

PAKISTAN 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The government's respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom remained poor. The government's limited capacity and will to investigate or prosecute the perpetrators of attacks against religious minorities allowed a climate of impunity to persist. The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion, and it requires that laws be consistent with Islam. The constitution states, "subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion." Some government practices and laws, however, limited freedom of religion, particularly for religious minorities. Authorities continued to enforce blasphemy laws and laws designed to marginalize the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. During the year, 34 new cases were registered under the blasphemy law, and 18 Ahmadis were arrested in matters related to their faith, although at least one death sentence for blasphemy was overturned, and the government has yet to carry out a death sentence for blasphemy. Nevertheless, at least 17 people are awaiting execution for blasphemy, and at least 20 others are serving life sentences. These laws continued to restrict religious freedom, and remained the most visible symbols of religious intolerance. Incidents including the September 22 suicide bombings of the All Saints Church in Peshawar, the March 9 mob attack on the Joseph Colony Christian community in Lahore, and twin bombings targeting the Hazara Shia community in Quetta on January 10 highlighted the government's failure to provide adequate security, including to religious minority communities. There were continued reports of law enforcement personnel abusing members of religious minorities and persons accused of blasphemy while in custody.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, and practice. Societal intolerance persisted, including through mob attacks and actions by violent extremists. Violent extremists in some parts of the country demanded all citizens follow their authoritarian interpretation of Islam and threatened brutal consequences if they did not. They also targeted Muslims who advocated tolerance and pluralism. There were scores of attacks on Sufi, Hindu, Ahmadi, Shia, and Christian gatherings and religious sites, resulting in numerous deaths and extensive damage. Religious freedom advocates and members of minorities reported self-censorship due to a climate of intolerance and fear. Acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities by violent extremists exacerbated existing sectarian tensions.

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U.S. embassy and other U.S. government officials met with senior Pakistani officials to discuss religious freedom and religious minority issues and encouraged the government to address concerns. Diplomatic staff reached out to leaders of all religious groups to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 193.2 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the most recent census, conducted in 1998, 95 percent of the population is Muslim (75 percent of the Muslim population is listed officially as Sunni and the other 25 percent is listed officially as Shia). While the country's estimated two to four million Ahmadis consider themselves Muslim, the law does not recognize them as such and prohibits them from self-identifying as Muslim. Groups officially constituting the remaining 5 percent of the population include Hindus, Christians, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Bahais, Sikhs, Buddhists, and others. Other religious groups include Kalasha, Kihals, and Jains. Official figures indicated the presence of a very small Jewish community. Less than 0.5 percent of the population is silent on religious affiliation or claims not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure is such that few persons claim no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and laws restrict religious freedom. Although the constitution declares that adequate provisions shall be made for all citizens to profess and practice their religious beliefs freely, other constitutional provisions and laws impose limits on this right.

According to the constitution and penal code, Ahmadis are not Muslims and are prohibited from calling themselves Muslims or their belief Islam, as well as from preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, proselytizing, or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine.

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable restrictions in the interest of the glory of Islam," as stipulated in the penal code. Under the blasphemy laws, persons are subject to death for "defiling Prophet Muhammad," to life imprisonment for "defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Quran," and to 10 years' imprisonment for

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“insulting another’s religious feelings.” Speech or action intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment.

The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions reflecting differences in civil, criminal, and Islamic jurisprudence. The Federal Shariat Court (FSC) and the sharia bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal courts, including those for rape, extramarital sex, alcohol use, and gambling. The FSC exercises “revisional jurisdiction” in those cases (the power to review, of its own accord, cases in lower courts), a power which applies to such cases whether they involve Muslims or non-Muslims. Non-Muslims are allowed to consult the FSC in other matters that affect them or violate their rights if they so choose. On July 16, during a hearing of a petition filed against the ban on a social media site, Peshawar High Court Chief Justice Dost Muhammad Khan stated the courts would not allow anyone to play with the sentiments of Muslims by placing blasphemous material on social media websites.

A December 4 ruling by the FSC states the death penalty should be the only punishment in blasphemy cases and life imprisonment should not be an option. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the government has 60 days from the ruling to challenge it; otherwise the FSC will expect the decision to be implemented. Previous cases have shown, however, that in practice the government has only sporadically enforced the FSC’s judgment. For example, in 1990, the FSC ruled similarly on the death penalty for blasphemy cases during its review of the country’s revised penal code, but the government never implemented the ruling. The FSC’s December ruling is in response to a petition calling on the government to implement the 1990 ruling.

The government designates religious affiliation on passports and requests religious information in national identity card applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, and must denounce the Ahmadiyya movement’s founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. This provision inhibits Ahmadis from obtaining legal documents and puts pressure on members of the community to deny their beliefs in order to enjoy citizenship rights, including voting, which requires an identity card.

The constitution provides for “freedom to manage religious institutions.” In principle, the government does not restrict organized religious groups from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. There is no

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official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship; however, Ahmadis are forbidden to call them mosques.

The government provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain minority religious properties that were abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India before independence. The government collects a 2.5 percent zakat (tax) on all Sunni Muslims and distributes the funds to Sunni mosques, madrassahs, and charities. The government does not impose similar requirements on other religious groups.

As of July the previously independent Ministry of National Harmony is a part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The merger is part of a larger government effort to streamline the number of federal ministries. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is responsible for organizing participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages. Authorities also consult the ministry on matters such as blasphemy and Islamic education. The combined ministry's budget covers assistance to indigent minorities, repair of minority places of worship, establishment of minority-run small development projects, celebration of minority religious festivals, and provision of scholarships for religious minority students.

The Ministry of Law, Justice, and Human Rights is responsible for protecting individuals against discrimination based on religion although federal authorities largely defer such responsibility to provincial governments.

Islamic studies are compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam, they generally are not offered parallel studies in their own religious beliefs and by default are required to take the Islamic studies class. In some schools, non-Muslim students may study ethics. Parents may send children to private schools, including religious schools, at the family's expense. Private schools are free to teach or not to teach religious studies as they choose; however, they are often under government pressure to teach Islamic studies. In September the Punjab government banned the subject of "comparative religious studies," which was part of the curriculum of a private school, the Lahore Grammar School. The move was taken after a private television talk show host accused the school of "attempting to convert students to other religions" and removing Islamic studies from the sixth grade curriculum. The school stated Islamic studies had not been removed from its syllabus. The Punjab government also confiscated the school's science books for containing "obscene and provocative material." The provincial government has

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constituted a committee to review material deemed objectionable in the syllabi of all private educational institutions across the province.

The constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution based on religious affiliation. Officials state the only factors affecting admission to government schools are students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms. This declaration also is required for private educational institutions, including universities. Students who identify themselves as Muslims must declare in writing they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, thereby excluding Ahmadis. Non-Muslims are required to have the head of their local religious communities verify their religious affiliation.

Private schools run by Islamic clerics, or madrassahs, vary greatly in their curriculum and character. In some rural communities, government schools may be difficult to reach or in poor condition, making madrassahs the only viable form of education available to impoverished students. By law madrassahs are prohibited from teaching sectarian or religious hatred or encouraging sectarian or religious violence. In practice, hard-line clerics who preach intolerance toward other sects are common. In recent years, in violation of the law, a small yet influential number of madrassahs have taught violent extremist doctrine in support of terrorism. In an attempt to curb the spread of violent extremism, the law requires all madrassahs to register with one of five *wafaqs* (independent boards) or directly with the government, to cease accepting foreign financing, and to accept foreign students only with the consent of their governments. In September according to press reports, the Ministry of Interior identified more than 500 foreign-funded religious schools (of the estimated 10,000-20,000 nationwide) that foment violent extremism, based on information from provincial law enforcement and intelligence agencies. The government officially categorizes most madrassahs as "non-extremist institutions."

The government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, the sale of Ahmadiyya religious literature is banned. The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets and insults to others' religious beliefs.

There is no legal requirement for individuals to practice or affiliate nominally with a religious group. Nevertheless, the constitution requires the president and prime minister be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity.

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Non-Muslim missionary activity is permitted and missionaries can proselytize as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge that they are not Muslim (thereby excluding Ahmadis). Foreign missionaries are required to have specific visas valid from two to five years and are allowed one entry into the country per year. Only “replacement” visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries are available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems are common.

The government bans the activities of, and membership in, several religiously oriented groups it judges to be “extremist” or “terrorist.” Many banned groups remain active, and some others avoid the law by changing their names once banned.

The law allows the government to use special streamlined courts to try cases involving violent crimes, terrorist activities, and acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, including blasphemy cases.

The government does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages generally are performed and registered according to one’s religious group. There is no legal mechanism for the government to register the marriages of Hindus and Sikhs, causing women of those religious groups difficulties in inheritance, accessing health services, voting, obtaining a passport, and buying or selling property. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal upon conversion to Islam. If a non-Muslim woman converts to Islam and her marriage was performed according to her previous religious beliefs, however, the marriage is considered dissolved. Children born to non-Muslim women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate, and therefore ineligible for inheritance. The only way to legitimize the marriage, and render the children legitimate, is for the husband to also convert to Islam. The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religious group are considered illegitimate, and the government may take custody of the children.

There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The 342-seat National Assembly has 10 seats for religious minorities. The 104-seat Senate has four reserved seats for religious minorities, one from each province. In the provincial assemblies, there are three such reserved seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; eight in Punjab; nine in Sindh; and three in Balochistan.

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The law provides for establishment of an independent Human Rights Commission consisting of 10 members, with one seat reserved for a person belonging to a religious minority. The commission would have the authority to hold any institution accountable for violations. The government has not constituted the commission to date.

Government Practices

The government generally enforced existing legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom, particularly against Ahmadis. Government policies did not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups, and due to discriminatory legislation, minorities often were afraid to profess freely their religious beliefs. Minorities also complained the judiciary was biased against religious minorities, especially in cases involving blasphemy.

During the year media and NGOs reported killings and torture of religious minorities by government authorities. According to the local NGO Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), on June 10, police reportedly tortured to death an 18-year-old Christian, Adnan Masih, at Lahore's Sharakpur Sharif police station. During the six days he spent in custody, CLAAS stated police cut parts of Masih's body with a knife, beat him with an iron rod, broke his legs, and pulled out his fingernails and toenails, all in an attempt to force him to confess to taking part in the "abduction" of a local Muslim woman (who in fact had fled an abusive marriage). After holding him for six days, police reportedly broke Masih's neck and subsequently hung the body in a bathroom to make it appear he had committed suicide. In July the Asian Human Rights Commission reported an internal police inquiry had cleared three officers of any responsibility for Masih's death.

According to NGO reports, Zafar Bhatti, a Christian pastor and head of a humanitarian NGO, Jesus World Mission, was poisoned and beaten by guards in the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi after his arrest on charges of blasphemy in November 2012. Bhatti remained in custody at year's end as legal proceedings continued.

Abuses continued under the blasphemy and other discriminatory laws, such as "the anti-Ahmadi laws," and the government did not take measures to prevent them. According to an analysis released by the daily newspaper *Dawn* in August, an estimated 1,274 people were charged with blasphemy between 1986 (when the constitution was amended to include the criminalization of blasphemy) and 2010, and an estimated 51 people were killed extrajudicially after being accused of

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blasphemy. Between 1860 and 1986, there were only 14 total blasphemy cases. Observers noted individuals frequently initiated blasphemy complaints against neighbors, peers, or business associates to settle personal grievances or to intimidate vulnerable people. While the law required a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint was filed, this was not uniformly enforced.

As blasphemy cases moved through the justice system, lower courts often failed to adhere to basic evidentiary standards, which led to some convicted persons spending years in jail before higher courts overturned their convictions and ordered them freed for lack of evidence. Lower courts conducted proceedings in an atmosphere of intimidation by violent extremists and generally refused to free defendants on bail or acquit them for fear of reprisal. In an effort to avoid confrontation with or violence from extremists, judges and magistrates often delayed and continued trials indefinitely.

According to data provided by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 34 new cases were registered under the blasphemy laws during the year. While at least one death sentence for blasphemy was overturned during the year, at least another 17 people were awaiting execution for blasphemy and at least 20 others were serving life sentences. Although the government has never carried out a death sentence for blasphemy, NGOs reported at least five persons accused of blasphemy had died in police custody in recent years.

In July a court in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab, convicted Sajjad Masih of blasphemy and sentenced him to life in prison and a 200,000 rupee (\$1,902) fine for allegedly sending text messages denigrating the Prophet Muhammad. Media reported local Islamic hardliners pressured the judge to convict Masih, even after prosecutors had failed to present substantial evidence against him. In October the court acquitted Masih of the charges.

On August 29, a court in Karachi sentenced a Muslim man named Naveed to life imprisonment for blasphemy. According to the prosecutor, a prayer leader reportedly caught Naveed desecrating a copy of the Quran at a mosque in Mauripur in August 2006. The suspect, who was booked on a complaint by his father, recorded a confessional statement and was sent to jail.

On September 4, media reported a secondary school principal named Salma had been arrested in Lahore after a local cleric accused her of distributing blasphemous materials. The accused denied the charges and stated the cleric had made false

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allegations to settle an ongoing personal feud. According to police, she received death threats and her house was ransacked by a mob of nearly 200 people. The woman remained in jail while police continued their investigation into her alleged blasphemy.

On August 30, police in Bhara Kahu, Islamabad, announced the arrest of a suspect in the 2011 assassination of Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian and an outspoken opponent of the blasphemy laws. Suspected Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant Hammad Adil reportedly confessed to Bhatti's assassination after his arrest. According to media reports, militants Muhammad Tanveer and Omar Abdullah also confessed to their involvement in the attack. Adil, Abdullah, and Tanveer remained in police custody at year's end.

On April 4, the Lahore High Court overturned the death sentence of Younis Masih, a Christian man who had been imprisoned since 2005 for blasphemy. The court found there was no credible evidence against Masih and ordered his immediate release. Masih had previously stated he had been beaten and deprived of food and medical attention by prison guards in October 2012. On November 28, Masih was finally released from prison.

Religious organizations and human rights NGOs expressed their concern over the failure to punish persons who made false blasphemy allegations. Although members of religious minorities comprised a disproportionate percentage of defendants in blasphemy cases, persons who made false blasphemy accusations were often not charged or were acquitted of such charges.

On August 17, a court dismissed all charges against Muslim Imam Khalid Jadoon Chishti stemming from his false blasphemy allegations against Rimsha Masih in August 2012. Chishti had alleged the mentally disabled 13-year-old Masih, a Christian, had desecrated pages of the Quran. Witnesses subsequently came forward to report Chishti had planted the desecrated pages on the child as part of an effort to create animosity against members of the local Christian community in order to seize their property. Masih spent over a month in jail before being released on bail, and she and her family ultimately fled the country. In dismissing the charges against Chishti, the judge cited the lack of a formal indictment and the retraction of witness statements against him.

Ahmadiyya community leaders expressed continued concern over authorities' targeting and harassing Ahmadis, and frequently accusing Ahmadis of blasphemy, violations of "anti-Ahmadi laws," or other crimes. The vague wording of the

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provision forbidding Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against members of the community for using the standard Muslim greeting and for naming their children Muhammad. According to Ahmadiyya leaders, between January and September authorities charged 26 Ahmadis in seven separate cases. Most of these cases were filed in connection with “anti-Ahmadi laws.” Ten Ahmadis were charged with blasphemy for allegedly defiling the Quran. Two others were charged under a terrorism clause. During the year 18 Ahmadis were arrested in matters relating to their faith and spent time in prison before being released on bail. In November police arrested physician Masood Ahmad for “posing as a Muslim” after he was videotaped reading a verse from the Quran. Ahmad remained in custody awaiting trial at year’s end.

The constitution provides for the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, but in practice the government restricted this right for religious minorities, especially Ahmadis. District-level authorities consistently refused to grant permission to construct places of worship for religious minorities, especially for the Ahmadiyya and Bahai communities, citing the need to maintain public order. Ahmadis reported their mosques and community lands were routinely confiscated by local authorities and given to the majority Muslim community. Ahmadis also reported incidents in which authorities tried to block construction or renovation of their places of worship. The law prohibits Ahmadis from reciting or relating to the *kalima* (Islamic testimony of faith), and authorities forcibly removed the *kalima* from Ahmadiyya places of worship. District governments often refused to grant Ahmadis permission to hold public events. According to the Ahmadiyya community, between 1984 (when the “anti-Ahmadi laws” were promulgated) and 2013, the authorities sealed 30 Ahmadi mosques and barred construction of 46 mosques, while 28 Ahmadi mosques were demolished or damaged, 13 mosques were set on fire, and 16 mosques were forcibly occupied.

During the registration process for the general elections in May, the Election Commission of Pakistan required members of the Ahmadiyya community to disavow the founder of their faith or, alternatively, “admit” they were not Muslims. As a result, nearly all of the country’s Ahmadis were unable to vote in the elections.

Members of religious minorities were highly critical of the government’s decision to fold the Ministry of National Harmony into the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Minorities also said the Ministry of Law, Justice, and Human Rights, and its provincial counterparts, had failed to safeguard their rights. Observers noted the

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inconsistent application of laws and enforcement of protections of religious minorities at both the federal and provincial levels remained serious problems.

Hindus, Sikhs, and other religious minorities stated the government did not spend adequate funds on the protection and upkeep of minority religious properties that were abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India before independence. They also said the government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims, and the policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities.

Officials sometimes used bureaucratic demands and requested or took bribes to delay attempts by minority religious groups to build houses of worship or obtain land. In contrast, Sunni groups sometimes built mosques and shrines without government permission, at times in violation of zoning ordinances and on government-owned lands, without repercussions.

The government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to their alleged links to terrorist organizations.

Although the constitution provides for freedom of assembly, Ahmadis have been prohibited from holding conferences or gatherings since 1983. They have also been banned from preaching. Although the government has banned Ahmadiyya publications from public sale, the umbrella Ahmadiyya organization published religious literature that circulated only within Ahmadiyya communities. On August 12, local media reported Ahmadis had been prevented from offering Eid prayers at an Ahmadiyya mosque in Rawalpindi for a second year in a row. According to a spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya community, the Rawalpindi City Commission's refusal to grant worshippers access to the mosque violated the constitutional protection of freedom to worship for every citizen of Pakistan.

Foreign books must pass the government's censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines were imported freely but were subject to censorship for sexual or religious content considered objectionable by the government. Generally, sacred books for religious minorities, except Ahmadis, were imported freely, although Hindus faced some difficulty in importing books from India.

The government funded and facilitated Hajj travel for Muslims, but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. Due to the passport requirements to list religious affiliation and denounce the Ahmadiyya prophet, Ahmadis were

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unable to participate in the Hajj because they were prohibited from declaring themselves Muslims.

The government does not recognize Israel, and citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, were not permitted to travel to Israel. This especially affected Bahais, since the Bahai World Center – the spiritual and administrative heart of the community – is located in Israel.

Discrimination against Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadis in admission to higher education institutions persisted. Sikh leaders reported they faced restrictions in securing admissions into colleges and universities. They indicated each Sikh student was required to obtain a certificate of permission from the Evacuee Trust Property Board, which they said was a lengthy process that discouraged Sikhs from pursuing higher education. There were no reports of discrimination against Christians when they applied for entry to universities and medical schools.

Most religious minority groups, with the exception of Shia, complained of discrimination in government hiring. While there was a 5 percent quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal and provincial levels, it was not consistently enforced.

Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contended a “glass ceiling” prevented their promotion to senior positions, and certain government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. The government also discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith, a Sunni reformist movement to which four percent of the country’s Muslims adhere, in hiring clergy for government mosques and the military, and faculty members for Islamic studies positions in government colleges.

Although there were no official obstacles to advancement of minority religious group members in the military service, in practice non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities.

According to reports from the Jinnah Institute and other organizations, public school curricula included derogatory statements in textbooks about minority religious groups, particularly Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews. The teaching of religious intolerance was widespread. According to a 2013 report by the human

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rights NGO National Commission for Justice and Peace, hate material in school curricula was the main reason behind discrimination towards minority groups. The study examined textbooks for academic year 2012-13 in Punjab and Sindh for grades 1-10. It said 55 chapters contained hate material against Hindus and Christians, and insulting remarks against religious minority groups. Some provinces reversed efforts to revise curricula to eliminate intolerant teachings. In August the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Party-led provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reinserted Quranic verses related to jihad in the textbooks of Islamic studies for grades 9 and 10. The material had been removed earlier under a curriculum reform process initiated in 2006 in the province by the outgoing Awami National Party government.

Government Inaction

The government's general failure to investigate, arrest, or prosecute those responsible for societal abuses promoted an environment of impunity that fostered intolerance and acts of violence, according to domestic and international human rights organizations. In numerous cases during the year, authorities failed to protect victims of religiously motivated mob violence.

There were continued attacks and killings of members of the Shia Muslim community that authorities failed to prevent or punish. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, during the year 504 Shia were killed in sectarian violence across the country, while another 965 were injured. Terrorist attacks on ethnic Hazara Shias killed hundreds in Quetta during the year. On January 10, nearly 100 people were killed and another 121 were injured in twin bombing attacks in Quetta. The Shia community refused to bury the dead victims for four days until the government acceded to their demands for more security by dismissing the provincial government and imposing governor's rule in Balochistan. On February 16, a bomb attack in a Hazara Shia neighborhood in Quetta killed at least 89 people and injured nearly 200. Fifty people were killed and more than 135 were injured in the March 3 bombing of Karachi's Shia-majority neighborhood of Abbas Town.

On March 9, an alleged act of blasphemy prompted several thousand Muslim demonstrators to set fire to a Christian community in Joseph Colony, Lahore. The mob looted over 150 homes, at least 15 shops, and two churches before burning them to the ground. No deaths were reported. Then-President Asif Ali Zardari ordered an inquiry into the attacks. Human rights activists faulted the provincial

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government for not providing the minority community with adequate security, and stated police had failed to intervene as the mob attacked the neighborhood.

According to multiple media reports, a dispute between Christian youths and Muslim clerics sparked a mob attack in Gujranwala, Punjab, on April 3. A group of several hundred Muslims attacked Christian-owned businesses and properties, including the local church. Witnesses said police had stood by as the violence spread. A large group of Christians staged a retaliatory protest that injured three police officers. The clash between the Christians and Muslims ended after police and city officials worked with elders from both communities to restore the peace. Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Najam Sethi said action would be taken against the people responsible for the riots, including negligent police officials. Police filed criminal cases against hundreds of Muslims and more than three dozen Christians for their role in the rioting, and created a joint committee to investigate the incident.

On June 3, a group of 12 armed men reportedly beat three Christian women and paraded them naked through the streets of Kasur. The incident stemmed from a dispute between one of the men and the women's family over property damage caused by goats. According to media reports, the police were slow to respond to the attack and were hesitant to file charges against the assailants. Pattoki Saddar police official Haji Abdul Aziz summarily dismissed the victims' claims, saying "the Christians are accusing innocent people." None of the assailants had been arrested at year's end.

Minority religious groups accused the government of inaction or complicity in multiple cases of extremist bombings and mob attacks on places of worship during the year. There were examples, however, where the government arrested and jailed a number of militant leaders responsible for sectarian attacks targeting Shia. On July 19, the Intelligence Bureau announced the capture and arrest of Masoom Bilah, the chief of a Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) "death squad" that had launched sectarian attacks. In February the authorities arrested LeJ leaders Malik Ishaq and Ghulam Rasool after LeJ claimed responsibility for the February 16 bombing of a Hazara Shia community in Quetta.

In September a mob pressured Siakolt police to destroy the minarets of three Ahmadiyya mosques and remove Islamic verses from their edifices, after threatening to vandalize the holy places themselves. Police said they were simply following the law, which makes it illegal for Ahmadis to build minarets or write Islamic verses on their mosques.

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Religious minorities expressed concern that government actions addressing forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam by societal actors were absent or inadequate. For example, media reported the May 3 abduction of Rozi Munir, a minor Christian girl, who was allegedly forced to marry a recently-converted Muslim man. Munir and her abductor were married by a Muslim cleric on May 4. A magistrate judge reviewed the matter but postponed the hearing due to the “sensitive nature” of the case.

On March 29, the Hindu community in Jacobabad protested the reported kidnapping and conversion of a girl to Islam. The unrest surrounding the incident resulted in the postponement of local Hindu community elections, as protesters threatened to strike until the incident was resolved. The girl reportedly married a Muslim man and changed her name to “Aasia” shortly after the kidnapping. The girl’s parents filed a police report against the groom and the other accused kidnappers but the girl remained with her alleged abductor.

Minority community leaders charged that the government failed to take adequate action to protect minorities from bonded labor in the brick-making and agricultural sectors, an illegal practice whose victims were disproportionately Christians and Hindus.

There were numerous reports of attacks by societal actors on holy places, cemeteries, and symbols of religious minorities, in which police failed to intervene. On October 8, a mob in Pangrio, Sindh, reportedly dug up the grave of recently deceased Bhoro Beel, a Hindu man, and dragged his corpse through the town. Human rights groups reported the attack was carried out by local members of the Pakistan Muslim League-Functional political party. According to the district police chief, clerics from the Sunni fundamentalist group Ahle Sunaat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) were behind the attack. The Hindu community led a demonstration in front of the police station to protest the grave desecration; by year’s end authorities had made no arrests.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of religious groups by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. government under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and by armed sectarian extremist groups with strong links to such organizations, including LeJ and TTP.

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Attacks on houses of worship, religious gatherings, and religious leaders perpetrated by sectarian, violent extremist, and terrorist groups resulted in hundreds of deaths during the year.

On September 22, at least 83 people were killed and over 146 sustained injuries when two suicide bombers attacked a church in Peshawar. While initial media reports indicated the TTP Jundulallah group claimed responsibility, other media reports attributed the attack to another TTP faction, Jundul-Hafsa. Following the attack, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif issued a strong condemnation of the attackers. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar announced at a press conference the government would develop a strong security plan for churches and other places of worship. In the days following the attacks, Christian communities protested in many cities throughout the country.

Attacks against ethnic Hazara Shias in Balochistan occurred throughout the year. On June 30, a suicide bomb attack on the Abu Talib Shia congregation hall in Quetta killed at least 28 people and injured another 65. Banned militant group LeJ claimed responsibility for the attack.

Violent attacks during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, highlighted sectarian tensions. On November 9, gunmen fired on Shia *imambarghs* (Shia ceremonial halls) in two separate attacks in Gujranwala, Punjab, killing three worshipers. The attacks sparked outrage in the Shia community and resulted in both President Mamoon Hussain and Prime Minister Sharif issuing statements condemning the violence. On November 15, sectarian clashes during a Shia procession in Rawalpindi left 11 people dead and another 80 injured. The Punjab government implemented a two-day curfew and suspended cell phone service in order to maintain law and order. Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif created a judicial commission to investigate the incident.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a number of attacks against Shias claimed numerous lives. On February 1, at least 27 people were killed and 55 injured in an attack which targeted worshippers in a Shia mosque in Hangu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In another incident, three militants attacked a Shia mosque in Peshawar June 21, killing at least 14 people and injuring another 28. Police later arrested two Taliban militants charged with participating in the attack. On July 26, two suicide bombings targeting the Shia community killed at least 62 people and injured nearly 200 in Parachinar, Kurram Agency of FATA. In Punjab province, clashes between ASWJ members and the Shia community killed at least 11 people in Bhakkar District on August 23.

Attacks on Sufi shrines continued during the year. On February 25, a bomb blast killed two people and injured another 12 at the Shah Ghazi Ghulam Mari Shrine located near Shirkarpur, Sindh. According to the police, the blast occurred while

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followers were honoring the Sufi saint. No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Citizens frequently used blasphemy laws to harass religious minorities and vulnerable Muslims, and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Societal elements also used “anti-Ahmadi” provisions of the penal code to justify abuse and discrimination of Ahmadis. Human rights and religious freedom activists and members of minorities reported they were at times hesitant to speak in favor of religious tolerance due to a climate of intolerance and fear.

Relations among religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and among Muslim groups continued. While a small number of persons were involved in violent attacks, discriminatory laws and lack of reform of these laws, the teaching of religious intolerance, and the lack of police protection of minorities and prosecution of perpetrators created a permissive environment for such attacks.

During the election campaign, all major candidates expressed strong support for the anti-Ahmadiyya provisions of the constitution and criminal law.

Persons accused of blasphemy continued to be killed during the year. For example, on September 14, media reported Muhammad Arif had killed a fellow scrap collector named Boota Masih in Karachi by slitting his throat and announcing, “I have killed an infidel blasphemer.” According to press reports, dozens of witnesses stood by and did not intervene while the killer fled.

Some religious groups protested against public debate about potential amendments to the blasphemy laws or against alleged acts of blasphemy. On September 18, the Council of Islamic Ideology recommended anyone wrongly accusing a person of blasphemy be executed.

Sectarian violence between violent Sunni and Shia extremists continued, and several religious minority individuals and communities were the targets of religiously motivated violence across the country. Attacks on the Shia minority, particularly in Dera Ismail Khan, Quetta, Hangu, Kohat, Tank, Dera Ghazi Khan, Gilgit, and in Kurram and Orakzai agencies continued.

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Conversion to minority religious beliefs generally took place in secret to avoid societal backlash. Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. On October 10, police arrested three Muslim men outside of Islamabad for forcing a Christian family to convert to Islam. The men allegedly broke into the victim's home, tortured his family, and forced them to convert to Islam at gunpoint. Police officials confirmed one of the accused perpetrators had ties to an Islamic militant group. The assailants remained in police custody at the end of year.

According to *The Express Tribune*, a group of Sunni clerics in Kasur led a mob attack against an Ahmadi man and his family after he refused to renounce his beliefs on March 26. The mob chanted anti-Ahmadi slogans before breaking into the victim's home. The mob assaulted the man and beat his family before eventually dispersing. Police were present during the attack but reportedly declined to take any action against the mob or protect the victims.

There were instances when informally organized groups seized minority places of worship using threats, intimidation, and other unlawful means to force the religious communities to abandon their properties or force a sale by the government.

Ahmadis and Ahmadiyya institutions were victims of religiously motivated violence, much of it organized by violent extremists.

Media, particularly the vernacular press, published derogatory reports on minorities, especially Ahmadis. Anti-Semitic articles were commonly found in the vernacular press.

Some Sunni groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shias, other Sunnis, and Hindus. Some Urdu newspapers frequently published articles containing derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews.

Discrimination against Christians in employment was widespread. Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists stated the situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years.

All *wafaqs* continued to mandate the elimination of teachings promoting religious or sectarian intolerance and of terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs.

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Inspectors from the education boards mandated affiliated madrassahs with full-time students to supplement religious studies with secular subjects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy and consulates maintained a dialogue with government, parliament, and civil society, including religious and minority community representatives, to encourage religious freedom and tolerance and to discuss specific issues of concern. These included: blasphemy laws; curriculum reform in public education and madrassah education systems; treatment of the Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other minority communities; sectarian violence; and ways to improve the protection of and outreach to minority religious groups. Embassy and consulate officials met regularly with government ministers and other high-ranking officials to discuss government plans to promote religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Embassy officials, including the Ambassador and consuls general, and visiting Department of State officials attended and hosted meetings with government officials, as well as with leaders from communities of all religious groups and NGOs working on religious freedom issues. Interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and religious freedom were discussed in these meetings. Embassy officials also explored with these groups the development of programs and projects to promote religious tolerance.

The embassy and consulates general held events honoring religious minority leaders and supporters of religious freedom. Diplomatic staff, including the Ambassador and consuls general, visited several prominent places of worship throughout the country, including those of religious minorities, and participated in interfaith events sponsored by the government and civil society.

Embassy officers investigated and monitored human rights cases involving religious minorities and urged a swift and effective government response to these cases.