

The elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 2014 faced an aggressive protest movement—headed by politician Imran Khan and cleric Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri—that was thought to have some degree of support from the military. The protesters called for the government’s resignation, alleging corruption and fraud in the May 2013 elections that brought Sharif to power.

Demonstrators established an encampment in central Islamabad in August, penetrating the high-security zone where government buildings, Parliament, and the Supreme Court are situated. On September 1, protesters occupied the state television headquarters, briefly taking the outlet off the air before the military reasserted control. At a joint session of Parliament the following day, politicians from both ruling and opposition parties voiced support for the continuation of the elected government and raised suspicions of military collusion with the protesters. The military ultimately did not force Sharif’s ouster, however, and Qadri eventually called off his followers’ sit-in in the capital in late October; Khan followed suit in December.

Also during the year, the civilian government attempted to take charge of security matters, forming a four-member committee in January to hold direct peace talks with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). However, large-scale terrorist attacks continued across the country, including an assault on Karachi’s international airport in June that killed some two dozen people, in addition to the 10 gunmen. Later that month, the government announced a major military operation against the TTP and all other militant groups in the restive North Waziristan Agency, part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The offensive had displaced roughly a million people by year’s end. In December, the TTP responded with an attack on a military-run school in Peshawar that killed 150 people, most of them children.

Five senior military commanders retired in October, including Zaheer-ul-Islam, head of the powerful Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), who had reportedly been among several officers pushing for the prime minister’s ouster during the summer political crisis. The country’s top military commander, General Raheel Sharif, had resisted such calls, according to media accounts. The new ISI chief, Rizwan Akhtar, was seen as an ally of General Sharif.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

## **Political Rights: 20 / 40 (-1) [Key]**

### **A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12**

Pakistan consists of four provinces (Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or KPK) and two federal territories (the FATA and the Islamabad Capital Territory).

Parliament (Majlis-i-Shoora) is bicameral, with a 342-member National Assembly (NA) and a 104-member Senate. The constitution envisages a parliamentary system of government headed by a prime minister, who must command a majority in the NA. An electoral college consisting of the Senate, the NA, and the provincial assemblies elects the president for up to two five-year terms.

The Senate is intended to provide equal representation to all units of the federation. Each provincial assembly chooses 23 members, NA members representing the FATA elect 8, and 4 are chosen by the NA to represent the capital territory. Senators serve six-year terms, with half of the seats up for election every

three years.

Members of the NA are elected for five years. Of the 342 seats, 272 are filled through direct elections in single-member districts, 60 are reserved for women, and 10 are reserved for non-Muslim minorities. The reserved seats are filled through a proportional representation system with closed party lists. The seats for women are allocated in proportion to the number of general seats a party gains in each of the provinces. Parties fill the non-Muslim seats in proportion to the number of seats they win nationwide. The provincial assemblies employ a similar electoral system.

The 2013 general elections were held under an improved legal and regulatory framework put in place following the 2008 elections. However, a number of weaknesses persisted, including vague and subjective candidacy requirements, procedural problems, and election-related violence. Despite these concerns, prominent international and domestic election observers judged the elections favorably, citing active competition and campaigning, and a relatively high voter turnout of 55 percent. Voters gave a clear mandate to the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) to replace the ruling Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) at the federal level. The PML-N took 126 of the directly elected seats in the NA, followed by the PPP with 31 and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) with 28. Various smaller parties took less than 20 directly elected seats each. The PML-N formed a governing majority with the help of allied independents, and Nawaz Sharif became prime minister.

At the provincial level, the PML-N won in Punjab, the PPP formed a government in Sindh, and a coalition led by the National Party assumed power in Balochistan. In KPK, a PTI-led coalition took office. Lawmakers chose Mamnoon Hussain as president in July.

In 2014, Imran Khan, leader of the PTI, accused the Electoral Commission of Pakistan of rigging the 2013 elections in favor of the PML-N and demanded electoral reforms followed by new elections. In July, at the government’s request, Parliament established an all-party committee to draft electoral reforms, including constitutional amendments. The committee’s deliberations were ongoing at year’s end. Separately, a parliamentary committee nominated retired judge Sardar Muhammad Raza as the new chief election commissioner in December, and he was duly installed by the president, ending a 16-month vacancy caused by disagreement between the government and opposition.

## **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16 (–1)**

Pakistan has a thriving multiparty system, with numerous factions represented in Parliament and provincial governance. Nonetheless, parties continue to be characterized by a lack of internal democracy and transparency, with most funds generated through private, opaque means. Parties typically rely on charismatic leadership by individual personalities or political dynasties.

Tribal and clan loyalties play a powerful role in determining voters’ choices, and deadly violence between supporters of rival parties remains a problem. Political participation is also undermined by intimidation from nonstate actors including the TTP, associated Islamist militant groups, and an insurgent movement in Balochistan.

Women are underrepresented in all spheres of the political process and have been prevented from casting votes in some districts, particularly in KPK, though they participated in large numbers in the antigovernment protests of 2014.

The participation of non-Muslims in the political system continues to be marginal. Political parties nominate

members to legislative seats reserved for non-Muslim minorities, leaving non-Muslim voters with little say in selecting the parliamentarians who supposedly represent them. Ahmadis, members of a heterodox Muslim sect, continue to face political discrimination and are registered on a separate voter roll. Religious minorities in general faced a significant increase in violent attacks during 2014, and the problem has led many to emigrate rather than pursue their interests through political institutions.

### **C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12**

Although Pakistan has an elected civilian government, the military retains considerable autonomy and influence in matters of national security, foreign policy, and some elements of economic policy. Prime Minister Sharif sought to assert control over such issues in 2013 and early 2014, but the military reportedly used the crisis caused by antigovernment protests in the summer of 2014 to put pressure on the government and reestablish primacy in its traditional policy domains.

Corruption, lack of accountability, and lack of transparency are pervasive problems at all levels of government, in politics, and in the military. The National Accountability Bureau has made little progress in tackling official graft, due largely to inadequate political will and institutional capacity. High-profile corruption cases against former president Asif Ali Zardari, reopened by the Supreme Court in 2012, were still under way in 2014. Procedural delays are a hallmark of such cases.

The Sharif government attempted to demonstrate accountability and responsiveness to the demands of protesters during 2014. In addition to initiating electoral reforms, the prime minister in August called on the Supreme Court to establish a judicial commission to investigate allegations of organized rigging in the 2013 elections.

### **Civil Liberties: 22 / 60 (+1)**

#### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16**

Pakistan has a vibrant media sector that presents a range of news and opinions. There are about 90 television channels, 160 radio stations, and over 200 daily newspapers. However, the country remains one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. At least three journalists and three other media workers were killed in 2014, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. In March, unidentified gunman attempted to assassinate news analyst and television anchor Raza Rumi as he left a studio in Lahore. Another prominent television journalist, Hamid Mir of the Geo network, survived an assassination attempt in Karachi the following month.

Geo aired accusations by Mir's family that ISI chief Zaheer-ul-Islam had ordered the attack, and the military responded by intimidating and harassing employees of Geo and affiliated newspapers owned by the Jang Group. Cable transmission of the channel was blocked, reportedly under pressure from the military, and copies of Jang newspapers were burned by armed men. The government backed the ISI, and the media regulator formally suspended transmission of Geo for 15 days in June. Also during the year, Imran Khan accused Geo of siding with the PML-N in the 2013 elections, and PTI supporters attacked Geo reporters and offices during the sit-in protests in August and September.

The media regularly face censorship and other pressure from state and nonstate actors. The constitution authorizes the government to curb speech on subjects pertaining to the armed forces, the judiciary, and

religion. Blasphemy laws are occasionally used against the media. During the 2014 political crisis, a number of media houses allegedly supported the opposition protests and criticized the Sharif government on instructions from the military. The TTP and other militant groups have attacked media groups and reporters for their coverage.

Online media have grown in reach and popularity in recent years, and Pakistanis can use the internet to access foreign and independent news services. However, more than 200,000 websites are banned in the country because of their allegedly anti-Islamic, pornographic, or blasphemous content. Access is also restricted for security reasons. The video-sharing site YouTube has been blocked since 2012, when an anti-Islamic video sparked protests across the Muslim world.

Pakistan is an Islamic republic. Although the constitution provides for freedom of religion and the protection of minorities, discriminatory legislation—particularly blasphemy laws—exacerbates religious extremism and vigilantism. The penal code makes it a criminal offense for members of the Ahmadi minority to call themselves Muslims “directly or indirectly,” to preach or propagate their faith, to outrage Muslims’ religious feelings, or to refer to their places of worship as mosques. Violations of religious freedom by the government and nonstate actors are fairly common and rarely punished.

Religious minorities faced an increase in violence in 2014, with bombings targeting Shiite Muslims and Christians throughout the year. In January, a bomb attack on a bus carrying Shiite pilgrims killed nearly 30 people near Mastung. The terrorist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for the blast and a series of other attacks on the Shiite community over the following months. In another high-profile incident, two Hindu traders were shot and killed in Umerkot, Sindh, drawing attention to violence faced by the Hindu minority. In May, a Hindu PML-N lawmaker stated in Parliament that about 5,000 Hindus emigrate from Pakistan each year to escape discrimination and forced conversions. Two incidents involving accusations of blasphemy occurred in 2014—a crowd burned down the homes of Ahmadis in Gujranwala in July, killing three people, and in November, a mob burned a Christian couple to death in a brick kiln in the Kasur district of Punjab.

Education is not free of political indoctrination. Pakistan’s primary and secondary public schools as well as privately run religious seminaries use textbooks that promote prejudice and intolerance against religious minorities. In colleges and universities, the student wings of political parties and Islamist groups use intimidation to impose their beliefs, including Islamic codes of conduct. In the FATA and KPK, female access to education is under constant threat.

In October, Prime Minister Sharif ordered a review of the curriculum at all levels of the education system. Also that month, the Higher Education Commission issued a document urging universities to monitor and prohibit student activities that challenged government views or the “ideology and principles of Pakistan.” The document was widely criticized by academics.

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12 (+1)**

The constitution guarantees the rights to associate, demonstrate, and organize, but the government often imposes arbitrary restrictions in practice. Such official obstacles were less common during 2014, as demonstrated by the authorities’ relative tolerance for large and lengthy protests in the capital and other cities.

The authorities generally allow nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to function, including those that are highly critical of the government. Nevertheless, such groups face a number of challenges when working in

violence-prone areas in the FATA, KPK, and Balochistan. Radical Islamist groups frequently threaten and attack NGOs devoted to female education and empowerment. In November, police in Karachi raided offices of a U.S.-based digital-mapping NGO and arrested its staff. A polio vaccination drive undertaken by international entities like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been denounced by the TTP as a Western plot to sterilize Muslims. Radical Islamists have killed more than 60 polio workers since mid-2012. Separately, many charitable and cultural organizations operating from Pakistan have links to Islamist militant groups.

The right of workers to organize and form trade unions is recognized in law. The constitution also grants unions the rights to collective bargaining and to strike. However, many categories of workers are excluded from these protections, accounting for approximately 60 percent of the formal-sector workforce. The procedures that need to be followed for a strike to be legal are onerous. Nevertheless, strikes are organized regularly. Employers usually respond by harassing and firing workers for union activity. Roughly 70 percent of the workforce is employed in the informal sector and is not represented by unions.

## **F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16**

Over the last decade, executive interference in the higher judiciary has decreased. However, the broader justice system is marred by endemic problems including corruption, intimidation, a large backlog of cases, and insecurity. In response to the TTP attack on a Peshawar school in December 2014, Prime Minister Sharif announced that special military courts would be formed to try terrorism suspects, prompting rights advocates to raise concerns about due process. Sharif also ended a four-year moratorium on capital punishment, and several convicted militants were executed later that month.

While the main court system operates on the basis of common law, parallel legal systems employ Sharia (Islamic law) and tribal law. A separate Federal Shariat Court is empowered to determine whether a provision of law goes against Islamic injunctions. The existence of different legal systems results in unequal treatment. Moreover, many communities resort to informal, traditional forms of justice due to the inefficiency of the formal courts, leading to arbitrary and unjust decisions.

The FATA are governed by the president and federal administration under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), and lie outside the jurisdiction of the Pakistan Supreme Court and Parliament. The FCR authorizes tribal leaders to administer justice according to Sharia and tribal custom, and despite 2011 amendments, it retains provisions that allow collective punishment of tribes for transgressions by individual members.

In a potential milestone for the rule of law in Pakistan, former military ruler and president Pervez Musharraf was formally indicted in March 2014 on charges of subverting the constitution through an emergency decree and other actions in 2007 that included the removal of many top judges. At year's end, it remained unclear whether the civilian authorities would be able to pursue the trial to completion in the face of reported resistance from the military.

The police, the military, and the intelligence services enjoy impunity for indiscriminate or excessive use of force. Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other abuses are common. Enforced disappearances have targeted terrorism suspects, Balochi and Sindhi nationalists, journalists, researchers, and social workers. In July 2014, Parliament enacted a law confirming a 2013 ordinance that expanded the power of law enforcement agencies to engage in detention without trial, electronic surveillance, searches and seizures, and the use of deadly force, ostensibly to combat terrorism and other serious crimes.

The TTP and other radical Sunni groups with varying agendas continue to attack foreign, government, and religious minority targets, as well as aid workers and human rights advocates, killing hundreds of civilians each year.

Balochi activists continue to seek enhanced political autonomy or outright independence, as well as more local control over Balochistan's natural resources. Meanwhile, armed Balochi militants carry out attacks on infrastructure, security forces, and non-Balochi teachers and educational institutions. The army's counterinsurgency operations in the province have led to increasing human rights violations and the displacement of civilians.

Ethnic violence in the city of Karachi is exacerbated by political rivalry between the traditionally dominant Muttahida Quami Movement, founded to represent refugees from India who came to Pakistan after 1947; the Awami National Party, representing ethnic Pashtun migrants; and the PPP, which is allied with Balochi gangs. The criminal gangs that carry out much of the violence regularly extort money from businesses in Karachi, Pakistan's economic hub.

Pakistan has a number of religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities and other marginalized groups. Multiple forms of discrimination are common. Members of the transgender and intersex community are authorized to register for official documents under a "third gender" classification recognized by the Supreme Court in 2009. In another ruling in 2011, the court granted them the right to vote, enabling them to participate in the 2013 elections. Nonetheless, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community continues to face societal and legal discrimination. The penal code prescribes prison terms for consensual sex "against the order of nature." Although prosecutions are rare, such laws deter LGBT people from acknowledging their orientation or reporting abuses.

According to the UN refugee agency, Pakistan hosts some 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees. Many others are unregistered. These populations are vulnerable to extortion, illegal detention, and harassment, and they are unable to work legally.

## **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16**

There are few legal limitations on citizens' travel or their choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher learning. One exception affects Ahmadis, who are obliged to deny their faith to obtain a passport. Practical constraints on freedom of movement and related rights are common, ranging from insecurity and corruption to societal taboos. These are more pronounced in the case of women.

Pakistan's rampant corruption, weak regulatory environment, and ineffective legal system undermine property rights and economic freedom. The military controls a disproportionate share of the country's economy.

A number of reforms have been enacted in recent years to improve conditions for women. A 2010 law offered protections against workplace harassment, while legislation passed in 2011 criminalized various forms of forced marriage, provided specific punishments for acid attacks, and addressed inheritance issues for women. In 2012, the National Commission on the Status of Women was made a permanent body tasked with monitoring implementation of relevant legislation and investigating violations. However, the implementation of such laws has been weak, and violence against women continues unabated. In addition to acid attacks, domestic violence, rape, and so-called honor crimes, women face restrictions on voting and education, especially in KPK, the FATA, and Balochistan.

Exploitative forms of labor remain common. Though bonded and child labor are outlawed, they are widespread in practice.

**Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

**[Full Methodology](#)**

The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, which is examined in a separate report.