

PAKISTAN 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Note: This report was updated 4/14/16; see Appendix F: Errata for more information.

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) replacing him. Orderly transitions in the military (chief of army staff) and the judiciary (Supreme Court chief justice) solidified the democratic transition. The military and intelligence services nominally reported to civilian authorities. Police generally reported to civilian authority.

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; 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.

Continuing terrorist violence and human rights abuses by nonstate actors contributed significantly to human rights challenges in the country. In June 2014 the government and military began Operation Zarb-e-Azb, a military campaign against militant and terrorist groups in North Waziristan; the operation later expanded to include areas throughout the country. Following a December 2014 Tehrik-i-Taliban attack on the Army Public School of Peshawar that killed 145 individuals, including 132 schoolchildren, the government announced a National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism. Under the NAP the government passed a

constitutional amendment, which established military courts to try civilians suspected of engaging in terrorism and related activities; the Supreme Court upheld the amendment in August. The government reinstated the death penalty after a seven-year hiatus.

Discrimination against religious minorities 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 problems. 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. On August 5, the Constitutional Court upheld a 2011 constitutional amendment that devolved many government responsibilities to the provinces, including for most human rights and labor functions. As a result human rights and labor legislation, enforcement, and practice varied from province to province.

Lack of government accountability remained a problem, and abuses often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity. Authorities seldom punished government officials for human rights violations.

Violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nongovernmental actors contributed to a culture of lawlessness in some parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, formerly known as the North West Frontier Province), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Between 2003 and November, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), militants killed 6,336 security force personnel and 20,790 civilians, while authorities killed 32,261 terrorists/insurgents.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

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. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid (SHARP) reported more than 960 civilian deaths after encounters with police, compared with 400 in 2014. Lengthy trial delays and failure to discipline and prosecute those responsible for killings contributed to a culture of impunity.

There were reports of alleged kidnapping and killing of individuals in Sindh. In July, Hyderabad Police and the National Database and Registration Authority confirmed that Sindhi nationalist leader Raja Dahir Bhanbhro had been killed and buried along a highway. Sindhi nationalist group Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM) claimed that Dahir was their general secretary and that law enforcement agencies killed him.

Allegations that killing of Baloch nationalists were politically motivated continued in Balochistan and Karachi. On August 28, the Voice of Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP) issued a report detailing the discovery of mutilated corpses in Noshki and Kalat districts of Balochistan and what VBMP termed the inadequate measures taken to preserve and identify the bodies.

According to a September report from the Balochistan Home Ministry, law enforcement forces killed 204 alleged terrorists in the province and injured 29 between December 2014 and September 15.

The SATP reported that journalists, teachers, students, and human rights defenders also were targeted in Balochistan. According to the SATP, as of November 8, at least 229 civilians were killed in Balochistan, compared with 301 during 2014. The Balochistan Home Ministry claimed that as of August, terrorist attacks had killed 143 civilians and injured 216 between January 1 and August 31.

There were reports of politically motivated killings by political factions or unknown assailants in Sindh. On April 24, gunmen killed well-known activist Sabeen Mahmud in Karachi after she hosted a discussion on Balochistan disappeared persons. Her driver, expected to be a witness in her murder case, was killed on September 7. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP), an independent NGO, 1,465 persons were killed in Karachi during the first nine months of the year, compared with 2,273 during the same period in 2014. Of those 69 were victims of sectarian violence, compared with 97 during the corresponding period in 2014.

The provincial government and political parties in Sindh and Punjab remained targets of attack. There was a significant increase in attacks on the Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), Pakistan People's Party, and government office holders. On August 16, militants killed Punjab Provincial Home Minister Shuja Khanzada and as many as 21 others in a suicide-bombing attack on his political office in Shadi Khan village, Attock district, Punjab. An offshoot of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed credit for the attack.

On August 18, unknown assailants in Karachi shot and severely wounded MQM politician Abdul Rashid Godil.

There were fewer targeted killings of political leaders in KP compared with previous years. A suicide attacker attempted to assassinate Qawmi Watun Party Chairman Aftab Sherpao in Charsadda, KP, on April 30, killing a police officer but leaving Sherpao unharmed. On September 5, ANP District Councilor Malik Mumtaz Khan was killed and three others injured in an attack using an improvised explosive device in KP's Hangu district.

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

A moratorium on capital punishment ended in December 2014, following the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. Human rights organizations reported concerns with rule of law and due process violations, including the execution of individuals who were allegedly under the age of 18 years when they 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) listed 156 individuals in its online database of missing persons who had been abducted during the year. The HRCP listed 107 individuals it claimed were victims of "enforced disappearances" in Balochistan in the first nine months of the year.

Karachi-based political party MQM alleged that the paramilitary Sindh Rangers kidnapped, tortured, and killed some of its members in ongoing security operations in Karachi. They claimed that as of August, 151 MQM members remained missing and that authorities killed 55 extrajudicially in the operations. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan called for a probe into extrajudicial killings and disappearances of MQM workers. The Sindh Home Ministry reported that since late 2013, the operation, which was continuing, arrested 10,438 persons and killed 464.

As of March the judicial commission of inquiry on missing persons listed 211 Sindh missing persons cases as “untraced.” The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances headed by Supreme Court Justice Javed Iqbal and retired law enforcement official Muhammad Sharif Virt received 2,722 missing persons cases between 2011 and March 31. The commission claimed to have disposed of 1,452 of those cases and to have traced 1,233 of the missing persons, while the rest of the cases remained open.

In March the KP Police presented a report to the federal Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances stating that police had investigated 1,066 missing-persons cases. Of those they had located 415 individuals, while 651 remained missing.

Government and NGO statistics on the number of persons who disappeared in Balochistan continued to diverge. The VBMP claimed the total number of persons who had disappeared could be greater than 19,000. The Balochistan National Movement claimed that a single security operation in Awaran district in July and August caused the death or abduction of 391 individuals. The online database of the International Voice for Baloch Missing Persons listed 156 individuals as having been abducted during the year, while the HRCP compiled a list of 107 individuals it claimed had been the victims of enforced disappearances in Balochistan during the year.

According to a September report from the Balochistan Home Ministry, in implementing the NAP, law enforcement forces arrested 8,326 “suspects” in the province between December 2014 and September 15.

During the year the VBMP claimed to have records of 157 mutilated bodies found in Balochistan and of 463 missing persons. Official Home Ministry of Balochistan figures indicated that authorities had recovered only 164 bodies in Balochistan during the year.

In March 2014 Zahid Baloch, Chairman of the Baloch Students Association Azad (BSO-A), was abducted from Quetta, Balochistan. BSO-A members alleged law enforcement personnel were responsible and launched a countrywide protest, including a 46-day hunger strike in Karachi. Zahid's whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

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 "hurt" but does not mention punishing perpetrators of torture. There are no legislative provisions specifically prohibiting torture. There were reports 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 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 police personnel employed cruel and degrading treatment and punishment. SHARP reported that police committed acts they described as torture in more than 6,000 cases, compared with 7,800 cases in 2014. Multiple sources reported that torture occasionally resulted in death or serious injury and was often underreported. Acts described by SHARP and other human rights organizations included beating with batons and whips, burning with cigarettes, whipping the soles of feet, prolonged isolation, electric shock, denial of food or sleep, hanging upside down, and forced spreading of the legs with bar fetters.

In July, *Dunya News* reported that 28-year-old Atif died in Faisalabad after being tortured in police custody. Police denied the allegations. In August the government executed Shafqat Hussain. His lawyers and other human rights organizations reported that authorities tortured him into confessing to murder.

Justice Project Pakistan said it documented scars and injuries that a forensic doctor attested were consistent with allegations of torture.

The practice of collective punishment continued in FATA and 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 NGOs expressed concern about the concept of collective responsibility, as authorities used employed to detain members of fugitives’ tribes, demolish their homes, confiscate or destroy their property, or lay siege to a fugitive’s village pending his surrender or punishment by his own tribe in accordance with local tradition.

The military operation Zarb-e-Azb 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 civil society and nongovernmental actors about possible abuses in these areas.

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 96,000, while claiming that the normal capacity of prisons was approximately 36,000.

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

SHARP reported 21 deaths in jails during the year, compared with 46 in 2014.

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. In a 2013 raid on the Dera Ismail Khan prison, the TTP freed hundreds of inmates, including high-profile militants.

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. The Center for Legal Aid and Assistance reported that 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 of time, sometimes for more than a year. The government asserted that this treatment was for the individual's safety.

Authorities held women separately from men in some, but not all, prisons. Balochistan has no women's prison; officials claimed that they housed women in separate barracks in Quetta and Lasbela district prisons.

Police often did not segregate detainees from convicted criminals. Prisoners with mental illness usually lacked adequate care, and authorities did not separate them from the general prison population.

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 spent long periods behind bars because they could not afford bail. Rather than being rehabilitated, child prisoners often became hardened criminals by spending long periods in the company of adult prisoners.

The Juvenile Justice System Ordinance, which outlines the treatment of juveniles in the justice system, did not extend its protections 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, as in the case of Shafqat Hussain who claimed to be 14 when he committed the crime for which he was convicted. SHARP 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 the criminal justice system, sentencing alternatives come in the form of bail during pretrial, fines and probation during sentencing, and parole post-sentencing. While the courts regularly used fines and bail as alternatives to jail for nonviolent offenders, courts did not extend probation and parole as readily. There are departments to deal with probationers and parolees, but SPARC, SHARP, and other organizations noted these departments were understaffed, underfunded, and lacked material resources.

There is an ombudsman for detainees, with a central office in Islamabad as well as 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 confrontation with the jail authorities they have complained about.

The constitution mandates that religious minority prisoners have places to worship inside jails. It was unclear whether 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 Pakistan-administered Kashmir 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 June 3, a known Balochi-language poet was taken from his home in Pasni, on Balochistan's southern coast, along with his adult son. Initial press reports asserted that they had been abducted by unknown militants, but family members claimed that father and son were in the custody of security forces. Several days later, the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) Balochistan held a press conference at which the poet appeared, apologized for his "radical" poetry, and urged separatist militants to surrender. On June 16, authorities released him and his son. Baloch activists asserted that he made his statement under duress.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Police have primary domestic security responsibilities for most of the country. Local police are under the Ministry of Interior. 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. The military is responsible for external security.

The FCR provides the framework for law and order in FATA, implemented through appointed political agents who report to the governor of KP Province. 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. In other instances parents often represent their children, and men often represent their female relatives. Additionally, observers

often criticized the FCR for several 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 the right 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, which report to the Ministry of Interior in peacetime and the army in times of conflict; the Frontier Constabulary, which patrols the area between FATA and KP and also operates in FATA; Khasadars (hereditary tribal police); and FATA levies, which help the political agent maintain order. Tribal leaders convene lashkars (tribal militias), to deal with temporary law and order disturbances, but are a private tribal militia and not a formal law enforcement entity.

Police effectiveness varied by district, ranging from good to ineffective.

Failure to punish abuses contributed to a climate of impunity throughout the country. 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 Human Rights Commission, established in May, may not inquire into any complaints against intelligence agencies or armed forces, and must refer such complaints to the competent authorities concerned.

In July 2014 the president signed into law the Protection of Pakistan Act after the government and opposition passed a consensus bill in the National Assembly. The law gives law enforcement agencies and military services broad powers to arrest and detain militants. It also authorizes the establishment of a separate legal structure for the prosecution of persons charged with terrorism-related offenses. The law grants civilian police powers to the armed forces (when acting in aid of civilian power), and it allows law enforcement officers above the most junior grades, as well as any member of the armed forces or civil armed forces, to shoot a person who violates the act. Human rights groups expressed concern that the act would undermine citizens' universal rights and freedoms in an effort to bolster

national security. In an attempt to address such concerns, legislators amended the original ordinance to reduce the time a suspect could be detained without charge (from 90 to 60 days), to require law enforcement officers to warn suspects before firing at them, and to “sunset” the law after two years, among other concessions.

During the year the government continued to use the military to support domestic security. In July 2014 the prime minister invoked article 245 of the constitution, calling on the military to support the civilian government to maintain law and order in Islamabad. Observers viewed the decision as necessary to bolster the capital’s security after military operation Zarb-e-Azb raised government concerns of retaliatory attacks from militant groups. Paramilitary forces, including Rangers and the frontier constabulary, provided security to some areas of Islamabad and continued active operations in Karachi. In KP military and paramilitary personnel supported civilian security forces in guarding 360 polling stations for the July 30 local election repolling. Opposition parties demanded army assistance for the repolling following the May 30 KP Province local elections, which they claimed were insufficiently secure. Paramilitary FC forces continued active security operations in Balochistan.

In January, 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 will expire after two years. On August 5, the Supreme Court upheld this use of military courts, while retaining its 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. According to an August 24 article in the English-language newspaper, *Dawn*, the government passed a regulation in February to allow the courts also to try approximately 6,000 civilian detainees captured in military operations throughout the country since 2009 and held in more than 40 internment centers throughout FATA and KP.

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. On March 15, suicide attackers struck two churches in Lahore’s majority-Christian Youhanabad neighborhood, killing at least 15 persons. Crowds killed two Muslim individuals immediately following the attack. Police later arrested five individuals alleged to have participated in planning the attack on the church. On June 30,

police in a village in Punjab's Sheikhpura district rescued Christians from a mob threatening to lynch them for committing blasphemy and arrested a local imam for inciting the crowd. As in previous years, the Punjab provincial government conducted regular training in technical skills and protection of human rights for police at all levels.

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; police can file FIRs on their own initiative. An 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 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.

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 foreign embassies or consulates. At times foreign diplomats could meet with prisoners when they appeared in court but had to request clearance from the Ministry of Interior 20 days in advance to visit prisoners. Often the requests were not answered in time, and sometimes with incorrect information about the location of a prisoner.

There was a functioning bail system. SHARP and other 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 or upon payment of bribes. NGOs reported that authorities sometimes denied bail in blasphemy cases on the grounds that such 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 21st Amendment.

The government provided state-funded legal counsel to prisoners facing the death penalty, but 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 that police detained individuals arbitrarily to extort bribes for their release or detained relatives of wanted individuals to compel suspects to surrender.

Pretrial Detention: Police routinely held persons in investigative detention without seeking a magistrate's approval, and often held detainees without charge until a court challenged the detention. When asked to do so, magistrates generally approved investigative detention without requiring justification. When they 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 their 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 establishes courts for corruption cases. Suspects may be detained for 15 days without charge (renewable with judicial concurrence) and, may be denied access to counsel prior to being charged, but the NAB rarely exercised these powers. 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 individuals preventively 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 right 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 and PATA and in 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. Although these conditions were improving, family members often were not allowed prompt access to detainees.

The 2011 Actions in Aid of Civil Power Regulation provides the military with 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. Others noted the regulation established a legal framework to regulate military actions in FATA and PATA where none previously existed, providing for the registration of registration, a legal process for their transfer from military to civilian authorities for prosecution, and an appeals process for detainees and their relatives. Detainee transfers to internment centers continued on a regular basis.

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. 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 systems, costly litigation, 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, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (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 September 21, two unknown persons killed a police officer set to be a key witness in May 13 Safoora Chowk bombings that killed 45 members of the Ismaili community.

Informal justice systems lacking institutionalized legal protections continued, especially in rural areas, and often resulted in human rights abuses. Feudal landlords and other community leaders in Sindh and Punjab, and tribal leaders in Pashtun and Baloch areas, at times held local council meetings (known as panchayats or jirgas), in defiance of 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. The Pashtunwali code of conduct obligates a man, his family, and his tribe to take revenge for wrongs, real or perceived, to redeem their honor.

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 stated 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 for security reasons, which were valid in most cases and extended to the accused, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and witnesses. NGOs voiced 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 special courts 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 ATA had been incorrectly applied, authorities returned 15 percent of cases initially brought to ATCs to regular courts, according to Punjab's prosecutor general. NGOs commented, however, 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 provide speedy trials and had significant case backlogs.

The government instituted military courts for civilian trials, which try civilians on terrorism and related charges. Trials in military courts are not public (see section 1.d.).

The Federal Shariat Court (FSC) typically reviewed cases 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 enforcing punishments for extramarital sex, false accusations of extramarital sex, theft, and drinking alcohol.

The Supreme Court subsequently ruled that in cases in which a provincial high court decided in error to hear an appeal in a Hudood case, the shariat courts lacked 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 shariat courts may overturn legislation judged inconsistent with Islamic tenets, but such cases 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 used laws prohibiting blasphemy discriminatorily 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.

On July 22, the Supreme Court suspended the death sentence of Aasia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy in 2010, pending its decision on her appeal. Bibi has 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 November 2014.

On October 7, the Supreme Court upheld the guilty verdict of Mumtaz Qadri, who killed the then provincial governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer. Qadri killed Taseer for publicly criticizing the blasphemy laws. The Supreme Court's written judgment on the case said that criticism of the blasphemy laws was not blasphemy and did not justify vigilante violence. (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 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 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 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.

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

The law requires court-issued warrants for property searches. Police sometimes ignored this requirement and on occasion 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, and the media. These services included the InterServices 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. Use of Excessive Force and Other Abuses in Internal Conflicts

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 safehavens. In June 2014 the military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb, a comprehensive 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, more than 2,130 terrorists were killed. 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 potential 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 Sindhi, Baloch, and Pashtun migrants, shifting the balance between 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. Numerous militants died in clashes with security forces in Punjab and elsewhere in the country. On July 29, security forces killed Malik Ishaq, leader of the violent anti-Shi’a extremist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), along with his two sons and 11 other supporters. Many observers believed that the security forces orchestrated at least some of these killings.

Militant and terrorist bombings in all four provinces and in FATA also killed hundreds of persons and wounded thousands. According to the SATP, up until mid-September estimated terrorist and violent extremist attacks and operations to

combat insurgency resulted in 2,895 deaths, of which 702 were civilians, 243 were security forces, and 1,950 were terrorists or insurgents.

Government security personnel remained a target of militant attacks. According to the SATP, as of mid-October militants had killed 6,318 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 September 1, a suicide bomber who was attempting to attack the local assistant political agent in Khyber Agency's Jamrud area killed six individuals, including a Khasadar (tribal police) member. TTP claimed responsibility for the attack, which left the assistant political agent uninjured.

On September 7 and 8, Lashkar-e-Islam militants abducted approximately 20 members of the local peace militia in the Qamar Khel area of Khyber Agency, killing at least 11.

There were reports that groups prohibited by the government conducted attacks against civilians in Balochistan. On April 11, 20 laborers, reportedly from the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, were killed in an attack claimed by the Balochistan Liberation Army. The United Baloch Army claimed responsibility for a May 29 attack in which it singled out and killed 22 Pashtun bus passengers. On July 5, four Punjabi laborers were killed in Gwadar district in an attack claimed by the Baloch Republican Army.

Sectarian violence also continued throughout the country. According to the SATP, sectarian attacks from January to mid-November resulted in the deaths of 249 individuals in 51 incidents, compared with 204 deaths in 84 incidents in 2014. On February 13, TTP militants attacked a Shi'a mosque in Peshawar's Hayatabad district, killing 20 worshippers.

In January a suicide bomber killed 62 Shi'a Muslims at a religious center in Shikarpur, Sindh. Additionally, continuing attacks against Hazara Shi'as, often perpetrated by violent extremist groups, claimed at least 146 lives.

On October 23, a suicide bomber attacked a Shi'a Muharram procession in Jacobabad in upper Sindh, killing 27. LeJ claimed responsibility for the attack. On October 22, LeJ bombed a mosque and killed 11 Shi'a Muslims in rural Kacchi district of Balochistan.

Abductions: There were reports that militant groups kidnapped or took civilians hostage in FATA, KP, Punjab, and Balochistan. According to media reports, on August 23, police in Balochistan rescued two kidnapped foreigners, one Tanzanian and one Nigerian national. Both were allegedly kidnapped for ransom.

Militants who kidnapped the Ali Haider Gilani, son of former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani in 2013, did not release him during the year, but according to media reports, the former prime minister received a phone call from his son in May.

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 that the acts they committed were justified. The government operated a center in Swat to rehabilitate and educate former child soldiers.

Other Conflict-related Abuses: Militants 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.

During the year militants killed at least eight persons in KP/FATA and Balochistan in attacks against polio vaccination campaigns; other health workers and support staff remained missing at the end of the reporting period. Polio campaigns included armed escorts for vaccination staff provided by the government. Security forces reportedly foiled at least one attack during a September antipolio campaign.

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 restrictions. In addition threats, harassment, violence, and killings led journalists and editors to practice self-censorship.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: According to the constitution, every citizen has the right to free speech, subject to “any reasonable restriction imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam” or the integrity, security, or defense of the country. The law permits citizens to criticize the government publicly or privately, but criticism of the military could result in political or commercial reprisal from government entities. Blasphemy laws restricted 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 government. The press addressed the persecution of minorities. By law the government may restrict information that might be prejudicial to the national interest. Threats and violence against journalists who reported on sensitive problems such as security-force abuse occurred during the year.

There were numerous, 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, Inter-Services Public Relations. The government-owned Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation 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.

Private cable and satellite channels broadcast domestic news and criticized the government. Private radio stations existed in major cities, but their licenses prohibited news programming. Some channels evaded this restriction by discussing news in talk shows. International radio broadcasts, including the BBC, were normally available. There was complete blockage of transmissions of Indian television news channels.

On August 20, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) released the The Electronic Media (Programs and Advertisements) Code of Conduct, which was effective immediately. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the 24-point guideline sets strict limits for on-air news coverage and commentary on television and radio.

On November 2, PEMRA prohibited media from covering the activities of any militant organizations banned by the government, reportedly to bring the country into compliance with UN terrorism-related sanctions regimes. The NAP also bans “the glorification of terrorism and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media.”

Violence and Harassment: Security forces, political parties, militants, and other groups subjected media outlets, journalists, and their families to violence and harassment. Security forces abducted journalists. Media outlets that did not practice self-censorship were often the targets of retribution. Additionally, journalists working in remote and often conflict-ridden areas lacked basic digital security as well as traditional security skills, which placed additional pressure on them to self-sensor themselves or, in some cases, not cover a story at all.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, there were instances in which journalists were killed, physically attacked, harassed, intimidated, kidnapped, and subjected 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.

On June 28, armed men killed journalist Zafarullah Jatak at his home in Balochistan. The media reported that on November 10, unidentified persons abducted journalist Afzal Mughal from his home in Quetta. They released him 15 hours later after asking him “hundreds of questions” about his “family, professional life, and phone calls from banned militant groups that he said he had received as part of his job.”

On September 8, gunmen fired on a van owned by the private satellite news channel *Geo TV*, killing a technician and wounding the driver. On November 3, TTP claimed credit for killing journalist Zaman Mehsud. According to news reports, TTP said they killed Mehsud because he was “writing against them.”

Information minister Pervaiz Rashid announced a financial assistance program of one million Pakistani rupees (approximately \$10,000) for families of journalists killed in the line of duty and 300,000 rupees (approximately \$3,000) for the injured.

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 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 have used libel and slander laws in the past to counter public discussion of their actions.

In May, PEMRA issued a blanket ban on all transmissions deemed to be against the judiciary, Pakistan army, or various law enforcement agencies. PERMA issued

the directive in reaction to 14 news channels airing a controversial speech on May 1 by MQM party leader Altaf Hussain that was critical of the military.

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 an ongoing military operation.

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 detained, threatened, expelled, or otherwise obstructed a number of reporters who covered the conflict in FATA, KP, and Balochistan.

Internet Freedom

There were reports that the government restricted internet access and monitored internet use, e-mail, and internet chat rooms. In 2012 the government began a systematic, nationwide content-monitoring and filtering system to restrict or block “unacceptable” content, including material that is 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. In its *Freedom in the World Report* for 2015, Freedom House claimed that the government blocked more than 200,000 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.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance, 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.

There were restrictions on internet traffic during the year. The government continued to block access to YouTube (begun in 2012) and restricted access to other social media websites.

Freedom House noted that high-profile individuals came under increased scrutiny on the internet. In January a pop star turned Muslim evangelist faced blasphemy accusations when his video making controversial remarks went viral online. The evangelist later filmed an apology, but mounting pressure forced him to leave for the United Kingdom.

NGO and internet-freedom contacts continued to report that government surveillance online was a concern and that there were indications of the use of surveillance software.

Internet usage was limited. There were approximately 17 million internet subscribers and an estimated 30 million persons with some kind of internet access in a population of approximately 199 million. Broadband penetration remained very low at only 5.12 percent.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government generally did not restrict academic freedom. 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 minor 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.

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.

Several protests, strikes, and demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, took place throughout the country. The government rejected political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) request to hold a demonstration in Islamabad on October 4, citing security restrictions that limit all public rallies and gatherings in the red-zone section of the city.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association subject to certain restrictions imposed by law. The country has begun to implement new regulations governing international NGOs (INGOs). Observers believed some aspects of the policy could potentially constrict INGO operating space.

On June 11, the government ordered the INGO Save the Children to close and its foreign staff to depart within 15 days, but later rescinded that decision. In July the government announced that the mandate for INGO registration would shift from the Ministry of Finance's Economic Affairs Division to the Ministry of Interior, and all INGOs needed to reregister via an online registration system. As of the end of the year, the government had not rejected any INGO registrations. In October the government announced new policies governing the registration and activities of INGOs. The policies included bans on INGO participation in "political activities"

and “antistate activities,” but neither defined these terms nor indicated what body would be responsible for arbitrating claims against INGOs. Many INGOs expressed concern that authorities would use these prohibitions to curtail work on projects related to governance or human rights advocacy. The government stated that the new policy and registration process were needed to improve oversight over domestic and international NGOs, to clarify the regulations that govern their work, and to improve the tracking of the foreign funding that supports them. INGOs continued to experience challenges in obtaining visas for foreign staff and “no-objection certificates” (NOCs) for in-country travel.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

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 FATA, KP, and Balochistan, often due to security concerns, hindered freedom of movement. The government required NOCs for travel to areas 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.” 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 (ECL) 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.

In August and again in September, the government announced its intention to remove approximately 5,000 names from the ECL. The minister of interior reportedly cited historical abuse of the process for adding persons to the list, or keeping persons on it, as grounds for the list’s adjustment. The minister said that, “in future people would be placed on the ECL only on the recommendations of defense institutions, intelligence agencies, high courts, and the Supreme Court.” The minister further announced that persons added to the list would have a month in which to “prove the inclusion wrong.”

Internally Displaced Persons

Both natural disasters and conflict resulted in internal displacement. The National Disaster Management Authority reported approximately 1.5 million persons as displaced due to monsoon floods across the country during the year.

Large population displacements also occurred as a result of militant activity and military operations in KP and FATA. Although an estimated 1.6 million persons affected by conflict returned home in 2013 and 2014, at the beginning of the year 1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) continued to live with host communities, in rented accommodations, or in camps. The government and UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF collaborated to assist and protect those affected by conflict and to assist in their return home. 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. Several IDP populations settled in informal settlements outside of major cities like Lahore and Karachi. City authorities evicted IDPs in Islamabad and Muzaffarabad and bulldozed squatter settlements to restore land rights to owners.

According to the FATA Disaster Management Authority, military operations in North Waziristan Agency displaced approximately 72,000 families and the Khyber-1 Operation in Khyber Agency displaced an additional 38,000 families.

The number of IDPs fluctuated due to militant activity and military operations. Those displaced by conflict generally resided with host families, in rented accommodations, or to a lesser extent, in camps.

More than 13,000 unregistered IDPs returned home from March to September. According to the Political Administration Khyber Agency, 1,536 unregistered female-headed households were among these returns. Approximately 21 percent of all returns were female-headed households. On September 10, returns involving the Kamar Khel tribe of Bara Khyber Agency began with the remaining caseload of 7,073 families, 500 of whom resided inside Jalozai Camp. An estimated 1,023 Kamar Khel families had already returned with other tribes. More than 700 families from the lower and central tehsils of Orakzai Agency living in Togh Serai Camp returned by September 30. More than 4,500 off-camp families of upper Kurram returned by September 30.

As of September 3, the UN Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 215,313 families remained displaced outside of FATA. With average family size of six persons, 86,861 families that registered with government authorities have returned to their homes. According to government sources, approximately 987 families returned to 11 villages in South Waziristan, including 313 unregistered families. Khyber returns continued while authorities postponed returns to North Waziristan until further notice.

The government required humanitarian organizations assisting civilians displaced by military operations to request NOCs to access Mohmand and Kurram 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. Although government authorities encouraged IDPs to return to officially cleared areas, the vast majority of displaced families were unable or unwilling to go home. This was due to what many families regarded as inadequate compensation and assistance for returnees, persistent insecurity, and damaged housing. 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 were vulnerable to the disease due to the Taliban-imposed ban on immunizations. Many families delayed their return to gain regular access to health care. 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 six to nine months to IDPs who returned to their areas of origin.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: No legislation provides for 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, the government in most cases provided protection against expulsion or involuntary repatriation of registered refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened. The country cooperated with UNHCR in managing an Afghan refugee population. The pace of voluntary repatriation rose in 2014 and 2015 due to the impending expiration of proof of registration (PoR) cards on December 31 (they were provisionally extended at the end of the year) and to and stricter enforcement of the law under the NAP, which frequently complicated refugee access to education, livelihood, and housing outside refugee camps.

The two voluntary repatriation centers operated during the year in Quetta and Peshawar. The Ministerial Committee on Refugees adopted measures to document unregistered Afghans and to provide them with identification cards. The government does not accord Afghan refugees Pakistani citizenship.

A 2013 cabinet decision extended the validity of the PoR cards--official documents held by registered refugees that allowed them to remain legally in the country--until December 31 and renewed the Tripartite Agreement between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and UNHCR to consult on and resolve refugee problems. As of January, Afghans holding expired cards were no longer considered persons of concern to UNHCR. Pakistan announced a provisional extension of 1.5 million PoR cards for Afghans on December 30. UNHCR and refugee-affiliated NGOs have expressed concern that Afghan refugees could face heightened exposure to arrest, harassment, and detention by local law enforcement without a formal extension of PoR cards.

The government generally abstained from forcibly returning Afghans with PoR cards, and during the year UNHCR received reports of only 17 deportations of PoR cardholders, who reportedly returned to Pakistan and rejoined their families after their initial deportation. As of September the International Organization for Migration recorded the deportation of 9,295 unregistered Afghans. Another 79,105

undocumented migrants spontaneously returned to Afghanistan between January and September. Return levels remain higher than in previous years, with 4,003 returns in August compared with 2,515 returns in August 2014. Concerns remained among government and humanitarian partners regarding the long-term reintegration of returnees into host communities in Afghanistan due to a deteriorating security situation and economic downturn.

Nearly one-third of registered Afghans lived in one of 22 refugee villages. The remaining two-thirds lived in host communities, whether in rural or urban areas.

Refugee Abuse: Police in many cases demanded bribes from refugees. There were firsthand accounts of members of the intelligence services harassing refugees.

Refugees faced societal discrimination from local communities, whose members resented economic competition and blamed refugees for high crime rates and terrorism. Single women, woman-headed households, and children working on the streets were particularly vulnerable to abuse and trafficking. Provincial officials in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and nationwide cited the presence of Afghan “refugees”--without differentiating between PoR cardholders, migrants, and temporary visitors --as the cause for deteriorating law and order in major cities. Public comments blaming Afghan refugees for the December 2014 terrorist attack on the Peshawar Army Public School, which resulted in 150 casualties, most of them children, led to the tightening of asylum space for refugees nationwide. In this context politicians made remarks opposing the extension of PoR cards and calling for the forced encampment or deportation of Afghan refugees.

Employment: Refugees could not legally work, but many worked as day laborers or in informal markets. 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: Afghan refugees could avail themselves of the services of police and courts, but some, particularly the poor, were afraid to do so. 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. Afghan refugees received health services at all government health facilities without discrimination. There were no reports of refugees denied access to a health facility

because of their nationality. In many instances local governments determined which rights and services Afghan refugees could use.

There were a number of Afghan private schools, including those funded through foreign assistance, but Afghan children usually could attend the country's primary schools. 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 on the basis of their PoR cards. Afghan students were eligible to seek admission to Pakistani public and private colleges and universities, and the government issued 7,000 scholarships to Afghan students in public colleges and universities.

Durable Solutions: A Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas program seeks to increase support for impoverished Pakistani communities hosting a refugee population. It is a joint initiative among the government, United Nations, and implementing partners under the framework of the UN Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. It was launched in 2009, and the government extended the initiative to the entire country in 2013.

The government did not accept refugees for resettlement from other countries and did not facilitate local integration. While the government had no system to confer refugee status or asylum, it generally abstained from forcibly returning foreigners with asylum certificates or refugee cards granted by UNHCR, which had responsibility for determining refugee status in the absence of government procedures.

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 breakups 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 elections based on universal and equal suffrage, and citizens generally exercised this ability. Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK, and FATA have

political systems that differ from the rest of the country. FATA 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 Frontier Crimes Regulations, as amended in 2011. No local government elections were held in FATA, even as the country's other provinces elected local representatives. The elected councils in FATA, set up to provide local representation within the tribal areas, did not have an active role in governing the tribal areas. 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 some internal debate over the possibility of FATA's integration into KP Province to normalize its administration. In the 2013 national elections, voter turnout was low in some tribal agencies where military operations were common. Some IDPs had difficulty casting their votes due to security concerns.

AJK has an interim constitution, an elected unicameral assembly, a prime minister, and a president elected by the assembly. AJK residents had the ability to choose their government through elections and generally exercised this ability, but the federal government controlled and influenced the structures of the AJK government and its electoral politics. The military also retained a guiding role on politics and governance. 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 replaced 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. Voter turnout was high, with the chief election commissioner initially claiming that 60 percent of eligible voters participated in the elections. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems reported a 54 percent voter turnout, and Gallup Pakistan indicated a 55 percent turnout. Political analysts credited greater participation by women and young adult voters for the high turnout rate. The elections marked a democratic milestone: For the first time since independence in 1947, one elected government peacefully completed its five-year term and transferred power to another civilian government. While judged to be mostly free and fair, some independent observers and political parties raised concerns about some election irregularities. In one district (Dera Ismail Khan), polling was postponed for security reasons.

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. The speaker again won his district's by-election in October. The railways minister remained in office pending the resolution of his appeal before the Supreme Court, and the ECP scheduled a by-election for the third district for December 23, which the incumbent lost.

NGOs accused local leaders in Dir in KP Province of not allowing women to vote in a by-election for a new member of the National Assembly following the disqualification of the original member due to a fake educational degree. The by-election was declared null and void, and women voted in the subsequent repolling.

Balochistan concluded local elections in January and KP Province in May. In Balochistan January's peaceful ballot concluded a nearly two-year process of local government elections, marked by lengthy delays. Punjab and Sindh held local elections for the first time in 10 years in three phases in October, November, and December. Independent monitors identified problems of capacity in ECP's administration of the polls but found no evidence of systematic interference. The

Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) conducted its first local election ever on November 30.

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, including Anusha Rehman Khan, Minister of State for Information Technology, Telecommunications, and Saira Afzal Tarar, Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination.

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. An April 2014 report by Transparency International asserted that the major causes of corruption were lack of accountability and low salaries. 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 National Accountability Bureau (NAB) serves as the highest-level anticorruption organization, with a mandate to eliminate corruption through awareness, prevention, and enforcement. The NAB launched a series of high-profile corruption inquiries against politicians and government officials. As of December, one of five cases against former president Zardari remained pending before the NAB, while four had been dismissed. Reports indicated that in December, authorities reinstated the NAB chair after he faced an investigation regarding his alleged involvement in a high-profile corruption scandal.

The 2007 National Reconciliation Ordinance provides an amnesty mechanism for public officials accused of corruption, embezzlement, money laundering, murder, and terrorism between 1986 and 1999. In 2009 the Supreme Court declared the ordinance null and void and reopened all 8,000 cases against those who received amnesty, including the president, ministers, and parliamentarians.

KP's accountability (ehtesab) commission, established in January 2014, became active during the year, investigating and arresting approximately 25 individuals on suspicion of corruption in the province. Authorities intended the 2013 Pakhtunkhwa Right to Public Services Act as a mechanism for oversight over the performance of public servants in the province. In line with this measure, authorities subjected a public servant who failed to provide public services expected of him within a stipulated period of time to disciplinary proceedings and punishment, including a fine.

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, as well as the assets and liabilities of their spouses and dependent children. 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 1973 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 under the National Accountability Ordinance. Under this ordinance 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.

According to the Representation of People Act, political parties and politicians must file annual financial accounting reports declaring their assets and liabilities. This provision 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 ordinance for having too many exempt categories and for not encouraging proactive disclosure.

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.). These regulations include a prohibition of INGO involvement in “antistate activities” or “political activities.” Some civil society actors have expressed concern that the language could be misused to restrict legitimate work such as governance support or human rights advocacy. There are no reports to date that the government found an INGO in violation of this regulation.

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 May.

Civil society groups lobbied the new government to reestablish an independent ministry of human rights, but this was not done during the year.

In May the government constituted its first National Human Rights Commission.

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

The constitution provides for equality for all citizens and broadly prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, caste, residence, or place of birth, but significant governmental and societal discrimination occurred based on each of these factors.

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 they 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. Media reported at least one rape conviction in October, with the accused reportedly receiving a 12-year prison sentence. Spousal rape is not a crime.

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 complaint to be made 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. While this procedure was meant to eliminate police and societal abuses, NGOs reported it created other barriers for rape victims who could not afford to travel to or access the courts. Rape was a severely underreported crime.

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. The Aurat Foundation reported in 2014 that 1,515 women were raped with 1,408 instances in Punjab, 85 in Sindh, five in KP, four in Balochistan, and 13 in the Islamabad Capital Territory.

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. While the use of post-rape medical testing increased during the year, 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.

In 2010 the FSC declared several clauses of the Women's Protection Act un-Islamic and unconstitutional. The verdict sought to reinstate certain provisions of the 1979 Hudood Ordinance and expand the FSC's jurisdiction in cases of adultery and false accusations of adultery. Reinstatement of these provisions could permit reintroduction of adultery charges against female rape victims. In 2011 the federal government appealed the FSC's decision to the Supreme Court, which had not set a hearing date by year's end. In 2013 the nongovernmental Council of Islamic Ideology, which advises Parliament and the prime minister, rejected the Women's Protection Act, saying it was contrary to the spirit of the Koran and sharia.

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.

In 2014 Balochistan's Provincial Assembly passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, which criminalizes many forms of domestic violence in addition to physical abuse, which is already covered under the penal code. The legislation made domestic violence legislation in Balochistan similar to legislation enacted by the Sindh Assembly in 2013.

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 and more education was needed.

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 (approximately \$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. In November the Punjab government broke ground on a pilot Violence Against Women Center in Multan, which would provide legal, medical, psychological, and other aid, and serve as a model for other centers in the province.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: At times women were victims of various types of societal violence and abuse, including honor killings, forced marriages, imposed isolation, and being used 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 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” (karo) 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.

Human rights groups criticized the federal law banning so-called honor killings because it allows the victim or the victim’s heirs to negotiate physical or monetary restitution with the perpetrator in exchange for dropping charges. NGO leaders commented that in many instances a member of the victim’s family, such as a father or brother, carried out the honor killing, and the new guardian or heir was a brother or cousin, which meant the negotiation was often moot.

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 February media reported that a brother killed his sister in an alleged karo-kari case, and, while a case was registered with police, they were unable to arrest the accused. In April police arrested Muhammad Siddique and his father after they set the son’s wife, Shabana Bibi, on fire for leaving the house without asking permission.

The practice of cutting off a woman’s nose or ears, especially in connection with honor crimes, was frequently reported, but authorities often did not take action to combat the practice.

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 Koran,” forcing a female family member to stay unmarried to avoid division of property. Property of women married to the Koran 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.

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 Koran, including forcing her to take an oath on the Koran 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 to 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 brought to justice. According to a panel organized by the HRCP in October, more than 98 percent of registered acid-attack cases remained unresolved. The HRCP alleged that authorities registered 150 to 400 cases of acid attacks each year. In May, two women suffered burn injuries when a man, in a case of personal enmity, threw acid on them as they walked home. Police arrested the attacker.

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 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. A press report indicated that the social media also targeted young female doctors for harassment.

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. Couples and individuals did not have the right to attain the highest standard

of reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. 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 during 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 2014, 28 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 170 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013, a rate attributed to lack of information and services. Few women in rural areas had access to skilled attendants during childbirth, including essential obstetrics and postpartum care. According to UNICEF, deteriorating security, which caused displacement and affected access to medical services, especially in KP and FATA hindered the situation for mothers and children.

According to 2014 statistics published by the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS, 94,000 persons, including 26,000 women, had HIV; 2,800 persons died due to AIDS in 2014.

Discrimination: Women faced legal and economic discrimination. The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, but authorities did not enforce it. 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 (see section 7.d.).

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 post-secondary 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.

The penal code defines statutory rape as sexual intercourse with a girl younger than age 16. The punishment for rape is death or 10 to 25 years' imprisonment and a fine. Gang rape is punishable by death or life imprisonment.

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 March 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.

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 (see section 6).

In 2013 Sindh passed the Early Child Marriage Act, which criminalizes marriages to children under the age of 16. Despite this legislation Sindh has not effectively stopped the practice of early child marriage. On October 19, Sukkur police recovered three missing girls from a village in northern Sindh, who claimed local authorities married them to men in the village against their free will. The Punjab provincial assembly passed a law in March 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 years of age.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Local authorities subjected children to harmful traditional practices such as “swara,” the use of women to settle disputes and debts.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: 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, engaged in forced begging at bus terminals and on the side of the road and experienced sexual and physical abuse.

In August an investigation revealed that criminals sexually abused an estimated 280 children to produce child pornography in Kasur, Punjab. Following media disclosure of the activity, the HRCP undertook an independent investigation that found evidence of abuse of a large number of children. A special panel subsequently created by the government to investigate the incident found evidence to substantiate claims of abuse against only 19 children and brought charges against 17 individuals.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: According to the Edhi Foundation, its staff recovered more than 1,300 dead infants in 2013. By law anyone found to have abandoned an infant may be jailed for seven years, while anyone guilty of secretly burying a 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 the NGO BeFare, 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 health conditions. Poor hygiene and crowded conditions found in the IDP communities forced some children to endure 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.).

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at

travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html. For country-specific information see the Department of State's report at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/pakistan.html.

Anti-Semitism

There is a very small Jewish population in Pakistan. 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/.

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, 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 the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, most children with disabilities did not attend school. At the primary level, 50 percent of girls and 28 percent of boys with disabilities were out of 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 December 2014 and continuing sporadically thereafter, persons with visual 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 September 2013 the PTA blocked the country's first online platform for the LGBTI community to share views and network.

Violence and discrimination continued against LGBTI persons. In April, two members of the transgender community were killed and a third abducted and raped. In June authorities arrested two men in Balochistan for allegedly getting married and charged them with violating the penal code after a medical examination indicated they had intercourse with each other.

Society generally shunned transgender persons, eunuchs, and intersex persons, collectively referred to as "hires," 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.

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 Shi’a Muslims. For example, on May 24, a mob of approximately 150 individuals looted Christian homes and clashed with riot police in the Dhoop Sari neighborhood of Lahore after a mentally ill Christian man allegedly tore pages of a Koran.

Members of the Hazara ethnic minority, who are Shi’a, 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 sparking violent incidents, authorities confined Shi’a religious processions to the Hazara enclaves. Anti-Shi’a graffiti was common in Quetta. According to multiple media reports, assailants killed at least 16 persons in attacks against Hazara Shi’as during the year. Media reported that on July 6, gunmen killed two Hazaras and a police officer in front of a passport office in Quetta; on July 17, a suicide bomber attempting to enter a Hazara neighborhood in Quetta blew himself up, killing two; and on July 28, gunmen on a motorcycle killed two Hazaras in Quetta.

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 competent authority,” that is, 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 any 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. As of year’s end no reports on compliance by the various provinces were forthcoming. The ILO noted that the provinces enacted industrial relations acts without tripartite consultation or resolution of shortcomings in the former federal legislation, including the inability of agricultural workers to form worker associations. 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.

According to the ILO, the government significantly improved its coordination mechanism by the end of the year by providing a coordinating body to respond to ILO requests and provide related reports.

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 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. For example, in August

the government of Punjab launched an education program for the children of brick-kiln workers.

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. On November 5, a plastic bag factory collapsed in Lahore, killing more than 30 individuals. According to numerous news accounts, the owner refused to cease construction on the fourth floor after cracks appeared in the building following the October 24 earthquake.

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 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 and/or two to five years' imprisonment--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.

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, in August began registering 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 law, however, 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, did 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 considered four occupations and 34 processes illegal for children, 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. NGOs and government sources noted that the 2010 and 2011 floods were devastating for children and resulted in the destruction of schools and dire financial conditions that compelled families to put children to work. 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, and child prostitution.

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 or Occupation

While regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation regarding race, sex, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation and/or 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 minimum wage for unskilled workers was 12,000 rupees (\$118) per month, except in Balochistan and KP, where it was 15,000 rupees (\$148) per month. The Punjab government set a minimum monthly wage of 13,000 rupees (\$125) for industrial laborers and workers. The federal government's minimum wage for unskilled workers was 12,000 rupees (\$118) per month. 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, workhours, 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. Litigation continued over the 2012 fire at a Karachi textile factory that killed 259 persons. 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.