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Violence and political instability persisted in Pakistan throughout 2014. Beginning in August, mass demonstrations led by the opposition leader Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party took place in cities across the country, with participants demanding Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's resignation on account of alleged vote rigging during the 2013 election. The protests were only called off on 16 December, in response to an attack on a military-run school in the northern city of Peshawar that killed 141 people, including 132 children. According to the perpetrators, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), this attack – the deadliest perpetrated by the group so far – was in response to ongoing military operations in North Waziristan. The offensive, launched by the government in June after peace talks previously collapsed and followed later in the year by a similar push into the Khyber region, resulted in the displacement of more than a million people during the year, including many Pashtuns – an ethnic minority in the country who have historically made their homes in the tribal areas.

In this context of insecurity and division, Pakistan's Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in particular have faced high levels of social marginalization, hate speech and the constant threat of violence. While there was a slight decrease in the number of attacks compared to 2013, when sectarian violence in the country reached unprecedented levels, these groups continue to face disproportionate levels of violence, particularly Shi'a, who account for around 15 per cent of the country's Muslim population. Hazara Shi'a have been particularly vulnerable to attack as a result of the intersectional discrimination they have encountered as both a sectarian and visible ethnic minority. Indeed, in recent years Sunni militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP) and TTP have increasingly targeted Hazara Shi'a, the majority of whom reside in Quetta. A stark indication that 2014 would bring little significant change to their situation came on 1 January, when a car bomb targeted a bus carrying Shi'a pilgrims returning from Iran to Baluchistan's capital city, Quetta, killing at least three and injuring 31 others. Later that month, a similar attack was perpetrated by LeJ on a bus carrying Hazara Shi'a pilgrims in Mastung District, just outside of Quetta. At least 22 of these passengers were killed, with more than 20 others wounded.

Similar targeted attacks against the community continued throughout 2014. In April, for example, two Hazara men were victims of a targeted killing near a bus terminal in Quetta. In October, at least eight Hazara were killed at a market in the outskirts of Quetta when gunmen opened fire on the bus in which they were travelling. Outside Baluchistan, Shi'a in Pakistan also suffered a

number of targeted attacks in cities such as Karachi. This violence had been accompanied by widespread intimidation: for example, in April the banned militant outfit, Lashkar-i-Islam, distributed incendiary pamphlets in a Peshawar neighbourhood, threatening residents – mostly Shi'a Muslims – with violence if they did not leave their homes.

Another marginalized religious group is Pakistan's Ahmadi population, who – despite considering themselves to be Muslims – remained subject to severe legal discrimination in the country's criminal code and Constitution, which officially designates them as 'non-Muslims'. Alongside this persistent institutional discrimination, in 2014 Ahmadis faced a number of targeted attacks, resulting in 11 casualties. In May, an Ahmadi man accused of blasphemy was shot dead by a teenager while he was in police custody. Later that same month, a Canadian-American doctor undertaking humanitarian work in Pakistan was killed, apparently on the basis of his Ahmadi faith. International pressure failed to bring an end to such attacks: less than two months after the UN statement, in response to blasphemy allegations, a mob set fire to homes in a small Ahmadi community in Gujranwala District, Punjab, killing two children and their grandmother.

The situation for non-Muslim minority groups remained similarly tense in 2014. Discrimination against Pakistan's Christian population culminated in a particularly violent attack in November when a Christian couple in Kot Radha Kishan accused of desecrating the Qur'an were beaten and burned to death in the brick kiln where they worked. More recently, in the first large-scale attack suffered by the Christian community since the bombing of All Saints Church in 2013, Jamaat-ur-Ahrar – a TTP splinter group – bombed two churches in Lahore during Sunday processions in March 2015, killing at least 15 and wounding upwards of 70 people.

Meanwhile, for Pakistani Hindus, there was an alarming increase in attacks on places of worship in 2014. While a total of nine Hindu temples were attacked during the previous year, five temples were targeted in March 2014 alone. According to the NGO Life for All, this signalled the most violent month suffered by Pakistan's Hindus in two decades. Forced conversion and marriages of minority women also continued in 2014, with Dalit Hindu girls especially targeted. These incidents have been perpetuated by the lack of substantial reform to personal laws, which prevent or obstruct certain minorities from registering marriages. Although attempts were made to address such gaps in the province of Punjab with the tabling of the Punjab Hindu Marriage Registration Bill in 2014, substantial reform remains to be seen.

The year 2014 also saw violent attacks against religious minorities who have typically been less affected by such harsh discrimination in Pakistan, such as Zikris and Sikhs. In August, for example, at least six people from the Zikri community were shot and killed near a shrine in Awaran District, Baluchistan. The attack was preceded by graffiti in the town a week before, calling on Zikris and Hindus to convert to Islam or face death. For Pakistan's small Sikh community, growing religious intolerance manifested in an attack on three shops run by Sikhs in Hashtnagri, Peshawar. In response members of the Sikh community took to the streets to demand greater security.

Muslim and non-Muslim minorities continued to be disproportionately affected by the country's notorious blasphemy laws during the year. In March, Sawan Masih – a Christian man convicted of uttering blasphemous remarks the year before – was sentenced to death. Meanwhile, international efforts to appeal the death sentence of a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was convicted of blasphemy in 2010, were undercut when the Lahore High Court upheld the ruling in October; she has now appealed to the Supreme Court. Amid growing religious intolerance, attempts to challenge blasphemy laws or defend those accused of violating them also became increasingly difficult: in May, human rights lawyer and activist, Rashid Rehman, was the victim of a targeted killing due to his defence of a professor accused of blasphemy.

Although political and social obstacles have stood in the way of improving conditions for minorities in Pakistan, in June 2014 the Supreme Court delivered a groundbreaking judgment in response to the bombing of All Saints Church in Peshawar in 2013. This ruling not only called on the government to ensure that victims of the attack were compensated, but also directed federal and provincial governments to develop institutions to monitor implementation of minority protection laws and to create a National Council for Minorities. Meanwhile, also in June, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pervez Khattak directed that increased security should be provided to protect places of worship for minorities. In response to rising violence against Hindus in Sindh, the provincial government similarly took initiatives to promote the security of minority places of worship, and officially celebrated the Hindu festival Diwali in October. While all these are welcome initiatives, progress has been slow and an effective response at federal, provincial or local levels is still lacking.

Religious minorities are not the only groups that suffered discrimination in Pakistan in 2014. Pakistan has become an increasingly hostile environment for the country's mostly Pashtun refugees from Afghanistan, the majority of whom have lived in Pakistan for decades. In March, shortly after the government declared its intention to restrict the number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, bulldozers were sent to demolish a settlement outside Islamabad where over 100 Afghan families resided, some for almost 30 years. Meanwhile, in the context of the persistent nationalist struggle in the province of Baluchistan, enforced disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings of members of the Baluch minority by security forces reportedly continued with impunity.

Extreme levels of violence and instability in Pakistan have encouraged many to flee their homes for safer environs, either within or outside the country. In October, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reported that at least 300,000 people – including over 200,000 Hazara, 10,000 Hindus and hundreds of Zikris and Parsis – had left Baluchistan over the last ten years, with many migrating to large urban areas in other provinces. Yet those arriving in Pakistan's cities, many of whom are minorities, typically do so for a variety of reasons: not only to escape insecurity and natural disasters, but also to seek out better public services and opportunities. However, rapid and unplanned growth has perpetuated infrastructural and social problems in Pakistan's cities, with many migrants and other marginalized groups concentrating in informal settlements. For example, a large number of Hazaras who have left Baluchistan to escape insecurity are now living in difficult conditions in cities such as Islamabad and Rawalpindi, where they lack access to adequate housing, jobs and other services.

Although ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in Pakistan have tended to live in particular geographic areas – with the majority of Hindus living in Sindh, for example, and the majority of Punjabi speakers in Punjab – cities such as Karachi are much more densely mixed. Though it is important not to oversimplify ethnic and other divisions, poorly planned urban development and rapid demographic growth have the potential to escalate levels of violence along sectarian lines, with serious implications for Pakistan's minorities. This is particularly the case in Karachi, where ethnicity is highly politicized. Violent disputes between different parties over control of local settlements are therefore defined increasingly in ethnic terms, placing minorities at even greater risk of attack. With Pashtuns now constituting the largest segment of new arrivals in Karachi, there is concern this could exacerbate tensions between the locally ruling Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), which largely represents the *muhajir* population – mostly Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from northern and western India following partition – and the Pashtun-dominated Awami National Party.

Indeed, relocating to cities has also not always ensured greater security for Pakistan's minorities. Hindus who have migrated to Karachi, for example, have continued to fall victim to incidents of forced conversion and marriage. Militants have also increasingly focused their attacks against minorities in urban areas. In Karachi, growing numbers of TTP fighters and high levels of

violence led to 750 sectarian targeted killings reported between September 2013 and September 2014. However, government anti-terrorism measures have often only served to increase the vulnerability of minorities and other marginalized groups in urban areas. In response to a double suicide bomb attack in Islamabad in March 2014, for example, the government swiftly blamed and conducted raids on the city's slums, or *katchi abadis*, where many minorities make their homes. Subsequent efforts to demolish slums have been met with protests from those living in these areas, including many of Islamabad's Christians who migrated from other parts of the country in search of better opportunities. These actions reflected increasing hostility from the recently elected government towards these settlements, which it has regarded as a security threat, though some inhabitants have argued that the attempted clearances are also driven by commercial interests.

Patronage networks and discriminatory attitudes in areas such as employment are often reproduced in Pakistan's cities, with minorities often confined to underpaid and low-status livelihoods. In Lahore, the Christian population accounts for the bulk of the city's sanitation workers and street-sweepers – a fact that reinforces their stigmatization – while most of their supervisors are Muslim. Nevertheless, urbanization has presented opportunities for minorities and other disadvantaged groups to transcend prescribed roles and access services such as education that might otherwise have been unavailable to them. Urban centres have also been a site of resistance where – despite the severe repercussions they can and often do confront – members of minorities and other groups have protested against the persistent targeting they face. One such instance took place in November 2014 when, following the murder of a Christian couple in Kasur, various Christian, Hindu and other groups took to the streets in Peshawar, calling on the government to end impunity for the perpetrators and promote religious harmony.

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