

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	333
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	Minority Rights Group International
Titel:	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2016 - Pakistan
Udgivet:	12. juli 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. november 2016



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2016 - Pakistan

Publisher [Minority Rights Group International](#)

Publication Date 12 July 2016

Cite as Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2016 - Pakistan*, 12 July 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5796082215.html> [accessed 7 November 2016]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

Events of 2015

The tragic events of December 2014 at the Army Public School in Peshawar cast a long shadow over Pakistan in 2015. Following the attack by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that claimed 141 lives, including 132 children, the government introduced a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) that relinquished greater political authority to the military and introduced a broad range of measures with the stated aim of eradicating terrorism from Pakistan.

Though insecurity has persisted, the number of sectarian fatalities of religious minorities fell by 35 per cent during 2015 compared to the previous year, with the situation particularly improving in the second half of 2015. However, this decline was lower than the reduction in violent killings in general, which over the year as a whole fell by 40 per cent. In fact, in the first quarter of 2015 fatalities among minorities actually rose by 38 per cent compared to the same period in 2014, while general conflict-related fatalities were 20 per cent lower – a disparity that suggests that minorities do not necessarily benefit equally from security efforts. But while perceptions of the NAP's effects have been mixed, with some crediting it for the improved security situation while others have criticized its expansion of military powers, the plan's acknowledgement of the specific situation of minorities– including its aim to 'stop religious extremism and to protect religious minorities', as well as curb hate speech – are unusual in their acknowledgement of the specific situation of minorities.

Whether this will achieve a lasting impact for minorities, however, remains to be seen. Despite the weakening of extremist outfits such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and the decrease in overall sectarian violence, 2015 saw increased numbers of Shi'a killed in sectarian attacks compared to the previous year. In January, Jundallah – an offshoot of the TTP, which has pledged allegiance to ISIS – bombed a Shi'a mosque in Shikarpur, Sindh province, killing 60 people. Just over two weeks later in Peshawar, another Shi'a mosque was targeted during Friday prayers by the TTP, leaving at least 20 dead. Later, in December 2015, LeJ claimed responsibility for a bombing in Parachinar in the north-west tribal region, killing at least 22 Shi'a.

Particularly vulnerable to attack and with limited government protection are Pakistan's Shi'a Hazara, who suffer intersectional discrimination as a visible ethnic minority as well as for their faith. Living mostly in Quetta, Baluchistan, in recent years Hazara have increasingly been targeted

by Sunni militant groups such as the LeJ and TTP. In late May, five members of the community in Quetta were killed in two separate shootings, followed by the deaths of five more Hazara in June. In early July two brothers were shot and killed when queuing at a passport office in Quetta. Other Shi'a sub-sect communities such as Ismailis have also been increasingly targeted, with 43 killed in a single attack in May when gunmen stormed a bus in Karachi.

Pakistan's Ahmadiyya community, long persecuted at both a popular and official level, continued to be targeted in religiously motivated attacks during the year, primarily in Punjab and Sindh, including in October when gunmen injured a man and his nephews in Karachi as they returned home from worship. In November in Jhelum, Punjab, a mob set fire to an Ahmadi-owned factory following rumours of blasphemy allegations against the factory owner and Ahmadi workers, and it was not until the army intervened that the situation calmed. In the wake of the attacks, some Ahmadi women in Jhelum were forced to remove their distinctive *burqas* and cover their heads with scarves to avoid detection. The following day the community suffered a subsequent attack when a crowd set fire to a local Ahmadi place of worship. The persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan is encouraged by a constitutionally sanctioned legal regime, broadly referred to as the 'anti-Ahmadi laws'.

Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws, often used to settle personal scores and achieve political gains, continued to disproportionately impact Pakistan's minority communities. Yet in a positive step, a recent Supreme Court judgment acknowledged that criticizing or reforming blasphemy laws does not itself constitute blasphemy. An October judgment then cautioned that, according to Islam, a false accusation of blasphemy could be as serious a crime as committing blasphemy itself. Still, the process of reforming the country's blasphemy laws has remained at a standstill, in part due to a climate of intimidation against reformers, such as the assassinated minorities minister Shahbaz Bhatti and Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer. While met with scepticism, another notable development was the announcement by the head of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) of his willingness to review the country's blasphemy laws to determine if they are Islamic, requesting the government to officially refer the law to the CII.

Members of Pakistan's minority communities accused of blasphemy continue to languish in prison. This includes Asia Bibi, a Christian woman on death row since her conviction in a high-profile blasphemy case in 2010. In July 2015 the Supreme Court agreed to suspend her execution to hear an appeal against her sentence, although no date was set. In October she was placed in solitary confinement after threats to her life following the Court's decision to uphold the death sentence of Mumtaz Qadri, who murdered Salmaan Taseer. Following Qadri's hanging in February 2016, protests against the execution and in support of Pakistan's blasphemy laws have occurred across the country.

In addition to everyday discrimination in education and employment, Pakistan's Christian community also experienced a rise in violent attacks in 2015. In March, a Taliban offshoot bombed two churches in a Christian neighbourhood of Lahore, killing 15 people and injuring more than 70 who were attending Sunday mass. The attack sparked a strong reaction from the Christian community, with violent protests and the killing of two men accused of involvement in the two bombings. Following the immolation of a 14-year-old Christian boy by two men in Lahore, in May a mentally ill Christian man accused of blasphemy narrowly avoided the same fate at the hands of a mob before police intervened to arrest him and after which local Christian homes were ransacked, forcing some to flee. Later in 2015, a Christian couple in Sheikhpura, Punjab, were attacked by a crowd after local clerics accused them of committing blasphemy. The situation shows little sign of abating: 2016 began grimly with an arson attack on a church in Lahore, and the burning of Bibles and other Christian literature at a church in Kasur, plus an attack against Christians who were privately worshipping in Sialkot.

Recent years have also seen Christian girls increasingly subjected to abduction, forced marriage and conversion to Islam. Yet such acts have typically and more frequently been committed against Hindu girls and women, who are especially vulnerable due to the lack of Hindu marriage laws. This has deprived Hindu women of basic documentation to prove their marital status or identity, as well as restricted their access to divorce, inheritance, visas or the ability to adopt a child. Finally, after decades of legal limbo, in a landmark decision in February 2016, the Sindh Provincial Assembly approved the Hindu Marriage Bill, marking the first time Hindu marriage laws have been codified in a province of Pakistan. This similarly benefits Sindh's Zoroastrian and Sikh populations, who can also register their marriages under this new law. A national law that would apply to Baluchistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab – all of which have passed resolutions allowing the federation to legislate on the matter – is currently under consideration, but progress has been stalled partially due to a controversial clause in the draft bill that states that a marriage will be annulled if any spouse converts to another religion. Hindus are also harshly stigmatized in government school textbooks, and their places of worship continue to be targeted.

Other groups besides religious minorities also experienced discrimination in Pakistan in 2015. Afghan refugees, many of whom have been living in the country for decades, saw their situation worsen following the introduction of the NAP, with harsher limits on legal residency encouraging greater levels of police harassment and extortion. Meanwhile, in the context of the continued separatist struggle in Baluchistan, disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings of armed separatists and activists by security forces reportedly continue, sustained by a climate of impunity. In April 2015, just after hosting a small panel discussion on Baluchistan's 'disappeared people', prominent Pakistan human rights activist Sabeen Mahmud was assassinated. Mahmud was the director of T2F café, an arts and social forum in Karachi.

Violent attacks and discrimination against minorities have been legitimated by the gradual development of a rigid national narrative that, in the decades following Partition, has included the renaming of streets and towns, as well as the deliberate abandonment of cultural practices such as minority religious festivals. Despite the resilience of Pakistan's minority communities, this repression has often left minorities with little choice but to flee the country. In Sindh, historically known for its tolerance and pluralism, rising extremism has compelled large numbers of Hindus to leave their historic homeland. While the UN says the figure is closer to 4,000, it has also been reported that as many as 10,000 Pakistani Christians are living 'under the radar' in Thailand.

The rising climate of intolerance has also put at risk the existence of some smaller religious minority groups, some of which have not typically been the target of violence. This includes Pakistani Parsis who, as vulnerable minorities in an unstable environment, have been prompted to leave the country in recent years, speeding the dwindling of their community. For Pakistan's small Zikri population, rising extremism – including the appearance of pro-ISIS graffiti in south-west Pakistan – has fuelled fear in the community. Following violent attacks in 2014, and the murder of six Zikris by Lashkar-e-Khurasan militants in August 2015, many Zikris have been forced to conceal their identity and flee their historic homes to other parts of the country.

Sikhs, many of whom now live in the north-west of the country and whose heritage stretches back 500 years to when the religion was founded in what is now Pakistan, have also been compelled to leave the country in increasing numbers. Migration spiked following violence targeting the community in mid 2014. For the first time, police and CCTV cameras were deployed at the two remaining Sikh temples in Peshawar and 1,000 police were dispatched to protect worshippers during the Baisakhi festival to mark the Sikh new year in 2015.

In a recent act of symbolic importance, however, the Hindu celebration of Diwali was officially designated a public holiday in Sindh province. Celebrations in Karachi were joined by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who delivered an address in which he expressed his solidarity with all

victims of violence, no matter their religion. Earlier, in April, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued a ruling on the rebuilding of a Hindu temple in Karak district, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa – an issue that had led to a rift between local religious leaders and the Hindu minority community. The Court ordered that the temple, destroyed by extremists in 1997, be restored by provincial authorities.

Through teaching methods and materials, schools in Pakistan have long propagated exclusionary views concerning the historical and contemporary place of religious minorities in society, while also restricting minorities from learning about their religious and cultural heritage. However, in a positive move, in January 2016 it was announced that, from 1 April 2016, a book called *Ikhlaiyat* ('Ethics') will be included in all Sindh public school curriculums, allowing minority students to study teachings of religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism, instead of requiring solely Islamic studies.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.

Search Refworld

by keyword
and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Pakistan](#)

Topics

- [Ahmadis](#)
- [Armed groups / Militias / Paramilitary forces / Resistance movements](#)
- [Christian](#)
- [Discrimination based on race, nationality, ethnicity](#)
- [Freedom of religion](#)
- [Minorities](#)
- [Religious discrimination](#)
- [Security situation](#)
- [Sikh](#)