

Pakistan

Pakistan had a disastrous year in 2011, with increasing attacks on civilians by militant groups, skyrocketing food and fuel prices, and the assumption of near-total control of foreign and security policy by a military that operated with complete impunity. Religious minorities faced unprecedented insecurity and persecution. Freedom of belief and expression came under severe threat as Islamist militant groups murdered Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer and Federal Minorities' Minister Shahbaz Bhatti over their public support for amending the country's often abused blasphemy laws. Pakistan's elected government notably failed to provide protection to those threatened by extremists, or to hold the extremists accountable.

In August and September the southern province of Sindh experienced massive flooding for the second year running, displacing some 700,000 people. Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, suffered from hundreds of targeted killings perpetrated by armed groups who are patronized by political parties.

Security continued to deteriorate in 2011, with militant and sectarian groups carrying out suicide bombings and targeted killings across the country. The Taliban and affiliated groups targeted civilians and public spaces, including marketplaces and religious processions. Ongoing rights concerns include the breakdown of law enforcement in the face of terror attacks, a dramatic increase in killings across the southwestern province of Balochistan, continuing torture and ill-treatment of criminal suspects, and unresolved enforced disappearances of terrorism suspects and opponents of the military. Abuses by Pakistani police, including extrajudicial killings, also continued to be reported throughout the country in 2011.

Relations between Pakistan and the United States—Pakistan's most significant ally and its largest donor of civilian and military aid—deteriorated markedly in 2011, fueled by a diplomatic crisis over a CIA contractor killing two men at a Lahore traffic junction and the US's killing of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Balochistan

Conditions markedly deteriorated in the mineral-rich province of Balochistan. Human Rights Watch documented continued “disappearances” and an upsurge in killings of suspected Baloch militants and opposition activists by the military, intelligence agencies, and the paramilitary Frontier Corps. Baloch nationalists and other militant groups also stepped up attacks on non-Baloch civilians, teachers, and education facilities, as well as against security forces in the province. Pakistan's military continued to publicly resist government reconciliation efforts and attempts to locate ethnic Baloch who had been subject to “disappearances.” The government appeared powerless to rein in the military’s abuses.

Human Rights Watch recorded the killing of at least 200 Baloch nationalist activists during the year, as well as dozens of new cases of disappearances. The dead included Abdul Ghaffar Lango, a prominent Baloch nationalist activist, and Hanif Baloch, an activist with the Baloch Students Organisation (Azad).

Since the beginning of 2011, human rights activists and academics critical of the military have also been killed in the province. They include Siddique Eido, a coordinator for the nongovernmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP); Saba Dashtiyari, a professor at the University of Balochistan and an acclaimed Baloch writer and poet; and Baloch politician Abdul Salam. Three employees of the BGP Oil and Gas company were killed and four injured in an attack in eastern Balochistan in September; the Baloch Liberation Army, a militant group, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Religious Minorities

Across Pakistan attacks took place against Shia and other vulnerable groups. Sunni militant groups, such as the supposedly banned Lashkar-e Jhangvi, operated with impunity even in areas where state authority is well established, such as the Punjab province and Karachi. On September 19, 26 members of the Hazara community travelling by bus to Iran to visit Shia holy sites were forced to disembark by gunmen near the town of Mastung and shot dead. Three others were killed as they took the injured to a hospital. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility. On October 4, gunmen riding on motorbikes stopped a bus carrying mostly Hazara Shia Muslims who were headed to work at a vegetable market on the outskirts of Quetta, Balochistan’s capital. The attackers forced the passengers off the bus, made them stand in a row, and opened fire, killing 13 and wounding 6.

In 2001 Aasia Bibi, a Christian from Punjab province, became the first woman in the country's history to be sentenced to death for blasphemy. She continued to languish in

prison after the Lahore High Court, in a controversial move, prevented President Asif Ali Zardari from granting her a pardon in November 2010. High-ranking officials of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) called for her release and the amendment of section 295(C) of Pakistan's penal code, otherwise known as the blasphemy law. However, the government succumbed to pressure from extremist groups and dropped the proposed amendment.

Ruling party legislator Sherry Rehman, who tabled the amendment, received multiple public death threats in the face of government inaction. On January 4 Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer was assassinated by a member of his security detail for supporting the amendment. On March 2 Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti was shot dead for the same reason. While Taseer's alleged assassin was arrested on the spot, the government reacted to the murders by seeking to appease extremists rather than hold them accountable. Emboldened extremists exploited the government's passivity by intimidating minorities further, and the year saw an upsurge of blasphemy cases and allegations. Minorities, Muslims, children, and persons with mental disabilities have all been charged under the law.

Members of the Ahmadi religious community also continue to be a major target for blasphemy prosecutions and are subjected to specific anti-Ahmadi laws across Pakistan. They also face increasing social discrimination, as illustrated by the October expulsion of 10 students from a school in Hafizabad, Punjab province, for being Ahmadi. In November, four Hindus, three of them doctors, were killed in an attack by religious extremists in the town of Shikarpur in Sindh province, sending shockwaves through the minority community.

Women's Rights

Mistreatment of women and girls—including rape, domestic violence, and forced marriage—remains a serious problem. Public intimidation of, and threats to, women and girls by religious extremists increased in major cities in 2011.

In a disappointing development, the government failed to honor its commitment to reintroduce the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, unanimously passed by the National Assembly in August 2009, but lapsed after the Senate failed to pass it within three months as required under Pakistan's constitution. In April the Supreme Court upheld a 2005 ruling by the provincial Lahore High Court acquitting five of the six men accused of the gang-rape of Mukhtar Mai, a villager from Muzaffargarh district in Punjab province, who was raped on the orders of a village council in 2002.

Militant Attacks and Counterterrorism

Suicide bombings, armed attacks, and killings by the Taliban, al Qaeda, and their affiliates targeted nearly every sector of Pakistani society, including journalists and religious minorities, resulting in hundreds of deaths. The US and others alleged that the military and Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) were complicit with these networks, claims the military and government adamantly denied.

Security forces routinely violate basic rights in the course of counterterrorism operations. Suspects are frequently detained without charge or are convicted without a fair trial. Thousands of suspected members of al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other armed groups—who were rounded up in a country-wide crackdown that began in 2009 in Swat and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas—remain in illegal military detention; few have been prosecuted or produced before the courts. The army continues to deny lawyers, relatives, independent monitors, and humanitarian agency staff access to persons detained in the course of military operations.

Aerial drone strikes by the US on suspected members of al Qaeda and the Taliban in northern Pakistan continued in 2011, with some 70 strikes taking place through early November. As in previous years these strikes were often accompanied by claims of large numbers of civilian casualties, but lack of access to the conflict areas has prevented independent verification.

Karachi

Karachi experienced an exceptionally high level of violence during the year, with some 800 persons killed. The killings were perpetrated by armed groups patronized by all political parties with a presence in the city. The Muttaheda Qaumi Movement (MQM), Karachi's largest political party, with heavily armed cadres and a well-documented history of human rights abuse and political violence, was widely viewed as the major perpetrator of targeted killings. The Awami National Party (ANP) and PPP-backed Aman (Peace) Committee killed MQM activists. Despite an October 6 Pakistan Supreme Court ruling calling for an end to the violence, authorities took no meaningful measures to hold perpetrators accountable.

Freedom of Media

At least six journalists were killed in Pakistan during the year. Saleem Shahzad, a reporter for the Hong Kong-based Asia Times Online and the Italian news agency Adnkronos International, disappeared from central Islamabad, the capital, on the evening of May 29, 2011. Shahzad had received repeated and direct threats from the military's dreaded ISI

agency. Shahzad's body, bearing visible signs of torture, was discovered two days later on May 31, near Mandi Bahauddin, 80 miles southeast of Islamabad. Following an international and domestic furor caused by the murder, a judicial commission was formed within days to probe allegations of ISI complicity. On August 9 Human Rights Watch testified before the commission. At this writing the commission had not announced its findings.

Earlier, on January 13, Geo TV reporter Wali Khan Babar was shot and killed in Karachi shortly after covering gang violence in the city. On May 10 Tribal Union of Journalists President Nasrullah Khan Afridi was killed when his car blew up in Peshawar; the provincial information minister described the act as a “targeted killing by the Taliban.” On August 14 thugs killed online news agency reporter Munir Ahmed Shakir after he covered a demonstration by Baloch nationalists in the Khuzdar district, Balochistan. On November 5 the body of Javed Naseer Rind, a sub-editor with the Urdu-language *Daily Tawar*, was found with torture marks and gunshot wounds in the town of Khuzdar in Balochistan province. He had been missing since September 9.

A climate of fear impedes media coverage of military and militant groups. Journalists rarely report on human rights abuses by the military in counterterrorism operations, and the Taliban and other armed groups regularly threaten media outlets over their coverage.

Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and the provincial high courts effectively muzzled media criticism of the judiciary in 2011 through threats of contempt of court proceedings, as has been the case since Pakistan’s independent judiciary was restored to office in 2009. In a positive development, journalists vocally critical of the government experienced less interference from elected officials than in previous years.

Key International Actors

The US remained Pakistan's most significant ally and was the largest donor of civilian and military aid to Pakistan, but relations deteriorated markedly in 2011. A major diplomatic crisis erupted on January 27 when Raymond Davis, a CIA contractor, shot two men dead at a Lahore traffic junction. While the US maintained that Davis had diplomatic immunity, Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry disputed the claim. Davis was released on March 16 after US\$2.4 million was paid in “blood money” compensation to the victims’ families under the country’s controversial Islamic law.

Further strains developed after a successful US operation in the city of Abbotabad killed al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In July the US announced it was withholding some \$800 million in military aid to Pakistan. Relations deteriorated still further over Pakistan's allegedly persistent support for "Haqqani network" militants, a group US officials accused of targeting the US Embassy and US troops in Afghanistan.

In October 2010 the US sanctioned six units of the Pakistani military operating in the Swat valley under the Leahy Law. That law requires the US State Department to certify that no military unit receiving US aid is involved in gross human rights abuses and, when such abuses are found, they are to be thoroughly and properly investigated. Despite pledges, Pakistan did not take any action in 2011 to hold perpetrators of abuse accountable as required under the law. In several instances in Swat, Balochistan, and the tribal areas, US aid to Pakistan appeared to continue to contravene the Leahy Law.

As tensions increased between the US and Pakistan, neighboring China repeatedly expressed support for Pakistan. Relations between Pakistan and nuclear rival India remained tense, although in a significant move Pakistan granted its larger neighbor "Most Favored Nation" trade status in November.