



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Pakistan

Pakistan – PAK38000 – Shi'ite Pashtuns –
Geographic location – Population –
Kurram – Orakzai – Kohat – Hangu

5 January 2011

1. Is there any ground to distinguish Pashtun Shias as a distinct group? How many Pashtun Shias are there in Pakistan and where are they mainly located?

The exact number of Shi'ite Pashtuns is unclear; however, sources indicate that there are at least 250,000 in Pakistan, many of whom traditionally reside in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Kurram Agency and Orakzai Agency. Most of these Shi'ite Pashtuns appear to be members of the Turi tribe; however, at least 8 percent of the neighbouring Bangash tribe also practise Shia Islam. Some Shi'ite Turi and Bangash have fled conflict in these agencies, and now live in nearby districts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as North West Frontier Province or NWFP). Given their history of conflict with Sunni Pashtuns from both Pakistan and Afghanistan in recent decades, it is possible that Shi'ite Pashtuns have developed a definite group identity based on both religion and tribe/clan.

According to the CIA Factbook, Pashtuns comprise approximately 42 percent of Afghanistan's estimated population of 29 million¹ and 15.42 percent of Pakistan's estimated population of 184 million², creating a combined population of over 40 million people. Despite the common Pashto tongue and the Pashtun tribal code, known as Pashtunwali, the Pashtun people are sub-divided into many tribes and clans. The Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor* places the number of Pashtun tribes in both states at 60; however, the author adds that this number "rises above 400 if all sub-clans are counted."³ Thus, the Pashtun ethno-linguistic family is not a homogenous nation in the modern sense.

Pashtuns are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim; however, a small minority of Pakistan's Pashtun population are Shi'ite, concentrated in a small number of tribes. There are also said to be Pashtun Shi'ites in Kandahar, Afghanistan.⁴ The most significant Shi'ite Pashtun tribe in Pakistan is the Turi of Upper Kurram, while a minority of the Pashtun

¹ 'Afghanistan' 2010, The CIA World Factbook, 28 December <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011 – Attachment 1

² 'Pakistan' 2010, The CIA World Factbook, 21 December <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011 – Attachment 2

³ Abbas, H. 2006, 'Profiles of Pakistan's Seven Tribal Agencies', *Terrorism Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Volume 4, 20 October

http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=891&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=181&no_cache=1 – Accessed 4 January 2011 – Attachment 3

⁴ Schetter, C. 2003, 'Ethnicity and the Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan', Arbeitsgemeinschaft Afghanistan website, 21 May, p.2 <http://www.ag-afghanistan.de/arg/arp/schetter.pdf> – Accessed 5 January 2011 – Attachment 19

Bangash tribe in Kurram and Orakzai agencies is also Shi'ite. A 2010 report in *IRIN News* states that 40 percent of Kurram's estimated population of 500,000 and 8 percent of Orakzai's population of 450,000 are Shi'ites. In the Kohat district of NWFP, authorities estimate that there are some 3,300 Shi'ite families who are classified as internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kurram and Orakzai. The number of indigenous Shi'ite Pashtuns in Kohat district is unknown; however, *IRIN News* quotes a local Shi'ite who fears that conflict has followed the IDPs into Kohat and will affect local Shi'ite communities.⁵ For a map of the regions being discussed, please see Attachment 10 (p. 27).

Despite being members of the Pashtun 'nation', Shi'ite Turi and Bangash have a history of harm being perpetrated against them by Sunni Pashtuns in both Kurram and Orakzai. The Turi have had a long running conflict with Sunni members of the Bangash tribe; however, they also have a history of armed conflict with the Haqqani Network, one of three main Afghani Taliban factions.^{6 7} The Turi raised the ire of the previously mentioned tribes and organisations due to their strong resistance to the presence and movement of Haqqani, Al Qaeda and Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) militants in Upper Kurram, all of whom are violently anti-Shi'ite.^{8 9 10}

In 2009, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that Shia residents of Kurram frequently had to travel to elsewhere in Pakistan via Afghanistan to avoid being harmed in middle and lower Kurram.¹¹ The ICG has also reported that a new military offensive in Orakzai launched in March 2010 caused more than 328,000 people to flee both Kurram and Orakzai, into neighbouring NWFP. Some of the IDP registration camps for Shi'ites have been targeted by suicide bombers.¹² For more information on the Turi-Haqqani/Bangash conflicts, see *Country Advice PAK37630*¹³ and *Country Advice PAK37535*.¹⁴

Despite recent hopes for a settlement, the conflict between Pashtun Shi'ites and Sunnis continues to claim lives; between September and November 2010 at least 100 people were killed in clashes between such groups in Kurram.¹⁵ In the past twelve to eighteen months

⁵ 'Pakistan: Shia IDPs fearful of being targeted' 2010, UNHCR Refworld, source: *IRIN News*, 11 February <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7ba8db1a.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011 – Attachment 4

⁶ Khan, M.I. 2010, 'The Pakistani tribe that is taking on the Taliban', *BBC News*, 7 October <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11486528> – Accessed 14 October 2010 – Attachment 5

⁷ 'Siraj Haqqani sheltering in Kurram, near area of US helicopter strikes' 2010, The Long War Journal, , 22 October http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/10/siraj_haqqani_shelte.php – Accessed 11 November 2010 – Attachment 6

⁸ Khattak, I. 2010, 'Parachinar boy released after paying ransom', *Dawn*, 16 August <http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/local/peshawar/parachinar-boy-released-after-paying-ransom-680> – Accessed 24 November 2010 – Attachment 7

⁹ Afzal, H. 2010, 'Militants Free Six Students', *Dawn*, 8 November <http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/national/militants-free-six-students-810> – Accessed 24 November 2010 – Attachment 8

¹⁰ 'U.S. concerns grow as militants move bases along Pakistan border' 2010, *The Los Angeles Times*, 7 November <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-pakistan-haqqani-20101108,0,7180350.story> Accessed 9 November 2010 – Attachment 9

¹¹ International Crisis Group 2009, *Pakistan: Countering Militancy in FATA*, Asia Report N°178, 21 October, p.6-7, p.13-14 – Attachment 10

¹² International Crisis Group 2010, *Pakistan: The Worsening IDP Crisis*, Asia Briefing N°111, 16 September, p.3 – Attachment 11

¹³ RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice PAK37630*, 3 November – Attachment 12

¹⁴ RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice PAK37535*, 18 October – Attachment 13

¹⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010, 'IDPs returning to South Waziristan; displacements in Kurram as tribes fight Haqqani network', 26 November <http://www.internal->

Shi'ite Turi and Bangash IDPs have been targeted for harm in the neighbouring Kohat and Hangu districts of NWFP. In December 2010 an estimated 18 people were killed by a suicide bomber in a Shia hospital in the Pass Kili area of Hangu.¹⁶ In March 2010, 12 people, 7 of whom were believed to be Shi'ite, were killed by a suicide bomber in Hangu, while en route to Parachinar in Upper Kurram.¹⁷ In September 2009, at least 35 people died in an attack on Shia villages in Kohat.¹⁸ Tensions between Shi'ite and Sunni Pashtuns are particularly pronounced during Muharram, the holy month when Shi'ites commemorate the martyrdom of Ali.¹⁹

Attachments

1. 'Afghanistan' 2010, The CIA World Factbook, 28 December
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011.
2. 'Pakistan' 2010, The CIA World Factbook, 21 December
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011.
3. Abbas, H. 2006, 'Profiles of Pakistan's Seven Tribal Agencies', *Terrorism Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, Volume 4, 20 October
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4. 'Pakistan: Shia IDPs fearful of being targeted' 2010, UNHCR Refworld, source: *IRIN News*, 11 February <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7ba8db1a.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011.
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¹⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2010, *PAKISTAN: Security and Militancy Report – Week Ending 14 December*, 14 December – Attachment 15

¹⁷ 'Four women among 12 killed in Hangu suicide bombing' 2010, *Daily Times*, 6 March
http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010/03/06/story_6-3-2010_pg1_5 – Accessed 15 September 2010 – Attachment 16

¹⁸ 'Pakistan: Shia IDPs fearful of being targeted' 2010, UNHCR Refworld, source: *IRIN News*, 11 February
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b7ba8db1a.html> – Accessed 4 January 2011 – Attachment 17

¹⁹ 'Taliban exploit Shi'a-Sunni divide in Pakistan's Kurram Tribal Agency' 2010, The Jamestown Foundation, 17 April
http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bwords%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=pakistan&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36269&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=f17760e860 – Accessed 29 April 2010 – Attachment 18

[newspaper/local/peshawar/parachinar-boy-released-after-paying-ransom-680](#) – Accessed 24 November 2010.

8. Afzal, H. 2010, 'Militants Free Six Students', *Dawn*, 8 November <http://news.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/national/militants-free-six-students-810> – Accessed 24 November 2010.
9. 'U.S. concerns grow as militants move bases along Pakistan border' 2010, *The Los Angeles Times*, 7 November <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-pakistan-haqqani-20101108,0,7180350.story> Accessed 9 November 2010. (CISNET Pakistan CX253030)
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12. RRT Country Advice 2010, Country Advice PAK37630, 3 November.
13. RRT Country Advice 2010, Country Advice PAK37535, 18 October.
14. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2010, 'IDPs returning to South Waziristan; displacements in Kurram as tribes fight Haqqani network', 26 November [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004D31AA/\(httpIDPNewsAlerts\)/7D87B93FD787D957C12577E7003BD69A?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004D31AA/(httpIDPNewsAlerts)/7D87B93FD787D957C12577E7003BD69A?OpenDocument) – Accessed 29 November 2010. (CISNET Pakistan CX254260)
15. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2010, *PAKISTAN: Security and Militancy Report – Week Ending 14 December*, 14 December. (CISNET Pakistan CX255011)
16. 'Four women among 12 killed in Hangu suicide bombing' 2010, *Daily Times*, 6 March http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\03\06\story_6-3-2010_pg1_5 – Accessed 15 September 2010. (CISNET Pakistan CX249276)
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18. 'Taliban exploit Shi'a-Sunni divide in Pakistan's Kurram Tribal Agency' 2010, The Jamestown Foundation, 17 April http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bwords%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=pakistan&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36269&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=f17760e860 – Accessed 29 April 2010. (CISNET Pakistan CX242887)
19. Schetter, C. 2003, 'Ethnicity and the Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan', Arbeitsgemeinschaft Afghanistan website, 21 May <http://www.ag-afghanistan.de/arg/arp/schetter.pdf> - Accessed 5 January 2011.