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MID-YEAR UPDATE: 10 CONFLICTS TO WORRY ABOUT IN 2021

The Armed Conflict
Location & Event
Data Project
(ACLED)

August 2021

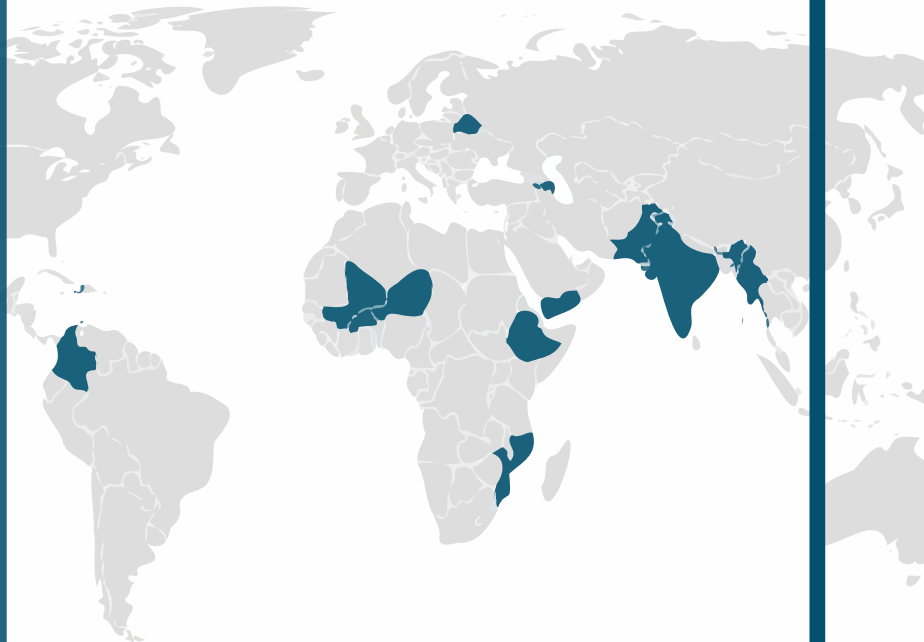


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India and Pakistan: Decreased cross-border violence in Kashmir; rising militancy in Pakistan

Ashik KC

A spike in cross-border fighting made 2020 the most violent year for conflict between India and Pakistan since the beginning of ACLED coverage in 2016. Yet, contrary to expectations at the beginning of 2021, cross-border violence virtually ceased after the two countries reaffirmed the 2003 ceasefire agreement on 25 February 2021 ([Al Jazeera, 25 February 2021](#)). The reaffirmation of the ceasefire agreement followed a decline in cross-border tensions early in the new year. This downward trend emerged from back-channel negotiations between India and Pakistan that were reportedly initiated by Pakistan's army chief in January 2021 ([Financial Times, 5 April 2021](#), [The Diplomat, 19 March 2021](#)). Both India and Pakistan have largely adhered to the ceasefire, apart from two incidents in May and June.

Although the ceasefire has held, the situation remains tense. On 27 June, suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba militants launched a drone attack, the first of its kind, on a military facility in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) ([The Hindu, 2 July 2021](#)). Two bombs were dropped inside an Indian Air Force station by drones in Jammu district, injuring two officers. Indian security forces accuse Pakistani security services of providing support to militants to conduct the attack ([The Hindu, 11 July 2021](#)), though Pakistan denies the accusations ([The International News, 30 June 2021](#)). In the past, major attacks by militant groups on both Indian military and civilian targets in J&K have led to a break in negotiations and an escalation of violence (*for more, see this [ACLED analysis piece](#)*). While this fragile peace continues to hold along the India-Pakistan border, disorder persists in other parts of both countries.

In J&K's neighboring region of Ladakh, a disengagement agreement in February led to withdrawal of both Chinese and Indian forces from the north and

south banks of Pangong Tso Lake. In May and June last year, clashes along the Line of Actual Control¹ led to the deaths of 20 Indian and at least four Chinese soldiers ([The Hindu, 13 June 2020](#); [Reuters, 18 February 2021](#)). Following the 2020 clashes, troops from both sides positioned themselves on the north and south banks of the lake ([BBC, 21 February 2021](#)). Tensions remain high in the region as phased disengagement and the withdrawal of troops at other contentious areas in eastern Ladakh have yet to take place ([The Print, 22 April 2021](#)). In addition, both India and China have bolstered the number of military personnel and infrastructure along the disputed border in recent months ([The Wall Street Journal, 2 July 2021](#)).

Elsewhere in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government held an all-party meeting with political leaders from J&K in June. This is a first since August 2019, when J&K's special status was revoked and the region was bifurcated into two union territories. The meeting was attended by 14 J&K leaders, including four former chief ministers. During the meeting, the government outlined its intentions to soon complete redrawing the boundaries of assembly seats and to hold assembly elections quickly thereafter. While the home minister indicated that the statehood of J&K — a key demand for Kashmiri political leaders — would be restored in “due course,” no timeline was agreed to ([The Wire, 25 June 2021](#)). The restoration of statehood would ensure that people in J&K would have the right to elect their own state government. Currently, J&K is a federal territory governed by the central government of India through an appointed lieutenant governor.

1. A border alignment between China and India that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory but has not yet been delineated or demarcated.

Demonstrations against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 have largely subsided since mid-February, with the exception of protests in the northeast state of Assam, in March. The All Assam Students' Union launched statewide demonstrations against the CAA just before the first phase of Assam's state assembly elections; since their completion in early April, anti-CAA demonstrations have not been reported in Assam. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the main proponent of the CAA, secured a majority in the elections while also inducting several prominent anti-CAA leaders into the party ([The Quint, 26 March 2021](#); [Scroll, 2 May 2021](#)). However, other anti-CAA movement leaders have vowed to continue protesting and, once implementation begins, demonstrations and violence are likely to renew and escalate ([The Economic Times, 2 July 2021](#)). The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs missed another deadline on 9 July to finalize the rules for the CAA, and the deadline has now been extended by another three months ([The Economic Times, 3 June 2021](#)).

Meanwhile, nationwide farmer demonstrations demanding the repeal of three agricultural acts passed by the central government in September 2020 have continued during the first half of 2021. Due to the new legislation, farmers fear losing market protections, including a minimum guaranteed price for their produce ([BBC News, 27 November 2020](#)). Despite 11 rounds of talks between farmers and the government, no agreement has yet been reached. The government has hinted that talks with the farmers could resume, but has ruled out a complete repeal of the laws — a key demand of the farmer unions ([Outlook, 18 June 2021](#); [Foreign Policy, 13 January 2021](#)). The demonstrations are set to continue with the farmer unions' planned daily sit-in protest outside the parliament in the capital, Delhi, throughout the monsoon season.

In Pakistan, militant violence increased in both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, indicating the continued resurgence of both the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch separatist movement. Already this year, the TTP has claimed large-scale attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as in the heart of the provincial capital of Balochistan. During the first half of 2021, violence involving the TTP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has nearly equaled levels recorded during the entirety of last year. Similarly, after a long period of decline, violence involving Baloch separatist groups has continued to rise in 2021. Baloch separatist groups have increasingly targeted the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to build infrastructure and expand trade links

across Eurasia, and Chinese interests in the province ([Gandhara, 8 June 2021](#)). The separatists oppose Chinese infrastructure development and investment and consider such projects to be an exploitation of local labor and natural resources ([Deutsche Welle, 14 July 2021](#)).

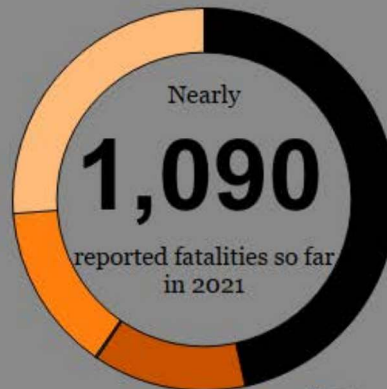
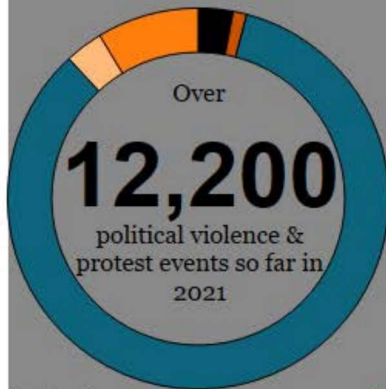
In other developments, the Pakistan Democratic Movement, an alliance of opposition parties that aimed to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan, lost the momentum it had gained during anti-government demonstrations at the end of last year. In April, two major opposition parties quit the alliance after disagreements over the nomination for the leader of the opposition in the senate ([Dawn, 13 April 2021](#)). The anti-government national march, planned to be launched in March, was also postponed. Currently, efforts are being made to revive the alliance ([Dawn, 25 May 2021](#)). While anti-government demonstrations decreased, overall demonstration levels in Pakistan have remained steady. Demonstrations opposing India's policy in J&K have continued, and large nationwide demonstrations have been held by Islamist parties.

FURTHER READING:

- [Cow Protection Legislation and Vigilante Violence in India](#)
- [Naxal-Maoist Insurgency Trends in India During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)
- [Rising Organized Political Violence in Balochistan: A Resurgence of Baloch Separatism?](#)
- [COVID-19 and Political Unrest In Northeast India](#)

INDIA & PAKISTAN

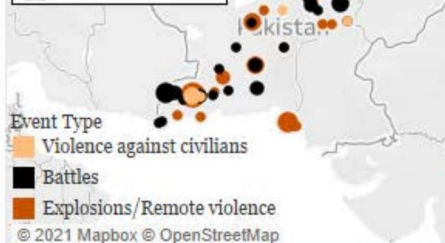
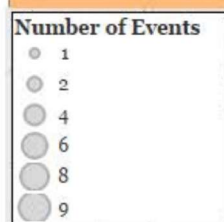
Decreased cross-border violence in Kashmir; rising militancy in Pakistan



Cross-border violence between India and Pakistan along the disputed Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) border virtually ceased after the two countries reaffirmed the 2003 ceasefire agreement on 25 February. In Pakistan, militant violence increased in both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, indicating the continued resurgence of both the TTP and the Baloch separatist movement.



Militant violence has increased in Balochistan province in 2021

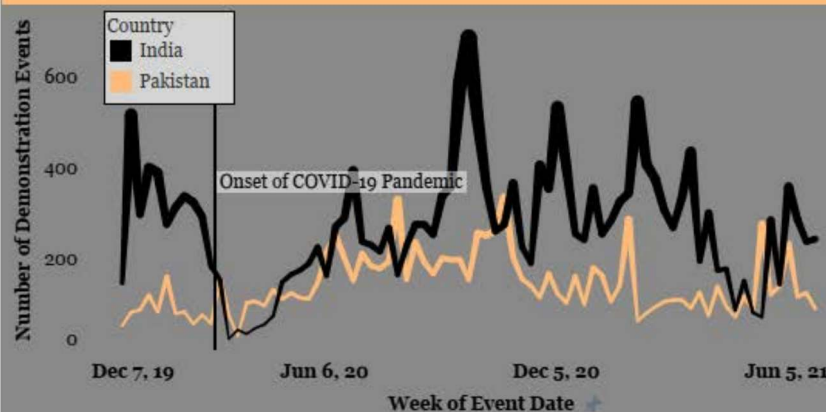


Violent events involving Baloch separatist actors so far in 2021

Violent events involving Baloch separatist actors in 2020

Number of Events

In 2021, demonstrations in both countries remained steady



In India, demonstrations against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 largely subsided. Nationwide demonstrations by farmers demanding the repeal of three agricultural acts passed by the central government in September 2020 have continued during the first half of 2021. In Pakistan, momentum around anti-government demonstrations decreased while demonstrations opposing India's policies in J&K continue.