



World Report 2013: Pakistan

Events of 2012

Pakistan had a turbulent year in 2012, with the judicial ouster of Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, attacks on civilians by militant groups, growing electricity shortages, rising food and fuel prices, and continuing political dominance of the military, which operates with almost complete impunity. Religious minorities continued to face insecurity and persecution as the government failed to provide protection to those threatened or to hold extremists accountable. Islamist militant groups continued to target and kill Shia Muslims—particularly from the Hazara community—with impunity. In September, the southwestern province of Balochistan experienced massive flooding for the third year running, displacing some 700,000 people.

Ongoing rights concerns included the breakdown of law enforcement in the face of terror attacks, continuing abuses across Balochistan, ongoing 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 2012.

Relations between Pakistan and the United States —Pakistan’s most significant ally and its largest donor of development and military aid—remained tense for much of the year due to the “Salala Attack” in November 2011, in which US forces killed 24 Pakistani soldiers during a military operation near the Afghan border.

Sectarian Attacks

In 2012, at least 325 members of the Shia Muslim population were killed in targeted attacks that took place across Pakistan. In Balochistan province, over 100 were killed, most of them from the Hazara community. On August 16, gunmen ambushed four buses passing through the Babusar Top area of Mansehra district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The attackers forced all the passengers to disembark, checked their national identity cards, and summarily executed 22 travelers whom they identified as belonging to the Shia community. A spokesman for the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility. On August 30, gunmen shot dead Zulfiqar Naqvi, a Shia judge, in Quetta, Balochistan’s capital. In two separate attacks on September 1, 2012, gunmen attacked and killed eight Hazara Shia in Quetta.

Sunni militant groups, including those with known links to the Pakistani military, its intelligence agencies, and affiliated paramilitaries—such as the ostensibly banned Lashkar-e Jhangvi—operated with widespread impunity across Pakistan, as law enforcement officials effectively turned a blind eye to attacks.

Students and teachers were regularly attacked by militant groups. On October 9, 2012, gunmen shot Malala Yousafzai, a 15-year-old student and outspoken advocate for children's right to education, in the head and neck leaving her in critical condition. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed responsibility for the attack in the Swat Valley. The attack on Yousafzai garnered condemnation from across the political spectrum in Pakistan. Militant Islamist groups also attacked more than 100 schools, and rebuilding is slow.

Religious Minorities and Women

Abuses under the country's abusive blasphemy law continued as dozens were charged in 2012 and at least 16 people remained on death row for blasphemy, while another 20 served life sentences. Aasia Bibi, a Christian from Punjab province, who in 2010 became the first woman in the country's history to be sentenced to death for blasphemy, continued to languish in prison. In July 2012, police arrested a man who appeared to suffer from a mental disability for allegedly burning the Quran. A mob organized by local clerics demanded that the man be handed to them, attacked the police station, pulled the victim out, and burned him alive.

On August 17, Islamabad police took into custody Rimsha Masih, a 14-year-old Christian girl from a poor Islamabad suburb with a "significantly lower mental age," who was accused of burning pages filled with Quranic passages. Police had to beat back a mob demanding that it be handed the girl so that it could kill her. Threats against the local Christian community forced some 400 families to flee their homes. But Islamist groups who support the blasphemy law took a significantly different position, demanding a full investigation. The accuser, local cleric Khalid Chishti, was himself arrested for fabricating evidence in order to rid the neighbourhood of Christians. On September 23, police officials stated they had found no evidence against Rimsha Masih, who was released and given state protection at an undisclosed location.

Members of the Ahmadi religious community continued to be a major target for blasphemy prosecutions and subjected to specific anti-Ahmadi laws across Pakistan. They faced increasing social discrimination as militant groups used provisions of the law to prevent Ahmadis from "posing as Muslims," forced the demolition of Ahmadi mosques in Lahore, barred Ahmadis from using their mosques in Rawalpindi, and vandalized Ahmadi graves across Punjab province. In most instances, Punjab provincial officials supported militants' demands instead of protecting Ahmadis and their mosques and graveyards.

Violence against women and girls—including rape, "honor" killings, acid attacks, domestic violence, and forced marriage—remained a serious problem. Intimidation and threats against women and girls out in public increased in major cities in 2012.

Freedom of Expression

At least eight journalists were killed in Pakistan during the year, including four in May alone. On May 9 and 10 respectively, Tariq Kamal and Aurangzeb Tunio were killed. On May 18, the bullet-riddled body of *Express News* correspondent Razzaq Gul was found dumped in a deserted area near Turbat in Balochistan province. Security agencies are suspected of involvement in his killing. On May 28, Abdul Qadir Hajizai was shot dead in Balochistan by armed men on a motorbike. The Baloch Liberation Front reportedly claimed responsibility for his killing. No one was held accountable in any of these cases.

A climate of fear impeded media coverage of the state security forces and militant groups. Journalists rarely reported on human rights abuses by the military in counterterrorism operations, and the Taliban and other armed groups regularly threatened media outlets over their coverage.

In June, gunmen shot at the building of Aaj TV, a private Urdu-language news channel, wounding two guards. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility and threatened such attacks would continue if media outlets did not reflect the Taliban's priorities and positions in coverage. However, as has been the case since the return to civilian rule in 2008, journalists vocally critical of the government experienced less interference from elected officials than in previous years.

Judicial Activism and Independence

Pakistan's judiciary continued to assert its independence from the government in 2012. In December 2011, the judiciary began controversial hearings into the so-called "Memogate" scandal investigating Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's former ambassador to the US on charges that he attempted to conspire against Pakistan's military in collusion with the US. The court notably failed to investigate allegations from the same source that the head of the country's dreaded Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had conspired to oust the elected government.

In June, the Supreme Court controversially fired Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani for refusing to sign a letter to Switzerland asking for an investigation into corruption allegations against President Asif Zardari.

Despite the adoption of a National Judicial Policy in 2009, access to justice remained abysmal and courts remained rife with corruption and incompetence. Case backlogs remain huge at all levels. The judiciary's use of *suo motu* proceedings—acting on its own motions—was considered so excessive that the International Commission of Jurists raised concerns about it.

While the Supreme Court was active in raising the issue of government abuses in Balochistan, no high-level military officials were held accountable for them. As has been the case since Pakistan's independent judiciary was restored to office in 2009, Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and the provincial high courts muzzled media criticism of the judiciary in 2012 through threats of contempt

of court proceedings. In October, both the Lahore and Islamabad high courts effectively barred media from criticizing the judiciary or giving airtime to critics in the aftermath of a multi-million dollar corruption scandal involving Arsalan Iftikhar, the son of the Supreme Court chief justice.

Balochistan

The human rights crisis continued to worsen in the mineral-rich province of Balochistan. Human Rights Watch recorded continued enforced disappearances and 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. Pakistan's military continued to publicly resist government reconciliation efforts and attempts to locate ethnic Baloch who had been subject to "disappearances." Pakistan's government appeared powerless to rein in the military's abuses. As a result, large numbers of Hazara community members sought asylum abroad.

Militant Attacks and Counterterrorism

Suicide bombings, armed attacks, and killings by the Taliban, al Qaeda, and their affiliates continued in 2012, targeting politicians, journalists, religious minorities, and government security personnel. Many of these attacks were claimed by groups such as the Haqqani network, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and other al Qaeda affiliates.

Security forces routinely violated basic rights in the course of counterterrorism operations. Suspects were frequently detained without charge or were convicted without a fair trial. Thousands of suspected members of al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other armed groups—who were rounded up in a nationwide crackdown that began in 2009 in Swat and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas—remained in illegal military detention; few were prosecuted or produced before the courts. The army continued to deny lawyers, relatives, independent monitors, and humanitarian agency staff access to persons detained during military operations. Terrorism suspects, particularly in the Swat Valley, reportedly died inexplicably of "natural causes." However, lack of access to the detainees made independent verification of the cause of death impossible.

Aerial drone strikes by the US on suspected members of al Qaeda and the Taliban in northern Pakistan continued in 2012, with some 44 strikes taking place through early November. As in previous years, these strikes were often accompanied by claims from Pakistanis of large numbers of civilian casualties, although lack of access to the conflict areas largely prevented independent verification.

Human Rights Defenders

Community-based human rights activists faced increased threats. In June, Asma Jahangir, the country's most prominent human rights defender, alleged that she had discovered that an assassination attempt was being planned against her from "the highest levels of the security establishment." In the preceding months, Jahangir had been at odds with the Pakistani military in a series of high-profile standoffs, including over the military's policies in Balochistan and elsewhere.

Key International Actors

The US remained the largest donor of development and military aid to Pakistan, but relations remained abysmal through much of 2012. The US rejected apologizing for the "Salala Attack," prompting Pakistan to ban the movement of NATO supplies to Afghanistan through Pakistan. The routes were only reopened in July after the US offered a formulation of regret that Pakistan found acceptable. Major areas of bilateral tension remained, particularly Pakistan's alleged persistent support for the Haqqani network, a militant group that US officials accused of targeting US troops in Afghanistan. In September, the US declared the Haqqani network a terrorist body.

Pakistan and China continued to deepen extensive economic and political ties. Historically tense relations between Pakistan and nuclear rival India showed marked improvement in 2012. In September, the two countries signed landmark trade and travel agreements.

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) visited Pakistan in September and reported in preliminary findings that there is "acknowledgment that enforced disappearances have occurred and still occur in the country."

Courtesy: [HRW](#)