

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

|                                 |                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bilagsnr.:</b>               | <b>267</b>                                                                                              |
| Land:                           | Pakistan                                                                                                |
| Kilde:                          | UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office                                                                      |
| Titel:                          | Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Report - Country Updates: Pakistan |
| Udgivet:                        | 18. juli 2013                                                                                           |
| Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet: | 20. november 2013                                                                                       |

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**  
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**  
Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Pakistan
- **Publication date:**  
18 July 2013
- **ecoi.net summary:** Quarterly updates on human rights situation [ID 244472]
- **Countries:**  
Pakistan
- **Original link** <http://www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk/human-rights-in-countries-of-concern/pakistan/quarterly-updates-pakistan/?showall=1>

**Recommended citation:**

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Pakistan, 18 July 2013 (available at ecoi.net)  
[http://www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/244472/366674\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/244472/366674_en.html) (accessed 29 October 2013)



## Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Pakistan

**Latest update: 30 June 2013**

Pakistan's new government took office on 5 June, following elections on 11 May. The elections were a crucial milestone in Pakistan's democratic history. It is the first time that power has transferred democratically between one civilian government and another, after completing a full parliamentary term. This represents a vital step on the path to a strong, stable and democratic Pakistan. These elections are among the most credible in Pakistan's history, with an improved electoral register and the highest-ever number of women and first time voters. Disaggregated data on voters is not yet available to determine whether excluded groups and minorities fully participated in the elections. However, the Commonwealth Observation Mission noted with concern the manner in which the Ahmadi community is treated with regard the right to vote. To protect that credibility we and other election observers have urged that all allegations of malpractice be thoroughly investigated.

Unfortunately, the election campaign was marred by targeted violence, with more than 150 people having been killed. Whilst some inter-party violence was observed, much of the pre-election violence was carried out by militants against politicians and political parties, workers, election officials and voters, restricting some parties' ability to hold political rallies and campaign. Those parties that are perceived as "secular" including the ANP, MQM were particularly targeted. However, rejecting terrorist violence and intimidation, some 50 million people in Pakistan went to the ballot box on 11 May, with only a small number of isolated attacks on polling stations.

In the period April to June, reports of sectarian attacks continued. A Shia lawyer and his two sons were shot dead in Karachi in May, and a Shia doctor was critically injured in June. A Shia doctor was killed in Peshawar in June also. Police are investigating, but no arrests have yet been made. The offices of the weekly magazine "The Lahore", owned by an Ahmadi family have been under siege for the past two months.

The number of internally displaced people has increased over the reporting period with large numbers moving from FATA to neighbouring provinces; others already displaced have been unable to return to their homes due to on-going security operations against non-state armed actors. More than 1 million people are now displaced in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and FATA due to insecurity dating back to 2008 and require continued humanitarian assistance. [SOURCE: OCHA Pakistan FATA displacements situation report 6 June 2013]. Polio vaccination

teams continue to be targeted, four vaccination workers have been killed in two separate incidents in Swabi (June) and Peshawar (May).

From a freedom of expression point of view, there was unprecedented media activity in the run up to elections, although the past few months have seen some setbacks. The New York Times bureau chief was expelled just prior to elections; Amnesty International received credible reports of threats to journalists during the election campaign; one journalist was killed in April; and seven newspapers in Quetta are being investigated for printing a press release from an "outlawed" organization.

On women's rights, Pakistan supports the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York in April, and met with key government officials to promote the agenda that Pakistani women's rights activists had agreed for CSW 57. Unfortunately, in June, 14 female students were killed by a suicide bomber on a women's university bus in Quetta. It appears that this was an attack on education for females. The hospital where the injured were taken was subsequently attacked by a sectarian group.

#### **Update: 31 March 2013**

In the last three months Pakistan has moved closer to landmark democratic elections, but marginalised communities have continued to face persecution and deadly attacks.

The start of 2013 has seen a number of terrorist attacks targeting Pakistan's Shia Muslims. On 10 January and 16 February the Hazara community in Quetta was targeted by bombings which killed over 200 people. On 3 March a bomb was detonated outside a Shia mosque in Karachi, killing at least 48 people. Impassioned demonstrations across the country followed these attacks, putting pressure on the Pakistani authorities to respond. We publically condemned the attacks in company with others in the international community, including the UN Secretary General.

On 9 March allegations of blasphemy were made against a member of the Christian community in Joseph Colony in Lahore which led to violent anti-Christian riots. A mob of several thousand destroyed over 150 homes and other property. Following the attacks, Baroness Warsi spoke to Paul Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for National Harmony and Minority Affairs to express her sympathy and the UK's ongoing commitment to help Pakistan tackle religious persecution.

On International Women's Day on 8 March landmark domestic violence legislation was passed in the Sindh Provincial Assembly. This is a significant step towards protecting women, children and other vulnerable people in Sindh from domestic violence. It follows several years of hard work by its supporters, including the UK. We hope that Pakistan's other provinces will follow Sindh's example.

On 16 March Pakistan's National Assembly dissolved after successfully completing its full five-year parliamentary term for the first time. This signals the start of an important electoral process for Pakistan. The elections, to be held on 11 May, will be a crucial milestone in Pakistan's democratic history. The UK continues to support democracy in Pakistan and will be joining other international partners to observe the elections.

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