



Pakistan 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Islamabad



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. OSAC encourages travelers to [use this report](#) to gain baseline knowledge of security conditions in the Islamabad and Rawalpindi Consular District. For more in-depth information, review OSAC's [Pakistan country page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Travel Advisory

The U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses most of Pakistan at Level 3, indicating travelers should reconsider travel due to terrorism. Do not travel to Balochistan Province and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, including the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, due to terrorism and kidnapping; or to the immediate vicinity of the Line of Control due to terrorism and the potential for armed conflict. Review OSAC's report, [Understanding the Consular Travel Advisory System](#).

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Islamabad as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Crime statistical data can be underreported or inaccurate. According to available statistics, the number of reported crimes in the Islamabad Capital Territory has remained relatively steady over the past two years. This includes residential crimes such as burglary, robbery, theft, and assaults. The U.S. Embassy uses residential guards, which is a common practice.

U.S. Government personnel may not stay overnight in hotels except in exceptional circumstances. Depending on security assessments, the U.S. Embassy sometimes places areas such as tourist attractions, hotels, markets, shopping malls, and restaurants off-limits to official personnel. U.S. Government personnel are generally restricted to the E, F, and G sectors of Islamabad, closest to the Diplomatic Enclave. Travel to other areas of Islamabad is restricted except for travel related to official business. Review OSAC's reports, [Hotels: The Inns and Outs](#), and [Considerations for Hotel Security](#).

Street crimes (e.g., pickpocketing, purse snatchings, mobile phone theft) are common. The frequency of these crimes increases with distance from the government-controlled city center of Islamabad, commonly referred to as the Red Zone. In general, street crime is more prevalent in Rawalpindi than Islamabad. Review OSAC's report, [All That You Should Leave Behind](#).

Avoid ATMs that are isolated or not protected from tampering and examine them for skimming devices before use. Review OSAC's report, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#).

Cybersecurity Issues

As in any location, maintain good cybersecurity awareness and take precautions with personal devices to keep them secure from hacking and physical tampering.



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Review OSAC's reports, [Cybersecurity Basics, Best Practices for Maximizing Security on Public Wi-Fi, Traveling with Mobile Devices: Trends & Best Practices, and Satellite Phones: Critical or Contraband?](#)

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

All U.S. citizens require advance permission from the Pakistani government to travel to areas considered sensitive or dangerous. Examples include the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas and areas in the Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces.

Inconsistent regard for traffic laws and traffic conditions is common. Vehicles must be right-side drive, and travel is on the left side of the road. Safety and road worthiness of vehicles may not be well-maintained. Traffic congestion is common, and drivers often maneuver erratically. Traffic signals occasionally malfunction, resulting in precarious intersections and delays. In some areas outside of Islamabad, traffic control systems are limited, and road conditions get worse.

Vehicular collisions frequently draw crowds and can become violent. Depending on the area of the accident, police response may be delayed or not occur at all. Injured parties often use private vehicles for transport to the closest hospital. Review OSAC's reports, [Road Safety Abroad, Driving Overseas: Best Practices, and Evasive Driving Techniques; and read the State Department's webpage on driving and road safety abroad.](#)

Public Transportation Conditions

Use of overland public transportation such as trains, taxis, and other forms of public transportation or online taxi services is not approved for U.S. Government personnel. Review OSAC's report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights.](#)

Aviation/Airport Conditions

The Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority is a member of the International Civil Aviation Organization. In the past, there have been risks to U.S. civil aviation operating in the territory and airspace of Pakistan, particularly at low altitude, during the arrival/departure phases of flight, and when on the ground, due to extremist/militant activity. Threats to civil aviation in Pakistan are not limited to attacks in which militants target airports. The U.S. Government is aware of narcotics smuggled onto flights from Pakistan, which may indicate broader security vulnerabilities at Pakistani airports.

The Islamabad International Airport (ISB) has significant security resources devoted to its protection, but has been a target in the past for attempted and aspirational terror plots. U.S. Government personnel must use armored vehicles for travel to and from the airport.

The U.S. Embassy restricts U.S. Government personnel from traveling on certain Pakistan military aircraft due to issues with safety and maintenance. Travelers should verify airworthiness or avoid this means of conveyance.



Terrorism Threat

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Islamabad as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Terrorists have targeted U.S. diplomats and diplomatic facilities in the past. Notwithstanding, national statistics show terrorist violence across Pakistan is at its lowest level in the past decade, the result of a steady decline since a 2008-2009 spike. Although Pakistan's security environment has improved substantially, terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in Pakistan. Local history of terrorism and ongoing ideological aspirations of violence by extremist elements have led to indiscriminate attacks on civilian as well as local military and police targets. Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting transportation hubs, markets, shopping malls, military installations, airports, universities, tourist locations, schools, hospitals, places of worship, and government facilities.

Terrorists have targeted U.S. diplomats and diplomatic facilities in the past. U.S. government personnel may not stay overnight in local hotels anywhere in the country, except in exceptional circumstances. Depending on ongoing security assessments, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates sometimes place areas such as tourist attractions, hotels, markets, shopping malls, and restaurants off-limits to official personnel.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Islamabad as being a **HIGH**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

Civil Unrest

Large protests can prove difficult to control and have led to citywide traffic disruptions, damage to property, and violent incidents. Review OSAC's report, [Surviving a Protest](#).

During demonstrations or periods of civil unrest, the Pakistani government has in the past disabled cellular telephone and internet service, making it difficult for individuals to contact each other or the U.S. Embassy or Consulates.

Planned and spontaneous protests and demonstrations do occur. In 2019, police and security forces effectively controlled these gatherings. There were no significant acts of violence related to civil unrest. Most protests and demonstrations are anti-government in nature, with student issues, utility/fuel shortages, and political grievances as the most common reasons for protests.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Pakistan's security services stay alert to the potential for sectarian violence. Religious events, institutions, and gathering places such as markets frequented by minority populations have been targets of sectarian attacks and unrest, especially around religious holidays and in areas with significant religious minority populations.



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Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Pakistan is subject to seismic activity. Earthquakes can occur without warning. Most buildings and residences do not meet seismic standards. Although there are emergency response organizations in Islamabad, a large-scale disaster could quickly overwhelm response capabilities. Sufficient stock of supplies and an earthquake plan are recommended in this region. Review OSAC's report, [Central Asia Earthquake Preparedness](#).

Air quality is a significant environmental problem across Pakistan, varies by city, and fluctuates depending on the season and local weather patterns. Follow the U.S. Mission Pakistan [Air Quality Program twitter feed for Islamabad](#).

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Lack of code enforcement has led to unsafe buildings and structures, including leaking and defective natural gas infrastructure.

In Islamabad, high-speed internet is readily available in most neighborhoods. Areas outside of urban centers have less communication infrastructure. In cities, the government may shut down cellular service during emergencies and civil unrest. Maintain multiple forms of communication.

Economics Concerns/Intellectual Property Theft

Counterfeit goods and pirated entertainment are readily available. Only exchange currency at recognized banks.

U.S. citizens have been the victims of kidnapping, assault, or threats by family members in response to family disputes over property. Land disputes are common in Pakistan and are often difficult to resolve through legal channels. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates cannot protect personal property, and cannot take sides in a legal dispute. Those wishing to purchase property should be aware of the risks, including not being physically present to oversee property. Those involved in a court dispute run the risk of having cases filed against them, and they may face arrest and imprisonment. In March 2019, two doctors, including one U.S. national, were kidnapped and murdered in Taxila. The suspects confessed to wanting to steal land owned by the U.S. doctor.

Pakistan is largely a cash economy. Neither personal nor travelers' checks are commonly accepted in Pakistan. Outside major cities, credit cards are generally not accepted, and there have been numerous reports of credit card fraud. There are bank branches as well as registered currency exchangers and ATMs in all international airports. Review OSAC's reports, [The Overseas Traveler's Guide to ATM Skimmers & Fraud](#) and [Taking Credit](#).



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Privacy Concerns

Unauthorized access to personally identifiable information (PII) is quite possible. Few holders of PII employ adequate safeguards and access controls to prevent dissemination of sensitive personal information. Official intrusions into personal privacy are also common.

Personal Identity Concerns

U.S. females have been subject to domestic abuse and violence, and have had their passports confiscated by male family members seeking to control their freedom of movement. Females have been brought to Pakistan by family members and forced to marry against their will. Women who attempt to report these kinds of cases to local police might find their complaints not taken seriously. U.S. citizens in life-threatening situations should contact the police for immediate assistance, and contact U.S. Embassy or its Consulates. Some Pakistani NGOs can assist victimized women within the Pakistani community. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [female travelers](#).

Authorities may not document sexual assaults accurately. Open-source reporting indicates that sexual crimes and gender-based violence, including honor-killings occur, as do cases of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Same-sex sexual conduct is a criminal offense in Pakistan. While the government rarely prosecutes cases, society generally shuns LGBTI+ persons, and violence and discrimination against LGBTI+ persons occur frequently. The penalty for same-sex relations is a fine, imprisonment (sentences ranging from two years to life imprisonment), or both. No laws protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and LGBTI+ persons rarely reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity. Socially conservative elements of the local society tend to disapprove of LGBTI+ individuals, although media reporting indicates more progressive views are evolving, particularly in larger cities. Members of the LGBTI+ community may find Pakistan difficult, and, at worst, dangerous. More detailed information about LGBTI+ rights in Pakistan is available in the [State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) and the department's webpage on security for [LGBTI+ travelers](#).

While in Pakistan, individuals with disabilities can find accessibility and accommodation difficult. The law provides for equality of rights of persons with disabilities, but legal provisions are not always implemented in practice. Families typically care for most individuals with physical and mental disabilities. Access for individuals with physical disabilities to public facilities is very limited in major cities and almost non-existent outside major population centers. Review the State Department's webpage on security for [travelers with disabilities](#).

Drug-related Crimes

With the exception of publicized drug seizures related to transnational counter-narcotics efforts, drug-related crimes are not well documented. While illicit drug use occurs, information concerning its frequency, type, and proliferation typically comes from non-governmental organizations and open-source reporting.



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Balochistan and Sindh are drug trafficking routes, with significant quantities of narcotics typically flowing south from Afghanistan for shipment by sea. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking in illegal drugs are severe; convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences in local prisons, heavy fines, and sometimes the death penalty.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping remains a concern throughout Pakistan. Extremist groups and criminals have targeted business owners and prominent families to finance terror operations and profit through ransom. U.S. citizens and foreign nationals working for non-government organizations have been targets, and U.S. citizens have been kidnapped in other countries and held in Pakistan. Review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

Police Response

The emergency line in Pakistan is **15**. Although Islamabad has a large police department, resource constraints affect the efficiency of police operations. Low salaries and a lack of equipment are pervasive issues throughout the country, although authorities devote significant resources to government buildings and activities in Islamabad. Police corruption is an issue throughout Pakistan, but is significantly less of a problem in Islamabad.

Arrested or detained U.S. citizens should request that Pakistani authorities immediately notify the U.S. Embassy or nearest Consulate. Pakistani government formalities may delay consular access by 20 business days or more. Download the State Department's Crime Victims Assistance [brochure](#).

Medical Emergencies

Travelers can contact ambulance services by dialing **1122**. In general, effective emergency medical care is available only in major cities. Most hospitals possess limited advanced life support equipment. Their level of care varies but is typically less than that of hospitals in the United States. Find contact information for available medical services and available air ambulance services on the [U.S. Embassy website](#).

Consider purchasing medical and medical evacuation (medevac) insurance before traveling to Pakistan. Medevac can be prohibitively expensive, and patients must usually secure payment or prove insurance prior to service. The U.S. Department of State strongly recommends purchasing international health insurance before traveling internationally. Review the State Department's webpage on [insurance overseas](#)

Water quality and sanitation standards are better in Islamabad than in the rural areas of Pakistan. The U.S. Government advises personnel against drinking tap water. For more information, refer to OSAC's report, [I'm Drinking What in My Water?](#)



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CDC published a [travel notice](#) in 2018 warning travelers of an outbreak of extensively drug-resistant (XDR) typhoid in Pakistan and its potential to cause cases of typhoid in the United States and other countries through travelers returning from Pakistan. The notice describes the nature of XDR typhoid and its lack of response to many antibiotics, and offers advice on preventing and treating the disease. The notice also states that while all travelers to Pakistan are at risk of getting XDR typhoid, those visiting friends or relatives have a higher risk of contracting XDR typhoid and infectious diseases generally because they normally stay longer, eat more local food in homes, and take fewer precautions than tourists or business travelers.

All travelers (even short-term travelers) to South Asia, including Pakistan, should receive vaccination against typhoid fever. Two typhoid fever vaccines are available in the United States — an oral vaccine and an injectable vaccine. The oral vaccine is available to people who are at least six years old and should be given at least one week before travel. The injectable vaccine is available to people who are at least two years old and should be given at least two weeks before travel.

The CDC recommends vaccinations for hepatitis A and B, typhoid, Japanese encephalitis (for prolonged travel), polio, and rabies. Prevent mosquito bites to avoid malaria and dengue fever. The Consulate Health unit considers the risk of malaria to be moderate and recommends medication to prevent the disease.

The Pakistani government has implemented the polio vaccination for travelers' guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization. Authorities may ask travelers to show proof of recent polio vaccinations. Visitors who have stayed in Pakistan for longer than four weeks might have to show a yellow vaccination card certifying that they have received a dose of polio vaccine within the past year.

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Pakistan](#). Review OSAC's reports, [The Healthy Way](#), [Traveling with Medication](#), [Shaken: The Don'ts of Alcohol Abroad](#), [Health 101: How to Prepare for Travel](#), and [Fire Safety Abroad](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

The OSAC Country Council in Islamabad meets periodically. Interested private-sector security managers should contact [OSAC's South & Central Asia team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Contact Information

Diplomatic Enclave, Ramna 5, Islamabad
Monday-Friday, 0800 – 1630
Telephone: +92-51 201 4000
Emergency Contact Information: +92-51 201 4000
Website: <https://pk.usembassy.gov/>



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Other U.S. Diplomatic Posts in Pakistan:

- [Consulate Karachi](#), Plot 3, 4, 5, New TPX Area Mai Kolachi Road, Karachi. (+92) (21) 3527-5000.
- [Consulate Lahore](#), 50, Shahrah-e-Abdul Hameed Bin Badees, (Old Empress Road) near Shimla Hill, Lahore. (+92) 042-3603-4000.
- [Consulate Peshawar](#), 11, Hospital Road, Peshawar. (+92) 091-526-8800. U.S. Consulate General Peshawar does not provide routine consular services.

Helpful Information

Before you travel, consider the following resources:

- [OSAC Risk Matrix](#)
- [OSAC Travelers Toolkit](#)
- [State Department Traveler's Checklist](#)
- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#)
- [Pakistan](#) Country Information Sheet