

Historically, Pakistan has not been considered particularly sectarian. However, in recent years, Pakistan has seen a sharp resurgence of sectarian violence - nearly **1,000** Shi'a Muslims, predominantly from the Hazara community, have been killed in targeted attacks since 2012, including **400 in 2013**.¹ Other religious minorities, such as Christians and Ahmadis, have also been targeted.

Historical Background

- Key factors in the increase in sectarian violence since the 1980s: (1) General Zia-ul-Haq's 'Islamisation' programme (2) Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan-Soviet war, (3) the Iranian revolution
- Many religious minorities began to experience persecution by militant organisations, questions about their loyalty and restrictions on their freedom to practice.

A Pervasive Pattern of Sectarian Violence

- **Key areas and cities:** Balochistan, Punjab, Karachi, the FATA and Kyber Pakhtunkhwa
- **Key militant groups:** Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Sunni Tahrik and Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan (Shi'a)
- **Methods used:** targeted killings, bomb attacks, suicide bombings and communal violence
- **Balochistan:** Hazaras are the primary target i.e. January and February 2013, Quetta: two bomb attacks on crowded Hazara areas of Quetta, approx. 171 people killed and 300 injured;² January of 2014, Mastung: a bomb attack on a bus, approx. 22 Shi'a pilgrims killed.³ Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has been linked to all three attacks.
- **Karachi and other cities:** a high frequency of attacks, often targeted killings against prominent citizens such as doctors, lawyers, teachers and clerics, many are claimed by/linked to groups such as LeJ - part of a wider pattern of anti-Shi'a ethnic cleansing – i.e. February 18, 2013, Lahore: Dr. Syed Ali Haider, a Shi'a, and his 11 year old son were shot by unidentified gunmen.⁴

The holy month of Muharram has seen escalations in violence in recent years; for example, in 2012 there were approx. 30 attacks and 70 fatalities.⁸

In 2010, Asia Bibi, a Christian, was sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws and remains in custody.⁹ In 2013, Mohammad Asghar, a British national with a history of mental illness, was sentenced to death for writing letters claiming to be a prophet.¹⁰

- **Moharram:** sectarian violence often increases during this period, and Ashura processions are key targets. Moharram in 2012: approx. 30 attacks, 70 people killed, victims included Shi'as, Ahmadis and other religious minorities.⁵
- **Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA):** Shi'a tribes are identified as being particularly vulnerable – significant presence of TTP and al-Qaida actors. Some retaliatory strikes against TTP groups by Shi'a militants.⁶
- **Other religious minorities:** including Sufi Muslims, Christians,

Ahmadis, Bohras, Hindus and Sikhs are also targeted by sectarian violence because of their religious identity – i.e. September 2013, Peshawar: a bomb attack on a church killed approximate 80 people.⁷ **Blasphemy Laws:** highly controversial, often used to settle personal scores and to target religious minorities, especially Christians and Ahmadis.

Conclusion

- Sectarian violence in Pakistan is severe, widespread and frequent, and targets both Shi'a Muslims and members of other religious minorities. All religious minorities should be able to practice their faith and live without fear of being victimised.
- Banned militant groups are able to operate within Pakistan with relative impunity. Urgent action needs to be taken by the Pakistani authorities increase security and ensure the due process of law is implemented.

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