



# Pakistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report: Islamabad



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The current 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. Some areas have increased risk: Do not travel to Balochistan province and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, including the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), due to terrorism and kidnapping; or to the Azad Kashmir area due to terrorism and the potential for armed conflict.

## Overall Crime and Safety Situation

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad does not assume responsibility for the professional ability or integrity of the persons or firms appearing in this report. The American Citizens' Services unit (ACS) cannot recommend a particular individual or location, and assumes no responsibility for the quality of service provided.

Review OSAC's [Pakistan-specific webpage](#) for proprietary analytic reports, Consular Messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

## Crime Threats

There is moderate risk from crime in Islamabad. Statistical data on crime suffer from underreporting and inaccuracies. There are often broad discrepancies in the types and frequency of crimes reported in media and non-governmental reports compared to the official statistics offered by the Government of Pakistan.

Street crimes (e.g. pickpocketing, purse snatchings, mobile phone theft, and other crimes of opportunity) 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.

Major crimes remain a concern. According to available statistics, the number of reported violent and non-violent crimes in the Islamabad Capital Territory has remained relatively steady over the past two years. This includes residential crimes, such as burglaries and vandalism. Armed guards protect all residences owned or leased by the U.S. Embassy.

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

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

Check fraud is one of the most frequently reported crimes in Pakistan.

### Cybersecurity Issues

Cybersecurity concerns in Pakistan are growing, particularly in large urban centers. Take precautions with personal devices to keep them secure from hacking and physical tampering.

### Other Areas of Concern

U.S. government employees may not stay overnight in local hotels anywhere in the country, except in exceptional circumstances. Depending on ongoing 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 employees 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.

All U.S. citizens who do not also possess Pakistani citizenship must obtain advance permission from the Pakistani government to travel to areas considered sensitive or dangerous. Examples include the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas and many areas in the Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

### Transportation-Safety Situation

For more information, review OSAC's report, [Security in Transit: Airplanes, Public Transport, and Overnights](#).

### Road Safety and Road Conditions

Although better in Islamabad than surrounding areas, road safety is a concern throughout Pakistan. Vehicles must be right-side drive, and travel is on the left side of the road. Drivers generally observe traffic laws in Islamabad, but rarely do outside the city center. Traffic congestion is common, and drivers often maneuver erratically. Traffic signals frequently malfunction, resulting in hazardous intersections and delays. In areas outside of Islamabad, traffic control systems are scarce, and road conditions are significantly worse.

Vehicular collisions frequently draw crowds, which can become violent. Depending on the area of the accident, police response may be significantly delayed or not occur at all. Injured parties often use private vehicles for transport to the closest hospital. Bystanders may demand that the person perceived to be at fault transport the injured to a hospital. For more information on self-driving, review OSAC's report, [Driving Overseas: Best Practices](#).

### Public Transportation Conditions

Avoid all trains, taxis, and other forms of public transportation or online taxi services. U.S. government personnel may not use any type of overland public transportation.

### Aviation/Airport Conditions

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 U.S. Embassy has restricted U.S. government personnel from travel on certain Pakistani military aircraft due to issues with safety and maintenance. Exercise caution when traveling within Pakistan on such official aircraft; verify the airworthiness of aircraft in planned flights, or avoid this means of conveyance until verification.

The Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority is a member of the International Civil Aviation Organization. The Islamabad International Airport (ISB) has significant security resources devoted to its protection, but is a frequent target of attempted and aspirational terror plots. U.S. government employees must use armored vehicles to travel to and from the airport.

## **Terrorism Threat**

### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There is serious risk from terrorism in Islamabad. Despite notable gains against some groups in recent years, numerous terrorist organizations continue to operate in parts of Pakistan. Islamabad benefits from more security resources and infrastructure than the rest of the country, although the capital remains an attractive target due to the prevalence of government institutions, foreign missions, and administration officials. Terrorist attacks have declined in frequency but still take place in different parts of the country. Security forces continue to conduct operations against extremist elements in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan Provinces. Security forces also conduct irregular or ad hoc operations against terrorist groups in other provinces, including Sindh and Punjab provinces.

Notwithstanding national statistics that 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, terrorist organizations remain active, and numerous notable terror incidents occurred in Pakistan during 2018.

### Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

U.S. government personnel and facilities have consistently remained targets for terror groups in Pakistan. Western organizations including businesses also remain attractive targets. U.S. government officials working in Islamabad must vary their routines to reduce predictability, limit public exposure, and avoid loitering in markets and shopping centers.

## **Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence**

### Civil Unrest

There is considerable risk from civil unrest in Islamabad. Protests and demonstrations can form unexpectedly and risk becoming violent. Avoid large gatherings and processions. Large protests have proven difficult for the government to control, and have led to citywide traffic disruptions, damage to property, and violent incidents.

### Religious/Ethnic Violence

Sectarian violence has occurred on numerous occasions and continues to be a concern, especially around religious holidays and in areas with significant religious minority populations. Religious events, institutions, and gathering places such as markets frequented by minority populations have been targets of sectarian attacks and unrest.

## Post Specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

Islamabad is subject to seismic activity. Earthquakes can occur without warning. Most buildings and residences do not meet any seismic standard. Although there are emergency response organizations in Islamabad, a large-scale disaster would quickly overwhelm response capabilities. Proper stocks of supplies and an earthquake plan are necessary in this region. For more information, review OSAC's report, [Central Asia Earthquake Preparedness](#).

During the winter, air pollution reaches significant levels and can present health hazards, particularly to individuals who suffer from respiratory diseases.

### Critical Infrastructure

Infrastructure in the city center of Islamabad is much better than in surrounding areas and Rawalpindi. Running water and natural gas are available in many of the neighborhoods in/around Islamabad.

Lack of code enforcement has led to a proliferation of 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 significantly less communication infrastructure. In cities, the government shuts down cellular service during emergencies and civil unrest. Maintain multiple forms of communication.

### Economic Concerns

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

### Personal Identity Concerns

The Embassy regularly receives reports of U.S. females subjected to domestic abuse and violence. U.S. females have had their passports confiscated by male family members who seek to control their freedom of movement. In other cases, U.S. females are brought to Pakistan by family members and forced to marry against their will. Despite the fact that many of these cases are not taken seriously, when U.S. citizens find themselves in life-threatening situations, they should contact the police for immediate assistance. There are non-governmental organizations that assist victimized women, reachable via American Citizen Services.

Members of the LGBTI community will find Pakistan difficult, and, at worst, dangerous. Pakistan's socially conservative society tends to disapprove of LGBTI individuals, although some media reports indicate more progressive views are evolving in larger cities. More detailed information about LGBT rights in Pakistan is available in the [State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#).

Individuals with disabilities will find significantly less accessibility and accommodation compared to the U.S. Accessibility infrastructure is limited in major urban centers, and is nearly non-existent elsewhere.

### 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 organization and open-source reporting.

### Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping is a serious threat 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. There is also significant reporting on U.S. citizens kidnapped in other countries held in Pakistan. For more information, review OSAC's report, [Kidnapping: The Basics](#).

### Police Response

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

### How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If arrested or detained, U.S. citizens should request that Pakistani authorities immediately notify the U.S. Embassy or nearest Consulate. Government of Pakistan formalities may delay consular access by 20 business days or more.

### Crime Victim Assistance

Travelers can contact the police by dialing **15**.

U.S. citizens should report crimes committed against them to the police and the U.S. Embassy American Citizen Services section at (+92) 51-201-4000 or 5000.

### 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 U.S.

### Contact Information for Available Medical Services

A list of doctors and hospitals in the Islamabad Consular District is on the [Embassy's website](#).

## Air Ambulance Services

Several air ambulance companies provide service to Pakistan. Research the availability and quality of air ambulance services and make an informed choice based on individual requirements.

## Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

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.

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

The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Pakistan](#).

## OSAC Country Council Information

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

## U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Islamabad: Diplomatic Enclave, Ramna 5  
Monday-Friday, 0800 – 1630

### Embassy Contact Numbers

Telephone: 011 92-51 201 4000  
Emergency Contact Information: 011 92-51 201 4000  
Website: <https://pk.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts: [Consulate Karachi](#), [Consulate Lahore](#), [Consulate Peshawar](#)

### Embassy Guidance

The U.S. Department of State strongly encourages U.S. travelers to Pakistan to enroll in the U.S. Department of State's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) prior to their travel. Doing so provides the U.S. Embassy/Consulate with emergency contact information, and allows travelers to receive emergency and security messages sent to U.S. citizens in Pakistan. U.S. Consulate General Peshawar does not provide routine consular services.

Additional Resource: [Pakistan](#) Country Information Sheet