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Pakistan: Human Rights

United States Department of State

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Pakistan is a federal republic. There was significant consolidation of the country's democratic institutions during the year. On May 11, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party won a majority of seats in parliamentary elections, and Nawaz Sharif became prime minister for the third time. The election marked the first time since independence in 1947 that one elected government completed its term and peacefully transferred power to another. Independent observers and some political parties, however, raised concerns about election irregularities. On September 8, President Asif Ali Zardari completed his five-year term and stepped down from office. His successor, President Mamnoon Hussain of the PML-N, took office the next day. Orderly transitions in both the military and the judiciary, in the positions of army chief of staff and Supreme Court chief justice, further solidified the democratic transition. The PML-N controlled the executive office, the National Assembly, and the Provincial Assembly of Punjab, with rival parties or coalitions governing the country's three other provinces. The military and intelligence services nominally reported to civilian authorities but at times operated without effective civilian oversight, although the new government took steps to improve coordination with the military. Police generally reported to civilian authority, although there were instances in which police forces acted independently. Security forces sometimes committed abuses. The most serious human rights problems were extrajudicial and targeted killings, sectarian violence, disappearances, and torture. Other human rights problems included poor prison conditions, arbitrary detention, lengthy pretrial detention, a weak criminal justice system, lack of judicial independence in the lower courts, and infringement on citizens' privacy rights. Harassment of journalists, censorship, and self-censorship continued. There were some government restrictions on freedom of assembly and some limits on freedom of movement. Sectarian violence and discrimination against religious minorities continued. Corruption within the government and police was a persistent problem. Rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, "honor" crimes, other harmful traditional practices, abuse, and discrimination against women and girls continued to be serious problems. Child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children persisted. Widespread human trafficking – including forced and bonded labor – remained a serious problem. Societal discrimination against national, ethnic, and racial minorities persisted, as did discrimination based on caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status. Lack of respect for worker rights continued. Lack of government accountability remained a problem, and abuses often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity. Authorities punished government officials for human rights violations in very few instances. Violence, abuse, and social and religious intolerance by militant organizations and other nongovernmental actors contributed to a culture of lawlessness in some parts of the country, particularly the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, formerly known as the North West Frontier Province), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

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