

Abstract for LEAP Presentation, October 18, 2013

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This summer I was a research intern at the Jinnah Institute in Islamabad, Pakistan. I was carrying out independent research on the persecution of religious minority groups in the country. Over the past few years incidents of violence against non-Muslim Pakistanis have risen dramatically, but governmental response has been nowhere near adequate to protect religious minority citizens. In fact, there is an environment of fear when it comes to talking about these issues. In 2011 Salmaan Taseer, Governor of the Punjab province was shot by a member of his own security force because he spoke against Pakistan's notorious anti-Blasphemy laws. This incident was followed by the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, who was a Christian and the Minister for Minority Affairs.

My research was primarily interview based, but also consisted of monitoring the print and audio-visual media platforms in order to find out what kinds of views exist in Pakistan regarding religious minority persecution. One of the main themes of my research was exploring the construction of Pakistani national identity, and how that affects the status of minorities in the country. In researching these issues, I was able to experience firsthand the challenges of conducting independent research, especially regarding an issue as controversial as my chosen topic, which many people in Pakistan are reluctant to speak about.