



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Pakistan: Shia Muslims

Version 3.0

July 2021

Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#) / Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, and to provide a range of views and opinions which are compared and contrasted where possible, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance and welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

Contents

Assessment	6
1. Introduction.....	6
1.1 Basis of claim.....	6
1.2 Points to note.....	6
2. Consideration of issues.....	6
2.1 Credibility.....	6
2.2 Exclusion.....	6
2.3 Convention reason(s).....	7
2.4 Risk.....	7
2.5 Protection.....	9
2.6 Internal relocation.....	10
2.7 Certification.....	10
Country information	11
3. Demography.....	11
3.1 Population.....	11
3.2 Community integration.....	13
3.3 Religious practices.....	13
3.4 Identifying characteristics.....	14
4. Legal rights.....	16
4.1 Constitution.....	16
4.2 Blasphemy laws.....	16
5. State treatment and attitudes.....	17
5.1 Representation in government.....	17
5.2 Discrimination and harassment.....	18
5.3 Application of the blasphemy laws.....	19
5.4 Enforced disappearances.....	21
5.5 Police and judicial protection.....	23
6. Societal and non-state actor treatment and attitudes.....	26
6.1 Discrimination, harassment and hate speech.....	26
6.2 Sectarian violence.....	29
6.3 Intersect marriage.....	34
7. Access to education and employment.....	34
7.1 Education.....	34
7.2 Employment.....	34
Terms of Reference	36

Bibliography	37
Sources cited	37
Sources consulted but not cited.....	40
Version control.....	41

Assessment

Updated: 12 July 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by state or non-state actors because the person is a Shia Muslim.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 This note focusses on followers of Shia Islam, though not specifically Hazaras, who are predominantly Shia. For further analysis and information on Hazaras, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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Official – sensitive: End of section

[Back to Contents](#)

2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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Official – sensitive: End of section

[Back to Contents](#)

2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 Actual or imputed religion.

2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.

2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.4 Risk

a. State treatment

2.4.1 The Shia Muslim population is estimated to be between 20 and 40 million (in a total population of 208 million, according to 2017 provisional census results) and reside throughout the country, sometimes in enclaves, but can be well integrated, particularly in large cities. However, in other areas such as southern Punjab, where conservative madrassas and militant groups have a larger presence, there is greater segregation (see [Population](#)).

2.4.2 The state religion is Islam and Shia Muslims are freely permitted to practise their faith, including commemorating the Day of Ashura (see [Constitution](#) and [Identifying characteristics](#)).

2.4.3 In July 2020 the Punjab Assembly passed the Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam (Protection of Foundation of Islam) Bill, which supported only the Sunni interpretation of Islam. At the time of writing this CPIN, the bill had not been signed into law and it is unclear what the consequences of it might be (see State treatment and attitudes – [Discrimination and harassment](#)).

2.4.4 The blasphemy laws, which carry severe penalties, apply to and are used against all religious groups, can lead to criminal prosecution and often arise from trivial disputes and social media activity (see [Blasphemy laws](#) and [Application of the blasphemy laws](#)). The year 2020 saw a rise in blasphemy charges – at least 199 people were charged, of which 70% were Shia Muslims. At least 40 cases were registered against Shias in one month alone, which sources suggest were linked to hate speech directed at Shias during the month of Muharram. Sources indicated that between 80% and 95% of blasphemy cases were acquitted on appeal, though often after lengthy periods of detention. As at 2019, 82 persons were in prison on blasphemy charges (see [Application of the blasphemy laws](#)). Relative to the overall number of Shias in Pakistan, the risk of being accused and charged with blasphemy is, in general, very small.

- 2.4.5 Shias are well represented in government and other public service sectors (see [Representation in government](#) and [Employment](#)). There are no legal restrictions preventing marriage between Shia and Sunni Muslims (see [Intersect marriage](#)).
- 2.4.6 Whilst there are reports of ‘enforced disappearances’ by Pakistan security services of Shia men suspected of being recruited by Iran to fight against the Islamic State in Syria, there is no generalised risk of enforced disappearances facing all Shia men. In 2018, there were estimated to be between 140 and 300 disappeared Shias. At least 34 recorded cases had been missing for 2 or more years. Sources indicated that disappearances continue to occur. Numerous protests have taken place demanding the recovery of missing persons but with limited results (see [Enforced disappearances](#)).
- 2.4.7 Relative to the size of the Shia population in Pakistan, Shia Muslims are, in general, unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution.
- 2.4.8 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived religion.
- 2.4.9 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

b. [Societal treatment and sectarian violence](#)

- 2.4.10 Although sectarian violence has significantly decreased in Pakistan since 2013, Shias continue to face security threats from extremist groups, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), also known as Ahi-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ), LeJ al-Alami, and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). According to the Center for Research and Security Studies, 2,099 people were murdered in Pakistan because of their religion in the years from 2013 to 2018, 815 of whom described as Shia. In 2019, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces saw incidents of sectarian violence, with 4 fatalities recorded amongst the Shia community. During 2020, the deaths of 7 Shias were attributed to sectarian violence, although numbers varied between different sources (see [Sectarian violence](#)).
- 2.4.11 With the exception of the ethnic Hazara, Shia Muslims are generally not physically or linguistically different from Sunni Muslims. However, clothing – particularly during the month of Muharram – makes Shia Muslims more conspicuous, as well as prominence during religious events and pilgrimages, scars from self-flagellation during Ashura ceremonies, Shia names, ethnic and tribal names, and places of worship (see [Religious practices](#) and [Identifying characteristics](#)). As a result, Shias are reported to be particularly vulnerable to attacks during times when they are more visible, such as during large religious gatherings, including Ashura processions, and along religious pilgrimage routes (see [Societal and non-state actor treatment and attitudes](#) and [Sectarian violence](#))

- 2.4.12 In 2020, the spread of COVID-19 was blamed on Shia pilgrims returning from Iran, giving rise to hate speech and discrimination targeting Shias. There were reports of an increase in hostility towards the Shia community during Muharram in 2020 after Shia clerics were accused of making blasphemous comments, which caused a spike in blasphemy allegations. In September 2020, multiple large sectarian rallies in Karachi and Islamabad, organised by Sunni religious groups, took place where protesters were heard calling Shias heretics and infidels and seen pelting stones at a Shia mosque and community centre (see [Discrimination, harassment and hate speech](#) and [Application of the blasphemy laws](#)).
- 2.4.13 Although there have been sporadic targeted attacks against Shia Muslims, relative to the size of the Shia population in Pakistan, they are, in general, unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by non-state actors that is sufficiently serious by its nature or repetition to amount to persecution.
- 2.4.14 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at risk, taking into account factors such as the person's age, gender, education, socio-economic background and place of residence. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at real risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived religion.
- 2.4.15 For analysis and information on Hazaras, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).
- 2.4.16 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.3 The state has established a functioning criminal justice system that is capable of detecting, prosecuting and punishing acts of persecution from non-state actors. Police efficacy varies by province as do the challenges faced by each force (see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Actors of protection](#)).
- 2.5.4 In regard to Shia Muslims, the state takes action to curtail extremist activities, such as increased security force presence and visibility, restrictions on clerics known for exacerbating sectarian tensions, suspension of cellular services, and heightened security monitoring, particularly in the run up to and during the month of Muharram. Federal and provincial authorities increase security during Shia religious commemorations, reducing the risk of attack. Military escorts are provided for Shia pilgrims travelling along high-risk roads to and from Iran although they are reported to be infrequent (see [Police and judicial protection](#)).

- 2.5.5 In general, the state is both willing and able to offer effective protection to Shia Muslims. A person's reluctance to seek protection does not necessarily mean that effective protection is not available. Decision makers must consider each case on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.
- 2.5.6 For general information on protection, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).
- 2.5.7 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. While the onus is on the person to establish a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm, decision makers must demonstrate that internal relocation is reasonable having regard to the individual circumstances of the person.
- 2.6.3 The Shia population is spread across Pakistan and there are large Shia communities in major urban centres. Many communities are integrated and live alongside the majority Sunni Muslims (see [Demography](#)). In general, there are parts of the country where a person would not have a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of suffering serious harm from non-state actors and it will be reasonable for them to relocate there.
- 2.6.4 Women without support of family or a male guardian may be less able to relocate. For further information on internal relocation for women in general, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).
- 2.6.5 For general information on internal relocation, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Background information, including internal relocation](#).
- 2.6.6 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Country information

Section 3 updated: 8 July 2021

3. Demography

3.1 Population

- 3.1.1 As of July 2021, the total population of Pakistan was estimated to be over 238 million¹, whilst the provisional 2017 census results put the figure at just under 208 million².
- 3.1.2 There was no general consensus on the official number of Shia Muslims in Pakistan, according to sources informing the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada's Research Directorate (IRB)³. According to the provisional 2017 census results, Muslims (Sunni and Shia) were estimated to make up 96% of the population, of whom 15% to 20% (30 to 40 million) were believed to be Shia (including Hazara, Ismaili, and Bohra, a branch of Ismaili)^{4 5}. Other sources estimated between 10% to 15% (20 to 30 million) of Muslims were Shia^{6 7}. Hazaras were estimated to make up between 600,000 and 1 million of the total population^{8 9}.
- 3.1.3 Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted in its Country Information Report for Pakistan, based on a range of sources and dated 20 February 2019, that:
- 'Pakistani Shi'a live throughout the country in urban centres, including Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan, Jhang and Sargodha. While Shi'a are not a majority in any of Pakistan's four provinces, they are a majority in the autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 'Significant numbers of Shi'a live in Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; in Kurram and Orakzai districts in the former FATA [Federally Administered Tribal Area]; in and around Quetta and the Makran coastline in Balochistan; in parts of southern and central Punjab; and throughout Sindh. Although some Shi'a live in enclaves in these cities..., Shi'a and Sunni communities are generally well integrated.'¹⁰
- 3.1.4 In regard to Shias living in Karachi, a city with an estimated population of around 15 million (2017 estimate¹¹) to 16.5 million people (2021 estimate¹²), the DFAT report noted that 'Sunnis and Shi'a live throughout the city, although concentrations of Shi'a, particularly Hazaras... can be found in

¹ CIA World Factbook, '[Pakistan](#)' (People and society), 4 May 2021

² PBS, '[Provisional Summary Results of 6th Population and Housing Census-2017](#)', 2017

³ IRB, '[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi'a, Shi'i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)', 4 December 2020

⁴ USSD, '[IRF Report 2020](#)' (section I), 12 May 2021

⁵ IRB, '[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi'a, Shi'i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)', 4 December 2020

⁶ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 2.9), 20 February 2019

⁷ IRB, '[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi'a, Shi'i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)', 4 December 2020

⁸ MRG, '[Shi'a and Hazaras](#)', June 2018

⁹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.27), 20 February 2019

¹⁰ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraphs 3.90 to 3.91), 20 February 2019

¹¹ PBS, '[Provisional Summary Results of 6th Population and Housing Census-2017](#)', 2017

¹² CIA World Factbook, '[Pakistan](#)' (People and society), 4 May 2021

Abbas Town, Hussain Hazara Goth, Mughal Hazara Goth, Rizvia, Ancholi, DHA Gizri, Pak Colony and Manghopir.¹³

- 3.1.5 The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), an international consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and funded by the UK Government, published a report in November 2020 on women religious minorities in Pakistan¹⁴. The report noted ‘In Karachi and Lahore, though official data are unavailable, Shias are in such significant numbers that their presence is quite visible, i.e. there are Shia-dominated neighbourhoods and hundreds of congregation centres. For example, in Karachi, there are huge localities which are dominated by Shias such as Ancholi, Jaffer-e-Tayyar, Rizvia, etc. or in Lahore, Mochi Gate.’¹⁵
- 3.1.6 The DFAT report also noted there was a large Hazara Shia population in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan¹⁶, where the community lives in 2 main areas, Hazara town and Mariabad¹⁷. The source also stated that: ‘Turis tend to live in enclaves with other Turis, mitigating societal discrimination. Outside these areas, Turis face a moderate risk of societal discrimination based on their Shi’a religion... and historical animosity with the Bangash tribe.’¹⁸
- 3.1.7 The DFAT report added:
‘The population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is mostly Pashtun and predominantly Sunni. Most Shi’a live in Hangu, Kohat, Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan. Most Shi’a in Peshawar are long-term residents of the Old City, while many Shi’a in Hangu, Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan are Turi or Bangash Shi’a from Kurram and Orakzai agencies... Shi’a comprise around 40 per cent of the population of Kurram Agency; Upper Kurram Agency is estimated to be around 80 per cent Shi’a, while central and lower Kurram Agency is majority Sunni. Most Shi’a in Kurram Agency are from the Turi tribe, particularly in Parachinar... The Bangash tribe is around 40 per cent Shi’a, and lives mainly in Orakzai Agency as well as parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa such as Kohat, Hangu and Peshawar.’¹⁹
- 3.1.8 According to the DFAT report, the autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan in the north of Pakistan, with an estimated population of 2 million, was comprised of approximately 39% Shia, 18% Ismaili Shia, 27% Sunni, and 16% Nurbakshis, who adhere to a Sufi tradition combining aspects of Shia and Sunni theology²⁰.
- 3.1.9 For further information on Hazaras in Pakistan, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

¹³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.105), 20 February 2019

¹⁴ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)’ (page 1), November 2020

¹⁵ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)’ (pages 57 to 58), November 2020

¹⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.107), 20 February 2019

¹⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.30), 20 February 2019

¹⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.25), 20 February 2019

¹⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraphs 3.108 to 3.109), 20 February 2019

²⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.112), 20 February 2019

3.2 Community integration

3.2.1 According to the DFAT report, 'Conservative madrassas and militant groups are more prominent in southern Punjab, and Sunni and Shi'a communities are more segregated. Shi'a live throughout Punjab, including in Lahore. Shi'a and Sunni communities in cities are much more integrated.'²¹

3.2.2 With the exception of the 2 enclaves in Quetta where Hazara Shias live, the CREID report stated that Sunni and Shia Muslims living in larger cities were 'more interdependent and live in mixed communities...'²² DFAT also noted that although some Shia live in enclaves in cities, Sunni and Shia communities were 'generally well integrated.'²³

3.2.3 When comparing non-Hazara Shia and Hazara Shia, the CREID report stated, based partially on reflections from focus group discussions with Shia Hazara men and women from Quetta:

'Non-Hazara Shia have certain advantages that somehow lessen their vulnerabilities and make them more resilient. Mixed settlements, no distinguishable facial features that make them identifiable from others and being native and having more resources are some factors that are worthy of mention. Basically, being woven in the economic and social fabric of society together with the Sunni makes the non-Hazara Shia less vulnerable. Though sectarian identity is also an important marker for non-Hazara Shia, their shared ethnic identity with that of the Sunni majority is a defining factor of integration.'²⁴

See also the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.3 Religious practices

3.3.1 The DFAT report noted, 'Most Shi'a in Pakistan follow the Twelver (athna ashariya) school, with smaller numbers of Nizari Ismailis, Daudi Bohras and Sulemani Bohras. Most of Pakistan's ethnic, linguistic and tribal groups include followers of Shi'a Islam.'²⁵

3.3.2 The same source stated:

'Shi'a in Pakistan are most prominent during Shi'a religious events and pilgrimages to Iraq and Iran. Shi'a commemorate the Day of Ashura [a recognised public holiday²⁶] with re-enactments of the martyrdom and processions, during which Shi'a men and women dressed in black parade through the streets slapping their chests and chanting. Self-harm, such as flagellation performed during Ashura processions, can leave permanent marks.'²⁷

3.3.3 The December 2020 IRB response indicated that

²¹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.106), 20 February 2019

²² CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)' (page 58), November 2020

²³ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraphs 3.90 to 3.91), 20 February 2019

²⁴ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)' (page 65), November 2020

²⁵ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.74), 20 February 2019

²⁶ Ministry of Interior, '[Public and optional holidays for the year 2020](#)', 5 December 2019

²⁷ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.93), 20 February 2019

‘... some Shias engage in “more than light flagellation (hitting themselves with big knives),” which creates scar tissue (Professor of Islam and politics 19 Nov. 2020). An August 2020 Al Jazeera article reports that, during Ashura [Ashoura], a Shia religious event that commemorates the death of Imam al-Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, “some” Shias engage in self-flagellation with chains and the blunt ends of swords to “exemplify the suffering Imam-al-Hussein experienced” before his death (Al Jazeera 28 Aug. 2020).’²⁸

- 3.3.4 The DFAT report also noted ‘Shi’a and Sunni mosques are clearly distinguishable’²⁹, adding:

‘Shi’a mosques and places of worship, or imambargahs, feature different Muslim iconography, including the Shi’a sword, horses, images of Ali and Hussein, and “U-shaped” crescent moons. Shi’a and Sunni mosques have different prayer times, and worshippers use different hand positions while praying. Shi’a mosques are located throughout Pakistan. Shi’a can pray in Sunni mosques and vice versa, although this rarely happens. Both sects share a number of famous religious sites, including Sufi shrines.’³⁰

- 3.3.5 The [IRB’s December 2020 response](#) described the theological differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims³¹.

[Back to Contents](#)

3.4 Identifying characteristics

- 3.4.1 With the exception of the ethnic Hazara (who are predominantly Shia and visibly distinct due to their Eurasian origins^{32 33}), most Pakistani Shia Muslims are not physically or linguistically different from Pakistani Sunni Muslims^{34 35}, as they share common racial and ethnic origins³⁶. According to the DFAT report, the exclusively Shia Pashtun Turi tribe ‘... are not generally distinguishable from other Pashtuns by appearance, but are identifiable by tribal names, accents, and residency in known Turi areas’, including in Parachinar, lower and upper Kurram Agency, Orakzai, DI Khan, Kohat, and Hangu and were concentrated ‘in small geographic areas, particularly in and around Parachinar and Kurram Agency...’³⁷

- 3.4.2 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada’s Research Directorate (IRB) noted in December 2020:

‘The Professor of Islamic studies [at Clemson University, South Carolina, USA] indicated that if Shias do not belong to a distinct ethnic, linguistic, or cultural group, they are less identifiable (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). According to the Jinnah Institute representative, Hazara Shias and

²⁸ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

²⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.93), 20 February 2019

³⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.94), 20 February 2019

³¹ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

³² DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.27), 20 February 2019

³³ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)’ (pages 23 and 26), November 2020

³⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraphs 3.92 and 3.102), 20 February 2019

³⁵ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

³⁶ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)’ (page 23), November 2020

³⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.13), 20 February 2019

people from the North are easily recognizable and there is an assumption that people coming from these regions are Shia; however, “it is not as obvious” for people in Punjab province and other regions (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). The same source added that “[e]ven in mainstream cities, people can tell Shia from other people,” noting that Shias wear their beards differently and wear a ring on their right hand (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). According to the Professor of Islam and politics [at SOAS University, London], some Shias wear turquoise rings; however, wearing one is fashionable “nowadays,” so it does not necessarily mean the wearer is Shia (Professor of Islam and politics 19 Nov. 2020).³⁸

- 3.4.3 Sources consulted by the IRB in 2013 noted that Sunni and Shia were generally not distinguishable by their dress, although during the month of Muharram many Shia wear black clothes and “display signs of the grave, horse and blood of Hussein”. Similarly, Shia religious clerics often wore black, as opposed to the Sunni clerics green or white. Shia scholars were reported to be distinguishable from Sunni scholars, wearing different dress, cloaks and turbans³⁹.
- 3.4.4 Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) do not name the person’s religion (although this data is held by the National Database and Registration Authority – NADRA). Whilst passports identify the holder as Muslim, they do not identify the person’s sect^{40 41}.
- 3.4.5 According to the DFAT report, ‘Militants identify Shi’a by Shi’a names displayed on CNICs, or flagellation marks from Ashura ceremonies.’⁴² Sources reported that common Shia names include Abbas, Ali, Hasan, Hussain, Jafery, Jaffar, Jafri, Naqvi, Raza, Rizi, Rizvi, Saah, Sayyed, Syed and Zaidi^{43 44 45}. The DFAT report added ‘Similarly, ethnic and tribal names can reveal a person’s ethnicity or tribal affiliation: nearly all Hazaras and Turis are Shi’a, and significant numbers of Bangash are Shi’a.’⁴⁶
- 3.4.6 The DFAT report also noted ‘Shi’a and Sunni mosques are clearly distinguishable’⁴⁷, adding:

‘Shi’a mosques and places of worship, or imambargahs, feature different Muslim iconography, including the Shi’a sword, horses, images of Ali and Hussein, and “U-shaped” crescent moons. Shi’a and Sunni mosques have different prayer times, and worshippers use different hand positions while praying. Shi’a mosques are located throughout Pakistan. Shi’a can pray in Sunni mosques and vice versa, although this rarely happens. Both sects share a number of famous religious sites, including Sufi shrines.’⁴⁸

³⁸ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

³⁹ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis...](#)’, 9 January 2014

⁴⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.92), 20 February 2019

⁴¹ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

⁴² DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.102), 20 February 2019

⁴³ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis...](#)’, 9 January 2014

⁴⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.92), 20 February 2019

⁴⁵ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

⁴⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.92), 20 February 2019

⁴⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.93), 20 February 2019

⁴⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.94), 20 February 2019

3.4.7 The [IRB's December 2020 response](#) described the theological differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims⁴⁹.

3.4.8 For further information on Hazaras in Pakistan, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 4 updated: 8 July 2021

4. Legal rights

4.1 Constitution

4.1.1 The Constitution of Pakistan establishes Islam as the state religion (Article 2). Article 20 provides that 'Subject to law, public order, and morality: (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.' Article 36 guarantees 'the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services.'⁵⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

4.2 Blasphemy laws

4.2.1 Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) prescribes the blasphemy laws. Section 295c notes that: 'Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.'⁵¹

4.2.2 Tabulated summary of the blasphemy laws and penalties for breaching them, as prescribed in the Pakistan Penal Code⁵²:

Penal Code	Description	Penalty
295	Injuring or defiling place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class	Up to 2 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
295a	Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs	Up to 10 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
295b	Defiling, etc., of Holy Quran	Life imprisonment
295c	Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet	Death or life imprisonment and a fine

⁴⁹ IRB, '[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi'a, Shi'i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)', 4 December 2020

⁵⁰ [Constitution of Pakistan](#) (Articles 2, 20 and 36), 1947

⁵¹ [Pakistan Penal Code](#) (Article 295 and 295c), 6 October 1860

⁵² [Pakistan Penal Code](#), 1860 (with amendments)

298	Uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings.	One year imprisonment, or fine, or both
298a	Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages.	Up to 3 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
298b	Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places	Up to 3 years imprisonment and fine
298c	Person of Qadiani [Ahmadi] group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith	Up to 3 years imprisonment and fine

- 4.2.3 Referring to the blasphemy laws, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) stated in its December 2019 report on religious freedom in Pakistan that:
‘The law itself is poorly defined and has low standards for evidence, as it does not require specific proof of intent to commit blasphemy; as a result spurious accusations are commonplace. It is clear that the blasphemy laws are not a deterrent – they are indiscriminately used as a weapon of revenge against both Muslims and non-Muslims to settle personal scores or to resolve disputes over money, property or business, under the guise of insults to religion.’⁵³
- 4.2.4 An October 2019 Policy Brief by the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted ‘While the Supreme Court and other Pakistani officials have recognized the growing problem of false blasphemy accusations being used to target religious minorities, political leaders – under pressure from certain religious groups – have made no serious steps to repeal the blasphemy law.’⁵⁴
- 4.2.5 Amnesty International reported in August 2020, with regard to Pakistan, that ‘The broad, vague and coercive nature of the blasphemy laws violate the rights to freedom of religion and belief and of opinion and expression. They have been used to target some of the most marginalized people in society, including children, individuals with mental disabilities, members of religious minorities, and poorer people.’⁵⁵

See also [Application of the blasphemy laws](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 5 updated: 8 July 2021

5. State treatment and attitudes

5.1 Representation in government

- 5.1.1 According to the DFAT report, ‘Shi’a are well represented in parliament and regularly contest elections for mainstream political parties.’⁵⁶ Minority Rights

⁵³ CSW, ‘[Religious Freedom Under Attack](#)’ (page 13), December 2019

⁵⁴ USCIRF, ‘[Policy Brief: Pakistan's Blasphemy Law](#)’ (page 3), October 2019

⁵⁵ Amnesty International, ‘[Accusations of blasphemy continue to endanger lives](#)’, 25 August 2020

⁵⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.98), 20 February 2019

Group International (MRG) noted in June 2018, ‘Pakistani Shi’a are represented in all walks of life, but in many cases have succeeded in playing prominent roles in Pakistan’s cultural sphere and attaining influential, high-profile positions.’⁵⁷

See also [Employment](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

5.2 Discrimination and harassment

5.2.1 The Diplomat (international current affairs magazine for the Asia-Pacific region) reported in September 2020 on a bill passed in July 2020 in Punjab which supported only the Sunni interpretation of Islam ‘... the Punjab Assembly passed the Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam (Protection of Foundation of Islam) Bill, which upheld the Sunni interpretation as the only acceptable version of Islam in Pakistan. This sparked uproar among the Shia clergy who reiterated that the sweeping implementation of the bill’s clauses — making it mandatory for all Pakistanis to identically revere esteemed Sunni figures — was contrary to Shia beliefs.’⁵⁸

5.2.2 The US State Department (USSD) International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report of 2020 stated that:

‘Among the restrictions outlined in the bill, publishers, editors, and translators would be barred from printing or publishing any book and material containing statements or anything deemed to be of a blasphemous nature. The bill would also require the words “last of the prophets” to be written after the name of Mohammed and specific honors for his companions revered in the Shia community (“may Allah be pleased with them,” rather than “peace be upon them”)... Shia leaders, meanwhile, denounced the specific honors prescribed by the bill to Mohammed’s companions, which they said risked stoking discord between Shia and Sunnis, given their fundamental disagreements over some of the companions’ status within Islam.’⁵⁹

5.2.3 On 21 October 2020, The Guardian also reported on the bill, noting:

‘Shia Muslims ... fear their religious freedom is being legislated away. In July, Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam [protection of foundation of Islam bill] was passed by the Punjab assembly, which supported only the Sunni interpretation of Islam, provoking a huge backlash from the Shia community. “Persecution seems to be waiting for the Shia minority,” said Hamza Baloch, a founding member of Secular Shia Voices, an advocacy group. “At first, they used hashtags, then killed us and rallied against us. Now they’re coming up with legislation to eliminate the Shia minority”.’⁶⁰

5.2.4 Also referring to the Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam bill, the USSD IRF Report 2020 noted that Punjab Governor Chaudhary Muhammad Sarwar:

‘... did not sign the bill, which was promoted by the PML-Q [Pakistan Muslim League-Q] party, noting controversy about its provisions and concerns that it could be seen as anti-Shia. According to a Punjab government official,

⁵⁷ MRG, ‘[Shi’a and Hazaras](#)’, June 2018

⁵⁸ The Diplomat, ‘[What Role Does the State Play in Pakistan’s Anti-Shia...?](#)’, 17 September 2020

⁵⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

⁶⁰ The Guardian, ‘[Pakistani Shias live in terror as sectarian violence increases](#)’, 21 October 2020

Sarwar had no intention of signing the bill until there was a consensus that it would not harm religious minorities. Other government officials, including Prime Minister Khan, advised Sarwar against signing the bill, according to a Lahore-based journalist.⁶¹

- 5.2.5 For further information on the Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam bill, see the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) October 2020 report: '[Sectarianism and Censorship in Pakistan: The Punjab Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam Bill 2020](#)', which also noted 'Although the Bill was passed in the legislature, it has yet to acquire the Governor of Punjab's seal to become law.'⁶²
- 5.2.6 The 2019 DFAT report noted that 'Journalists also self-censor reporting on sensitive religious issues, and Shi'a and other religious minority journalists experience similar pressure from security agencies as other journalists when reporting on topics of sensitivity, and additionally face religious based threats and harassment.'⁶³
- 5.2.7 The Guardian noted in its October 2020 article that 'Last week, in Punjab, police beat up and arrested 22 Shia Muslims, including seven women, who were taking part in a ceremony to mark a Shia martyr.'⁶⁴ No corroborating information could be found by CPIT in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

5.3 Application of the blasphemy laws

- 5.3.1 Freedom House reported in its 2021 Country Report for Pakistan that 'Members of the Shia sect, Christians, and other religious minorities remain at risk of blasphemy accusations that can arise from trivial disputes and escalate to criminal prosecution and mob violence.'⁶⁵
- 5.3.2 The USSD IRF Report 2020 noted 'Human rights groups reported an increase in blasphemy cases and allegations against members of the Shia Muslim community.'⁶⁶ The same source noted there were 82 persons imprisoned on blasphemy charges as at 2019, adding that NGOs reported an increase in blasphemy charges in 2020 – at least 199 persons were charged, the highest number of cases seen in a single year, according to the Center for Social Justice (CSJ). Of those, 70% of cases were against Shia Muslims⁶⁷.
- 5.3.3 The USSD IRF Report 2020 noted that:

'On January 30, police arrested two Shia men in Tando Mohammed Khan, southern Sindh, and charged them with blasphemy. According to police, the content they posted on Facebook insulted the companions of Mohammed, which, they said, infuriated Sunni Muslims.'

⁶¹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2020](#)' (section II), 12 May 2021

⁶² ISAS, '[Sectarianism and Censorship in Pakistan...](#)', 9 October 2020

⁶³ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.196), 20 February 2019

⁶⁴ The Guardian, '[Pakistani Shias live in terror as sectarian violence increases](#)', 21 October 2020

⁶⁵ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2021: Pakistan](#)' (section D2), 3 March 2021

⁶⁶ USSD, '[IRF Report 2020](#)' (section II), 12 May 2021

⁶⁷ USSD, '[IRF Report 2020](#)' (section II), 12 May 2021

‘... On August 30, police charged Shia cleric Taqqi Jaffar with blasphemy for criticizing Mohammed’s companions during a Karachi Muharram procession. Jaffar made his remarks in Arabic, which were then aired on a popular Karachi news station, 24 News HD. Following complaints by some Sunni groups, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority temporarily suspended 24 News from broadcasting, citing Jaffar’s comments as “hate-inciting content.”

‘The blasphemy charges against Jaffar were followed by anti-Shia rallies throughout the country and at least three rallies in Karachi by Sunni groups on September 11 and 13 attended by thousands of individuals. Speakers at these rallies warned Shia of dire consequences, including beheadings, if they continued to blaspheme against the Prophet Mohammed’s companions.’⁶⁸

5.3.4 On 5 September 2020, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed concern at a surge in blasphemy cases against religious minorities, particularly the Shia community and the potential for ensuing sectarian violence. According to the report, anecdotal evidence indicated that over 40 blasphemy cases were registered against Shias in August 2020⁶⁹.

5.3.5 On 16 November 2020, USCIRF released a press statement on the rise in blasphemy cases leading to mob violence in Pakistan, stating that:

‘The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is troubled by the sharp rise in blasphemy cases and mob violence in recent months targeting Shi’a Muslims in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province.

‘... Last week, vigilante students at Kohat University of Science and Technology, in Kohat district, attempted to lynch an unnamed Shi’a student for allegedly posting blasphemous remarks on Facebook. The angry mob beat the student and charged the vice-chancellors office, demanding that the student be expelled from the university or they would kill him. The accused student was expelled, taken into police custody, and charged with blasphemy under Pakistan’s Penal Code.’⁷⁰

5.3.6 The media platform Naya Daur, affiliated with the Islamabad-based non-profit organisation Peace and Justice Network⁷¹, reported in September 2020 that, according to data compiled by a social media user, 42 blasphemy cases were registered over a single month⁷², including one against a 3 year-old child⁷³, and that nearly 80% of those cases were against Shia activists and eulogists⁷⁴. According to Naya Daur, reporting in the same month, ‘Authorities have arrested at least a dozen Shia zakirs and clerics across the

⁶⁸ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

⁶⁹ HRCP, ‘[HRCP alarmed by surge in blasphemy cases against Shia community](#)’, 5 September 2020

⁷⁰ USCIRF, ‘[USCIRF Gravely Concerned about the Rise in Blasphemy Cases...](#)’, 16 November 2020

⁷¹ Naya Daur, ‘[About us](#)’, no date

⁷² Naya Daur, ‘[42 Blasphemy Cases Registered In Pakistan In Last 30 Days](#)’, 1 September 2020

⁷³ Naya Daur, ‘[Police Nominate 3-Year-Old Shia Child In FIR For Organising...](#)’, 7 September 2020

⁷⁴ Naya Daur, ‘[42 Blasphemy Cases, Mostly Against Shias, Registered In...](#)’, 3 September 2020

country for allegedly making blasphemous statements against some companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).⁷⁵

See [Discrimination, harassment and hate speech](#).

- 5.3.7 The Guardian reported in October 2020 that over 50 Shia Muslims were booked under blasphemy and anti-terrorism charges over the last month⁷⁶.
- 5.3.8 According to a 2015 report by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), over 80% of blasphemy cases were overturned on appeal, ‘... with judges expressly stating in a large majority of such cases that the complaint was fabricated and spurred on by personal vendettas.’⁷⁷ The DFAT report indicated that around 95% of blasphemy cases ended in acquittal⁷⁸, though often only after lengthy periods of detention⁷⁹ ⁸⁰. The USSD IRF Reports for 2019 and 2020 reported some blasphemy convictions were overturned during those years, with others acquitted after the accused had spent years in prison ⁸¹ ⁸².
- 5.3.9 Although death sentences continued to be passed for blasphemy, the authorities have never executed anyone for this offence⁸³ ⁸⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

5.4 Enforced disappearances

- 5.4.1 The USSD Country Report on Human Rights for 2020 noted ‘Shia Muslim activists reported continuing instances of targeted killings and enforced disappearances in limited parts of the country.’⁸⁵
- 5.4.2 The Diplomat reported in April 2021:
‘In May 2018, estimates for the number of forcibly “disappeared” Shias ranged from 140 to around 300. In April 2019, the Shia community, led by the Joint-Action Committee for Shia Missing Persons, held a two-week-long sit-in outside the President’s House in Karachi. As a result, some 17 Shias were freed and 16 appeared in court, officially charged with [sic]. Currently, there are 34 recorded cases of Shia missing persons from different parts of the country who have been missing for two years or more, some as many as six years.’⁸⁶
- 5.4.3 Reporting on the State of Human Rights in 2019, the HRCP noted ‘Families and friends of missing persons from the Shia community ended a 13-day protest sit-in outside the President’s residence in the Bahadurabad area in May after some persons were released and the whereabouts of others were made known. The sit-in had been supported by several political leaders and

⁷⁵ Naya Daur, ‘[Several Shia Speakers Arrested On Blasphemy Charges After...](#)’, 4 September 2020

⁷⁶ The Guardian, ‘[Pakistani Shias live in terror as sectarian violence increases](#)’, 21 October 2020

⁷⁷ ICJ, ‘[On Trial: The Implementation of Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws](#)’ (page 7), November 2015

⁷⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.87), 20 February 2019

⁷⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.87), 20 February 2019

⁸⁰ HRCP, ‘[HRCP alarmed by surge in blasphemy cases against Shia community](#)’, 5 September 2020

⁸¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

⁸² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

⁸³ USCIRF, ‘[Annual Report 2021](#)’ (page 37), April 2021

⁸⁴ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

⁸⁵ USSD ‘[HR Report 2020](#)’ (section 6), 30 March 2021

⁸⁶ The Diplomat, ‘[Pakistan’s Shias Face Double Threat: Extremists and ...](#)’, 6 April 2021

rights activists. Some of the protestors were detained by police but later released.⁸⁷

5.4.4 The Diplomat article noted:

‘It is not clear why and on what grounds Shias are being “disappeared.” The abductors – presumably the security agencies – claim that the missing persons were involved in the Syrian civil war and sectarian violence in the country. According to an unofficial and unverified estimate, between 700 and 5,000 Pakistan Shias from Karachi, Parachinar, and Gilgit-Baltistan, recruited by Iran, went to Syria to fight against the Islamic State. The security agencies fear that Shias who returned from Syria pose a threat to Pakistan’s stability.

‘Under this pretext, the security agencies have picked up Shias who returned from Syria. Police and the paramilitary often raid homes and tell the families that their loved ones will be sent back once the investigation is done. But the people are moved to undisclosed locations, with no information given to their families. Family members are left to search at local police stations, hospitals and even morgues for some news of their loved ones.

‘More concerningly, some of those who have been “disappeared” never went to Syria, Iraq, or Iran.’⁸⁸

5.4.5 An article in Deutsche Welle in July 2019 also noted that:

‘Authorities say that many of the "missing persons" had gone to conflict-ridden countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and never returned to Pakistan. Those who did come back were allegedly taken into custody by security agencies, although their families say they are unaware about their whereabouts.

‘... But Shiite organizations and activists in Pakistan say that the Syria connection is just an excuse for Pakistani authorities to target Shiites, who make up around 10% of the Muslim-majority country's 180 million population.

“Most of the 'missing Shiites' have no militant background. I'm not ruling out the possibility that some may have gone to Syria to fight for the regime, but some 150-160 missing persons simply went on a pilgrimage to Iran, Iraq and Syria,” Shiite activist Rashid Rizvi told DW. “Even if they committed a crime, they should be produced before a court of law,” he added.’⁸⁹

5.4.6 Sit-ins continued to be held in 2020, as noted in the HRCP’s State of Human Rights in 2020 report, which said that the Joint Action Committee (JAC) for Shia Missing Persons demanded the safe recovery of missing relatives and that they be produced in court and due process followed. The report added ‘Following a protest in August, during which protestors alleged they had been baton-charged by the police, federal minister Ali Zaidi assured them their grievances would be addressed.’⁹⁰

5.4.7 However, the English-language Pakistani news site, Dawn, reported on 15 March 2021, that the JAC ‘... expressed grave concern over the non-

⁸⁷ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2019](#)’ (page 79), April 2020

⁸⁸ The Diplomat, ‘[Pakistan’s Shias Face Double Threat: Extremists and ...](#)’, 6 April 2021

⁸⁹ DW, ‘[Why are Pakistani Shiites 'disappearing'?](#)’, 9 July 2019

⁹⁰ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2020](#)’ (page 58), May 2021

recovery of their loved ones and alleged that the government and state institutions were not serious in their recovery. They said despite repeated assurances from the authorities the missing persons had not returned to their home or been traced.⁹¹ The Dawn article also noted that ‘The JAC leaders said that more and more people were being secretly rounded up every day.’⁹²

- 5.4.8 Sit-in protests, organised by the JAC, took place in Karachi during April 2021 where families demanded the recovery of their missing relatives^{93 94}. The protests ended on 30 April 2021 ‘... in view of the rising Covid-19 cases as well as after holding successful talks with the government and security agencies’⁹⁵, reported The News International, an English language newspaper in Pakistan. The article also noted that ‘A speaker said that the government and security agencies had assured them of resolving the issue in phases. “Under that agreement, two people have returned.” The families warned that if the authorities did not honour their commitment, they could resume the protest.’⁹⁶ Rallies against the enforced disappearance of Shia Muslims also took place in April 2021 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa⁹⁷.

[Back to Contents](#)

5.5 Police and judicial protection

- 5.5.1 According to sources made available to an April 2018 report by the IRB:

‘The CASS [Centre for Academic Shi’a Studies] research department explained that the “[p]olice provide protection to Shia Muslims for religious gatherings and processions that are public and whose licenses and permits have been held by Shias for many years” (CASS 19 Mar. 2018). Similarly, according to Dr. Matthew Nelson, a Reader in Politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London [5], in 2017, there was a “greater police presence to protect certain [Shia] processions” than in previous years and the “level of sectarian violence during Muharram was down partly because the police were more on the front foot in trying to prevent some of that violence” (Nelson Feb. 2018, 24-25)...’⁹⁸

- 5.5.2 However, the IRB report added:

‘The Executive Director of the SATP indicated that Shia Muslims in Pakistan have a lack of trust in state institutions (SATP 22 Mar. 2018). According to the CASS research department, “in general, people and Shia community do not rely on the law enforcement agencies” although “[t]o an extent it also depends on the situation and the area” (CASS 19 Mar. 2018). According to the Executive Director of the SATP,

‘[o]ver the years, the police and public have become inured of extremist sectarian incitement through wall posters, public speeches, addresses in

⁹¹ Dawn, ‘[Countrywide protest planned for recovery of Shia “missing” persons](#)’, 15 March 2021

⁹² Dawn, ‘[Countrywide protest planned for recovery of Shia “missing” persons](#)’, 15 March 2021

⁹³ The News, ‘[Sattar visits sit-in, demands release of missing Shia persons](#)’, 12 April 2021

⁹⁴ Dawn, ‘[Release of “missing” persons sought before Ramazan](#)’, 13 April 2021

⁹⁵ The News, ‘[Sit-in for Shia missing persons called off after talks with govt](#)’, 1 May 2021

⁹⁶ The News, ‘[Sit-in for Shia missing persons called off after talks with govt](#)’, 1 May 2021

⁹⁷ Shiite News, ‘[Protest rallies in KP province against enforced disappearance of Shia...](#)’, 7 April 2021

⁹⁸ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Prevalence of clerics inciting violence against...](#)’, 30 April 2018

mosques and, increasingly, social media. These are seldom acknowledged or acted against. Among the legitimate problems in this regard is the low capacity of the police and unwillingness to take on additional “cases,” particularly those that go against the broad political environment sympathetic to Sunni majoritarianism. (SATP 22 Mar. 2018)

‘... According to Fazli [Senior Analyst and Regional Editor, South Asia, of International Crisis Group],

‘[p]olice protection against sectarian hatred and violence is weak, as resources are limited, and the conviction rate in terms of tackling sectarian violence is close to zero. It is possible that police authorities themselves fear for their lives, especially in dealing with militant groups. While police authorities are expected to go after members of certain militant groups, like the LeJ, they let members of other militant groups, like the Jaish-e-Mohammed, “off the hook,” despite that both groups recruit from the same madrasas and networks and despite [the fact] that their financial resources and weapons originate from the same sources. In addition to police authorities, prosecutors and judges too fear for their lives and have often been targeted. (Fazli 28 Mar. 2018)

‘According to the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC), a Hong Kong-based human rights organization that focuses on justice institutions in Asia (ALRC n.d.), “[s]tate bias and prejudice is apparent in the judicial and administrative attitude” towards religious minorities, including “Hazara Shias” (ALRC 26 Feb. 2018).’⁹⁹

5.5.3 According to the USSD IRF Report 2020:

‘The Ministry of Interior maintained multitier schedules of religiously oriented groups it judged to be extremist or terrorist that were either banned or had their activities monitored and curtailed (Schedule 1) and individuals whose activities in the public sphere could also be curtailed, including during religious holidays such as Ashura (Schedule 4). On August 23, the Sindh provincial government barred 142 “firebrand” speakers and religious scholars from leaving their home districts for 60 days to avoid violent disturbances during Shia Muharram commemorations. These 142 individuals included both Shia and Sunni clerics who in the past had given controversial statements leading to sectarian tensions.’¹⁰⁰

5.5.4 The same source added:

‘According to media reports and law enforcement sources, in the weeks leading up to and during the Islamic month of Muharram – religiously significant for Shia Muslims – authorities at the federal and provincial levels again restricted the movement and activities of dozens of clerics on the Ministry of Interior’s Schedule 4 listing. According to civil society and media reports, the government restricted the movement and activities of these individuals because they were known for exacerbating sectarian tensions.’¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Prevalence of clerics inciting violence against...](#)’, 30 April 2018

¹⁰⁰ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

¹⁰¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

- 5.5.5 The DFAT report stated, in regard to Karachi, which has historically seen a high level of violence, that, ‘The NAP [National Action Plan, established in December 2014¹⁰²] and the highly visible presence of the paramilitary Rangers, have led to a significant decrease in violence, including sectarian violence.’¹⁰³
- 5.5.6 The same source also reported that ‘Shi’a are most vulnerable during large gatherings, such as Ashura processions. Heightened state protection measures during these events partly mitigate the threats associated with this greater exposure.’¹⁰⁴
- 5.5.7 The USSD IRF Report 2020 also noted, as it had done in previous years¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷, that the authorities increased security for Shia Muslims, as well as other religious minorities, at places of worship at various times throughout the year, including around religious holidays or in response to specific threats¹⁰⁸. The USSD IRF Report 2020 added ‘In August and September [2020], increased security was provided throughout the country for the Shia community’s Muharram processions. In Islamabad, the deputy inspector general of police said as many as 15,000 police, Rangers, and Frontier Corps personnel were involved.’¹⁰⁹
- 5.5.8 Samaa TV reported on 8 October 2020 that increased security was provided for processions held across Pakistan to mark the Shia observance of Chelum, including a bomb disposal squad and over 5,000 security personnel on duty in Karachi, as well as the blockage of mobile services along the procession routes¹¹⁰. More than 10,000 police officers were on duty in Lahore, with procession routes monitored by security cameras and cellular services suspended, whilst 2,300 armed police were deployed in Rawalpindi ‘to ensure security and to protect the mourners.’¹¹¹
- See [Discrimination, harassment and hate speech](#) for details of anti-Shia demonstrations and rhetoric that occurred during Muharram in 2020.
- 5.5.9 Reporting in October 2020, MRG and the Imam Al Khoei Foundation (an international religious charitable institution founded by created by Abul-Qassim Khoei, a Grand Ayatollah) noted that they were ‘...concerned that events between August and September 2020 confirm that proscribed anti-Shi’a organisations, which have a history of targeting all religious minority communities, including Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus and Shi’as, still operate with impunity.’¹¹²
- 5.5.10 Reporting on the surge in blasphemy cases, The Guardian reported in October 2020 noted that, ‘Bakhtawar Jaffri, a Shia rights activist in Punjab, said she had recently filed a police report for anti-Shia hate speech but it had

¹⁰² NACTA, ‘[National Action Plan 2014](#)’, no date

¹⁰³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.105), 20 February 2019

¹⁰⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.101), 20 February 2019

¹⁰⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2017](#)’ (section II), 29 May 2018

¹⁰⁶ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2018](#)’ (section II), 21 June 2019

¹⁰⁷ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁰⁸ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

¹⁰⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

¹¹⁰ Samaa TV, ‘[Chehlum processions held across Pakistan](#)’, 8 October 2020

¹¹¹ Daily Pakistan, ‘[Chehlum Imam Hussain: Pakistan mourns Karbala martyrs...](#)’, 8 October 2020

¹¹² MRG, ‘[Shi’a become latest target of Pakistan’s extremist Islamic factions...](#)’, 20 October 2020

been ignored. “In contrast, even the baseless and fake cases from the other side are being entertained by police,” she said.¹¹³ (see also [Application of the blasphemy laws](#)).

- 5.5.11 The DFAT report noted ‘Shi’a in Pakistan often travel to Iran and Iraq for religious pilgrimage. Militant groups have historically targeted routes used by Shi’a pilgrims, particularly through Balochistan.’¹¹⁴ According to DFAT’s understanding ‘... the Pakistani military provides escort services for Shi’a pilgrims to protect them from attacks, significantly mitigating the risk of violence. Military escorts can be infrequent.’¹¹⁵ The source noted also that ‘Local sources claim that government security for Shi’a undertaking religious pilgrimage... is more readily available for non-Hazara Shi’a, and the government provides escorts for Hazaras only every couple of months.’¹¹⁶ (see also [Sectarian violence](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 6 updated: 8 July 2021

6. Societal and non-state actor treatment and attitudes

6.1 Discrimination, harassment and hate speech

- 6.1.1 According to the 2019 DFAT report, ‘Low-level anti-Shi’a discrimination does occur at the community level, and can manifest in violence or damage to property.’¹¹⁷

- 6.1.2 The US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted in its 2021 Annual Report, covering 2020 events, that ‘The government’s failure to address hate speech and promote religious harmony contributed to mob violence. In September, after Sunni extremists led anti-Shi’a protests in Karachi, a mob attempted to lynch a Shi’a student at Kohat Technical University while another targeted an elderly man in Charsadda.’¹¹⁸

See also [Police and judicial protection](#) and [Application of the blasphemy laws](#).

- 6.1.3 Reporting in October 2020, MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation noted that a wave of anti-Shi’a rhetoric and violence began at the start of the Islamic sacred month of Muharram following the arrest of a Shia cleric for alleged blasphemous comments on 30 August 2020:

‘The current wave of anti-Shi’a rhetoric and violence began with the advent of the Islamic sacred month of Muharram, when an elderly Shi’a man was arrested on the 30th of August over allegations that he had recited Ziarat-e-Ashura, an essential part of Shi’a practice in which they proclaim their allegiance to the third holy imam, Husayn ibn Ali. Deemed un-Islamic or blasphemous by banned militant organisations, the act led to pressure on the police to arrest the man on the evening of that same day.’¹¹⁹

¹¹³ The Guardian, ‘[Pakistani Shias live in terror as sectarian violence increases](#)’, 21 October 2020

¹¹⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.102), 20 February 2019

¹¹⁵ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.103), 20 February 2019

¹¹⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.35), 20 February 2019

¹¹⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.96), 20 February 2019

¹¹⁸ USCIRF, ‘[Annual Report 2021](#)’ (page 37), April 2021

¹¹⁹ MRG, ‘[Shi’a become latest target of Pakistan’s extremist Islamic factions...](#)’, 20 October 2020

6.1.4 Naya Daur reported on 7 September 2020, ‘Since the start of Muharram, there has been an increase in hate campaigns against Shia groups and subsequent blasphemy allegations for reciting Ziyarat-e-Ashura – a prayer that denounces the killers of Imam Hussain. Moreover, a number of Shia orators were detained across the country for allegedly making blasphemous statements against some companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).’¹²⁰

See also [Application of the blasphemy laws](#).

6.1.5 Naya Daur reported that following the arrest of the Shia cleric ‘... anti-Shia wall chalking – a hate practice common since the 80s – has reappeared in various neighbourhoods of Karachi. According to a post shared on Facebook, the wall chalking also had flags of banned sectarian outfits next to it.’¹²¹

6.1.6 The Diplomat reported on 17 September 2020 on apparent anti-Shia demonstrations in Karachi:

‘Rallies targeting the Shia Muslims of Pakistan were orchestrated on successive days in Karachi over the past weekend. Demonstrators numbering in the tens of thousands – at least 30,000 according to security officials – descended on the city’s major highways, MA Jinnah Road and Saeed Manzil Road, chanting anti-Shia slogans, declaring the community “heretics.”

‘Among those leading the demonstrations was Muneeb-ur-Rehman, the chairman of the government affiliated Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, which decrees the moon sighting for the Islamic calendar. While Rehman claimed that the rallies only “upheld the sanctity” of the Sahaba (Prophet Muhammad’s companions) and “didn’t target any sect,” the unabated echoes of “Shia kafir” (Shia infidels) among the demonstrators suggested otherwise. The Ruet-e-Hilal Committee chairman’s own position was further clarified by his demand that sects be declared in the next census and his threats that the participants could “turn to negative activities” if their religious sentiments were hurt.

‘Abid Mubara, the Karachi chief of the Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), was more brazen in his threats when he said that Sunnis could “behead people” who blasphemed against their revered personalities.

‘... While the apostatizing slogans and banners of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) — a proscribed terror group that has the genocide of Shia as its declared manifesto — would suffice to illustrate their intentions, the Sunni Islamists leading the demonstrations took care not to mention the word Shia in their own speeches. Their rhetoric, demanding expansion of the already murderous blasphemy law, was in line with the systematic growth in anti-Shia hysteria in recent months.’¹²²

6.1.7 The MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation expressed concern at events targeting Shia Muslims and the authorities’ lack of action against proscribed

¹²⁰ Naya Daur, ‘[Police Nominate 3-Year-Old Shia Child In FIR For Organising...](#)’, 7 September 2020

¹²¹ Naya Daur, ‘[Police Nominate 3-Year-Old Shia Child In FIR For Organising...](#)’, 7 September 2020

¹²² The Diplomat, ‘[What Role Does the State Play in Pakistan’s Anti-Shia...?](#)’, 17 September 2020

groups. Reporting on anti-Shia rallies in Karachi and Islamabad, the MRG stated:

'... Consecutively, on the 11th, 12th and 13th of September, three massive rallies were held under the slogan "Azmat-e-Sahaba" ("Honour of the Companions"). These marches were organised by Sunni religious and religio-political organisations including Jamiat-e-Ulama Islam and Tahreek-e-Labbaik Party, a far-right organisation known for anti-minority hatred and misuse of the blasphemy laws, Ahl-e-Hadith Action Committee and proscribed organisations including ASWJ-SSP [Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal-Jamaat, formerly known as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan].

'Thousands of participants and supporters of these rallies were heard openly calling Shi'as "infidels" and were seen pelting stones at the Imambargah, a Shi'a mosque and community centre. Demands were made to ban Muharram processions, other essential Shi'a rituals and practices, and implement across the country the controversial Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam bill which, having recently been passed in the Assembly of Punjab, is a direct attack on the freedom of religion of Shi'as and other minorities.'¹²³

6.1.8 The Guardian reported in October 2020:

'The anti-Shia Muslim campaign first began gathering pace on social media in September, demanding that Shia Muslims were declared heretics. The hashtag "infidel, infidel, Shias are infidel" began trending.

'Then, in mid-September, a march of more than 30,000 people, organised by extremist Sunni Muslim groups, gathered in Karachi over two days to call Shia Muslims "unbelievers" and "blasphemers" and called for their beheading. It was the largest anti-Shia march seen in decades in Pakistan, and was copied in other cities including the capital Islamabad...

'At the forefront of anti-Shia campaign in Pakistan are two hardline Sunni Muslim groups, Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ) and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)... Despite their well-documented extremist positions, over the past two years TLP and ASWJ have been allowed to assemble, make public anti-Shia speeches, carry out rallies, run for political office and mobilise against the Shia community, ensuring their power and influence in Pakistan has gone from strength to strength.'¹²⁴

6.1.9 The Guardian report added 'Over the past month, Pakistan has seen an unprecedented rise in attacks and arrests of its Shia population... As well as the 50 who have been charged in the blasphemy crackdown, five have been killed since September and many more Shia families and well-known figures have gone into hiding.'¹²⁵

6.1.10 A joint report by the non-governmental think tank Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) and the German political foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) stated in its December 2020 report, based on a range of primary and secondary sources:

¹²³ MRG, '[Shi'a become latest target of Pakistan's extremist Islamic factions...](#)', 20 October 2020

¹²⁴ The Guardian, '[Pakistani Shias live in terror as sectarian violence increases](#)', 21 October 2020

¹²⁵ The Guardian, '[Pakistani Shias live in terror as sectarian violence increases](#)', 21 October 2020

‘Banned sectarian groups are at the forefront of the endeavors to fuel sectarian hatred on social media platforms. For instance, after the outbreak of Covid-19 in Pakistan, Sunni social media activists blamed the Shia pilgrims returning from Iran, while the Shia activists accused the Sunni Tablighi Jamaat gatherings for the spread of the virus in the country. Frequent posts and messages carrying sectarian hate speech could be seen on social media platforms in those days.’¹²⁶

- 6.1.11 The Diplomat reported in April 2020 that Shia Hazara pilgrims returning from Iran were blamed for spreading COVID-19 even though they represented only a small proportion of returnees. According to the report:

‘The racial profiling of Hazaras followed a targeted campaign against the wider Shia community. Two government ministers, Zulfikar Bukhari and Ali Zaidi, both Shias, were singled out and blamed for the spread of the virus in Pakistan. A coordinated campaign on Twitter was trending between April 1 and 2 where people such as Ahmad Ludhyanvi, chairman of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, an anti-Shia organization, were calling COVID-19 the “Shia virus”.’¹²⁷

- 6.1.12 HRCP’s State of Human Rights in 2020 report stated that:

‘Since Pakistan’s first group of cases comprised mostly Shia pilgrims returning from Iran via Balochistan, the issue was unnecessarily tarred with a sectarian brush, thereby subjecting a vulnerable minority sect to further hate speech and discrimination, especially the already- beleaguered Shia Hazara community in Quetta. Reports that returning pilgrims were being packed into inhumane quarantine conditions fuelled fear among the wider public of getting caught with Covid-19 and aided resistance to testing and shielding of positive cases. This was augmented during the initial ‘contact-tracing’ exercises by provincial governments, whereby infected persons were picked up by police and whisked away to isolation centres, sometimes in the dead of night, which too were often dilapidated, making the spread of the virus even more probable and putting lives at further risk.’¹²⁸

- 6.1.13 The MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation reported on a wave of online hate speech against Shia Muslims between August and September 2020, citing a sentiment algorithm, which documented 46% of social media mentions of Shias examined during that period were negative, with the Urdu word for ‘infidel’ most prevalent¹²⁹.

[Back to Contents](#)

6.2 Sectarian violence

- 6.2.1 The November 2020 CREID report noted in regard to Shia Muslims:

‘In Pakistan, anti-Shia violence dates back to the 1979 Iranian Revolution when the Pakistani military, with the help of Saudi funding, formed Sipah-e-Sahaba (literally translated to “Soldiers of the Companions of the Prophet”) to contain the influence of the revolution... However, violence against Shias

¹²⁶ PIPS/FES, ‘[Strengthening Governance in Pakistan...](#)’ (page 38), December 2020

¹²⁷ The Diplomat, ‘[COVID-19 Fans Religious Discrimination in Pakistan](#)’, 28 April 2020

¹²⁸ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2020](#)’ (pages 3 to 4), May 2021

¹²⁹ MRG, ‘[Shi’a become latest target of Pakistan’s extremist Islamic factions...](#)’, 20 October 2020

intensified as soon Pakistan became an ally of the US in its “war on terror”. Many religious militant groups saw Pakistan’s support to the US, particularly the crackdown against al-Qaeda in northern parts of the country, as a reason to wage war against Pakistan and its people. This was the beginning of a series of attacks against Shias (including Hazaras) across Pakistan.’¹³⁰

6.2.2 DFAT noted in its February 2019 report:

‘Sectarian violence in Pakistan has historically targeted individuals, places of worship, shrines and religious schools, however Shi’a traditionally represented a higher proportion of the casualties... Shi’a continue to face a threat from anti-Shi’a militant groups, including LeJ [Lashkar-e-Jhangvi], Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), also known as Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ), LeJ al-Alami, and other factions of the TTP [Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan]. The LeJ’s objective is to establish an Islamist Sunni state in Pakistan and seeks to have Shi’a declared “non-believers” or apostates, and to eliminate other religious groups such as Jews, Christians and Hindus.

‘The LeJ... has claimed several attacks on Shi’a in recent years, particularly Hazaras in Quetta... and other Shi’a groups in the former FATA and Karachi. In an open letter released in June 2011, LeJ leaders declared their intention to ‘abolish the impure sect’ of ‘Shi’a and Hazara Shi’a.’¹³¹

6.2.3 The source also noted that: ‘The Taliban and Al Qaeda have gained significant ground in the former FATA, killing many Shi’a – especially in Parachinar, rendering Turis and other Shi’a tribes of the former FATA amongst the most vulnerable across Pakistan.’¹³²

6.2.4 The USSD IRF Report 2020 also reported that:

‘According to civil society and media, armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including the LeJ, TTP, and the once-banned anti-Shia group SSP, continued to be responsible for violence and other abuses against religious minorities. Groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, such as ISIS, also committed violent acts. Among the targets of these attacks were Shia Muslims, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara community.’¹³³

6.2.5 Citing different sources, the CREID report noted ‘For LeJ and the TTP, the killing of Shias is necessary to make Pakistan “pure” from “heretics”; therefore, they consider that the extermination of Shias “from every city, every village, and every nook and corner of Pakistan” is necessary... A letter sent by LeJ to Hazaras in 2011 stated: “All Shias are worthy of killing. We will rid Pakistan of [this] unclean people”.’¹³⁴

6.2.6 In a section on anti-Shia violence, the DFAT report stated that ‘Karachi has historically experienced high levels of violence due to rival ethnic, sectarian, political, business and criminal interests. The NAP [National Action Plan, established in December 2014¹³⁵] and the highly visible presence of the

¹³⁰ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)’ (pages 22 to 23), November 2020

¹³¹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.99), 20 February 2019

¹³² DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.14), 20 February 2019

¹³³ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

¹³⁴ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)’ (page 23), November 2020

¹³⁵ NACTA, ‘[National Action Plan 2014](#)’, no date

paramilitary Rangers, have led to a significant decrease in violence, including sectarian violence.¹³⁶

6.2.7 The report also noted that:

‘In Punjab, sectarian tensions and violence are more prevalent in the south, and in parts of Gujranwala, Sialkot and Rawalpindi. Conservative madrassas and militant groups are more prominent in southern Punjab, and Sunni and Shi’a communities are more segregated...

‘Balochistan has historically suffered from ethno-sectarian tensions and politically motivated violence, including violence from an active separatist movement. There is a large Hazara Shi’a population in Quetta, the provincial capital, which has historically been a target for sectarian violence... Militants also target Shi’a travelling through Balochistan to the Iranian border... The number of casualties from sectarian violence in Balochistan has fallen since the introduction of the NAP and Operation Zarb-e-Azb...

‘Similar to other parts of Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has seen a significant reduction in militant violence in recent years...

‘Despite a relative decline in violent incidents, violence across the former FATA is still widespread and sectarian attacks can be lethal.

‘The mountainous terrain, sparse (and majority Shi’a) population, and the fact that communities tend to live in isolation from each other mean that Gilgit-Baltistan has fewer violent incidents than other regions in Pakistan...¹³⁷

6.2.8 Reporting on the treatment of Shia Muslims, the December 2020 IRB response stated that:

‘The Jinnah Institute representative stated that there have been targeted killings and attacks on mosques and shrines in southern Punjab province, the North, Balochistan province, and Karachi (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). The same source indicated that there has been renewed violence by militant groups and that sectarian groups that were previously quiet have become violent again (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). The Professor of Islamic studies noted that while “there is undeniably persecution of Shias on the ground in Pakistan,” it is not the same everywhere and that “persecution does not exist in all regions of Pakistan” (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). The same source stated that “the experience of Shias varies from one individual to another” (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). The Senior Fellow stated that “there is no city-specific violence that you can isolate, other than recent surge in attacks on Hazara Shias in Balochistan, mostly around the city of Quetta” (Senior Fellow 19 Nov. 2020). The same source noted that incidents of violence “can happen at any place in any province” and that “there have been incidents [in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, and Hyderabad] with Karachi topping the list for incidents of violence against the Shias” (Senior Fellow 19 Nov. 2020).¹³⁸

¹³⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.105), 20 February 2019

¹³⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraphs 3.106 to 3.112), 20 February 2019

¹³⁸ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

6.2.9 The IRB response also compiled a series of responses on area specific situation and treatment of Shia Muslims in Pakistan, though noted that information on the treatment of Shia Muslims in Lahore and Islamabad ‘was scarce’:

‘The Professor of Islam and politics noted that while groups tend to cluster together in neighbourhoods, which “could speak to discrimination,” the situation regarding discrimination in Lahore is relatively minor (Professor of Islam and politics 19 Nov. 2020). In contrast, the Jinnah Institute representative stated that although it has dense communities of Shias, Lahore is one of the “worst” cities for Shias because militant groups are also present (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020)...

‘Professor of Islamic studies indicated that the situation in certain cities, including Islamabad, is “not as bad” (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the Professor of Islam and politics noted that, in Islamabad, “almost nothing happens because it is very well policed” (Professor of Islam and politics 19 Nov. 2020)...

‘The Professor of Islamic studies indicated that Karachi is one of the cities with the “worst persecution” of Shia Muslims (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). The same source noted that “Shias in Karachi come from all ethnic groups; this has been a hotbed for Sunni Islam, and some groups have become focused on anti-Shia violence. Karachi has more crime as well” (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). ... the Professor of Islam and politics indicated that Karachi has “been worse” in the past two to three years (Professor of Islam and politics 19 Nov. 2020). The Jinnah Institute representative stated that although it has dense communities of Shias, Karachi is among the “worst” cities for Shias because of the presence of militant groups (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020).’¹³⁹

6.2.10 The DFAT report noted that ‘Shi’a in Pakistan often travel to Iran and Iraq for religious pilgrimage. Militant groups have historically targeted routes used by Shi’a pilgrims, particularly through Balochistan. In 2014, militants attacked a bus on the Quetta-Taftan highway in Mastung District, Balochistan, killing at least 29 Shi’a pilgrims and injuring 35. ... Shi’a pilgrims can travel by air rather than by road, but many cannot afford to do so.’¹⁴⁰

6.2.11 The December 2020 PIPS/FES report noted:

‘On the whole, sectarian violence has plummeted in Pakistan in recent years. Yet its factors as well as sectarian discord and the groups promoting it continue to exist. Sporadic triggers are continuous reminders of that. In a recent manifestation, Sunni and Shia sectarian groups and their supporters blamed Shia pilgrims returning from Iran and congregations by Tablighi Jamaat members for the spread of Covid-19 in Pakistan.’¹⁴¹

6.2.12 The number of Shia Muslim casualties varied according to different sources and did not always distinguish between non-Hazara and Hazara Shia.

¹³⁹ IRB, ‘[Pakistan: Differences between Shia \[Shi’a, Shi’i\] and Sunni Muslims...](#)’, 4 December 2020

¹⁴⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.102), 20 February 2019

¹⁴¹ PIPS/FES, ‘[Strengthening Governance in Pakistan...](#)’ (page 24), December 2020

- 6.2.13 The USSD IRF Report of 2020 noted that ‘Data on sectarian attacks varied because no standardized definition existed of what constituted a sectarian attack among reporting organizations... There were multiple reports of targeted killings of Shia Muslims in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, although because religion and ethnicity were often closely related, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity.’¹⁴²
- 6.2.14 According to data compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), between 2000 and 2020 there were 365 attacks against Shia Muslims resulting in 1,672 deaths and 2,187 injuries¹⁴³. The SATP data indicated that casualties peaked in 2013 (445 deaths and 657 injuries) but gradually reduced over the following years. In 2019, SATP recorded 5 attacks on Shias, resulting in 13 deaths and 20 injuries. In 2020, one attack was recorded, with no casualties, and 6 abductions¹⁴⁴.
- 6.2.15 The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) recorded 11 attacks against Shias (mostly Shia Hazaras) in 2019, resulting in 32 deaths and 72 injuries¹⁴⁵, and 4 attacks in 2020, with 5 deaths and 14 injuries¹⁴⁶.
- 6.2.16 According to the think tank Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) report covering 2013 to 2018, of 2,099 fatalities due to sectarian violence, 1,104 were Shias (815 were described as Shia and 289 as Shia Hazaras)¹⁴⁷. Reporting on sectarian violence in 2019, the CRSS recorded 4 deaths and 4 injuries of non-Hazara Shia Muslims in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces in its Annual Security Report for 2019¹⁴⁸. In 2020, the CRSS recorded the deaths of 7 Shias in the ex-FATA region, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh as a result of sectarian violence, but did not distinguish whether any were ethnic Hazara¹⁴⁹.
- 6.2.17 The MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation cited 4 killings that occurred over one week in September 2020:
- ‘In early September, a Shi’a man, Qaiser Abbas, was shot dead in broad daylight at his shop in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Then, on the 13th of September, Malik Alamdar Hussain, the license holder of a Shi’a procession, was gunned down in Heelan area of Mandi Bahauddin, Punjab. On the 15th of September, two more Shi’a men, Syed Mir Hassan Jan and Irtiza Hassan, were shot dead in Kohat.’¹⁵⁰
- 6.2.18 The USSD IRF Report 2020 also noted that in September 2020, a Shia employee of the National Bank of Pakistan was shot in Islamabad. The report added ‘On October 11, unidentified militants abducted six Shia pilgrims near the Pakistan-Iran border region of Panjgur, in Balochistan. The

¹⁴² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2020](#)’ (section II), 12 May 2021

¹⁴³ SATP, ‘[Attacks on Shias](#)’, no date

¹⁴⁴ SATP, ‘[Attacks on Shias](#)’, no date

¹⁴⁵ PIPS, ‘[Pakistan Security Report 2019](#)’ (page 20), 2020

¹⁴⁶ PIPS, ‘[Pakistan Security Report 2020](#)’ (page 12), 2021

¹⁴⁷ CRSS, ‘[Annual Security Report Special Edition 2013-2018](#)’ (pages 57 to 58), 1 March 2019

¹⁴⁸ CRSS, ‘[Annual Security Report 2019](#)’ (page 31), 27 January 2020

¹⁴⁹ CRSS, ‘[Annual Security Report 2020](#)’ (page 28), 10 February 2021

¹⁵⁰ MRG, ‘[Shi’a become latest target of Pakistan’s extremist Islamic factions...](#)’, 20 October 2020

six, all from Karachi, were returning from a pilgrimage in Iran; they remained missing at year's end.¹⁵¹

- 6.2.19 The USSD Country Report on Human Rights for 2020 reported that 'Political, sectarian, criminal, and ethnic violence in Karachi continued, although violence declined and gang wars were less prevalent than before security operations in the city. On August 14, Syed Mohammad Ali Rizvi, a traffic policeman from the Shia community, was killed in Karachi in an alleged sectarian attack.'¹⁵²

[Back to Contents](#)

6.3 Intersect marriage

- 6.3.1 According to the DFAT report, 'No legal barriers prevent marriage between Shi'a and Sunnis in Pakistan. While marriages do occur, Sunni-Shi'a marriages are becoming less common in an environment of increasing religiosity. One partner (typically the bride) usually undergoes religious conversion. DFAT is not aware of forced conversions between sects.'¹⁵³
- 6.3.2 The November 2020 CREID report indicated that that while 'there is an exceptionally low (almost zero) trend of intermarriage between Hazara and non-Hazara ethnic groups', due to 'sectarian identity as the non-Hazara ethnic groups hail mainly from the Sunni sect'¹⁵⁴, intersect marriage between Sunni and non-Hazara Shia Muslims was 'comparatively common' due to greater community integration and a shared ethnic identity¹⁵⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 7 updated: 8 July 2021

7. Access to education and employment

7.1 Education

- 7.1.1 The DFAT report noted:

'Sunni and Shi'a students attend the same public and private education institutions. Students must declare their religious affiliation for entry into both public and private institutions, including universities. Religious bias in public education predominantly affects non-Muslims, but Shi'a groups have raised concerns that the public school syllabus and prescribed textbooks contain depictions of Sunni prayer rituals, and omit prominent historical Shi'a figures.'¹⁵⁶

7.2 Employment

- 7.2.1 According to the DFAT report, 'DFAT has no evidence of systemic discrimination against Shi'a in gaining employment in the public service, police, military or the private sector. However, some Shi'a perceive

¹⁵¹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2020](#)' (section II), 12 May 2021

¹⁵² USSD '[HR Report 2020](#)' (section 1), 30 March 2021

¹⁵³ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.95), 20 February 2019

¹⁵⁴ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)' (pages 67 to 68), November 2020

¹⁵⁵ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women...](#)' (page 65), November 2020

¹⁵⁶ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.97), 20 February 2019

discrimination against Shi'a gaining roles at higher levels of some organisations.¹⁵⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁵⁷ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.96), 20 February 2019

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Demography
 - Population
 - Integration
 - Religious practices
 - Characteristics
- Legal rights
 - Constitutional rights
 - Blasphemy laws
- State treatment and attitudes
 - Discrimination
 - Application of blasphemy laws
 - State support/security operations
 - Police and judiciary protection
- Societal treatment and attitudes
 - Discrimination and hate speech
 - Sectarian/militant violence
 - Intersect marriage
- Access to employment and education

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **12 July 2021**

Official – sensitive: Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

[Back to Contents](#)