additional judicial commissioner.

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

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

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

**e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

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

Extensive case backlogs in the lower and superior courts, together with other problems, undermined the right to effective remedy and to a fair and public hearing. Delays in justice in civil and criminal cases were due to antiquated procedural rules, unfilled judgeships, poor case management, and weak legal education. In Punjab, lawyers’ strikes added to delays. From September 2016 to March, lawyers observed 1,474 strikes in 36 districts of Punjab, which severely hampered the functioning of the courts. The Lahore High Court took steps to improve judicial efficiency. The court’s chief justice introduced legal reforms intended to reduce strikes and formalized an alternate dispute resolution (ADR) system. The court established 36 ADR centers, which received 3,883 references in six months and resolved 2,497 cases by August.

The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the high courts does not extend to several areas that operated under separate judicial systems. For example, the AJK
PAKISTAN

has its own elected president, prime minister, legislature, and court system. Gilgit-Baltistan also has a separate judicial system.

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

There were instances in which unknown persons threatened and/or killed witnesses, prosecutors, or investigating police officers in high-level cases. According to press reports, a suicide bomber on February 15 targeted a van carrying four judges in Peshawar, KP. The attack killed the vehicle’s driver and injured the four judges.

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

**Trial Procedures**

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

SPARC reported that adjudication of cases involving juveniles was slow due to a lack of special juvenile courts or judges. It concluded that a fair and just juvenile justice system did not exist. Many juveniles spent long periods behind bars.
because they could not afford bail. According to SPARC, rather than being rehabilitated, child prisoners often became hardened criminals after spending long periods in the company of adult prisoners.

The Juvenile Justice System Ordinance, which outlines the treatment of juveniles in the justice system, does not apply to juveniles accused of terrorism or narcotics offenses. SPARC reported that, in the past, officials arrested children as young as 12 on charges of terrorism under the Antiterrorism Act. Children convicted under the act could be sentenced to death. There were numerous cases of individuals on death row having been convicted of, and/or tried for, crimes they allegedly committed while under the age of 18. Lack of documentation continued to be a problem for verifying questions of legal age. Civil society sources reported that, while they had no official reports of juvenile inmates on death row, they could not rule out the possibility. Different courts made different decisions as to what was “adequate” proof of age.

There were instances of lack of transparency in court cases, particularly if the case dealt with high-profile or sensitive issues. NGOs reported the government often located trials in jails because of security concerns, which extended to defendants, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and witnesses. NGOs expressed concerns regarding the security of jail trials and the lack of privacy for defendants to consult with a lawyer.

The Antiterrorism Act allows the government to use special, streamlined antiterrorism courts (ATCs) to try persons charged with violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state. In other courts, suspects must be brought to court within seven working days of their arrest, but the ATCs are free to extend the period. Human rights activists criticized the expedited parallel system, charging it was more vulnerable to political manipulation. In 2014, after a judge’s ruling that the Antiterrorism Act had been incorrectly applied, authorities returned 15 percent of cases initially brought to ATCs to regular courts, according to Punjab’s prosecutor general. NGOs reported that if a case needed to be expedited due to the egregious nature of the crime or political pressure, it was often sent to an ATC rather than through the regular court system. Others commented that, despite being comparatively faster than the regular court system, the ATCs often failed to meet speedy trial standards and had significant case backlogs.

The government continued to utilize military courts to try civilians on terrorism and related charges. Trials in military courts are not public (see section 1.d.).
The Federal Shariat Court typically reviewed cases prosecuted under the Hudood Ordinance, a law enacted in 1979 by military leader Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq to implement a strict interpretation of Islamic law by punishing extramarital sex, false accusations of extramarital sex, theft, and drinking alcohol. Should a provincial high court decide to hear an appeal in a Hudood case, the Shariat Court lacks authority to review the provincial high court’s decision. The Supreme Court may bypass the Shariat Appellate Bench and assume jurisdiction in such appellate cases. The Federal Shariat Court may overturn legislation judged inconsistent with Islamic tenets, but such decisions may be appealed to the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court and ultimately may be heard by the full bench of the Supreme Court.

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

In 2015 the Supreme Court suspended the death sentence of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy in 2010, pending its decision on her appeal. Bibi had been on death row since 2010 after a district court found her guilty of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammed during an argument. Her lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court in 2014. The appeal was due to be heard in October 2016 but was delayed after one member of the three-judge bench recused himself. The court did not set a date for the next hearing.

In February 2016 authorities executed Mumtaz Qadri, who was convicted of killing then governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer after Taseer had publicly called for a presidential pardon for Asia Bibi.

Also see the Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Some Sindhi and Baloch nationalist groups claimed that authorities marked their members for arrest and detained them based on their political affiliation or beliefs. Under the 2009 Aghaz-e-Haqooq (“beginning of the rights”) Balochistan
legislative “package” of reforms (intended to address the province’s political, social, and economic problems), the government announced a general amnesty for all Baloch political prisoners, leaders, and activists in exile as well as those allegedly involved in “antistate” activities. In 2015 the federal and Balochistan provincial governments jointly announced a new peace package called “Pur Aman Balochistan” (“peaceful Balochistan”), intended to offer cash and other incentives for “militants” who wished to rejoin mainstream society. Despite the amnesty offers, some Baloch groups claimed that illegal detention of nationalist leaders by state agencies continued. Several of the missing persons documented by the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons were well-known leaders of nationalist political parties and student organizations.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

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

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

The law requires court-issued warrants for property searches. Police sometimes ignored this requirement and on occasion reportedly stole items during searches. Authorities seldom punished police for illegal entry. Police at times detained family members to induce a suspect to surrender. In cases pursued under the Antiterrorism Act, the government allowed security forces to search and seize property related to a case without a warrant.

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

Militant and terrorist activity continued, and there were numerous suicide and bomb attacks in all four provinces and FATA. Militants and terrorist groups, including the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) targeted civilians, journalists, community leaders, security forces, law enforcement agents, and schools, killing hundreds and injuring thousands with bombs, suicide attacks, and other forms of violence. Militant and terrorist groups often attacked religious minorities. A low-intensity separatist insurgency continued in Balochistan. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in the fight against militant groups.

The military conducted multiple counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations to eradicate militant safe havens. In 2014 the military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb, an operation against foreign and domestic terrorists in FATA. The operation continued until February, when the military replaced it with Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, a nationwide counterterrorism campaign aimed at consolidating Zarb-e-Azb’s gains. The government also acted throughout the country to weaken terrorist groups and prevent recruitment by militant organizations. For example, law enforcement agencies reported seizures of large caches of weapons in urban areas such as Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. Police arrested Karachi gang members and TTP commanders who allegedly provided logistical support to militants in the tribal areas. Police arrested would-be suicide bombers in major cities, confiscating weapons, suicide vests, and planning materials.

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

Political, sectarian, criminal, and ethnic violence in Karachi continued, although violence declined and gang wars were less prevalent than before security operations in the city. Natural disasters and instability caused by terrorist activity and military operations elsewhere in the country motivated ongoing relocation of citizens from different ethnic groups--including Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtun migrants--to Karachi. This trend continued to shift the balance among political parties and the ethnic and sectarian groups they represented. Political parties and
their affiliated gangs continued to vie for political and economic control, engaging in a turf war over bhatta (extortion) collection privileges and “ownership” over katchi abadis (illegal/makeshift settlements).

**Killings:** There were reports that government security forces caused civilian casualties and engaged in extrajudicial killings during operations against militants. Security forces killed militants throughout the country. There were numerous media reports of police and security forces killing terrorist suspects in “police encounters.” Some observers believed security forces orchestrated at least some of these killings.

The TTP faction Jamaat-ur-Ahrar claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack near the Punjab Provincial Assembly in Lahore on February 13 that killed 13 individuals and injured more than 80. The militant faction said the attack was the beginning of a new campaign of violence against the government, security forces, the judiciary, and secular political parties.

On July 24, at least 26 individuals died and 58 were injured in a suicide explosion in Lahore. Officials stated the attack targeted a group of police. According to provincial authorities, at least nine of those killed were police officers. The TTP claimed responsibility for the blast.

ISIS-K claimed responsibility for several attacks in Balochistan and Sindh. On February 17, ISIS-K claimed responsibility for killing at least 75 persons and injuring more than 200 others, when a suicide bomber detonated at the Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine in Sindh.

Sectarian violence also continued throughout the country. NGOs differed in their definitions of sectarian violence, leading to differences in accounting for the number of attacks and deaths. According to SATP, 15 sectarian attacks from January to mid-December resulted in the deaths of 229 individuals, compared with 132 deaths in 31 incidents in 2016. Kurram Agency, FATA, which is the only part of FATA that has a majority Shia population, was the target of three separate bombings that claimed the lives of more than 120 individuals. On January 21, a bomb was detonated in a vegetable market in Parachinar, the capital of Kurram Agency, killing 25; Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the TTP claimed responsibility. On June 23, twin blasts hit the Turi Market in central Parachinar, killing 72. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed the attack. On October 10, a suicide bomber killed at least 24 worshippers at a shrine in Balochistan.
Multiple Ahmadiyya community members died in what appeared to be targeted killings. Unknown gunmen killed three Ahmadis in three separate attacks on March 30, April 7, and May 3.

**Abductions:** There were reports militant groups kidnapped or took civilians hostage in FATA, KP, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the May 24 abduction and killing of two Chinese nationals from Quetta.

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

**Child Soldiers:** Nonstate militant groups kidnapped boys and girls and used fraudulent promises to coerce parents into giving away children as young as 12 to spy, fight, or die as suicide bombers. The militants sometimes offered parents money, often sexually and physically abused the children, and used psychological coercion to convince the children the acts they committed were justified. The government operated a center in Swat to rehabilitate and educate former child soldiers.

**Other Conflict-related Abuse:** The terrorist groups TTP, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and related factions bombed government buildings and attacked and killed female teachers and polio vaccination workers. During the year there were two reported cases of fatal attacks against health-care workers associated with a polio vaccination campaign. Both incidents took place in KP, the first on May 24 in Bannu and the second on July 2 in Peshawar. The TTP particularly targeted girls’ schools to demonstrate its opposition to girls’ education but also destroyed boys’ schools. Military operations created hardships for the local civilian population when militants closed key access roads and tunnels and attacked communications and energy networks, disrupting commerce and the distribution of food and water.

**Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

**a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press**

The law provides for freedom of speech and press, but there were constitutional restrictions. In addition, threats, harassment, violence, and killings led journalists and editors to practice self-censorship.
Freedom of Expression: The constitution provides for the right to free speech and the press, subject to “any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam” or the “integrity, security, or defense of Pakistan, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality.” The law permits citizens to criticize the government publicly or privately, but criticism of the military could result in political or commercial reprisal. Blasphemy laws restrict individual rights to free speech concerning matters of religion and religious doctrine. The government restricted some language and symbolic speech based on “hate speech” and “terrorism” provisions.

Press and Media Freedom: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views, and journalists often criticized the civilian portions of the government. The press addressed the persecution of minorities. By law the government may restrict information that might be prejudicial to the national interest. Threats, harassment, and violence against journalists who reported on sensitive issues such as civil-military tensions or abuses by security forces occurred during the year.

There were 455 independent English, Urdu, and regional-language daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. To publish within AJK, media owners had to obtain permission from the Kashmir Council and the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting controlled and managed the country’s primary wire service, the Associated Press of Pakistan, the official carrier of government and international news to the local media. The military had its own media and public relations office, Inter-Services Public Relations. The government-owned Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation and Pakistan Television Corporation broadcast television programs nationwide and operated radio stations throughout the country. In FATA and PATA, authorities allowed independent radio stations to broadcast with the FATA secretariat’s permission.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) licensed 89 private domestic and 22 foreign television channels; many of the channels were critical of the government. There were 143 commercial FM radio stations, but their licenses prohibited news programming. Some channels evaded this restriction by discussing news in talk-show formats. International radio broadcasts, including the BBC, were normally available. PEMRA imposed a blockage of transmissions of Indian television news channels until July 17, when the federal Lahore High Court lifted the ban.
PEMRA continued to enforce a ban on criticism of the judiciary and armed forces as proscribed in the constitution. PEMRA issued editorial directives to television stations during the year and authorized its chairman to shut down any channel found in violation of the PEMRA code of conduct, primarily with regard to prohibiting telecasts of protests that might instigate sectarian violence. PEMRA also maintained its ban on radio outlets broadcasting any Indian media content. Outlets continued to defy the ban, and most FM radio channels aired popular Indian songs.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces, political parties, militants, and other groups subjected media outlets, journalists, and their families to violence and harassment. Female journalists in particular faced threats of sexual violence and harassment, including via social media. Security forces allegedly abducted journalists. Media outlets that did not practice self-censorship were often the targets of retribution. Additionally, journalists working in remote and conflict-ridden areas lacked basic digital security as well as traditional security skills, which placed additional pressure to self-censor or not cover a story.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, state and nonstate actors killed, physically attacked, harassed, intimidated, and kidnapped journalists and subjected them to other forms of pressure. The Committee to Protect Journalists included the country in its annual “impunity index” because the government allowed deadly violence against members of the press to go unpunished.

In January unidentified attackers shot and killed Muhammad Jan of the Daily Qudrat newspaper while on a motorbike in Kalat, Balochistan. The Lahore-based Express Tribune reported that journalist Rana Tanveer suffered a broken leg after he was struck by a car on June 9. He had previously received death threats from unidentified sources for covering stories about religious minorities. On June 21, the University of Agriculture Faisalabad’s private security guards beat journalists from news channel Samaa TV, who had arrived to cover a student-related incident. The journalists had been refused entry but were filming from outside the university when the guards attacked them. University guards also attacked journalists from other television channels who arrived to support their fellow reporters. Also on June 21, in Islamabad, madrassa students attacked a Din News television reporter and cameraman filming what appeared to be electricity theft by the madrassa. The seminary students beat the news team and pelted them with stones.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Small, privately owned wire services and media organizations generally reported that they engaged in self-censorship,
especially in reporting news about the military forces. Journalists reported regular denial of official permission to visit conflict areas or having to be escorted either by members of the military or by militants in order to report on conditions in conflict areas. The result was pressure to produce final articles that were slanted toward the military or militant viewpoint, depending upon the escort. Other reporting tended to be relatively objective and only focused on events, rather than deeper analysis, which journalists generally regarded as risky. Observers perceived that foreign journalists had more autonomy to write about issues and to be under less scrutiny by the government. Private cable and satellite channels also reported that they censored themselves at times. Blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws restricted publication on certain topics. Foreign books needed to pass government censors before they could be reprinted, but there were no reports of books being banned during the year. Imported books and magazines were subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content. Obscene literature, a category the government defined broadly, was subject to seizure.

The government fined private television channels for alleged violations of the “code of ethics” and for showing banned content on-screen. According to Freedom House, authorities used PEMRA rules to silence broadcast media by either suspending licenses or threatening to do so.

**National Security:** Some journalists asserted authorities cited laws protecting national security to censor and restrict media distribution of material that criticized government policies or military or public officials. The 2015 *Electronic Media (Programs and Advertisements) Code of Conduct* included a clause that restricted reporting in any area that was part of a military operation in progress.

**Nongovernmental Impact:** Militant and criminal elements killed, kidnapped, beat, and intimidated journalists and their families, leading many to censor their reporting.

**Internet Freedom**

Since 2012 the government has implemented a systematic, nationwide content-monitoring and filtering system to restrict or block “unacceptable” content, including material that is deemed un-Islamic, pornographic, or critical of the state or military forces. According to Freedom House, the government justified such restrictions as necessary for security purposes. There also were reports the government attempted to control or block some websites, including sites the government deemed extremist and sites that advocated for Baloch independence.
There was decreasing transparency and accountability surrounding content monitoring, and the government often used vague criteria without due process. In its *Freedom in the World Report* for 2017, Freedom House claimed that more than 200,000 (down from 400,000 in 2016) websites were banned in the country because of their allegedly anti-Islamic, pornographic, or blasphemous content. The report noted restrictive laws governing the use of the internet and stated that civil society organizations faced a continuing clampdown. The provincial government in Balochistan blocked access to a Baloch human rights blog run by journalists. The government blocked several Baloch websites, including the English-language website *The Baloch Hal* and the website of *Daily Tawar*, a Balochistan-based newspaper.

In March the government petitioned Facebook and Twitter to identify Pakistanis worldwide who are found posting material considered offensive to Islam so that local authorities could prosecute them or pursue their extradition on charges of blasphemy, which could result in a death sentence.

On June 10, an antiterrorism court sentenced Taimoor Raza, a 30-year-old Shia man, to death for making allegedly blasphemous posts on Facebook, which observers noted was the first time a court handed down a death sentence specifically for committing blasphemy on social media.

The government enforced the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which many critics claimed contained overly broad and vague definitions of what constituted online speech deemed suitable for removal and/or criminal charges. On June 25, a journalist was arrested by armed men at his house in Quetta and subsequently was handed over to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and charged under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act for allegedly posting “illegal material” on social media. Digital rights activists expressed serious concerns about the law’s potential to curb freedom of expression, particularly on social media. The law states that the government will establish special tribunals for cybercrimes, but it remained unclear how the courts would enforce and interpret the bill.

The Electronic Transaction Act and other laws cite a number of offenses involving the misuse of electronic media and systems and the use of such data in other crimes. The act also stipulates that cyberterrorism resulting in a death is punishable by the death penalty or life imprisonment.
The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) is responsible for the establishment, operation, and maintenance of telecommunications and has complete control of all content broadcast over telecommunication channels. Despite a 2011 PTA ban on using virtual private networks (VPNs) and voice-over-internet protocol (VOIP), at year’s end VPNs and VOIP were both accessible.

NGO and internet-freedom observers reported that the government intensified its surveillance of activists and journalists online, resulting in disappearances of numerous social media activists. In May the FIA informed media outlets it was investigating as many as 200 social media accounts on charges of “spreading negative material against the army and other institutions.” There were also reports that the government used surveillance software.

According to the PTA, as of November there were approximately 50 million broadband subscribers, representing approximately 24.5 percent internet penetration.

**Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government generally did not restrict academic freedom but screened and censored cultural events. There was government interference with art exhibitions, musical, and cultural activities. All such events require a government-issued permit (a “no objection certificate”) in order to be held. The Ministry of Culture operated the Central Board of Film Censors, which previewed and censored sexual content and any content that glorified Indian heroes, leaders, or military figures in foreign and domestic films.

**b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

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

**Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

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

Authorities generally prohibited Ahmadis, a religious minority, from holding conferences or gatherings. Ahmadis cited a December 2016 Punjab provincial
Police raid on the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community headquarters in Rabwah as evidence of worsening conditions for the community. In May an antiterrorism court sentenced two Ahmadis who were arrested during the raid to three years in prison.

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

**Freedom of Association**

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

In 2015 the government adopted a new online registration regime for INGOs. The process entails extensive document requirements, multiple levels of review, and constant investigations by security and other government offices. On November 27, the government sent letters rejecting registration to certain INGOs. The letters required the named INGOs to close operations within 60 days. The letter offered an appeals process, but the guidelines and criteria were opaque, according to INGOs. As of December 15, at least 17 INGOs had received a rejection letter. No-objection certificates were hard to obtain in certain provinces without an approved registration, thus hindering implementation and monitoring of activities, even for INGOs that had initiated the registration process. INGOs also faced an uptick in visa denials for international staff. The unpredictability of the registration process caused at least one INGO to withdraw its registration application and terminate operations in the country.

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

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

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

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

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: The government provided temporary legal status to approximately 1.4 million Afghans formally registered and holding proof of registration (PoR) cards. In February the federal cabinet approved: 1) the extension of PoR cards in two one-year increments, with the first increment valid through December 31; 2) the creation of specific visa categories for Afghans, such as investment, skilled and unskilled labor, student, medical, and spousal visas with a path to naturalization; 3) support for a national refugee law; and 4) the documentation of undocumented Afghans in the country. An estimated 600,000 undocumented Afghans migrants resided in the country.

There were reports of harassment and extortion of Afghan refugees by provincial authorities, police, and host communities. UNHCR reported that, from January to October, there were 3,345 arrests and detentions of refugees. All those arrested were released, 76 percent without charges, often following the intervention of UNHCR or its implementing partners. Arrests spiked in February, with the highest number of refugee arrests and detentions countrywide during any single month in the previous two years, largely due to security operations such as Radd-ul-Fasaad, initiated by the government in the wake of terrorist attacks early in the year.
Harassment of Afghan refugees decreased during the year, although individual cases of harassment persisted. Refugee accounts of harassment ranged from public protests against the presence of Afghan refugees by local communities to individual stories of harassment by law enforcement officials.

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

**Foreign Travel**: The law prohibits travel to Israel, and the country’s passports include a statement that they are “valid for all countries except Israel.” Passport applicants must list their religious affiliation and, if Muslims, affirm a declaration that the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement was a false prophet. Ahmadi representatives reported the word “Ahmadi” was written on their passports if they refused to sign the declaration. According to policy, government employees and students must obtain no-objection certificates from the government before traveling abroad. Authorities rarely enforced this requirement for students, however.

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

**Exile**: During the year the government refused the return of immigrants deported from Europe. One European mission reported several deportees were refused entry as unidentifiable Pakistani citizens, despite having passports issued by Pakistani embassies abroad. Some NGOs commented the government increased restrictions on the issuance of identity and proof of nationality documents, such as passports, from its missions abroad.

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

Large population displacements continued as a result of militant activity and military operations in FATA. A total of 5.3 million residents of FATA were displaced since 2008, some of them multiple times. Of those, approximately five million had returned as of the end of October. The government and UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, and the UN World Food Program (WFP) collaborated
to assist and protect those affected by conflict. Once evacuated, IDPs received immunizations, with many of the children receiving them for the first time in five years. The state and relief organizations placed special emphasis on polio, as many IDP children had been vulnerable to the disease due to the Taliban-imposed ban on immunizations in their home regions. In some areas an estimated 50 percent of the IDP population had been displaced five years or longer, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. Those displaced by conflict generally resided with host families, in rented accommodations, or to a lesser extent, in camps. Several IDP populations settled in informal settlements outside of major cities, such as Lahore and Karachi.

The return of IDPs displaced by Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan Agency, Operations Khyber I, II, III, and IV in Khyber Agency, and other military activities continued. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 329,012 families had returned to FATA and 32,469 families remained displaced as of October 31. Since 2015, 90 percent of the total IDP population had returned to FATA. As of September 27, 66 to 94 percent of IDPs had returned to their home province.

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

There were no reports of involuntary returns. Many IDPs reportedly wanted to return home, despite the lack of local infrastructure, housing, and available service delivery and the strict control that security forces maintained over returnees’ movements through extensive checkpoints. Other IDP families delayed their return or chose some family members to remain in the settled areas of KP where regular access to health care, education, and other social services were available. For IDPs who were unwilling or unable to return, the government coordinated support with the United Nations and other international organizations. The WFP distributed a monthly food ration to IDPs in KP displaced by conflict and continued to provide a six-month food ration to IDPs who returned to their areas of origin in FATA.
Despite large-scale recurring displacements of individuals due to natural disasters and disruptions caused by terrorist activities and counterterrorist operations, the government had not adopted specific legislation to tackle internal displacement problems. In addition, the National Disaster Management Act of 2010 does not provide any definition of IDPs or their rights.

Protection of Refugees

Refoulement: There were no reported cases matching the legal definition of refoulement.

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

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

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

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

**Durable Solutions:** The government did not accept refugees for resettlement from other countries and did not facilitate local integration. The government does not accord Afghan refugees Pakistani citizenship.

The Ministry of States and Frontier Regions and Ministry of the Interior’s National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on May 11 to document unregistered Afghans in the country. The MOU established 21 documentation centers in areas with high concentrations of unregistered Afghans. Under the MOU, NADRA agreed to issue new identity cards, called Afghan citizen cards (ACCs), over a period of six months. According to UNHCR, the ACCs provided undocumented Afghans legal protection from arbitrary arrests, detention, or deportation under the Foreigner’s Act and would “allow Afghans to stay in Pakistan for the time being.” If cardholders leave the country, they relinquish their status. After the documentation period concludes at the end of January 2018, only new births to existing ACC cardholders will be recorded. Any undocumented Afghans encountered in the country after the registration period would be vulnerable to detention and deportation under the Foreigners Act.

**Stateless Persons**

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

**Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

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

Despite their representation in the national Parliament, FATA residents do not have a voice in federal decisions regarding the tribal areas; authority in FATA resides with the president. Tribal residents do not have the right to change their local government because unelected civilian bureaucrats nominally run the tribal agencies under the 1901 FCR, as amended in 2011. No local government elections have ever been held in FATA, even as the country’s other provinces elected local representatives. Through the 2011 Extension of the Political Parties Order 2002 to the tribal areas, the government allowed political parties to operate freely in FATA. Political observers credited this order with laying the foundation for a more mature political system in the tribal agencies, and there was a continuing internal debate over the possibility of FATA’s integration into KP Province to normalize its administration.

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2013 the country held national elections that resulted in a PML-N-majority government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In 2013 Mamnoon Hussain succeeded Asif Ali Zardari as president. On July 28, the Supreme Court disqualified Sharif from office over corruption allegations. Parliament elected Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as the new prime minister on August 1. Asif Ali Zardari completed his five-year term as president in 2013 with Mamnoon Hussain (PML-N) succeeding him. According to Article 41 of the constitution, the Electoral College (made up of the members of both houses of parliament, and of the provincial assemblies) selects the country’s president by secret ballot in a
special session that is held between 30 and 60 days prior to the expiration of the sitting president’s five-year term.

In the most recent general elections in 2013, the Election Commission of Pakistan accredited approximately 43,000 domestic observers, the majority of whom were from the Free and Fair Election Network. The EU, Democracy International, the Aurat Foundation, and the National Democratic Institute were among the many groups to observe the election. The government permitted all existing political parties to contest the elections, although several smaller parties boycotted the polling. Election observers generally considered the elections a success, despite terrorist violence and some procedural problems.

Political Parties and Political Participation: There were few restrictions on political parties. In most areas there was no interference with the rights to organize, run for election, seek votes, or publicize views. In Balochistan, however, there were reports security agencies and separatist groups harassed local political organizations, such as the Balochistan National Party and the Baloch Students Organization.

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

The comprehensive Elections Act 2017, which was passed on October 2 and replaced eight older laws, stipulates special measures to enhance electoral participation of women, religious minorities, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities. Under the new law, women must constitute 5 percent of party tickets, and if less than 10 percent of women vote in any constituency, it will be presumed that the women’s vote was suppressed and the results for that constituency or polling station may be nullified. The law provides for mail-in voting for persons with disabilities. It requires expedited issuance of identification cards (which also
serve as voter identification cards) for non-Muslims, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities.

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

The constitution reserves four seats in the Senate, one for each of the four provinces, for religious minorities, defined by the government as “non-Muslim.” These seats are filled through indirect elections held in the provincial assemblies. Ten National Assembly seats are reserved for members of religious minorities. The authorities apportioned seats to parties based on the percentage of seats each won in the assembly. Minorities held 22 reserved seats in the provincial assemblies: eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, two in KP, and three in Balochistan. Some members of religious minority communities criticized the system of minority representation, whereby minority representatives at the provincial and federal levels are appointed by their political parties to reserved seats; they stated this system resulted in minority representatives serving the interests of their political parties rather than of minority communities.

Women and minorities may contest unreserved seats.

**Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

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

**Corruption:** In November 2016 the Supreme Court convened a special bench to investigate allegations of corruption levelled against then prime minister Sharif and members of his family. The charges stemmed from allegations related to the 2016 “Panama Papers” leaks, which named Pakistanis having off-shore banking accounts, according to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. On July 28, the Supreme Court disqualified then prime minister Sharif from his National Assembly seat, prompting him to resign as prime minister the following day. The court also ordered the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to prosecute the prime minister, members of his family, and the sitting finance
minister. The trials before a national accountability court began in September and continued at year’s end.

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

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

Anecdotal reports persisted about corruption in the judicial system, including reports of small-scale facilitation payments requested by court staff. Lower courts reportedly remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from higher-ranking judges as well as prominent, wealthy, religious, and political figures.

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

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

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

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights
Although some domestic and international human rights groups operated without significant government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases, the government increasingly restricted the operating ability of NGOs. Some groups that implicated the government, military, or intelligence services in misdeeds or worked on issues related to IDPs, conflict areas, or advocacy reported their operations were at times restricted. These groups faced numerous regulations regarding travel, visas, and registration that hampered their efforts to program and raise funds. International staff members of organizations, including those from the few successfully registered INGOs, continued to face delays or denials in the issuance of visas and no-objection certificates for in-country travel. The domestic NGO registration agreement with the government requires NGOs to “not use controversial terms like Peace and Conflict Resolution, IDPs, etc. in your annual reports or any other documents/correspondence/agreements.” Very few NGOs had access to KP, FATA, and certain areas in Balochistan.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The 2012 National Commission for Human Rights Bill authorized the establishment of an independent committee, the National Commission on Human Rights, and an independent Ministry of Human Rights was reconstituted in 2015. The Senate and National Assembly standing committees on law, justice, minorities, and human rights held hearings on a range of human rights problems, including honor crimes, police abuses in connection with the blasphemy law, and the Hudood Ordinance.

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

Women

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

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

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

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

According to the Aurat Foundation and others, prosecutions of reported rapes were rare. Police and NGOs reported individuals involved in other types of disputes sometimes filed false rape charges, reducing the ability of police to identify legitimate cases and proceed with prosecution. NGOs reported police were at times implicated in rape cases. NGOs also alleged police sometimes abused or threatened victims, demanding they drop charges, especially when police received bribes from suspected perpetrators or the perpetrators were influential community leaders. Some police demanded bribes from victims before registering rape charges, and investigations were sometimes superficial. The use of postrape medical testing increased, but medical personnel in many areas did not have sufficient training or equipment, which further complicated prosecutions. Accusations of rape were often resolved using extrajudicial measures, with the victim often forced to marry her attacker.

No specific federal law prohibits domestic violence, which was widespread. Forms of domestic violence reportedly included beating, physical disfigurement, shaving of women’s eyebrows and hair, and—in the most extreme cases—homicide. In-laws abused and harassed the wives of their sons. Dowry and other family-related disputes sometimes resulted in death or disfigurement by burning or acid.
Women who tried to report abuse faced serious challenges. Police and judges were sometimes reluctant to take action in domestic violence cases, viewing them as family problems. Instead of filing charges, police typically responded by encouraging the parties to reconcile. Authorities routinely returned abused women to their abusive family members.

To address societal norms that disapprove of victims who report gender-based violence and abuse, the government established women’s police stations, staffed by female officers, to offer women a safe haven where they could safely report complaints and file charges. These women’s police stations, however, struggled with understaffing and limited equipment.

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

Government centers lacked sufficient space, staff, and resources. Conditions in many dar-ul-amans did not meet international standards. Many were severely overcrowded with, in some cases, more than 35 women sharing one toilet. Few shelters offered access to basic needs such as showers, laundry supplies, or feminine hygiene products. In some cases, women were reportedly abused at the government-run shelters, found their movements severely restricted, or were pressured to return to their abusers.

There were some reports of women being trafficked and prostituted out of shelters. Shelter staff reportedly sometimes discriminated against women in shelters; they assumed that if women fled their homes, it was because they were women of ill repute. In some cases, women were reportedly abused at the government-run shelters, found their movements severely restricted, or were pressured to return to their abusers.
Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): No national law addresses the practice of FGM/C. According to human rights groups and media reports, many Dawoodi Bohra Muslims practiced various forms of FGM/C. Some other isolated tribes and communities in rural Sindh and Balochistan also practiced FGM/C. Some Dawoodi Bohras spoke publicly and signed online petitions against the practice.

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

A 2004 law on honor killings, the 2011 Prevention of Antiwomen Practices Act, and the 2016 Criminal Law Amendment (Offenses in the Name or Pretext of Honor) Act criminalize acts committed against women in the name of traditional practices. Despite these laws, hundreds of women reportedly were victims of so-called honor killings, and many cases went unreported and unpunished. In many cases, the male involved in the alleged “crime of honor” is not killed but allowed to flee. In October 2016 the government passed the anti-honor-killing law, closing the loophole that allowed perpetrators in “honor killings” to go free if the victim’s family pardoned the perpetrator.

Because honor crimes generally occurred within families, many went unreported. Police and NGOs reported that increased media coverage enabled law enforcement officials to take some action against a limited number of perpetrators. In July 2016 social media celebrity Fouzia Azeem (better known as Qandeel Baloch) was killed by her brother at their family home in southern Punjab. The brother said she had shamed the family with her “liberal” lifestyle. The government charged Baloch’s brother and accomplices with her murder, which made the state a party in the case and barred the family from “forgiving” the brother and setting him free, a common outcome in these types of killings.

The practice of cutting off a woman’s nose or ears, especially in connection with honor crimes, was reported, and legal repercussions were rare.

In March, Parliament passed the federal Hindu Marriage Act. The national law codifies the legal mechanisms to register Hindu marriages and to prove the legitimacy of Hindu marriages under the law. While leaders in the Hindu community generally saw the legislation as a positive step toward preventing forced marriages of Hindus to Muslims, the law contains one controversial
provision allowing for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. A similar provision was included in Sindh’s 2016 Hindu Marriage Act.

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

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

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

Sexual Harassment: Although several laws criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and public sphere, the problem was widespread. Laws require all provinces to establish provincial-level ombudsmen. Sindh was the first province to do so in 2012. Punjab Province and administrative district Gilgit-Baltistan also established ombudsmen.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion, involuntary sterilization, or other coercive population control methods. Estimates on maternal mortality and contraceptive prevalence are available at: www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/maternal-mortality-2015/en/.

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

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

Children

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

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

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

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

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

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

Early and Forced Marriage: Despite legal prohibitions, child marriages occurred. Federal law sets the legal age of marriage at 18 for men and 16 for women. The 2014 Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act sets 18 as the legal age of marriage for both girls and boys in Sindh Province. A February amendment to the federal 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act substantially increased punishment for violators of the law. Under the amendment, violators may be imprisoned for up to 10 years...
and no less than five years (up from imprisonment of up to one month), and may also be fined up to one million rupees ($9,000), up from 1,000 rupees (nine dollars).

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

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

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

**Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities:** By law anyone found to have abandoned an infant may be imprisoned for seven years, while anyone guilty of secretly burying a deceased child may be imprisoned for two years. Murder is punishable by life imprisonment, but authorities rarely prosecuted the crime of infanticide.

**Displaced Children:** According to civil society sources, it was difficult for children displaced by military operations to access education or psychological support. SPARC and other child rights organizations expressed concern that children displaced by flooding and conflict were vulnerable to child labor abuses as some families relocated to urban areas.

**International Child Abductions:** The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html.
Anti-Semitism

There is a very small Jewish population in the country. Anti-Semitic sentiments were widespread in the vernacular press. Hate speech broadcast by traditional media and through social media derogatorily used terms such as “Jewish agent” to attack individuals and groups.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

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

In Sindh the law mandates the minister for bonded labor and special education to address the educational needs of persons with disabilities. According to civil society sources, most children with disabilities did not attend school.

Employment quotas at the federal and provincial levels require public and private organizations to reserve at least 2 percent of jobs for qualified persons with disabilities. Authorities only partially implemented this requirement due to lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms.

Organizations that did not wish to hire persons with disabilities could instead pay a fine to a disability assistance fund. Authorities rarely enforced this obligation. The National Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled provided job placement and loan facilities as well as subsistence funding. Voting was challenging for persons with disabilities, however, because of severe difficulties in obtaining transportation and access to polling stations. The Elections Act 2017, however, allows for mail-in voting for persons with disabilities. In addition, the
Election Commission of Pakistan issued a directive for 2018 general election polling stations to be installed on ground floors when possible and to be equipped with ramps in order to facilitate access for persons with disabilities.

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

Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is a criminal offense; however, the government rarely prosecuted cases. The penalty for same-sex relations is a fine, two years’ to life imprisonment, or both. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, male transgender, and intersex persons rarely revealed their sexual orientation or gender identity. There were communities of openly transgender women, but they were marginalized and were frequently the targets of violence and harassment. Transgender women were marginalized and were frequently the targets of violence and harassment. No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2013 the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority blocked the country’s first online platform for the LGBTI community to share views and network, but social media pages working on LGBTI rights and related issues continued to function.

Violence and discrimination continued against LGBTI persons. Police generally refused to take action on cases involving members of the LGBTI community. In Karachi, Sindh police were slow or reluctant to pursue crimes committed against transgender women, including in the cases of an August 30 killing and two separate gang rapes in September. Outreach by NGOs in KP, in contrast, improved interactions between police and the transgender community there.

According to a wide range of LGBT NGOs and activists, society generally shunned transgender women, eunuchs, and intersex persons, collectively referred to as “hijras”--a word some transgender individuals view as pejorative, preferring the term “khwaja serra”--who often lived together in slum communities and survived by begging and dancing at carnivals and weddings. Some also were prostitutes. Local authorities often denied transgender individuals places in schools or admission to hospitals, and landlords often refused to rent or sell property to them. Authorities often denied transgender individuals their share of inherited property. A 2012 Supreme Court ruling recognizes transgender persons as a “third gender” and allows them to obtain accurate national identification cards. Because of the ruling, in 2013 transgender individuals were able to participate in elections for the first time as candidates and voters.
HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

The country continued to have a concentrated HIV epidemic with an estimated prevalence among the general population at less than 0.1 percent. Estimates indicated that 93 percent of those living with HIV were in two provinces: Punjab (50 percent) and Sindh (43 percent). The epidemic was concentrated among key populations, primarily injecting drug users. For all key populations, stigma and discrimination by the general population and by health-care providers in particular remained a significant barrier to treatment access.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

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

Members of the Hazara ethnic minority, who are Shia Muslim, continued to face discrimination and threats of violence in Quetta, Balochistan. At least 13 Hazara Shia were killed in targeted attacks throughout the year. For example, on July 19, unidentified gunmen killed a Hazara Shia family of four travelling from Quetta to Karachi. According to press reports and other sources, Hazara were unable to move freely outside of Quetta’s two Hazara-populated enclaves. Consumer goods in those enclaves were available only at inflated prices, and Hazaras reported an inability to find employment or pursue higher education. They also alleged government agencies discriminated against Hazaras in issuing identification cards and passports. To avoid causing violent incidents, authorities confined Shia religious processions to the Hazara enclaves.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The vast majority of the labor force was under the jurisdiction of provincial labor laws. The 2010 18th constitutional amendment, which devolved labor legislation and policies to the four provinces, stipulated that existing national laws would remain in force “until altered, repealed, or amended” by the provincial governments. Provinces implemented their own industrial relations acts in 2011. In 2012 Parliament passed a new industrial relations act that took International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions into account but applied them only to the Islamabad Capital Territory and to trade federations that operated in more than one
province. Most of the labor force was not covered by federal labor regulations of any kind.

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

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

Worker organizations noted the limited capacity and funding for labor relations implementation at the provincial level, and there was controversy over the federal government’s decision to maintain control of the Workers Welfare Fund and Employees Old Age Benefits Institution as opposed to devolving it to the provinces.

The law prohibits state administrators, workers in state-owned enterprises, and export processing zones, and public-sector workers from collective bargaining and striking, but labor groups reported the law was not applied during the year. Provincial industrial relations acts also address and limit strikes and lockouts. For example, the KP act specifies that when a “strike or lockout lasts for more than 30 days, the government may, by order in writing, prohibit the strike or lockout” and must then refer the dispute to a labor court.

Unions were able to organize large-scale strikes, but police often broke up the strikes, and employers used them to justify dismissals. Marches and protests also occurred regularly, although police often arrested union leaders and occasionally
charged them under antiterrorism and antistate laws. Violence and other problems involving freedom of association persisted throughout the year.

Federal law defines illegal strikes, picketing, and other types of protests as “civil commotion,” which carries a penalty of up to life imprisonment. The law also states that gatherings of four or more persons may require police authorization, a provision authorities could use against trade union gatherings, since the federal government has authority on criminal matters.

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

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

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

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Lack of political will, the reported complicity of officials in trafficking, technical flaws in the law, federal and local government structural changes, and a lack of
funds contributed to the failure of authorities to enforce federal law relating to forced labor. Gaps also remained in the legislative framework. Consequently, when law enforcement officers registered bonded labor offenses, they often did so under other sections of the penal code, including kidnapping and illegal confinement. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate, and penalties under federal law—including a 50,000-rupee ($450) fine, two to five years’ imprisonment, or both—were insufficient to deter violations.

The use of forced and bonded labor was widespread and common in several industries across the country. NGOs estimated that nearly two million persons were in bondage, primarily in Sindh and Punjab, but also in Balochistan and KP. A large proportion of bonded laborers were low-caste Hindus as well as Christians and Muslims with lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Bonded labor was reportedly present in the agricultural sector, including the cotton, sugarcane, and wheat industries, and in the brick, coal, and carpet industries. Bonded laborers often were unable to determine when their debts were fully paid, in part because contracts were rare, and employers could take advantage of bonded laborers’ illiteracy to alter debt amounts or the price laborers paid for seed and fertilizer. In some cases, landowners restricted laborers’ movements with armed guards or sold laborers to other employers for the price of the laborers’ debts. The government of Punjab funded the Elimination of Child Labor and Bonded Labor Project, which aimed to rehabilitate bonded laborers working in brick kilns, increase law enforcement and service provider capacity, and promote integration and coordination of government responses.

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

Some bonded laborers returned to their former status after they were freed due to a lack of alternative employment options. Ties between landowners, industry owners, and influential politicians hampered effective elimination of the problem. For example, some local police did not pursue landowners or brick kiln owners effectively because they believed higher-ranking police, pressured by politicians or the owners themselves, would not support their efforts to carry out legal investigations.
The KP, Punjab, and Sindh ministries of labor reportedly worked to register brick kilns and their workers in order to regulate the industry more effectively and provide workers access to labor courts and other services. According to ILO officials, the KP and Punjab provincial governments have registered nearly all brick kilns in their provinces and Punjab has completed digital mapping of the kilns. The Punjab Department of Labor continued its project to combat child and bonded labor in brick kilns by helping workers obtain national identity cards and interest-free loans and providing schools at brick kiln sites. Since its 2014 launch, the project has reportedly succeeded in removing nearly 90,000 children from work in brick kilns and enrolling them in school.

Also see the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ and the Department of Labor’s Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The constitution expressly prohibits the employment of children below age 14 in any factory, mine, or other hazardous site. The national law for the employment of children sets the minimum age for hazardous work at 15, an age not in compliance with international standards. The national law establishes 15 as the minimum age for employment, although the law’s age limit does not extend to informal employment. For children over 14, the law limits a child’s workday to seven hours, including a one-hour break after three hours of labor, and sets permissible times of day for work and time off. The law does not allow children to work overtime or at night, and it specifies they should receive one day off per week. Additionally, the law requires employers to keep a register of child workers for labor inspectors to verify. These prohibitions and regulations, however, do not apply to home-based businesses.

On January 26, Sindh Province adopted the Prohibition of Employment of Children Bill that bars children under 15 from employment and establishes 19 as the minimum age for employment in hazardous work. It penalizes perpetrators with six months’ imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 rupees ($450) or, in the case of dangerous workplaces, three years’ imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 rupees ($900). Other provinces also passed legislation during the year on child labor and child protection, and all four provinces dedicated resources to address child labor practices.
Federal law prohibits the exploitation of children younger than 18 and defines exploitative entertainment as all activities related to human sports or sexual practices and other abusive practices. Parents who exploit their children are legally liable. The law makes bonded labor of children punishable by up to five years in prison and 50,000 rupees ($450) in fines. The government prohibited the employment of children under 15 in hazardous work, including four occupations and 34 processes, such as street vending, surgical instrument manufacturing, deep-sea fishing, leather manufacturing, brick making, soccer ball production, and carpet weaving. Despite these restrictions, there were reports of children working in all these areas.

Coordination of responses to child labor problems at the national level remained ineffective. As a result of devolution, labor inspection was carried out at the provincial rather than national level, which contributed to uneven application of labor law. Enforcement efforts were not adequate to meet the scale of the problem. Inspectors had little training and insufficient resources and were susceptible to corruption. Labor inspections became even less frequent after devolution, with no floor for the minimum frequency of inspections. Authorities allowed NGOs to perform inspections without interference, and SPARC noted that officials usually cooperated with its visits.

Authorities often did not impose penalties on violators; when they did, the penalties were not a significant deterrent. For example, while authorities obtained hundreds of convictions for violations of child labor laws, the fines were too low to deter future violations.

Due to weak government enforcement of child labor laws, child labor remained pervasive, with many children working in agriculture and domestic work.

Approximately 70 percent of nonagricultural child labor took place in small workshops, complicating efforts to enforce child labor laws, since by law inspectors may not inspect facilities employing fewer than 10 persons.

Employers and families forced children to work in brick kilns and in the glass-bangle and carpet-weaving industries as well as in agriculture as part of fulfilling their families’ debt obligation to landowners or brick kiln owners. In 2012 researchers estimated there were two million bonded laborers, many of whom included entire families with children. Children also reportedly worked in the production of incense, cotton, wheat, textiles, tobacco, sugarcane, and gemstones and in stone crushing.
Poor rural families sometimes sold their children into domestic servitude or other types of work, or they paid agents to arrange for such work, often believing their children would work under decent conditions. Some children sent to work for relatives or acquaintances in exchange for education or other opportunities ended in exploitative conditions or forced labor.

Children also were kidnapped or sold into organized begging rings, domestic servitude, militants and gangs, and child sex trafficking.

See the Department of Labor’s Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations.

Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted. The nature of penalties for violations was insufficient to deter violations.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

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

In July 2016 the government raised the minimum wage for unskilled workers from 13,000 rupees ($118) to 14,000 rupees ($127) per month, and all provincial governments’ budgets were required to follow that directive. While authorities
increased the minimum wage in the annual budget, both federal and state
governments also must issue required notifications for such increases to go into
effect. Minimum wage laws did not cover significant sectors of the labor force,
including workers in the informal sector, domestic servants, and agricultural
workers.

The law provides for a maximum workweek of 48 hours (54 hours for seasonal
factories) with rest periods during the workday and paid annual holidays.
Additional benefits required under the labor code include official government
holidays, overtime pay, annual and sick leave, health care, education for workers’
children, social security, old-age benefits, and a workers’ welfare fund. The
majority of factory workers, however, were employed as contract laborers with no
benefits beyond basic wages and no long-term job security, even if they remained
with the same employer for years.

These regulations do not apply to agricultural workers, workers in factories with
fewer than 10 employees, domestic workers, or contractors. Workers in these
types of employment also lack the right to access “worker courts” to seek redress
of grievances and were otherwise extremely vulnerable to exploitation. The
inapplicability of many labor laws and the lack of enforcement by the government
gave employers in many sectors relative impunity with regard to working
conditions, treatment of employees, work hours, and pay.

Provincial governments have primary responsibility for enforcing national labor
regulations. Enforcement was ineffective due to limited resources, corruption, and
inadequate regulatory structures. In Punjab, a system whereby owners voluntarily
posted their own declarations about workplace safety, health, and wage conditions
in their factories replaced routine inspections. Officials then chose factories at
random for inspection. Balochistan and KP allowed surprise inspections. Many
workers, especially in the informal sector, remained unaware of their rights. Given
the serious restrictions on labor inspections and the effect of limited resources and
corruption, inspections and penalties were insufficient to deter violations of labor
laws.

Health and safety standards were poor in all sectors. There was a serious lack of
adherence to mine-safety and health protocols. Many mines had only one opening
for entry, egress, and ventilation. Workers could not remove themselves from
dangerous working conditions without risking loss of employment. Informal-
sector employees faced multiple precarious situations, particularly in less visible
areas, such as domestic work. There were no official statistics on workplace
fatalities and accidents during the year. Factory managers were often unable to ascertain the identity of fire or other work-related accident victims because these individuals were contract workers and generally did not appear in official records. In November 2016 an estimated 20 individuals died and more than 50 others were injured in an explosion and fire at a ship-breaking facility in Gadani, Sindh. From 2016 to August 2017, at least seven workers died in Gadani due to poor safety standards at ship-breaking facilities there. Three workers died and a fourth was critically injured on September 23 after falling into a chemical tank at a factory in Karachi. Eight coal miners were killed in three separate incidents in Balochistan in September, and labor leaders reported 80 coal miners were killed annually due to poor safety standards.

The country’s failure to meet international health and safety standards raised doubts abroad as to its reliability as a source for imports. On November 18, however, the provincial government of Sindh enacted a comprehensive occupational health and safety law that the government developed in consultation with the ILO.

Following the 2012 fire at a Karachi textile factory that killed 259 workers, some labor advocates complained that many families had not received their promised compensation. In September 2016 the ILO, together with the factory owner and trade union representatives, concluded a victim compensation arrangement, including $5.15 million in long-term financial assistance to those affected by the fire. Labor activists asserted that, due to poor implementation of existing laws, many factors that led to the tragedy--most notably a fraudulent safety certification and inadequate fire safety measures--continued to exist at many other companies.
PAKISTAN 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan is a federal republic. In May 2013 the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party won a majority of seats in parliamentary elections, and Nawaz Sharif became prime minister for the third time. While judged to be mostly free and fair, some independent observers and political parties raised concerns about election irregularities. Asif Ali Zardari completed his five-year term as president in September 2013 with Mamnoon Hussain (PML-N) succeeding him. Orderly transitions in the military (chief of army staff) and the judiciary (Supreme Court chief justice) solidified the democratic transition.

Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most serious human rights problems were extrajudicial and targeted killings; disappearances; torture; lack of rule of law (including lack of due process, poor implementation and enforcement of laws, and frequent mob violence and vigilante justice); gender inequality; violence against gender and sexual minorities; and sectarian violence.

Other human rights problems included poor prison conditions, arbitrary detention, lengthy pretrial detention, a weak criminal justice system, lack of judicial independence in the lower courts, and governmental infringement on citizens’ privacy rights. Harassment of journalists continued, with high-profile attacks against journalists and media organizations. There were government restrictions on freedom of assembly and limits on freedom of movement. Government practices and certain laws limited freedom of religion, particularly for religious minorities. Discrimination against religious minorities, and sectarian violence continued. Corruption within the government and police, as well as rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, honor crimes, other harmful traditional practices, and discrimination against women and girls remained serious societal problems. Gender inequality continued. Child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children persisted. Child labor remained pervasive. Widespread human trafficking, including forced and bonded labor, continued. Societal discrimination against national, ethnic, and racial minorities persisted, as did discrimination based on caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status. Respect for worker rights was minimal.
Lack of government accountability remained a problem, and abuses often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity among the perpetrators whether official or unofficial. Authorities seldom punished government officials for human rights violations.

Continuing terrorist violence and human rights abuses by nonstate actors contributed significantly to human rights challenges in the country. The military continued significant campaigns against militant and terrorist groups. Nevertheless, violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nonstate actors located in the country and from neighboring countries contributed to a culture of lawlessness in some parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), during the year there were 1,720 fatalities from terrorism, compared with 3,682 fatalities in 2015. Terror-related fatalities have been declining in the country since 2009, when fatalities totaled 11,704.

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

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

There were numerous reports that authorities committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in connection with conflicts in Punjab, Balochistan, FATA, Sindh, and KP (see section 1.g.).

Physical abuse while in official custody allegedly caused the death of some criminal suspects. Lengthy trial delays and failure to discipline and prosecute those responsible for killings contributed to a culture of impunity.

On May 1-2, Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) officials alleged that the Sindh Rangers illegally detained and tortured an MQM worker who died in custody in Karachi. Chief of Army Staff Raheel Sharif ordered an inquiry into the incident. The director general of the Sindh Rangers suspended five officers for their alleged involvement in the MQM worker’s death.

There were continued allegations of politically motivated killings of Baloch nationalists in Balochistan and Sindh. In his testimony before the Senate of Pakistan Standing Committee on Human Rights, Balochistan’s Frontier Corps Deputy Inspector General for Investigations and Crime declared that 1,040 persons
had been killed in Balochistan in 2015-16. He claimed there was “no evidence of security agency involvement” in the killings.

The SATP reported that journalists, teachers, students, and human rights defenders also were targeted by state and nonstate actors in Balochistan. According to the SATP, as of November 20, at least 244 civilians were killed in Balochistan, compared with 247 during 2015.

On August 8, a coordinated attack in Quetta killed at least 73 individuals, 55 of them lawyers. Both Da’esh and the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) splinter group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar claimed responsibility for the attack.

There were reports of politically motivated killings by political factions or unknown assailants in Sindh. On May 8, gunmen killed a well-known activist and journalist, Khurram Zaki, in Karachi. The Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) Hakeemullah Mehsud Group claimed credit for the attack and said it was retribution for the media campaign he ran against the Islamabad-based Red Mosque cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz. On June 22, gunmen killed Amjad Sabri, a well-known Sufi qawali (Sufi devotional music) singer in a targeted attack in Karachi. According to media reports, the TTP Hakeemullah Mehsud Group claimed responsibility for the killing, calling the Sufi music “blasphemous.” Police and security agencies arrested several MQM members, who reportedly confessed to involvement in the Sabri murder.

The provincial government and political parties in Sindh, Balochistan, KP, and Punjab remained targets of attack by militant and other nonstate actors.

On July 24 unidentified militants killed a senior cleric from the Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazlur (JUI-F), a coalition partner of the ruling PML-N, and his son in Balochistan’s Kech District. In March the bodies of five government employees who had been abducted in Kech district were found. All the victims were employees of the Urban Planning and Development Department. On January 22, Balochistan Home Minister Mir Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti (PML-N) narrowly escaped an assassination attempt when his convoy hit a roadside bomb in Dera Bugti, Balochistan. Bugti survived another attempt on his life near Sui, Balochistan, on February 29.

In October hundreds of sleeping police recruits were attacked at a police academy in Quetta, Balochistan. Suicide bombers killed 61 cadets and injured 117. Da’esh
claimed responsibility, but security officials told media that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi was behind the attack.

District-level and provincial politicians from Awami National Party, Pakistan People’s Party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and JUI-F were shot and killed in targeted attacks throughout KP and FATA. On April 25, PTI provincial assembly member Sardar Soran Singh (from the minority Sikh community) was killed by gunmen in KP’s Buner District. Police alleged the killing was politically motivated, ordered by a rival Sikh politician who stood to inherit Singh’s reserved seat in the Provincial Assembly.

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

The government ended its moratorium on capital punishment in 2014, following the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. Human rights organizations reported concerns with observance of due process and the execution of individuals under age 18 when they allegedly committed the crime.

b. Disappearance

There were kidnappings and forced disappearances of persons from various backgrounds in nearly all areas of the country. Some police and security forces reportedly held prisoners incommunicado and refused to disclose their location. Human rights organizations reported many Sindhi and Baloch nationalists as among the missing; for example, the International Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (a separate organization from the VBMP) in August claimed that forced disappearance victims were being killed by security forces in contrived police encounters.

Karachi-based political party MQM alleged that the paramilitary Sindh Rangers kidnapped, tortured, and killed some of its members in security operations in Karachi. They claimed authorities killed 61 MQM members extrajudicially in the operations. In May the MQM submitted to the Supreme Court a list of 171 political workers who it said had been missing since January. The party said Sindh Rangers were responsible for abducting party workers. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) called for a probe into extrajudicial killings and disappearances of MQM workers. Nationalist parties in Sindh also alleged that law enforcement agencies kidnapped and killed Sindhi political activists. Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM), a banned Sindhi nationalist party, claimed that
during 2016, 11 of their party members had been abducted by security agencies across Sindh. In April, a senior nationalist leader and founder of Jiye Sindh Tehreek, Shafi Karnani, was shot and killed in Thatta, Sindh by unknown assailants.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances headed by Supreme Court Justice Javed Iqbal and retired law enforcement official Muhammad Sharif Virt received 3,522 missing persons cases between 2011 and July 31. The commission claimed to have closed out 2,105 of those cases and to have traced 1,614 of the missing persons, while 1,417 of the cases remained open.

According to press reporting and human rights groups, a Karachi-based Baloch activist was abducted by alleged security officials when he stopped at a highway toll plaza on July 26; he was released in December. The National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) opened an investigation, but there were no additional details regarding his abduction as of the end of the year.

In January the Peshawar High Court dismissed the case of Indian citizen Hamid Nehal Ansari, pending since 2012, when the Ministry of Defense confirmed to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances that Ansari was in the army’s custody pending trial before a military court. According to media reports, he was convicted of espionage and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in February. According to Ansari’s mother, the Mumbai native was job seeking in Afghanistan when he crossed into Kohat, KP, to meet a woman he had met online before being arrested at his hotel.

The VBMP claimed the total number of persons who had disappeared since 2000 in Balochistan could be greater than 20,000. The International Voice for Baloch Missing Persons maintained an online database of missing persons in Balochistan, and it listed a total of 739 individuals missing since 1969, including 100 individuals who allegedly were abducted during the year.

There were reports of disappearances in connection with continuing conflicts between militant groups and government forces in Punjab and FATA.

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

Although the constitution prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, the criminal code has no specific section against torture. It prohibits
causing “hurt” but does not mention punishing perpetrators of torture. There are no legislative provisions specifically prohibiting torture. There were reports that security forces, including the intelligence services, tortured and abused individuals in custody.

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission, the absence of proper complaint centers and the absence of a particular section in the criminal code that defines and prohibits torture contributed to such practices. The commission maintained that the government undertook no serious effort to make torture a crime and that perpetrators, mostly police or members of the armed forces, operated with impunity.

There were reports some police personnel employed cruel and degrading treatment and punishment. The HRCP reported that police committed acts they described as “police excesses” in more than 124 cases as of November, compared with more than 178 cases in 2015. Multiple sources reported that torture occasionally resulted in death or serious injury and was often underreported. Acts described by Society for Human Rights and Prisoners’ Aid (SHARP) and other human rights organizations included beating with batons and whips, burning with cigarettes, whipping the soles of feet, prolonged isolation, electric shock, denying food or sleep, hanging upside down, and forced spreading the legs with bar fetters.

In March the newspaper Dawn reported that Manzoor Shah died three days after he was transferred to Karachi Central Prison after allegedly being tortured by police while in custody. An MQM senator said Shah was arrested by paramilitary forces and then handed over to prison authorities after the end of his remand period. According to the postmortem, Shah died from a head injury caused by a hard and blunt object.

The practice of collective punishment continued in FATA and the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA), as provided for in the 114-year-old “Frontier Crimes Regulation” (FCR), which governs FATA. In 2011 the government amended the FCR to exempt women, all individuals over age 65, and children below age 16 from collective punishment. Authorities apply collective punishment incrementally, starting with the first immediate male family members, followed by the subtribe, and continuing outward. Although this graduated approach reduces its scope, the FCR assigns collective punishment without regard to individual rights. Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed concern about the concept of collective responsibility, as authorities used collective responsibility to detain members of fugitives’ tribes, demolish their homes,
confiscate or destroy their property, or lay siege to fugitive villages pending surrender or punishment by fugitives’ own tribes in accordance with local tradition. In November media and local government officials reported security forces demolished a market in Wana, South Waziristan, near the Afghan border in an attribution of “collective responsibility” following the death of a military officer by an improvised explosive device during a raid on the market conducted against militants.

Military Operations in the FATA continued throughout the year, targeting militant groups, primarily in Waziristan. Restrictions on access to these conflict zones imposed by the government limited the information available to international observers, including the United Nations, civil society, and nongovernmental actors about possible abuses in these areas.

Pakistan has a total of 7,156 police, military experts, and soldiers performing peacekeeping duties around the world. The United Nations reported that during the year (as of December 20) it received two allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against Pakistani peacekeepers for one alleged incident occurring during the year and for one of which the date was unknown. One allegation involved military personnel deployed to the UN Operation in Cote d’Ivoire, was being investigated by the government and allegedly involved minors. There was no result by the end of the year. The other allegation, involving military personnel deployed to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, was investigated by the government and found to be unsubstantiated.

**Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Conditions in some prisons and detention centers were harsh and life threatening. Problems such as overcrowding and inadequate medical care were widespread.

**Physical Conditions:** Prison conditions often were extremely poor. Overcrowding was common. SHARP estimated the nationwide prison population at 100,000 while claiming that the normal capacity of prisons was approximately 36,000.

Provincial governments were the primary managers of prisons and detention centers, after those run by the national government and the military.

Inadequate food and medical care in prisons led to chronic health problems and malnutrition among inmates unable to supplement their diets with help from family or friends. In many facilities sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and access to potable
water were inadequate. Most prison facilities were antiquated and had no means to control indoor temperatures. A system existed for basic and emergency medical care, but bureaucratic procedures slowed access. Foreign prisoners often remained in prison long after completion of their sentences because they were unable to pay for deportation to their home countries.

Prison security remained a concern. Media reported that a prison break in Mardan, KP, occurred in June; however, prison officials denied there were any escapees, and no further information was available.

Prisoners who were members of religious minorities generally received poorer facilities than Muslims and often suffered violence at the hands of fellow inmates. Representatives of Christian and Ahmadiyya Muslim communities claimed their members were often subjected to abuse in prison. Civil society organizations reported prisoners accused of blasphemy violations were frequently subjected to poor prison conditions. NGOs reported that many individuals accused of blasphemy remained in solitary confinement for extended periods, sometimes for more than a year. The government asserted this treatment was for the individual’s safety.

Authorities held women separately from men in some, but not all, prisons. Balochistan had no women’s prison; officials claimed they housed women in separate barracks in Quetta and Lasbela district prisons.

Police often did not segregate detainees from convicted criminals. Prisoners with mental disabilities usually lacked adequate care.

Prison officials usually kept juvenile offenders in barracks separate from adults. Nevertheless, officials often mixed children with the general prison population at some point during their imprisonment. According to the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), prisoners and prison staff often subjected children to abuse, rape, and other forms of violence.

According to SPARC, authorities sometimes held juvenile prisoners mixed with the general population in prisons in all four provinces and FATA.

SPARC described conditions for juvenile prisoners as among the worst in the country. Many juveniles spent long periods behind bars because they could not afford bail. According to SPARC, rather than being rehabilitated, child prisoners
often became hardened criminals after having spent long periods in the company of adult prisoners.

The Juvenile Justice System Ordinance, which outlines the treatment of juveniles in the justice system, does not apply to juveniles accused of terrorism or narcotics offenses. SPARC reported that in the past, officials arrested children as young as age 12 on charges of terrorism under the Antiterrorism Act. Children convicted under the act could be sentenced to death. There were numerous cases of individuals on death row having been convicted of crimes allegedly committed, and/or tried for, while under the age of 18. Lack of documentation continued to be a challenge for verifying questions of legal age. Civil society sources reported that while they had no official reports of current juvenile inmates on death row, they could not rule out the possibility. Different courts made different decisions as to what was “adequate” proof of age.

Administration: According to SHARP, there was adequate manual recordkeeping on prisoners, but there was a need for computerized records. In July the reported that a digitized Prison Management Information System was operational in 20 prisons in Punjab.

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

By law prison authorities must permit prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhuman conditions. According to SHARP, however, prisoners often refrained from submitting complaints to avoid retaliation from jail authorities.

The constitution mandates that religious minority prisoners must be accorded places to worship inside jails. It was unclear to what extent authorities implemented this provision.

Independent Monitoring: International organizations responsible for monitoring prisons reported difficulty accessing detention sites, in particular those holding security-related detainees. Authorities did not allow international organizations access to detention centers most affected by violence in KP, FATA, and Balochistan. Provincial governments in Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) permitted some international organizations to monitor civil
prisons, but leaders of monitoring organizations noted that their operations were becoming more restricted each year.

Authorities at the local, provincial, and national levels permitted some human rights groups and journalists to monitor prison conditions of juveniles and female inmates.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, but authorities did not always comply. Corruption and impunity compounded this problem.

On April 23, law enforcement officials arrested Sindh nationalist party Jeay Sindh Qaumi Muhaz (JSQM) activist Kehar Ansari, which JSQM claimed was arbitrary and designed to sabotage their organization. On May 2, JSQM members organized a protest calling for Ansari’s release. Law enforcement agencies broke up the protest, injuring six and killing one protester, according to press reports. Ansari was released on May 4.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Police have primary domestic security responsibility for most of the country. Local police are under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. The Rangers are a paramilitary organization under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, with branches in Sindh and Punjab. The Frontier Corps is the Rangers’ counterpart in Balochistan and the tribal areas; it reports to the Ministry of Interior in peacetime and military in times of conflict. The military is responsible for external security but continues to play a role in domestic security.

The FCR provides the framework for law and order in FATA, implemented through appointed political agents who report to the governor of KP. The court system and judiciary do not have jurisdiction in FATA. Under the FCR the trial by jirga (gathering of tribal leaders) does not allow residents legal representation. If the accused is an adult male, he normally appears before the jirga in person to defend his case. Parents normally represent their minor children, and men normally represent their female relatives. Observers often criticized the FCR for harsh provisions. In 2011 authorities amended some of these provisions, including modifying the collective responsibility of a tribe, restricting the arbitrary nature of the powers of political agents or district coordination officers, and granting citizens
limited rights to challenge the decisions of political agents in a codified tribunal system.

In lieu of police, multiple law enforcement entities operated in FATA. They included the paramilitary Frontier Corps; the Frontier Constabulary, which patrols the area between FATA and KP and also operates in FATA; Khasadars (hereditary tribal police); and FATA levies, which report to the political agent to help maintain order. Tribal leaders convene lashkars (tribal militias) to deal with temporary law and order disturbances, but they operate as private tribal militias and not as formal law enforcement entities.

Police effectiveness varied by district, ranging from good to ineffective.

Failure to punish abuses contributed to a climate of impunity throughout the country. According to civil society sources, police and prison officials frequently used the threat of abuse to extort money from prisoners and their families. The inspectors general, district police, district nazims (chief elected officials of local governments), provincial interior or chief ministers, federal interior minister, prime minister, or courts can order internal investigations into abuses and order administrative sanctions. Executive branch and police officials have authority to recommend, and the courts may order, criminal prosecution. The court system remained the only means available to investigate abuses by security forces. The NCHR, established in 2015, may not inquire into any complaints against intelligence agencies and must refer such complaints to the competent authority concerned. The NCHR may seek a report from the national government on any complaint made against the armed forces, and after receipt of a report, it can either end the process or forward recommendations for further action to the national government.

During the year the government continued to use the military to support domestic security. Paramilitary forces, including Rangers and the Frontier Constabulary (FC), provided security to some areas of Islamabad and continued active operations in Karachi. Following the March 27 Easter suicide bombing attack on Lahore’s Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, which killed 75 individuals, the military launched a limited counterterrorism offensive in southern Punjab, which resulted in the arrest of more than 200 suspected militants, although much of the military’s effort focused on criminal gangs in the area. In May the International Crisis Group assessed in a special report on Jihadist groups operating in southern Punjab that the military campaign did not target certain militant groups, and instead carried out a 21-day operation against the Chotu criminal gang located in the Rajanpur district.
of Punjab. Paramilitary FC forces continued active security operations in Balochistan.

In January 2015, in response to a terrorist attack on the Peshawar Army Public School, Parliament approved a constitutional amendment to allow military courts to try civilians on terrorism, militancy, sectarian violence, and other charges. The amendment included a provision under which the courts would expire in January 2017. In August 2015 the Supreme Court upheld this use of military courts while retaining its own right to review cases. NGOs, opposition leaders, and activists expressed concerns about the use of military courts for civilian suspects, citing lack of transparency and its redundancy with the civilian judicial system. On August 29, the Supreme Court upheld the death sentences for 16 civilians convicted of terrorism by the military courts.

Police often failed to protect members of religious minorities--including Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Shi’a Muslims, and Hindus--from attacks. There were improvements, however, in police professionalism and instances of local authorities protecting minorities from discrimination and communal violence. During the year at least 20 members from these communities were killed; in April allegations that a Christian man had blasphemous videos on his cell phone led to a mob forming and attempting to burn houses in the Christian community of Chak 44 in northern Punjab. Ten Christian families fled. A deployment of an additional 70 police officers and the coordinated messaging of a local “peace committee” of Christians and Muslims helped to disperse the mob and diffuse tensions. In May, Christians near Gujrat used an emergency police hotline when a mob formed after a local cleric tried to file blasphemy charges against a young Christian woman. Police and community members worked to diffuse the situation, and ultimately the cleric withdrew the complaint. As in previous years, the Punjab provincial government conducted regular training in technical skills and protection of human rights for police at all levels.

On December 12, a mob of approximately 1,000 persons attacked an Ahmadi mosque in Chakwal, Punjab, throwing stones and firing rounds at the building. Police eventually dispersed the crowds. There were reports that one Ahmadi died of a heart attack, and one member was killed during the attack; police arrested multiple Ahmadies on murder charges as a result. The Ahmadis’ local leadership had written to the district and provincial government one week earlier requesting security for the mosque due to local religious clerics’ incitements of violence against the site.
Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

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

NGOs reported that individuals frequently paid bribes to visit prisoners. The Ministry of Interior frequently did not provide notification of the arrest of foreigners to their respective embassies or consulates. In 2015 the ministry introduced a new requirement that foreign missions request access to their arrested citizens 20 days in advance.

There was a functioning bail system. Human rights groups, noted, however, that some judges set bail based on the particular circumstances of a case instead of following established procedures. Judges sometimes denied bail at the request of police or the community and victims, or upon payment of bribes. NGOs reported that authorities sometimes denied bail in blasphemy cases on the grounds that defendants, who faced the death penalty, were likely to flee or were at risk from public vigilantism. Bail is not available in antiterrorism courts or in the military courts established under the January 2015 amendment to the constitution.

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

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports police arbitrarily detained individuals to extort bribes for their release or detained relatives of wanted individuals to compel suspects to surrender.
Pretrial Detention: Police sometimes held persons in investigative detention without seeking a magistrate’s approval and often held detainees without charge until a court challenged the detention. Magistrates generally approved investigative detention at the request of police without requiring justification. When police did not develop sufficient evidence to try a suspect within the 14-day period, police generally requested that magistrates issue new FIRs, thereby further extending the suspect’s detention.

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

In some cases trials did not start until six months after the FIR, and at times individuals remained in pretrial detention for periods longer than the maximum sentence for the crime with which they were charged. SHARP estimated that more than 70 percent of the prison population was awaiting trial. Authorities seldom informed detainees promptly of charges against them.

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

Under the FCR in FATA, the political agent has legal authority to detain preventively individuals on a variety of grounds and may require bonds to prevent undesired activities. Indefinite detention is not allowed, and detained persons may appeal to the FCR tribunal. Prisoners have the right to compensation for wrongful punishment. Cases must be decided within a specified period, and authorities may release arrested persons on bail. Regulations require prisoners to be brought before FCR authorities within 24 hours of detention, which curtails the ability of political agents to arbitrarily arrest and hold persons for up to three years. The accused have the right of appeal via a two-tiered system, which starts with an appellate authority comprising an FCR commissioner and an additional judicial commissioner.

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

A 2011 Regulation provides the military a legal framework to operate in conflict areas. It regulates the armed forces and provides them with legal authority to handle detainees under civilian supervision when called upon by the government. Retroactive to 2008, the regulation empowers the KP governor to direct armed forces to intern suspected terrorists in FATA and PATA. Critics stated the regulation violates the constitution because of its broad provisions expanding military authority and circumventing legal due process. Detainee transfers to internment centers continued on a regular basis.

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

**e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but the judiciary often was subjected to external influences, such as fear of reprisal from extremist elements in terrorism or blasphemy cases and public politicization of high-profile cases. The media and the public generally considered the high courts and the Supreme Court credible.

Extensive case backlogs in the lower and superior courts, together with other problems, undermined the right to effective remedy and to a fair and public hearing. Delays in justice in civil and criminal cases were due to antiquated procedural rules, unfilled judgeships, poor case management, and weak legal education.

The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the high courts does not extend to several areas that operated under separate judicial systems. For example, AJK has its own elected president, prime minister, legislature, and court system. Gilgit-Baltistan also has a separate judicial system.
Many lower courts remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from wealthy persons and influential religious and/or political figures.

There were instances in which unknown persons threatened and/or killed witnesses, prosecutors, or investigating police officers in high-level cases. On June 21, the Sindh High Court chief justice’s son, Owais Ali Shah, was abducted outside a grocery store in Karachi. Security forces rescued Shah on July 19 near the Tank district of KP.

Informal justice systems lacking institutionalized legal protections continued, especially in rural areas, and often resulted in human rights abuses. Landlords and other community leaders in Sindh and Punjab, and tribal leaders in Pashtun and Baloch areas, at times held local council meetings (“panchayats” or “jirgas”), external to the established legal system. Such councils settled feuds and imposed tribal penalties, including fines, imprisonment, and sometimes the death penalty. These councils often sentenced women to violent punishment or death for so-called honor-related crimes. In Pashtun areas, primarily in FATA, such councils were held under FCR guidelines. Assistant political agents, supported by tribal elders of their choosing, are legally responsible for justice in FATA and conduct hearings according to their interpretation of Islamic law and tribal custom.

**Trial Procedures**

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

SPARC reported that adjudication of cases involving juveniles was slow due to a lack of special juvenile courts or judges. It concluded that a fair and just juvenile justice system did not exist.
There were instances of lack of transparency in court cases, particularly if the case dealt with high-profile or sensitive issues. NGOs reported that the government often located trials in jails because of security concerns, which extended to the accused, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and witnesses. NGOs expressed concerns about the security of the jail trials and lack of privacy for the accused to consult with a lawyer.

The Antiterrorism Act allows the government to use special, streamlined Antiterrorism Act Courts (ATCs) to try persons charged with violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts, or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state. In other courts suspects must be brought to court within seven working days of their arrest, but the ATCs are free to extend the period. Human rights activists criticized the expedited parallel system, charging that it was more vulnerable to political manipulation. In 2014, after a judge’s ruling that the Antiterrorism Act had been incorrectly applied, authorities returned 15 percent of cases initially brought to ATCs to regular courts, according to Punjab’s prosecutor general. NGOs reported that if a case needed to be expedited due to the egregious nature of the crime or political pressure, it was often sent to an ATC rather than through the regular court system. Others commented that, despite being comparatively faster than the regular court system, the ATCs often failed to meet speedy trial standards and had significant case backlogs.

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

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

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

In 2015 the Supreme Court suspended the death sentence of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy in 2010, pending its decision on her appeal. Bibi had been on death row since 2010 after a district court found her guilty of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad during an argument. Her lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court in November 2014. The appeal was due to be heard on October 13 but was delayed after one member of the three-judge bench recused himself. The court did not set a date for the next hearing.

On June 20, the Lahore ATC acquitted five Christians who had been accused of blasphemy and detained since August 2015. Local police near Gujranwala had filed charges against a group of 16 individuals for allegedly publishing offensive material, and in September a Gujranwala ATC released one Muslim but denied bail to Christian defendants. Other members of the group were subsequently released on bail.

On February 29, authorities executed Mumtaz Qadri, who was convicted of killing then governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer after Taseer had publicly called for a presidential pardon for Asia Bibi. Protests erupted after the execution, including large demonstrations in Rawalpindi that continued until March 30. Protesters, including police and lawyers, expressed support for Qadri and demanded continued enforcement of blasphemy laws.

Also see the Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Some Sindhi and Baloch nationalist groups claimed that authorities marked their members for arrest and detained them based on their political affiliation or beliefs. Under the 2009 Aghaz-e-Huqooq (“beginning of the rights”) Balochistan “package,” intended to address the province’s political, social, and economic problems, the government announced a general amnesty for all Baloch political prisoners, leaders, and activists in exile, as well as those allegedly involved in “antistate” activities. In August 2015 the federal and Balochistan provincial governments jointly announced a new peace package called “Pur Aman Balochistan” (“peaceful Balochistan”), intended to offer cash and other incentives
for “militants” who wished to rejoin mainstream society. Despite the amnesty offers, some Baloch groups claimed that illegal detention of nationalist leaders by state agencies continued. Several of the missing persons documented by the VBMP were well-known leaders of nationalist political parties and student organizations.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

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

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

The law requires court-issued warrants for property searches. Police sometimes ignored this requirement and on occasion reportedly stole items during searches. Authorities seldom punished police for illegal entry. Police at times detained family members to induce a suspect to surrender. In cases pursued under the Antiterrorism Act, the government allowed security forces to search and seize property related to a case without a warrant.

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

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

Militant and terrorist activity continued, and there were numerous suicide and bomb attacks in all four provinces and FATA. Militants and terrorist groups, including the TTP, targeted civilians, journalists, community leaders, security
forces, law enforcement agents, and schools, killing hundreds and injuring thousands with bombs, suicide attacks, and other forms of violence. Militant and terrorist groups often attacked religious minorities. A low-intensity separatist insurgency continued in Balochistan. Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings in the fight against militant groups.

The military conducted multiple counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in FATA to eradicate militant safe havens. In 2014 the military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb, an operation against foreign and domestic terrorists in FATA, which continued throughout the year. In the first nine months of the year, according to the SATP, the military killed more than 2,313 suspected terrorists. The government also acted throughout the country to weaken terrorist groups and prevent recruitment by militant organizations. For example, law enforcement agencies reported seizures of large caches of weapons in urban areas such as Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. Police arrested Karachi gang members and TTP commanders who allegedly provided logistical support to militants in the tribal areas. Police arrested would-be suicide bombers in major cities, confiscating weapons, suicide vests, and planning materials.

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

Political, sectarian, criminal, and ethnic violence in Karachi continued, although violence declined and gang wars were less prevalent than before security operations in the city. Since 2005 natural disasters elsewhere in the country resulted in a large influx of citizens from different ethnic groups to Karachi, including ethnic Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtun migrants, shifting the balance among political parties and the ethnic and sectarian groups they represented. Political parties and their affiliated gangs continued to vie for political and economic control, engaging in a turf war over “bhatta” (extortion) collection privileges and “ownership” over “katchi abadis” (illegal/makeshift settlements).

Killings: There were reports that government security forces caused civilian casualties and engaged in extrajudicial killings during operations against militants. Security forces killed numerous militants in Punjab and elsewhere in the country. There were numerous media reports of police and security forces killing terrorist suspects in “police encounters” nearly every week. Some observers believed security forces orchestrated at least some of these killings.
Militant and terrorist bombings in all four provinces and in FATA and PATA also killed hundreds of persons and wounded thousands. According to the SATP, until November 20, estimated terrorist and violent extremist attacks and operations to combat insurgency resulted in 1,730 deaths, of which 596 were civilians, 281 were security forces, and 853 were terrorists or insurgents.

Militants continued to target government security personnel for attack. According to the SATP, as of November 20, militants had killed 6,651 security force personnel since 2003. Military officials often quoted a much higher number, with casualties from militant attacks in the tens of thousands over the past decade.

On April 20, militants killed seven policemen guarding polio workers in two separate attacks in Orangi Town of Karachi. On January 13, a terrorist killed 15 persons, including 13 police officers and an FC soldier, in a suicide attack near a government health center in Quetta, Balochistan. The TTP claimed responsibility for the attack.

There were reports that groups prohibited by the government conducted attacks against civilians in Sindh and Balochistan. On May 30, a Sindhi separatist group, the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army, killed a Chinese worker and his driver in a roadside bomb attack. The group opposes the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. A Baloch separatist group, the Balochistan Liberation Army, claimed responsibility for killing two persons for allegedly spying for security agencies in May and for killing another two alleged spies in June.

Sectarian violence also continued throughout the country. According to the SATP, 31 sectarian attacks from January to mid-November resulted in the deaths of 132 individuals, compared with 276 deaths in 53 incidents in 2015.

On April 6, unidentified gunmen in Dera Ismail Khan, KP, killed two lawyers and two schoolteachers, all Shia. The April 22 killing of provincial assembly member and advisor to the KP chief minister on minority affairs Sardar Soran Singh (a member of the Sikh minority) was initially claimed by the Pakistani Taliban; a subsequent police investigation indicated that a rival Sikh politician may have ordered the attack, which was political rather than sectarian in nature (see section 1.a.).

On May 5, four Shias were killed in two separate incidents in Dera Ismail Khan, prompting protests in the area. On May 7, prominent Shia civil society activist
Syed Khurram Zaki was shot in Karachi in an apparent targeted killing. On October 4, unknown gunmen boarded a bus in Quetta and shot five Hazara Shia women, killing four. On October 7, gunmen shot four Shia men in two separate incidents in Karachi, killing one.

On March 27, a suicide bomber in Lahore’s Gulshan-e-Iqbal park killed 75 persons and injured more than 350, including 29 children and many victims were from Christian families who had gathered in the park for Easter Sunday. TTP splinter faction Jamaat-ul-Ahrar claimed responsibility for the bombing. Authorities subsequently arrested more than 200 suspected militants in a crackdown throughout Punjab Province.

Multiple Ahmadi community members died in what appeared to be targeted killings. Unidentified assailants stabbed an Ahmadi man to death on March 1 near Punjab’s Shiekhpura district. On May 25, assailants on a motorbike shot and killed an Ahmadi man; on June 20, assailants shot an Ahmadi doctor in his clinic, with no witnesses; both killings occurred in Ahmadi community neighborhoods in Karachi. On June 4, unidentified gunmen killed an Ahmadi pharmacy owner in the city of Attock in Punjab.

Abductions: There were reports that militant groups kidnapped or took civilians hostage in FATA, KP, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan. In June the son of the Sindh High Court chief justice was kidnapped and subsequently rescued by a military operation in July. A military spokesman stated a splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban was responsible for the kidnapping.

In May, Ali Haider Gilani, son of former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and kidnapped in 2013, was rescued during a military operation in Afghanistan. In March, Shahbaz Taseer, son of the late Punjab governor Salman Taseer, reappeared outside Quetta and claimed that he had escaped from Pakistani Taliban custody.

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

Child Soldiers: Nonstate militant groups kidnapped boys and girls and used fraudulent promises to coerce parents into giving away children as young as age 12 to spy, fight, or die as suicide bombers. The militants sometimes offered parents money, often sexually and physically abused the children, and used psychological coercion to convince the children the acts they committed were justified. The
government operated a center in Swat to rehabilitate and educate former child soldiers.

Other Conflict-related Abuses: Terrorist groups TTP, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and related factions bombed government buildings and attacked and killed female teachers and polio vaccination workers. The TTP particularly targeted girls’ schools to demonstrate its opposition to girls’ education; however, it also destroyed boys’ schools. Military operations created hardships for the local civilian population when militants closed key access roads and tunnels and attacked communications and energy networks, disrupting commerce and the distribution of food and water.

In January terrorists killed 15 individuals in a bombing of a polio vaccination center in Quetta, Balochistan. In April terrorists killed seven police officers guarding polio health workers in an attack in Karachi. Terrorists attacked other health workers and support staff during the year, and others remained missing at year’s end. The government provided armed escorts for vaccination staff to carry out polio campaigns.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

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

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The constitution provide for the right to free speech and the press, subject to “any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam” or the “integrity, security, or defense of Pakistan, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality.” The law permits citizens to criticize the government publicly or privately, but criticism of the military could result in political or commercial reprisal. Blasphemy laws restrict individual rights to free speech concerning matters of religion and religious doctrine. The government restricted some language and symbolic speech based on “hate speech” and “terrorism” provisions.

Press and Media Freedoms: The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views, and journalists often criticized the civilian portions of the government. The press addressed the persecution of minorities. By law the
government may restrict information that might be prejudicial to the national interest. Threats, harassment, and violence against journalists who reported on sensitive issues such as civil-military tensions or abuses by security forces occurred during the year.

There were 434 independent English, Urdu, and regional-language daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. To publish within AJK, media owners had to obtain permission from the Kashmir Council and the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting controlled and managed the country’s primary wire service, the Associated Press of Pakistan, the official carrier of government and international news to the local media. The military had its own media and public relations office, Inter-Services Public Relations. The government-owned Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation and Pakistan Television Corporation broadcast television programs nationwide and operated radio stations throughout the country. The law does not extend to FATA or PATA, and authorities allowed independent radio stations to broadcast there with the permission of the FATA secretariat.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) licensed 89 private domestic and 22 foreign television channels; many of the channels were critical of the government. In July, GEO TV alleged it had been severely restricted in its broadcasting signal in Karachi for political purposes, dramatically cutting its reach in the city. GEO was restored to its previous position following the protests. There were 141 commercial FM radio stations, but their licenses prohibited news programming. Some channels evaded this restriction by discussing news in talk-show formats. International radio broadcasts, including the BBC, were normally available. There was a blockage of transmissions of Indian television news channels through late December.

PEMRA continued to prohibit media from covering the activities of any militant organization banned by the government, reportedly to bring the country into compliance with UN terrorism-related sanctions regimes. The National Action Plan also bans “the glorification of terrorism and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media.” PEMRA enforced this ban throughout the year using fines. PEMRA issued editorial directives to television stations during the year and authorized its chairman to shut down any channel found in violation of the PEMRA code of conduct, primarily with regard to prohibiting telecasts of protests that might instigate sectarian violence. This included protests against the execution of Mumtaz Qadri (convicted for the murder of Punjab governor Salman Taseer over his opposition to the blasphemy law), and the Saudi government’s
execution of a prominent Shia cleric. PEMRA also banned television and radio outlets from broadcasting any Indian media content.

**Violence and Harassment:** Security forces, political parties, militants, and other groups subjected media outlets, journalists, and their families to violence and harassment. Female journalists in particular faced threats of sexual violence and harassment, including via social media. Security forces abducted journalists. Media outlets that did not practice self-censorship were often the targets of retribution. Additionally, journalists working in remote and conflict-ridden areas lacked basic digital security as well as traditional security skills, which placed additional pressure on them to self-censor or not cover a story at all.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, state and nonstate actors killed, physically attacked, harassed, intimidated and kidnapped journalists and subjected them to other forms of pressure. The Committee to Protect Journalists included the country in its annual “impunity index” because the government allowed deadly violence against members of the press to go unpunished.

In January media reported that an unidentified individual threw a grenade at offices of the private news television station ARY in Islamabad. The attack injured one person, and Da’esh claimed credit for the attack.

In March a district court in KP sentenced the killer of a journalist from the newspaper *Karak Times* murdered in 2013 to life imprisonment and a fine of $47,600. There had been only three other convictions for the murder of journalists, according to the Pakistan Press Foundation.

**Censorship or Content Restriction:** Small, privately owned wire services and media organizations generally reported that they engaged in self-censorship, especially in reporting news about the military forces. Journalists reported regular denial of official permission to visit conflict areas or having to be escorted either by members of the military or by militants in order to report on conditions in conflict areas. The result was pressure to produce final articles that were slanted toward the military or militant viewpoint, depending upon the escort. Other reporting tended to be relatively objective and only focused on events, rather than deeper analysis, which journalists generally regarded as risky. Observers perceived foreign journalists to have more autonomy to write about issues and to be under less scrutiny by the government. Private cable and satellite channels also reported that they censored themselves at times. Blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws restricted publication on certain topics. Foreign books needed to pass government
censors before they could be reprinted, but there were no reports of books being banned during the year. Books and magazines could be imported freely but were subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content. Obscene literature, a category the government defined broadly, was subject to seizure.

The government fined private television channels for alleged violations of the “code of ethics” and for showing banned content on-screen. Final fines depended on legal proceedings and decisions, but initial fines were between $1,000 and $10,000 per violation. The NGO Intermedia reported that state-run Pakistan Television did not operate under the purview of the law and benefitted from a monopoly on broadcast license fees. According to Freedom House, authorities used PEMRA rules to silence the broadcast media by either suspending licenses or threatening to do so. Some civil society leaders reported that military authorities frequently pressured journalists to modify the content of articles and opinion pieces critical of military actions.

Libel/Slander Laws: Ministers and members of the National Assembly used libel and slander laws in the past to counter public discussion of their actions.

National Security: Some journalists said authorities cited laws protecting national security to censor and restrict media distribution of material that criticized government policies or public officials. The 2015 Electronic Media (Programs and Advertisements) code of conduct included a clause that restricted reporting in any area that was part of a military operation in progress.

Nongovernmental Impact: Throughout the country militants and criminal elements killed, kidnapped, beat, and intimidated journalists and their families, leading many to censor their reporting. Militant and local tribal groups killed, detained, threatened, expelled, or otherwise obstructed a number of reporters who covered the conflict in FATA, KP, and Balochistan.

Internet Freedom

Since 2012 the government implemented a systematic, nationwide content-monitoring and filtering system to restrict or block “unacceptable” content, including material that is deemed un-Islamic, pornographic, or critical of the state or military forces. According to Freedom House, the government justified such restrictions as necessary for security purposes. There also were reports the government attempted to control or block some websites, including sites the government deemed extremist and proindependence Baloch sites. There was
decreasing transparency and accountability surrounding content monitoring, and the government often used vague criteria without due process. In its *Freedom in the World Report* for 2016, Freedom House claimed the government blocked more than 400,000 websites due to content. The provincial government in Balochistan blocked access to a Baloch human rights blog run by journalists. The government blocked several Baloch websites, including the English-language website *The Baloch Hal* and the website of *Daily Tawar*, a Balochistan-based newspaper.

In September the government signed into law the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, which many critics said contained overly broad and vague definitions of what constituted online speech deemed suitable for removal and/or criminal charges. Digital rights activists expressed serious concerns about the law’s potential to curb freedom of expression, particularly on social media. The law states that the government will establish special tribunals for cybercrimes, but it remained unclear how the courts would enforce and interpret the bill.

Additionally, the Electronic Transaction Act and other laws cite a number of offenses involving the misuse of electronic media and systems and the use of such data in other crimes. The act also stipulates that cyberterrorism resulting in a death is punishable by the death penalty or life imprisonment.

The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) is responsible for the establishment, operation, and maintenance of telecommunications and has complete control of all content broadcast over telecommunication channels. Despite a 2011 PTA ban on using virtual private networks (VPNs) and voice-over-internet protocol (VOIP), at year’s end VPNs and VOIP were both accessible. Many smartphones had built in VPNS. According to Freedom House, two of the best-known services, Spotflux and HotSpot VPN, became inaccessible in January 2014. Spotflux said the government actively blocked its services. The government later restored both.

The government reached an agreement with Google in January to lift its YouTube ban, which had been in place since 2012 after Google declined to remove a controversial video the government considered blasphemous. As part of the agreement, Google set up a localized version of the site, YouTube.pk, which does not include the video.

NGO and internet-freedom observers continued to report that government surveillance online was a concern and that there were indications of the use of surveillance software.
Although internet access and usage was limited, mobile broadband access continued to grow rapidly, reaching 34.3 million subscribers in September. Fixed broadband connections remained very low, at approximately three million subscribers in a population of approximately 199 million.

**Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government generally did not restrict academic freedom but screened and censored cultural events. At some universities, however, members of student organizations, often with ties to political parties, fostered an atmosphere of intolerance or undue influence that limited the academic freedom of fellow students.

In addition to public schools, there was a large network of madrassahs (private schools run by Muslim clerics) under the supervision of five major governing bodies. These schools varied in their curriculum, with a focus on Islamic texts.

There was government interference with art exhibitions or other musical or cultural activities. The Ministry of Culture operated the Central Board of Film Censors, which previewed and censored sexual content and any content that glorified Indian heroes, leaders, or military figures in foreign and domestic films. In October it banned all Indian content from broadcast in retaliation for a ban on Pakistani artists working on films in India. This ban was lifted on December 17.

**b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

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

**Freedom of Assembly**

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

Authorities generally prohibited Ahmadis, a religious minority, from holding conferences or gatherings. In December, Punjab provincial police raided the publications department at the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community headquarters in Rabwah and arrested four workers for publishing religious material deemed
offensive. According to Ahmadi representatives, the “unprecedented” raid was indicative of worsening conditions for the community in Pakistan.

Several protests, strikes, and demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, took place throughout the country. The government generally prevented political and civil society groups of any affiliation from holding demonstrations in Islamabad, citing security restrictions that limit all public rallies and gatherings in the red-zone section of the city, a secured area where the diplomatic enclave and government buildings are located.

**Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for freedom of association subject to certain restrictions imposed by law. The government adopted a series of policies that steadily eroded the freedom of international NGOs (INGOs) to access the communities that they serve. For many project activities, INGOs must request government permission in the form of so-called no-objection certificates (NOCs). INGOs, UN organizations, and international missions have long been required to obtain NOCs before they can conduct most in-country travel or initiate new projects.

In October 2015 the government required that INGOs reregister, a process entailing extensive document requirements, multiple levels of review, and repeated investigations by security and other government offices. As of December more than 60 percent of INGOs that applied for registration under the new system were awaiting a registration decision; none had been rejected. In the meantime the unregistered INGOs ostensibly could not accept new foreign funding or initiate new projects. The government continued to restrict the operating space for the INGOs registered under the new process, delaying or denying visas for some foreign staff or NOCs for official travel.

The government, at both the federal and/or provincial level, similarly restricted the access of local NGOs through NOCs and other requirements. Authorities required NGOs to obtain NOCs before accepting foreign funding, booking hotel or university spaces for events, or working on sensitive human rights issues. Even domestic NGOs with all required NOCs faced government harassment.

**c. Freedom of Religion**

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

The law provides for freedom of internal movement and for uninhibited foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government limited these rights. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Pakistan is host to more than 1.3 million Afghan refugees. The government provided temporary legal status to Afghans formally registered and holding Proof of Registration (PoR) cards. In July, the government extended the validity of PoR cards until December 31, and in September, extended the cards an additional three months until March 31, 2017. There were reports, however, of harassment and extortion of Afghan refugees by provincial authorities, police, and host communities. According to UNHCR reports, from January to August, there were 4,150 arrests and detentions, compared with 3,595 for all of 2015. Of those arrested, 99 percent were released, 70 percent without any charges, often following the intervention of UNHCR or its implementing partners. Arrests spiked in August, largely due to security operations and arbitrary actions by the Frontier Corps apprehending Afghans at various checkpoints in Balochistan. There were firsthand accounts of members of the intelligence services harassing refugees. Refugees faced discrimination from local communities. Provincial officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and nationwide cited the presence of Afghan “refugees”—without differentiating between proof of registration (PoR) cardholders, migrants, and temporary visitors—as the cause for deteriorating law and order in major cities. In June the government released press statements that labeled refugee camps safe havens for terrorists and urged the early return of Afghan refugees to their homeland.

In-country Movement: Government restrictions on access to certain areas of FATA, KP, and Balochistan, often due to security concerns, hindered freedom of movement of persons. The government required an approved NOC for travel to areas of the country it designated as “sensitive.”

Foreign Travel: The law prohibits travel to Israel, and the country’s passports include a statement that they are “valid for all countries except Israel.” Passport applicants must list their religious affiliation and, if Muslims, affirm a declaration
that the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement was a false prophet. Ahmadi representatives reported the word “Ahmadi” was written on their passports if they refused to sign the declaration. Government employees and students must obtain NOCs from the government before traveling abroad. Authorities rarely enforced this requirement for students.

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

**Emigration and Repatriation:** During the year the government refused the return of immigrants deported from Europe. One European mission reported several deportees were refused entry as unidentifiable Pakistani citizens despite having passports issued by Pakistani embassies abroad. Some NGOs commented the government increased restrictions on the issuance of identity and proof of nationality documents, such as passports, from its missions abroad.

**Internally Displaced Persons**

Large population displacements continued as a result of militant activity and military operations in FATA. The government and UN agencies such as UNHCR and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) collaborated to assist and protect those affected by conflict. Once evacuated, internally displaced persons (IDPs) received immunizations, with many of the children receiving them for the first time in five years. The state and relief organizations placed special emphasis on polio, as many IDP children had been vulnerable to the disease due to the Taliban-imposed ban on immunizations in their home regions. In some areas an estimated 50 percent of the IDP population had been displaced five years or longer, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. Those displaced by conflict generally resided with host families, in rented accommodations, or to a lesser extent, in camps. Several IDP populations settled in informal settlements outside of major cities such as Lahore and Karachi.

The return of IDPs displaced by Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan Agency, Operations Khyber I, II, and III in Khyber Agency, and other military activities continued, with 114,511 families returning to FATA and 76,507 families still displaced, according to the UN Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Since 2015, 75 percent of the total IDP population had returned
to FATA. OCHA reported that 89 percent of IDPs had returned to Khyber Agency with 9,524 families still displaced; 72 percent had returned to North Waziristan Agency with 29,360 families still displaced; 64 percent had returned to South Waziristan Agency with 23,879 families still displaced; 77 percent had returned to Khurram Agency with 5,457 families still displaced; and 66 percent had returned to Orakzai Agency with 7,965 families still displaced. The average family size in FATA was six. Approximately 16 percent of all returns were female-headed households.

The government required humanitarian organizations assisting civilians displaced by military operations to request NOCs to access all agencies in FATA. According to humanitarian agencies and NGOs, the NOC application process was cumbersome. The government maintained IDP camps inside and near the FATA agencies where military operations took place, despite access and security concerns raised by humanitarian agencies. Humanitarian agency workers providing assistance in the camps were exposed to danger when travelling to and within FATA. UN agencies maintained access to the camps and the affected areas mainly through local NGOs.

There were no reports of involuntary returns. Many IDPs reportedly wanted to return home, despite the lack of local infrastructure, housing, and available service delivery, and the strict control that security forces maintained over returnees’ movements via extensive checkpoints. Other IDP families delayed their return or chose some family members to remain in the settled areas of KP where regular access to health care, education, and other social services were available. For IDPs who were unwilling or unable to return, the government coordinated support with UNHCR and other international organizations. The World Food Program distributed food rations to IDPs displaced by conflict and continued to provide rations for extendable periods of six to nine months to IDPs who returned to their areas of origin.

Protection of Refugees

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

Refoulement: In general the government did not forcibly return PoR cardholders, refugees, or asylum seekers to countries where their lives or freedom may be threatened. In August, five PoR cardholders were deported to Afghanistan but were able to return to Pakistan the following day.

Beginning in July there was a sharp increase in UNHCR-assisted returns of PoR cardholders to Afghanistan. In 2015, 58,460 PoR cardholders returned to Afghanistan; between January and June 2016, approximately 8,000 had returned. The returns increased in July, and by early September more than 229,000 Afghan PoR cardholders had returned to Afghanistan. In its emergency funding request, OCHA stated, “The spike in returns is motivated by different factors, including an apparent drastic deterioration of the protection/political space in Pakistan with increasing incidents of detention, forced evictions, police raids, and harassment.” Additional factors reported by UNHCR included stricter border management, calls by the Afghan government for refugees to return, harassment and extortion by local authorities and host communities, and the increase of UNHCR’s repatriation grant from $200 to $400 per person.

For most of the year, two voluntary repatriation centers operated in Quetta and Peshawar; a third center was opened in Peshawar in September to process the increase in repatriations.

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

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

The constitution stipulates free and compulsory education for all children between ages five and 16 years regardless of their nationality. Any refugee registered with
both UNHCR and the government-run “Commissionerate” of Afghan Refugees was, in theory, admitted to public education facilities after filing the proper paperwork. In practice access to schools was on a space-available basis as determined by the principal, and most registered Afghans attended private Afghan schools or schools sponsored by the international community. For older students, particularly females in refugee villages, access to education remained difficult. Afghans who grew up in Pakistan needed student visas to attend universities, but they qualified for student visas based on their PoR cards. Afghan students were eligible to seek admission to Pakistani public and private colleges and universities. In public statements, including at the Leadership Summit on Refugees on September 20, the government reaffirmed the right of all children, regardless of status, to public primary education.

**Durable Solutions:** The government did not accept refugees for resettlement from other countries and did not facilitate local integration. The government does not accord Afghan refugees Pakistani citizenship.

**Stateless Persons**

Statelessness continued to be a problem. There is no national legislation on statelessness, and the government does not recognize the existence of stateless persons. International and national agencies estimated there were possibly thousands of stateless persons as a result of the 1947 and 1971 partitions of India and Pakistan, and of Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively.

**Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

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

Despite their representation in the national Parliament, FATA residents do not have a voice in federal decisions regarding the tribal areas; authority in FATA resides with the president. Tribal residents do not have the right to change their local government, because unelected civilian bureaucrats nominally run the tribal agencies under the 1901 FCR, as amended in 2011. No local government elections were held in FATA, even as the country’s other provinces elected local representatives. Through the 2011 Extension of the Political Parties Order 2002 to
the Tribal Areas, the government allowed political parties to operate freely in FATA. Political observers credited this order with laying the foundation for a more mature political system in the tribal agencies, and there was ongoing internal debate over the possibility of FATA’s integration into KP Province to normalize its administration. In December 2016 the Committee on FATA reforms, established by Prime Minister Sharif, formally recommended that FATA be merged with KP Province.

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2013 the country held national elections that resulted in a PML-N-majority government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. In 2013 Mamnoon Hussain succeeded Asif Ali Zardari as president.

For the 2013 elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) accredited approximately 43,000 domestic observers, the majority of whom were from the Free and Fair Election Network. The EU, Democracy International, the Aurat Foundation, and the National Democratic Institute were among the many groups that observed the election. The government permitted all existing political parties to contest the elections. Although several boycotted, the largest parties participated. Election observers generally considered the elections a success, despite terrorist violence and some procedural problems.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems noted weak formal adjudication of challenges of disputed election results and also the high courts’ failure to meet statutorily prescribed deadlines for adjudication in the majority of cases.
As a result of alleged irregularities in balloting and in the candidates’ documentation during the 2013 elections, election tribunals constituted by the ECP removed legislators from three constituencies in Punjab from office, including the speaker of the National Assembly and the minister of railways. The tribunals ordered that by-elections or repolling be conducted in all three constituencies.

Political Parties and Political Participation: There were few restrictions on political parties. In most areas there was no interference with the rights to organize, run for election, seek votes, or publicize views. In Balochistan, however, there were reports security agencies and separatist groups harassed local political parties, such as the Balochistan National Party and the Balochistan Student Organization.

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

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

The constitution reserves four seats in the Senate, one for each of the four provinces, for religious minorities, defined by the government as “non-Muslim.” These seats are filled through indirect elections held in the provincial assemblies. Ten National Assembly seats are reserved for members of religious minorities. The authorities apportioned seats to parties based on the percentage of seats each won in the assembly. Minorities held 23 reserved seats in the provincial assemblies: eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, three in KP, and three in Balochistan.

Women and minorities may contest unreserved seats.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government
The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices. Corruption was pervasive in politics and government, and various politicians and public office holders faced allegations of corruption, including bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft, and embezzlement.

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

Anecdotal reports persisted about corruption in the judicial system, including reports of small-scale facilitation payments requested by court staff. Lower courts reportedly remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from higher-ranking judges as well as prominent, wealthy, religious, and political figures.

The NAB serves as the highest-level anticorruption organization, with a mandate to eliminate corruption through awareness, prevention, and enforcement. The NAB and other investigative agencies, including the Federal Board of Revenue, State Bank of Pakistan and the Federal Investigative Authority, were reportedly opening investigations into corruption, tax evasion, and money laundering following international press reports of Pakistanis named in the “Panama Papers” and “Bahamas Leaks” revelations of offshore banking accounts from the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. In November the Supreme Court convened a special bench to investigate allegations of corruption levelled against the prime minister and members of his family. After several sessions in November and December, the Supreme Court adjourned without issuing a judgment. The case was scheduled to be taken up by a new bench in early 2017.

The director general of KP’s Accountability (Ehtesab) Commission resigned in February, alleging that amendments to the province’s accountability legislation had compromised the commission’s autonomy and rendered his position redundant. The director of the province’s Anti-Corruption Establishment (which likewise investigates corruption cases) was transferred from his post in May and faced an inquiry regarding the investigations he led.

Financial Disclosure: There are many laws regarding the disclosure of assets and liabilities of civil servants and elected officials. By law members of parliament, civil servants, and ministers must declare their assets. Failure to disclose this information may lead to their disqualification from public office for 10 years.
Heads of state, in contrast, are not required to declare their income and assets. The assets of judges, generals, and high-level officials were often concealed from the public.

Under the Efficiency and Disciplinary Rules, an official must face an inquiry if accused of corruption or financial irregularities. If the inquiry results in a derogatory finding, the accused official faces criminal charges. A person convicted of corruption faces a prison term of up to 14 years, a fine, or both. The government may appropriate any money, property, or other assets obtained by corrupt means.

Political parties and politicians must file annual financial accounting reports declaring their assets and liabilities. The law was not fully implemented, and lawmakers often disregarded it. It is the duty of the ECP to verify that political parties and politicians make their financial information publicly available; the ECP posted the list of parliamentarians’ assets in January.

Public Access to Information: The law allows any citizen access to public records held by a public body of the federal government, including ministries, departments, boards, councils, courts, and tribunals. It does not apply to government-owned corporations or provincial governments. Bodies subject to the law must respond to requests for access within 21 days. Regulations restrict certain records from public access, including classified documents, those deemed harmful to a law enforcement case or an individual, or those that would cause grave and significant damage to the economy or the interests of the nation. NGOs criticized the law for having too many exempt categories and for not encouraging proactive disclosure. KP and Punjab provincial governments enacted provincial Right To Information laws.

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

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Some groups that implicated the government, or the military or intelligence services, in misdeeds or worked on issues related to IDPs and areas of conflict reported their operations were at times restricted. Very few NGOs had access to KP, FATA, and certain areas in Balochistan. International staff members of organizations faced delays in the issuance of visas and NOCs for in-country travel.
The government also released new guidance for INGOs (see section 2.b.). Some civil society actors expressed concern the language could be misused to restrict legitimate work such as governance support or human rights advocacy. There were no reports that the government found an INGO in violation of this regulation.

The government increasingly restricted the operating space of domestic and international human rights groups, particularly those that work on issues related to government abuses, IDPs, conflict areas, and advocacy. These groups faced numerous regulations regarding travel, visas, and registration that hampered their ability to program and fundraise. International staff members of organizations, including those from the few successfully registered INGOs, continued to face delays in the issuance of visas and NOCs for in-country travel.

The new INGO registration regulations announced in October 2015 prohibits INGOs from participating in “political activities” and “antistate activities,” but the regulations neither define these terms nor indicate what body would be responsible for adjudicating claims against INGOs.

Security threats were a problem for NGO workers, and organizations that promoted women’s rights faced particular challenges.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The Senate and National Assembly Standing Committees on Law, Justice, Minorities, and Human Rights held hearings on a range of human rights problems, including honor crimes, police abuses in connection with the blasphemy law, and the Hudood Ordinance. The committees served as useful forums in which to raise public awareness of such problems, but their conclusions generally adhered to existing government policy. The committees did little beyond broad oversight. The 2012 National Commission for Human Rights Bill authorized the establishment of an independent committee, the National Commission on Human Rights, and the government constituted the commission in 2015. An independent Ministry of Human Rights was reconstituted in November 2015.

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

**Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** Rape is a criminal offense, with punishment that ranges from a minimum of 10 to 25 years in prison and a fine to the death penalty.
The penalty for gang rape is death or life imprisonment, but sentences, when convictions occurred, were often less severe. Although rape was frequent, prosecutions were rare. According to data presented by the Ministry of Interior to the Senate in 2014, there had been no rape convictions in the country during previous years. Spousal rape is not a crime. During the year Parliament passed a new antirape law that provides for collection of DNA evidence and includes nondisclosure of a rape victim’s name, the right to legal representation of rape victims, and enhanced penalties for rape of victims with mental or physical disabilities.

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

The provincial government of Punjab passed the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016) in February to provide greater legal protections for domestic abuse victims, including judicial protective orders and access to a new network of district-level women’s shelters, the first of which was scheduled to open in Multan.

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

According to the Aurat Foundation and others, prosecutions of reported rapes were rare. Police and NGOs reported individuals involved in other types of disputes sometimes filed false rape charges, reducing the ability of police to identify legitimate cases and proceed with prosecution. NGOs reported police were at times implicated in rape cases. NGOs also alleged police sometimes abused or threatened victims, demanding they drop charges, especially when police received bribes from suspected perpetrators or the perpetrators were influential community leaders. Some police demanded bribes from victims before registering rape charges, and investigations were sometimes superficial. The use of postrape
medical testing increased, but medical personnel in many areas did not have sufficient training or equipment, which further complicated prosecutions. Accusations of rape were often resolved using extrajudicial measures, with the victim often forced to marry her attacker.

No specific federal law prohibits domestic violence, which was widespread. Husbands reportedly beat and occasionally killed their wives. Other forms of domestic violence included torture, physical disfigurement, and shaving the eyebrows and hair off women’s heads. In-laws abused and harassed the wives of their sons. Dowry and other family-related disputes sometimes resulted in death or disfigurement by burning or acid.

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

To address societal norms that disapprove of victims who report gender-based violence and abuse, the government established women’s police stations, staffed by female officers, to offer women a safe haven where they could safely report complaints and file charges. Men were also able to use these police stations. These women’s police stations, however, struggled with understaffing and limited equipment. Training female police and changing the cultural assumptions of male police also remained challenges. Due to restrictions on women’s mobility and social pressures related to women’s appearance in public, utilization of women’s police centers was limited, but NGOs and officials reported that use was growing and more centers were needed. Many women remained unaware of the centers.

The government continued to operate the Crisis Center for Women in Distress, which referred abused women to NGOs for assistance. Twenty-six government-funded Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Centers for Women across the country provided legal aid, medical treatment, and psychosocial counseling. These centers served women who were victims of exploitation and violence. Victims later were referred to “Dar-ul-Amans,” or shelter houses, and funds from provincial Women Development Departments had established approximately 200 such homes for abused women and children. These provided shelter and access to medical treatment. According to NGOs the shelters did not offer other assistance to women, such as legal aid or counseling, and primarily served as halfway homes for
women awaiting trial for adultery, even though they were the victims of rape and domestic abuse.

Government centers lacked sufficient space, staff, and resources. Conditions in the Dar-ul-Amans did not meet international standards. They were severely overcrowded with, in some cases, more than 35 women sharing one toilet. Few shelters offered access to basic needs such as showers, laundry supplies, or feminine hygiene products. Some shelters were given a daily food allowance of nine rupees ($0.09) to feed nearly 100 women.

There were some reports of women being trafficked and prostituted out of shelters. Shelter staff reportedly sometimes discriminated against women in shelters; they assumed that if women fled their homes, it was because they were women of ill repute. In some cases women were reportedly abused at the government-run shelters, found their movements severely restricted, or were pressured to return to their abusers.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): No national law addresses the practice of FGM/C. According to human rights groups and media reports, between 70 and 90 percent of Dawoodi Bohra Muslims practiced various forms of FGM/C, often in private homes and without medical supervision. A population of approximately 40,000 Dawoodi Bohra Muslims lived in Karachi, with smaller pockets in Lahore, Islamabad, and other cities. Some Dawoodi Bohras spoke publicly and signed online petitions against the practice. Some isolated tribes and communities in rural Sindh and Balochistan also practiced FGM/C.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: At times women were victims of various types of societal violence and abuse, including so-called honor killings, forced marriages, imposed isolation, and being used as chattel to settle tribal disputes. There were cases in which husbands and male family members treated women as chattel.

A 2004 law on honor killings and the 2011 Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act already criminalize acts committed against women in the name of traditional practices. Despite these laws hundreds of women reportedly were victims of honor killings. Many cases went unreported and unpunished. The practice of “karo-kari” or “siyah kari”—a premeditated honor killing that occurs if a family, community, tribal court, or jirga determines that adultery or some other “crime of honor” occurred—continued across the country. Karo-kari derives from “black male” (kar) and “black female” (kari), metaphoric terms for someone who has
dishonored the family or is an adulterer or adulteress. In many cases the male involved in the alleged “crime of honor” is not killed but allowed to flee. In October the government passed the antihonor killing law, closing the loophole that allowed perpetrators in “honor killings” to go free so as long as the victim’s family pardoned the perpetrator.

Police in Sindh established karo-kari cells with a free telephone number in the districts of Sukkur, Ghotki, Khairpur, and Nausharo Feroze for persons to report karo-kari incidents. Because honor crimes generally occurred within families, many went unreported. Police and NGOs reported that increased media coverage enabled law enforcement officials to take some action against a limited number of perpetrators. In July social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch was killed by her brother at their family home in southern Punjab. The brother said his sister had shamed the family with her “liberal” lifestyle and for posing in photographs with a famous mullah. The government charged Baloch’s brother and accomplices with her murder and invoked Section 311 of the penal code, which made the state a party against the brother. This effectively barred the family from “forgiving” the brother and setting him free, a common outcome in these types of murders.

The practice of cutting off a woman’s nose or ears, especially in connection with honor crimes, was reported, but legal repercussions were rare.

Although prohibited by law, the practice of buying and selling brides also continued in rural areas. Many tribes, communities, or families practiced sequestering women from all contact with men other than their relatives. Despite prohibitions on handing over women as compensation for crimes or as a resolution of a dispute (also known as “vani” or “swara”), the practice continued in Punjab and KP. In rural Sindh landowning families continued the practice of “marriage to the Quran,” forcing a female family member to stay unmarried to avoid division of property. Property of women “married to the Quran” remained under the legal control of their fathers or eldest brothers, and such women were prohibited from contact with any man older than age 14. Families expected these women to stay in the home and not contact anyone outside their families.

In February the Sindh Assembly approved the Hindu Marriage Act, which creates a specific legal mechanism to register Hindu marriages and to prove the legitimacy of marriages under the law. Observers viewed these new bills as the step forward in protecting Hindu minorities, particularly Hindu women who are disproportionately targeted for abductions and forced conversions. One controversial provision of the Sindh law provides that a marriage between Hindus
is to be dissolved if either party converts to a different religion; some members of Hindu communities worried this provision could be used to break up marriages by forcing women to convert to Islam, which would then nullify the marriage and permit the women to marry Muslim men.

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

The 2010 Acid Control and Acid Crime Practice Bill makes maiming or killing via corrosive substance a crime and imposes stiff penalties against perpetrators. As with other laws, these measures are not applicable in FATA and PATA unless the president issues a notification to that effect. Nevertheless, there were numerous acid attacks on women across the country, with few perpetrators bought to justice. In July media reported that a spurned suitor threw acid at the family who rejected his marriage proposal, injuring six individuals.

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

Sexual Harassment: Although the 2010 Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace and public sphere, the problem was widespread. The law requires all provinces to establish provincial-level ombudsmen. Sindh was the first province to do so, in 2012. Punjab Province and administrative district Gilgit-Baltistan also established ombudsmen. Neither Balochistan nor KP had an ombudsman. Press reports indicated harassment was especially high among domestic workers and nurses. According to press reports, some women were harassed via social media. In August police charged a man in Nowshera, KP, with online harassment under the recently passed cybercrimes legislation.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of children, but they often lacked the information and means to
do so. Young girls and women were especially vulnerable to problems related to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. They often lacked information and means to access care. According to a survey by the Women’s Empowerment Group released in 2013, only 25 percent of adolescents were aware of their sexual and reproductive rights. Spousal opposition also contributed to the challenges women faced in obtaining contraception or delaying pregnancy. According to UN Population Division estimates in 2016, 29 percent of women of reproductive age used a modern method of contraception. Access by women, particularly in rural areas, to health and reproductive rights education remained difficult due to social constraints. For these same reasons, data collection was also difficult.

According to the National Institute of Population Studies’ 2012-13 Demographic and Health Survey, 27 percent of women received no prenatal care; however, the report showed a substantial improvement in the proportion of mothers receiving antenatal care over the prior 13 years, increasing from 43 percent in 2001 to 73 percent in 2013. The survey also revealed that skilled health-care providers delivered 52 percent of births and that 48 percent of births took place in a medical facility.

According to the most recent UN research, the maternal mortality ratio was 178 deaths per 100,000 live births, a rate attributed to lack of health information and services. Few women in rural areas had access to skilled attendants during childbirth, including essential obstetric and postpartum care. According to UNICEF, deteriorating security caused displacement and affected access to medical services, especially in KP and FATA.

**Discrimination:** Women faced legal and economic discrimination. The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in general, but authorities did not enforce it. Also, women faced discrimination in family law, property law, and the judicial system. Family law formulates protection for women in cases of divorce, including requirements for maintenance, and sets clear guidelines for custody of minor children and their maintenance. Many women were unaware of these legal protections or unable to obtain legal counsel to enforce them. Divorced women often were left with no means of support, as their families ostracized them. Women are legally free to marry without family consent, but society frequently ostracized women who did so, or they risked becoming victims of honor crimes.

The 2011 Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act makes it illegal to deny women inheritance of property by deceitful means. The law entitles female children to
one-half the inheritance of male children. Wives inherit one-eighth of their husband’s estate. Women often received far less than their legal entitlement. Women faced significant discrimination in employment and frequently were paid less than men for similar work.

**Children**

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship is derived by birth in the country, although for children born abroad after 2000, citizenship may be derived by descent if either the mother or the father is a citizen and the child is registered with the proper authorities (see section 2.d.). Reporting of births is voluntary, and records are not kept uniformly, particularly in rural areas. While the government reported that it registered more than 75 percent of the population, observers believed actual figures were lower. Public services, such as education and health care, were available to children without a birth certificate.

**Education:** The constitution mandates compulsory education provided free by the government to all children between the ages of five and 16. Government schools often charged parents for books, uniforms, and other materials. Parents of lower economic means sometimes chose to send children to madrassahs, where they received free room and board, or to NGO-operated schools.

The most significant barrier to girls’ education was the lack of access. Public schools, particularly beyond the primary grades, were not available in many rural areas, and those that existed were often too far for a girl to travel unaccompanied. Despite cultural beliefs that boys and girls should be educated separately after primary school, the government often failed to take measures to provide separate restroom facilities or separate classrooms, and there were more government schools for boys than for girls. The attendance rates for girls in primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools were lower than for boys. Additionally, certain tribal and cultural beliefs often prevented girls from attending schools.

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

**Child Abuse:** Child abuse was widespread. Employers, who in some cases were relatives, abused young girls and boys working as domestic servants by beating them and forcing them to work long hours. Many such children were trafficking victims. While there was no official count of street children, SPARC estimated they numbered 1.5 million.
Local authorities subjected children to harmful traditional practices such as “swara,” treating girls as chattel to settle disputes and debts.

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

**Early and Forced Marriage:** Despite legal prohibitions, child marriages occurred. The law sets the legal age of marriage at 18 for men and 16 for women and prescribes punishment for violators of imprisonment for up to a month, a fine of 1,000 rupees ($9.90), or both.

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

Many young girls and women were victims of forced marriages arranged by their families. Although forced marriage is a criminal offense and many cases were filed, prosecution remained a problem. In 2012 the Family Planning Association of Pakistan estimated that child marriages constituted 30 percent of marriages. In rural areas poor parents sometimes sold their daughters into marriage, in some cases to settle debts or disputes.

In 2013 Sindh passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act, which criminalizes marriages to children under the age of 16. Despite this legislation Sindh had not effectively stopped the practice of early child marriage. In March, three men were arrested under the act after one of the men married a 15-year-old girl. In June a 61-year-old man was arrested for marrying an 11-year-old girl in Jacobabad district. The Punjab provincial assembly passed a law in March 2015 increasing the penalties for parents and clerics who assisted in marriages between children, although the law left the legal minimum age for women to marry at 16.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting:** Information on FGM/C is provided in the women’s section above.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** In March, Parliament amended the criminal code to protect further children from specific crimes of child pornography, sexual abuse,
seduction, and cruelty. The 1961 Suppression of Prostitution Ordinance and portions of the penal code are intended to protect children from sexual exploitation. Authorities did not regularly enforce these laws. Child pornography is illegal under obscenity laws. Socioeconomic vulnerabilities led to the sexual exploitation of children, including trafficking for sexual exploitation. Many children, including trafficking victims forced to beg at bus terminals and on the side of the road, experienced sexual and physical abuse. In May a sex abuse scandal involving the kidnapping, drugging, sexual abuse, and filming of young boys for child pornography by a gang in Swat was reported by media and civil society; however, the March amendment to the criminal code was reportedly not applicable to PATA, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan, and AJK.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: By law anyone found to have abandoned an infant may be jailed for seven years, while anyone guilty of secretly burying a deceased child may be imprisoned for two years. Murder is punishable by life imprisonment, but authorities rarely prosecuted the crime of infanticide.

Displaced Children: According to civil society sources, it was difficult for children displaced by military operations to access education or psychological support. SPARC and other child rights organizations expressed concern that children displaced by flooding and conflict were vulnerable to child labor abuses as some families relocated to urban areas. Doctors working in IDP camps reported difficulty in treating the large influx of patients, including children and elderly persons, because they were especially sensitive to disease, malnutrition, and other unhealthy conditions. Poor hygiene and crowded conditions found in the IDP communities caused some children to contract skin rashes, gastroenteritis, and respiratory infections. The government provided polio vaccinations to many displaced children who were not inoculated, since they came from areas where militant groups banned vaccination campaigns (see section 2.d.).


Anti-Semitism

There is a very small Jewish population in the country. Anti-Semitic sentiments were widespread in the vernacular press. Hate speech broadcast by traditional
media and through social media derogatorily used terms such as “Jewish agent” and “Yahoodi” to attack individuals and groups.

**Trafficking in Persons**

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

**Persons with Disabilities**

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

In the provinces social welfare departments worked for the welfare and education of persons with disabilities. In Sindh the law mandates the minister for bonded labor and special education to address the educational needs of persons with disabilities. According to civil society sources, most children with disabilities did not attend school. At the higher-education level, Allama Iqbal Open University, the University of the Punjab, and Karachi University had programs to train students as educators for individuals with disabilities.

The government’s 2003 National Disability Policy designated the federal capital and provincial capitals as disability-friendly cities and granted permission to persons with disabilities to take central superior service exams to compete for entry to the civil service. The policy also provided for 127 special education centers in main cities. Employment quotas at the federal and provincial levels require public and private organizations to reserve at least 2 percent of jobs for qualified persons with disabilities. Authorities only partially implemented this requirement due to lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms. In Lahore, beginning in 2014 and continuing sporadically thereafter, persons with vision disabilities held protests against the lack of jobs, which were in short supply despite the legal quota. Families cared for most individuals with physical and mental disabilities.
Organizations that did not wish to hire persons with disabilities could instead pay a fine to a disability assistance fund. Authorities rarely enforced this obligation. The National Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled provided job placement and loan facilities, as well as subsistence funding. There were no legal restrictions on the rights of persons with disabilities to vote or participate in civil affairs. Voting was challenging for persons with disabilities, however, because of severe difficulties in obtaining transportation and access to polling stations.

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

Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is a criminal offense; however, the government rarely prosecuted cases. The penalty for same-sex relations is a fine, two years’ to life imprisonment, or both. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons rarely revealed their sexual orientation or gender identity. No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Discrimination against LGBTI persons was widely acknowledged privately, but insufficient data existed for accurate reporting, due in part to severe societal stigma and fear of recrimination on the part of any who came forward. In 2013 the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority blocked the country’s first online platform for the LGBTI community to share views and network, but social media pages working on LGBTI rights and related issues continued to function.

Violence and discrimination continued against LGBTI persons. Police generally refused to take action on cases involving members of the LGBTI community. In November a gang of 20 men in Sialkot assaulted and physically abused five transgender women. After a video of the attack appeared online and the transgender community protested, police arrested members of the gang. In April a transgender woman received delayed medical treatment in Peshawar following multiple gunshot wounds and later succumbed to her injuries. The provincial government launched an investigation against the hospital administration that refused to treat her and police officials who allegedly would not file charges against them. In July, three transgender women reportedly were raped in Faisalabad.

Society generally shunned transgender persons, eunuchs, and intersex persons, collectively referred to as “hijras,” who often lived together in slum communities and survived by begging and dancing at carnivals and weddings. Some also were prostitutes. Local authorities often denied hijras places in schools or admission to
hospitals, and landlords often refused to rent or sell property to them. Authorities often denied hijras their share of inherited property. A 2012 Supreme Court ruling recognizes hijras as a “third gender” and allows them to obtain accurate national identification cards. Because of the ruling, hijras fully participated in the 2013 elections for the first time as candidates and voters. In June a group of muftis (religious leaders) issued a fatwa (religious ruling) that allows transgender persons to marry other transgenders.

**HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

Societal attitudes toward HIV-positive individuals were changing, but discrimination persisted. Cases of discrimination often went unreported due to the stigma faced by HIV/AIDS patients. In addition to operating treatment centers, the National Aids Control Program held rallies and public campaigns and spoke in mosques about birth control and AIDS awareness. The government established 13 HIV treatment and care centers nationwide, which provided comprehensive HIV-care services.

**Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Societal violence due to religious intolerance remained a serious problem. Occasionally, there were reports of mob violence against religious minorities, including Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Hindus, and Shia Muslims. In July rioting occurred in Mehrab Samejo in Sindh’s Ghotki district after an incident in which a previously Hindu convert to Islam was accused of desecrating the Quran. Two Hindu men were subsequently shot during a mob attack.

In late June a mob of local residents clashed with members of the small Kalash tribe in Chitral after a teenage Kalash girl alleged that she was forced to convert to Islam; the Kalash people are adherent to pre-Islamic beliefs. Local law enforcement responded quickly and dispersed the mob; some minor injuries to Kalash villagers in the Bumburate valley were recorded.

Members of the Hazara ethnic minority, who are Shia Muslim, continued to face discrimination and threats of violence in Quetta, Balochistan. According to press reports and other sources, they were unable to move freely outside of Quetta’s two Hazara-populated enclaves. Consumer goods in those enclaves were available only at inflated prices, and Hazaras reported an inability to find employment or pursue higher education. They also alleged government agencies discriminated against Hazaras in issuing identification cards and passports. To avoid causing
violent incidents, authorities confined Shia religious processions to the Hazara enclaves. Anti-Shia graffiti was common in Quetta. According to press reports, there were several attacks on Hazaras during the year. Media reported that three Hazaras were killed and nine others injured in separate attacks in Quetta in May. In June, five Hazaras were killed in Quetta. Two Hazara men were shot in Quetta on August 1.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The vast majority of the labor force was under the jurisdiction of provincial labor laws. A 2010 constitutional amendment, which devolved labor legislation and policies to the four provinces, stipulated that existing national laws would remain in force “until altered, repealed, or amended” by the provincial governments. Provinces implemented their own industrial relations acts in 2011. In 2012 Parliament passed a new industrial relations act that took International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions into account but applied them only to the Islamabad Capital Territory and to trade federations that operated in more than one province. Most of the labor force was not covered by federal labor regulations of any kind.

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

Without any federal-level legislation or federal-level entity responsible for labor, the continued existence of the National Industrial Relations Commission remained in question. The 2012 federal industrial relations act stipulates that the commission may adjudicate and determine industrial disputes within the Islamabad Capital Territory to which a trade union/federation of trade unions is a party and any other industrial dispute determined by the government to be of national importance. This provision does not provide a forum specifically for interprovincial disputes but appears to allow for the possibility that the commission could resolve such a dispute.
Worker organizations noted the limited capacity and funding for labor relations implementation at the provincial level, and there was controversy over the federal government’s decision to maintain control of the Workers Welfare Fund and Employees Old Age Benefits Institution as opposed to devolving it to the provinces.

The law prohibited state administrators, government and state enterprises, workers in export processing zones, and public-sector workers from collective bargaining and striking, but labor groups reported the law was not applied during the year. The provincial industrial relations acts also address and limit strikes and lockouts. For example, the KP act specifies that when a “strike or lockout lasts for more than 30 days, the government may, by order in writing, prohibit the strike or lockout” and must then refer the dispute to a labor court.

Unions were able to organize large-scale strikes, but police often broke up the strikes, and employers used them to justify dismissals. Marches and protests also occurred regularly, although police often arrested union leaders and occasionally charged them under antiterrorism and antistate laws. Violence and other problems involving freedom of association persisted throughout the year.

Federal law defines illegal strikes, picketing, and other types of protests as “civil commotion,” which carries a penalty of up to life imprisonment. The law also states that gatherings of four or more persons may require police authorization, a provision authorities could use against trade union gatherings, since the federal government has authority on criminal matters.

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

In July the government of Punjab passed the Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Ordinance, 2016, which includes provisions aimed at protecting children
from labor exploitation. Other provinces also passed legislation during the year on
child labor and child protection, and all four provinces dedicated resources to
address child labor practices.

Labor leaders also stressed the need for legislation to cover the rights of workers in
the informal and agricultural sectors. The majority of factory workers were
employed as contract labor with no benefits beyond basic wages and no long-term
job security, even if they remained with the same employer for years. Factory
managers were often unable to ascertain the identity of fire or other work-related
accident victims because these individuals generally did not appear in official
records. In August a shop roof collapsed in Lahore, injuring five workers.
According to media reports, the roof collapsed due to disrepair. In November an
undetermined amount of workers (some reportedly undocumented) died in an
explosion and fire at a ship-breaking facility in Gadani, Sindh Province.

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

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

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

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Lack of political will, the reported complicity of officials in trafficking, technical flaws in the law, federal and local government structural changes, and a lack of funds all contributed to the failure of authorities to enforce federal law relating to forced labor. Gaps also remained in the legislative framework. Consequently, when law enforcement officers registered bonded labor offenses, they did so under other sections of the penal code, including kidnapping and illegal confinement. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate, and penalties—including a 50,000 rupee ($495) fine, two to five years’ imprisonment, or both—were insufficient to deter violations.

The use of forced and bonded labor was widespread and common in many industries across the country. NGOs estimated nearly two million persons were in bondage, primarily in Sindh and Punjab, but also in Balochistan and KP. A large proportion of bonded laborers were low-caste Hindus, as well as Christians and Muslims with lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Bonded labor was common in the agricultural sector, including the cotton, sugarcane, and wheat industries, and in the brick, coal, glass, and carpet industries. Bonded laborers often were unable to determine when their debts were fully paid, in part because contracts were rare, and employers could take advantage of bonded laborers’ illiteracy to alter debt amounts or the price laborers paid for seed and fertilizer. In some cases landowners restricted laborers’ movements with armed guards or sold laborers to other employers for the price of the laborers’ debts. The government of Punjab passed ordinances banning the employment of children in hazardous environments and a separate ordinance to prevent children from working in brick kilns. Enforcement was reportedly being carried out but not complete.

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

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

The KP, Punjab, and Sindh ministries of labor were motivated to register brick kilns and their workers to regulate the industry better and provide workers access to labor courts and other services. Officials claimed they took steps to register brick kilns, but the exact number of registrations was not available. The Punjab Department of Labor ran a project to combat bonded labor in brick kilns by helping workers obtain national identity cards and interest-free loans; the department also opened schools at brick kiln sites and registered the children of brick kiln workers for school.

Also see the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The constitution expressly prohibits the employment of children below age 14 in any factory, mine, or other hazardous site. The national law for the employment of children set the minimum age for hazardous work at 15, an age not in compliance with international standards. The national law also does not establish a minimum age for employment in nonhazardous occupations. For children over 14, the law limits a child’s workday to seven hours, including a one-hour break after three hours of labor, and sets permissible times of day for work and time off. The law does not allow children to work overtime or at night, and they should receive one day off per week. Additionally, the law requires employers to keep a register of child workers for labor inspectors to verify. These prohibitions and regulations, however, do not apply to family businesses or government schools.

The law prohibits the exploitation of children younger than age 18 and defines exploitative entertainment as all activities related to human sports or sexual practices and other abusive practices. Parents who exploit their children are legally liable. The law makes bonded labor of children punishable by up to five years in prison and 50,000 rupees ($495) in fines. The government prohibited the employment of children under age 15 in four occupations and 34 processes, including street vending, surgical instrument manufacturing, deep-sea fishing, leather manufacturing, brick making, soccer ball production, and carpet weaving. Despite these restrictions there were reports of children working in all these areas.
Coordination of child labor problems at the national level remained ineffective. As a result of devolution, labor inspection was carried out at the provincial rather than national level, which contributed to uneven application of labor law. Enforcement efforts were not adequate to meet the scale of the problem. Inspectors had little training and insufficient resources and were susceptible to corruption. Labor inspections became even less frequent after devolution, with no floor for the minimum frequency of inspections. Authorities allowed NGOs to perform inspections without interference, and SPARC noted that officials usually cooperated with its visits.

Authorities often did not impose penalties on violators; when they did, the penalties were not a significant deterrent. For example, while authorities obtained hundreds of convictions for violations of child labor laws, the fines were too low to deter future violations.

Due to weak government enforcement of child labor laws, child labor remained pervasive. According to the ILO, there were 3.4 million child laborers. In private briefings NGOs estimated the number to be significantly higher, with many children working in agriculture and domestic work.

Approximately 70 percent of nonagricultural child labor took place in small workshops, complicating efforts to enforce child labor laws, since by law inspectors may not inspect facilities employing fewer than 10 persons.

Employers and families forced children to work in brick kilns, and in the glass-bangle and carpet-weaving industries, as well as in agriculture, as part of fulfilling their families’ debt obligation to landowners or brick kiln owners. UNICEF estimated the number of children working in brick kilns at 250,000. In 2012 researchers estimated there were approximately two million bonded laborers, many of whom included entire families with children. Children also reportedly worked in the production of incense, cotton, wheat textiles, tobacco, sugarcane, gemstones, and stone crushing.

Poor rural families sometimes sold their children into domestic servitude or other types of work, or they paid agents to arrange for such work, often believing their children would work under decent conditions. Some children sent to work for relatives or acquaintances in exchange for education or other opportunities ended in exploitative conditions or forced labor.
Children also were kidnapped or sold into organized begging rings, domestic servitude, militants and gangs, and child sex trafficking.

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

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, and gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status, the government did not effectively enforce those laws and regulations.

Discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on these factors persisted. The nature of penalties for violations was insufficient to deter violations.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

In July the government raised the minimum wage for unskilled workers from 13,000 ($125) rupees to 14,000 rupees ($135) per month, and all provincial governments budgets were required to follow that directive. While authorities increased the minimum wage in the annual budget, both federal and state governments also must issue required notifications for such increases to go into effect. Minimum wage laws did not cover significant sectors of the labor force--including those in the informal sector, domestic servants, and agricultural workers.

The law provides for a maximum workweek of 48 hours (54 hours for seasonal factories) with rest periods during the workday and paid annual holidays. Additional benefits required under the labor code include official government holidays, overtime pay, annual and sick leave, health care, education for workers’ children, social security, old age benefits, and a workers’ welfare fund.

These regulations do not apply to agricultural workers, workers in factories with fewer than 10 employees, domestic workers, or contractors. These workers also lack the right to access “worker courts” to seek redress of grievances and were otherwise extremely vulnerable to exploitation. The inapplicability of many labor laws and the lack of enforcement by the government gave employers in many sectors relative impunity with regard to working conditions, treatment of employees, work hours, and pay.
Provincial governments have primary responsibility for enforcing national labor regulations. Enforcement was ineffective due to limited resources, corruption, and inadequate regulatory structures. In Sindh Province policies against surprise inspections severely limited effective enforcement. In Punjab a system whereby owners voluntarily posted their own declarations about workplace safety, health, and wage issues in their factories replaced routine inspections. Officials then chose factories at random for inspection. Balochistan and KP allowed surprise inspections. Many workers, especially in the informal sectors, remained unaware of their rights. In face of the serious restrictions on labor inspections and the effect of limited resources and corruption, inspections and penalties were insufficient to deter violations of labor laws.

Health and safety standards were poor in all sectors. There was a serious lack of adherence to mine-safety and health protocols. Many mines had only one opening for entry, egress, and ventilation. Workers could not remove themselves from dangerous working conditions without risking loss of employment. Informal sector employees faced multiple precarious situations, particularly in less visible areas such as domestic work. There were no official statistics on workplace fatalities and accidents during the year.

The country’s failure to meet international health and safety standards raised doubts abroad as to its reliability as a source for imports. The Sindh government consulted with the ILO to develop a program to improve its labor standards and laws in an attempt to regain its status as an export source. Following the 2012 fire at a Karachi textile factory that killed 259 persons, some labor advocates complained that many families had not received their promised compensation and that the factors that led to the tragedy--most notably a fraudulent safety certification and inadequate fire safety measures--existed at many other companies.
TAB 7
UNAIDS continues to support the response to the HIV outbreak in Pakistan
18 June 2019

UNAIDS is continuing its support to Pakistan in responding to the outbreak of HIV in Larkana, during which more than 800 people have been newly diagnosed with the virus. More than 80% of the new cases are among children aged under 15, with most among children aged under 5. By 17 June, 396 people had been referred to treatment.

At a press conference on June 14 the authorities presented the findings of a preliminary investigation into the outbreak. It concluded that poor infection control practices, including a lack of sterilization and the re-use of syringes and intravenous drips, are the most significant factors behind the rise in new infections.

"There is a huge amount of work that needs to be done to improve infection control and support the affected children and their families," said UNAIDS regional director, Eamonn Murphy, during the press conference held in Karachi, Pakistan. "UNAIDS will continue to facilitate and coordinate within the United Nations system and with other partners to ensure that the required support is provided effectively and efficiently," added Mr Murphy.

As well as improving infection control procedures, the preliminary investigation found that strengthening community education is critical to raise awareness about HIV prevention and to tackle stigma and discrimination. The conclusions of a rapid assessment on HIV-related knowledge presented at the press conference found that information about HIV is very limited among the affected communities. Many parents and caregivers learnt about HIV only on the day their children were diagnosed or because of media reports about the increase in cases. A lack of accurate information created panic and some families with children diagnosed with HIV have been shunned and isolated.

In response, UNAIDS in partnership with UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Health Organization and the JSI Research and Training Institute have been supporting national partners to develop a community response plan to promote health education and reduce stigma and discrimination. The Sindh AIDS Control Programme, together with UNAIDS and UNICEF, has started to train health workers on paediatric case management and health education sessions are being organized with the involvement of community led organizations and religious leaders. Training sessions for local media on responsible HIV reporting are also being carried out.

UNAIDS has been working closely with the federal and provincial governments to provide on-site technical support to help respond to the crisis and mitigate its impact. Sindh’s Ministry of Health has increased its efforts to prevent unlicensed and informal medical practices from operating and, as a result, 900 health clinics and unlicensed blood banks have been closed.

The preliminary investigation was led by the World Health Organization, in partnership with organizations including the Sindh AIDS Control Programme, Aga Khan University, the Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Programme, the Dow Medical University in Karachi, the Microbiology Society of Infectious Disease and UN agencies, including UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNFPA.

With 20 000 new HIV infections in 2017, Pakistan has the second fastest growing AIDS epidemic in the Asia Pacific region, with the virus disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable and marginalized, especially key populations. UNAIDS continues to work with the government and partners in Pakistan to strengthen the response in the country.
TAB 8
WHO EMRO | Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences organizes awareness-raising seminar on HIV-related discrimination in health care facilities

The Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences organized an awareness-raising seminar on 1 December as part of a week-long series of events to mark World AIDS Day 2017.

The main objectives of the seminar were to assist health care providers in working collectively towards addressing HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health care facilities, and to devise joint key recommendations for action to end this discrimination.

Dr Rizwan Qazi, Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, gave a presentation at the seminar on Basic HIV facts and success stories at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences.

“Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV (PLHIV) and those at increased risk of transmission is still unremitting in Pakistan, including in health care settings,” said Dr Baseer Khan Achakzai, National Programme Manager, said. He stated that in addition to social rejection and exclusion, PLHIV were also often denied health care in health care facilities. PLHIV have reported dentists refusing to work on their teeth, and surgeons refusing to do surgery, while pregnant women living with HIV have reported being denied obstetric care. In addition, PLHIV have also reported that their HIV status was also disclosed without their consent, he said.
Dr Achakzai also emphasized that he negative treatment PLHIV experience within the health care system may discourage them from engaging with HIV care and treatment or indeed seeking health services in general. Individuals who are exposed to or at risk of acquiring HIV may not seek HIV testing due to fear of maltreatment at the testing site or their anticipation of maltreatment in subsequent health services. Furthermore, PLHIV may choose to seek care in HIV services far from their places of residence, resulting in more challenges regarding care and treatment retention. Dr Achakzai said that simply a welcoming smile from the health care provider can bring a lot change in care-seeking behavior, and can in fact change the lives of thousands living with HIV. When not stigmatized or discriminated against, all PLHIV could access lifesaving antiretroviral therapy, and that all that was needed was small changes in our thinking and behaviour, Dr Achakzai said. He stressed that access to HIV treatment is every individual’s basic right, and that health care providers should facilitate access to treatment.

“The government of Pakistan is fully committed to fulfilling the global commitment to eliminate HIV/AIDS by 2030 ... We invite all health care providers, including the public and private sectors and nongovernmental organizations, to join hands and increase access to and utilization of available services for people living with HIV/AIDS,” Dr Achakzai said.

“World AIDS Day reminds us of our commitment to end the HIV epidemic … Today we are better equipped than ever to move forward. We have a wealth of evidence-based interventions and tools that enable us to broaden prevention options, simplify diagnosis, optimize treatment and above all save lives. All we need to do is to put these interventions and tools within the reach of people who need them,” said Dr Assai Ardakani, WHO Representative to Pakistan.

He stated that between 2012 and 2016 the number of PLHIVs receiving antiretroviral treatment in Pakistan more than doubled, but that in spite of this progress, the country still has the lowest coverage of HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care services in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and that over 85% of PLHIVs in the country and who need life-saving antiretroviral therapy are not receive it.

“HIV prevention should be a priority in our country, particularly among key populations at risk of HIV,” said Dr Ardakani. HIV testing services constituted an essential part of the HIV prevention package, and testing was of crucial importance in accessing HIV treatment and care, he continued. In knowing their HIV status, PLHIVs could access treatment and care services and lead a normal life without illness; with treatment, the virus was suppressed, and transmission could be prevented, he stated.
Dr Ardakani stressed the fact that a large gap in diagnosis exists in Pakistan today, with only 3 out of 10 PLHIVs knowing their HIV status, and that a similar gap exists regarding treatment – it is estimated that only 7% of PLHIVs receive antiretroviral therapy. This low case identification and treatment was due to factors such as the limited availability of HIV testing and treatment services, inappropriate approaches to service delivery for people at risk of HIV, the reluctance of health care providers to offer an HIV test to their clients, and stigma and discrimination. In addition, the testing of partners of people living with HIV has either long been neglected, or practised in an unethical manner that deters people from testing, he said.

WHO strongly advocated the integration of HIV treatment into the treatment strategies of other communicable disease such as tuberculosis and malaria, which would ensure service availability at all health system levels, Dr Ardakani continued, adding that with today’s advances in HIV testing and treatment technologies and the advent of highly sensitive and specific rapid HIV tests and simplified treatment, health interventions to combat HIV have become simpler than ever. In reaffirming the call on all concerned parties need to commit to making HIV testing and treatment services available and easily accessible, particularly for key population groups at risk of HIV, he also stressed that by routinely offering HIV testing and counselling services should to pregnant women, mother-to-child transmission of HIV can be prevented. “When we know our HIV status we can make better choices for living a healthy life. Test for HIV!” he declared.

Dr Mamadou L. Sakho, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Country Director, stated that the widespread HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health care settings in Pakistan impeded access to services and also undermined efforts to achieve the highest attainable standards of health for all. “There is a need to have concrete actions within health care settings so that more people can get themselves tested and adhere to treatment so that Pakistan can achieve three 90s and end AIDS by 2030”.

Dr Quaid Saeed, Senior Programme Officer in NACP, presented the results of latest HIV surveillance survey carried out in 2016. The results of this survey show that HIV in Pakistan is concentrated in People Who Inject Drugs but this trend is now shifting with rising prevalence levels in Female Sex Workers and Transgenders. These are alarming figures since this disease in the country is following the path of Asian Epidemic Modelling whereby infection from injecting drug users spread to sexual networks and then into the general population. He emphasised the need that prevention programs should be implemented to stop new infections while community based testing should be employed to identify new HIV cases and link them to HIV treatment centers spread across the country and supported by national and provincial AIDS control Programmes.
Ms Fahmida, UNAIDS spoke on Stigma and Discrimination in Health care settings. She said, “Stigma and Discrimination in Health Care settings has many forms which includes denial of health care services to key population and unjust behaviors to service provision, lack of respect and behaviors that stop people living with HIV and AIDS and key populations to avail testing and treatment services. UNAIDS and WHO calls for concrete actions under the leadership of NACP to establish mechanisms within health care settings to address stigma faced by key population”.

Towards the end of the seminar, there was question and answer session.

HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, having claimed more than 35 million lives so far. In 2016, 1.0 million people died from HIV-related causes globally. There were approximately 36.7 million people living with HIV at the end of 2016 with 1.8 million people becoming newly infected in 2016 globally. 54% of adults and 43% of children living with HIV are currently receiving lifelong antiretroviral therapy (ART). Global ART coverage for pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV is high at 76%.

HIV infection is often diagnosed through rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs), which detect the presence or absence of HIV antibodies. Most often these tests provide same-day test results, which are essential for same day diagnosis and early treatment and care. There is no cure for HIV infection. However, effective antiretroviral (ARV) drugs can control the virus and help prevent transmission so that people with HIV, and those at substantial risk, can enjoy healthy, long and productive lives.

Between 2000 and 2016, new HIV infections fell by 39%, and HIV-related deaths fell by one third with 13.1 million lives saved due to ART in the same period. This achievement was the result of great efforts by national HIV programmes supported by civil society and a range of development partners.

Testing for HIV and is strongly advised for all people exposed to any of the risk factors. This way people learn of their own infection status and access necessary prevention and treatment services without delay.

The Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly endorsed a new Global Health Sector Strategy on HIV
for 2016-2021. The strategy includes 5 strategic directions that guide priority actions by countries and by WHO over the next six years.

The strategic directions are: Information for focused action (know your epidemic and response); interventions for impact (covering the range of services needed); delivering for equity (covering the populations in need of services); financing for sustainability (covering the costs of services); and innovation for acceleration (looking towards the future).

WHO is a cosponsor of UNAIDS. Within UNAIDS, WHO leads activities on HIV treatment and care, HIV and tuberculosis co-infection, and jointly coordinates with the United Nations Children’s Fund the work on the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Tuesday 12th of May 2020 01:45:53 AM
TAB 9
The residents of one village have demanded that families of HIV-positive children leave and set up their own town.

By Sameer Mandhro
Published: December 14, 2019

Perhaps the most heartbreaking part of living with HIV, even more than facing the spectre of an early death, is being shunned into isolation for the years one has left.

For some families in one village near Rato Dero, where hundreds of children were infected with the incurable virus through no fault of their own, that prospect has come to pass. Still reeling from the ramifications of the tragedy, the parents of the HIV-infected children now find their own near and dear ones ganging up against them, demanding they leave their hometown or live with a social boycott.

Rato Dero outbreak: ‘It is not HIV but stigma that is killing us’
Despite many vigorous uninterrupted campaigns by health authorities, the parents of these HIV-positive children are being constantly pressured by the rest of the village into keeping them away from the remaining ‘healthy’ kids.

“All of us parents of HIV-positive children have been asked to leave the village and establish a separate one,” revealed a distraught Shahzado Khan Shar, a 32-year-old police constable. “Our own relatives even. They hate us,” he told The Express Tribune as he broke down in tears. “Where should we go with our innocent kids?”

Narrating the isolation he and others in his predicament were already facing, Shar said his own relatives have stopped even shaking his hand. “I am not HIV-positive but the other villagers believe I will infect them simply because my son now lives with this disease.”

“They throw away kitchen utensils which we use and our children are not allowed to play with the ‘healthy’ kids,” he said, heartbroken. “Even those who understand that they will not be infected by eating with us or by touch alone hate our children. Instead of receiving moral support, all we face is contempt.”

“Most of us, the parents of these kids, are facing mental, social and financial problems ever since the [Rato Dero] outbreak happened. But it is the social isolation that kills us. It is killing us daily,” Shar added. “We die every time we face the attitude which our fellow villagers have developed for us. We are devastated.”
Outside Subhani Khan Shar, the parents of HIV-positive children in other parts of Rato Dero are also being made to feel like outcasts. Some families have even moved out and migrated to smaller towns as a result of silent pressure.

"The other parents tell their kids not to play with my son," lamented Dil Murad Ghangro, who runs a small spare parts shop on Larkano Road just outside Rato Dero town. "My son is too young to understand social gap being created now," he said as he kissed and embraced his two-and-a-half-year-old son, Abdul Samad.

"From Madeji and Shikarpur, my relatives in this situation are facing the same attitude. Our kids are innocent. It's not their fault."

But even as others around him turn against him and his family, Murad said his love for his child had grown exponentially. "I feel the hatred my son will have to face when he is old enough to understand. I cannot leave him," he said as he wept.

Dr Imran Akbar Arbani who visits and interacts with the parents of HIV-positive children told The Express Tribune that such families were connecting with each other after being shunned by their own blood relatives. "I see a close relationship developing among the parents. They have same pain," he elaborated.
Dr Arbani believes money could help reduce some of the stigma these children and their families face. “I think the government should insure these children. It could help create some acceptance for them,” he suggested.

According to the recent figures shared by the health department the number of infected persons has crossed the 1,200 mark, including 950 children.

“Yes, I understand the severity of the issue the parents have been facing in Rato Dero,” said Dr Sikandar Memon, the head of the Sindh AIDS Control Programme. “We have even involved clerics to convince people not to hate the children and others infected with the virus.”

Dr Memon said that the Sindh government was working on the community mobilisation. “But social taboos are stronger than our campaigns.” He said that through different organisations, his department has tried to connect the parents of these children with each other.

Rato Dero is hardly half-an-hour’s drive from Larkana city – a bastion of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). It is the constituency of PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto, who has been elected on the National Assembly seat from the area. It is also the constituency of his aunt, MPA Faryal Talpur.

More in Pakistan

IIUI shut, hostels vacated after clash
TAB 10
Panic in Pakistani City After 900 Children Test Positive for H.I.V.

Health workers say the reuse of syringes drove the outbreak in the city of Ratodero.

By Zia ur-Rehman and Maria Abi-Habib

Published Oct. 26, 2019    Updated Oct. 30, 2019

RATODERO, Pakistan — Nearly 900 children in the small Pakistani city of Ratodero were bedridden early this year with raging fevers that resisted treatment. Parents were frantic, with everyone seeming to know a family with a sick child.

In April, the disease was pinned down, and the diagnosis was devastating: The city was the epicenter of an H.I.V. outbreak that overwhelmingly affected children. Health officials initially blamed the outbreak on a single pediatrician, saying he was reusing syringes.

Since then, about 1,100 citizens have tested positive for the virus, or one in every 200 residents. Almost 900 are younger than 12. Health officials believe the real numbers are probably much higher, as only a fraction of the population has been tested so far.

Gulbahar Shaikh, the local journalist who broke the news of the epidemic to residents of his city and the nation in April, watched as his neighbors and relatives rushed to clinics to line up and test for the virus.

When officials descended on Ratodero to investigate, they discovered that many of the infected children had gone to the same pediatrician, Muzaffar Ghangrho, who served the city's poorest families and appeared to be at the center of the outbreak.

Mr. Shaikh panicked — that was his children's pediatrician. He rushed his family to be tested, and his 2-year-old daughter was confirmed to have the virus, which is the cause of AIDS.

"It was devastating," said Mr. Shaikh, a 44-year-old television journalist in Ratodero, a city of 200,000 whose residents are some of Pakistan's poorest, with high illiteracy rates.

Mr. Ghangrho was the cheapest option in this city, charging 20 cents a visit for the many parents here who earn less than $60 a month.
The pediatrician treated all six of Imtiaz Jalbani’s children, four of whom contracted H.I.V. His two youngest, 14-month-old Rida and 3-year-old Sameena, have died.

Mr. Jalbani, a laborer, said he first grew alarmed when he saw Mr. Ghangro rummage through the trash for a syringe to use on Ali, his 6-year-old son, who is also infected. When Mr. Jalbani protested, he said, Mr. Ghangro snapped at him and told him he was using an old syringe because Mr. Jalbani was too poor to pay for a new one.

“He said, ‘If you don’t want my treatment, go to another doctor.’” Mr. Jalbani said. “My wife and I had to starve ourselves to pay for the medicine.”

Mr. Ghangro was arrested and charged by the police with negligence, manslaughter and causing unintentional harm. But he has not yet been convicted, and in an interview with The New York Times, he insisted he is innocent and has never reused syringes.
The doctor recently renewed his medical certificate and now works as a general practitioner at a government hospital on the outskirts of Ratodero, despite laws that make the reuse of syringes an offense that is not eligible for bail.

Health officials now say that Mr. Ghanghro is unlikely to be the sole cause of the outbreak. Visiting health workers saw many cases of doctors reusing syringes and I.V. needles. Barbers take the same razor to the faces of multiple customers, they said, and roadside dentists crack away at patients' teeth on sidewalks with unsterilized tools.

Such unhygienic practices are prevalent across Pakistan and probably the leading cause of the country's surging rates of H.I.V. infection, according to health officials. But Ratodero is so poor that such practices are likely to be much more common, as residents struggle to make ends meet and scrimp wherever they can.
At first, the government was slow to respond to Ratodero’s outbreak and barely had the resources to test residents and treat the sick. Teams of international health workers from various countries came to the city to help, and the World Health Organization donated hundreds of testing kits.

Testing centers were set up in government buildings, while dozens of yellow tents sprouted up across the city to deal with the influx of terrified residents eager to be tested.

Still, with not even a quarter of the city’s population yet tested for the virus, officials are dreading that the real number of infected is much higher than the 1,112 confirmed cases so far.

The daughter of Mr. Shaikh, the journalist, has become an outcast in the community, he said. Education about the virus is sparse, and many fear contracting it by touch. Relatives won’t hug the girl, and other children will not play with her.

At school, the sick children are segregated from the healthy, forced to sit on one side of the classroom.

“My wife and I, fortunately, we are literate. We hug and love our daughter. But our relatives stopped touching her and are now reluctant to visit us,” said Mr. Shaikh, whose daughter is now responding well to treatment.

Five months on, the panic of the outbreak still hangs over Ratodero. Doctors and paramedics are struggling to cope with the number of H.I.V.-positive patients, while residents are still lining up to be tested.

Farzana Bibi was one of those waiting in a long line that snaked hundreds of yards out the door of a government hospital. She had just had her 3-year-old son tested after he had run a fever for three months, and doctors had confirmed that he was H.I.V.-positive. She held his hand as they waited in line to receive medicine for his treatment, a desperate frown on her face.

“It seems it is God’s affliction on us,” she said. “How could so many of our children have such a terrible disease?”
The outbreak in Ratodero reflects a nationwide uptick in H.I.V. cases, despite a global decline of new infections.

From 2010 to 2018, the number of H.I.V.-positive people in Pakistan nearly doubled, to about 160,000, according to estimates by UNAIDS, the United Nations task force that specializes in H.I.V. and AIDS. During that time, the number of new infections jumped 38 percent in those 15 to 24.

The real number is likely higher; much of the population goes untested, while only about 10 percent of people thought to be H.I.V.-positive are being treated.

The country spends very little on its efforts to counter H.I.V. and AIDS and is nearly entirely dependent on support from other countries for its programs, whether for funding to staff testing centers or to provide retroviral drugs to counter the virus.

“With competing priorities, H.I.V. and AIDS is at the back seat of the government’s agenda,” said Maria Elena Filio-Borromeo, the UNAIDS director for Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Since 2003, there have been eight H.I.V. outbreaks in Pakistan. And Ratodero had been the site of one before: In 2016, an outbreak hit some 1,500 adult men who had engaged in sex with infected prostitutes, officials said.
But this year’s outbreak in Ratodero is the first time that children have been the most frequent victims on such a large scale, Ms. Filio-Borromeo said.

To counter the outbreak, the Pakistani authorities in May began shutting down the clinics of unqualified doctors and illegal blood banks — many of which were found to be reusing syringes. Months later, however, some of those clinics had since reopened, locals say.

“Unless these quack doctors, barbers and dentists are not checked, the number of incidents of H.I.V. infection will continue going up,” said Dr. Imran Akbar Arbani, a local doctor, who had tipped off Mr. Shaikh about the outbreak as he also alerted government authorities.

In February, Dr. Arbani started noticing dozens of children coming to his office with persistent fevers, from newborns to 8-year-olds.

“In Pakistan, the government does not act unless there is a national uproar sparked by media coverage,” Dr. Arbani said, explaining why he was quick to tell Mr. Shaikh, the journalist, when he realized the scale of infection.

At least 35 children have died in the area since April 25, according to Dr. Arbani.

The effect on Ratodero’s social fabric has been grim.
In May, one man strangled his H.I.V.-positive wife to death.

And in June, residents in another town discovered their neighbor tied to a tree by her family, after she had tested positive for the virus. The family said they had bound her to prevent her from spreading the virus to the rest of the town.

After public outcry and police intervention, the family untied her. She now lives in an isolated room in the house, her every movement monitored by her family.

Mr. Shaikh said he had sold all his wife’s jewelry and borrowed money in order to afford the treatment his daughter needs.

“But how will the children from very poor families live?” he asked. “At the beginning, there was attention and an outcry, the patients were in the spotlight. Now, they are nearly forgotten.”

Correction: Oct. 26, 2019
An earlier version of this article misspelled the surname of a pediatrician who has been arrested and charged by the police in connection with the H.I.V. outbreak in Ratodero, Pakistan. He is Muzaffar Ghangro, not Ghangro.

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A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 27, 2019, Section A, Page 10 of the New York edition with the headline: Panic in Pakistani City After 900 Children Test Positive for H.I.V.
A NEW report by UNAIDS has some upsetting insights on Pakistan, which has been placed on a list of 11 countries with the highest prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS. While in other countries, HIV/AIDS cases are on the decline, there has been a worrying upsurge of the disease in Pakistan. According to the report, the number of HIV/AIDS patients in the country rose to over 160,000 in 2018. Of these, around 110,000 were men; 48,000 women; and 5,500 children under the age of 15. Approximately 6,400 died from the disease. A decade ago, in 2008, the number of patients living with HIV/AIDS in the country stood at 4,300, showing a considerable increase.

Undoubtedly, the number of patients would have risen even higher in 2019, in light of the sudden outbreak of the disease in Larkana in the past few months, particularly amongst children, some under the age of two.

For years, health researchers have been warning of the potential threat of an HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country, but an ostrich-like attitude and inability to talk about things as they are has resulted in the issue aggravating over the years. Because HIV/AIDS is still associated with what is condemned as socially deviant sexual activity, stigma surrounds the topic in our largely conservative society. HIV/AIDS was understood to be more prevalent amongst marginalised communities without access to treatment, such as the transgender population, drug addicts and commercial sex workers, but there is reason to believe it is increasingly spilling into the general population. In Larkana, for instance, the spread of the disease was traced to a single doctor reusing infected syringes on patients, though a JIT report cleared him of intentionally injecting the children with HIV/AIDS.

The cases in Larkana bring back memories of a small village in Sargodha in January 2018 when blood screening found 669 residents infected with the virus. It was largely blamed on a thriving quackery racket, where unsterilised equipment and infected syringes were used on an unsuspecting
population, many of them women and children. In later interviews with HIV/AIDS patients in Sargodha, few were aware of how the disease was spread and what implications it had for their health. Even more recently, a news story that failed to garner as much attention as Larkana stated that there were around 2,800 patients registered with the Punjab AIDS Control Programme for free medicines, hailing from five districts in the province. Most were unaware they had the disease until they underwent screenings while donating blood, travelling abroad or undergoing surgery. In a culture of shame and silence, and in the absence of a nationwide HIV/AIDS awareness programme, few know the facts about their illness or how to ask for help until it is too late.

Published in Dawn, July 30th, 2019
TAB 12
Dirty Needles, Social Stigma Contribute to Troubling HIV Outbreak in Pakistan: Public Health Watch

JUN 05, 2019 | BRIAN P. DUNLEAVY

The Trump administration may be talking about ending the HIV epidemic by 2030, and researchers may be touting a new treatment that effectively eliminates person-to-person transmission, but for children in Pakistan—not to mention other regions in the developing world—the virus is and will likely remain a very real threat.

That’s the underlying message, experts say, of recent reports regarding an outbreak of HIV among 494—and counting—children in the country’s Sindh province, in particular in the largest city in the region, Larkana. The city and province are located in the south-central part of Pakistan, not far from the border with regional rivals India. Indeed, most of the victims involved here are not part of a so-called “at-risk” group, other than being poor and lacking access to safe—and satisfactory—medical care. Wahid echoed the sources who spoke with NPR in blaming the Sindh outbreak on “unsafe medical practices, specifically use of contaminated syringes.” The NPR report also noted the lack of standards surrounding the provision of blood transfusions in the country. The pediatrician implicated in this recent case cluster. According to the NPR report, many of the initial confirmed cases involved children as young as 2 months old, and most of them were simply the patients of a local pediatrician whom, it was later revealed, is HIV-positive himself (although he has since told officials he was unaware of his status prior to the outbreak).

Such crimes are abhorrent, of course, but it would take a person with a particularly hardened heart to pursue such violent punishment against the victims of the most recent case cluster. According to the NPR report, many of the initial confirmed cases involved children as young as 2 months old, and most of them were simply the patients of a local pediatrician whom, it was later revealed, is HIV-positive himself (although he has since told officials he was unaware of his status prior to the outbreak).

“Almost all under-privileged countries of the world face similar problems,” Braira Wahid, an infectious disease researcher in the Department of Life Sciences at the University of Management and Technology in Lahore, Pakistan, told Contagion®. Wahid has published articles on similar outbreaks in the country in the past.

“Lack of awareness is a [major] problem,” Wahid explained. “Infected people don’t have enough courage to open up…and they prefer to stay undiagnosed because of the stigma attached with HIV/AIDS. An incident that happened last week—a husband killed his wife after she [was] found [to be] HIV positive. Upon being interviewed, he said he did this to save other family members because the disease is contagious and spread by touching and eating together.”

Closer to Larkana, she added, local officials have confirmed what’s being described as an “honor killing” of an HIV-positive person after the current outbreak became public.

“The infected communities do not have access to screening and treatment, or they can’t afford it. The global public health community should step forward and help us organize free HIV screenings to both children and adults. By May 20th, according to NPR, some 10,000 people in the area had been tested, with 607 found to be HIV-positive.

For local experts like Wahid, such efforts are, and should be, only the beginning.

“Poverty is also a major issue [in this case],” she said. “The infected communities need to access screening and treatment, or they can’t afford it. The global public health community should step forward and help us organize free HIV screenings to both children and adults.

“Working Toward a Cure for HIV: Where Are We? Is there a cure? How long until we find it? And will it work for the majority of people living with HIV?"
ISLAMABAD - Pakistan is registering approximately 20,000 new HIV infections annually, the highest rate of increase among all countries in the region, warns the World Health Organization (WHO).

The international body says mortality among Pakistanis living with the virus, which causes the deadly AIDS disease, is also rising, in spite of the availability of lifesaving antiretroviral therapy.

The latest government figures show that only 16 percent of the estimated 150,000 people living with HIV had been tested and only 9 percent have access to lifesaving treatment.

"The remaining 135,000 people are walking around in the communities as carriers of (HIV) infection who are ready to transmit infections to those who are not infected, even to their unborn babies," Dr. Saima Paracha of the National AIDS Control Program, told VOA.

Officials say the HIV epidemic in Pakistan remains largely concentrated among the key populations, including people who inject drugs, the transgender community, sex workers and their clients and men who have sex with men.
"The drivers of infection are now the sexual networks and they are ready to spill the infection into the general public," Dr. Paracha cautioned.

Paracha says the Pakistani government offers free HIV testing and treatment, but she notes the marginalized key populations continue face widespread stigma and discrimination in the society.

The fear of maltreatment, and punitive actions by law enforcers impacts the willingness of these populations to pursue testing, which remains a major challenge facing national efforts to treat and prevent the spread of HIV, she lamented.

Official estimates show that Pakistan has seen a 45 percent increase in new HIV infections since 2010.

"The number of new HIV infections will continue to increase dramatically if implementation rates of intervention remain at current levels," said Dr. Nima Saeed Abid, country head of WHO.

An official statement issued in connection with World AIDS Day quoted him as saying that Pakistan has the lowest rate of all regional countries in diagnosing people who are infected and linking them to care and treatment.

Naila Bashir, who heads the HIV treatment center at Islamabad's Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), told VOA the facility receives up to 40 new HIV patients every month, underscoring the alarming increase in the number of infections.

The center was established in 2005 and the number of patients has since increased from 22 to more than 3,000, including men, women and children of all ages, said Dr. Bashir.

HIV has never been a priority program in the national health system and the recent abolition of the federal health ministry and the devolution of its functions
to the provinces, which lacked preparedness and capacity, have led to the increase in infections, say WHO experts in the country. However, they acknowledge the new government of Prime Minister Imran Khan is giving priority to tackling health emergencies in Pakistan, including HIV.

Federal Minister for National Health Services Regulation and Coordination, Aamir Mehmood Kiyani, says the government is working on a strategy to remove barriers and challenges in protecting people from HIV infections.

Kiyani told a seminar in Islamabad that since taking office three months ago, the government has moved to established 12 new HIV treatment centers while overall 33 such facilities have been working throughout Pakistan.

U.N. officials say the Pakistan government urgently needs to redouble efforts to "de-stigmatize HIV testing, advocate for confidential, non-discriminatory, community based care models and raise awareness about disease transmission, prevention treatment" to achieve reductions in new infections in affected populations.

RELATED STORIES

**Science & Health**

**WHO: Fear, Stigma and Ignorance Keep AIDS Epidemic Going**

As the 30th World AIDS Day approaches, the World Health Organization says fear, stigma and ignorance are the reasons the AIDS epidemic is not over, because doctors can treat HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. With treatment, no one needs to die from AIDS, and those with the virus can't give it to someone else. In addition, with prevention therapy, no one needs to get infected. Dr. Jared Baeten, an HIV specialist at the University of Washington, says even...
By

Ayaz Gul
TAB 14
In Pakistan, HIV is still a taboo that leads to discrimination

Almen Tahir | March 06, 2016

Lahore: Nazir Masih, 58, an HIV/AIDS patient, became an outcast when he socially disclosed he was suffering from the deadly disease.

But he did not give up. Masih launched an organisation to help AIDS patients and spread awareness about the disease in the country.
“I was forced to drop out of school at the age of 11 as a breadwinner for my family. I tried working as a motor mechanic but earnings were low against long hours. I left the job and tried my luck working in Abu Dhabi. Things worked out and I went to the place where I worked as a domestic worker for a rich Arab family and earned enough money to send home,” says Nazir Masih, founder and CEO of New Life Aids Control Society.

Narrating his tale, he says: “A few years later, I returned to Lahore for marriage. I was earning well, but I could not afford to bring my wife to Abu Dhabi yet as I was living with two other men and I did not have appropriate accommodation for her.”

The absence of his wife in Abu Dhabi made it hard for Nazir to resist the temptation of visiting a brothel. “I am certain that I contracted the virus from one of the sex workers at the brothels I used to visit,” he says.

Nazir came to learn about the disease in 1990 when he visited Pakistan’s Embassy in Abu Dhabi for passport renewal and a visa.
extension which required a mandatory medical test for visa applicants.

“I took the medical test as a formality and was diagnosed as HIV positive, thus leading to my deportation to Pakistan.”

Shattered and heartbroken, Nazir was unable to cope with the harsh reality.

“My friends and neighbours started avoiding me.

“Our family would be treated with discrimination at all social gatherings; we were never invited to parties and social gathering. My entire family was being punished for my mistakes.”

He says he felt like an outcast, which ultimately led to three failed suicide attempts on his part.

“There were no medications or guidelines available for HIV carriers in Pakistan and my life was doomed in every sense,” Nazir recalls.

“Better late than never. With the help of a Christian charity organisation in Lahore, I was able to gather enough courage to fight HIV. I did that by initiating a platform called ‘New Life AIDS Control Society’ to raise awareness
regarding medication and treatment for HIV carriers in Pakistan since 1999.

“Over the years, through efforts at various fronts, I managed to introduce registered medicines for HIV in Pakistan in 2003.”

It also involved bringing 1,400 other HIV carriers including men, women and children on a platform for treatment, he says.

“I did this by going public with my HIV status and convincing their families get rid of fear of being rejected by society.

“I urged them to come forth and register themselves as HIV carriers for medication, hence making a breakthrough against the social stigma surrounding HIV carriers.”

According to USAID estimates, there are 94,000 individuals in Pakistan living with HIV, out of which 26,000 are females aged 15 and above, while 2,100 are children.

There have been 2,800 deaths due to HIV in Pakistan.

According to Pakistan Global AIDS Response Progress Report, Pakistan’s HIV epidemic started in the 1980s when cases surfaced
mostly amongst migrant workers employed abroad.

This stage of low prevalence continued for the next two decades when suddenly a surveillance study in Karachi exposed an epidemic amongst intravenous drug users in Karachi (26 per cent) and Larkana (9.7pc).

Pakistan is following an HIV epidemic trend having moved from low prevalence, high risk, to a more concentrated epidemic in the early 2000s.

Pakistan’s epidemic is primarily concentrated among two key population groups: people who are involved in intravenous drug use with a national prevalence of 27.2pc followed by transgender sex workers standing at 5.2pc, and male sex workers at 1.6pc.

Fortunately, prevalence in female sex workers is still low and accounts for 0.6pc of the cases.

According to Pakistan Global AIDS Response Progress Report, the epidemic trend is moving from low prevalence to high risk due to the steady increase in the number of persons injecting drugs regularly for non-therapeutic purposes.
Similarly, bisexual behaviour was reported by approximately 39.5% of the cases. Consistent condom use was very low at only 13% with paying partners, and even lower at 11% in the case of non-paying partners. Transgender persons are considered at a higher risk of acquiring HIV in Pakistan.

Pakistan Global Aids Response Progress report further states that female sex workers reported an average of three clients a day.

Condom use with clients was generally low as only 33.2% reported they always used a condom with their clients and 20.6% reported consistent condom use with non-paying partners. Hence, HIV prevalence in female sex workers is still low at 0.6% as opposed to other concentrated high risk groups.

In antenatal clinics, the report claims the disease has not yet spread amongst the general population – there are little to no cases of HIV and rare STDs in the population under study. Two other studies amongst men from the general population showed similar outcomes.

Though statistics show that HIV is a grave problem, the ban placed on condom advertisements in 2014 depicts how reluctant
the government of Pakistan is to address this serious issue.

Another HIV carrier from Rahim Yar Khan, who wishes to remain anonymous, told News Lens that he was diagnosed with HIV at a medical camp in Lahore in 2010.

The 29-year-old man said he became addicted to drugs in his teens. He used syringes to inject himself with drugs, which he would also share with fellow addicts.

After being diagnosed with HIV, his experiences were not very different from other HIV carriers in Pakistan.

He was reluctant to come forward and fight the disease, but after years of counseling, he not only registered as an HIV carrier for medical treatment but also quit drugs.

Talking to News Lens Pakistan, Faisal Majeed, Project Director, Provincial Aids Control Program, Punjab, said the government of Pakistan is working hard to prevent HIV transmission with measures such as safe blood transfusions, establishment of surveillance and dealing with HIV-related stigma.

The government had registered 14,705 HIV carriers across Pakistan till December 2015 but
fighting cultural ignominy is still a serious challenge.

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