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Introduction

# The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia

How do conflict and violence affect Asia? What are their roots, and how have they evolved within countries over time? And what countries are particularly prone to different forms of conflict and violence?

*The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia* contains accessible, up-to-date, data-driven analyses of historical patterns and current trends in conflict and violence in 14 Asian countries. Designed for government officials and diplomats, scholars, aid and development professionals, business leaders, international affairs and security analysts, and activists, this volume presents a concise overview of the diversity and complexity of conflict and violence in Asia today.

Each chapter considers conflict and violence and their impacts in one Asian country. Each assesses the post-World War II roots of contestation and how current political, economic, and social conditions shape patterns of conflict and violence today. The chapters use a common framework, examining nine types of contestation at the transnational, national, subnational, and local levels: national civil war, national political conflict, transnational terrorism, separatism and autonomy, communal and ideological conflict, local political and electoral violence, local resource conflict, urban crime and violence, and domestic and gender-based violence. Countries are ranked for each type of conflict and violence, allowing for easy comparison. Five thematic, expert essays—focusing on the links between conflict and regime type, intercommunal violence, cross-border insurgency and terrorism, gender-based violence, and land and natural resource conflicts—draw out broader findings and implications.

The *State of Conflict and Violence in Asia* fills critical gaps in the understanding of conflict in Asia. International violence datasets are unreliable and often massively underreport levels of violence. Solid data on local forms of violence is often non-existent. Many reports provide data and comparative analysis of violence, in Asia and beyond, but these reports tend to focus on just one type of violence, such as civil war violence, political violence, or terrorism.[1] Looking in isolation at civil war violence—or at electoral violence, urban crime, or domestic violence—means that the links to other forms cannot be untangled, and little is understood about how they relate, i.e. whether countries that experience one type of violence (say, transnational terrorism) are also prone to other types (such as national political contestation). On the other hand, homicide datasets that aggregate all forms into one measure can obscure the causes of conflict and violence.[2] Are most of the homicides a result of interpersonal violence, or are they the result of larger outbursts of collective violence, such as ethnic riots? *The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia* considers a wide range of types of conflict and violence, clarifying which predominate in different locales, and allowing for a finer-grained analysis of what drives each type. This can help policymakers and others in planning and prioritizing how to address conflict and violence most effectively.

Each chapter draws on a broad range of sources, including official data, survey evidence, and academic studies and policy analyses, weaving them together to provide an accurate picture of

conflict and violence in Asia today. Drawing on The Asia Foundation's own long-standing experience in each country, the chapters combine analysis of published materials with in-depth knowledge and nuanced understanding of local politics and power, including in some of the most entrenched conflict zones and challenging geographic locales in the world.

## Five emerging patterns

### #1. Conflict and violence affect every country in Asia, not just those often thought of as conflict-ridden.

This volume highlights just how widespread and serious conflict and violence are in Asia, a region typically thought of as a rare bastion of peace in a troubled world. Large-scale violence is not confined to Afghanistan; many other countries are deeply affected by subnational conflicts and large-scale intercommunal violence. Localized violence is present everywhere—often with dramatic cumulative impacts. In Indonesia, almost 2,500 people were killed from 2005 to 2014 in violence related to local issues, including land conflicts and vigilante justice attacks. Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the different forms of conflict and violence occurring in each country in the last 15 years. It shows that all countries are significantly affected by at least one type of conflict or violence. Mongolia, for example, has low levels of most types of conflict, but it has particularly high levels of violent crime. There has been relatively little conflict or violence in Cambodia in recent years, but land and natural-resource conflict is a significant problem, and there is the potential for electoral violence to increase. Across the spectrum, it becomes clear that conflict and violence are an issue everywhere, not just in countries typically thought of as being affected by conflict.

### #2. Asian countries have been relatively successful at managing national contestation, but often at the price of significant subnational and local violence.

Since the end of Nepal's war in 2006, nationwide civil war has been absent from Asia, with the exception of Afghanistan. In Bangladesh, Thailand, and Pakistan, national political conflicts have been particularly bloody, but have not led to large-scale, sustained civil war in recent decades. Yet the strategies used to achieve such relative national stability have often inadvertently led to other forms of conflict and violence. Subnational conflicts in the peripheries of many Asian states, highlighted throughout the volume, are a consequence of national statebuilding strategies that consolidate central power and maintain territorial integrity at the expense of recognizing the immense local diversity within Asian countries and the desire of borderland areas for sufficient autonomy to protect their customs and local values. The use of patronage to bind competing national elites to the prevailing political settlement undermines the rule of law, providing space for violence to be used as a political and economic strategy. These conflicts, such as those in Myanmar and Thailand's borderlands, have been more frequent and enduring in Asia than anywhere else in the world.[3]

### #3. The politicization of ethnic and religious identities has frequently led to violence and creates major risks for the future.

Powerful political elites across Asia have increasingly emphasized exclusive ethnic or religious identities as they bid to win or maintain power. This trend has become more marked

as nations in the region have democratized and politics have become more competitive. The Malaysia chapter, for example, shows how politicians have increasingly utilized the Malay-Muslim card to fend off allegations of corruption. In Indonesia, local elites in a range of outlying, religiously balanced provinces emphasized threats to confessional identities as a way to rally voters; recent elections in the capital, Jakarta, have seen the same tactics at play. Identity politics have often led to violence, which has sometimes spun out of control. In India, for example, instigating religious riots has been a strategy for politicians to win elections, but these riots have led to thousands of deaths. Violence in turn has deepened the cleavages between ethnic and religious groups.

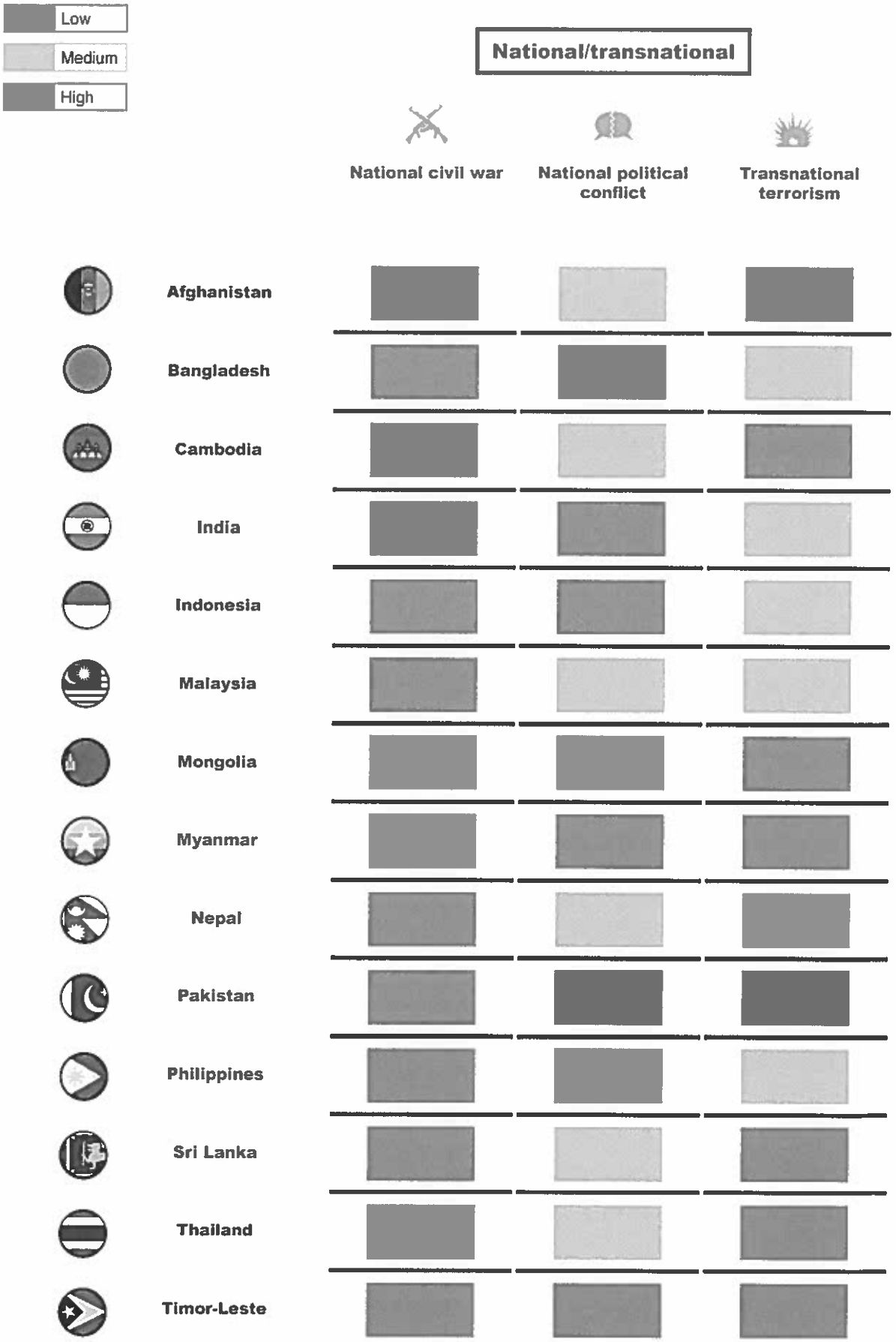
## #4. Development and urbanization will likely increase rather than decrease violence in the coming decade.

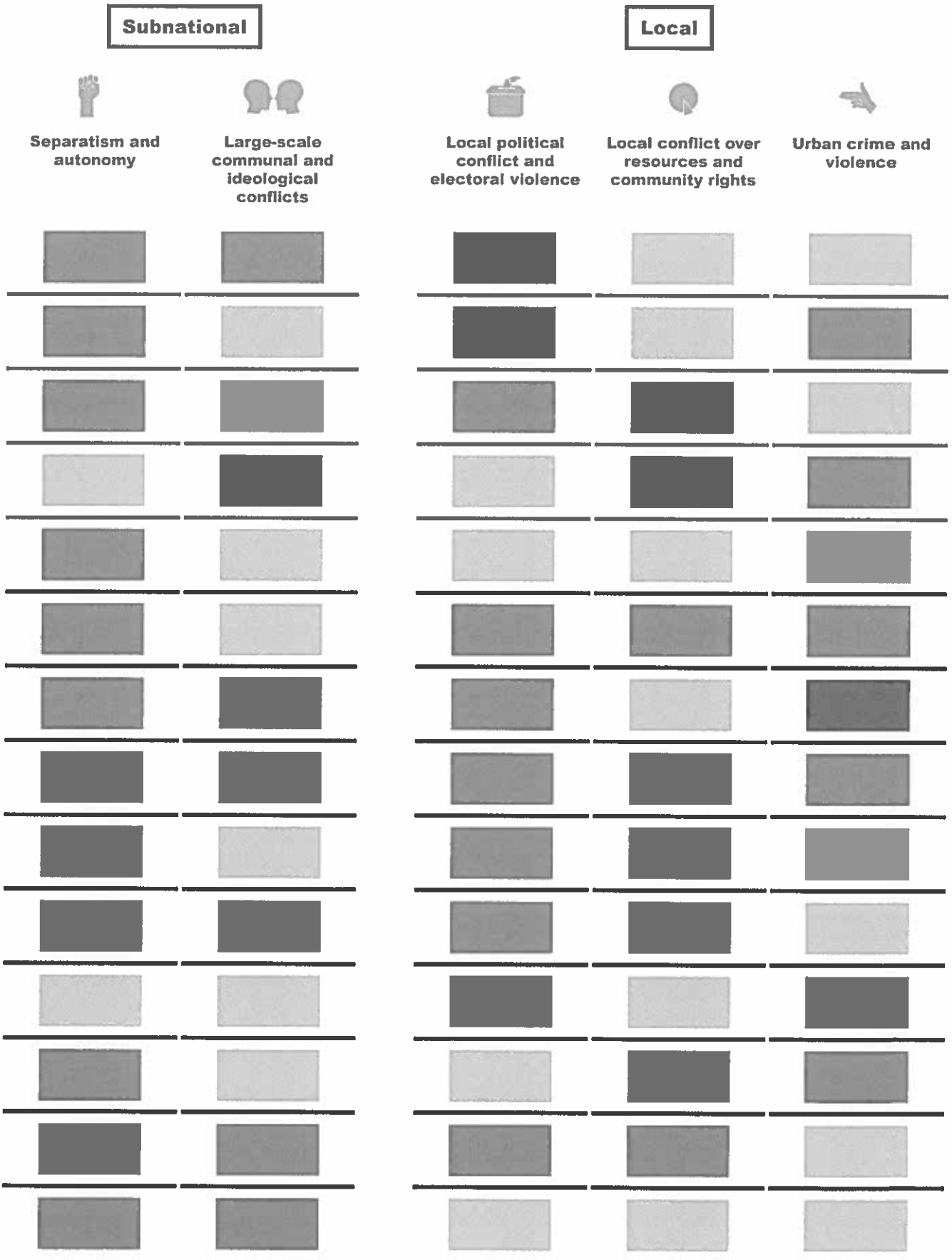
Asia's economic rise has been momentous. Since the early 1960s, it has grown richer faster than any other region in the world. In 1990, 60 percent of people in East Asia and 45 percent in South Asia lived on less than USD 1.90 a day (PPP).[4] By 2013, these rates had fallen to under 4 percent and 15 percent, respectively. In 2013, East Asia grew by 7.1 percent and South Asia by 5.2 percent, far outpacing any other region.[5] This rapid development has improved the lives of many, but the chapters in this volume show that the forces it has unleashed have also commonly led to violence. One of those forces has been the rise of inequality and regional disparities. In places like Thailand and the Philippines, subnational conflicts have intensified even as growth has accelerated. In Cambodia, rapid economic expansion has reduced the security of land tenure for many, and protests have been met with violent crackdowns. In India, large-scale development schemes have contributed to the rise of the Naxalite movement. In Mongolia, where two-thirds of the population now live in Ulaanbaatar, rapid urbanization has helped push the capital to the highest homicide rate of any Asian city—11.9 deaths per 100,000 people.

## #5. Gender-based violence is widespread in Asia, and its impacts are greater than previously understood.

The chapters in this volume point to the overwhelming pervasiveness of gender-based violence in most Asian countries. In Timor-Leste, for example, 14 percent of all women between the ages of 15 and 49 report being raped. In India, there were 8,342 rapes reported per year between 2009 and 2013, which averages out to roughly 23 women raped every day. Nepal has seen a sharp increase in reported violence against women. Yet the full range and impact of such violence is still unexplored and little understood. Survey data is inconsistent within and between countries,[6] and cultural factors lead to widespread underreporting. As a result, the country chapters do not classify countries by their levels of gender-based violence, although they do suggest countries that deserve particular attention. Better research and data are clearly needed.

**Table 1. Levels of violence and conflict in Asia**






** Rankings are based on the last 15 years and are relative to other Asian countries.*

## Five critical implications

### #1. Target hot spots with conflict programming, but remain alert to risks elsewhere.

There are conflict hot spots in Asia, as elsewhere: most of Afghanistan; zones of active subnational conflict in the Philippines, Myanmar, Thailand, and Indonesia; border zones between Bangladesh and Myanmar and between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These areas require the continuing attention of policymakers and peacebuilders. Yet, looking back over time, conflict and violence have ebbed and flowed in most Asian countries. Twenty years ago, Timor-Leste was in the midst of violent resistance to an illegal occupation. Fifteen years ago, Nepal was wracked by a bloody civil war. Less than a decade ago, horrific violence affected Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces. Each is now firmly "postconflict": current levels of most types of violence are lower than in many other countries in the region. Yet old conflicts have a habit of resurfacing, and peace should never be taken for granted. Other relatively peaceful countries in Asia, such as Malaysia and Cambodia, exhibit strong risk factors.

### #2. Understand the history and the politics.

Today's conflicts and violence are often the product of historical trends and events that have defined relations between groups, between society and the state, and between neighboring countries, and that have shaped the way that institutions function. The legacy of the South Asian subcontinent's two great Partitions still greatly impacts internal politics in India, Pakistan, and especially Bangladesh. Choices made by colonial powers and the first generation of postcolonial leaders in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Myanmar have directly determined the conflict cleavages that drive violence today. These cleavages are often exploited, and further solidified, by elites. Understanding this political-economy, and how history has shaped it, is key to developing effective strategies.

### #3. Focus on building the rule of law.

Peacebuilding work—facilitating and supporting peace processes, building local conflict-resolution mechanisms, promoting intercommunal tolerance—is vital in many areas of Asia. Yet it is just as crucial to develop effective and legitimate institutions to manage political and economic competition in nonviolent ways. In many of the countries considered in this volume, conflict and violence occur because institutions do not uphold the rule of law. Elite impunity leads to local grievances and sometimes violent resistance. Crimes go unpunished, fostering resentments. Weak institutions create space for elites to use violence as a political strategy. Promoting good governance is not just important for improving service delivery or enhancing growth; it is also a key preemptive strategy to ensure that human rights are respected and security is provided for all.

### #4. Deal with cross-border drivers of conflict and violence, and promote country-to-country learning.

The chapters in this volume show that conflict and violence in one country often affect other countries in the region. Guns, people, goods, and ideologies cross national borders, spawning transnational jihadi networks and strengthening insurgent movements. Governments and development agencies have often coped less effectively with these cross-border dynamics than with the

local drivers of violence. Multi-country approaches are needed to bolster security in the region. Increased cooperation in sharing lessons learned could also be fruitful. India has reduced the violence in its Northeast. Indonesia managed to negotiate a peace settlement that has stuck in Aceh Province. At the local level in many countries, civil society organizations have developed effective strategies to reduce ethnic or religious tensions and detect emerging problems. Finding ways to share positive lessons such as these can help other governments and civil society organizations promote peace at home.

### #5. Support locally owned violence monitoring systems to generate better data.

It was clear when producing this volume that available data on the impact and incidence of conflict and violence is still of limited quality. International violence datasets often massively underreport levels of violence.[7] It is extremely hard to find reliable data for many forms of conflict and violence for many countries. As noted above, global datasets tend to focus on just a few types of violence or to aggregate all violence together. Solid data on localized forms of violence, and especially gender-based violence, is often missing. The Asia Foundation has been promoting the development of locally owned violent incident monitoring systems in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal, and Bangladesh, and data from these is cited throughout this volume. Developing similar systems across the region would contribute to a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the conflict and violence issues discussed here.

## Notes

1 See, for example, the data produced by ACLED (http://www.acleddata.com/), Uppsala University (http://ucdp.uu.se/), and the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index (http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/terrorism-index/).

2 World Health Organization (WHO), *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014* (Geneva: WHO, 2014), http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/status_report/2014/en/; and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* (Vienna: UNODC, 2014), http://www.unodc.org/gsh/.

3 Thomas Parks, Nat Colletta, and Ben Oppenheim, *The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance* (Bangkok and San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2013).

4 "Poverty headcount ratio at $1.90 a day," World Bank website, accessed August 21, 2017, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.DDAY

5 "Poverty & Equity Regional Dashboard: East Asia & Pacific," World Bank website, accessed August 17, 2017, http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/region/EAP

6 A major World Health Organization study from 2013 used a more rigorous methodology; however, it only uses information on seven Asian countries, and reports results at the regional rather than the country level. World Health Organization (WHO), *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence* (Geneva: WHO, 2013), http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/.

7 Patrick Barron, Anders Engvall, and Adrian Morel, *Understanding Violence in Southeast Asia* (San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2016).

The 2016 Global Terrorism Index ranked Afghanistan as the country second-most affected by terrorism after Iraq, accounting for 14 percent of the world's terrorist attacks in 2015.[30] In 2016, the country suffered 6,994 civilian casualties from terrorist attacks—2,131 dead and 4,863 injured—a 2 percent increase over the previous year.[31] While the Taliban were responsible for the majority of terrorist attacks in the country, an IS affiliate, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), carried out multiple deadly attacks that killed 286 civilians in 2016.[32] The ISKP claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Kabul in July 2016 that killed at least 85 people; more recently, in March 2017, they stormed Kabul's main military hospital, killing 50, and claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing near the defense ministry in April.

## Subnational level

### Separatism and autonomy

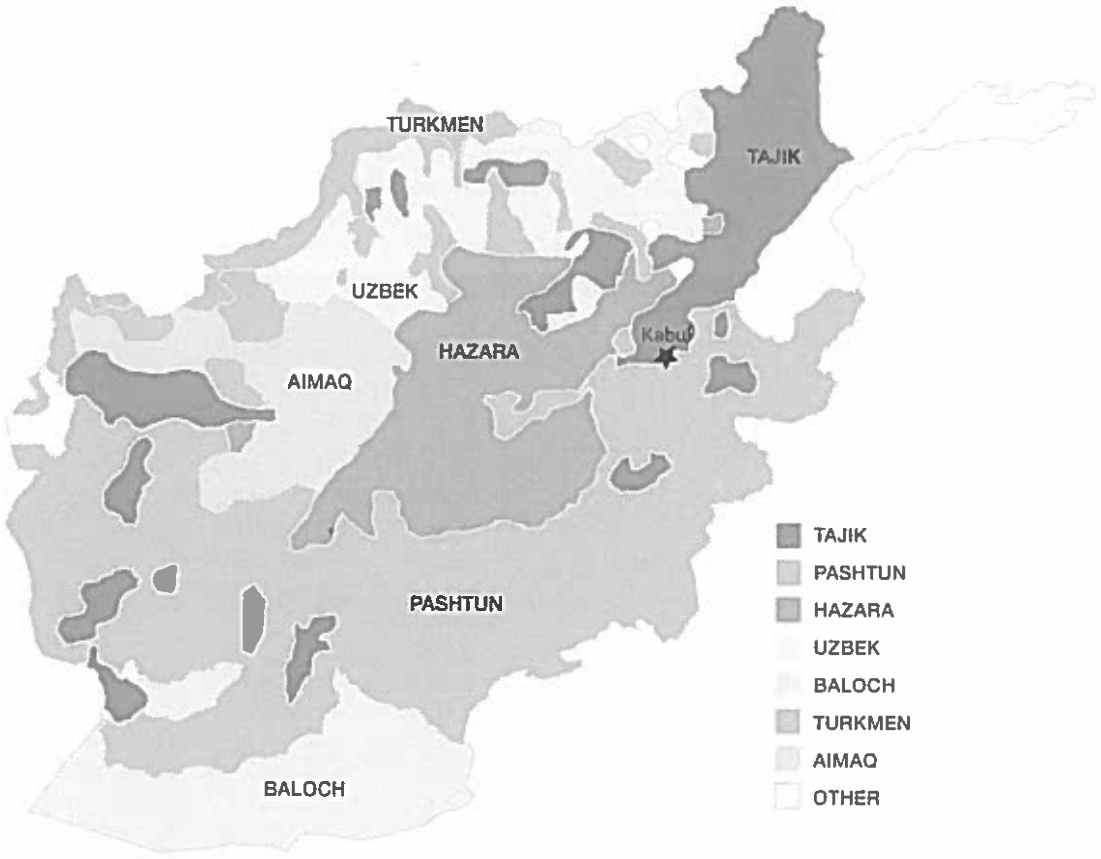
While there is no significant separatist movement in Afghanistan, and formal state authority is highly centralized, much of the country is governed in practice by local tribal and ethnic leaders. Due to weak and ineffective governance at the subnational level, the central government relies heavily on traditional mechanisms and local institutions such as *shuras* (standing councils) or *jirgas* (ad hoc councils).[33] Confidence in local institutions such as shuras and community development councils is generally higher than in national institutions.[34] To connect village politics to the central government, the international community adopted a hybrid approach: it built state capacity by integrating informal powers into the government.[35] Warlords thus were offered ministerial posts and received financial support to fight the Taliban.

Limited state capacity and accountability also resulted in a governance vacuum and local fragmentation, which contributed to worsening security.[36] With strong influence, militias, and rich resources, local strongmen have the political and economic means to challenge both the government and insurgents.[37] In some areas, the central government cannot maintain security or provide basic services, strengthening the influence of local warlords at the subnational level.

### Large-scale communal and ideological conflicts

Afghanistan has faced growing ethnic and sectarian tensions in recent years, which have contributed to the ongoing conflict and violence. The country has 14 different ethnic groups recognized in the 2004 constitution: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, and Pashai.[38] Over 99 percent of the population is Muslim, Sunni Muslims comprising 85–90 percent and Shia Muslims making up 10–15 percent.[39] The Shia population includes Ismailis and a majority of ethnic Hazaras. Other religious groups, mainly Hindus, Sikhs, Bahais, and Christians, comprise an estimated 0.3 percent of the population.

Even though the two largest religious groups, Sunni and Shia, have lived in peace since the Taliban regime, a new surge of sectarian violence against the Shia community has been reported, with attacks on the Hazaras in particular. In the second half of 2016, UNAMA recorded five separate attacks against Shia mosques and gatherings, which killed 162 civilians and injured 618 others.[40] One of the worst attacks was during the peaceful protest organized by the Enlightening Movement in Kabul in July 2016, killing at least 85 civilians and injuring over 400 people.[41] Almost all civilian casualties were from the Shia Hazara community. The ISKP claimed responsibility for most of the attacks against Shias, particularly ethnic Hazaras. The group has carried out lethal attacks on religious minorities that have strongholds in Syria and Iraq.[42] The government has recognized inciting ethnic strife as a crime. Many believe that violence along ethnic lines may increase, including within the country's own security forces.[43]




## Local level

### Local political conflict and electoral violence

Local conflict and violence are intertwined with and mirror national political conflict. Local leaders have often resorted to ethnic allegiance and incited violence, just as they did during the civil war. The last provincial council elections were held on the same day as the first round of the presidential election in April 2014. These elections were also marred by attacks from the Taliban and affiliated groups. UNAMA documented 27 civilian deaths and 128 injuries on the day of the elections, including among Independent Election Commission (IEC) staff, women, and children.[44] The majority of civilian casualties resulted from violent clashes and bomb attacks by antigovernment groups targeting IEC convoys, polling stations, candidates, and supporters. The final results from the provincial council elections were released in October 2016, six months after the elections.[45] The adjudication of provincial election complaints was deferred due to the controversy around the presidential runoff election, which consequently postponed the release of the final results.

### Local conflict over resources and community rights

Disputes over natural resources such as land, water, forests, minerals, and opium and cannabis often exacerbate existing political, ethnic, sectarian, and regional divisions in Afghanistan. Widespread poverty and a scarcity of productive land generate intense competition for access to and management of land and natural resources among people and communities, which often leads to intracommunal and intercommunal conflict. For example, disputes over access to pastoral land have been at the heart of interethnic tensions between the Shia Hazaras and the Sunni Kuchis for over a century, tensions that have frequently flared into violence.[46] According to a 2008 Oxfam report, land was a major cause of local disputes, accounting

# 70%

## civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks are in Kabul

for nearly 30 percent of all cases.[47] The Asia Foundation's 2016 *Survey of the Afghan People* found that land disputes were the most common type of disputes brought to dispute-resolution institutions by respondents.[48]

Population growth, urbanization, returning refugees/displaced people, and rising property values are among the critical factors driving pervasive land conflicts in the country.[49] The country has a mix of formal and traditional institutions governing the land-tenure system. The government attempted to address land rights by reformalizing land settlement and administration through the 2007 Land Policy and the 2008 Law on Managing Land Affairs, but land governance remained ambiguous, complex, and lacking in transparency.[50] Despite the government's effort to modernize the land-management system, most land ownership and use is still based on informal or customary arrangements that have evolved over time.

Disputes over access to and allocation of water are the second-most commonly cited cause of conflict after land.[51] Land and water issues are intimately related, as agriculture absorbs 95 percent of the water used in the country.[52] Inequitable distribution of water remains a source of great tension between communities that is often an underlying factor in other conflicts labeled as ethnic or sectarian in nature. To generate hydroelectricity and capture more water, the government has proposed 31 major infrastructure projects across the country, including the construction of 15 storage dams.[53] These projects have generated significant tensions among different groups, as well as with neighboring countries such as Iran, India, and Turkmenistan.

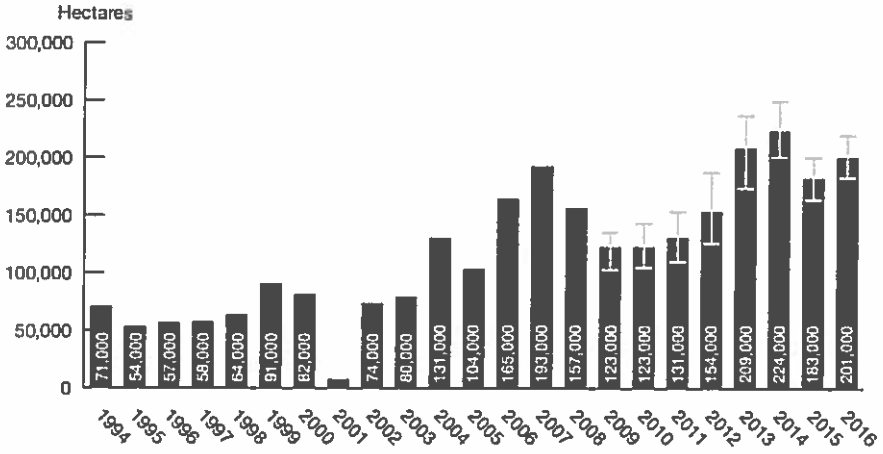



**Figure 3.** Opium cultivation in Afghanistan (1994–2016)
*Source:* UNODC (2016)[54]

Opium cultivation and trade are closely linked to insurgencies and terrorist activities, contributing to the high level of violence in the country. Afghanistan is the world's largest exporter of opium and a major producer of cannabis. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that Afghanistan's total area under opium poppy cultivation reached a peak of 224,000 hectares in 2014 (figure 3).[55] Potential opium production was estimated at 4,800 tons in 2016, an increase of 43 percent from 3,300 tons in 2015.[56] The Taliban and other insurgent groups earn revenue to support their operations through taxation of poppy farmers, providing protection for the opium trade, and heroin production.[57] With a lack of economic incentives such as markets for other crops, current opium eradication efforts are doomed to failure.[58] The government's eradication efforts have been slow and risky due to poor security in the major opium-growing areas, which are typically insurgent strongholds.

## Urban crime and violence

Kabul, Afghanistan's most populous city with 3.8 million people (2016–2017 estimate),[59] is a high-profile target for large-scale insurgent attacks. Antigovernment groups continue to conduct suicide and complex attacks against civilian and noncivilian targets in densely populated areas. In 2016, UNAMA recorded the second-highest number of civilian casualties (534 deaths and 1,814 injuries), an increase of 34 percent compared to 2015, in the central region that includes Kabul.[60] In particular, 70 percent of all civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks took place in Kabul.[61] According to The Asia Foundation's 2016 survey, the level of crime and violence experienced by respondents in the central region went up by six points between 2006 and 2016.[62]

Homicide, assaults, thefts, kidnapping, and terrorist threats are rampant and deadly nationwide. While no regional crime statistics are available, the overall number of criminal incidents in the country rose from 1,107 in 2009 to 1,795 in 2014, an increase of 62 percent over seven years. However, this may reflect improvements in reporting as much as an actual increase in criminal activity. Data from the Ministry of Interior Affairs indicated that the rate of intentional homicide (excluding battle deaths) increased from 4.0 per 100,000 people in 2009 to 6.5 per 100,000 people in 2012.[63]

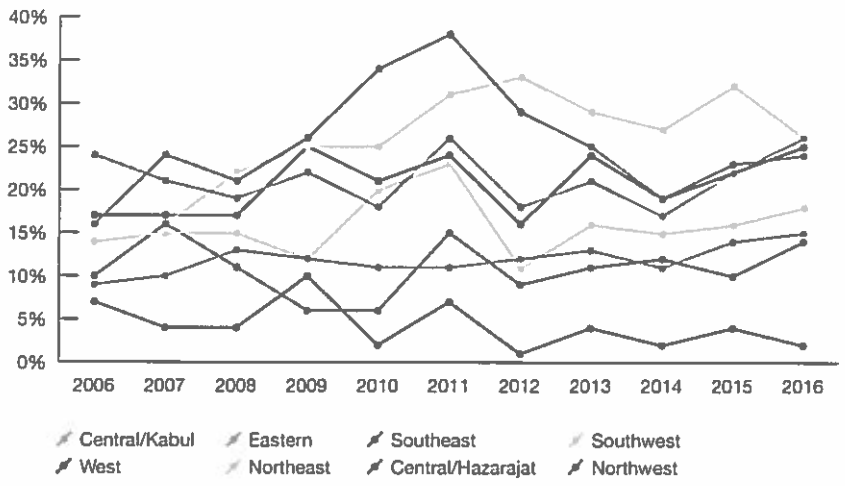



**Figure 4.** Level of crime or violence experienced by respondents, by region (2006–2016)
*Source:* The Asia Foundation

1947

**1947**
Pakistan becomes an independent nation, comprising East and West Pakistan, following partition.

**1948**
Insurgency breaks out in Balochistan, the first of five.

**1971**
Pakistan army attacks East Pakistan. The Bangladesh Liberation War lasts for eight months; a quarter million to 3 million people die.

**1977**
Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq seizes power from Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and implements Islamization policies, raising tensions between Sunnis and Shias.

**1999**
General Pervez Musharraf takes power and forms a military government.

**2004**
Fifth insurgency erupts in Balochistan. It remains ongoing.

**2007**
New wave of sectarian violence begins between Sunni and Shia militants.

**2007**
Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister, and chair of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), is assassinated.

**2008**
PPP wins general elections.

**2010**
Eighteenth Amendment to the constitution paves the way for local elections.

**2013**
Parliament passes the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act.

**2013**
Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League wins general elections.

**2013**
Church bombing in Peshawar kills more than 80 in one of the deadliest attacks on Christians.

**2013**
Many key Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leaders are killed by U.S. drone strikes, leading to internal power struggles.

**2014**
Karachi airport attack by TTP and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) kills 37.

**2014**
TTP attack on an army public school in Peshawar kills almost 150, mostly children; government steps up counterterrorism operations.

**2015**
Government launches National Action Plan to boost counterterrorism efforts.

**2015**
Suicide bombing at Quetta hospital kills 93, mostly lawyers gathered to mourn the killing of the Balochistan Bar Association president.

**2015**
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor agreement is signed.

**2015**
Police statistics report 34 percent increase in violence against women.

**2016**
Parliament passes anti-honor-killing and anti-rape laws.

**2017**
Supreme Court ousts Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, ruling that his failure to disclose his family's assets disqualifies him from holding office.

2017

# Pakistan

## At a glance


National civil war
Absent


Communal/ideological conflict


National political conflict


Local political and electoral conflict
Low with potential to rise


Transnational terrorism


Local resource conflict


Separatism and autonomy


Urban crime and violence
Medium

** Rankings are based on the last 15 years and are relative to other Asian countries.*

## Overview

Pakistan's security landscape remains volatile and complex due to sectarian and ethnopolitical tensions and the intricate web of terrorist and militant groups in the country. In 2016, Pakistan saw 749 violent incidents that killed 1,887 people by various forms of violence related to politics and elections, terrorist attacks, security operations against terrorist groups and armed insurgents, ethnopolitical tensions, and sectarian cleavages. The overall number of violent incidents fell by 32 percent from 2015 to 2016, and fatalities fell by 46 percent in the same period.[1] Terrorist attacks were the most common form of violent incident reported. The decrease in violent incidents and fatalities is largely attributable to military-led operations throughout the country. Due to the heavy crackdown on terrorist and militant groups in the tribal areas, however, terrorist activities are spreading from the border region to many parts of the country.[2] In 2016, Balochistan was the region most affected by terrorist attacks, accounting for 34 percent of all attacks and 45 percent of deaths from terrorism.[3] Changing dynamics of unrest and insecurity in Balochistan indicate that the province faces a larger threat from terrorist and militant groups, as seen in Quetta and Khuzdar, than from Baloch nationalist insurgents.

# Pakistan

## National level

### National civil war

There has been no civil war in Pakistan since the Bangladesh Liberation War, which ended in 1971 when East Pakistan became Bangladesh. The war broke out in March of that year when the Pakistani army launched a military operation against Bengali civilians, students, intellectuals, and armed personnel after the Bengali-led Awami League won a majority in the National Assembly and demanded the separation of East Pakistan from the rest of the country. The Bengali population in East Pakistan had been underrepresented in the central government and army, which were dominated by political elites from West Pakistan. In response to the Pakistani military operation, Bengali politicians and army officers declared Bangladesh independent, forming the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army), which engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Pakistani army. During the war, the Pakistan army, together with religious extremist militias, committed systematic genocide and atrocities against Bengali civilians. Bangladeshi authorities claim that as many as 3 million people died, but the total may be significantly lower. World Health Surveys data collected in 2002–2003 estimates that 269,000 people died,[4] whereas other independent researchers have estimated between 300,000 and 500,000 deaths as a result of the eight-month war.[5]

### National political conflict

Pakistan has a long history of political violence in which competition among political parties involves frequent clashes. The dominance of Punjab and the political, social, and economic exclusion of other provinces, particularly Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), are major drivers of political violence in the country.[6] The Pakistani military often intervenes in politics, overthrowing weak civilian governments. The country has had alternating periods of electoral democracy and authoritarian, military government since its independence in 1947. Following the Musharraf-led military government that took power in 1999, democratic governance returned in 2008 when the left-oriented Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won the general elections. The PPP government completed its five-year term, and another democratic election was held in May 2013, when the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), led by Nawaz Sharif, won the largest number of votes.

There were waves of political unrest ahead of the 2008 and 2013 general elections. Following the December 2007 assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister and chair of the PPP, there were several attacks in KP and FATA targeting leftist politicians and political rallies in the weeks preceding the 2008 general elections. For example, a suicide attack killed as many as 31 people at a political rally for the Pashtun nationalist Awami National Party (ANP) in Charsadda, KP, on February 9, 2008, and another attack killed ten ANP activists in North Waziristan Agency on February 11, 2008.[7] Political violence continued to negatively affect security in Karachi throughout 2008, resulting in 143 deaths and 333 injuries.[8] Most political clashes in Karachi were between the Sunni Tehreek (ST), a Sunni Islam religious political organization, and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a liberal, secular political party. A number of criminal groups in the city, some supported by local land mafia, were also involved in violent acts with backing from political parties.

Terrorist attacks and violent clashes among different political parties during the 2013 general elections led to 298 deaths and 885 injuries between January 1 and May 15 of that year.[9] The province of Sindh—primarily Karachi—was the most affected by both terrorist attacks and incidents of political violence, followed by KP and Balochistan. A total of 148 terrorist attacks were reported across Pakistan in that four-and-a-half-month period, targeting political leaders, offices, and rallies, election candidates, and polling stations. Of the 148 attacks, 108 were perpetrated

**40+**

**terrorist organizations operate in and from Pakistan**

by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its local affiliates, killing 156 people and injuring 665. Baloch nationalist insurgents were responsible for 40 attacks, which killed 14 and injured 78. The ANP and the PPP were targeted in almost every region of Pakistan, while the MQM was primarily attacked in Karachi. The 2013 elections demonstrated the lengths to which militant groups would go to manipulate political outcomes through violence, targeting secularist parties, such as the PPP, ANP, and MQM, who formed the last government.

Beyond terrorist attacks, riots and protests between political parties are also common across the country. During the same period in 2013 there were 97 reported incidents of political clashes between supporters and workers of different political parties, resulting in 128 deaths and 142 injuries.[10] Seventy-three of these incidents took place in Sindh—70 of them in Karachi alone—taking the lives of 97 people, largely leaders and workers of political parties including the ANP, the MQM, the PPP, the ST, the PML, the Mohajir Qaumi Movement-Haqqiqi (MQM-H), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), and the People's Aman Committee. Political violence has long been a prominent feature of insecurity in Karachi; however, during the weeks preceding the May 2013 elections, incidents were also reported in other provinces.

From August to December 2014, an opposition party, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), held public rallies, marches, and sit-ins across the country, accusing the PML of electoral fraud during the 2013 elections and demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The PTI's protests in Islamabad prompted violent clashes between protesters and security forces, resulting in at least three deaths and hundreds of casualties.[11] Following a deadly attack by the Taliban in December, 2014, PTI decided to cancel the protest to restore national unity.

In July 2017, the Supreme Court ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The court had appointed a panel to investigate his assets after the publication of the "Panama Papers", files from a law firm in Panama that had facilitated offshore transactions for many political leaders, including Nawaz Sharif. The court ruled that he had failed to disclose his family's assets and disqualified him from holding office.

## Transnational terrorism

Pakistan experiences a high number of terrorist attacks. According to the 2016 Global Terrorism Index, it is among the world's top five countries most affected by terrorism.[12] The country had over 12,000 terrorist attacks between 2009 and 2016, resulting in 16,526 deaths (figure 1). The number of terrorist attacks and consequent fatalities has been declining, however, with the exception of 2013, which saw a jump in sectarian attacks. The recent reduction in terrorist incidents can be attributed to military-led counterterrorism operations, such as Zarb-e-Azb in FATA. Zarb-e-Azb was implemented in June 2014 in response to the joint terrorist attack by the TTP and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) on the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, which left 37 people dead, including 10 militants.[13] The government strengthened counterterrorism operations by launching the National Action Plan in January 2015, following an attack by the Taliban on the Army Public School in December 2014, which killed 136 schoolchildren and nine teachers.[14] The government also started to strengthen the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), which launched the Pakistan Action to Counter Terrorism (PACT) program in April 2017, aiming to enhance the capacity and technical expertise of counterterrorism efforts in the country.[15] Supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the program will first be piloted in KP, then expanded across the country.

Transnational terrorism is most common in areas bordering Afghanistan. Balochistan is the region most affected by terrorist violence in the last few years, followed by KP and FATA. Balochistan accounted for 34 percent of all attacks in 2016, resulting in 412 deaths and 702 injuries.[16] This included the August 8 hospital suicide bombing in Quetta, which killed 93 people, many of them lawyers gathering to mourn the killing of the Balochistan Bar Association president the day before.[17] KP was also significantly affected by terrorism in 2016, with 127 reported attacks killing 189 people and injuring another 355.[18] Meanwhile, FATA had 99 attacks, which killed 163 people and wounded 221.[19] Patterns of terrorist activity in 2016 suggest that militants who have been pushed out of the tribal regions are moving into Pakistan's urban areas, such as Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta, to carry out large-scale attacks.[20]

There are over 40 terrorist organizations operating in and from Pakistan.[21] More than 60 percent of the terrorist attacks in 2016 were carried out by the Pakistani Taliban, mainly the

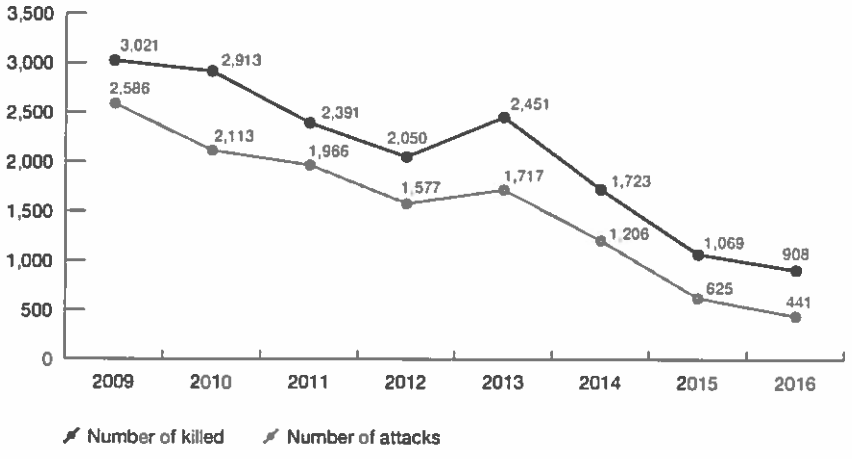



**Figure 1.** Terrorist attacks and related fatalities in Pakistan (2009–2016)
*Source:* PIPS[22]


TTP, and other groups with similar objectives, including Islamic State (IS) affiliates and supporters.[23] Since the key TTP leaders were killed by U.S. drone strikes in 2013, terrorist groups have experienced a period of power struggles, splits, and internal reorganizations. Since 2014, military-led counterterrorism operations against terrorist groups have significantly reduced the capability of militant groups, particularly the TTP. The presence of transnational groups such as al-Qaeda and IMU has also been largely eradicated. However, the geopolitical situation in the region complicates the country's approach to different terrorist organizations. The International Crisis Group (ICG) pointed out that the military still distinguishes between "bad" jihadi groups, which target the government and security forces, and "good" jihadi groups, which are perceived to promote its strategic objectives in India and Afghanistan.[24] For example, anti-India outfits, such as Jamaat-ud-Dawa (formerly Lashkar-e-Tayyaba), have not been targeted in ongoing operations in FATA, while Pakistan accuses India of supporting the Baloch insurgent movement.

## Separatism and autonomy

Balochistan suffers from a history of separatist conflict. Baloch nationalists previously led four insurgencies against the federal government, in 1948, 1958–59, 1962–63, and 1973–77. These insurgencies were suppressed by the Pakistani army. The fifth insurgency, which began in 2004, is still ongoing.[25] It is estimated that nearly 1,000 people were killed by insurgent attacks between 2004 and 2015 in Balochistan.[26] Balochistan is the largest but least populous province of Pakistan.[27] It is rich in natural resources,[28] meeting more than 40 percent of Pakistan's energy needs through its gas and coal reserves and accounting for 36 percent of the country's total gas production.[29] However, Balochistan is the least economically developed of the four provinces of Pakistan. It has the country's lowest rate of economic growth, highest poverty rate, and lowest social indicators for health and education.[30]

The conflict in Balochistan is driven by a number of grievances and inequities, including lack of autonomy, lack of Baloch representation in the government and military, and economic oppression. After Pakistan became independent in 1947, it adopted a highly centralized and militarized state model, insisting on a high level of central control over its provinces and imposing a top-down conception of the federation and national identity. This became a source of tension between the federal government and multiethnic Balochistan. Each time the Balochs demanded autonomy, the central government suppressed them by force, alienating the Balochs further. The Balochs are not significantly represented in government, as Punjabis dominate the central government, the Pakistani military, and the provincial administration of Balochistan.

One of the primary drivers of the current conflict is the federal government's extraction of natural gas in Balochistan and its failure to distribute a fair share of the revenue to the local population. Balochistan's natural gas fields are a major revenue earner for the federal government, but the majority of Baloch benefit little. The ICG notes that Baloch anger over central control and exploitation of the province's economic resources reached new heights when the central government excluded them from the development of the Gwadar port, which aims to transform a small fishing village into a major transportation hub for Afghanistan, China, Central Asia, and the Middle East.[31]

In April 2015, Pakistan signed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement with China, which agreed to invest USD 46 billion in a series of energy and transport projects in Pakistan.[32] Trade through the corridor, which connects Gwadar port with China's largest province, Xinjiang, had partially begun in November 2016. CPEC aims to contribute to the development of Balochistan and connect hard-to-reach areas with other parts of the country.[33] However, it is suspected that Balochistan may not directly benefit from economic activities through CPEC, because revenue generated from ports and airports will be collected by the federal government, not the provincial government.[34]

The political and economic marginalization of the Baloch, coupled with the increased presence of Pakistani security forces in the province, have led to further resentment and resistance by the Baloch against the federal government. Alleged foreign interventions have added to the conflict's complexity. Pakistani officials claim that India has been involved in perpetuating the conflict by providing Baloch militants with training and financial support through its 26 consulates established along the Balochistan border in Afghanistan and Iran.[35] The Pakistani parliament has made some attempts to resolve the conflict, but negotiations have fallen through, and fighting has continued. Insecurity in the province is further exacerbated by sectarian-related terrorist attacks by the TTP and other militant groups.

## Large-scale communal and ideological conflicts

Sectarian and ethnic violence has been a recurrent feature of Pakistan's history since 1947, in the form of both violent conflict between religious and ethnic groups, and one-sided violence against religious and ethnic minorities by the state and Islamic extremists. Home to an estimated population of over 190 million in 2015,[36] Pakistan has many different ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian groups. Ethnic composition roughly corresponds to the linguistic distribution of the population, at least among the largest groups: Punjabi 44.7 percent, Pashtun 15.4 percent, Sindhi 14.1 percent, Sariaki 8.4 percent, Muhajir 7.6 percent, Baloch 3.6 percent, and others 6.2 percent.[37] The vast majority of the population (96.3 percent) is Muslim, with much smaller minorities of Christians (1.6 percent), Hindus (1.6 percent), Ahmadiyyas (0.2 percent), scheduled castes (0.2 percent), and other religions (0.07 percent).[38]

Sectarian violence between the majority Sunnis (70–85 percent) and the minority Shias (15–20 percent) is prevalent in the country.[39] Since 2007, Pakistan has seen a new wave of sectarian attacks perpetrated by militant groups. Even though incidents of sectarian violence have been decreasing since 2013, such fluctuations in sectarian violence are common in Pakistan (figure 2). In 2016, there were 34 sectarian terrorist attacks, perpetrated mostly by banned Sunni and Shia militant groups, which killed 104 people.[40] Over 80 percent of people killed in sectarian violence in 2016 were in Khuzdar, in Balochistan, and Karachi, in Sindh.[41] While a single suicide attack at the Shah Noorani shrine in Khuzdar took 54 lives, most attacks in Karachi were targeted killings.

Tensions between Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan rose when Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator, seized power from Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1977. His Islamization policies favored the Sunni interpretation of Islam, causing a rift between the two denominations. Sunni-based Sharia law was incorporated into Pakistani law. A Sharia court and a Sharia bench of the Supreme Court were established, leading to a demand from the Shia community to follow their own interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. Shia leaders also strongly opposed Zia's imposition of the Islamic tax system, known as Zakat. The sectarian proxy war between Saudi Arabia (Wahhabi Sunni Islam) and Iran (Twelver Shia Islam) has helped ignite the escalation of sectarian violence

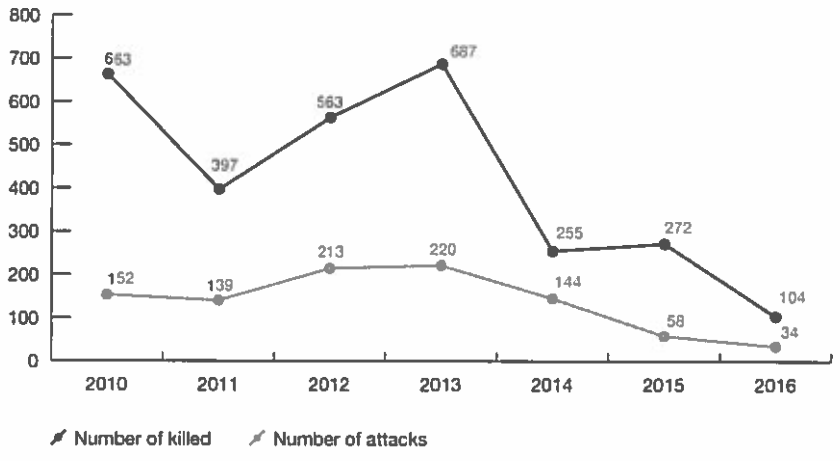



**Figure 2.** Sectarian violence in Pakistan (2010–2016)
*Source:* PIPS[42]

**80%+**

**of those killed**

**in sectarian violence in 2016 were in Khuzdar and Karachi**

in Pakistan.[43] Sunni and Shia militant groups have each targeted members of the other sect. The rise of the TTP in the mid-2000s, and its growing ties with militant sectarian groups such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami (LeJ-A, formerly known as LeJ), have led to more violence.

In addition to violence between Sunnis and Shias, Pakistan's religious minorities, such as Christians, Ahmadis, and Ismailis, who belong to the Shia branch of Islam, suffer discrimination and violence. For example, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a group affiliated with the TTP, targeted Christians in Lahore on Easter Sunday in March 2016, killing more than 70 people, including children.[44] It was the deadliest attack on Christians since the 2013 Peshawar church bombing, which killed over 80. The Ahmadis, who are considered non-Muslim under Pakistani law, also face continued attacks and persecution. On Prophet Mohammed's birthday in December 2016, a procession of around 2,000 Sunni Muslims attacked the Ahmadi mosque, injuring several people despite police resistance.[45] A massacre of Ismailis carried out by a TTP-associated group in 2015 left at least 45 people dead.[46]

## Local level

### Local political conflict and electoral violence

Local electoral violence has been relatively limited in Pakistan. Balochistan was the first province to hold local government elections after the Local Government Acts (LGAs) were passed by the provincial assemblies.[47] Compared to the May 2013 general elections, the first phase of the local elections, in December 2013, was held in a peaceful manner, with just over 30 people receiving minor injuries in a few violent incidents.[48] Strict security measures by the provincial government helped, as over 54,000 personnel from the army, Frontier Corps, Balochistan Constabulary, Levies Force, and police were deployed in and around the polling stations.[49] Following Balochistan, KP, Punjab, and Sindh held their local government elections in 2015. KP had 13 reported incidents of political or election-related violence, which took the lives of 25 people and injured 70 others, while as many as 19 such incidents were reported in Punjab, resulting in 11 deaths and 107 injuries.[50] Out of 30 reported incidents of political and election-related violence in Sindh, as many as 23 took place in Karachi, resulting in 26 deaths.[51] Violent incidents were also reported in the interior of Sindh, killing 18 people and injuring 99 others. The election-related violence was primarily caused by clashes between rival political groups. Over 30,000 police officers were also deployed in these provinces during the elections.[52]

### Local conflict over resources and community rights

See the separatism and autonomy section on the local conflict over natural resources in Balochistan.

### Urban crime and violence

Urban crime and violence are widespread in Pakistan. Between 2008 and 2016, the police recorded over 12,000 homicide cases in Karachi, the most populous city in Pakistan, with 9.8 million inhabitants (1998 census). In the years leading up to 2012, the city witnessed a steady rise in lethal violence. This increase was partially attributed to rapid and uncontrolled urbanization and ethnopolitical tensions.[53] Since 2012, the city has experienced a downward trend in the number of crimes and violent incidents. In 2016, crime statistics indicated a 91 percent decrease in targeted killings, a 93 percent decrease in extortion cases, and a 72 percent decrease in incidents of terrorism.[54] The recent crime reduction is primarily due to security operations against terrorist and criminal groups, launched in September 2013 by the Sindh Rangers.

Underrepresentation of migrants, intensifying ethnopolitical conflict, and the migration of hardline and extremist groups are key factors driving violence in Karachi. Demographic changes have significantly contributed to a sharp resurgence in ethnopolitical tensions and sectarian violence in Karachi. The ethnic composition of the city has been transformed since 1941, when Sindhis were about two-thirds of the population and Muhajir immigrants from northern India were just 6 percent.[55] Karachi today is 43 percent Muhajir, 17 percent Pashtun, 11 percent Punjabi, 6 percent Sindhi, 5 percent Balochi, 3 percent Saraiki, and 2 percent Hazara or Gilgiti. Relations between the Muhajirs and the Pashtuns have been strained by economic and political competition for control of land and resources.[56] Much of the ethnic violence in recent years has involved turf wars between rival criminal groups backed by political parties, such as the ANP, a Pashtun nationalist party, and the MQM, which represents the interests of the Muhajir community. Karachi is also a major target of sectarian violence by militant groups, such as the TTP and LeJ.

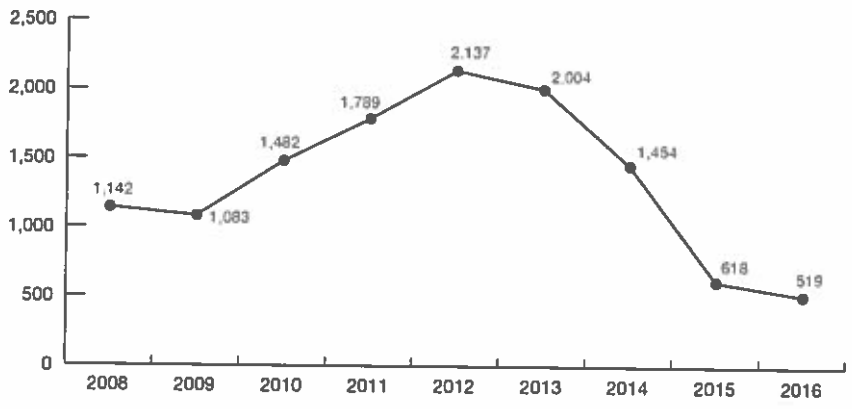



**Figure 3.** Number of homicide cases in Karachi (2008–2016)
*Source:* Crime statistics provided by the Sindh Bureau of Statistics and Sindh Police[57]

**Almost 1,100 honor killings reported in 2015**

Beyond Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta are also operational and financial bases for various extremist groups and criminal gangs that exploit poor governance and failing law and order to establish recruitment and patronage networks.[58] These groups attempt to lure youth into their violent activities by providing services, work, and a purpose in life. Criminal gangs and jihadi networks continue to inflict violence in the big cities. Lack of political representation and the neglect of some ethnic groups have also exacerbated conflict in some cities, as seen in Balochistan.

## Domestic and gender-based violence

Violence against women (VAW) is prevalent in Pakistan, due to patriarchal social norms and values coupled with customary and religious practices. Pakistan had over 53,000 reported VAW cases between 2011 and 2015 (figure 4).[59] Police statistics indicated an increase of 34 percent in VAW cases between 2014 and 2015. Punjab had the most recorded cases in 2015, followed by Sindh and KP. Crimes targeting women, such as abduction, murder, and rape, are among the most common. According to the Aurat Foundation, a women's rights organization based in Islamabad, while rates of most crimes ebb and flow, rape and gang rape are significantly increasing.[60] In October 2016, the parliament passed anti-honor-killing and anti-rape bills, which lengthened sentences and prevented victims' relatives from pardoning the perpetrators of honor killings.[61]

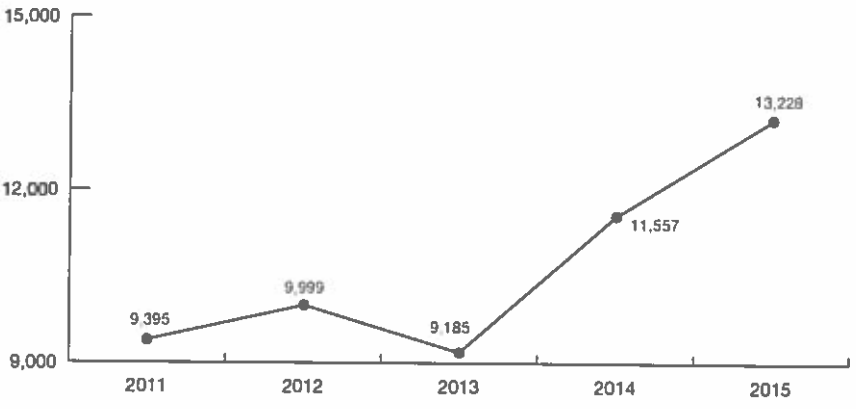



**Figure 4.** Cases of violence against women in Pakistan (2011–2015)
*Source:* Abbasi[62]

Domestic violence is an endemic social problem in Pakistan. Even though Pakistan passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act in March 2013, cases of domestic violence are underreported and often not investigated thoroughly because domestic violence is considered a private matter. One study found that 85 percent of women had experienced domestic violence by their spouse since marriage.[63] The most common form of domestic violence was psychological abuse (81 percent), followed by physical violence (75 percent) and sexual violence (66 percent).[64] Sixty-four percent of women who experienced physical violence had been injured by it, including broken bones and teeth, bruises, sprains, and burns.[65] The majority of women (63 percent) who received injuries never sought medical treatment, and 35 percent of those were not allowed by their families to seek treatment.

Other forms of domestic violence—including honor killings, where women are killed because they are believed to have brought shame to their family, dowry-related violence, acid attacks, and burning—are also prevalent. The Aurat Foundation recorded nearly 4,000 cases of honor killings between 2008 and 2014.[66] A report by the independent Human Rights Commission estimated almost 1,100 honor killings in 2015 alone.[67] In a Rutgers WPF study, 34 percent of women had witnessed an honor killing within their extended family.[68] Women who had a history of honor killing in their families were more likely to experience psychological, physical, and sexual violence from their spouse than women who had not. Dowry- and family-related disputes often resulted in death or disfigurement by acid attack or burning. Women are often attacked and murdered if their husband or his family deem their dowry to be insufficient.